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JAIPUR'S LOATHING & FEAR: JLF MEMORIES

WORLD 8

IMRAN REJECTS REPORTS CLAIMING DISMISSAL OF ARMY CHIEF

MONEY 10

E-VEHICLE RETAIL SALES ZOOM OVER 3-FOLD IN FY22

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Shehbaz likely next Pak PM, Imran vows fight

PML-N's leader and joint Opp's pick Sharif files papers for Pak premier's post

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday nominated himself for the post of prime minister after the ouster of Imran Khan, whose party threatened to withdraw its lawmakers from Parliament if the former Punjab chief minister was allowed to contest the election for the top post on Monday.

The process of electing the new leader of the house began on Sunday after Khan was removed from office through a no-confidence vote, becoming the first premier in the country's history to be sent home after losing the trust of the House.

The joint Opposition - a rainbow of socialist, liberal and radically religious parties - has nominated 70-year-old Sharif for the premier's post while ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was named



Supporters of an Opposition party celebrate the success of a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Imran Khan, in Karachi on Sunday

by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as its candidate.

The nomination papers of Sharif, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president have been accepted by the National Assembly Secretariat after objections raised by the PTI were rejected. Qureshi's nomination papers were also accepted. Senior PTI leader Babar Awan challenged Sharif's candidature, saying that the

PML-N chief faced several court cases.

Meanwhile, the PTI has decided to withdraw its lawmakers from the National Assembly and launch a movement against the new upcoming government, which is likely to be headed by Sharif, who has served as the Chief Minister of Punjab three times. "The core committee has recommended to Imran Khan

that we should resign from the assemblies. We are starting from the National Assembly. If our objections against Shehbaz Sharif's nomination papers are not [entertained], we will submit the resignations tomorrow," PTI leader and former minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters after the party held a core committee meeting at the residence of Khan.

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Ukraine, Pak, Lanka in Modi-Biden talks today

Discussion to take place ahead of 2+2 dialogue today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing Ukraine conflict and fast-paced developments in Pakistan and Sri Lanka are likely to figure in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's virtual talks with US President Joe Biden on Monday.

The talk will take place ahead of the "two plus two dialogue between Defence and Foreign Ministers of the two countries in Washington the same day. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will hold parleys with their US counterparts Lloyd Austin and Antony Blinken, respectively. It will be the fourth annual "two plus two dialogue for reviewing strategic and defence ties".

Announcing the talks between Modi and Biden, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement "the two leaders will review ongoing bilateral cooperation and exchange views on recent developments in South Asia, the Indo-Pacific region, and global issues of mutual interest".



The Ministry also said, "The virtual meeting will enable both sides to continue to use the meeting to 'continue our close consultations on the consequences of Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and mitigating its destabilising impact on global food supply and commodity markets'."

The virtual meeting will be held against the backdrop of differences between the two sides on the conflict in Ukraine and its fallout on the world order. In a rare expression of these differences, Biden said last month the world had mounted a "united front" on the Russian aggression against Ukraine while India had been "somewhat shaky" within the Quad.

India has so far abstained from voting against Russia in the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly on

the issue of Ukraine conflict.

White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said Biden intended to use the meeting to "continue our close consultations on the consequences of Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and mitigating its destabilising impact on global food supply and commodity markets".

Psaki said the meeting between Biden and Modi will deepen ties "between our Governments, economies, and our people". He said the two leaders will discuss cooperation on a range of issues, including ending the Covid-19 pandemic, countering the climate crisis, strengthening the global economy and upholding a free, open, rules-based international order to bolster security, democracy, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

The two leaders will also

advance conversations about developing an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and delivering high-quality infrastructure, she added.

Biden last spoke to Modi and other leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad during a virtual summit in March. The US and its European allies have been nudging India to change its position on the Ukraine crisis.

During a recent visit to India, US Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh said the US did not want to see a "rapid acceleration" in India's imports from Russia of energy and other commodities and cautioned that there will be consequences for countries that attempt to circumvent Western sanctions.

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Mayawati slams Rahul's 'CM-post offer' claims

Congress casteist, Rahul should put his own house in order: BSP chief

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A day after Rahul Gandhi's attack on Mayawati, the Bahujan Samaj Party supremo hit back, rejecting claims that the Congress had offered her the post of Chief Minister in an alliance.

The former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh hit out at the grand old party, saying it had never stood with Dalits.

"I have come to know through the media about the remarks made by Rahul Gandhi on Saturday on the BSP. This statement reflects his casteist mindset.

The Congress never took any steps to improve the economic and social conditions of



Dalits. Even the full benefit of reservation was not given to Dalits," Mayawati said in a press conference in Lucknow on Sunday.

"Rahul Gandhi himself is plagued with a casteist mentality and he is blaming me. He is lying. I did not get any offer and the Congress has never

stood with the Dalits," she said. Rahul had on Saturday claimed the Congress had extended an offer to the BSP for an alliance ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, even offering her the Chief Minister's post in case of a joint victory.

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Patkar NGO's 12 suspicious bank accounts under lens

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

After reports surfaced about the alleged dubious transactions of environmentalist Medha Patkar's NGO Narmada Navnirman Abhiyan, investigative agencies are probing as many as 12 different bank accounts used for channelising such funds.

These 12 bank accounts — all opened with the State Bank of India — are in the name of another organisation "Narmada Jeevan Shala" formed by Patkar, whose activities are also under the scanner of the agencies, sources privy to the investigation said.

These 12 bank accounts were opened from 2011 to 2018, wherein a total amount of ₹4.25 crore was deposited, they said.

As reported earlier, Narmada Navnirman Abhiyan already had two active bank accounts 001010100064503 in the Bank of India, and 001010100064503 in HDFC Bank. In all, ₹7,82,18,597 were deposited in these 14 bank

accounts," the sources said.

Out of the six closed bank accounts of Narmada Jeevan Shala, five bank accounts (37213437901, 37213505292, 37213505327, 37213505350 and 37219252164) were opened on a single day on October 13, 2017 by a cash deposit of ₹1500 each and were also closed on the same date on November 3, 2018 in a span of just 13 months.

The other closed bank account (38056103409) was opened on November 16, 2018 and closed on March 31, 2021 in a span of 28 months.

"These glaring facts not only raise serious doubts over the motive behind opening so many bank accounts but also indicate the existence of a possible money laundering syndicate. A complaint has been filed by one Sanjeev Kumar Jha with the Revenue Secretary, Enforcement Directorate, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Mumbai," officials said.

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accounts from 2007 to 2021.

The most glaring aspect revealed by the investigation so far is that out of these 12 bank accounts, six accounts (37213437901, 37213505292, 37213505327, 37213505350, 37219252164 and 38056103409) were closed in just 13 months, while remaining six accounts are still active.

"A detailed scrutiny reveals that an amount of ₹21,20,150 was deposited in these six closed bank accounts and almost the entire amount was withdrawn by cash, and the accounts were closed immediately.

Interestingly, the cash withdrawals were made the very next day the amount was deposited in these bank

6 hurt in JNU clash over non-veg, pooja

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Six students were injured after a clash broke out between members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the Left alliance on Sunday over serving of non-vegetarian food and Ram Navami celebrations in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus.

Images of wounded students went viral and were doing rounds on social media, however, police said appropriate legal action will be taken on the receipt of complaint.

The Left had accused the members of ABVP of imposing a ban on non-vegetarian food at the JNU's Kaveri Hostel while the ABVP had alleged that the members of Left, including NSUI, were not allowing them to conduct a pooja on the occasion of Ram Navami.

"Some of them have sustained injuries. Police teams are all positioned here. On the request of the university, we have come here. We are trying

to maintain peace," a senior police official said, adding that a protest was also held here which is over as of now.

"Friends, ABVP does it again. First they tried to impose a non-veg ban on everybody in Kaveri Hostel, and when common students stood up against #FoodFascism, the Sanghi goons resorted to all out violence. Students are facing serious wounds," tweeted JNU student union chief Aishw Ghosh.

JNUSU issued a statement and accused the ABVP of forcing and attacking the mess committee to change the dinner menu and exclude non-vegetarian items.

"The menu has food items for both vegetarian and non-vegetarian students who can consume it based on their personal choice. But, the ABVP is using muscle power and its goondaism to create a complete ruckus and reinforce their Brahmanical hegemonisation ideals by manhandling the staff and asking to not prepare any non-vegetarian items," it read.

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FBI didn't send any team to probe bitcoin scam: CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Sunday refuted reports that a team of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the US was in India to probe the alleged bitcoin case being investigated by the Karnataka police.

In a statement, the CBI said, "Reference is invited to reports in sections of the media that an FBI team has come to India to investigate a bitcoin case of Karnataka police. This is to inform that the FBI has not sent any team to India for conducting a probe in the matter nor has any request been made by the FBI to the CBI for conducting an investigation in this case in India."

"Accordingly, the question of according any permission for the probe by the competent authority in India does not arise. The CBI as the National Central Bureau for Interpol in India coordinates closely with international law enforcement agencies including the FBI."

The agency's statement comes after the Congress on Friday asked whether the FBI is in India to investigate an alleged "Bitcoin scam" which the party had accused the BJP Government in Karnataka of covering up last year.

In a tweet, the Congress MLA from Chittapur, Priyank Kharge, had said he believed the "FBI is in Delhi to investigate the billion-dollar bitcoin scam."

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Dream home remains a pipe dream!

SAURAV GUPTA ■ GREATER NOIDA

Hundreds of flat buyers of the Roma Dreams society staged a protest at the under-construction site on Sunday, demanding the possession of their apartments that were to be delivered in 2015.

According to the buyers, they booked flats in 2010 at Earth Towne society, which was renamed Roma Dreams after the first company was declared insolvent.

Thousands of buyers across Delhi-NCR have been left in the lurch by the builders, and the apathetic approach of the authorities has further compounded their woes.

Carrying her two-year-old child in the scorching heat, a woman lamented, "I have to carry my child to the protest site as there is no one at home to look after him. We all are frustrated and hopeless as no one is even noticing our plights and suffering. Why should I



Homebuyers protest against delay in delivery of their Earth Towne Society (renamed Roma Dreams) flats at the under-construction site on Sunday

suffer after paying for my home? Is it not the Government's responsibility to interfere? I request the Yogi Government to help us in getting our flats as soon as possible."

Talking about the delay in granting possession by many builders here in Noida, Umesh Kumar Gupta, who lives at Paramount Emotions Society, said, "The authorities have done nothing to provide help

to flat buyers. The Government should interfere into this matter as people are suffering and no one is listening to their plights.

Sunita Rawat, one of the flat buyers of the society, said

they booked the two-bedroom flat in this society in 2007 and paid around ₹20 lakh. They were supposed to get the possession in 2015 but due to the builder's insolvency they failed to get the possession. Now when another builder came to complete the project, the Greater Noida Development Authority claimed the builder must clear their dues before they can start the construction.

"I have two children and this is the first flat which we have purchased with our hard earned money. We purchased this flat hoping that in two or three years we will shift in our own home but our dream is shattered. We are living on rent and it's very difficult for us to even get our children into a good school. I want to ask Yogi and Modi that they talk about giving a home to homeless people, but what about the people who already purchased the home but are not getting the possession," she said.

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CAPSULE

CENTRE TO WITHDRAW MASK LAXITY ORDER

New Delhi: After the detection of a case of highly transmissible Covid variant XE from Gujarat, and some States reporting a gradual surge in infections, the Government is likely to withdraw its recent order making the mask-wearing optional. Following the Central Government order late last month allowing States to decide on their own regarding the mask usage, many of them had gone easy on the curbs and announced that there would be no fines for not wearing a face mask.

FM TELLS BANKS TO GO FOR CREDIT EXPANSION

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to meet heads of public sector banks on April 23 to review performance of the lenders and progress made by them on various schemes launched by the government for revival of the economy battered by the pandemic.

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NCR PULSE

NEW OFFICE BEARERS FOR FIVE MORE STATES: AAP
New Delhi: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday announced new office bearers for five more states. Upendra Gaonkar has been named the party's Karnataka co-in-charge and Mani Naidu has been appointed as the Andhra Pradesh in-charge. Virender Kadian has been appointed as the Odisha in-charge while Mahadev Naik has been named the Maharashtra election in-charge with Deepak Singhal as the state in-charge and Ankush Narang as the Mumbai municipal in-charge.

SGT VARSITY IN GURUGRAM HOLDS INTERACTIVE SESSION
Gurugram: The SGT University in Gurugram organised a talk and interactive session in which Professor Hemant Kumar Gupta, Former Scientist, Director Technology Development Fund, DRDO, was the guest speaker. Professor Gupta spoke on the Triple Helix model for Science and technology beautifully explaining the crucial relationship between the three helices - industry, academia (university), and government and how harmony between them can result in the development of Innovations.

MEMBER OF THAK-THAK GANG ARRESTED IN CP
New Delhi: A 47-year-old man from Tamil Nadu, who is also a member of infamous thak-thak gang, has been arrested by Delhi Police in Connaught Place area of national capital. The accused identified as Ranganathan, a resident of Tiruchirappalli, has been involved in crime for more than 25 years. He used to commit crimes as part of a gang and lifted bags from civilians by distracting them.

DELHI POLICE FOILS ₹40 CR GOLD BURGLARY BID
New Delhi: With the arrest of four men, the Southeast district of Delhi Police have foiled a major burglary of gold worth Rs 40 crore at the Muthoot finance Ltd office in Govindpuri area. The accused were identified as Surender Shetty (36), Ajul Sheikh (51), Salman Sheikh (34) and Ram Govind (41).

SKM TO ORGANISE DHARNAS OVER MSP ON MONDAY
New Delhi: Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) will organise dharnas, demonstrations and seminars at different places for their demand to make legal guarantee of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) on Monday. SKM has claimed that despite assurances, the government has not formed a committee on MSP so far.

30-YR-OLD WOMAN'S LIFE SAVED BY DELHI POLICE
New Delhi: The Delhi Police saved life of a 30-year-old woman, who was trying to commit suicide at her house in Southwest Delhi's R K Puram area. On April 7, Assistant Sub Inspector Ram Swaroop and Constable Dharam Raj were on duty when a PCR call was received regarding a suicide threat by a woman. Police team on spot found that the woman had locked herself inside a room and had tied the knot of 'dupatta' to allegedly commit suicide. Police personnel broke open the door and stopped her from committing suicide and saved her life timely.

DELHI-JAIPUR EXPRESSWAY'S TRAFFIC CAN BE IMPACTED
Gurugram: Traffic on Delhi-Jaipur Expressway may be hit on May 15 due to the proposed march in support of a demand for the creation of the 'Ahr Regiment' in the Indian Army. The protest march is expected to be held from the Kherki Daula Toll plaza to the Delhi-Gurugram border near the Ambiance mall.

Pvt centres start paid Covid booster for 18+

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a steady rise in daily case count in the last few days, private vaccination centres on Sunday began the administration of the precautionary "third" dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, for the 18-plus population even as the pace was sluggish.

While Apollo Hospital had said on Saturday that it would begin vaccinating people with the dose from April 11, authorities running other big Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs), like those at Fortis Healthcare and Max Healthcare, said they are expected to begin from Monday. Authorities at Manipal Hospital and Star Imaging and Path Labs, confirmed that they had started the precaution dose roll-out on Sunday. "Yes, we began the administering of the booster dose from this morning. About 60 beneficiaries have already received it, most of whom came through walk-in procedure.

About 130 had registered by afternoon," said Director Star Imaging and Path Labs Dr Samir Bhati adding that most of the beneficiaries were those people who have to travel abroad, and it was largely a young population segment. "There were a few elderly too,



who had co-morbidities, but largely youths came on day one," he said.

Bhati also emphasised that daily cases in Delhi have been showing a rise in the last few days and there is a threat of a new variant too.

A spokesperson of the Manipal Hospital here also said the administering of the precaution dose began at its CVC on Sunday. "We began the administering of the third dose from today," he said.

"Vaccination centres at our hospitals are ready to administer the booster doses. We welcome this move as and this will provide stronger protection against Covid," Dr Sandeep Budhiraja, Group Medical Director, Max Healthcare group, had said.

However, on Sunday, by afternoon, none of the CVCs run by Max Healthcare group had started the exercise, and sources said, it is likely to start

by Monday. Fortis Healthcare group on Saturday evening had said: "The vaccine stock that we are currently holding was purchased at the previously approved government prices. We will resume the vaccinations as soon as we receive clarifications, hopefully by Monday".

Doctors and administrators at several leading private hospitals in Delhi had on Saturday asserted that they were all prepared for the exercise starting from April 10.

The nationwide exercise for the precaution dose at private vaccination centres for all aged above 18 years, who have completed nine months since the administration of their second dose, started on Sunday.

Vaccine majors Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech on Saturday had said they have decided to cut prices of the precaution dose of their respective COVID-19 vaccines -- Covishield and Covaxin -- to Rs 225 per shot for private hospitals after discussions with the Government.

Official sources on Sunday said SII has informed the Centre that it will compensate the price difference for the current unexpired stocks lying with private centres in form of free vials of fresh stocks.

Capital sees 2 fire incidents on Sunday, no casualty reported

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two fire incidents were again reported in the national Capital on Sunday. In the first incident, a fire broke out in a banquet hall near the Peeragarhi Chowk here on Sunday morning. No casualty was reported.

According to Atul Garg, the Director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), a call was received about a blaze at Maidens Crown banquet hall at around 11 am following which seven fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

Meanwhile, police said that when the police team reached the spot, a lot of smoke was coming from Maidens Crown banquet, seven fire tenders and one ambulance was also deployed, but the fire staff managed to control the fire without any casualty.

"During inquiry, it was found that the fire incident occurred due to a short circuit on the main stage of the hall," said Sameer Sharma, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Outer district.

In another fire incident, a godown caught fire on Nicholson Road in North Delhi's Mori Gate area in the morning. "A fire call was received at around 9.30 am and 12 fire-tenders were

rushed to the spot. No casualty was reported and the fire was brought under control," Garg said. "The fire broke out in a godown in which rubber materials were kept stored. As the fire broke out, we vacated the adjacent buildings.

No casualty or injury was caused to any person and the fire is under control and later extinguished," said Sagar Singh Kalsi, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district.

The cause of fire is suspected to be an incident triggered due to short-circuit. In the last one week around six to seven fire incidents have been reported in the national Capital. On Saturday morning,

a massive fire broke out in three buildings in Delhi's Azad market area. Police said that following the fire in one of the buildings, a four-storey structure also collapsed.

Five people suffered minor injuries after a cylinder exploded at a shop. It is suspected that the cause of the fire was a short circuit in an electric pole.

Same day, nine people including six firefighters were injured while trying to douse a blaze at an electrical components manufacturing factory in the Anand Parbat area here. Police said that it was suspected that the fire broke out after an LPG cylinder exploded.



Firefighters attempt to douse a blaze in a warehouse, at Mori Gate in New Delhi on Sunday. **RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER**

141 Covid cases, one death reported

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 141 fresh Covid cases and one more death on Sunday, while the positivity rate stood at 1.29 per cent. As per data of the Delhi Government health department, the national Capital's Covid-19 caseload has increased to 18,66,243 and the death toll to 26,157.

There has been an uptick in Covid-19 cases in Delhi over the last few days.

The capital had on Saturday reported 160 new Covid-19 cases with a positivity rate of 1.55 per cent. On Friday, it had reported 146 new cases and one more death, while the positivity rate stood at 1.39 per cent.

On Thursday, the city had recorded 176 cases, registering a 40 per cent increase over the previous day's count. The positivity rate stood at 1.68 per cent while no death was reported.

On Wednesday, 126 new cases were reported with a positivity rate of 1.12 per cent and one person had succumbed to the disease. A total of 10,939 COVID-19 tests were conducted in Delhi the previous day, the bulletin said.

The number of daily COVID-19 cases in Delhi had touched the record high of 28,867 on January 13 this year during the third wave of the pandemic.

The city had recorded a positivity rate of 30.6 per cent on January 14, the highest during the third wave of the pandemic which was largely driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

As many as 450 COVID-19 patients are in home isolation in the capital, the bulletin stated. There are 9,745 beds for COVID-19 patients in Delhi hospitals and 49 (0.5 per cent) of them are occupied, it said.

In a letter to Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra and Mizoram, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has asked them to maintain a strict watch and take pre-emptive action if required owing to the rise in the number of cases last week.

The states have also been advised to monitor influenza-like illness (ILI) & SARI cases in all health facilities on a regular basis for detecting early warning signals.

Sisodia criticises UP Govt for allowing pvt schools to hike fees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday criticised the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Government for allowing private schools to increase fees in the State.

Sisodia, who is also Delhi's Education Minister, said this is an insensitive decision by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruled UP Government in the times of unprecedented pandemic when people have lost their jobs and are going through severe financial crunch.

"The BJP is unable to improve the condition of government schools in Uttar Pradesh. They have ruined the public school education system in the state completely and now they are giving free hand to school administrations to hike the fees. If this is the vision of BJP then who will take care of the needs of the common man," said Sisodia. "In the past 7 years, private schools in Delhi



have been restricted from hiking the fees. If any school wants to hike the fees, then they need to take permission from the government. Their accounts are audited by the team from the government and if they are found in need of funds then only they are allowed to hike the fees," said Sisodia.

"The same Kejriwal model of governance is now being followed in Punjab. Chief Minister of Punjab Sardar Bhagwant Mann took action on this as soon as he took over as CM. He restricted the schools from hiking fees immediately which was a big relief for parents in state," said Sisodia.

Ghazipur landfill blaze doused in 3 hrs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Another fire broke out at the Ghazipur landfill site in east Delhi late on Saturday night. According to Delhi Fire Services officials this fire, though, was doused in three hours and no casualty was reported.

The incident comes nearly two weeks after a massive fire broke out at the same site. The blaze was doused within 48 hours. A call about the fire at the landfill site was received at around 10.30 pm, following which four fire-tenders were rushed to the spot.

According to the fire department, the fire had spread to the mounds of garbage and smoke billowed from the yard. The primary aim of the firemen was to prevent the blaze from spreading to other areas.

"The fire, which continued to rage on for nearly three hours, was doused by 1.30 am. The thick layer of smoke did pose a challenge but the firefighters brought the blaze under control and then con-

tinued with the cooling process," a fire department official said. Lambasting the BJP, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday said that the "mountain of garbage" the Ghazipur landfill site has become blaming it on "corruption" in BJP-controlled municipal bodies. "Ghazipur landfill site is Delhi's biggest suffering (kasht).

BJP has transformed Delhi into a mountain of garbage. These mountains of garbage are there because of their corruption," Sisodia said. "Just when Delhiites had made up their mind to allow CM Arvind Kejriwal to clean these mountains of garbage, the BJP postponed the elections," he said.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Kuldeep Kumar posted a video purportedly of fire incident on Twitter on Saturday. "Ghazipur's mountain of garbage has burnt again, people of Kondli are suffocating..." he said in tweet. Last week Delhi Police had registered a case against unknown people under Indian Penal

AAP leader terms move by BJP-ruled MCD to establish new landfill site unfortunate

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and MCD in-charge, Durgesh Pathak, on Sunday termed the move by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruled MCD to establish a new landfill site in national Capital as unfortunate. Pathak said that after gifting Delhi the three hazardous landfills in Ghazipur, Okhla, and Bhalswa, the BJP wants to add another to its list.

Pathak said that in 2017, BJP leader, Manoj Tiwari stated that if voted to power in the MCD, their party will get rid of all three of these landfills within a year, and will not leave any trace of garbage in these areas. "The Ghazipur landfill yet again

caught fire on Saturday night and despite being aware of the distressing situation of the people living nearby the area, the BJP is so shameless that it has gone ahead and sought permission for a new landfill site," said Pathak.

Countering the allegations, Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that AAP leader Durgesh Pathak is misleading the people of Delhi. "Will Pathak tell the people if he won't allow any landfill site then where would the disposal of garbage take place in Delhi? World's top developed cities like Singapore, New York, London, Paris & Sydney etc. all have at least one or more landfill sites," said Kapoor.

Code (IPC) sections on making atmosphere noxious to health, negligent conduct with

respect to fire and act endangering life or personal safety of others.

Test blast of Supertech's twin towers carried out on Sunday

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A trial run to demolish one of the twin towers of Supertech was carried out in just 3 seconds on Sunday. The test blast was carried out with five kg explosives in the apex tower. The test blast was held to ascertain amount of explosive which would be needed during actual demolition of both the towers on May 22.

After the trial test, a report will be prepared within a week, which will carry all details related to kind and quantity of explosives that will be needed for demolition of entire twin towers next month.

According to officials, the trial blast took place at 2.30 pm. The trial was conducted on six different panels of the building, in which different amounts of explosives were applied and dif-

ferent types of safety parameters were also used. A siren lasting a few seconds went off at 2.15 PM followed by two to three sirens at 2.30 PM, moments preceding the test blast. The Edifice Engineering and Jet Demolitions has been roped in by the Noida authority, and the residents living nearby have been asked to stay indoors.

Joseph Brinkman, managing director of Jet Demolition, said, "We are satisfied with today's trials, the building has stood firm. Demolition of building is extremely challenging for us, but we have right crew to work with. So we will overcome this challenge.

After trial blast, the authorities have got good results and in next 10 to 15 days, the results of this blast will be studied, after which further process will start."

DMRC introduces new baggage scanner system

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro has started introducing highly advanced and state-of-the-art baggage scanners at its metro stations in a phased manner to provide extra safety and security to passengers.

In a statement, the Delhi Metro said that the advanced features in these newly-introduced baggage scanners also ensure more convenience for the elderly and women commuters while lifting and placing heavy baggage items through the system for scanning.

Presently, 34 such baggage scanners with specialised commuter-friendly features have already been installed at major stations at Kashmere Gate, AIIMS, Vishwavidyalaya, HUDA City Centre, Rajouri Garden, Mayur Vihar Ph-1, NOIDA Sec-18, Palam, replacing the older X-BIS systems, the DMRC said. Gradually, over 250 more such baggage scanners will be installed across all Delhi Metro stations by the year end. At present, there are around 400 X-BIS machines installed at different metro stations across DMRC network it said.

"In order to further upgrade and strengthen X-Ray baggage Scanning System (X-BIS System) at security frisking points of Metro stations, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation has started introducing highly advanced and state-of-the-art baggage scanners at its Metro stations in a phased manner," the DMRC said in a statement.

On the auspicious occasion of पंचायती राज NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY CELEBRATION (24th April, 2022)

Note: The event will take place both in virtual as well as physical mode. Last date of receiving applications - April 20, 2022

Recognizing the outstanding efforts of the Gram Panchayat Sarpanches / Mukhyas / Pradhans from across India,

We "SANGUINE WE CARE WELFARE SOCIETY" (A National Level NGO) are organizing

"ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT RASHTRIYA GRAMYA SASHAKTIKARAN PURUSKAR - 2022"

Date: 24th April, 2022 Venue: Hotel Pacific, Subhash Road, Dehradun

Thus, we request nominations from eligible Gram Panchayat Sarpanches / Mukhyas / Pradhans who believe they are the most deserving ones for this Award.

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UTTARAKHAND HERITAGE MEDIA

Study attributes high pollution in city to biofuel burning in crematoria at peak of 2nd Covid wave

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A study has found that Delhi saw unusually high air pollution despite a lockdown during the March-May period which could be attributed to exceptionally high biofuel burning at crematoria and higher-than-normal frequency of dust storms during the second Covid-19 pandemic.

The study conducted by researchers from the National Institute of Advanced Science, Bengaluru; Delhi Pollution Control Committee; Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune; Utkal

University and Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology has been published in the multidisciplinary journal Chemosphere.

Led by scientist and senior meteorologist Gufran Beig, the research explained the reasons for the worsening air quality instead of improvement under lockdown by using India's first air quality forecasting framework model of SAFAR. It revealed that an unaccounted emission source was playing a leading role in high air pollution after balancing off impact of curtailed lockdown emissions. The hidden source of emission is

believed to be associated with additional carbonaceous bio-fuel burning related to crematoria whose emissions could not be accounted for in modeling. "The model failed to reproduce some observed unusual features mainly related to an unaccounted hidden source of emission which was related to biomass burning at the crematorium in all likelihood," the paper read.

The sudden increasing trend in PM2.5 followed steep surge in infection counts and peak mortality period (around 400 deaths per day) was directly coinciding with peak levels of PM2.5, it showed.

IMD: Maximum temperature of 41.8 degrees Celsius recorded

SAURAV GUPTA ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital witnessed the minimum temperature of 23.5 degree Celsius on Sunday, which was four notches warmer than the normal temperature for the season and which is 3.6 degree more than minimum temperature on Saturday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD data showed that the maximum temperature of 41.8 degrees Celsius was recorded at Delhi's base station, Safdarjung Observatory, which was six notches above normal for this time of the year. The highest humidity recorded was 32 per

cent at 8:30 in the morning and the lowest humidity recorded was 15 per cent at 5:30 in the evening on Sunday.

The weather stations at Ridge, Ayanagar, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, Palam and Delhi University recorded maximum temperatures of 43 degrees Celsius, 44 degrees Celsius, 43 degrees Celsius, 43 degrees Celsius, 42 degrees Celsius and 43 degrees Celsius, respectively, stated the IMD data. For the plains, a "heatwave" is declared when the maximum temperature is over 40 degrees Celsius and at least 4.5 notches above normal.

Post XE cases, Centre to cancel mask laxity order

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After the detection of a case of highly transmissible Covid variant XE from Gujarat, and some States reporting a gradual surge in infections, the Government is likely to withdraw its recent order making the mask-wearing optional.

Following the Central Government order late last month allowing States to decide on their own regarding the mask usage, many of them had gone easy on the curbs and announced that there would be no fines for not wearing a face mask.

In fact, the States had relaxed the majority of the restrictions in the wake of a consistent drop in Covid cases in the past few weeks, even as there has been an unexpected rise in infections worldwide as the deadly BA.2 variant of Omicron swept through the countries.

China, South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom are battling the fatal coronavirus surge. The BA.2 variant, also known as the Stealth Omicron, is the current variant of concern, causing a rise in cases worldwide. It is known for carrying over 32 mutations in its spike protein.

However, the detection of XE variant cases from Gujarat and the gradual rise in daily Covid cases in states like Delhi and Haryana, have alarmed the Centre making it introspect if its decision was not made in haste.

"In fact, in a span of seven days in the last week, Delhi, Haryana, and Gujarat have reported a rise in average daily Covid-19 cases even as the countrywide numbers have exponentially slowed down and are currently at a two-year low," said an official from the Ministry. He added that people have started taking the virus lightly and this is dangerous behaviour.

Moreover, there is a fear of a fourth wave if this trend of increase in cases continues. Mask usage is the best Covid prevention strategy that needs to be followed religiously. But we are adopting a wait and watch policy and will make a decision soon in this regard, he said.

Delhi on Saturday recorded 160 fresh COVID-19 cases while the positivity rate rose to 1.55 percent, according to data shared by the city health department. With this, the national capital's COVID-19 caseload has increased to



18,66,102. The death toll due to the viral disease remained unchanged at 26,156, the latest bulletin stated.

On the other hand, the seven-day average increased from 47 on April 4 to 68 on Saturday in Haryana.

Gujarat too has simultaneously seen a slight rise in Covid-19 cases in the past few days. The western Indian states, which reported just eight cases on Thursday, saw the case count jump to 34 on Saturday, the highest since March 13.

Meanwhile, the seven-day average has risen to 15, from nine on April 4. The Centre on its part has advised Kerala, Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra and Mizoram to take pre-emptive

action in areas of concern to control any emerging spread of coronavirus infection after they reported a higher contribution to the country's daily Covid-19 cases tally.

In a letter to the four states and the union territory, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan underlined that regular monitoring and follow-up action in emerging areas of concern are crucial and that laxity at any level may nullify the gains in pandemic management so far.

Meanwhile, states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal have shown signs of stability as far as the numbers of Covid cases are concerned.

Nadda accuses Cong of giving step motherly treatment to HP

PNS ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda on Sunday took part in a series of organisational and public meetings in the poll-bound Himachal Pradesh and accused the Congress of giving "step-motherly treatment" to the State and credited the "double-engine" Governments of the BJP with restoring its special status and making the State as a pharma-hub.

The BJP president said ropeway construction is soon going to commence in 13 places in Himachal Pradesh including Shimla, Kullu, Manali and Dharamshala which will give a major boost to tourism in the State.

The main rivals BJP and the Congress and the new entrant AAP have stepped-up their political activities in Himachal Pradesh, which is to elect a new state assembly by the year-end.

Addressing a press conference later at Shimla, Nadda said whenever there has been the BJP at the Centre the state has seen fast growth and development, and also a major improvement in all socio-economic parameters.

"But Himachal Pradesh has always suffered and its rights have been trampled upon by the Congress governments in New Delhi," he said, adding it was the BJP government that



restored the special status of Himachal and helped it turn into a pharma hub.

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur and Union Minister Anurag Thakur were present on the occasion.

In the run-up to the assembly poll in December, the BJP, this month, is organising 'Gram Kendra Sammelan' in Himachal Pradesh.

From May 15 to June 15 Sammelan of 'Panna Pramukh' will be organized. Between June 25 and June 30, a 'Yuva Rally' will be held in which over 1 lakh youth will participate.

In July, 'Panch Parmeshwar Sammelan' will be organized in Himachal Pradesh. Similarly, in August 'Labharthi (beneficiary) Sammelan' will be held in the

state. In September separate 'Rath Yatras' will be organized in the four Lok Sabha constituencies in Himachal Pradesh.

Nadda said under the special status given to Himachal Pradesh, the state used to get funding from the centrally-sponsored projects in the ratio of 90:10 where 90 percent funds were given by the Centre, but the Congress government changed it to 60:40 thus increasing the share of the state government and putting extra burden on the Himachal Pradesh government", alleged the BJP president.

He said under Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government Himachal Pradesh had got "an industrial package for 10

years, but when the Congress-led UPA government came into power it withdrew the industrial package when it was in its eighth year." Today the state witnessed high growth in the pharmaceutical industry it is due to the BJP's policies.

He said it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi fast-tracked Atal Tunnel project and dedicated to the nation the strategically located project whose foundation was laid way-back in 2002.

He said to ensure uninterrupted water supply to the people of Shimla by 2050 work on a mega project is going on to bring water from Satluj river. The project will cost around Rs 1813 crores.

UGC twitter account hacked

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) Twitter account was hacked on Sunday. This is the third prominent Twitter account that has been hacked in the past two days including that of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's Office and the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

The unidentified hackers took control of UGC India's Twitter account and posted a long thread of irrelevant tweets tagging numerous unknown persons across the world. The hacker has also used a cartoonist picture as the profile photo.

The Twitter handle with the username @ugc_india has around 2,96,000 followers at



present. The account is also linked to its official website. Earlier, the official Twitter account of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) was hacked on Saturday. However, the account was restored after a few hours, IMD tweeted.

The IMD said in a statement issued on Saturday night: "Official Twitter account (@Indiametdept) of India Meteorological Department (IMD) has been hacked about an hour ago. All the tweets from this account should be ignored till its restoration."

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Every year, lakhs of Indians are falling to kidney ailments due to lifestyle disorders including an unhealthy diet. If not detected and treated in time, the illness can aggravate into chronic kidney disease (CKD), warn doctors who have said that Ayush can be a life-saver to the ailing but vital organ of the patient.

"The CKD is increasing at an alarming rate in the country. Modern lifestyle disorders coupled with an unhealthy diet are a major reason. People should be alert about what they are consuming to lower the risk," warned Chief Medical Officer (CGHS) from the Union Health Ministry,

Dr. DC Katoch at an event held recently.

At the same time, Dr Bheema Bhatta, Medical Director from Medanta Ayurveda, Medanta Hospital explained that CKD is a condition in which the functioning of the kidney almost stops.

Mostly, diabetes, high blood pressure, fat, smoking, increasing age, and kidney stones are the major causes. Incidentally, all these conditions, also called 'silent killers', are on the increase.

He said that in the early stages of chronic kidney disease, there are a few signs or symptoms which even a patient is not able to realize until the condition reaches an

advanced stage. But by that time these diseases take serious form. Ayurveda can help save this vital part of the body, if the treatment is started at an early stage, said Dr Bhatta while giving his views on 'the appropriate traditional approach for CKD management.'

According to doctors, functioning of kidney can be significantly improved with the consumption of extracts of time-tested medicinal plants like Gokchur, Guduchi, Punarava, Kasani, Tulsi, Ashwagandha and gooseberry which are well known for their diuretic and blood purifier properties.

This not only cut down the risk of the disease, retard

its progression but can also corrects any deficiency arise out of the disease. NEERI KFT, based on the extracts of these herbs, is one of such formulations which have been found to be directly beneficial to the patients.

Dr Aref Hussain, consultant in Internal Medicine from Aurangabad in Maharashtra concurred saying that NEERI KFT can save the patient with CKD, once the disease is diagnosed correctly. "Dialysis cycles can also be brought down significantly."

The Ayurveda drug has been found to be effective in many patients who have been enrolled in the clinical trial," Dr Bhatt chipped in.

During discussion, Dr Sanchit Sharma, Executive Director

AIMIL Pharmaceuticals said that most people fall for fast food particularly fried crispy eatables without knowing that the luring brown layer is laden with amino-acid crispy which is harmful to various vital body organs, particularly the kidney.

Chronic kidney disease is the sixth fastest-growing cause of death globally and around 1.7 million people are estimated to die annually because of acute kidney injury globally.

In India, it is estimated that a population of over 7.8 million people are living with CKD, as per the doctors.

Vaccine majors to compensate for price difference for unexpired stocks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after slashing the prices of their jabs, vaccine majors Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech told the Centre that they will compensate for the price difference for the unexpired stocks lying with private centres in the form of free vials of fresh stocks, according to official sources. Bharat Biotech had also announced that the price differential with any existing stocks of Covaxin in private hospitals shall be compensated in the form of additional doses.

In a communication to the Union health ministry, Prakash Kumar Singh, director, government and regulatory affairs at the SII, on Sunday said, "As per direction of Dr. Adar C Poonawalla, we want to inform you that we will compensate the price difference for the

with the Union Health Ministry.

On Sunday, the Pune-based SII said that it will compensate for the price difference for the unexpired stocks lying with private centres in the form of free vials of fresh stocks, according to official sources. Bharat Biotech had also announced that the price differential with any existing stocks of Covaxin in private hospitals shall be compensated in the form of additional doses.

The difference between Rs 600 plus GST and our recent price of Rs 225 plus GST would be compensated in the form of free vials of the fresh stocks of Covishield," Singh is learnt to have conveyed in the communication. The inventories at the private CVCs would be verified by SII representatives and



current unexpired stocks lying with private Covid vaccination centres (CVCs)."

The inventories at the private CVCs would be verified by SII representatives and

the claim would then be processed on the basis of their approval.

India began inoculation of the precaution dose of Covid-19 vaccines to all beneficiaries aged above 18 years at private vaccination centres from Sunday. Those above the age of 18 and who have completed nine months after the administration of the second dose of the The inventories at the private CVCs would be verified by SII representatives and the claim would then be processed on the basis of their approval.

According to the Ministry, the precaution dose would be the same as the first and second jab. Presently, 82 per cent of the Covid-19 shots being administered in the country are Covishield from SII.

TN, MP tiger reserves get global accreditation certificates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu and Bandhavgarh and Pench Tiger Reserves in Madhya Pradesh have been conferred with the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA/Ts) international accreditation certificates.

With this, the total number of tiger reserves to get CA/Ts certification becomes 17 as on date, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change announced.

CA/Ts is a globally accepted conservation tool that sets best practices and standards to manage tigers and encourages assessments to benchmark progress. Habitats

that support tiger populations are the building blocks of wild tiger conservation and effectively managing them is essential for the long-term survival of wild tigers, said officials.

CA/Ts is being implemented across 125 sites in seven tiger range countries and India has the highest 94 sites, out of which assessment was completed for 20 tiger reserves this year.

The certificates of accreditation were handed over to the officials from the three tiger reserves at Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh during the 20th National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) meeting being held on Saturday and Sunday there.

The other 14 tiger

reserves, which have been accredited, are Manas, Kaziranga and Orang in Assam; Satpura, Kanha, and Panna in Madhya Pradesh; Pench in Maharashtra; Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar; Dudhwa in Uttar Pradesh; Sunderbans in West Bengal; Parambikulam in Kerala; Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka; and Mudumalai and Anamalai Tiger Reserves in Tamil Nadu.

India has over 50 tiger reserves. The government initiated this CATS standardization process 10 years ago. India harbors about 70 per cent of the world's tiger population in the wild.

But even reserves after reserves are being awarded for the best practice and stan-

dards to manage big cats, an analysis by Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment, the environmental organisation has noted that the condition of many tiger reserves has declined due to the diversion of land for infrastructure projects. Giving several instances of diversion of land from tiger habitats, the report said that there is almost no consideration of the fact that such diversion will have an impact on tiger habitat...

"The issue of concern is that tiger habitats (tiger reserves and tiger corridors) continue to be diverted for infrastructural projects such as roads, railways, pipelines, transmission lines, etc. which were given clearances," it noted.

Cong leader fires questions on price rise at Irani in flight, IndiGo begins probe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Mahila Congress acting president Netta D'Souza on Sunday fired questions on price rise at Union Minister Smriti Irani when the two came face-to-face on IndiGo's Delhi-Guwahati flight, with the Minister objecting to being "accosted".

IndiGo said the incident is currently under investigation. D'Souza on Sunday posted a short video of the incident on Twitter where she asks Women and Child Development Minister Irani about the rising prices of cooking gas and petrol.

The minister - who was sitting in the first row of the plane - is heard asking D'Souza to not



tells Irani that she is a minister to which the latter replies, "I am answering ma'am", and goes on to speak about free COVID-19 vaccination.

Some parts of the conversation in the video are not audible. IndiGo spokesperson told PTI, "We are aware of the matter on flight 6E262 DEL-GAU on 10 April 2022 and it is currently under investigation. We would like to confirm no IndiGo employees were involved in this matter." The airline had banned comedian Kunal Kamra for six months after he had heckled Arnab Goswami, the editor of Republic TV, on IndiGo's Mumbai-Lucknow flight on January 28, 2020.

The Congress leader then

SKM to observe MSP Guarantee Week from Apr 11

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha will observe an 'MSP Guarantee Week' from April 11 to 17 to press its demand for a legal guarantee on minimum support price for farmers.

During this week, farmer unions will hold dharnas, demonstrations and seminars across the country, the SKM said in a statement on Sunday.

The programme was first announced on March 14.

The SKM had spearheaded a year-long agitation against the Centre's three farm laws.



demands, including withdrawal of cases registered against farmers during the agitation, a legal guarantee on MSP and compensation for kin of farmers who died dur-

ing the protest.

Between April 11 and 17, farmer organisations across the country will observe an 'MSP Guarantee Week' under the banner of the Samyukt

Kisan Morcha, the statement said.

"Under this programme, public awareness campaigns will be held through dharnas, demonstrations and seminars at different places for the demand to make Minimum Support Price (MSP) a legal right of farmers," it said.

Last year in November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the repeal of the three farm laws and the formation of a committee on MSP and other issues, the statement said.

"This was also mentioned in the assurance letter of the government dated December 9. But today, even after four months, the government has not constituted this committee."

"On March 22, the gov-

ernment had sent a verbal message to the Samyukt Kisan Morcha to give some names for the committee.

But after the Morcha demanded a written explanation regarding the constitution of the committee, its chairmanship, its TOR (Terms of Reference) and tenure etc., the government has again maintained silence. Obviously, the intention of the government on this question is not clear," it said.

The SKM also appealed to farmers and farm organisations across the country to organise at least one programme in their respective districts between April 11 and 17 so that preparations can be started for the nationwide movement on the question of MSP.

BJP creating 'fake' Hindu Hriday Samrat, says Uddhav

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday came down heavily on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for trying to create "banavat (fake) Hindu Hriday Samrat", a sobriquet used for late Sena chief Bal Thackeray, and wondered whether Narendra Modi was the Prime Minister or a village sarpanch considering that Modi's was the only photograph used in all elections.

Addressing a rally for the Congress candidate Jayashri Jadhav in the Kolhapur Assembly by-poll from North Kolhapur constituency through video-conferencing, Uddhav — without naming Modi — said that the people rejected the "banavat (fake) Hindu Hriday Samrat" projected by the BJP.

"When you make a mention of Hindu Hriday Samrat, the only name that comes to the mind of the people is Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray. No person other than Balasaheb Thackeray can

ever become of Hindu hriday Samrat He was the only Hindu hriday Samrat who went to assistance of Hindus when they were in trouble without bothering about the risks involved," Uddhav said.

Ridiculing the BJP for using Modi as the party's poster boy in all elections, including that of Village sarpanch, the Sena President said: "The BJP election posters contain only the photograph of only Modi in all elections including the one held for the village sarpanch post. Where have your other leaders including LK Advani and Vajpayee gone? I would like to know which post that this gentleman is contesting for? Is Modi the Prime Minister or a village sarpanch?"

Uddhav was responding to the criticism of former chief minister and senior BJP leader



Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) against the BJP's Satyajit Kadam.

The by-poll has been necessitated by the death of Congress' sitting MLA Chandrakant Jadhav. In the 2019 assembly elections, Jadhav had defeated then Sena MLA Rajesh Kshirsagar to win the Kolhapur North Assembly seat. Jadhav's wife Jayashri is contesting as the Congress' candidate in the current elections.

Uddhav charged that the BJP, despite being in alliance with the Shiv Sena then, had engineered the defeat of the Shiv Sena in the 2019 Assembly polls.

"The vote share of the Congress increased in 2019 polls in Kolhapur North compared to 2014 elections which resulted in the defeat of Shiv Sena's nominee. This was despite the fact that the Sena was contesting the elections in alliance with the BJP. Where did the BJP's votes go in 2019? Did you have a hidden alliance with Congress at that time?" Uddhav asked.

Devendra Fadnavis who had hit out at the Shiv Sena for using the photograph of late Sena chief Bal Thackeray with Congress president Sonig Gandhi for the Assembly by-polls from Kolhapur north constituency.

Uddhav said that the BJP was not sole custodian of the Hindutva and that the Sena severing its alliance with the BJP did not mean that it had given up Hindutva.

In the April 12, 2022 Kolhapur north Assembly by-polls, Congress' Jayashree Jadhav is contesting as the joint candidate of the ruling

CPM conclave ends with call to oust BJP

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KANNUR

The 23rd Party Congress of the CPI(M) concluded at Kannur on Sunday with a call by general secretary Sitaram Yechury to all democratic, secular, liberal and socialist forces to come together to defeat the "communal" BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. In its bid to capture power at the Centre in alliance with the secular democratic and liberal forces, the CPI(M) reconstituted its Central Committee and Polit Bureau by inducting young members and weeding out the old.

K N Balagopal, the Fin Min of Kerala, P Rajeev, the intellectual face who also holds the industries portfolio, C S Sujatha and P Sathedeve were inducted as members of the Central Committee. A Vijayaraghavan, the convener of the LDF, who is also the husband of Higher Edu Minister R Bindu was elevated as a polit bureau member of the party.

There are 15 women in the 85-member central committee while 84 year old s

Ramachandran Pillai has been made a special invitee as a prelude to his retirement from decision making bodies. The last day of the five-day long party congress turned out to be a sad day for the CPI(M) as one of its central committee members M C Josephine from Kerala breathed her last following a cardiac arrest. The Party Congress expressed its condolences over the passing away of Josephine, who was a former chairperson of the State Women's Commission.

Though there was no formal announcement about the kind of alliance to be forged for the 2024 polls, it is certain that status quo would be continued all over the country barring Kerala, where the CPI(M) and Cong are rivals. Ramachandra Dom was made a member of the polit bureau of the party, the first Harijan to be elevated to this exclusive club of party commissars. Till now there was no Harijan members in the PB of the party, though the CPI had appointed D Raja from the same community as its all-powerful general secretary.

SC agrees to hear plea challenging Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a plea related to the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014.

The plea contended that the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act was passed by both houses of Parliament in a "controversial" manner.

A bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana was told by advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for a petitioner, that though the challenge to the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, one of the key aspects of the petition, has become "infertile" with the passage of time, there are other important issues which needed to be adjudicated upon.

"This case is regarding the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. That part may have become infructuous but there are other questions which are involved regarding the bifurcation of states. Please list it some day," he said.

"We will see," the bench which also comprised Justices

Krishna Murari and Hima Kohli said on Friday.

Telangana was carved out of Andhra Pradesh through the legislation in 2014.

The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act was passed in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on February 18 and 20 respectively and got the assent of the then President Pranab Mukherjee on March 1. It was published in the official gazette a day later.

Several petitions, including the one which was filed by former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Kiran Reddy, challenging the bifurcation and the "controversial manner" in which the bill was cleared in Parliament were filed in the apex court in 2014 and they are pending.

The petitioners contended that the bifurcation of the state was illegal and unconstitutional. They had questioned the Centre's decision to pass the bill pertaining to the bifurcation of the state in Parliament despite it being rejected by the AP state assembly.

MNS leader plays Hanuman Chalisa in front of Sena HQ; held

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai police on Sunday detained MNS leader MNS leader Yashwant Killedar when he played "Hanuman-chalisa" on a loudspeaker in front of the Shiv Sena headquarters "Sena Bhavan" at Dadar in north-central Mumbai, on the occasion of Shri Ram Navami.

The loud-speaker, fitted on a "kaali-peeli" taxi, was playing "Hanuman-chalisa" and other devotional songs, when the police arrived on the scene, seized the loudspeaker and detained Killedar.

It may be recalled that in his address to the MNS workers on the occasion of Gudi Padva on April 2, party president Raj Thackeray 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.

This was the second such incident since April 2. Earlier, the police had on April 3 removed the loud speaker set up a loudspeaker playing "Hanuman Chalisa" in front of the party office at Ghatkopar in north-east Mumbai, and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 the local MNS leader for the violation of the sound norms.

Asked to comment on Sunday's development, Maharashtra Tourism Minister and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray said: "They're trying to revive their dead party. Our Hindutva is known to everyone. We will fulfil what we have promised to the people."

UP sets up yarn unit to aid sheep farming

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In order to transform the sheep farming sector in Uttar Pradesh, the Government is setting up a unit of woollen yarn production centre in Prayagraj where the yarn will be produced from sheep's wool.

With this unit, sheep farmers will get better prices for their wool and a better quality of yarn will be available across the state. The yarns will be used to weave blankets in mills established by the government. The quality of these blankets will be better than conventionally made blankets. The sheep farmers of the state are set to benefit from these wool mills.

It is worth mentioning that Uttar Pradesh has seven blanket-making mills in Ghazipur, Adilabad (Ghazipur), Khajni (Gorakhpur), Nazimabad (Bijnor), Bhadohi, Mirzapur, and Tikar Mafi (Amethi).

At present, the government buys wool from the open market to make blankets. Since

the sheep wool blanket is warm and durable, therefore, apart from the general demand, the government also needs the blankets in large numbers to be distributed among the poor during winters. Since the demand is high, more people will be encouraged towards sheep rearing.

According to veterinarian Rakesh Shukla, "The sheep industry offers a significant contribution to the financially deprived sections of society. Wool and meat are obtained from sheep. Manure made from sheep's excreta has the ability to make barren land fertile."

Sheep rearing has proved to be a good employment activity for the poor because it requires less time, less space and less expense to grow. Also, sheep have a high fertility rate. Normally a sheep becomes fertile in 12 to 18 months and gives birth to 1-2 lambs at a time. This way their number also increases rapidly, he added.

Son of TMC leader held in gangrape case, girl dies

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

There was no stopping of criminal incidents in Bengal. The police on Sunday arrested the son of a district level Trinamool Congress leader at Hanskhali block in Nadia district for gang-raping a pubescent girl who perished to her injuries hours after her ordeal.

The incident took place last Monday in the Shyamnagar locality of Gagna panchayat when the girl was invited to a party — at the house of the accused — where she was drugged and then gang-raped by her tormentors. Brajgopal who raped the 14-year-old minor along with his friends is the son of Gajna Gram Panchayat member Samar Gowla.

Hours after the rape the victim was dropped at her house with a warning that her house and family members would be burnt alive if a thing was revealed to the police, sources said.

The ordeal would not stop there. Moments after she was severely bleeding girl succumbed to her injuries in the wee hours of Wednesday the henchmen of accused returned and hurriedly cremated her at the nearby funeral ground, her relatives who informed the police as late as Saturday said.

On why the family did not call up the police or why they would not visit a hospital, locals who raised a hullabaloo after coming to know about the incident, said the perpetrators of the crime had warned them against doing so.

"They told the family that they were free to call a doctor but should not go to a hospital or call the police or else the whole family would be burnt alive... so the petrified kin refrained from taking to a hospital," said a local adding that they gathered courage to lodge a police complaint after an NGO supported them.

"No postmortem was

conducted, no death certificate was issued and she was consigned to flames," a local police officer said adding the family of the victim kept mum as they were afraid of the dire consequences that they had been threatened by the family of the deceased.

This was the fourth incident of gang rape in the past one month with the previous one taking place at North 24 Parganas and Malda. The victims were luckier in the earlier cases as they survived the crime and were undergoing treatment at various hospitals. In earlier cases also TMC functionaries or their relatives were involved, sources said.

Meanwhile, the police on Sunday arrested Jaan e Alam a Trinamool Congress functionary who had on Saturday shot dead two of his party men inside one of his farm houses at Mogaahaat at Diamond Harbour 50 miles south of Kolkata before fleeing the area.

Alam is a businessman

who had developed a business worth crores through alleged fake business ventures, police said adding he had taken advance payments from the victims for supplying construction materials but would not supply them. When the victims challenged him and asked for a refund he shot them dead before hacking them to confirm their deaths inside his farmhouse.

Reacting to the situations the opposition BJP and the Left said the time had come when Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's men would engage in fratricide as they had already occupied the entire opposition space and now the fight is for the share in the booty.

"Not a single crime you can show me in Bengal where a TMC leader or a worker is not involved," said CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty adding "the Frankenstein's monster that Mamata Banerjee has created will one day kill her own party."

Akhilesh alleges misuse of power, booth capturing in council polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president and leader of Opposition in UP Assembly, Akhilesh Yadav, charged that the double engine Government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had broken all records of blatant misuse of State power and other irregularities for winning the UP Legislative Council elections from the local bodies.

"Besides booth capturing by the BJP candidates with the active support of the police and administration, the elected members of the three-tier panchayat bodies had to face intimidation and at many places they were forced to cast their votes for the BJP candidates," Akhilesh Yadav alleged,

and added, "The credibility of the Election Commission of India is under serious doubt as no action was taken by the poll panel to prevent booth capturing and malpractices even when the SP had cautioned it about the elaborate planning by the ruling party for winning the election by unfair means."

The SP chief said at Dhanpatganj block of Sultanpur district, the polling agent of the BJP was intimidating the voters to cast their vote for the BJP candidate.

He said despite the blatant irregularities committed by the BJP candidates in Amethi, the administration remained a mute spectator. He said at Bhatni polling centre in Deoria district, the polling agents of

the SP were forced to flee while the polling agent of SP at Laar polling centre in Deoria was not given the authorisation documents by the administration. The SP chief alleged that at many places in Deoria, village pradhan and other panchayat members were tortured by the police to vote for the BJP candidates. Asserting that the SP would continue its struggle against the arrogance of power shown by the BJP, Akhilesh Yadav said his party thanked all those who voted for the candidates of the opposition party.

He said in Amroha, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Ghazipur, the BJP cadres indulged in booth capturing and police remained a mute spectator.

UP Govt allows pvt schools in State to hike fees by 10%

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Government has allowed private schools across the State to increase fees by 10 per cent.

An order issued by Additional Chief Secretary Aradhana Shukla said private schools could increase their fees from the upcoming academic session.

The fee structure of the academic session 2019-20 will be kept as the base after which the fees can be increased by 10 per cent, Shukla added. The government had earlier banned all private schools from increasing the school fees in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Private schools can increase the fees for the academic session 2022-23 as per

norms," reads the letter issued by the UP government which has been sent to the district inspectors of schools and other Secondary Education department officials.

The Association of Private Schools of UP, on January 7, had challenged the government order that prohibited hike in school fees due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, on March 15, had asked the state government to file its reply on the petition.

In the academic sessions 2020-21 and 2021-22, the government had stopped the private schools from hiking fees due to the pandemic. The schools were asked to continue with the fee structure of 2019-20.



Mumbai: Shiv Sena's national spokesperson and MP Priyanka Chaturvedi (extreme right) speaking at the launch of 'The Opium Toffee' a book written by author-biographer and current Information Commissioner of Punjab, Khushwant Singh, in Mumbai on Saturday. Seen in the middle is Khushwant Singh, while author and major social media influencer Kiran Manral is on the extreme left. 'The Opium Toffee' is the fourth book written by Singh, who has authored the biography of former Punjab Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh, titled 'The People's Maharaja'. Set in the troubled times of extremism in Punjab and Chandigarh, 'The Opium Toffee' is a story of a love that was lost, only to be regained after years of separation, and a story of resilience and the will to survive against all odds. It encompasses the intriguing journey of Shabnam and Ajit through the highs and lows of their teenage years, India's fashion industry, drugs, extremism, illegal migration and so much more.

Six killed in accidents in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Four persons, including a woman and her son, died in a shocking road accident on Meerut-Baghat road under Jani Khurd police station on Sunday.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the deaths and directed the Meerut district officials to ensure proper treatment of those injured in the mishap.

According to reports, in a head-on collision between a speeding car and a motorcycle, the mother-son duo riding the two-wheeler and two women in the car were fatally injured.

The police, who reached the spot on getting information, sent the bodies for post-mortem, while those injured in the accident were undergoing treatment at the hospital.

The accident took place near the Sai temple in front of Kurali.

The police said the injured

Bhushan, Bala Devi, Magan Devi, all residents of Aminagar Sarai Baghat, motorcycle rider Anuj and his mother Saroj of village Mukri police station Chandinagar district Baghat were taken to the hospital where the doctors pronounced Bala Devi, Magan Devi, Anuj and Saroj dead.

In another incident in Hardoi, reckless driving led to the death of a woman sweeping a grocery shop near the turn in Husepur village on Hardoi-Shahjahanpur highway.

The woman's son, who was near the shop, was also injured in the accident along with all the five occupants of the luxury car.

The police reached the spot on getting information and seized the car and sent the injured for treatment.

Reports said that Ravi Kala Mishra, wife of Radheshyam Mishra of Hunseypur village of Shahabad Kotwali, was sweeping the verandah of the grocery

shop located near the house on Sunday morning. Her son Rinku was also sitting near the shop.

Meanwhile, a speeding car coming from Shahabad hit the wall of the shop and later it went crushing Ravi Kala, killing her on the spot. Her son was also seriously injured after he was buried in the rubble of the wall which fell over him after the mishap.

The doctors at the district hospital referred the son to Lucknow after finding his condition critical.

The local police claimed that the occupants of the car were going to consult a doctor regarding a patient suffering from cancer.

According to Inspector Suresh Mishra, so far he had not received any complaint from the victim's family but he would get a case registered in the matter and would take further legal action against the driver.

Body of missing teenager recovered in Meerut

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The body of a 17-year-old teenager, who was missing for the last 11 days in Meerut, was finally recovered by the police on Sunday afternoon.

The body was found lying behind Harvansh City in TP Nagar police station area. The family has accused the teen's friends of murder.

As soon as the information was received, the police reached the spot and started investigation into the matter. The body was also sent for post-mortem.

Reports said that on March 30, the relatives of Rahul (17) had lodged a missing complaint with the TP Nagar police station. Rahul had gone to attend a party with his friends and later he went missing.

The relatives accused the friends of murder. After this, the police detained two friends

of Rahul for questioning. Superintendent of Police (City) Vineet Bhatnagar said that prima facie the reason for the murder was old enmity. He said that at present the police were investigating the incident after registering a case on the basis of complaint.

Deepak, the father of the deceased, told the police that on the night of March 30, friends had called Rahul for a party and after that he did not return home.

Meanwhile, a history-sheeter was lynched in Ambedkarnagar when agitated with the assault on a youth, the people of Gherwa Maroucha village of Baskhari thrashed the listed criminal to death.

The police have registered a case of murder against three named and some unknown persons on the complaint of the brother of the history-sheeter.

High level probe into hacking of UP CM office's Twitter handle

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A high level probe will be conducted into the hacking of the official Twitter handle of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's office.

The twitter handle of the UP CM office was hacked briefly in the early hours of Saturday. The police said strictest action would be taken against those responsible.

Subsequently, a case was registered in this connection.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the hackers sent out 400-500 tweets from the CM Office account.

"The account was hacked for around 29 minutes in the night. The hackers posted around 400-500 tweets, and the account was suspended on grounds of unnatural activity," said a police official of the team probing the case.

Later in a tweet in Hindi, the Uttar Pradesh government

said, "There was an attempt by anti-social elements to hack the official Twitter account of the Chief Minister's Office @CMOfficeUP at 12:30 am on April 9. Some tweets were posted by them which were removed immediately."

Strictest action will be taken against those responsible for this after an investigation of the case by cyber experts, it added.

"A case has been registered in this connection under the Information Technology Act at cyber crime police station in Lucknow against unknown persons," the cyber crime unit officials said.

The Twitter handle @CMOfficeUP has over 40 lakh followers.

In screenshots of the hacked account seen on various news websites, the profile picture of the handle has been replaced with an animated photo.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

At the brink

With political vagabonds playing around its Constitution, Pakistan is in peril today

Pakistan is in peril. It is not about who will succeed Imran Khan. Somebody surely will. Merely swearing in another Prime Minister is no solution. Never has the country's democracy been so shabbily treated and misused to the point of being ignored completely. Even the militarists shied away from cocking a snook at their Constitution. Imran did that with impunity and little remorse. That is the issue. A country can come out of a political crisis. It can weather an economic crisis. Can it survive an attack on its Constitution? The worst thing is, such a realisation is perhaps farthest from people's thoughts today. The focus is on the I-won-you-lost school of politics. The focus is on keeping elections in abeyance so that a Government, however short-term — the National Assembly is set to dissolve in August 2023 — can come to power. The focus is on returning as fast as possible to dynasty politics. That is one blame Imran escapes. Shehbaz Sharif, PML-N president and Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly, is presenting himself as the Prime Minister-in-waiting. He calls for a gathering of dynastic forces after Imran's exit when he says "neither I, nor Bilawal... will interfere" as the law takes its course. He is saying he will carry no vendetta against Imran. What is important is to include Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, in the "we".



INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

Bhutto, as if on cue, welcomes people to "purana" (old) Pakistan. That is all that the two families are interested in. Restoring the status quo. They want to get back to enjoying power like in the past. Imran broke the party in 2018 and now it is time to pick up the pieces. Imagine the mockery of Pakistan's tottering democracy if Shehbaz takes over the hot seat. He is an accused in a money laundering

case and was in jail till the courts released him on bail. He is the brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, whom the courts disqualified from holding public office and sentenced to prison in the Panama Papers case; now in London on expired bail. The more corrupt or morally compromised the leader, the easier it is for the Pakistani military to control such a person. Then are the minor issues of the FATF threat for terror financing, local jihadi bodies that find shelter in Pakistan, the regressive communal and blasphemy laws, the cracking economy and Pakistan's diplomatic faux pas that no leader ever took seriously. Simply put, Prime Ministers come and go but they neither govern nor subscribe to the rule of law or governance. The former cricketer was once asked by his President to return to captaincy. He repaid the trust with the World Cup. He belied the trust the second time, ruling by rhetoric, conceding ground to the regressive far right, gunning for the Opposition, trusting in populism and pursuing a non-existent Islamist welfare State.

PICTALK



Devotees at a Shobha Yatra on the occasion of Ram Navami, in Hyderabad

Shooting from the lip

Rahul's intentions may not be devious, but his utterances often land him in the soup

Recently, Rahul Gandhi spoke at the book launch of 'The Dalit Truth' at Jawahar Bhawan in the Capital. We don't know if it is a coincidence or part of a design that whatever Rahul talks about turns controversial. Rahul's 35-minute keynote address was well received by the audience. He spoke passionately but gave enough ammunition to his opponents and, at the end of it, made more enemies than friends.



He has been targeted for saying how the Government is arm-twisting Opposition leaders. He also invited flak for what he told the Dalit boys after the Una incident. Rahul said that the Government was intimidating its political opponents by using the ED and CBI; it was snooping on them through Pegasus. So the politicians with skeletons in their cupboard (and there would be many!) have been 'managed' and marginalised. He then spoke about how the Congress had offered the chief ministership of Uttar Pradesh to Mayawati for an alliance but the offer was declined for no ostensible reason. The contentious claim could be correct but presenting it thus is tantamount to saying that she is corrupt. Instead of hitting the Government, his arrow hit Mayawati.

Thoughts, if not articulated, often lead to such disasters. With Rahul Gandhi, it happens much too often. Rahul also narrated the Una incident, where Dalits were beaten up naked. He said they were beaten "like a dog". He also said that he wanted to understand how a man who can pat animals and kill cockroaches and insects with bare hands couldn't touch a human being. That did not sound proper. Though the intent wasn't wrong, it sounded awkward — comparing Dalits with cockroaches and animals is not the done thing. That has been his problem all along. He is not articulate enough and doesn't care about it. He would just not work on his speeches. Rahul says what he feels like, without caring for repercussions. He went on to say that he went to see the Dalit boys who had consumed insecticide after the Una incident, adding that had his sister been beaten like that, he would have killed the perpetrators with a knife rather than committing suicide. This was again an emotional outburst and not a call to defy the law of the land, which it has been made out to be. But then that is Rahul Gandhi: straightforward, fearless and speaking his heart out, come what may.

Jaipur's Loathing & Fear: JLF memories

The Jaipur Literature Festival conjures up a lot of images not only for the mind's eye but also for the soul and intellect of the attendees

So, it's a dark and somewhat hot night. The Rambagh Palace was beautified as a fair Rajput maiden, ready to receive the who's-who of literature. After all, it was the opening dinner for the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF). With a 'friend of the festival' pass neatly tucked in my pocket, the company of ambassadors, "kings", "princes" and the elite of Jaipur awaited me. Amidst them was a silver-haired magician. Sanjoy Roy's craft had conjured up the JLF many years ago.

The JLF brings beauty and brains to Jaipur, and after-parties are where you get to really meet them off guard. Intoxication, glib flirting and snobby men; no Jaipur after-party is complete without these, and I stuck around till 4 am. Night one was over, and I passed out.

Day One began early. I was at the JLF grounds around 10 am, sipping coffee, still waking up. What struck me was the Palestinian media advisor, wearing a blue linen suit and an undiplomatic personality. I said a "Hail Mary" for the future of Indo-Palestinian relations, and moved on to the sessions. And guess what I found: More diplomats!

Wearing a modern black *bandhgala* (traditional Indian-wear), over 6'3" tall, German ambassador Walter Lindner towered over everyone around him. He was proactively Russia-bashing and calling the Ukraine-Russia conflict as "Putin's war". But a young Caucasian woman broke his spell: "Why is Germany accepting Ukrainian refugees and not Syrian or middle-eastern ones?" A Russian agent in the crowd? Nope, but a defiantly truthful agent! But my "geo-politics" quota was over. I swerved towards Remo, the musician, who was talking about his life and book. Half an hour in, Remo proved his singing was better than his talk.

Behind the main stage, there was a cloistered space aka the writer's lounge. Naturally, it had the best booze, gossip and food. So I entered and was soon joined by a middle height, bluish jacket-wearing man. This writer-



looking-man actually was Turkish Ambassador Firat Sunel, there with his daughter. We chatted about Turkey, the Ottomans, new-age politics, Indo-Turkish relationships and the heartthrob of many Indians — Ertugrul. But our candid conversation was soon to end; the Sunels left early to prepare for his book reading. The JLF music night was on, but I stuck to the bar and conversations. Brushed shoulders with Shashi Tharoor on my way out and headed for the after-party.

Now Day Three was super fun, not because I was hitting the "coffee pot" since 10 am but because I was to hear Mak Dizdar, one of the greatest Bosnian poets translated into Hindi. For an hour or so, I was floating in Dizdar's world and his Bosnia, narrated through the words used by Firaq, Iqbal and Ghalib. However, Mak was no showstopper, though Manoj Bajpayee was. His session was overcrowded, so I caught up with him in the lounge. My question — what was the future of Hindi culture? Where does the hinterland culture go for laurels? His



THE JLF BRINGS BEAUTY AND BRAINS TO JAIPUR, AND AFTER-PARTIES ARE WHERE YOU GET TO REALLY MEET THEM OFF GUARD. INTOXICATION, GLIB FLIRTING AND SNOBBY MEN; NO JAIPUR AFTER-PARTY IS COMPLETE WITHOUT THESE

reply suited him as well as his chic brown leather shoes: "There is a scarcity of platforms. There are now places like this (JLF) which give us platforms, and we deeply appreciate it. Today, we work in Hindi films, yet people of the industry don't know Hindi. But nevertheless, people all over the Hindi belt are organising films and art gatherings. But the media doesn't show it. It will take time, but it's happening."

By the time the day ended, I had digested many sessions covering electoral bonds to UP elections and even heard a former election official say, "You need money and muscle to win elections." Now,

Day Three was Shashi Day, with Tharoor participating in three-four sessions, pulling thousands of people to the venue. Far from being a Fargo of distortions, Shashi did share his views on India and other topics and was flanked by hundreds of selfies and book signings. As the day was ending, Tharoor's words were still buzzing in my head: "India denied to someone among us today, will be denied to all of

us tomorrow. We must never give up, despite setbacks."

The next two days dealt with issues such as climate change, music and the usual *joie de vivre*. To sum up, I met up with Sanjay Roy again, and asked him about the secret to his energy. Surprisingly, it wasn't coca or caffeine, but meditation done every morning. Roy had also collected a group of young men, who were at the heart and soul of his organising abilities. What was his message? "It's young people that can bring about a change; our generation has failed both the planet and the newer generation. The only question for young people is — can they continue to be curious? Can they continue to ask questions about the world?" the wizard had spoken and my time was up. It was a long ride to Delhi, and still little time to filter through the memories of the five days at the JLF.

(The author writes on agriculture and environment, and is a former Director — Policy & Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JAGAN SHOULD KEEP HIS COOL

Sir — Jagan has stunned many of his admirers when he said that no one can pluck his hair, indirectly a derisive slang in Telugu. Normally a composed man, particularly after becoming the CM, Jagan is being cornered allegedly by unfair allegations of one part of the media and all Opposition parties put together. Ironically, the Congress is subdued, maybe because of its insignificance in Andhra's politics in particular. When he is pushed to *dharma-sankat*, Jagan is now referring to characters from Hindu mythology so that people understand the uncanny nature of how illogically he is being targeted by his foes.

Already wounded by courts, financial mess, power problems and fuel hikes, Jagan naturally expects moral support from one and all besides going on with politics. He should know that along with him, there are many CMs who are sailing in identical boats if not the same one. These days, no one in the Opposition is interested in giving suggestions, only in finding faults. Jagan has to move on in spite of and not because of any help from Opposition parties without losing his cool. That is the stark reality. Kodali Nani is enough for him to be vituperative instead of himself stepping into the former's shoes.

D Nagarjuna | Hyderabad

WORKING TO SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Sir — Even though we greatly rely on our environment, we are damaging it by exploiting our natural resources. Our negligence can have a harsh effect on the planet's environment. The constant use of fossil fuel-powered vehicles for transportation and incandescent bulbs is detrimental to the environment. We should concentrate on reducing our carbon footprint. First of all, people should try to choose clean transportation options. Public transportation is the right option. Small cars must be prioritised because of their energy-efficient nature. Instead of taking short-haul air trips, people should cover these distances by

Challenges for new Pak Govt



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's ouster extends Pakistan's unenviable record of political instability: No PM there has completed a full term since 1947, although Imran is the first to be removed through a no-confidence vote. Though the weeklong drama preceding the trust vote plunged Pakistan in a constitutional crisis, Imran's downfall had been in the making since last year when he crossed swords with the all-powerful army. The united Opposition in Pakistan, after weeks of tackling obstacles,

has succeeded in its objective of toppling the Imran Khan Government. The Opposition, of course, has cause to celebrate, but maybe not for long. Removing Imran is probably only the first in a long list of challenges that Pakistan's new leader will have to face.

The front-runner for PM post, Shehbaz Sharif, or whoever is elected as Pakistan's new PM, will inherit the same issues that Imran's Government was facing. These include crippling debt, rising inflation, militancy and unsteady relations with foreign powers. The new Government will need to stave off multiple challenges on domestic and foreign relations levels. With his claim that the US was involved in a conspiracy to topple his Government, Imran has directly contributed to the new Government's long list of problems. The new regime will have to fix its relations with the US, which is a key arms supplier. The incoming Government needs to put in hard efforts to undo the damage.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

public transport like trains and buses. Also, there is the need to instal energy-efficient products at homes. LED bulbs are the best option because an eight-tonne watt LED bulb provides the same bright light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb and uses approximately 90 per cent less energy than a traditional bulb. Similarly, passive solar heating is the best equipment for homes as it accumulates sunlight and releases it in the absence of sun. Our small steps will help us save the environment to a large extent.

Jubel D'Cruz | Mumbai

THE DRUG MENACE IN TOLLYWOOD

Sir — The ₹2000-crore Telugu film industry, Tollywood, which boasts of the country's second biggest entertainment industry after Bollywood, was taken aback by the spate of drug scandals within a year. Several Telugu film personalities, affluent school and college students, many bureaucrats and their next of kin are in the grip of drug mafia. Hyderabad, no doubt, is

known for its thriving IT sector but the ugly picture of drug mafia is also making an insidious entry. In fact, not a single day passes when ganja, cocaine, hash and other banned intoxicants are not seized. Ganja comes from Andhra and cocaine from Goa and Mumbai.

Recently, the police raided a posh pub at a luxury hotel in Banjara Hills, where around 150 youth were caught using drugs. But they were let off due to their close connection with a few IPS officers, politicians, businessmen and other powerful sections of society. This ugly underbelly is a threat to the nation's security. But nothing worthwhile can be achieved unless the police strike at their roots, i.e their sources of supply. Cooperation of all the States from where the contraband arrives is needed to bring the culprits to book.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

There will be subsidies available for the purchase of an e-cycle, which can travel up to 45 km on a single charge.



Delhi Transport Minister — Kailash Gahlot

We don't believe it's in India's interest to increase imports of Russian energy.



White House spokeswoman — Jen Psaki

I don't need to do Hindi films. I can do a Telugu film, it'll be seen all over.



Actor — Mahesh Babu

I feel it's unfair to keep fans away from the India-Pakistan contests.



Pakistan Cricket Board chairman — Ramiz Raja

What can the BJP do to us? They are misusing Central agencies to harass us.



Shiv Sena MP — Sanjay Raut

FIRST COLUMN A NEW WORLD ORDER?

Assessing hegemonic stability theory



ISHAAN SAXENA

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has rekindled the debate regarding the nature of international relations. The brutal conflict which has inflicted tremendous destruction seems to have emboldened the perspective that we may witness more global conflict in this century. There was global outrage when gory scenes of bodies lying scattered on the streets came to light. What has become a source of contention is perhaps the realism school of thought. The realists describe a rather gloomy picture of the international economic order. Countries want to wield power and force for personal gains. They claim that the international economy is anarchical in nature. There is a growing clamor call that a concerted effort needs to be made to curtail the burgeoning military might of Russia and China. But a more pertinent question is that can these two states undermine the posi-



tion of the United States? A theory which deserves mention here is the Hegemonic Stability Theory. It argues that a superpower is an indispensable prerequisite for a stable international regime. The theory does underscore the importance of a unipolar world which the world did not witness from the aftermath of World War II till the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now we live in a unipolar world with the United States assuming the role of the world's global police. The US dollar continued to enjoy supremacy and America's culture has penetrated most countries. A liberal international economic order is a reality. But can Russia and China ever compete with the United States? Can they build world class universities? Will their currencies ever enjoy supremacy like the US dollar? Will globally reputed companies ever mushroom in these countries? The communist government in China is already cracking down on the unbridled rise in capitalism. It seems implausible that any sort of dialogue with Russia will lead to any constructive outcome. Vladimir Putin seems determined to reignite the glory of the Soviet era. Is he planning an endless war? Diplomatic overtures to restore normalcy and mitigate the crisis may not result in anything constructive. But the Hegemonic Stability Theory will surely stand the test of time. America will have to carefully balance how it confronts these two nations. The approach will have to be nuanced. The view that America is the world's dominant force was challenged during the rapid exit from Afghanistan last year. The end of the Cold War era contributed to the rise of constructivism. It is a widely held belief that individuals and non-state actors played a prominent role in achieving the end result; a unipolar world. Ideas and actions of individual leaders play a pivotal role in politics. A number of world leaders have joined hands in displaying support for Ukraine. An arms race will slowly begin to emerge. The Pentagon has already urged the Congress for more money and has not precluded the possibility of a global conflict. Given the internecine nature of nuclear warfare, it seems improbable that conflict could be elevated to those levels. The dominance of America's military prowess will be challenged. The US has already warned China of severe consequences if it assists Russia. Trade disruptions seem an eventuality. Terrorist organizations could regroup in an attempt to rupture fragile relations. India has chosen its traditional approach of calling for peace and diplomacy to mitigate the extent of the conflict. It is only a matter of time before we will be forced to take a firm stand at this critical juncture. Indo-Russian ties are deeply rooted in history. But at times, they also need to be reassessed as a direct result of the changing nature of international relations.

(The writer is a socio-economic commentator. The views expressed are personal.)

Wang's walk sign of China's desperation

Russia's neutrality in the South China Sea dispute and its understanding of Sino-Pak collusive threat to India can help limit China's sphere of influence



NIKSHTHA KAUSHIKI

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi's tour of four South Asian countries in the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis and the Sri Lankan economic crisis displayed its sheer desperation for the future of OBOR. President Vladimir Putin has brutally cut short President Xi Jinping's 'China Dream', resulting in a blockade of the Russian route. The persistent problems of Central Asia make the situation dicier for Beijing. Within South Asia, the Sri Lankan economic and political turmoil has made small countries like Nepal more apprehensive of Chinese intentions. The consequences of the Sri Lankan balance of payments crisis owing to its decision to sideline international creditors have accelerated the process of balancing against Beijing.

The South Asian countries except for Pakistan now acknowledge the financial implications of Chinese loans. For instance, Myanmar has started pushing back against the Chinese tactics and has moved strategically closer to India. Against this backdrop, Wang's visit had the objective of assuring the Chinese leadership and the international community of its goodwill in South Asia just before the 20th Party Congress.

For Afghanistan, Wang continued Beijing's policy of having official talks with the U.N. designated terrorist Sirajuddin Haqqani, the supposed "interior minister". Post the South Asia tour after the Third Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Afghan issue, Beijing displayed a strategic inclination to give legitimacy to the Taliban by sidelining its human rights abuses. The sidelining of India on the Afghan issue is indicative of its sinister objectives. It is here that the US could have played a play a divisive role through its strategic flirting. Beijing is wary of its sea routes and is searching for alternate routes via Pakistan and Iran. The development hints at the upcoming 'normalisation' of the relations, and an extension of the BRI corridor might follow. With Iran already by its side because of an anti-American stand, the strategic experts are wary of a possible new axis of non-democratic regimes in India's vicinity which perhaps can reshape the Asian power dynamics unless skillfully managed. Nevertheless, it is not very likely to expect Tehran to forgo its Shia factor in favour of Afghanistan and Pakistan in return for the lucrativeness of the infrastructure development.

There is little that China has to offer to Pakistan, which is neck-deep in its debt trap. Islamabad owes China \$24.7 billion, or 27 per cent of its external debt. Apart from its projection as a 'fortress of Islam' or a Muslim brotherhood leader with nuclear weapons, the political turmoil finds no takers. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) makes things worse for the CPEC Projects passing through Gwadar. Any amount of force used either by Pakistan or China could raise the human rights issue at an international level. Instead, the sword of blacklisting hangs over the coun-



WITH PEACE ON RUSSIA'S EASTERN BORDERS, INDIA, THE US, AND OTHER LIKE-MINDED POWERS CAN ATTEMPT TO CREATE AND STRENGTHEN A DOUBLE MILITARY BARRIER SYSTEM TO CONTAIN CHINESE WOLF-WARRIOR DIPLOMACY. THE INSIDE RING CAN PROBABLY CONSIST OF CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY RIVALS LIKE JAPAN, THE PHILIPPINES, TAIWAN, AND VIETNAM

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The views expressed are personal.)



try, especially with its 'democratic coup' that the world is witnessing.

The mess gets all the more complicated with the different foreign policy approaches of Bajwa and Imran Khan. It is perhaps for the first time that the tussle between the civilian and military results in differing aligning positions, making the developments quite intriguing. In either case, economic sanctions on Pakistan due to its proximity with Russia, human rights violations, increasing Islamic fundamentalism or upsetting the US can result in another route blockade and closure of another chapter of Beijing's 'CPEC dream'. Also, it is essential to recall that the US has contributed immensely in terms of military supplies. Any disruption in the supply of their spare parts can tactically benefit India.

Further, in the case of Nepal, no new BRI Project loans were announced despite Beijing's displayed readiness for China-Nepal Cross Border Railway (CNR) project, connecting Keyrong in Tibet to Kathmandu. The focus remained mainly on technical cooperation and bilateral trade. Concerning India, Beijing's clumsy geopolitical approach in which it criticised India at the OIC conclave in Islamabad and simultaneously extended an 'olive branch' through unannounced and unplanned visits did more harm than good to the image of China. Its dicey strategic communication on the issue of LAC ensured that for the coming few months or perhaps years, the stalemate between the two would continue.

The visit is not a change of heart for India but a strategy-change due to the practical constraints of its "no limit" agreement with Russia. China

has well understood that it cannot antagonise the West and India at the same time when it cannot simultaneously put into effect the sanctions on Russia. The current momentum can be best described as "to secure peace, is to prepare for war", as asserted by Carl Von Clausewitz. India hence should be mindful of the Chinese strategy.

Through his visits, Wang sought to highlight first the diverging perceptions of South Asian countries about one another in the region and second, amongst the Quad members, by trying to see whether New Delhi was hesitant or not to host the Chinese Foreign Minister at this crucial point of time. China could have highlighted an Indian refusal as India's arrogance owing to its strategic proximity to the Quad members. As the Quad members understand the dynamics of India-Russia, especially about its defence supplies, the acceptance of India's stand on Ukraine ensured that Wang's visit had no substantial outcomes, which probably can leave Xi Jinping running out of options as it has become all the more pertinent for China to maintain friendly relations with the democratic countries. The acceptance can play an essential role in India's favour in the triangular dynamics between Russia, India and China.

Although a tricky one, the Ukrainian crisis has been managed well by the government, consequent to which most of the powers today look up to India for its support and possible solution. Despite India's absence in various resolutions against Russia, the announcement of Japan aiming to invest \$42 billion over the next five years in India speaks volumes of India's geopolit-

ical importance. If one is ready to ignore the rise in fuel prices, the crisis, in a nutshell, has increased India's strategic hedging capabilities towards Washington and Moscow. India's decision will also push the trade and economic initiatives against Chinese economic leverage, such as the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative, U.S.-Japan Competitiveness and Resilience Partnership, G-7's Build Back Better World initiative and the E.U.'s Global Gateway, without leaving much response opportunities for Moscow.

From a defence perspective, considering Russia's neutrality in the South China Sea dispute and its understanding of the Sino-Pak collusive threat to India, a new effort can be made to limit China's sphere of influence. Thus, new tactical strategies have to be formulated. With peace on Russia's eastern borders, India, the US, and other like-minded powers can attempt to create and strengthen a double military barrier system to contain Chinese wolf-warrior diplomacy. The inside ring can probably consist of China's contemporary rivals like Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The outer ring can consist of Australia, India, the US, and Japan, wherein there is active military intelligence coordination, apart from other cooperative defence activities that increase the interoperability of military platforms.

As China's strategic leverage decreases, so do Xi's re-election chances. Such a development makes it a fertile ground for China to increase its belligerence. The recent cyber-attacks on the power grid near Ladakh are an example and hence the country should remain alert.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

HOW CAN ONE FACE EVEN HIS OWN FAMILY MEMBERS AFTER BEING CALLED A TRAITOR?
— PAK OPPOSITION LEADER SHEHBAZ SHARIF



IF OUR OBJECTIONS ON SHEHBAZ SHARIF'S (NOMINATION) PAPERS ARE NOT ADDRESSED, THEN WE WILL RESIGN TOMORROW.
— FORMER PAK MINISTER FAWAD CHAUDHRY

Providing an enabling policy atmosphere

The mere presence of tax incentives can signal the importance of CSOs in a society and encourage philanthropy within society

Many countries across the world provide tax incentives for donations made to civil society organisations (CSOs) as a policy measure to help these organisations as well as acknowledge the critical roles they play in society. India too provides tax incentives for charitable donations and has done so for several decades. However, very little discussion takes place, especially in India, on how such incentives work, whether they are effective and what can be done to make policies more enabling for CSOs.

An original study produced by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University in research partnership with Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), focus-



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VARTY
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ing on twelve countries, including India, sheds light on some of these questions.

Tax incentives do have a positive impact on the level of donations, the study finds. They help increase the amount donated by existing donors, and sometimes encourage non-donors to start donating. While the extent of influence tax incentives has on donations by average donors is small, it can be significantly high for large and wealthy donors.

Also, tax incentives for charitable donations have a 'signalling effect'. That is, independent of whether donors avail tax incentives, the mere presence of tax incentives can signal the importance of CSOs in a society and create a wider norm of philanthropic giving within society.



The study also finds that tax incentives are likely to influence donor behaviour, depending on whether they are perceived to be easy to understand and access and seen as being 'fair' by the majority.

How do India's tax incentives compare to that of other countries? Factor such as tax rates, the form in which incentives are given, the tax incentive rate, etc., determine the generosity of tax incentives offered for charitable donations. That is what incentivises donors. Developed countries such as

the UK, the US, France and Singapore have relatively more generous tax incentive structures. India's tax incentive structure falls in the middle with it being somewhat more generous compared to other developing economies such as Bangladesh, Brazil and Mexico.

A unique feature of India's tax incentives for charitable donations is that it is the only country (among the countries studied) where donations to select government entities also attract incentives. More importantly, tax incentives offered for these entities are far more generous than those offered for donations to CSOs. While the entire amount donated to certain government entities can be claimed as deduction, only half the amount donated to NGOs can be claimed as deduction.

Further, the maximum amount that can be claimed as deduction is as high as 100 per cent of annual income for donations made to select government entities and funds, compared to a mere 10 per cent when donating to NGOs.

Understandably, this skewed tax incentive structure tilts the scales in favour of government entities and away from CSOs, which are far more dependent on such donations.

The absence of taxes that target the wealthy relatively more, such as wealth tax and inheritance tax, also makes India's tax incentives for charitable donations, less appealing for high-net worth individuals and large donors.

The Union Budget 2022-23 was an important occasion to take certain steps for providing

a more enabling policy atmosphere for civil society organisations (CSOs) in India.

Arguably, one of the many challenges that CSOs face is raising enough resources for carrying out their work effectively. This problem has compounded further due to the quantum jump in resources required to deal with the multiple socio-economic crises induced by the pandemic and growing constraints on international funding.

In such a scenario, tax incentives for charitable donations become even more critical for CSOs. Increasing incentives for donations to CSOs to bring them at par with what is offered for donations to many government entities and funds could go a long way in easing the situation. Even China,

which is not known to have very favourable policies for the charitable sector, has raised the generosity of its tax incentive offered for charitable donations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as has the USA.

For the government, providing more generous tax incentives comes with the risk of losing tax revenue. In order to avoid that, the government could have considered re-introducing taxes that affect the wealthy and provide tax incentives for donations on these. This one measure could have helped in inducing more donations from the wealthy as well help the government raise more revenue. The Budget was an ideal opportunity to bring in these changes, but that was missed.

Pak PM rejects reports claiming dismissal of Army chief



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

After Imran Khan loses no-trust vote, his close aide's house gets raided

PTI ■ LAHORE

Hours after Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted from power through a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly on Sunday, his close aide's house here was raided and his family's mobile phones were confiscated, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has alleged.

Dr Arsalan Khalid had worked as the focal person for Khan on the digital media team since 2019. "Ex Focal person on PM Imran Khan on Digital, Dr Arsalan Khalid's home has been raided and they have taken all phones from his family," Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) said on Twitter.

"He has never abused anyone on social media & never attacked any institutions," another tweet said. The party has urged the Federal Investigation Agency to investigate this incident. Khalid is a graduate of King Edward Medical University

New Govt not to indulge in politics of revenge: Shehbaz



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Imran Khan after a day of high drama in the lower house of Parliament, the President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, said that no one would interfere in the affairs of law and justice and would run the institutions together.

"I don't want to go back to bitterness of the past. We want to forget them and move forward. We will not take revenge or do injustice; we will not send people to jail for no reason, law and justice will take its course," the 70-year-old former chief minister of Punjab province said.

The younger brother of PML-N supremo and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif gratitude to other Opposition leaders, including Asif Ali Zardari and Maulana Fazlur Rehman, for their relentless struggle for upholding the rule of law and constitution which,

he added, had finally yielded fruits. Nawaz Sharif, 72, was first disqualified and then convicted on corruption charges. His younger brother, Shehbaz, is also accused of corruption. But the Sharif brothers have dismissed the allegations of corruption as "politically motivated" by the government led by Khan.

In his address, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said he would like to congratulate the whole nation and the House, "as for the first time in the history of the country, a no-confidence motion has succeeded and we have made history".

He recalled what had happened on April 10, adding that on this day, the country approved 1973 Constitution. "On April 10, 1986, Benazir Bhutto ended her self-imposed exile and arrived in Lahore to

launch her struggle against Ziaul Haq," said Bilawal, son of Pakistan's first woman prime minister and ex-president Zardari.

On April 10, 2022, the person who was declared "selected" by the Opposition and proved himself to be an "undemocratic burden" on country saw end of his rule, he said, referring to Khan. "Today [on] April 20, 2022, we welcome [you] back to the purana Pakistan," said Bilawal, in a jibe at Khan following the adoption of a no-confidence vote against him.

Khan, who came to power in 2018 with promises to create a 'Naya Pakistan', was unceremoniously removed from office, becoming first premier in country's history to be ousted through a no-trust motion. "I have a message for Pakistani youth that they should never give up on their

dreams as nothing is impossible. Democracy is best revenge. Pakistan Zindabad," said Bilawal.

Meanwhile, the lone lawmaker from Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) present in the House, Ali Muhammad Khan in an emotional speech defended tenure of cricketer-turned-politician as prime minister of country, saying that ousted premier paid price for pursuing independent foreign policy.

"I am proud of my leader that he did not bow down before West and fought till end... he will return to power with two-third majority," he added. "Imran Khan talked about a Muslim bloc, that's his sin. Imran Khan talked about an independent foreign policy, that's his sin... Russia [visit] is just an excuse, the real target has always been Imran Khan," Ali said.

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday night rejected reports that he had dismissed Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, amidst the raging political and constitutional crisis in the country over a no-confidence motion against him in Parliament.

Talking to a group of his favourite journalists, who are known for defending him in the talk-shows, Khan rejected rumours about making any change in the Army leadership.

"There was neither any talk of dismissing the army chief nor was this on the cards," Khan told journalists after chairing an emergency Cabinet meeting where it was decided that he should not resign despite losing majority in the National Assembly and facing possible defeat in the no-confidence motion which he has been trying to stall.

"I will do my job as per the law and in line with the Constitution," he was quoted as saying by Geo TV. The emergency Cabinet meeting has taken many by surprise as Khan has little chance of surviving the no confidence motion against him.

Reportedly, Army chief Gen Bajwa and the ISI chief have met with Khan. The result of the meeting is not known yet. Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry also denied that the government had taken any step to remove the army chief, terming such reports "baseless".

"The government fully understands the importance of the army chief and Pakistan Army as an institution. Reports that anyone is even thinking of changing the leadership of Pakistan Army are baseless rumours and lies.

This is being done under an agenda. The government condemns these rumours and completely denies them," the minister tweeted in Urdu.

Welcome back to purana Pakistan, says Bilawal Bhutto Zardari after Imran's ouster

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

We welcome (you) back to the purana Pakistan," top Opposition leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said on Sunday, as he took a jibe at ousted Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan following the adoption of a no-confidence vote against him.

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Petition filed in Pak court to put Imran, his Ministers on Exit Control List

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamabad High Court will hear on Monday a petition seeking to place the names of Imran Khan, who has been ousted from power after losing a no-confidence vote, and the ministers in his cabinet on the Exit Control List (ECL) to prevent them from flying abroad.

Khan became the first premier in the country's history to be voted out of power through a no-confidence motion held early Sunday and vacated the Prime Minister's official residence minutes before he lost the crucial no-trust vote in the National Assembly.

"The Islamabad High Court (IHC) will hear on Monday an application requesting for placing the names of the former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-ministers on the Exit Control List (ECL)," The News newspaper reported on Sunday.

The ECL is a system of border control maintained by the Government of Pakistan under Exit from Pakistan (Control) Ordinance, 1981. The people on the list are prohibited from leaving the country.

The court will also order an investigation into an alleged threat letter, the report said. Filed by Maulvi Iqbal Haider, plea seeks a probe into alleged threat letter and an inquiry against Khan and the ministers.

It has also requested IHC to put Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Qasim Suri and Pakistan's Ambassador to United States Asad Majeed on ECL along with Khan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, report said.

FIA officer probing money laundering charges against Shehbaz goes on leave

PTI ■ LAHORE

A top officer of Pakistan's top investigative agency who was probing the PKR 14 billion money laundering charges against the joint Opposition's prime ministerial candidate Shehbaz Sharif has gone on leave for indefinite period after Imran Khan was voted out in a no-confidence motion.

Federal Investigation Agency's Lahore chief Mohammad Rizwan has reportedly said that he has gone on leave anticipating his "certain transfer".

Rizwan was said to be the appointee Shehzad Akbar, former accountability adviser to the premier, to vigorously pursue cases against Shehbaz and his family members. Later Imran Khan sacked Akbar for failing to get Shehbaz convicted in the money laundering case. Of late, Khan took Shehbaz as a threat to his power and was keen to see him in jail.

The FIA investigation under Rizwan detected 28 benami accounts, allegedly of the Shehbaz family, through which an amount to the tune of PKR 14 billion was laundered from 2008 to 2018.

Pak media welcomes regime change, says catastrophic collision between pillars of state averted

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's media on Sunday welcomed regime change in Islamabad, while expressing relief that a "catastrophic collision" between pillars of state has been averted as minority government led by Imran Khan tried to cling on to power.

Khan was ousted from power after losing a no-confidence vote in his leadership following days of high drama. The vote was held past midnight after Khan's minority government tried its best to stall no-trust motion tabled by Opposition parties against cricketer-turned-politician.

"At one point late last night, it seemed as if all pillars of the state were on course for a catastrophic collision. Calamity seemed ready to strike at highest levels of state," the Dawn newspaper said in an editorial. "Even with his ouster a near certainty, Mr Imran Khan seemed more than willing to turn a simple parliamentary procedure into a farce by forcing heads of judiciary and military, along with entire legislature."

China makes semi-secret delivery of missiles to Serbia

AP ■ BELGRADE (SERBIA)

Russian ally Serbia took the delivery of a sophisticated Chinese anti-aircraft system in a veiled operation this weekend, amid Western concerns that an arms buildup in Balkans at time of war in Ukraine could threaten fragile peace in region.

Media and military experts said on Sunday that six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes landed at Belgrade's civilian airport early Saturday, reportedly carrying HQ-22 surface-to-air missile systems for the Serbian military.

The Chinese cargo planes with military markings were pictured at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla airport. Serbia's defense ministry did not immediately respond to AP's request for comment. The arms delivery

French go to polls in 1st round of Presidential election

AP ■ PARIS

French citizens flocked to polling stations across country Sunday to vote in the first round of country's presidential election, where up to 48 million eligible voters will be choosing between 12 candidates.

Centrist President Emmanuel Macron is seeking a second five-year term, but faces a strong challenge from the far right. Polls close at 7 pm (1700 GMT) in most places and an hour later in some larger cities. By noon, just over a quarter of France's electorate had cast their ballot, slightly down from previous elections. France operates a manual system for elections: Voters are obliged to cast ballots in person, and they are hand-counted once voting closes. Unless someone gets more

Shehbaz Sharif — a hard-core realist who makes no bones while performing onerous tasks

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz Sharif, who is tipped to be the next prime minister after the unceremonious ouster of Imran Khan, is a hard-core realist and over the years has earned the reputation of a matter-of-fact person.

Shehbaz, the 70-year-old younger brother of former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, has served as chief minister of the country's most populous and politically crucial Punjab province thrice.

This is first time his party PML-N - especially its supreme Nawaz Sharif - agreed on his name for post of prime minister.

Former president and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) co-chair Asif Ali Zardari had proposed Shehbaz's name for prime minister's position in a joint opposition's meeting to replace Imran Khan through a no-confidence motion.

Born in September 1951 in Punjabi-speaking Kashmiri family in Lahore, Shehbaz entered politics along with his elder brother Nawaz in mid

1980s. He first got elected as a member of Punjab Assembly in 1988 when Nawaz became chief minister of Punjab. Shehbaz first became chief minister of Punjab in 1997 when his brother was prime minister at the Centre.

Following General Pervez Musharraf's coup in 1999 toppling the Nawaz Sharif government, Shehbaz along with the family spent eight years in exile in Saudi Arabia before returning to Pakistan in 2007.

He wore the hat of Punjab chief minister for the second term in 2008 and he grabbed the same slot for third time in 2013.

Shehbaz has claimed that Gen Musharraf had offered him prime ministership provided he abandons his elder brother Nawaz which he said he had refused straight away.

After prime minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from holding office in 2017 in the Panama Papers case, the PML-N appointed Shehbaz as party president. Subsequently, after the 2018 elections he became the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly.

Palestinians vandalise West Bank shrine as tensions surge

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Palestinians set fire to a West Bank shrine revered by Jews as Israeli forces operated in the occupied territory following a spate of recent Palestinian attacks in Israel, the Israeli military said Sunday.

The developments come as tensions between Israelis and Palestinians have escalated during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which this year converges with major Jewish and Christian holidays.

Protests and tensions around holiday last year boiled over into 11-day Gaza war. Military spokesman Brig. Gen. Ran Kochav told Israeli Army Radio that some 100 Palestinians marched toward site late Saturday.

Shanghai releases thousands of recovered Covid patients, but new cases continue to rise

PTI ■ BEIJING

Shanghai, which is reeling under a massive outbreak of coronavirus cases, has released over 11,000 recovered COVID-19 patients from hospitals, but infection numbers continued to climb, raising questions about China's much-touted dynamic zero-case policy.

Wu Qianyu, a senior official with the east Chinese city's public health commission, told a media briefing on Sunday that patients would be put under home quarantine and no further controls should be imposed on them.

"Relevant authorities in areas they live in have to be alerted that they are allowed to go home. At same time, the officials are required to monitor their health (during quarantine period)," the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Over 11,000 recovered patients have been released, it said. But much to disquiet of ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) headed by President Xi Jinping, single-day new infections in Shanghai hit 24,944 on Sunday, setting a new record for ninth consecutive day.

'The Eagle Has Landed' author Jack Higgins dead at 92

AP ■ LONDON

British author Jack Higgins, who wrote "The Eagle Has Landed" and other bestselling thrillers and espionage novels, has died. He was 92.

Publisher HarperCollins said that Higgins died at his home on English Channel island of Jersey surrounded by his family. Born Henry Patterson in Newcastle, England, in July 1929, Higgins served in military before studying sociology at London School of Economics.

He became a teacher in northern city of Leeds and a writer in his spare time, with novels that sold modestly starting in late 1950s. That changed with the 1975 publication of "The Eagle Has Landed", about a fictional

Imran — a leader whose cricketing career overshadowed his political journey

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former cricketer Imran Khan, who turned his shaky team into world champions in 1992, failed to repeat same charisma in murky world of politics where he was run out by a determined Opposition in the middle of his first innings after key allies and his own lawmakers deserted him.

Khan, who effectively lost majority in 342-member National Assembly, dissolved Parliament and called for fresh election on April 3 after deputy speaker blocked a no-confidence motion against him. However, a five-member bench of Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial in a landmark 5-0 verdict on April 7 struck down deputy speaker's ruling and ordered speaker to call a session on

April 9 to organise no-confidence vote. Khan failed to pass his toughest political test since assuming office in 2018 due to defections in his party and cracks in ruling coalition. He is first premier in Pakistan whose fate was decided through a no-confidence vote.

The Oxford-educated Pasthun came to power in 2018 with promises to create a 'Naya Pakistan' but miserably failed to address basic problem of keeping prices of commodities in control.

Khan lost support of powerful Army after he refused to endorse appointment of ISI spy agency chief last year. Finally he agreed but it soured his ties with army, which has ruled coup-prone country for more than half of its 75 years of existence and has hitherto wielded huge power in matters of security and foreign policy.

Russian shelling traps residents of Mariupol

AP ■ MARIUPOL

Shelling by Russian forces of Ukraine's key port of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov has collapsed several humanitarian corridors, making it more difficult for people to leave.

It was not clear Saturday how many people remained trapped in the city, which had a prewar population of 430,000. Ukrainian officials have put the number at about 100,000, but earlier this week, British defense officials said 160,000 people remained trapped in the city.

Ukrainian troops have refused to surrender the city, though much of it has been razed.

Resident Sergey Petrov said Saturday that recently two shells struck around him in quick succession, but neither exploded upon landing.

He was in his garage at the time and said his mother later told him, "I was born again."

"A shell flew in and broke up into two parts but it did not explode, looks like it did not land on the detonator but on its side," he said.

He added that when another shell flew in and hit the garage, "I am in shock. I don't understand what is happening. I have a hole in my garage billowing smoke. I run away and leave everything. I come back in several hours and find another shell lying there, also unexploded."



Meanwhile, civilians remaining in Bucha lined up Saturday for food donated by the local church in the battered Kyiv suburb where Ukrainian forces and journalists reported evidence of war crimes after Russian soldiers withdrew.

With other civilians fleeing in the wake of Russia's invasion, most of the people remaining in Bucha were elderly, poor or unable to leave loved ones. Russian troops withdrew more than a week ago.

Volunteer Petro Denysyuk told The Associated Press that he and fellow church friends started providing food, with a wide array of basic foodstuffs and hot meals.

"We have gathered together with the youth from our church and prepared food for the needy," Denysyuk said. "We prepared pilaf, boiled eggs, prepared meat, sausages, noodles."

Ukrainian forces and journalists that went into Bucha saw bodies strewn in the streets, evidence of summary executions and the remains of people who could not have threatened soldiers. Russia has denied

address to the nation, Zelenskyy also thanked European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for a global fundraising event that raised more than 10 billion euros (\$11 billion) for Ukrainians who have had to flee their homes.

Zelenskyy said democratic countries were united in working to stop the war. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer became the latest of several European rulers to meet Zelenskyy in Kyiv.

"Because Russian aggression was not intended to be limited to Ukraine alone, to the destruction only of our freedom and our life," he said.

"The entire European project is a target for Russia."

Zelenskyy repeated his call for a complete embargo on Russian oil and gas, calling them the sources of Russia's "self-confidence and impunity."

"But Ukraine does not have time to wait. Freedom does not have time to wait. When tyranny begins its aggression against everything that keeps the peace in Europe, action must be taken immediately," he said.

He added: "And an oil embargo must be the first step.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said 10 evacuation corridors were planned for Saturday, and other stations were open for trains full of refugees.

Russia meanwhile has denied responsibility, accusing Ukraine's military of firing on the station to try to turn blame for civilian slayings on Moscow.

Panicked residents of eastern Ukraine boarded buses or looked for other ways to leave Saturday, a day after a missile strike killed at least 52 people and wounded more than 100 at a train station.

The attack in in Kramatorsk left the city with no trains running and came with thousands of people seeking to leave. Ukrainian authorities have called on civilians to get out ahead of an imminent, stepped-up offensive by Russian forces in the east.

Residents on Saturday feared the kind of unrelenting assaults and occupations by Russian invaders that brought food shortages, demolished buildings and death to other cities elsewhere in Ukraine.

"It was terrifying. The horror, the horror," one resident told British broadcaster Sky, recalling Friday's attack on the train station.

"Heaven forbid, to live through this again. No, I don't want to."

Western military analysts said an arc of territory in eastern Ukraine was under Russian control. It was from Kharkiv - Ukraine's second-largest city - in the north to Kherson in the south.

But Ukrainian counterattacks are threatening Russian control of Kherson, according to the Western assessments, and Ukrainian forces are repelling Russian assaults elsewhere in the Donbas region in the southeast.

U.S. Intelligence officials predict Russian President Vladimir Putin may use U.S. Support for Ukraine as justification for a new campaign to interfere in American politics.

Intelligence officials tell The Associated Press that they have yet to find any evidence that Putin has authorized measures like the ones Russia undertook in the last two elections to support former President Donald Trump. Several people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive findings said it remains unclear which candidates Russia might try to promote next.

Trump has repeatedly assailed U.S. Intelligence officials and claimed that investigations of Russian influence on his campaigns to be political vendettas. In Ukraine and elsewhere, Russia has been accused of trying to spread disinformation, amplifying pro-Kremlin voices in the West and using cyberattacks to disrupt governments.

Zelenskyy seeks peace despite atrocities



AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that he is committed to pressing for peace despite Russian attacks on civilians that have stunned the world, and he renewed his plea for countries to send more weapons ahead of an expected surge in fighting in the country's east.

He made the comments in an interview with The

Associated Press a day after at least 52 people were killed in a strike on a train station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk, and as evidence of civilian killings came to light after Russian troops failed to seize the capital where he has hunkered down, Kyiv.

"No one wants to negotiate with a person or people who tortured this nation. It's all understandable. And as a man, as a father, I understand this very well," Zelenskyy said.

But "we don't want to lose opportunities, if we have them, for a diplomatic solution."

Wearing the olive drab that has marked his transformation into a wartime leader, he looked visibly exhausted yet animated by a drive to persevere.

"We have to fight, but fight for life. You can't fight for dust when there is nothing and no people. That's why it is important to stop this war,"

he said.

Russian troops that withdrew from northern Ukraine are now regrouping for what is expected to be an intensified push to retake the eastern Donbas region, including the besieged port city of Mariupol that Ukrainian fighters are striving to defend.

Zelenskyy said he is confident Ukrainians would accept peace despite the horrors they have witnessed in the more than six-week-long war.

Those included gruesome images of bodies of civilians found in yards, parks and city squares and buried in mass graves in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha after Russian troops withdrew. Ukrainian and Western leaders have accused Moscow of war crimes.

Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged. It also put the blame on Ukraine for the attack on the train station as thousands of people rushed to flee ahead of an expected Russian offensive.

Despite hopes for peace, Zelenskyy acknowledged that he must be "realistic" about the prospects for a swift resolution given that negotiations have so far been limited to low-level

Pope Francis calls for an Easter truce



AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis opened Holy Week on Sunday with a call for an Easter truce in Ukraine to make room for a negotiated peace, highlighting the need for leaders to "make some sacrifices for the good of the people."

Celebrating Palm Sunday Mass before crowds in St. Peter's Square for the first time since the pandemic, Pope Francis called for "weapons to be laid down to begin an Easter truce, not to reload weapons and resume fighting, no! A truce to reach peace through real negotiations."

Francis did not refer directly to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but the reference was clear, and he has repeatedly denounced the war and the suffering brought to innocent civilians.

During the traditional Sunday blessing following Palm Sunday Mass, the pontiff said leaders should be "willing to make some sacrifices for the good of the people."

"In fact, what a victory would that be, who plants a flag under a pile of rubble?"

During his Palm Sunday homily, the pontiff denounced "the folly of war" that leads people to commit "senseless acts of cruelty."

"When we resort to violence... We lose sight of why we are in the world and even end up committing senseless acts of

Analysis: War, economy could weaken Putin's place as leader

AP ■ NEW YORK

Unforeseen - especially when they become deaf to the society around them. Just ask Hosni Mubarak.

"For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power," declared President Joe Biden of Putin last month in Poland. It was an unscripted but heartfelt comment as the bloodletting in Ukraine has mounted.

The 69-year-old Putin is up for re-election in 2024, and changes in the Russian constitution conceivably would allow him to remain president until 2036.

But the imprisonment of Russia's best-known opposition figure, Alexei Navalny, is just one sign that Putin is not confident enough of his popularity to submit to an actual democratic test.

While there can be no credible polling in a country now effectively under martial law, the number of Russians informed and courageous enough to protest against the war in Ukraine so far has numbered in the thousands, not the hundreds of thousands.

Tens of thousands of affluent citizens, intellectuals and political critics have abandoned Russia rather than remain under the tight controls Putin has imposed, finding escape in Istanbul, Tbilisi or cities in the West.

This brain drain no



doubt will hurt Russia in the future. But at the moment, their departure removes a possible nexus of opposition from the society.

Of course, history is unpredictable. Few anticipated the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. If Russian casualties in Ukraine are as high as has been reported - 15,000 or more dead and three times that wounded in the space of six weeks - those results eventually will begin filtering through the society in spite of official censorship.

Arguably, the USSR's fate was sealed in 1986 after its then-leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, loosened the Communist Party's iron grip on information and set sights on the restructuring of the Soviet Union's stagnating economy in order to better compete

Ukraine digs in to fight Russia's looming eastern offensive

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian forces dug in and Russia's military lined up more firepower Sunday ahead of an expected showdown in eastern Ukraine that could become a decisive period in a war that has flattened cities, killed untold thousands and isolated Moscow economically and politically.

Experts say a full-scale offensive in the east could start within days, though questions remained about the ability of Russia's depleted and demoralized forces to conquer much ground after Ukraine's inspired defenders repelled their push to capture the capital, Kyiv.

Britain's Defence Ministry reported Sunday that Russia's armed forces were trying to compensate for mounting casualties by boosting troop numbers with personnel who had been discharged from service since 2012. Ukraine has the bulk of its military forces in the east: estimates vary, but they are believed to number in the tens of thousands. Russia-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and control parts of the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region. Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb 24, its troops have bombarded government-held territory.

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HDB Financial Services Limited
Ground Floor, Zenith House, Keshavnagar Khadye Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai - 400034 Tel No.: +91 22 49116300

FINAL AUCTION CUM SALE NOTICE FOR GOLD ORNAMENTS

The borrower(s) (whose details are provided in the table herein below), in particular, and the public, in general, are hereby informed that the below mentioned accounts are overdue, and the borrowers/account holders have not responded/complied with the communication, and notice sent by HDB Financial Services Limited (the "Company") requesting the borrower to clear his/her dues as per the documents in respect of the below mentioned loan signed/accepted by the borrower(s) (such documents, collectively "loan agreement") and therefore defaulted in terms thereof. The Company has in exercise of its rights as a pledgee, decided to enforce the pledge and therefore hold a public auction of the gold ornaments pledged to the company as security for the loan for the purpose of selling the same and realizing/recovering the dues owed by the borrower(s) to the company. The auction will be conducted on **16-04-2022** at the below mentioned local branch of HDB Financial Services Limited from 11.00 am onwards on the date and branches mentioned in the table below:-

S. No.	Loan No	Customer Name	Date of loan	Overdue Amount Rs.	Branch Name
1	12816069	Aafreen Aqil	16/10/2020	9585	Delhi-Adarsh Nagar
2	11885753	Deepak D	16/07/2020	13675	Delhi-Anand Parbat
3	17938332	Jagnarayan Singh	23/09/2021	11853	Delhi-Badarpur
4	6207901	Gudren G	28/12/2018	5020	Delhi-Bhajanpura
5	11309005	Anas Ali	19/03/2020	38883	Delhi-Bhajanpura
6	13662821	Madan Pandey	23/12/2020	13485	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
7	16618390	Sachin Kumar	02/08/2021	83656	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
8	16815667	Gaurav Jain	16/08/2021	26194	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
9	17567976	Achin Jain	09/09/2021	43054	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
10	11376014	Ravi Shankar Kumar	13/05/2020	7628	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
11	12427096	Sudhir Singh	10/09/2020	13351	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
12	14095512	Sheela Verma	30/01/2021	20029	Delhi-Mayapuri
13	16617257	Mohd Sagor	31/07/2021	43180	Delhi-Nai Sadak
14	16900792	Hafiz Khan	13/08/2021	4896	Delhi-Nangloi
15	14507006	Mohd Momin	05/03/2021	35204	Delhi-Shahdara
16	14074169	Sunil Kumar	29/01/2021	5250	Delhi-Shastri Nagar
17	12103430	Nisha Kumari	10/08/2020	7220	Delhi-Tilak Nagar
18	13714771	Dharmender Arya	28/12/2020	9940	Delhi-Uttam Nagar
19	16052729	Sachin Kumar Narang	13/07/2021	78228	Delhi-Uttam Nagar

The auction shall be conducted on an "AS IS WHERE" and "AS IS WHAT IT" basis and the Company is not making and shall not make any representation or warranties as regards the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. It shall be the sole and absolute responsibility of the potential purchaser to verify, examine and satisfy themselves about the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments prior to placing their bid and for such purpose it shall be open to potential purchasers to examine, at their sole cost and expense, and at the address set out herein above, the gold ornaments whether with or without expert advice 45 minutes prior to the time stipulated for the conduct of the auction. All the bid shall be subjected to such minimum reserve price as the company may deem fit to fix in its regards. The auction process and sale (if any) pursuant to such auction shall be subjected to such further terms and condition as the company may at sole discretion deem fit to impose.

If the borrower(s) mentioned above pays the amount due to the Company in terms of the loan agreement in his individual loan account in full before the auction as mentioned above, the pledged ornaments securing the said loan may be withdrawn from the said auction without further notice. Please note that it is the absolute discretionary power of the undersigned authorized officer of the company, either to postpone or to cancel the auction proceeding without prior notice and without assigning any reason thereof and to reject any or all the bids or offer without assigning any reason for the same.

Place: DELHI
Date: 11-04-2022

Authorised Officer
(HDB Financial Services Ltd)

Finance Min to nudge PSBs' heads for credit expansion

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to meet heads of public sector banks (PSBs) on April 23 to review performance of the lenders and progress made by them on various schemes launched by the government for revival of the economy battered by the pandemic.

This is the first full review meeting after presentation of Budget 2022-23. Banks would be urged to sanction loans for productive sectors to accelerate revival of the economy, sources said.

According to sources, there would be a comprehensive review of various segments and progress in government schemes including Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

In the Budget, ECLGS was extended by a year till March 2023. Further, the guarantee cover for the scheme was expanded by Rs 50,000 crore to Rs 5 lakh crore. The coverage, scope and extent of benefits

under ECLGS 3.0 pertaining to hospitality, travel, tourism and civil aviation sectors were expanded. Also, the credit limit for eligible borrowers was increased to 50 per cent of their fund-based credit outstanding from 40 per cent earlier. The enhanced limit is subject to a maximum of Rs 200 crore per borrower.

Since its launch in May 2020, loans worth Rs 3.19 lakh crore have been sanctioned till March 25, 2022. About 95 per cent of the guarantees issued are for loans sanctioned to micro, small and medium enterprises.

The meeting to be held in New Delhi would set the agenda for the current financial year which has just started. During last financial year, no PSBs faced any loss in the April-December period and clocked a collective net profit of Rs 48,874 crore during the period.

PSBs earned a combined net profit of Rs 31,820 crore in 2020-21. However, there were

collective losses for five straight years during 2015-16 to 2019-20. The highest amount of net loss was registered in 2017-18 at Rs 85,370 crore, followed by Rs 66,636 crore in 2018-19; Rs 25,941 crore in 2019-20; Rs 17,993 crore in 2015-16 and Rs 11,389 crore in 2016-17.

During 2009-10 to 2014-15, PSBs were earning profits on their books.

To improve financial health of PSBs, the government implemented a comprehensive 4Rs strategy -- recognition of NPAs transparently, resolution and recovery of value from stressed accounts, recapitalising of PSBs, and reforms in PSBs and the wider financial ecosystem -- for a responsible and clean system. Comprehensive steps were taken under the 4Rs strategy to reduce NPAs of PSBs.

As part of the strategy, the government has infused Rs 3,10,997 crore to recapitalise banks during the last five financial years -- from 2016-17 to 2020-21. **PTI**

Electric vehicle retail sales zoom over three-fold in FY22

New Delhi: Electric vehicle retail sales in the country witnessed over three-fold jump last fiscal with two-wheeler offtake leading the segment, according to data compiled by automobile dealers' body FADA.

Total electric vehicle (EV) retails reached 4,29,217 units in 2021-22, a rise of three-fold from 1,34,821 units in the financial year 2020-21, the industry body said.

Total EV sales had stood at 1,68,300 units in the 2019-20 fiscal, it noted. According to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), electric passenger vehicle retail sales stood at 17,802 during the last fiscal, up over three-fold from 4,984 units in FY21.

Home-grown auto major Tata Motors led the segment with retails of 15,198 units and a market share of 85.37 per cent in the vertical. The Mumbai-based company's retail sales stood at 3,523 units in 2020-21.

MG Motor India settled into the second place with



sales of 2,045 units last fiscal with a market share of 11.49 per cent. It had retailed 1,115 units in the 2020-21 fiscal.

Mahindra & Mahindra and Hyundai Motor India stood at third and fourth places with dispatches of 156 and 128 units respectively, both settling for a market share of less than 1 per cent. M&M and Hyundai had sold 94 and 184 units respectively in the 2020-21 fiscal, FADA data said.

Electric two-wheeler retail sales last fiscal stood at 2,31,338

units, a jump of over five-fold from 41,046 units in 2020-21, it stated. Hero Electric led the segment with sales of 65,303 units, grabbing 28.23 per cent share in the domestic market.

It was followed by Okinawa Autotech which retailed 46,447 units last fiscal. Third place was taken by Ampere Vehicles with sales of 24,648 units. Hero MotoCorp-backed Ather Energy stood at fourth position with registration of 19,971 units in 2021-22. **PTI**

Sugar production in Maha all-time high this year: Official

Aurangabad: Maharashtra has recorded an all-time high sugar production of 132 lakh tonnes this year, state sugar commissioner Shekhar Gaikwad has claimed.

But, despite the high production, there is less possibility of the sugar prices coming down, the official told PTI on Saturday while speaking about issues related to excess sugarcane production and steps being initiated to tackle the situation.

He said 1,187 lakh tonnes of sugarcane has been crushed in the state till date this year, while about 90 lakh tonnes of the crop is still lying uncut in fields, mostly in the Marathwada region, he said.

"Maharashtra had a record of all-time high sugar production of 107 lakh tonnes in 2019-20. This year, it has reached nearly 132 lakh tonnes, which is again an all-time high record for the state, while Uttar

Pradesh so far produced 80 lakh tonnes of sugar so far this year," Gaikwad said.

Various companies in the state have also earned Rs 9,000-10,000 crore from the production of 130 to 140 crore litres of ethanol (is a by-product of molasses generated on crushing of sugarcane), which is also an all-time high, he claimed.

The sugarcane crushing season in Maharashtra generally lasts for 120 to 140 days, and maximum 145 days. This year, around 20 sugar factories in the state will run for 160 days due to the high sugarcane production, he said.

"Around 90 lakh tonnes of sugarcane, including 60 lakh tonnes in Marathwada, is yet to be crushed. We expect that the sugarcane in Marathwada will be crushed by May 31 this year," the official said.

The factories in Solapur are taking nearly 20,000 tonnes of sugarcane from Marathwada for crushing, he said. **PTI**

For 3rd quarter in row, startup funding crosses \$10 bn in Q1, creates 14 unicorns

Mumbai: The startup ecosystem has created as many as 14 unicorns in the first three months of 2022, and for the third consecutive quarter, they have received over USD 10 billion across 334 funding deals, says an industry report.

Creation of 14 more unicorns takes the overall tally of startups with over USD 1 billion valuation in the country to 84 now, according to a PwC India report.

This is the third consecutive quarter ending March 2022 when the fund inflows into the domestic start-ups ecosystem have grossed over USD 10 billion in fresh funding. The report also has seen as many as 14 startups becoming unicorns, the report said, adding the total fund inflow in Q1 stands at USD 10.8 billion.

According to the agency, the quarter saw maximum funds flowing into software-as-a-service (SaaS) companies, grossing more than USD 3.5

billion.

Unicorn creation continued to flourish with 14 startups attaining the coveted status in Q1 with the SaaS sector accounting for the largest share creating five unicorns.

Amit Nawka, the startups leader at the consultancy, told PTI that despite uncertainties in the global economic environment, the domestic startups have continued to attract capital, particularly in the growth capital stage.

He further said as more startups mature, talks around corporate governance are now becoming mainstream and it will become increasingly important for the startups to design a corporate governance roadmap that is in sync with organisational growth aspirations.

The quantum of investments into SaaS ecosystem has a threefold increase in the last three years, he said, adding the pandemic has only boosted

this ecosystem globally, given the rising importance of remote working, productivity and overall digital transformation.

The past year has seen the advent of 15 SaaS businesses in the unicorn category amongst in the country, including Darwinbox, Fractal, Uniphore, Hasura and Amagi Media Labs.

With Freshworks' blockbuster listing on the Nasdaq late 2021, mature SaaS players are increasingly considering public listing, he said.

The first quarter saw around 80 M&A transactions in the start-up ecosystem, driven primarily by roll-up e-commerce companies.

And Curefoods, Mensa Brands, GlobalBees and MyGlamm, which have M&As as their core business strategy continued to be the top acquirers in Q1 as well and Upscalio and Evenflow are other roll-up e-commerce companies that have joined this bandwagon. **PTI**

'Agri reforms important; repeal of three farm laws a setback for doubling farmers' income'

New Delhi: Stressing that reforms are necessary for the agriculture sector, Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand on Sunday said the repeal of three farm laws has come as a 'setback' to higher price realisation by cultivators and could be a factor in achieving the goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

He also suggested starting fresh consultations with the states for resuming the agriculture reform process, adding some people have already approached Niti Aayog with a call for effecting the reforms.

"You see, reforms are important for the agriculture sector. Some farmers were opposing it (three farm laws)...I think immediately what needs to be done is restarting fresh consultations with the states," the Niti Aayog member, who oversees farm policies at the

government think tank, told PTI in an interview.

"Already people are approaching us that reforms are needed. But in what way, in what form, in what shape, that I think we need to wait for some time," he added.

Chand was replying to a question on whether the stalled reforms for India's farm economy will get another push after BJP's victory in four states -- Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur -- in the recently held assembly elections.

Asked if it was possible to double farmers' income by 2022 without implementation of the three agriculture laws, he said reforms were needed to enable cultivators to get better prices, so if reforms are not happening, certainly that is a setback for higher price realisation by the farmers.

"So upto that extent there will be a setback to that goal (doubling farmers' income by 2022)," he opined.

The Narendra Modi-led NDA government has set a target of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

The Centre on December 1, 2021 notified a legislation to repeal the three agriculture laws against which thousands of farmers had protested for over a year.

These three farm laws were -- Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

To a question on the agriculture sector's growth, he said it will be around 3 per cent in

the 2021-22 financial year.

Chand added that he expects farm sector growth to improve in the current financial year if monsoon and other conditions remain favourable and do not turn adverse.

Replying to a question on high inflation, the eminent agriculture economist said it is always a matter of concern for the government.

"The government takes various measures that if there is inflation because of genuine shortages, we try to increase import of pulses of edible oils.

"But in the case of rise in vegetables, seasonal factor also plays a very very important role and prospects of import of vegetables is almost ruled out," he explained.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has raised the retail inflation projection for the current financial year to 5.7 per cent

from earlier forecast of 4.5 per cent.

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 the hardening of crude oil and non-food item prices.

Chand also flagged the impact of global factors on rising prices of various commodities in the domestic market.

"So now when price of fertilizer is increasing, price of diesel is increasing, that means the price of transport will also be increasing, cost of production will also be increasing," he noted. The Niti Aayog member asserted that the government is trying to moderate the effect of these global factors. **PTI**

Gold imports surge to USD 46.14 bn in 2021-22



New Delhi: India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), rose by 33.34 per cent to USD 46.14 billion during the 2021-22 fiscal on account of higher demand, according to official data.

Gold imports were worth USD 34.62 billion in 2020-21.

The surge in gold imports during the last financial year contributed to the widening of the trade deficit to USD 192.41 billion, against USD 102.62 billion in 2020-21.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports are largely driven by the jewellery industry. The gems and jewellery exports during 2021-22 grew by about 50 per cent to about USD 39 billion.

India's current account deficit widened to USD 23 billion or 2.7 per cent of the GDP in the October-December quarter, according to the RBI data. The current account records the value of exports and imports of goods and services, along with international transfers of capital.

Gold imports in volume terms stood at 842.28 tonnes in April 2021 - February 2022. **PTI**

High 5G spectrum prices may push players up against the wall: COAI DG

New Delhi: Apex telecom industry body COAI has asserted that spectrum pricing should be kept conducive to market conditions as 5G entails upfront capital investments with monetisation spread over a long-haul, and pricing radiowaves high will only push the players up against the wall.

The stage is set for Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to come out with its recommendations on 5G spectrum pricing and other modalities for upcoming auctions, and the announcement from the sector watchdog is expected anytime now.

Norms will also be worked out for new frequencies such as 526-698 MHz and millimetre band, that is 24.25 - 28.5 GHz, in addition to bands such as 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300-3670 MHz.

The auction can be conducted within 2-2.5 months of regulator coming out with spectrum recommendations, which would put the mega-event in the ballpark of June timeframe, a telecom department source said.

The industry has been aggressively pitching for a drastic 80-90 per cent cut in prices of spectrum for next-generation services, which will usher in ultra high-speeds and spawn new-age services and business models.

Advocating lower prices for spectrum, COAI Director General, SP Kochhar told PTI: "5G does not have any use cases which can be monetised in a quarter, so it is going to be a long-haul. At the same time, the capital investments have to be made in a particular period of time."

It is pertinent to mention here that last time around, TRAI had suggested Rs 492 crore per MHz for spectrum in

prime 5G band of 3300-3600 MHz, which meant that a mobile operator going for 100 MHz needed to shell out a whopping Rs 49,200 crore for all-India spectrum.

However, frequencies in this band were not put up for auction in the previous round, as the frequency range could not be vacated in time and the base price of the radiowaves in the spectrum band was seen to be very expensive for 5G services.

In March 2021, the government went ahead with auction of spectrum in 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz bands. A total of 2,308.80 MHz spectrum worth Rs 4 lakh crore at reserve price in different bands were put on the block, of which 855.60 MHz quantum was sold in the auction, resulting in total winning bids worth Rs 77,820.81 crore. **PTI**

the 2021-22 financial year.

Chand added that he expects farm sector growth to improve in the current financial year if monsoon and other conditions remain favourable and do not turn adverse.

Replying to a question on high inflation, the eminent agriculture economist said it is always a matter of concern for the government.

"The government takes various measures that if there is inflation because of genuine shortages, we try to increase import of pulses of edible oils.

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Indian Agri officers on Israel tour to learn new approaches, techniques

Jerusalem: Eighteen agricultural officers from seven Indian states are on a 15-day visit to Israel to learn about new innovative approaches and smart technologies in the key sector that can add more value to the farmers.

The agricultural officers from Indo-Israel Centers of Excellence (CoE) are taking part in an extensive state course, "Managing Centres of Excellence: Developing value for farmers", organised by Mashav Agricultural Training Centre (MATC) in Israel under the Indo-Israel Agricultural Project (IIAP), a press release said.

The programme looks to introduce the agricultural officers from partnering states to the organisation, management and challenges of Israel's unique model of regional agricultural Research and Development.

"The course aims to create

a framework for discussion and analysis of the current work plans of the CoEs. It will also evaluate the possibilities of implementation and adaptation of new strategies, approaches and technologies, taking into consideration the needs and challenges in the agriculture sector," the release issued by the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi said.

The participants have been visiting model CoEs in Israel and learning more about irrigation, fertigation and advanced agricultural technologies since their arrival on March 29th. The delegation is being led by Israel's Agricultural Attache in New Delhi, Yair Eshel.

"Glad to see Indian officers in Israel learning about Israeli agro-technology. This course will serve as a sustainable platform for sharing Israel's advanced agricultural knowledge. We hope to continue

conducting many such courses in the future that will benefit the farmers of India," he said.

MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation working with the Foreign Ministry, looks at providing developing countries with the best of Israel's experience in development and planning and has served as an important arm of the ministry's diplomatic outreach programme.

"As we mark 30 years of India-Israel diplomatic relations, we are happy to see the resumption of physical activities of Indian officers in Israel in the field of agriculture after a long absence due to the pandemic," Rony Yedidia Clein, Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy of Israel in India was quoted in the release as saying.

"Sharing agricultural technologies is an important element of the partnership between Israel and India. **PTI**

BMW eyes 'mega year' in India post Q1 show; to launch 24 products

New Delhi: German luxury automotive group BMW is expecting a 'mega year' in India in 2022 having clocked 25 per cent rise in four-wheeler sales and 41 per cent jump in two-wheelers in the first quarter despite challenges of semiconductor shortage, war in Ukraine and shutdowns due to COVID-19 in China, according to a senior company official.

The BMW group has also lined up 24 products to be introduced in India this year - 19 in the four-wheeler segment, including the all-electric sedan i4 in May, and five motorcycles through its BMW Motorrad division.

In the January-March period, the BMW group had posted one of its best quarters in India with a 25.3 per cent jump in four-wheeler sales at 2,815 units. The BMW range of sedans and SUVs clocked sales of 2,636 units, while the MINI luxury compact car sold 179 units.

The group's two-wheeler sales grew by 41.1 per cent at 1,518 units during the period.

"The supply is currently little restricted. We could have sold much, much more because we are holding roughly around 2,500 orders for four-wheelers and over 1,500 orders for motorcycles. Literally, you can say it could have been doubled," BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah told PTI.

When asked about the prospects for the full year on the back of the Q1 performance, he said, "It is a dynamic situation this year with all the logistical challenges and the supply conditions across the world, that will determine how we do.

We have got a very good order pipeline. If we are able to fulfil that, of course we are looking at a mega year."

He further said, "(Despite the challenges) we have seen growth in the first quarter of 25 per cent in four-wheelers and 41 per cent in two-wheelers. **PTI**

Goodluck India to invest ₹200 cr in 2-3 yrs to scale up capacity: CMD

New Delhi: Steel products maker Goodluck India will invest Rs 200 crore over the next two-three years to expand capacity, its Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) M C Garg said.

BSE-listed Goodluck India has five manufacturing units at Sikandrabad (Uttar Pradesh) and one in Kutch (Gujarat) with a total installed capacity of 3,40,000 tonnes per annum.

"We are in an expansion mode and will invest Rs 200 crore over 2-3 years to increase our capacity to 5,00,000 tonnes as demand for our products from customers is continuously rising," Garg told PTI in an interview. **PTI**

The company manufactures a wide range of engineered steel structures, precision/auto tubes, forging for defence and aerospace, CR (cold rolled) products and GI (galvanised iron pipes) pipes.

These products are used by automobile manufacturers, infrastructure companies, industries like engineering, oil and gas, among others, he said.

Replying to a question on funding for the expansion, Garg said the company will be using some of its own funds and "the remaining portion will be arranged through various sources including bank funding." **PTI**

India among top priority markets; to grow in double digits: Oriflame

New Delhi: India is among one of the "priority markets" for the direct selling Swedish beauty brand Oriflame, where it expects to continue its double-digit growth over the next 3-5 years, a top company official has said.

The company which sells cosmetic and wellness products in India also expects a double-digit growth in its sales force, adding more direct sellers in the coming years.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Oriflame has witnessed an upswing in the wellness products business, contributing to around 20 per cent of its India business from the earlier 4 per cent, and expects this trend to continue with some

minor corrections.

"We have an expectation to continue the double-digit growth over next 3-5 years and I do not see it as a huge challenge," Frederic Widell, Vice President & Head of South Asia & MD, Oriflame India, told PTI.

The company will continue to grow here for the next decades because of the growing population and would continue to invest in India and build the business, he added.

"One of the priority markets for Oriflame is India," he said.

Widell said though India's growth slowed down in the last two years of the pandemic, his company managed to make

sure that profitability is increased.

When asked about the ranking of the Indian market in Oriflame's global business, he said: "It's number one or two."

"It depends. It is between India and China. Both the markets are neck to neck and are of the almost same size," Widell said.

Besides Indonesia and Turkey, Mexico and Poland are the other leading markets for Oriflame globally.

Oriflame Holding AG's net sales for 2021 were 1,016.5 million euro (over Rs 8,400 crore).

Widell refused to share the revenue of the Indian entity, but

said the company is having a "very solid growth" in the country.

Oriflame had entered India in 1995 and was among the first direct selling firms here.

"We are here for the last 26 years and we are very happy with the progression of our business here," he said, adding, "now we have a good amount of experience, understand the country and have relevant products."

At present, 95 per cent of sales of Oriflame in India comes from online platforms through the app and websites, and because of this now the company has decided to close many of its offices in the country. **PTI**

Mbappe, Neymar score hat-tricks

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe and Neymar both scored hat-tricks as Paris Saint-Germain romped to a 6-1 thrashing of struggling Clermont on Saturday to move closer to winning Ligue 1.

Mbappe, who has still not decided whether he will stay at PSG beyond this season, scored twice and had three assists in last weekend's 5-1 rout of Lorient.

He added another assist and won a penalty in this game as he moved to the top of the Ligue 1 goalscoring charts with 20 goals this season.

Mauricio Pochettino's men are now 15 points clear of second-placed Rennes and appear certain to regain the title with only seven games remaining.

Clermont remain in 17th spot, just one point ahead of the relegation play-off place.

PSG only have Ligue 1 left to play for this season after being knocked out of the Champions League by Real Madrid, but put in a second straight impressive performance.

They took the lead in the sixth minute as Mbappe caused havoc in the home defence with a driving run off the left wing.

The ball eventually found its way to Lionel Messi, whose clever pass found Neymar and the Brazilian drilled the ball into the far corner.

The Clermont players were left incensed that PSG had continued to attack despite a defender being down injured.

The champions-elect doubled their advantage inside 20 minutes as Messi collected



his 12th league assist of the season.

The seven-time Ballon

d'Or winner volleyed the ball

through for Mbappe, who

goalkeeper Arthur Desmas.

But Clermont gave themselves hope of an unlikely

PSG ONLY HAVE LIGUE 1 LEFT TO PLAY FOR THIS SEASON AFTER BEING KNOCKED OUT OF THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE BY REAL MADRID, BUT PUT IN A SECOND STRAIGHT IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE

comeback shortly before half-time as Jodel Dossou bundled in at the back post to finish off a fine team move.

The game was ended as a contest with 20 minutes to play, as Mbappe was brought down in the box by Akim Zedadka following a quick counter-attack and Neymar sent Desmas the wrong way from the spot.

Mbappe grabbed his second goal just a few minutes later, racing onto Neymar's brilliant pass to round Desmas and tap in.

PSG's fearsome front three combined for the fifth goal, as Neymar's back-flick found Messi, who played in Mbappe to curl a magnificent strike into the far corner.

The away side made it four goals in the space of 12 minutes with seven minutes remaining, as Neymar completed his first hat-trick since December 2020.

He was indebted again to Mbappe, who ran clean through but unselfishly squared to give his teammate the easiest of finishes.

West Ham's top 4 bid rocked by promoted Brentford

AP ■ LONDON

West Ham's hopes of finishing in the Premier League's top four suffered a major blow in a 2-0 defeat at Brentford on Sunday.

In the top four race, West Ham look set to miss out after a damaging loss in west London.

Brentford struck in the 48th minute when Ivan Toney's flick reached Bryan Mbuemo for a thunderous low finish.

Mbuemo returned the favour with an assist for Toney as the striker headed home in the 64th minute.

David Moyes' sixth-placed side are now six points behind fourth-placed Tottenham, who have played a game less than their London rivals.

At the other end of the table, Norwich kept alive their faint hopes of beating the drop with a 2-0 win against fellow strugglers Burnley at Carrow Road.

Dean Smith's side took the lead in the ninth minute when a corner was only cleared to Pierre Lees-Melou on the edge of the area and his fierce drive deflected in off Josh Brownhill.

Teemu Pukki put the result beyond doubt with a lethal finish Mathias Normann's 86th-minute pass.

Leicester beat Crystal Palace 2-1 at the King Power Stadium as Ademola Lookman bagged his first goal since February.

Latching onto Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall's pass, Lookman cut inside Joachim Andersen and fired past Vicente Guaita in the 39th minute.

Dewsbury-Hall went from provider to scorer on the stroke of half-time, holding off Cheikhou Kouyate to net after Marc Guehi's mistake allowed Patson Daka to tee up the midfielder.

Wilfried Zaha got one back for Palace in bizarre fashion in the 66th minute.



IMMOBILE'S TREBLE FIRES LAZIO TO WIN AT GENOA

AP ■ ROME

Ciro Immobile shot to the top of the Serie A scoring charts on Sunday with a hat-trick in Lazio's 4-1 win at struggling Genoa which moved them up to fifth.

Italy forward Immobile took his league tally to 24 goals in 27 games this season in a victory which put Lazio in the Europa League spot, one point ahead of local rivals AS Roma who face Salernitana later on Sunday.

He has two more than Juventus forward Dusan Vlahovic after netting with a beautiful low finish on the stroke of half-time to put



Lazio two ahead and adding two more in the second period. Lazio are seven points off fourth-placed Juve, who are on the fringes of an enthralling title race which could well provide more twists and turns later on Sunday.

Real Madrid sail past Getafe

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid kept Chelsea in mind by resting Luka Modric and Toni Kroos but eased past Getafe 2-0 on Saturday to restore their advantage to 12 points at the top of La Liga.

Casemiro's header and a smart finish by Lucas Vazquez sealed a comfortable victory for Madrid, who can turn their attention back to finishing the job against Chelsea and reaching the Champions League semi-finals.

Karim Benzema, the hat-trick hero of Real Madrid's 3-1 win over Chelsea, started against Getafe but came off in the 74th minute, departing to a standing ovation which felt like the Santiago Bernabeu crowd paying tribute to his performance at Stamford Bridge.

Gareth Bale came on to make only his second La Liga appearance since August and his first at the Bernabeu since February 2020. Madrid had gone 20 home games in between without the Welshman, who



was whistled by a section of disgruntled supporters.

Bale's latest misstep with the Real Madrid fans was to play, and score, for Wales at the end of last month, four days after pulling out of the Clasico defeat by Barcelona through

injury.

Bale is likely to be back on the bench again for the visit of Chelsea on Tuesday and, despite another dynamic performance from Eduardo Camavinga, the rested Modric and Kroos will surely return to

Carlo Ancelotti's midfield in midweek. Neither were even needed off the bench.

Real Madrid's commanding lead in La Liga has afforded Ancelotti the luxury of rotation now around European games.

Barcelona play at Levante on Sunday and have two games in hand but the Catalans are 15 points behind in third.

Any hopes they had that the Clasico might send Madrid into a tail-spin have fizzled, Ancelotti's side instead responding with two wins in a row.

Benzema had an early goal ruled out for offside but it did not take long for Madrid to break through Getafe, a sumptuous cross from the outside of Vinicius Junior's right foot finding Casemiro's head six yards out.

Vazquez's goal came in the 68th minute, as he flicked the ball down the right-hand channel to Rodrygo and kept running, receiving the pass back and guiding a finish into the far corner.

India lose 0-3 to Netherlands in Jr WC semis

PTI ■ POTCHEFSTROOM

The Indian women's hockey team's dream run in the FIH Junior World Cup came to a screeching halt after it suffered a 0-3 defeat to three-time champions, the Netherlands in the semifinals, here on Sunday.

India, whose best finish in the tournament came in the 2013 edition where they finished as Bronze medalists, were eyeing a maiden berth in the summit clash of the event.

The team so far produced high quality hockey to march into the last-four round unbeaten.

But it was not to be as the Netherlands scored three field goals through Tessa Beetsma (12th minute), Luna Fokke (53rd) and Jip Dicke (54th) to emerge winners and sail into their fourth consecutive final.

The Netherlands scored against the run of play in the 12th minute through a fantastic field effort from Beetsma.

The Dutch extended their lead in the 53rd minute through Fokke's reverse hit past India custodian Bichu Devi Khariabam after receiving a brilliant cross-field pass from Noor Omrani.

A minute later, the Netherlands literally took the game away from the Indians with another field strike through Dicke, who deflected home a Beetsma reverse hit.



India's Pro League matches vs Eng cancelled

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian women's hockey team's two FIH Pro League matches against England, which were earlier postponed due to COVID-related issues in the English side, have been cancelled, handing the Savita-led side the top position in the standings.

The two matches were initially scheduled for April 2 and 3 at the Kalinga

Stadium here but postponed due to a high number of COVID-19 cases and injuries in the England team. The Indian team has now been awarded six points — three each for a match — for the two cancelled games. With six points from the two cancelled matches, India leapfrogged Olympic champions Netherlands to occupy the top position in the standings with 22 points. The Dutch are second at 19 points while Germany (13) are third.

Leclerc wins Australian GP as Verstappen fails to finish

AP ■ MELBOURNE

A flawless Charles Leclerc led from start to finish to steer his Ferrari to an action-packed win at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday with world champion Max Verstappen failing to finish.

The world championship leader from Monaco started from pole, held his position at the first corner and never looked back, scoring round the 58-lap Albert Park circuit to take the chequered flag by a massive 20.5 seconds.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez was second with George Russell an encouraging third for the struggling Mercedes and his seven-time world champion teammate Lewis Hamilton fourth.

"It's amazing, the car was incredible today. What a race and what a pace today," said Leclerc after clocking a fourth career win and second of the season.

"Honestly, what a car today. I did a good job all weekend but it's not possible without the car. I'm just so happy."

"Obviously we have only had three races so it's difficult to think of the championship but we have a very strong car and a reliable car," he added.

The McLarens of Lando Norris and Daniel Ricciardo were fifth and sixth.

Alpine's Esteban Ocon came seventh ahead of Valtteri Bottas in an Alfa Romeo, with Pierre Gasly's AlphaTauri and Alex Albon's Williams rounding out the top 10.

But there was disaster for Red Bull's Verstappen, the winner two weeks ago in Saudi Arabia, who pulled over on lap 39 when second, saying on the team radio: "I smell some weird fluid."



He jumped out with smoke coming from the engine, grabbing a fire extinguisher to help a marshal put out the flames. It was his second retirement in three starts this season.

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Aston Martin veteran Sebastian Vettel also failed to finish after spinning out.

Jabeur vs Bencic in Charleston Open final

AP ■ CHARLESTON

No 4 seed Ons Jabeur continued her run of success the past two years at the Credit One Charleston Open, overcoming Amanda Anisimova 2-6, 6-1, 6-4 on Saturday to reach the championship.

Jabeur of Tunisia will face Olympic Gold medalist Belinda Bencic of Switzerland, a 6-4, 6-3 winner of Ekaterina Alexandrova.

For Jabeur, it was just more good play on the green clay surface at Charleston. She reached the semi-finals of this event last year. A week later in a second tournament at the facility, Jabeur got a step further before losing in the final.

Now, Jabeur has another chance of gaining her first win here and her second on the WTA tour. Jabeur had breezed through her first three matches without dropping a set. But Anisimova, the 20-year-old seeded 15th, pounced quickly on Jabeur's mistakes to grab the first set. After Jabeur roared back to take the second set, Anisimova opened a 3-1 lead in the decider.

Once more, Jabeur dug in to win five of the last six games and move forward.



Squash stars hope to get TOPS funding

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's squash stars including Dipika Pallikal, Saurav Ghosal and Joshna Chinappa are hoping to get entry into Sports Ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) after their title winning exploits at the World Doubles Championship in Glasgow.

TOPS was formed in September 2014 to support elite athletes in Olympic sports but in the year of Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, players from non Olympic sports like squash have been added to the scheme in the past.

TOPS cuts through the government red tape and athletes get access to funds faster for competition and training. The chosen athletes also get a monthly stipend of Rs 50,000.

Ghosal, Joshna and Dipika are genuine medal contenders at CWG and Asia 2022 and were part of TOPS heading into the two multi sporting events back in 2018.

"It will only help if we are added to TOPS as it is a big year for us. It makes the exercise (to get funds) a



lot faster. It surely helps and makes it easier. Don't know why we are not included yet but hope that happens soon," world number 17 Ghosal said, a day after winning mixed doubles world title with Dipika in Glasgow.

It was a double delight for Dipika, who also won the women's doubles crown alongside Joshna. It was her first competitive event in more than 3 years, making

it a fairytale comeback. The 30-year-old had given birth to twins last October.

"The TOPS scheme will go a long way in helping the squash team. TOPS always makes it easier for the athletes to secure funding for training and tournaments."

"I feel before CWG and Asian Games, TOPS is a must for us. All medal contenders should be part of the scheme going into the

two events. It will just help us a lot if we get funded," said Dipika.

India's top-ranked player Joshna said getting entry into TOPS will provide a big boost to her preparation for the mega events later this year.

"I am hoping we are in TOPS soon. We were included in the scheme one and a half years before the 2018 CWG and Asian Games and it made a huge difference to our preparation," said the world number 13.

Though government has been funding her air travel for tournaments on the professional tour, Joshna is having to spend out of her own pocket for out of competition training in England and Egypt.

At the most recent Mission Olympic Cell meeting earlier this week, the matter of including athletes from non Olympic sports to TOPS was not discussed, a member told PTI.

"It was not proposed or discussed in this meeting but the players could be included going forward if the proposal is made," said the member.

There are still 11 league matches to go. We've got to get on a roll. We've seen in this tournament teams get on a losing roll or winning momentum. It's just a matter of (getting) first win — ZAHEER KHAN

DC return to winning ways

Kuldeep exacts sweet revenge against KKR as Shaw, Warner & Khaleel also shine in 44 run win

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Opens Prithvi Shaw and David Warner's fearless batting laid the foundation as Delhi Capitals out-batted Kolkata Knight Riders by 44 runs to notch up their second win in the IPL here on Sunday.

On a batting belter, KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer's decision to put Delhi Capitals in backfield as they piled up 215 for five riding on half-centuries from Shaw (51 off 29 balls) and Warner (61 off 45 balls).

In reply, KKR were all-out for 171 in 19.4 overs and it was left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav's evening at the Brabourne Stadium as he exacted sweet revenge against a franchise that didn't treat him too well during his stint as his career came to a halt.

The scoreboard pressure was always telling and Kuldeep (4/35 in 4 overs), who is proving to be an asset for Capitals, decisively swung the match in the Rishabh Pant-led side's favour, getting opposition skipper Shreyas Iyer (54 off 33 balls) stumped with a left-arm wrist spinner's googly. Iyer had no clue as he came down the track and the ball turned away after pitching.

Pat Cummins didn't play any manic knock as a Kuldeep leg-break ended his stay and then he took a magnificent skier off his own bowling to cap off a superb evening under lights.

Left-arm pacer Khaleel Ahmed (3/25 in 4 overs) bowled fast and sharp at the onset and in the end Andre Russell (24 off 21 balls) had too much to do with too little time left and result was a one-sided victory for DC. At the start, Shaw and Warner feasted on a quality bowling attack before DC survived a scratchy middle-order show to reach a healthy 215 for 5.

If Shaw-Warner added 93 to set



the platform, Shardul Thakur (29 not out off 11 balls) and Axar Patel (22 off 14 balls) added 49 in just 3.2 overs to finish the innings in style.

Warner and Shaw were facing one of the most lethal pace attacks of this edition but to their advantage it was perhaps the best batting track.

There was a layer of green but it was more about holding the surface which had even bounce for anyone wishing to hit through the line.

Umesh Yadav (1/48 in 4 overs) had his first bad outing in this IPL, while Warner also launched into Pat Cummins (0/51 in 4 overs) with two



boundaries over cover as 50 came in four overs.

It's a rarity to have 10 fours and two sixes being hit in the Powerplay as Iyer looked clueless.

Cummins was pulled for six by Shaw, while Warner slog swept Varun Chakravarthy (1/44 in 4 overs) over mid-wicket for a six. Sunil Narine (2/21) was reverse swept as both spinners were introduced within the Powerplay after pacers got severely punished first up.

It was Chakravarthy, who breached Shaw's defence to give his team first breakthrough but skipper Pant (27 off 14 balls), promoting

► pointstable

PO. TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1. RR	4	3	1	0	6	0.951
2. KKR	5	3	2	0	6	0.446
3. GT	3	3	0	0	6	0.349
4. RCB	4	3	1	0	6	0.294
5. LSG	5	3	2	0	6	0.174
6. DC	4	2	2	0	4	0.476
7. PBKS	4	2	2	0	4	0.152
8. SRH	3	1	2	0	2	-0.889
9. MI	4	0	4	0	0	-1.181
10. CSK	4	0	4	0	0	-1.211

► boundarymeter

4s	558
6s	294

himself up the order, didn't let the momentum slip away as he and Warner added 55 in just 4.1 overs.

Pant was audacious as usual, hitting those fallen reverse sweep off spinners and a straight six off Cummins.

Warner completed his first half-century of this edition with a six off Russell before Pant was dismissed by a slower bowled by the Jamaican all-rounder.

Once Pant was dismissed, Warner's shots lacked a bit of sting and Narine was very steady as he slowly brought KKR back into the game, dismissing Lalit Yadav and Rovman Powell in quick succession.

It was left to Axar and Shardul to show their batting prowess that helped DC reach a par score on this track.

Royals end LSG winning streak



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shimron Hetmyer lived up to his Rs 8.5 crore price tag with a six-hitting exhibition before Yuzvendra Chahal and Trent Boult displayed their wizardry with the ball as Rajasthan Royals outwitted Lucknow Super Kings by three runs in an IPL game here on Sunday.

Invited to bat, star West Indies batter Hetmyer smashed an unbeaten 36-ball 59 to lift RR from 67 for four to 165 for six in 20 overs.

Trent Boult (2/30) then struck twice in a sensational opening over, while Chahal (4/41) picked up four wickets to achieve the feat of claiming 150 IPL victims but Marcus Stoinis blasted two fours and four maximums in his unbeaten 38 off 17 balls to conjure up hopes of a turnaround.

But Kuldeep Sen, making his IPL debut, showed great nerves as he defended 15 runs in the last over as RR limited LSG to 162 for eight.

With this win, RR bounced back from their fourth wicket loss to RCB in the last match to take the top position in the IPL standings, while LSG slipped to fifth spot.

Defending the total, Boult pro-

duced a ripping late inswinging yorker to dismiss KL Rahul for a first-ball duck, before trapping Krishnappa Gowtham plumb in front in the opening over as LSG slipped to 1 for 2.

Prasidh Krishna then got rid of Jason Holder with a back of a length delivery which took a top-edge and ballooned to Ravichandran Ashwin at mid-on.

Madhya Pradesh pacer Sen made an impressive IPL debut as he disturbed the woods of Deepak Hooda to leave LSG at 52 for four.

The wily Chahal then got into the act as he first foxed young Ayush Badoni (5), and then had Quinton de Kock (39) holed out to Riyan Parag and knocked back the leg stump of Krunal Pandya (22) as RR put one foot in the door.

Needing 34 runs off 12 balls, Stoinis accumulated 19 of Krishna in the penultimate over but Sen held his nerves and gave away just one run in the first four balls to shine on his debut.

Earlier, Jos Buttler (13) and Devdutt Padikkal (29) added 42 runs in five overs but they lost three wickets in a 15-ball burst to be reduced to 67 for four at one stage.

Rawat a future star in making: Du Plessis



PTI ■ PUNE

Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis is mighty impressed with teammate Anuj Rawat in this IPL so far and feels the young wicket-keeper-batter is a "future" star in the making.

Rawat, a left-handed batter, has opened with Du Plessis in

all the matches for RCB so far this IPL season.

But his best came only in their last outing on Saturday when the 22-year-old slammed a 47-ball 66 to be adjudged the Player-of-the-match in RCB's successful 152-run chase against five-time champions Mumbai Indians.

"The way he's playing at the

moment is beautiful... He's a very good player for the future," Du Plessis said after their seven-wicket win over MI at the MCA Stadium here.

"Comes down the wicket, shows intent, he's a very good player for the future. That's what makes the young guy so good for us at the moment."

Rawat made a lacklustre IPL debut for Rajasthan Royals against Kolkata Knight Riders in 2021 when he was out for a golden duck, which happened to be the only match for the son of a farmer from Ramnagar in Uttarakhand.

Rawat made his Ranji debut for Delhi in 2017-18 and it was only in the next season he impressed with his maiden hundred — a 183-ball 134 — that helped Delhi recover from being 36/5 and seal a nine-wicket win.

In the last Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy domestic T20 tournament, Rawat struck 15 fours and 10 sixes from just five innings, while in the one-dayers he had the best average for Delhi — 58.33 — with a strike rate of 108.69.

RCB snapped up the youngster, shelling out ₹3.4 crore at this year's IPL mega auction.

Unbeaten Gujarat Titans take on inconsistent SRH

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Gujarat Titans, who have become the team to beat in its debut IPL season, would aim to build on a dream start against an inconsistent Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday.

Three consecutive wins in the IPL have given Gujarat Titans the momentum and they showed against Punjab Kings that they can win from any situation.

Skipper Hardik Pandya will need to showcase his tactical acumen against Sunrisers, who earned their first win against CSK but still are placed in the bottom half of the points table.

Gujarat have found different match-winners in every game while Sunrisers, who got a win after a horrendous start to their campaign, would like to keep improving with every game.

At the DY Patil stadium, focus again will be on young Shubman Gill. He has been in prime form and posted his

Hyderabad vs Gujarat
Live from 7:30 pm IST
STAR SPORTS 1

highest IPL score against Punjab Kings. The elegant right-hander would however need support from Matthew Wade, who has the ability to play big shots and Sai Sudarshan, who also chipped in with a useful knock in the last game.

In the last outing against Punjab, Rahul Tewatia found his mojo with two sixes and emerged as the match-winner.

Titans are up against death overs specialist Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the raw pace of Umran Malik, the yorkers of T Natarajan and classical off-breaks of Washington Sundar.

Add to it the variations brought in by lanky South African pacer Marco Jansen, the batters could encounter a tough time.

Gujarat's bowlers on the other hand have been right on the money.

Hardik's four overs can change the complexion of the game while another pacer who can

wreak havoc is Lockie Ferguson. Mohammad Shami too has been impressive with the new ball.

The other important cog in their wheel is Rashid Khan, who is capable of running riot and can pose challenges to his former team SRH.

For the Sunrisers, after failure in the first-two games, skipper Kane Williamson got a start and would be keen to score a big one against Gujarat.

SRH opener Abhishek Sharma reposed the faith shown in to him and made a match-winning 75 on last Saturday when the team chased a tricky 155 in 17.4 overs. He would also like to continue from where he left.

Rahul Tripathi's role will also be crucial and ditto for Nicholas Pooran and Aiden Markram.

The three need to show consistency and show their mettle while taking responsibility in the middle-order. Sundar has the ability to play cameo.

Both the teams are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination and considering dew, the toss becomes crucial as it has proved to be the case in majority of the games.



RCB pacer Harshal Patel bereaved

PTI ■ PUNE

Royal Challengers Bangalore pacer Harshal Patel has left the IPL bio-bubble following the death of a family member.

PTI has learnt that Harshal exited the bubble after getting to know about the tragedy in the family right after the game against Mumbai Indians.

Harshal has been the star performer for RCB over the past couple of seasons and took two wickets on Saturday night in the team's seven wicket win over MI.

"Unfortunately, Harshal had to leave the bio-bubble due to a death in his family. It was his sister. He did not take the team bus back to Mumbai from Pune," said an IPL source.

ICC Chairman Barclay to complete his term

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ICC board on Sunday convinced its chairman Gregor Barclay to complete his term till end of October before the global body starts its nomination process to find a new chairman where the Indian cricket board could play a massive role.

In another significant development, Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ramiz Raja's proposal for a four-nation tournament has been unanimously rejected by the board, putting an end to speculations of multiple India versus Pakistan matches on neutral venues. The other notable development was BCCI secretary Jay Shah being inducted into the ICC cricket committee.

The two-day board meeting which concluded in Dubai on Sunday was a win-win one for the



Indian cricket board as Barclay's continuation till October gives it ample time to strategise whether it will field a candidate for the top post in the month of November.

"There has been no discussion on re-nomination of Barclay. But he will finish his current two year term as a chairman till end of October. So the process of nominat-

ing a new chairman only starts in November," an ICC Board member said.

Originally, there was a possibility that the re-nomination or nomination would have happened in the month of June but that changed after deliberations between the member boards.

The decision also helps the BCCI buy time as they are likely to have their AGM in September after which the composition of the national parent body will be clear.

RAMIZ'S PROPOSAL SHOT DOWN BY BOARD

PCB chairman Ramiz Raja's ambitious proposal of conducting a four-nation tourney comprising India, Australia, England under the aegis of the ICC was unanimously rejected by the all-powerful board even though there was a projected revenue of \$750 million for five

years.

"In any case, ICC's Financial and Commercial Affairs Committee (F&CA) was against this proposal. As we know that the MPA (Members Participation Agreement) doesn't allow any member nation to host more than tri-nation, organising four-nation every year would have in any case devalued ICC's own marquee events," a board member said.

Another sensitive issue which board members are talking in hushed tones is whether Raja will remain PCB chairman for long after Imran Khan was removed from Prime Minister's position.

PCB chairman is a political appointee as Pakistan PMs are always Patron-in-chief of the board. Hence Raja, an appointee of Imran Khan, might be forced to tender his resignation in current political climate.

SA build on big lead against B'desh

AP ■ PORT ELIZABETH

South Africa batted aggressively in their second innings after securing a 236-run first innings lead on the third day of the second Test against Bangladesh at St George's Park in Gebeherha on Sunday.

Sarel Erwee made 40 not out as South Africa reached 84 for two at tea, an overall lead of 320 runs.

Left-arm spinner Tajjul Islam, who took six for 135 in the first innings, took both wickets at a cost of 31 runs.

Bangladesh were bowled out for 217 in their first innings, losing their last five wickets for 25 runs. Mushfiqur Rahim (51) and Yasir Ali (46) put on 70 for the sixth wicket but the innings folded rapidly after Yasir was caught and bowled by Keshav Maharaj.

South African captain Dean Elgar decided not to enforce the fol-



low-on. He and Erwee scored at better than five runs an over in an opening stand of 60 before Elgar missed a reverse sweep against

Tajjul and was bowled. Keegan Petersen made 14 but was leg before wicket to Tajjul in the last over before tea.