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‘MILITIESTABLISHMENT’
AND THE WARY SHARIFS**WORLD 9**
MARIUPOL HOLDS OUT
AGAINST ALL ODDS**MONEY 10**
MIN RELAXES EPCG NORMS
TO AID EASE OF DOING BIZ

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY APRIL 16, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Covid uptick: Be cautious, don't panic, say experts

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

There are unmistakable signs that Covid-19 is rearing its head again in pockets of the country with active cases increasing to 11,191 and the positivity rate climbing up proportionately. In Delhi, the positivity rate has gone beyond two per cent and there has been a rise of nearly 48 per cent in the number of home isolation cases in the last one week, according to official data.

The Indian Premier League saw a Covid positive case on Friday when Delhi Capitals physio Patrick Farhart tested positive for the virus. "He is being closely monitored by the DC Medical Team at the moment," the BCCI said in a media advisory.

Delhi's adjoining Noida saw over 20 students infected with Covid-19 in a week. Covid cases are also on rise in Mumbai and Gujarat.

Experts have pointed out that there is no reason to panic at the moment, but they have also advised the public to remain cautious, particularly in view of a forecast by scientists from IIT-Kanpur about the fourth wave in India in June.

Haryana has reported over 1,200 fresh Covid cases in over 14 days out of which over 1,000 infections were from Gurugram district, official data showed. The district has been



A healthcare worker administers a dose of the Covid-19 preventive vaccine to a beneficiary at a vaccination centre in Gurugram on Friday

witnessing a rise in Covid cases in the past few days.

During the same period, Gurugram added 1,022 fresh cases. Of 170 new Covid cases that the State reported on April 14, as many as 147 were from Gurugram and 19 from Faridabad. The Covid positivity rate in Haryana was 1.27 per cent on February 28, 0.41 per

cent on March 31 and 2.72 per cent on April 14.

As a precautionary measure amid spurt in Covid-cases in past few days, the Delhi Government has chalked out a blueprint envisaging preparation of at least 65,000 Covid-19 beds, including the ICU beds, to meet the emergency even as India logged 949 new coron-

avirus infections taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 4,30,39,972.

Sharing details about the preparation to combat Covid-19, Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain said about 37,000 beds and 10,594 ICU beds are being set up in the hospitals across the city.

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Infighting hits Cong in Punjab, Guj, Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA/NEW DELHI
/CHANDIGARH

After its rout in the recent Assembly polls, the Congress is in for fresh trouble as serious infighting has surfaced in several State units such as Gujarat, Bihar and Punjab.

In Bihar, senior party leader Madan Mohan Jha, who held the post of Bihar Congress chief for almost four years, tendered his resignation after meeting with former party chief Rahul Gandhi. His resignation comes a couple of days after the Gujarat Congress leader Hardik Patel expressed his anguish against the leadership of the State unit.

The Congress' plan to rope in the chairman of the Khodaldham Temple Trust Naresh Patel, a prominent Patidar face, ahead of 2022 State polls has apparently angered Hardik, who believes that his clout as Patidar leader will be finished if Naresh Patel joins the Congress party.

"You used Hardik in 2017, you want to use Naresh Bhai in 2022 and in 2027 you would use another Patidar leader. Why don't you support and strengthen Hardik?" he said. "They should take Naresh Bhai, but will they treat him like the way they did to me?" he added.

"I am more pained because



Congress president Sonia Gandhi being enrolled as a digital member by KC Venugopal, general secretary, organisation, AICC, during ongoing digital membership drive of the Congress party, in New Delhi on Friday

PTI

I have represented the situation to Rahul Gandhi many times, but no action has been taken by him against Gujarat Congress leaders," he said.

The Gujarat Congress is also divided over reports that the party high command was considering inducting poll strategist Prashant Kishor to anchor the State unit in the Assembly polls.

These two developments have come as a jolt for the leadership which is preparing for a Chintan Shivir after rumblings within the party following a series of Assembly elections debacle.

AICC national general secretary Tariq Anwar said the need for having a new man to head the Bihar unit was being

felt for quite some time.

"Jha, who is a senior leader, a former State Minister and currently a member of the legislative council, has cleared the path by resigning gracefully. The party high command is now vetting the names of prospective candidates for the new State president. A final decision will be taken in due course," Tariq Anwar said.

The party recently effected changes in Punjab Congress and Uttarakhand Congress after one of the worst ever performances in the just-concluded Assembly elections. Other States like Manipur, earlier Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh are also beset with factionalism.

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Each dist will get one medical college: Modi

'Govt schemes will produce record number of doctors in next 10 years'PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that Government schemes are fast making treatment "accessible to all" and the country is likely to get a record number of doctors in the next 10 years thanks to the expansion of medical education.

"The goal of having at least one medical college in every district and ensuring that medical education is within the reach of everyone will result in the country getting a record number of doctors after 10 years," the Prime Minister said. Speaking after dedicating

to the nation a 200-bed KK Patel multi-specialty Hospital in Bhuj in Gujarat's Kutch district via video-conferencing, Modi said Ayushman Bharat scheme has been instrumental in saving lakhs of crore rupees every year in the treatment of poor and middle-class families along with Janaushadhi Yojana.

This is the first charitable multi-specialty hospital in the Kutch region, and it has been built by the Leuva Patel community of Bhuj with help from donors based in India and abroad.

"Health and Wellness cen-

ters and campaigns such as the Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Scheme are helping to make treatment accessible to all," Modi said.

In his virtual address, the Prime Minister cautioned that Covid-19 had still not made its exit and people should not take it easy. Modi said Yoga and Ayurveda, which have their origins in India, caught the world's attention during the pandemic.

The PM said two decades ago Gujarat had just nine medical colleges with around 1,100 MBBS seats, but the medical education scenario has improved vastly in the last 20 years.

"Now, the State has one AIIMS and over three dozen medical colleges. Earlier, only 1,000 students used to get admission to medical colleges in Gujarat, now around 6,000 students get admission to these colleges. AIIMS in Rajkot has started admitting 50 students from 2021," Modi said.

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Shivpal dissolves party's all units, supports UCC, likely to join BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
LUCKNOW

The leadership of Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) dissolved all the national and regional units of the party on Friday, fueling speculation that Shivpal Singh Yadav has moved closer to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The battle of one-upmanship between the Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle and PSPCL supremo Shivpal has intensified after the landslide victory of the BJP in UP Legislative Council polls.

This latest development has intensified speculation that Shivpal may soon join hands with the BJP. However, neither Shivpal Yadav nor his party said anything officially about their future plan of action.

Shivpal on Thursday caused a stir in political circles by endorsing the idea of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), an issue identified with the politics of the BJP.

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Contractor's death: K'taka Min tenders resignation to CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Karnataka BJP leader KS Eshwarappa resigned as the Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Minister late on Friday evening.

He arrived in Bengaluru with his followers, in what was seen as a "show of strength" and affirmed that he would be back after getting a clean-chit in the enquiry. Thereafter, he tendered his resignation to Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai.

BJP president JP Nadda is to visit Karnataka on April 16-17 when State BJP executive is also to meet.

Eshwarappa, from Kuruba backward community, quit following the suicide of a contractor earlier this week. The contractor had alleged that the Minister had asked him to pay 40 per cent commission for releasing payments for the work executed by him.

UK PM to visit India next week; FTA, Ukraine on talks agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister of Britain Boris Johnson will hold wide-ranging discussions, including defence and strategic affairs and the raging conflict in Ukraine, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi here next week.

The two-day visit, likely to begin on April 21, comes after two postponements. Earlier, Johnson was to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade here last year and had to cancel it due to the rising number of corona cases. The second time the visit was called off in April, the same year as the second wave of the pandemic hit India. Modi also cancelled his visit to the UK for G-7 in May.

Modi and Johnson last met

on the margins of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow last November, when they reviewed the 2030 Roadmap which they had finalised at a virtual summit in May 2021.

India has seen some high profile visits in the last few weeks in the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis. British Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss was here last month, while Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar. Moreover, Russian Foreign Sergey Lavrov

also visited New Delhi.

Earlier this week, Modi held a virtual summit with US President Joe Biden before the 2+2 dialogue between the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the two countries in Washington.

Johnson recently made a surprise visit to Kyiv to meet President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, pledging to provide more weapons to Ukraine.

As regards the agenda of the upcoming summit between Modi and Johnson, sources said besides Ukraine the two heads will focus on a free trade agreement. The two leaders may firm up guidelines for their respective officials for ongoing negotiations in this regard. Some other pacts are also likely to be inked during the talks.

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When will you stop using facewash made with just chemicals?

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UP launches Dastak Abhiyan to fight waterborne diseases

Campaign is scheduled to end on April 30

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the aim to keep the people of Uttar Pradesh safe from communicable diseases, including encephalitis, malaria, dengue, filariasis and chikungunya, the Uttar Pradesh Government on Friday launched the Dastak Abhiyan to prevent the spread of water-borne and vector-borne diseases.

The campaign is scheduled to last till April 30.

Speaking about the campaign, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, “The preparations will help us contain the communicable diseases which normally erupt during summers and rainy season.”

The chief minister instructed officials to provide facilities for prevention, treatment, and medicines at the Chief Minister Jan Arogya Mela, organised every Sunday.

ASHA and Anganwadi workers have been entrusted with the responsibility to apprise people about various water-borne and mosquito-borne diseases. They will also be making a list of people running fever.

Stating that any kind of carelessness could spiral into a scary situation, the government has stated that special efforts should be made to improve surveillance. Along with the Health department, Rural Development and Child Welfare departments have been asked to stay alert.

It is worth mentioning here that Uttar Pradesh, which has formed the maximum number

(more than 60,000) of monitoring committees in the country, is playing a vital role in the fight against seasonal fever, and mosquito and water-borne diseases.

More than four lakh members associated with these committees have been engaged in making people aware of vector-borne diseases by visiting them from door to door.

To control the spread of vector-borne diseases, a Communicable Disease Control Campaign has already been launched and weekly Chief Minister Jan Arogya Melas have also been started from April 10.

The government has asked the officials concerned to link the communicable diseases campaign and Dastak Abhiyan with Jan Arogya Mela so that more and more people can be benefitted.

Communal tension in Agra after schoolgirl’s kidnapping

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Communal tension flared up in Agra after two youths on a motorcycle kidnapped a class 11 schoolgirl.

The sensational incident took place right in front of the school gate after the girl’s uncle dropped her off last Monday morning.

Agitated over the incident, an angry mob, on Friday, set ablaze two houses belonging to the family of the accused, who is said to be an adult in an interfaith relationship.

Police said members of ‘Dharam Jagran Samanvay Sangh’ torched the house belonging to Sajid, a gym owner, in the city’s Runakta locality.

An adjoining house, belonging to the family, was also set on fire.

The mob was demanding the arrest of the man accused

of kidnapping the girl, who police say is 22 years old. Shop owners in the local Runakta market also downed shutters over the demand.

There were no reports of any injuries in the attack on the gym owner’s home.

The police post incharge was suspended after the incident for negligence and a probe was ordered against the Sikandra station house officer.

“If found guilty, action will be taken against him as well,” Agra’s Senior Superintendent of Police Sudheer Kumar Singh told reporters.

The girl, who is a class 11 student, went missing on Monday. She was traced two days later by police, but Sajid’s whereabouts were not known. Her family members had lodged a missing person’s report, prompting a police search for the couple. But in a

video that surfaced on social media, the woman said she was an adult and had gone willingly with the man.

“Both are adults,” SSP Singh told reporters. He said police would produce the woman in court. He said this could not be done so far because of the holidays.

The SSP said an FIR had been registered against members of the group that set the houses on fire and they would be arrested soon.

The woman’s family has also filed a police complaint against the gym owner.

Meanwhile, in another sensational incident, an auto driver and two of his accomplices gang-raped a Delhi woman near the Nanau area of Akrabad in Aligarh and also snatched her purse containing Rs 20,000, police officials said on Friday.

Woman looking for missing daughter raped by 3 men in West Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A 36-year old woman was allegedly raped by three men in West Delhi’s Punjabi Bagh area, police said on Friday.

The incident was reported to police on Thursday morning after the woman gained consciousness, they said. Police said they have arrested Naveen Singh (28), Bishwa Mohan Acharya (26), and Akshay Taneja (30), all of whom worked in a nearby restaurant as waiters.

The woman, police said, alleged in her complaint that she was out looking for her 17-year-old daughter who had gone missing from home. On the way, she met a man who offered her help in finding her daughter but demanded that she accompany him and his two other friends to their rented accommodation.

AAP Gujarat leader invites disgruntled Hardik to join party

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Days after Gujarat Congress’ working president Hardik Patel expressed displeasure with the party leadership, the Aam Aadmi Party’s (AAP) state unit on Friday invited him to join it.

“Hardik Patel has come up as a leader on his own. He has expressed displeasure with the Congress leadership. We require leaders like Hardik in AAP Gujarat,” the AAP’s state unit leader Gopal Italia told reporters.

Hardik should not waste his time putting his case before the Congress leadership as it would not yield any results, he added. Earlier this week, Hardik Patel, who first rose on Gujarat’s political scene as leader of the Patidar quota agitation, had said he had been “sidelined and harassed” in the Congress, and local leaders wanted him to leave the party.

Covid uptick...

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“In case the infection spreads, we already have infrastructure ready to increase 100 oxygen beds in every ward of Delhi within two weeks. We have plans to prepare 65,000 beds, so that no person has to face bed shortage in case of emergency,” said Jain, adding that all hospitals in Delhi have been advised to remain alert.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal also said they are keeping a close eye on rising cases of corona and hospital admissions are not increasing, so there is no need to panic. Jain said though cases of corona have increased in Delhi, the number of patients admitted to hospitals is still normal and contact tracing of patients is on to prevent the spread of infection.

“Apart from this, the XE variant has not been included in the list of ‘Variants of Concern’ by the World Health Organization. So there is no need to panic,” said the Minister.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) will meet on April 20 to discuss the spike in Covid cases and measures to contain the spread of the epidemic. The State Government is also considering bringing back the mask mandate.

Jain said if the cases increase again in the city, the home isolation system will be

implemented and at the same time, patients with mild corona symptoms will get better treatment at home.

“The CDV teams, along with ANM, ASHA, paramedical workers, will visit the homes of corona infected patients and inform them about being in home isolation and taking necessary precautions,” said Jain.

During the second wave Delhi witnessed shortage of oxygen and speaking on the issue, Jain said the city Government has increased its oxygen capacity. “We have a capacity of 1363.73 MT of oxygen, including Liquid Medical Oxygen Storage (LMO), Liquid Medical Oxygen Buffer, and PSA Plant. At the same time, the medical institution has the capacity of oxygen cylinders of up to 217 metric tonnes. Apart from this, 6,000 D type cylinders have been kept in reserve for use in an emergency,” Jain shared the details.

“Earlier, the oxygen refilling capacity in Delhi was limited to 1,500 cylinders a day, but now the two cryogenic plants with a capacity of 12.5 MT will be able to fill an additional 1,400 jumbo cylinders every day,” said Jain.

In view of reports of Covid-19 cases among school children and staff members, Delhi’s Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Friday said a specific wing in schools or classrooms where a Covid-19 case has been detected should be closed temporarily and clarified that the entire school should only be closed in specific cases.

“We haven’t asked them to close schools. Our guidelines say only a specific wing or classroom where someone was found Covid positive should be temporarily closed. Schools can take a decision to close the entire premises in specific cases where an infected child or staff has been through multiple areas of the school...we have made it decentralised,” said Sisodia.

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Date : 15.04.2022 Shubhi Saxena (Advocate)
Place: New Delhi Enrolment No: D-4589/2020

Mr. Subash Bhat (Advocate)
Add: Trinity Legal Partners, C-401, The Courtyard, Nirvana Country, Sector 50, Gurgaon, Haryana.
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Sisodia accuses BJP Govt in HP of copying Kejriwal model

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After Himachal Pradesh (HP) Chief Minister, Jai Ram Thakur announced free power and water supply and a 50 per cent rebate in bus fare for women, the Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi’s Deputy Chief Minister, Manish Sisodia alleged that the BJP government in HP is “copying” the Arvind Kejriwal model of governance.

Addressing a press conference in the national Capital, Sisodia said the BJP government’s announcements ahead of assembly polls in the state are an attempt to “hoodwink” people, as the saffron party has always said it is “completely” against freebies like free electricity.

After coming back to

power in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP will take back all the announcements that its chief minister had made, Sisodia claimed, asking people of the hill state not to “fall in their trap”. “Vote for the AAP in elections,” he appealed to them.

While addressing an event in Chamba earlier in the day, the Himachal Pradesh chief minister announced his government has decided to provide free power up to 125 units and waive water bills in rural areas.

He also his government has decided to reduce the bus fare for women by 50 per cent.

“What the BJP government has announced today is an attempt to partially copy the Kejriwal model of governance. They have started staging a drama of copying the Kejriwal model of governance in the

state with an eye on elections,” Sisodia said.

Sisodia said the BJP and its “friends” are in power in 18 states but they have not thought of providing cheaper electricity in any of these.

“Everywhere they say electricity should not be free. They make fun of such freebies. They say freebie is anti-national. They even go on to review it at the level of Central government to come out and say that freebie is destroying the country,” he charged.

And just a few months ahead of the assembly polls in the state, the Himachal government has announced free electricity, water and a bus fare rebate for women because the party is “extremely scared” of Kejriwal and the AAP, Sisodia claimed.

CBI plans to conduct DNA tests in Nadia rape case

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The CBI is planning to conduct DNA tests in the Hanskhali rape case to check whether the samples collected from the scene of crime match with those found on the accused arrested in the case, an official of the agency said on Friday.

A class 9 student was allegedly raped on April 4 in Hanskhali in West Bengal’s Nadia district during a birthday party at the house of the prime accused, a local TMC leader’s son. She had died hours after the incident.

Her father filed a police complaint on April 10 and alleged that the accused had cremated her body after taking possession of it at gunpoint.



CHANGE OF NAME

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PD(9180)C

UK PM to visit...

From Page 1

On the Ukraine issue, Britain is one of the leading nations to impose sanctions against Russia. The UK Foreign Secretary Truss during her visit here said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine underlined the importance of democracies working together to deter aggressors and to strengthen global security. She also highlighted the importance of all countries reducing their strategic dependency on Russia. Modi and Johnson elevated the bilateral ties to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” during the virtual bilateral summit in May 2021. At the summit, the two sides adopted a 10-year roadmap to expand ties in the key areas of trade and economy, defence and security, climate change and people-to-people connections.

Infighting hits Cong...

From Page 1

Party sources claiming to be in the know of things asserted that the new Congress chief in Bihar could be either a Muslim or a Dalit or someone from the upper castes, preferably a Bhumihar.

This would be in line with the party’s strategy to revive itself in a State where it has come to be seen as a spent force and now finds itself isolated following the short stint given by old ally RJD, which has been blaming it for the Grand Alliance’s failure to win the 2020 Assembly polls despite performing better than expectations.

Meanwhile, Punjab Congress is also in turmoil amid reports that cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu is trying to propel himself as the captain after building ‘Team Sidhu’ by including the Congress party’s ‘rebel’ political players. Sidhu on Thursday held another round of meeting with party leaders, including former MLAs - a development that apparently did not go down well with the

Congress party’s newly-appointed state leadership.

Punjab Congress’ new president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring was quick to hint at action against his predecessor Sidhu by making it clear that anyone indulging in making the party “weak” will face strict action.

Notably, Warring was in Amritsar on Friday, along with Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee’s (PPCC) working president Bharat Bhushan Ashu, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Partap Singh Bajwa, and Deputy CLP leader Dr Raj Kumar Chabbawal, to pay obeisance at Golden Temple, Durgiana Mandir, and Ram Tirath.

Later, Warring held a meeting with former legislators and councilors of the Majha region. Sidhu, who was also a former MLA from Amritsar East, was conspicuous by his absence. Instead, he was meeting rebel party leaders to build up his “Team Sidhu”.

Sidhu first met Congress rebel and four-time MLA from Samrala Amrik Singh Dhillon

at Ludhiana, former Minister and senior leader Lal Singh, and later met party stalwart Sunil Jakhar at his Panchkula residence.

During these meetings, he was accompanied by former MLAs Ashwani Sekhri and Navtej Singh Cheema.

Notably, the Congress Disciplinary Action Committee has issued a showcase notice to Jakhar for his alleged “objectionable” comments against the SC community, besides indulging in “anti-party activities, asking him to respond in a week’s time. On the other hand, four-time MLA Dhillon had contested as an independent candidate in the recently-concluded assembly polls after he was denied a ticket by the Congress party. He has also been expelled from Congress ahead of elections.

“I will continue to fight for the interests of Punjab. During the meeting held today, we formed ‘Team Sidhu’ to look into the problems raised by party MLAs. I met the rebel MLAs of the State as well in this meet,” said Sidhu, after meeting Dhillon.

NIA searches two locations in case of explosives’ seizure in Mizoram

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday said it has conducted searches at two locations in Mizoram in a case of seizure of explosives in Siaha area of the State.

The case pertains to the recovery of 2421.12 kg of explosives including 1,000 detonators and 4,500 metres of detonating fuse from a vehicle and recovery of Rs 73,500 and Myanmar Currency of 9,35,500 Kyat.

This case was initially registered as FIR Number 01/2022 dated January 21, 2022 by Tipa Police Station, Siaha district of Mizoram and re-registered by NIA on March 21, 2022.

“During searches conducted at the premises of two accused persons, incriminating documents and digital devices have been seized. Further investigation in the case continues,” the NIA said in a statement.

Shivpal dissolves party’s....

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The remarks were made at a party function to mark Ambedkar Jayanti in Lucknow.

“Dr Ambedkar had raised the issue in the constituent assembly. Dr Ram Manohar Lohia had raised the issue too, and on Ambedkar Jayanti we are raising our voice for a uniform civil code. We are ready to agitate for it and raise our voice for it,” Shivpal Yadav said at the function.

After years of bickering between Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivpal Yadav that started before the 2017 Uttar Pradesh assembly election as the former chief minister tried to consolidate his hold over the Samajwadi Party eventually leading to his uncle’s exit, the two appeared to have made up before the 2022 election. Shivpal Yadav’s PSPL formed an alliance with the SP and he

contested the election on SP symbol from his stronghold Jaswantnagar and won.

However, the “reunion” was short-lived. Days after the SP lost the Uttar Pradesh election; Shivpal Yadav reportedly met the leaders of his PSPL and told them to “be prepared for a big fight”.

He also met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, reinforcing speculation that he was close to switching over to the ruling BJP. The fragile uncle-nephew relationship is at a breaking point over differences that have been getting more and more visible since the UP assembly election results. Shivpal Yadav reportedly met Akhilesh Yadav on March 24, just a day before Yogi Adityanath’s second oath-taking ceremony, and asked for a bigger role in the SP.

Sources say Akhilesh Yadav reminded his uncle that he was an ally, not a member of the SP.

Each dist will...

From page 1

He said the export of turmeric from India increased after the pandemic as people across the globe learned about its health benefits.

To spread the message of healthy living, Modi urged the people of Kutch to set a world record by ensuring maximum participation of citizens in the district during the International Day of Yoga on June 21.

To boost tourism in Gujarat and in the country, the PM sought the help of people from Kutch living abroad in persuading foreigners to visit attractions like the White Rann of Kutch during Rann Utsav and 182-meter tall Statue of Unity in Narmada district dedicated to Sardar Patel. “This is my appeal to the Kutchi Diasporas spread across the world.

“Every year, one such

Kutchi family should persuade at least five foreigners to visit the Rann of Kutch and the Statue of Unity. This will definitely boost tourism activity and also help poor people such as auto drivers and tea sellers in earning livelihood,” said Modi.

He called for constructing 75 lakes per district to mark the 75th anniversary of India’s independence. He urged the Diaspora to contribute in building at least 75 large lakes in the arid Kutch region so that people do not face water shortages.

Modi expressed concern about the Maldhari (cattle-rearer) community of Kutch whose members are forced to migrate to other districts with their livestock and family in search of water and fodder after the monsoon months get over and the dry season sets in.

“I want the people of Kutch

to convince these Maldharis to stay back because Kutch is no longer water deficient,” he said.

The PM appreciated that leaving the devastation caused by the earthquake behind, the people of Bhuj and Kutch are now writing a new destiny for this region with their hard work.

“Today many modern medical services exist in this area. In this series, Bhuj is getting a modern, super specialty hospital today. This hospital is the first charitable super specialty hospital of the region which will act as a guarantee of quality medical treatment for people of Kutch along with lakhs of soldiers, par military personnel and traders,” the PM said.

The PM elaborated that better health facilities are not limited only to the treatment of disease, they also encourage social justice.

Hindu Sena unfurls saffron flags near JNU main gate

Insult to saffron will not be tolerated and we might take stringent steps: Hindu Sena head



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a clash broke out in a hostel over allegedly serving non-vegetarian food during Ram Navami, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Friday again witnessed several posters and saffron flags put up by the Hindu Sena near the varsity main

gate on Friday morning. Police said three people were bound down as per legal procedure and the vehicle used in commission of the crime has also been seized by the police. The posters also warned of "stringent steps" if there is an "insult to saffron". A video of Hindu Sena chief Vishnu Gupta was doing round on social media. Gupta in the video said that the posters reading "Bhagwa (saffron) JNU" have been put up by the right-wing outfit's national vice-president Surjit Singh Yadav. "Saffron is being insulted on the JNU campus on a regular basis. We want to warn those who are doing this. Mend your ways. We won't tolerate

this. We respect your ideology and every religion. But insult to saffron will not be tolerated and we might take stringent steps," said Gupta in the video in Hindi. According to Manoj C, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Southwest district, on Friday morning, it was noticed that a few flags and banners have been put on the road and adjoining areas of JNU. "A case under section 3 of Delhi prevention of defacement of property act 2007 was registered and during investigation, factual or scientific evidence were collected, three persons who were involved in the offence were bound down as per legal procedure and the

vehicle used in commission of offence has been seized," said the DCP adding that further investigation is under progress. In a statement, the Hindu Sena said the police should not be in a hurry to take down the flags. "Saffron is not a symbol of terror that the police is showing haste. It is a right under the law to protect saffron and Hindutva," the outfit said. Two groups of students clashed at JNU's Kaveri Hostel on Sunday allegedly over serving non-vegetarian food in the mess on Ram Navami, with police saying 20 students were injured in the violence. The two groups, however, claimed that over 60 students from both sides were injured.

Body to be formed to review fares of autos/taxis: Min after unions vow strike over hike

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After auto and taxi unions announced to go on a strike on April 18 due to surge in fuel prices, Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot on Friday said a committee to consider fare revision in a time-bound manner will be formed soon. Gahlot took to Twitter to inform and wrote, "Due to the rising fuel prices, auto/taxi unions have been demanding revision of fares. @ArvindKejriwal govt. Understands their concerns. "A committee shall soon be constituted by transport Dept for this purpose, which shall furnish its recommendations in a time-bound manner." With a fresh hike of ₹2.5 in CNG prices, the members of auto, taxi and cab drivers' associations on Thursday warned authorities that they will go on

a strike from April 18 to press for their demand of subsidy on gas prices. On April 11, hundreds of auto, taxi and cab drivers staged a protest at the Delhi secretariat, demanding subsidy on CNG prices. The protest was held under the aegis of the Delhi Auto Rickshaw Sangh. Bus operators too have announced to join the strike by auto and taxi unions in the city. "We are also hit by the impact of Covid in the past two years and now the shooting CNG prices. Our members will also join the strike on April 18 and the private buses will not ply on that day," said Shyam Lal Gola, general secretary of STA Operators Ekta Manch. The auto and taxi association of Delhi had written a letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on April 6 demanding that they be provided with a subsidy of ₹35 per kg on CNG.

Probe begins to find man impersonating PM's PS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana on Friday said a complaint has been received regarding forgery, impersonation and identity fraud of an office bearer at the Prime Minister's Office. Sharing the screenshots of the alleged impersonation, the Commissioner tweeted, "We have received a complaint regarding forgery, impersonation and identity fraud of an office bearer at the Prime Minister's Office. Matter is under investigation." The screenshots were of the Instagram story posted by a designer named Kunal Merchant. The images shared by CP showed a conversation between Merchant and an unidentified person who was impersonating as Vivek Kumar, Private Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on email. "Dear Merchant, We are

pleased to inform you that our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has identified you and your design practice to design and build a permanent installation/ executive table for exclusive use by the Prime Minister. The desk will be placed in the PMO and used by subsequent Prime Ministers to come," the email read which was sent from the impersonator read, "Dr Mr Vivek Kumar, Additional Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, Thank you for considering me and my practice for such a prestigious project. Unfortunately due to my political and social views, I would like to respectfully decline this opportunity and wish not be considered as a contender for the same. Had things been different and should I have been able to do this project, I would have liked to call this desk 'The Swaraj Desk,'" Merchant wrote.

2 more synthetic track to be constructed in Delhi: NDMC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has decided to build two more "Synthetic Ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) Track" at Sanjay Jheel and Lodhi Garden parks in Central Capital. The move comes after civic body got a positive response from morning walkers on synthetic track constructed at Central Delhi's Nehru Park. The authorities said that as a pilot project, they constructed a three km track but now seeing response from public, the civic body has also decided to built another "Special Track Exclusively for Running" at Nehru Park. While informing about project NDMC, Vice Chairman, Satish Upadhyay said that jogging track which they are



about to build at Sanjay Jheel, will be provided at existing walkway after removing damaged red sand stone flooring and fancy kerb stones on both sides. "The length of the walkway is approximately 1750 meter and 1.5 meter wide," he added. Giving details about track to be constructed at Lodhi garden, vice-chairman said that synthetic EPDM jogging track will be provided at existing bituminous concrete walkway without much disturbing existing red sand stone flooring walkway.

Plaint registered in UGC twitter hack case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has registered an First Information Report (FIR) after the Twitter official account of University Grant Commission (UGC) was hacked. The incident occurred on April 10. The UGC also lodged a complaint with Twitter, which, acting on the complaint, restored access of Twitter account for official use by the UGC. According to FIR registered at Special Cell of Delhi Police, the official handle of UGC, an autonomous body under Ministry of Education was hacked at around 1:30 AM on April 10. "A complaint was registered with Twitter and services were restored.

Will resolve 15% interview weightage for admission through talks, says DU V-C

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After St Stephen's College announced that it will conduct interviews carrying 15 per cent weightage for admissions across categories, the Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, Yogesh Singh, said the varsity does not want any confrontation and will resolve the issue through dialogue. In an admission notice posted on its website on Tuesday, St Stephen's College said it will give 85 per cent weightage to Common University Entrance Test (CUET) scores and 15 per cent to interviews it will conduct for admissions for all categories of students. The college also said that it reserves the right to proceed with admissions as per its own admission policy guaranteed to it as a minority institution. While releasing DU's admission policy earlier this month, Singh had said that for the general seats, a college should solely take the CUET scores into consideration and for the minority seats, it can hold interviews and assign a weightage of 85 per cent to CUET scores and 15 per cent to interviews. Singh said he is planning to call the principals of Jesus and Mary College and St Stephen's College, both minority institutions, for a discussion on issue. St Stephen's College reserves 50 per cent of its seats for general candidates and remaining for Christian students.

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55-year-old woman's partially burnt body found

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

The Noida police on Friday found a partially burnt body of a 55-year-old woman in her house in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida. Police said that they suspect the role of her daughter and son-in-law in the case. Police said that a man-hunt has been initiated to nab the accused who are still at large. According to a senior police official, the woman's son has alleged that his sister and brother-in-law had been harassing their mother ever since she got Rs 15 lakh from an insurance policy after the death of their father. "Birna Devi lived in Dankaur town, under Dankaur police station limits.

SDMC slapped ₹50 lakh fines for single use plastic in 3 yrs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to the reduce the use of plastic bags in the national Capital and in order to protect the environment, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has issued the 2120 challans, and imposed fines of nearly Rs 50 lakh for using single use plastic in Delhi over the last three years, said a senior official. According to a senior SDMC official, the civic body has intensified its 'plastic free city' campaign to phase out Single Use Plastic bags from marketplaces and commercial complexes in all four zones, said a senior official. "The municipal corporation has taken many initiatives including Why Waste Wednesdays,

Plastic Lao Thaila Pao, utensil stores, project vikalp, plastic waste processing units and installation of bottle crushing machines have been installed," a senior official said. "Along with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a 'Swaccha Kendra' has been set up and a plastic waste processing plant having 5 TPD capacity has been made operational at Dwarka. Till date, nearly 485 tonnes of plastic waste has been recycled to make useful products at this plant," a senior official informed. "A material Recovery Facility (MRF) with the capacity of 100 TPD has also been established at Raghuraj Nagar this year and 23 tonnes of plastic garbage has been recycled so far at this facility.



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Govt finding remedy for chronic pain

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has started working towards finding a remedy for chronic pain, which presently remains a major health challenge in the country with most of the patients resorting to opioids/morphine medications leading to serious adverse outcomes.

The move also aims to provide relief to the long Covid-19 survivors and it has been constantly felt that clinicians need to know what to expect and how to manage related pain and dysfunction.

Chronic pain has been defined as a pain that persists or recurs for longer than 3 months, and it exerts an enormous personal and economic burden, affecting more than 30 percent of people worldwide.

According to reports, at least 50 per cent of Covid-19 survivors are expected to experience Long Covid, or post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection, and symptoms that overlap with those of fibromyalgia among others.

An official from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Union Science and Technology Ministry, said that plans are afoot to start a program on "chronic pain Biology" for which the process of mapping the expertise in the area has been started. The aim is to



develop targeted effective and non-addictive pain treatment options.

To begin with the DBT has recently invited Expression of Interest (EoI) in the area of chronic pain to map the expertise available in the country to gain "deeper insight into the pain mechanism and advancing research methodologies for developing targeted effective and non-addictive pain treatment options."

Chronic pain is a debilitating symptom of many diseases and causes significant disability and reduces the quality of life. "But we still do not have any effective treatment options and it remains a major unmet global public health challenge.

"The difficulty in understanding and managing pain has also led to widespread overuse of, and addition to opioids/morphine medications. This can lead to serious adverse outcomes," he added.

Pain has been classified into three major groups:

Noniceptive, Neuropathic and Nociceptive. Nociceptive pain results from activity in neural pathways and is the most common form of the chronic pain encompassing arthritis and most forms of spinal pain while Neuropathic pain is caused by a damage or disease affecting the somatosensory nervous system, typically associated with sensory abnormalities such as numbness and allodynia.

Approximately 15-25 per cent chronic pains are of neuropathic in nature and include diabetic neuropathy, post-therapeutic neuralgia and radiculopathy. Nociceptive pain is the pain arising from the abnormal processing of the pain signals without any clear association with damage, injury or disease pathology.

In order to address this challenge and improve the lives of people affected by pain conditions, better understanding of the mechanisms of pain and improved treatments are needed.

'Covid most brutal for diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery, chronic kidney disease patients'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

If you are suffering with two or four main comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension or chronic kidney disease and coronary artery disease and still survived Covid-19 then consider yourself to be lucky!

A study published in BioMed International Journal has said that at least 81 per cent of the patients afflicted with the above mentioned two or four Non Communicable Diseases did not survive the peak of the pandemic.

For, a study has said that Covid-19 has been found to be most brutal for the patients afflicted with two or four main co-morbidities including diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease and chronic kidney disease

The researchers studied the impact of each disease individually as well as together with other co-morbidities and found out that people with already severe comorbid conditions were vulnerable and hardly 19 out of 100 such patients could survive the deadly Covid disease.

The study 'Prevalence and Impact of pre-existing co morbidities on overall clinical outcomes of hospitalized Covid-19 patients', analyzed more than 369 individual Covid cases among which 59.1 per cent had at least one co-morbidity in Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad, between March 2020 and August 2020.

"The research was conducted to certain, the impact of Covid in patients suffering with existing co-morbidities. Though we knew that patients with co-morbidities infected with Covid faced more risk of certain death, we were not sure which were the existing diseases that impacted more on the patients' health.

"As anticipated we found that the combination of all four co-morbidities including diabetes, hypertension, Coronary artery disease and chronic kidney disease and after getting



infected with Covid-19, the patient was most likely to face certain death.

At least 272 (73.7 per cent) patients were male, and 97 (26.2 per cent) were female. Of the confirmed cases, 218 (59.1 per cent) had comorbidities, and 151 (40.9 per cent) were devoid of comorbidities. This study showed that old age and underlying comorbidities significantly increase mortality, hospital stay, and severity due to Covid-19 infection.

"To ascertain, the study clearly showed that 81.8 per cent of patients who had more than one comorbidity had died. Chronic kidney disease was found to be the second most deadly co-morbidity accounting to nearly 66.7 per cent of patients who did not survive the Covid-19 disease.

It was followed by Coronary artery disease, which accounted for more than 57 per cent of patients suffering with CAD and Covid-19 faced death during the pandemic.

The chance of survival among Covid-19 patients was the highest when there was no comorbidity and only 9.3 per cent of those who did not have either of the four comorbidities did not survive after being severely infected with the deadly Covid-19 disease during the pandemic.

CBI takes over probe into ₹11 cr coin deposit scam



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has taken over the probe into the fraud detected in the bulk deposit of coins at a branch of SBI in Karauli district of Rajasthan causing a loss to the public sector lender to the tune of over Rs 11 crore. The move comes following a directive from the Rajasthan High Court to the effect.

The preliminary probe revealed a scam worth Rs 11 crore involving the coin deposits of the branch.

On July 22, 2021, a professional vendor, Arpit Goods Carrier, was engaged by the bank to count the total coins worth Rs 13, 01,71,275 held by the branch.

Till August 6, 2021, the private vendor counted 2,350 bags of coins worth Rs 1,39,60,000 and the remaining 600-700 bags were estimated to contain Rs 60 lakh only as against the book value of Rs 11,62,11,275, leading to the bank's committee constituted to count the

coins estimating the scam to the tune of Rs 11 crore in the coins held by the public sector lender at Karauli in Rajasthan.

Also, during the pendency of the counting, an employee of the private vendor was threatened on August 10, 2021 by a group of armed men not to go ahead with the counting of the coins. In the event of continuing with the counting, the armed men threatened to kill the private employee who was staying at a dharamshala (guest house).

The State police had originally registered the case number 370/2021 on August 13 last year at police station Todabhim in Karauli district. The SBI, through its Controller, Controller Office, Sawai Madhopur region filed a criminal writ petition seeking transfer of the case to the federal probe agency.

The case was registered under IPC Sections relating to criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust and cheating.

The High Court on March 4 this year ordered the transfer of the case from the State police to the CBI.

Following detection of irregularities and irregular transaction of the coins by the then cashier at the branch Rajesh Kumar Meena was suspended and a committee constituted by the bank undertook a cash audit of the branch.

Modi, Vietnam leader Nguyen discuss Ukraine, South China Sea situations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



in a statement.

"Spoke with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam H. E. Nguyen Phu Trong, today. We exchanged views on a range of bilateral, regional and global issues and agreed to promote closer cooperation in our economic, trade and defence engagement," Modi said in his Tweet.

They complimented each other on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister Modi reiterated Vietnam's importance as an important pillar of India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific Vision, and sought to enhance the scope of the bilateral relationship, besides working for expeditious progress on existing initiatives.

The Prime Minister also requested for greater facilitation of market access for India's pharma and agri-products in Vietnam, the statement said.

Prime Minister Modi highlighted the historical and

civilisation links between the two countries and expressed his happiness on India's involvement in restoration of Cham monuments in Vietnam. The leaders agreed to enhance defence partnership between the two countries, the PMO said.

They also exchanged views on regional and global issues of shared interest, including the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the situation in South China Sea, the statement added.

China claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea, a huge source of hydrocarbons. However, several ASEAN member countries, including Vietnam, Philippines and Brunei, have counter claims.

PM greets Himachal on State's 75th establishment day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lauding Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur's "young" and "honest leadership" for the speedy development of the State, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday greeted the people of Himachal Pradesh on the State's 75th establishment day. Himachal Pradesh is to face Assembly polls this year-end.

Recalling the challenges of the hilly state at the time of its formation in 1948, the Prime Minister complimented the people of Himachal Pradesh for "converting the challenges into opportunities."

He praised the state's achievements in horticulture, power surplus, literacy rate,



rural road connectivity, tap water and electricity to every household. He underlined the efforts to build on these achievements in the last 7-8 years.

"Under the young leadership of Jai Ram ji, the 'double engine government' has taken the initiative of expanding rural roads, highway widening,

railway network, its results are now visible. As connectivity is getting better, Himachal's tourism is entering new areas, new regions", the Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister highlighted the new strides in tourism and new avenues of opportunities and employment for the local people. He especially noted the progress in the health sector by talking about the efficient and fast vaccination during the pandemic.

Modi said the need to work hard for unlocking the full potential of Himachal Pradesh.

He said that during the Amrit Kaal, there is a need to take forward the work in the fields of tourism, higher education, research, IT, biotech-

nology, food processing and natural farming.

He said the Vibrant Village scheme, announced in this year's budget will give immense benefit to Himachal Pradesh.

He also touched upon increasing connectivity, enriching forests, swachhta and people's participation for these initiatives.

The Prime Minister commented on the expansion of central welfare schemes by the Chief Minister and his team, especially in the field of social security. "Honest leadership, peace loving environment, blessings of gods and goddesses and people of Himachal who work hard, all these are incomparable. Himachal has everything needed for rapid development," Modi said.

Alliance Air shifts to its own cloud-based PSS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Centre-run Alliance Air said it will sell tickets with "9I" code and has shifted to its own cloud-based passenger service system (PSS) from Friday onwards.

Even though parent airline Air India's control was shifted to the Tata Group on January 27, Alliance Air till date was using the full-service carrier's PSS and its "AI" code to sell tickets. A PSS is used for various functions such as ticket reservation and flight scheduling.

Regional carrier Alliance Air was not part of the deal when the central government sold off Air India to the Tata Group on October 8 last year.

"Mr Vineet Sood, CEO

informed that going forward with absolute efficiency, Alliance Air will now sell its tickets under Alliance Air banner under flight code 9I-XXX," the airline's statement said on Friday. Alliance Air has migrated to cloud based passenger service system from Friday, it mentioned.

"We now have our own website www.allianceair.in and the passenger can start booking on it now," it noted.

"Our new call centre numbers are +91 44 4255 4255 and +91 44 3511 3511. In case of any queries passenger can also email us at helpdesk@allianceair.in," it mentioned. Alliance Air operates a fleet of 18 ATR-72 aircraft, each with around 70 seats.

Hawkers permitted to operate in markets only in accordance with policy, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



A hawker has no right to insist that he may be permitted to keep his goods and wares at the place of hawking overnight, the Supreme Court has said.

A bench of Justices M R Shah and B V Nagarathna said hawkers can be permitted to hawk in markets only in accordance with the hawking policy.

"The prayer before the high court was that the petitioner, who is a hawker in the Sarojini Nagar Market, be permitted to leave his goods and wares at the place of hawking overnight. The said prayer has been rightly rejected by the high court," the court said. "The petitioner,

being a hawker, has no right to insist that he may be permitted to keep his goods and wares at the place where he is hawking overnight," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a hawker in the Sarojini Nagar Market challenging an order of the Delhi High Court.

The hawker had sought directions from the high court to the New Delhi Municipal Council seeking to permit the

appellant-hawker to leave the goods overnight at the spot where he hawks during the day.

The high court noted that the prayer sought by the hawker goes against the very concept of hawking to permit him occupying any given area on a permanent basis.

"The whole concept of hawking is that the hawker comes to the allotted/demarcated area during the hours of hawking with his or her goods and wares; undertakes the activity of hawking and leaves the area along with his or her goods and wares at the end of the hawking period. In fact,

in respect of mobile hawkers even this much is not permitted," the high court had said.

Listed 500 substandard law colleges, will do surprise inspections: BCI to SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Bar Council of India (BCI) has told the Supreme Court that it has earmarked about 500 law colleges throughout the country which are sub-standard/below standard and a team led by some former judges/senior advocates and others plans to conduct surprise visits of such establishments and in case of any deficiencies, steps would be taken for their closure.

In an affidavit filed in a matter related to reforms in legal education and placements of young lawyers, the BCI said that it is constituting a high powered committee that would look into the issue of compulsory chamber place-

ment of five juniors by senior advocates or advocates having 25 years of standing at the Bar.

The council said it is proposed that the legal education committee of the BCI and the advisory board would consider introducing a State Level Entrance Test for admissions to law colleges in its next meeting. It said, "the appellant (BCI) has earmarked about 500 institutions throughout the country who are sub-standard/below standard and a team led by some former judges/senior advocates, noted academicians and plans to conduct surprise visits of such institutions and if any institution is found to be below standard, having neither the sufficient faculty nor infra-

structure then the Legal Education Committee shall take immediate steps to close such institutions".

The BCI said that it is not an executive body and relies upon the universities to close such colleges and/or upon the government to close such universities which despite the requests have been casual on the use of unfair means in LLB/LLM exams and awarding the LLD.

"Thus as a last resolve the BCI is considering withdrawing the approval granted for running courses of legal education to such university", it said and pointed out a slew of difficulties faced by the council in regulating legal education across the country.

Govt to launch teleconsultation facility e-Sanjeevani at 1L Ayushman centres

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to reach out to the maximum number of people particularly from the remote areas, the Government has plans to launch tele-consultation facility 'e-Sanjeevani' at 1 lakh Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) from Saturday.

This was stated by Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday after chairing a virtual meeting on Tuesday with health ministers and senior officials of all the states and union territories to review the operationalisation status of AB-HWCs and tele-

consultation services.

"On the occasion of the 4th anniversary of Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, 'e-Sanjeevani Teleconsultation' facility will be launched at 1 lakh centres on April 16. These centres are realising PM @NarendraModi ji's resolve of 'Ayushman Bharat', Mandaviya said in a tweet in Hindi on Friday.

As many as 1,17,440 AB-HWCs had been operationalised across the country by the end of March against the target of 1.1 lakh, according to the Health Ministry.

To ensure wider outreach of telemedicine services, eSanjeevani application has

also been integrated with 3.74 lakh Common Service Centers (CSCs) thereby facilitating access to equitable healthcare in the remotest areas of the country.

Under ECRP-II, financial assistance has been provided to all States/UTs for strengthening IT infrastructure for implementation of telemedicine services.

Under e-Sanjeevani platform, 56,994 Doctors have been registered to provide teleconsultation services. Till, 31st January, 2022, around 2.33 Cr consultations have been conducted through eSanjeevani platform, as per the data available from the

Ministry.

To ensure patient data privacy and security, required firewalls which monitor and control the access to the application is enabled. Only valid tokens are enabled to ensure authorized access and the data is stored in an encrypted form duly using industry-standard algorithms, a senior official said.

Presently, eSanjeevani OPD (Patient to Doctor Teleconsultation services) has been rolled out in 25 States/UT while eSanjeevani HWC (Doctor to Doctor Teleconsultation services) has been rolled out in 20 States/UT.

Tributes paid to 1965 Indo-Pak war hero

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force on Friday paid rich tributes to the legendary air warrior late Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh on his 103rd birth anniversary. An icon of India's military history, he had successfully led a young IAF during the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

"On this day, we recall the contribution made by the Marshal to the nation and Indian Air Force," the IAF said.

The only officer to attain the highest post of Marshal of the Air Force equivalent to the Army's five-star field marshal, Singh was a fearless and exceptional pilot who had flown more than 60 different types of

aircraft.

Singh passed away on September 16, 2017, at the age of 98.

He had played a major role in transforming the IAF into one of the most potent air forces globally and the fourth biggest in the world.

Singh was honoured with the rank of Marshal on Republic Day in 2002. Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw and K M Cariappa were the only two army generals honoured with the rank of field marshal.

On August 1, 1964, Singh took over as the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) in the rank of Air Marshal at the age of 44. Singh was born on April 15, 1919 in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad in Pakistan). "A

testing time for the nation came in September 1965 when Pakistan launched Operation Grand Slam, in which an armoured thrust targeted the vital town of Akhnur," the IAF recalled in a statement.

"When summoned to the Defence Minister's office with a request for air support and asked how quickly the IAF will be ready for operations, with his characteristic nonchalance, '...In an hour' was the reply," it said.

"And truly, the Indian Air Force struck the Pakistani offensive in an hour, gained air superiority over Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and helped Indian Army score strategic victories," it added.

He was awarded the

Padma Vibhushan for his leadership during the 1965 War.

Singh also continued his service to the nation as the Ambassador to Switzerland, the Holy See and Liechtenstein from 1971 to 1974, following which he headed the High Commission of India to Kenya at Nairobi from 1974 to 1977, the IAF said.

He also served as a member of The Minorities Commission of India from 1978 to 1981 and as the Lt Governor of Delhi from 1989 to 1990.

"His dynamic personality, professional competence, leadership and strategic vision sets him apart as an icon of the Indian Air Force," the IAF said

Baramulla sarpanch shot by terrorists

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The cycle of violence continues unabated in Kashmir valley as another elected representative was shot dead by “unidentified” terrorists in the north Kashmir district of Baramulla on Friday. The deceased has been identified by the police as Manzoor Ahmad Bangroo, an independent Sarpanch from the area.

Kashmir Zone police in a tweet clarified that the deceased sarpanch was not affiliated with any political party. He contested the Panchayat polls as an independent candidate. “Terrorists fired upon and killed one Manzoor Ahmad Bangroo (an Independent Sarpanch) at Goshbugh area of Pattan, Baramulla. Area has been cordoned off and search to track the involved terrorists is in progress. Further details shall follow”.



However, local reports suggested Bangroo was targeted in the nearby orchard barely hours after the Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla along with Director Intelligence Bureau (IB) Arvind Kumar reviewed preparedness for annual pilgrimage of Shri Amarnath Ji and militancy related situation in the Valley. Amid peak tourist season in the valley the terrorist handlers have been desperately trying to disturb peace prevailing in the region. Initially the terrorists targeted security

personnel and later trained their guns towards non local labourers and minority population in the South and Central Kashmir districts of Kashmir.

This is the first incident of targeted killing in the North Kashmir area. In the coming days the security grid would be further strengthened ahead of the 43 day long Amarnath pilgrimage. The UT administration is learnt to have demanded additional deployment of security forces to ensure incident free yatra after a gap of more than 2 years.

HC asks erring litigant to pay ₹25K to jail to purchase books for library

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an unusual punishment, the Bombay High Court has directed a litigant from Kolhapur to pay ₹25,000 to the local prison for purchasing books at the local jail library, as costs for having “done everything possible to manipulate and abuse the process of law”.

While imposing a cost of ₹25,000 on litigant Riyaz Jahiruddin Mulla, an employee of MR High School ad Junior College, Gadhinglaj, Kolhapur, a HC bench of Justices G A Sanap and Sunil B Shukre observed in its recent ruling: “We are of the view that this is a case wherein Respondent No.6 has done everything that was possible for him to manipulate and abuse the process of law and, therefore, it is necessary that suitable costs are imposed upon Respondent No.6, while allowing this petition”.

Respondent No.6 (Riyaz Jahiruddin Mulla) shall pay cost of ₹25,000 to Prison at Kalamba, Kolhapur for the

purpose of purchasing books for Jail Library,” the HC bench ruled, as it refused to grant him time to file a file his response to the averments made in the rejoinder to the petition.

The only issue involved in this Petition is as to whether or not the Hon’ble Minister could have interfered in the administration of affairs of Zilla Parishad by cancelling the transfer order of Mulla because he had approached the minister by making a complaint. “In our view the answer has to be given in the negative,” the HC bench noted as it cited reasons for the same.

Dwelling on the questionable conduct of Mulla who is one of the six respondents in a petition filed by Sushma Arun Patil, an aggrieved assistant teacher, the judges noted: “At this juncture, we would like to dwell upon the conduct of Respondent No.6 which is unbefitting of a Government employee like him. The petitioner had challenged his transfer from Kolhapur to Gadhinglaj. Seeing that he would not get any relief, the

Respondent No.6 withdrew the petition and the petition was disposed of as withdrawn by this Court vide its order dated 17th March 2021”

“During the pendency of this petition, the Respondent No.6, however, filed a complaint with the Hon’ble Minister on 23rd February 2020 alleging that the affairs of Zilla Parishad, Kolhapur were being run and managed in highly arbitrary manner and that the transfers of teachers were made illegally,” the Judges observed. The HC bench noted that in his complaint, Mulla did not mention anything about filing of Writ Petition by him questioning the legality or otherwise of his transfer order. “Some way or the other the Respondent No.6 succeeded in getting his complaint allowed by the Hon’ble Minister when the latter issued a direction on 15th January 2021 cancelling the transfers of teachers made in the year 2019 and giving a further direction that those teachers be posted after due counselling,” the bench said.

Popular Front leader murdered in Kerala’s Palakkad

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Vishu, the traditional agricultural festival, turned out to be a shocking and gruesome experience for the people in Palakkad district as Zubair, a 45-year-old Popular Front of India activist was murdered in broad daylight in front of a mosque.

Zubair, who was coming out of the mosque after offering Friday namaaz, was attacked by a team that arrived in a car as he was boarding the motor cycle along with his father. The PFI activist was hacked many times by the group which escaped in a waiting car.

Though the victim was rushed to the nearby hospital, he was declared brought dead by the hospital authorities. Father of the victim has been admitted to the hospital with injuries and is said to be out of

danger. Police has launched a man-hunt to nab the murderers and have seized the car that was used by them as a getaway vehicle.

It may be remembered that E Sanjith, an RSS activist was murdered on November 15 in a similar incident. Sanjith who was riding a bike in the company of his wife was dragged down and hacked to death reportedly by workers of the Popular Front of India.

It is said that Sanjith was on a long drawn out battle with drug traffickers and it was drug pushers who finished him off. Zubair was one of the persons who was interrogated by the police in connection with the murder.

Though the Police is yet to disclose the name of any organisation involved in the murder, the locality is full of reports that the murder was the handiwork of the Sangh Parivar.

Daughter-in-law killed for serving breakfast late

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Thane police are looking for a 76-year-old man who – in a shocking fit of rage – shot dead his daughter-in-law from his revolver for her delay in serving him breakfast.

The bizarre incident took place on Thursday morning when senior citizen and an ex-real estate developer Kashinath Pandurang Patil, who shot at his 42-0year-old daughter-in-law Seema Ravindra Patil at their home in Vihang Shantivan Apartments at Rutu Park of Rabodi in the neighbouring satellite city of Thane.

Quoting a complaint lodged by the younger sister-in-law of the accused father-in-law, the police said that Kashinath Patil, who till recently used to supply sand at residential building construction

sites, had absconded from his home after the incident.

According to the complaint, Kashinath Patil got agitated after his eldest daughter Seema served him only tea but delayed in giving him breakfast. He whipped out his personal revolver and fired at Seema who sustained severe bullet wounds.

The injured daughter-in-law Seema, who had been rushed by her family to a nearby private hospital, succumbed to bullet injuries on Friday morning.

The police, who had initially registered an offence under section 307 (attempt to murder) and 506 (2) (criminal intimidation), have booked Kashinath Patil under section 302 for murder. The police have launched a manhunt for the accused senior citizen.

Centre of excellence for potato to come up at UP’s Kushinagar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To boost potato cultivation in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath Government has decided to set up a centre of excellence for potato at Kasya in Kushinagar district which will not only increase production of potatoes but also increase the income of farmers.

“The foundation stone of the administrative building of the ultra modern Potato Centre of Excellence at Kushinagar will be laid soon,” Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi said, adding that this project has also been included in the 100-day action plan of the state government.

“This will contribute towards providing high quality seeds to the farmers in a

sle-free manner,” he said.

The minister said this centre would conduct research on the quality of potatoes, better varieties and new varieties for industrial use, and improved seed.

In addition, schemes will also be made to protect potatoes from diseases. Along with this, farmers will be taught new ways of potato cultivation in the centre of excellence.

Besides, Shahi said, workshops would be organised from time to time at the centre of excellence in which farmers would be able to discuss issues faced by them with agricultural experts and find out their solutions. Farmers would also be able to get information about getting maximum production by using minimum water in agriculture, he added.

Nine dist police chiefs among 14 IPS officers shifted in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a major administrative reshuffle, the State Government, on Friday, transferred 14 Indian Police Services officers, including nine district police chiefs.

According to an official communiqué released on Friday morning, Moradabad Senior Superintendent of Police Bablu Kumar and Amroha Superintendent of Police Poonam were removed and kept on the waiting list.

IPS officer Vikas Vaidya will replace Hathras SP Vineet Jaiswal, who has been sent to Amroha.

Rampur SP Ankit Mittal has been posted as Commandant of 8th Battalion PAC in Bareilly and Balrampur SP Hemant Kutiyal has been made the SSP of Moradabad.

Central agencies being misused in Maha, WB as BJP wanted power at any cost: Pawar

PTI ■ JALGAON

Central probe agencies were being used in a big way in Maharashtra and West Bengal as those “who are ruling the country wanted power in these two States at any cost,” NCP chief Sharad Pawar said in an attack on the BJP on Friday.

Interacting with reporters here, he said recent statements about loudspeakers on mosques by parties like MNS and BJP could vitiate the atmosphere in the state. Pawar also hinted that the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, which form the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi, intend to face the next state Assembly elections, scheduled for late 2024, together.

With an electricity crisis looming in the state, Pawar said the MVA government was very serious about the issue and was taking all steps to resolve it.

Hotel owner shot at, robbed in Sultanpur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Unidentified miscreants struck terror in Sultanpur when they critically injured a hotel owner and escaped after snatching cash bag from him.

The sensational incident took place on Friday morning.

According to reports, two unidentified persons riding motorcycles shot at the hotel owner on the Kudwar Naka overbridge at Karaudian under Kotwali Nagar police station on Friday morning. They robbed the cash from the hotel owner and fled.

The doctors at the district hospital referred the victim to the KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow after finding his condition critical.

According to Superintendent of Police Dr Vipin Kumar Mishra, Amit Kumar, a resident of Vivek Nagar, has his own hotel near the bus stop. On his way home

from the hotel on Friday morning as usual, two unidentified persons on a motorcycle shot at him at the Kudwar Naka overbridge. As Amit fell on the ground, the miscreants snatched the cash bag from him and escaped. He was admitted to hospital by the police.

The SP said that three police teams had been formed to investigate the incident and arrest the culprits.

Meanwhile, within a few hours of the killing of a BTech student in Aligarh, in another shocking incident in Saharanpur, a class 10 student was shot dead by schoolmates after a tiff over Instagram.

The deceased was identified as Vansh Panwar.

Police said the victim was shot dead outside the school in the city. The victim was studying in Gochar Krishi Inter College near Delhi Road at Rampur Maniharan.

Over 2.6 cr Cong workers enroll digitally ahead of internal polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi was among the last leaders who enrolled as Congress members digitally ahead of internal elections next month. Over 2.6 crore Congress workers have enrolled digitally and another 3 crore have used paper enrolment system to participate in the exercise that is being carried out for the first time in the party’s 137-year-old history.

The drive was started on November 1 last year and Rahul Gandhi was among the first leaders to enroll as a digital member. Congress General Secretary K C Venugopal said the Congress Working Committee had decided to implement the digital membership drive in addition to the standard paper membership

process for the period 2022-2027.

“It is a matter of happiness that the digital membership drive has evinced great interest from people of the country, specially younger supporters of the Congress party,” Venugopal said. AICC Data Analytics Department Chairman Praveen Chakravarty monitored the digital exercise, he said. Through the digital membership drive, he said the party has added 2.6 crore members across all booths in all Assembly segments.

“These are all verified members, enrolled into the party by a designated enroller using a proprietary mobile phone app called Congress Membership App. Every verified member gets a digital ID card that is QR coded for authenticity,” he said.

Around five lakh party

approved enrollers went door to door to enrol members across the length and breadth of the country.

“Ever since we started the drive, the key focus has been on quality of membership, not just quantity. Every member is verified at three levels, voter ID, photograph and phone number. The drive is strictly access controlled and only verified enrollers can use the membership app,” Chakravarty said. The Congress exercise comes after a series of electoral defeats in several states and internal calls from leaders and workers for a complete overhaul of the party organisation and leadership at all levels.

Congress launched a membership app in which party workers and leaders can enrol through a four-tier verification process.

Vengeance with which BJP bulldozing Constitution has reached homes of minorities, says PDP chief Mehbooba

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Friday accused the BJP of bulldozing India’s Constitution and the saffron party’s leaders of “outdoing each other in stripping Muslims” of their homes and livelihood.

She was referring to the Khargone district administration in Madhya Pradesh demolishing at least 50 “illegal” structures of people accused of pelting stones at a Ram Navami procession. A stone thrown at a Ram Navami procession during which loud music was being played near a mosque in Khargone led to arson and communal tension last Sunday. Curfew was imposed in the town after that.

The BJP government in Madhya Pradesh said the damage caused to public and private

properties during the violence will be recovered from rioters.

“The vengeance with which the BJP is bulldozing India’s Constitution has now reached the homes of minorities.

“BJP leaders are outdoing each other in stripping Muslims of everything, be it their homes, livelihood and dignity,” Mufti said in a series of tweets.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said the “silence” of the majority community was “deeply worrying”.

“As Kashmiri Muslims, we are often accused of being silent spectators while Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee.

“But the criminal silence of the majority community in today’s India while the BJP wrecks the very idea of India is deeply worrying and problematic,” Mufti added.

SP MP Sukhram meets CM Yogi

Political circles rife with speculation that the senior SP leader, who has differences with party president Akhilesh Yadav, is likely to switch over to the BJP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party’s Rajya Sabha member Sukhram Singh Yadav met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath here, triggering speculation that he might switch over to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

During the meeting at the chief minister’s residence here on Thursday, Yadav was accompanied by his family, including son Mohit, who had recently joined the BJP.

On being asked about the purpose of the meeting, Sukhram Yadav said on Friday that since he could not meet

Yogi Adityanath after his swearing-in ceremony in March, he had gone to congratulate him now.

The political circles are however rife with speculations that the senior SP leader, who has differences with party president Akhilesh Yadav, is likely to switch over to the BJP.

Sukhram Yadav, however, dismissed the speculations. “I don’t see any strength in these speculations,” he said.

The meeting assumes significance also because Yadav will retire as member of Rajya Sabha in July next and he might be hoping to get another stint through the saffron party. Yadav also denied this speculation saying, “The meeting with the Uttar Pradesh chief minister was a courtesy call. Since, I could not meet the chief minister after the elections and the oath-taking ceremony; I met him on Thursday, and congratulated him.”

The 70-year-old Sukhram

Yadav had served as chairman of Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council from 2004 to 10. He became a Rajya Sabha member from the Samajwadi Party on July 5, 2016.

“I have already said earlier that there are a few differences between me and the party leadership,” Yadav asserted. “The difference is that it was said by Akhilesh Yadav during the party feud in 2016 that Netaji (Mulayam Singh Yadav) will be made the national president of the party after the 2017 elections,” he said.

“However, many elections have passed but no action has been taken in this regard. I only want that the respect for Netaji should remain intact,” Yadav asserted. After the SP’s loss to the BJP in the recently concluded assembly polls, some SP leaders have raised voices against the party chief, and Sukhram Yadav’s meeting with Yogi Adityanath could signal fresh troubles from him.

Yogi for better amenities in all police stations

UP CM asks Home Guards to recruit women on 20% of seats

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday gave instructions regarding the strengthening of law and order, good governance and for ensuring peace and order in the state.

He said while establishing a clean environment for the general public in each police station, arrangements should be made for the general public to sit besides provision of clean drinking water and toilets etc, so that people may come to the police station for disposal of their grievances without any fear.

“To make the police station clean and beautiful, along with a cleanliness campaign, the work of tree plantation etc. should be done. Along with this, a security-good gover-

nance system should also be ensured by running a strict campaign for women empowerment and against criminals in the state,” he added.

Giving these details here on Friday evening, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Kumar Awasthi said that the chief minister stressed that all the police stations in Uttar Pradesh should be upgraded in the line of Rajghat police station of Gorakhpur where the local cops work hard to extend all possible comfort to the visitors along with facilitating a special desk for help of women.

Awasthi said that the then Inspector-in-charge, Randhir Kumar Mishra, took personal interest in the Rajghat police station of Gorakhpur district, along with the entire police station staff, while working with a team spirit with the cooperation of the local public. He said work was done for the restoration of the Rajghat police station complex, which resulted in the rejuvenation of the police station complex. He said all places like the visitor

room, police station office, women’s help desk etc. were well organised and renovated by Mishra and in addition, the campus was thoroughly cleaned and decorated with flowering plants, so that every visitor to the police station experienced a positive energy along with cleanliness.

He said working in the direction of women’s empowerment, a women’s help desk and women’s restroom were also constructed in the Rajghat police station so that women visitors coming to the police station did not face any kind of inconvenience.

Awasthi said the work done by Randhir Mishra had been highly appreciated by all and was exemplary for the entire police force so the chief minister wanted every cop to work on the same lines.

Meanwhile, the state government is soon going to give big job opportunities to women in UP Home Guards, an official spokesman said on Friday.

Only women will be recruited on 20 per cent of the vacant posts in the UP Home

Guards and the officials have been asked to prepare a proposal to start the recruitment process in 100 days.

These recruitments will be done in the Home Guards, which has contributed significantly to maintaining peace and internal security.

This will drastically reduce crimes against women in the state and develop an environment of security. Women of the state, who dream of touching the heights with their courage and passion, will get opportunities and they will be helpful in strengthening the security system of the state as well. Women will show their ability and efficiency on one hand and will also be able to serve the public, on the other hand.

The government has also issued guidelines to fill all the vacant posts of Home Guards phase-wise in the next four years. The government is working fast to fill the vacancies with empowered women, able youth and fill all departmental vacancies quickly and increase the number of women in jobs.

Bangla teen nabbed while sneaking into India to buy chocolate

PTI ■ AGARTALA

A Bangladeshi teen has been arrested and put behind bars for illegally crossing into India to buy chocolate, BSF said on Friday.

Eman Hossain, a resident of a Bangladeshi village close to Shalda River, which marks the international border between the two countries, regularly swam across the water body to buy his favourite Indian chocolate in Tripura’s Sipahijala district.

He used to sneak through a hole in the barbed wire fencing to buy chocolate from a shop in Kalamchoura village in India, and return home the same way. However, his adventurous came to an end on April 13 when Border Security Force (BSF) nabbed Hossain while he was undertaking one such journey. The boy was handed over to local police, which produced him before the court. He was

remanded to 15 days’ judicial custody, Sonamura SDPO Banoj Biplab Das said.

“During interrogation, the boy, a resident of Bangladesh’s Comilla district, confessed to sneaking into India for buying chocolate. Only 100 Bangladeshi Taka was found with him, but he did not possess anything illegal. He was arrested for entering India without valid documents,” Das said.

“Further investigation is underway. He will be again produced before the court to decide his fate,” he said.

No one from his family has contacted Indian authorities so far. “The international border in Sonamura sub-division is porous despite the erection of barbed wire fencing. There are many villages in Kalamchoura gram panchayat where the border slices through bedrooms and drawing rooms of many houses,” BSF sources said.

MP violence: Curfew relaxed for four hours in Khargone

PTI ■ KHARGONE

Curfew was relaxed for two hours each on Friday morning and evening in Khargone city of Madhya Pradesh as the situation began to normalise in the aftermath of the violence on Ram Navami, officials said.

No untoward incident was reported from the area, they added. Curfew was relaxed for all persons from 10 am to 12 noon and from 3pm to 5pm to allow people to buy essential items, though they were not allowed to use vehicles and must make purchases from nearby shops, Khargone district collector Anugraha P said.

Only the stores selling milk, vegetables, provisions and medicines were allowed to remain open during the curfew relaxation, the collector added.

In-charge Superintendent of Police Rohit Kashwani said the law and order situation in

the city was under control, and further relaxation will be granted depending on how it holds up.

So far, 41 cases have been registered in connection with the violence and 144 people have been taken into custody, Kashwani said.

The Ram Navami procession in the city on April 10 witnessed stone pelting, group clashes and arson. Among the injured was Superintendent of Police Siddharth Choudhary who received a bullet injury.

Four persons who arrived from Gujarat and were seen distributing relief and assistance to people were detained during the day amid reports that the Islamic outfit Popular Front of India (PFI) allegedly funded the violence in Khargone, said State Reserve Police Commandant Ankit Jaiswal.

Police were probing if these four persons had any link to the PFI, he said.

Cost of justice

Reforms are needed to end the notion of legal aid to the poor meaning poor legal aid

Does the ordinary citizen of the country have access to quality legal services when knocking at the doors of justice? Hardly, says Chief Justice of Odisha High Court S Muralidhar. Raising concern over the quality of legal aid available to the marginalised, he says the “lack of confidence in the legal aid lawyer is a reflection of the general approach to welfare services by the providers”. He insists that the system works “unequally” for the poor and the rich. The Justice is sounding a wake-up call. The entire exercise of a person seeking justice begins with hiring the services of a lawyer. The experience depends on the litigant’s ability to pay. As Justice Muralidhar points out, the poor do not get to complain if they get poor legal services because of the prevalent attitude that they cannot expect quality when the service is free. A complete overhaul of the legal aid system is long overdue. Last October, Justice UU Lalit of the Supreme Court also raised the issue, saying that legal aid to the poor “does not mean poor legal aid”. He wanted the lawyers to take the initiative to improve the standard of such aid. Both the Government and the judiciary should approach legal aid reforms by first introducing the general public to the concept of legal literacy. How many know that access to justice is a constitutional right? How many know that free legal aid is a Directive Principle because the State guarantees justice on the basis of equal opportunity for all?



A destitute person who cannot afford a lawyer is denied that equal opportunity until and unless legally assisted and for free. Over 80 per cent of Indians are eligible for subsidised legal aid. However, the number of legal aid lawyers is not more than a lakh or two. The per capita spending on legal aid is less than a rupee. In comparison, Australia spends ₹1748 and Argentina, ₹1292. Very few States allocate aid lawyers within a day. It takes over a month in a couple of States. The National Legal Services Authority is found wanting. It is true that over 15 million people have benefited from NALSA, but it suffers from several problems. The per capita availability of lawyers and legal assistants is pitifully low. The funds allotted are inadequate. The lawyers on the panel are not adequately compensated and that is the primary reason for inferior quality of service. These three issues need priority handling. Experienced and senior lawyers should be encouraged to take up legal aid work as that would encourage the juniors. *Pro bono* work should have weightage in promotions of lawyers to senior advocates or judges. Legal aid is not charity; it is an obligation. And legal literacy should one day empower the poor to demand the services of lawyers not just in courts but in police stations as well. That would be the day.

PICTALK



Artistes perform during an event to celebrate 'Himachal Diwas' at Dhalpur, Kullu district

PTI

Cheer, again!

People are jostling once again at Delhi’s liquor vends on the back of ongoing discounts

Barely days after the city celebrated the festival of Navratri and in spite of the ongoing month of Ramzan, the ‘*dhamaka* offer’ is back at the Capital’s liquor vends. As the mercury rises, the competition wars around alcohol is hotting up again between Delhi and Gurugram. Days after the Delhi Government allowed the L-72 licensees to offer discounts up to 25 per cent, Delhi is again on a high, and seemingly pleased as punch, too. In fact, most shops across town are offering the mandated 25 per cent discount on beer bottles and cans, and several are dangling the buy-one-get-one-free (on booze bottles costing up to ₹1,000) or buy-two-get-one-free (on liquor worth ₹1,000 or more) carrot to reel in the devotees of Bacchus. As expected, however, the development has had a ripple effect in adjoining Gurugram. With liquor in Delhi becoming cheaper, vendors in the Millennium City have moved to further slash prices in order to stay competitive with the rates in the national Capital and protect its reputation as the “cheapest liquor *adda*” in the NCR.



Both the neighbouring Governments are pulling out all the stops in the need to garner maximum excise revenue from this venture. After the earlier discount schemes were discontinued in February end after kicking off in mid-November last year, the sales had come down but have now picked up again on the back of the discounted rates and literally double the fun at half the cost. However, many people still don’t know that the discount is back so the liquor store owners are planning an “aggressive promotion campaign on social media to create awareness”. The city Government is likely to come up with the Delhi Excise Policy 2022-23 in the next couple of months, which will be a revised form of the existing policy. The Government had last month told the Delhi High Court that the heavy discounts and offers helped sell 24.5 million litres of liquor in February, almost double the average monthly sale of 13.2 million litres in 2019-20. The discounted supply apart, there still remain issues which shall hopefully be addressed therein. For example, draught beer, which requires utmost care in handling and is meant only for “on the premises” consumption, cannot be procured from retail liquor vends. But it’s all good as long as it lasts. For Delhiites, *abhi to party shuru hui hai!*

‘Militiestablishment’ and the wary Sharifs

In the Pakistani cloak-and-dagger system under the broody shadows of the military establishment, no one is permanently good or bad

A few years back, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen had painted a doomsday scenario: “Pakistan is 173 million people, 100 nuclear weapons, an Army bigger than the US Army, and Al-Qaeda headquarters sitting right there in the two-thirds of the country that the Government doesn’t control. The Pakistani military and police and intelligence service don’t follow the civilian Government; they are essentially a rogue State within a State.” Minor deviations from the prophecy notwithstanding, the precarious situation in Pakistan with its eponymous ‘Militiestablishment’ (Military ‘Deep State’) holds largely true. The Pakistani Generals have just tripped their erstwhile protégé, Imran Khan Niazi (who prefers not brandishing the ‘Niazi’ bit, owing to infamy associated with Lt Gen AK ‘Tiger’ Niazi)! As the Generals simply disowned Imran during the no-confidence saga with their combination of silences, contradictory statements and ostensible neutrality, a desperate Imran was left beseeching “only animals remain neutral”. Once ‘selected’ (not necessarily ‘elected’), Imran was sacrificed by the same institution of the Pakistani Army, just as it did earlier to all other civilian politicians of different partisan persuasions, without exception.

Imran is not done politically as he would still command a certain mass loyalty in the face of the barely credible alternatives in PML-N, PPP or even in Maulana Fazal ur Rehman — but he faces an insurmountable challenge for now, ie, ‘Militiestablishment’. This institution is beyond simplistic aspersions, popular passions or ideological affiliations as it is purely a self-defensive product of situational requirements, which can easily deploy seemingly contradictory or even counter-intuitive instincts to protect its own relevance. Increasingly preferring to control the reins from the shadows (Gen Musharraf last held national leadership position in



2008), the fine art of pulling puppetry strings is critical. Whenever the ‘redlines’ defined by Rawalpindi GHQ were breached by the civilian dispensation of the day, the alternatives in the Opposition ranks found themselves galvanised by what Nawaz Sharif once called ‘*Khalai Makhloog*’ (invisible aliens or angels). Clearly, Imran got carried away by his own cult and was seen questioning the ‘Militiestablishment’, and assuming himself to be an equal of the Generals — a cardinal sin with unpardonable consequences in the narrative of the powerful ‘Militiestablishment’. Ironically, the recent beneficiary of the meddlesome ‘Militiestablishment’ was none other than Shehbaz Sharif, the brother of Nawaz Sharif, who holds the fort on behalf of his presumably relieved (though wary) brother in London. The wily and the longest serving Prime Minister of Pakistan (3 non-consecutive terms), Nawaz would know about the ways of the ‘Militiestablishment’ — he was after all the product and victim of the same. Gen Zia-ul-Haq had inducted a young industrialist, Nawaz Sharif, into the

THE ONCE-DEPOSED (SHARIFS) ARE THE CHOSEN ONES YET AGAIN, TEMPORARILY. THE DEFIANT AND WHOLLY PERSONALISED WAY IN WHICH A KICKING AND SCREAMING IMRAN HAS BEEN LITERALLY PUSHED OUT OF OFFICE WILL FURTHER INFURIATE THE ‘MILITI-ESTABLISHMENT’


Punjab Cabinet as Finance Minister in 1981 (Chief Minister by 1985). The ‘Militiestablishment’ post-Zia’s death punted on Nawaz’s then Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) and ‘helped’ him (Supreme Court ruling later confirmed that IJI was created by ISI) become the Prime Minister by 1991. The young and overambitious Nawaz Sharif had perhaps succeeded too soon as he showed recklessness and impatience with the power structures — soon, his handpicked Army Chief, Gen Waheed Kakar, ensured the dismissal of the Sharif Government by 1993. In his second coming, Nawaz was defer in easing out Army Chief General Jehangir Karamat prematurely, and thought he had made a masterstroke with the out-of-turn selection of a ‘safe’ Mohajir ie, Gen Pervez Musharraf. Famously, history repeated itself, and his handpicked Gen Musharraf deposed Nawaz in the 1999 coup. In Nawaz’s third innings as Prime Minister, he had to deal with the outgoing dictator, Musharraf’s chosen, Gen Pervez Kayani, as his concurrent Army Chief (Kayani later extended his term by three years, unilaterally)! Finally, when



Nawaz did manage to appoint his own (again, out-of-turn) Gen Raheel Sharif as the Pakistani chief — Raheel turned out to be his own man who gave his Prime Minister many sleepless nights with his popularity and murmurs of ‘takeover’. Sixth man chosen by Nawaz to be Army chief was Gen Qamar Bajwa (yes, out-of-turn again!) who, instead of remaining beholden, gleefully upped the ante against Nawaz and allowed him to get disqualified — all six of Sharif’s selection of Pakistani chief’s in his tenures ultimately dumped him. In the Pakistani cloak-and-dagger system under the broody shadows of the ‘Militiestablishment’, no one is permanently good or bad as the once-deposed (Sharifs) are the chosen ones yet again, temporarily. The defiant and wholly personalised way in which a kicking and screaming Imran has been literally pushed out of office will further infuriate the ‘Militiestablishment’ who would not want to surrender the mantle of nationalism (never mind the history of 1965, 1971 or Kargil) from itself, that too, to a man who threatened to upstage them and re-script his own importance by diminishing that of the ‘Militiestablishment’. Already the bloodied Sharif-Bhutto dynasts have changed their tune after Imran’s ouster and are now singing hosannas in favour of ‘Militiestablishment’ — they know that the Rawalpindi GHQ can swing and bestow nationalistic credentials onto whichever side seems to be doing their bidding. Imran is perhaps too brash, boastful and even vain to recognise the futility of his cavalier grandstanding, that too, in front of military Generals, in Pakistan. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LET’S LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY
Sir — It is disturbing that nowadays systematic efforts are made to create tension between Hindus and Muslims as stones were pelted on Ram Navami processions. Provocative acts are done in front of mosques and residential areas. In social media, we see videos showing lumpen elements holding saffron flags shouting provocative slogans in front of mosques and even putting up saffron flags on their minarets. A temple priest gives a warning at the front of mosque that he will rape Muslim women and girls. A group of youth wearing orange scarves vandalises a poor watermelon vendor’s cart by throwing them all over the road just because he is Muslim. Our PM is talking about Russia and Ukraine but hasn’t uttered a word against people creating ruckus in the name of religion. On the other hand, an incident has touched my heart. In Gujarat’s Vadgam taluka, a small village has stood up for communal harmony. On Friday evening, a temple has invited Muslim *rozedaars* to offer *namaz* and break their fast at Iftaari. In this small village, the Hindus and Muslims help each other during Ram Navami and other holy festivals. This small village sets an excellent example that both communities can live with love and harmony. **Zeeshaan | Kazipet**

Two degrees at a time

The UGC allows students to pursue two degrees for UG or PG/Diplomas at once in physical+physical mode or physical+online mode or online+online mode with full-time degree courses, as UGC chairman M Jagadesh Kumar has said. This programme will start from the academic year 2022-23. Students can pursue it through open or distance learning programmes also; the two degrees can be pursued from the same university or from different universities and it will be governed by UGC and the statutory bodies of higher education. MPhil and PhD programmes will not fall under this scheme. It depends upon the universities if they want to provide such a scheme. It’s a very advanced decision by UGC for our education system where students can be flexible in their higher studies. It’s also a sustainable decision as it will help increase literacy rate and will act as a boon for fighting illiteracy. After a loss in the education system due to the pandemic, this scheme will provide a bright future in terms of skills and education. Most of the students sometimes want to pursue a job after completing UG, and sometimes it’s not easy to get a job, but from now it is highly possible because of having two degrees as the students will have the knowledge of two courses. Thanks to this move, they can build their skills in their choice of fields. **Akankhya Rout | Dhenkanal**

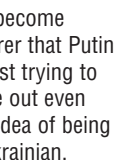
quarantine measures despite being vaccinated, pleading the authorities for food supply. At this crucial juncture, President Xi’s rules have isolated China from the rest of the world with strict travel restrictions; he should immediately heed the pathetic condition of the masses who want the curbs eased and basic facilities restored. It must be a matter of concern for other countries to gear up for precautions, including India. The recently registered COVID-19 cases in Delhi, specifically in schools, and in Kerala and Gujarat must not be ignored by the authorities and the Government must act with all due seriousness. **Janga Bahadur Sunuwar | Jalpaiguri**

MI HAS FAILED TO PROVE METTLE
Sir — The IPL cricket is a competitive game where each team is vying for the top honour in the 15th edition of the cash-rich tournament. With the inclusion of two new teams, Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants, the competition has become tougher and there are upsets all the way. Chennai Super Kings, after losing four games on the trot, came up trumps to win the fifth game. On the other hand, the champion side of Mumbai lost their fifth successive game, thereby raising doubts about the team qualifying for the last-four stage. Earlier also, the Mumbai outfit was on the receiving side but returned to win. For this, the Mumbai side was waiting for home games to return to their winning ways. But this time around, all the matches are being played in and around Mumbai but the results are still not forthcoming. Mumbai Indians has been the most successful franchise in the Indian Premier League, having won five titles — 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020. Mumbai lacks quality spinners in the side and that affects the talent of their batters. So far, Mumbai Indians has failed to show its mettle in IPL-15. **CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai**




People have a lot of faith in the uniform. Whenever they see you, they believe their life is safe.

Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



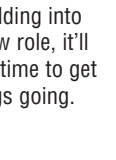
It’s become clearer that Putin is just trying to wipe out even the idea of being a Ukrainian.

US President — Joe Biden




I’m blessed to be ...where I can pursue my career while being able to give my family time.

Actor — Kareena Kapoor Khan



Moulding into a new role, it’ll take time to get things going.

CSK captain — Ravindra Jadeja



This is Rajasthan and not Afghanistan. Stop giving second-grade treatment to Hindus.

BJP MP — Tejasvi Surya

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

PANDEMIC AND THE LAY OF THE LAND

Restrictions may have been lifted, but anxiety still remains



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The last two years or so have been an unprecedented experience in the chain of human evolution. The phase has not been declared formally over, yet. There are ripples of different types of experiences continuing. China for one, is going through a re-spread of a version of the pandemic in Shanghai and elsewhere. On April 11 yet another version of the virus was detected in South Africa. The extent and the nature of the spread is yet to be fully worked out. Whereas social distancing has raised fewer crescendos, masks continue to be a major focus of attention. In India, some states have removed the penalty clause on not wearing masks whereas others have retained it just as an advisory. It remains in force in a few states in the country. It is a challenge to an average citizen to keep up with the various regulatory variations. The bewildering complexity does not end there. As the ART home testing kit becomes more popular the kind of monitoring system which was in place till some months ago with the district administration seems to be somewhat on a decline. The story has other interesting overtones. Some are reporting false positives in the ART test, the consequences of which can well be imagined. Clearly, the general verdict seems to be that if there is a variance between the ART test and the PCR test, the findings of the PCR test are deemed to prevail. Notwithstanding a general decline in the number of cases and its global virulence, the feeling of restlessness and the fallout thereof continue. It impedesa natural flow to return of normalcy. The collaterals continue to be significant. One has to also keep in mind the anxiety which would settle into anybody's psyche in the initial or the subsequent stages of the continuing trauma. The process of transmission of the virus is not yet sufficiently established in all its modes and shades. As the number of occasions grow for the number of social groups being spontaneously or temporarily formed, one can never be sure which individual is a potential carrier of the disease. In that case one would not know to what extent one is really being exposed to the possibility of an infection. These questions can only be answered by a far greater understanding and awareness of the nature of the virus and where it can survive or for how long does it survive. In the earlier stages of the pandemic the mutation process of the virus made an understanding of the process of infection, itself, open to debate. Medicines and therapies (such as the use of the blood plasma of a formerly infected person) did the rounds. With time, medicines like Remdesivir became less fashionable and the feeling grew that even the Pulmonologist could only go so far. Today, the atmosphere is far more relaxed and many a diagnosis stops with reference to a few doses of Erythromycin and more. How long this will continue to be so, as of now, evokes very few definitive projections. All told, the exacting distress of impending consequences of infection has receded but the habits which got formed as a psychological shield in the last several months of anxiety, continues. Anybody's cough in a group of people draws attention. If people then get to learn that somebody in the group was found infected, the others begin watching themselves for symptoms. All told, the infectivity seems to have waned but anxieties continue to be the underpinning in a seemingly overwhelmingly large part of the population. So it appears, the lay of the land in the era of the pandemic.

(The writer is an acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal.)

Social media literacy to address misinformation



ANNU ANAND

The pandemic has amplified the circulation of unverified information — both unwitting (misinformation) and deliberate (disinformation)



The spread of misinformation poses a considerable threat to the life and lifestyle of the common people as evident from various studies. During the pandemic, misinformation related to false cures and conspiracy theories caused panic, anxiety, false hope, mental trauma and fear as the virus was spreading. Due to spread of health misinformation, the business of fake healthcare services and fake medicines also increased. The most prevalent impact of misinformation that were seen during and after the lockdown - suffered different kinds of socio-psychological impact in different parts of the country. Multiple languages and the diversified socio-cultural environment have made it more critical to address the problem.

A top World Health Organization official in August noted that misinformation about COVID and vaccines was keeping people from getting the shots, driving an increase in cases around the world.

Digital media literacy is one wayto help internet users in India to identify and disregard misinformation and disinformation, especially in regional languages and rural areas.

One such media literacy training program run by the FactShala India Media Literacy Network, was conducted across 28 states of the country. In early 2021 the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), an independent socialand media research think tank, conducted a comprehensive impact evaluation of FactShala's training program. This evaluation study also tried to find out the impacts of the misinformation float on social media.

Many respondents in the study recalled that how misinformation impacted their health, communal harmonyin some parts of the country and also generated the fear, anxiety, false hope among many of them. The spread of misinformation makesmany people feel anxious, depressed, or emotionally exhausted. The respondents cited examples of posts that impacted their physical and mental health due to believing inwrong information on social media.

A young womanexplained that she didn't isolate herself for many dayseven after testing positive for COVID because she read a post claiming that 'if you can hold your breath for 30 seconds you aren't COVID positive.'The study found many such cases where either the treatment or the preventive measures were delayed or stopped after reading misinformation or disinformation appeared on social media. Many posts were spreading information against vaccination. Few respondents admitted that they had read the posts that one can die also after vaccination. It created a fear among some people and boosted vaccine hesitancy.

Communal disharmony was the other major impact reported by respondents from Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. Posts carrying misinformation related to employment or cancellation of exams or promotion of next class were created false hope and anxiety among students and job seekers. After reading and believing the post appeared on different platform of social media many people suffered financial loss. During the interviews many respondents admitted that they were duped and suffered financial loss after reading the posts of money laundering or cheap tickets for the flights.

As there is so much information on the social media and online in general, identifying useful andaccurate sources is deceptively difficult for average users. Media literacy interventions have an important role as citizens are not checking online information for accuracy and authenticity, largely because of the sheer volume of messages and low levels of awareness about misinformation, disinformation and fact-checking.

Small, standalone interventions targeting school students or institutions exist but they tend to focus either on fact-checking and verification training, or critical thinking. To make people knowledgeable and secure online an effective mechanism for increasing information literacy and building resilience to misinformation and disinformation within communities is required.

AS THERE IS SO MUCH INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE IN GENERAL, IDENTIFYING USEFUL AND ACCURATE SOURCES IS DECEPTIVELY DIFFICULT FOR AVERAGE USERS. MEDIA LITERACY INTERVENTIONS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE AS CITIZENS ARE NOT CHECKING ONLINE INFORMATION FOR ACCURACY AND AUTHENTICITY

(The writer is Director Advocacy, Centre for Media Studies and a development journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

ARRESTING MINISTER ESHWARAPPA ON MURDER AND CORRUPTION CHARGES IS THE ONLY WAY TO DELIVER JUSTICE. — CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON RANDEEP SURJEWALA



ONCE THE INQUIRY IS CONDUCTED, THE TRUTH WILL COME OUT. THE BACKGROUND IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THIS CASE. — KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER BASAVARAJ BOMMAI

The French election, round two

The latest numbers put Macron at 51 per cent and Le Pen at 49 per cent, which is effectively neck and neck



GWYNNE DYER

French President Emmanuel Macron won the first round of the presidential election on Sunday, but he's still in trouble. He knew he would be. Here's what he said on Saturday.

"Don't believe the pundits and the pollsters who tell you that it's impossible (that the far right will win in the second round of the election). Look at Brexit and so many elections, all that seemed improbable and yet came to pass. Nothing is impossible."

In fact, it's not even unlikely. Strategies have consequences, as Macron is now learning. The strategy that made Macron president last time (2017) has succeeded so well that it may cost him the election in the second round this time (24 April). Macron's strategy has always been to exaggerate the difference between the centre and the rest. If the left was too far left and the right was too far right, then the politician representing the centre (him) was the only rational choice.

It worked for him in 2017, when he waltzed into the presidency with a 66% majority of the vote despite the fact that he had never held elective office before. Fast forward five years, however, and the fantasy has become the fact.

The traditional moderate left-wing party, the Socialists, has been devoured by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's extreme left 'La France Insoumise' (Rebel France), which advocates withdrawal from NATO and also, in effect, from the European Union.

The Socialists only got 4.8% in the first round of voting on Sunday, which means they don't even get their election expenses reimbursed. The party may actually declare bankruptcy and disappear.

The traditional centre-right party, the Republicans, is suffering exactly the same fate. It too has fallen short of the 5% threshold and may go broke. Its place as standard-holder of the right has been taken by Marine Le Pen's National Rally, which remains ultra-nationalist, racist and anti-immigrant despite a cosmetic make-over that downplays its uglier policies.

Le Pen also benefited from the fact that an even harder-right candidate, xenophobic television pundit Éric Zemmour, made her look moderate, if only by comparison. She will inherit all his votes in the second round of voting, naturally, but Macron's problem is that she may also inherit some of Melenchon's hard-left supporters on 24 April.

They have a shared hostility to the European Union, for example, and most left-wing voters can remember that even though Le Pen has been downplaying it recently. They both have a strong populist tone: Le Pen may be a woman of the right, but she's promising that people under 30 won't have to pay income tax, and everybody can retire on full pension at 60.

Fully half of France's voting population has just voted for extremist parties, and according to the polls Le Pen is heading into the run-off still holding most of those votes. The latest numbers say Macron 51%, Le Pen 49%, which is effectively neck-and-neck.

This does not bode well for Macron, especially because it has always been hard for French presidents to win a second term. And while the other losing parties told their supporters to back Macron in the second round, Mélenchon just told his supporters "You must not give a single vote to Marine Le Pen." [But you could abstain, if you like.]

Despite Covid, France is actually in good shape after five years of Macron. Investment is up, inflation is low, jobs are plentiful, the country is even opening more factories than it closes. But the French do not feel good about their lot, and Le Pen could actually win. If she does, a great deal will change, and not just in France.

The new-found unity of 'The West' in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will vanish: Le Pen's campaign pamphlets feature a picture of her with Vladimir Putin, another hard-right icon. She has stopped talking aloud about 'Frexit', but it's still there in the background somewhere, as is the anti-immigrant racism her party has always peddled.

She is much more than Donald Trump in a skirt. She is far more intelligent than he is, and not at all corrupt. She is racist and Islamophobic, but much better at dog-whistling her true convictions. If the League of Authoritarian Leaders ever needs an honorary president, she would be the best candidate for the job.

Despite all this, I think Macron will win, because the French aren't fools. But it may be a near-run thing.

Lanka starts fuel rationing amid severe fiscal crisis



PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's state-owned Petroleum corporation announced fuel rationing for vehicles with effect from Friday, as an unprecedented economic crisis roils the country. According to the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) statement, now motorcycles and other two-wheelers can purchase fuel upto worth

₹1,000 per visit to a fuel station. Similarly, three-wheelers can purchase fuel worth ₹1,500, cars, jeeps and vans upto ₹5,000. Buses, lorries and commercial vehicles have been exempted from the rationing. Long queues at fuel stations have resulted in massive public anger. Further, households are experiencing nearly 12-hour-long powercuts and there is a massive shortage of essen-

tials, due to falling value of the Sri Lankan rupee. The island nation is in the midst of one of the worst economic crises it has ever seen. It has just defaulted on its foreign debts for the first time since its independence. The Galle Face protests in Colombo entered their seventh day on Friday with more and more youth joining it every passing day. They urge the resignation of President

Gotabaya for his incompetence in handling the island's worst-ever economic crisis. The protest campaign has been running on social media, urging youths to gather at Galle Face. Besides, there have been continuing protests across the island, blaming the government for its mishandling of the forex. The protesters have rejected talks with the government till the President and Prime Minister leave office.

CPC chairperson Sumith Wijesinghe last week told reporters the corporation was losing between ₹800 million to ₹1 billion every day on fuel subsidies due to high global market prices and the depreciation of the Sri Lankan Rupee. Wijesinghe said the CPC was losing 110 rupees per litre on diesel and ₹52 per litre on petrol. Wijesinghe said, "We are in discussions with India for another oil credit line for 500 million dollars". India last month extended USD 500 million to Sri Lanka, to help the country buy oil.

Visiting US lawmakers signal support for Taiwan

AP ■ TAIPEI

US lawmakers visiting Taiwan on Friday made a pointed and public declaration of their support for the self-governing island democracy while also issuing a warning to China. The six lawmakers met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Friday morning and will also meet with the island's defence minister. Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey gave a speech praising Taiwan's democracy and its global status as a manufacturer of semi-conductor chips used in everything from cars to smartphones, and he warned of consequences if that status were jeopardized.

"It is a country of global significance, of global consequence, of global impact, and therefore it should be understood the security of Taiwan has a global impact for those who would wish it ill," said Menendez, the head of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, in a speech from



Taiwan's Presidential Office. He emphasized that "we seek no conflict with China as I believe Taiwan seeks no conflict with China."

The delegation, led by Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, also includes Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, Sen. Robert Portman of Ohio, Sen. Benjamin Sasse of Nebraska and Rep. Ronny Jackson of Texas. Tsai said she welcomed their visit and hoped it would help to further deep-

en US-Taiwan cooperation. "Russia's invasion of Ukraine has proven that democracies must bolster their alliances and collectively we can defend ourselves from the threats posed by authoritarian nations that seek to disrupt regional peace," said Tsai. China publicly denounced the visit on Thursday. China is against any official exchanges between Taiwan's government and other foreign governments because it claims Taiwan is part

of its national territory and not an independent country. China and Taiwan split after a civil war in 1949. The U.S. Is the democratic island's biggest unofficial ally and has stepped up weapons sales to Taiwan in past years. By law, the U.S. Is bound to help Taiwan with arms that are defensive in nature. However, the question of whether the U.S. Would intervene in the case of a military invasion by China remains open.

US looks forward to work with Shehbaz, says ties with Pakistan 'vital'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US has said that it was looking forward to working with Pakistan's new government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, as it again refuted ousted premier Imran Khan's allegations of America's role in toppling his government.

Pakistan's relations with the US have been lukewarm, especially under the Biden administration. The ties touched a new low after 69-year-old Khan, who was ousted last week through a Parliament vote, accused the US of conspiring to topple his government. The US government has bluntly denied the

allegations. "We've congratulated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on his election by the Pakistani parliament, and we look forward to working with him and his government," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference on Thursday. Price said for almost 75 years, the relationship between the United States and Pakistan has been "a vital one". "We look forward to continuing that work with Pakistan's government to promote peace and prosperity in Pakistan and the broader region," he said.

A day earlier, Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulated Sharif and said the US values the bilateral relationship

and is looking forward to continuing the long-standing cooperation, signalling Washington's intent to improve ties with Islamabad under the new regime.

Responding to a question on Imran Khan's claims of the US role in overthrowing his government with the help of the Opposition parties, Price said there is "no truth" in it.

"Our message has been clear and consistent on this. There is no truth whatsoever to the allegations that have been put forward. We support the peaceful upholding of constitutional and democratic principles, including respect for human rights. We do not support, whether it's in Pakistan or

anywhere else around the world, one political party over another," he said. The US has rebutted Khan's allegations several times earlier also.

"We support broader principles, including the rule of law and equal justice under the law," Price said.

A day earlier, supporters of Khan organised anti-US protests in Washington DC. They attacked a Pakistani-American journalist and few community members as they continue to accuse the US of playing a role in the regime change.

Khan had alleged that Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs in the

Department of State, was involved in the "foreign conspiracy" to topple his government.

Price said the US agrees with the assessment of the Pakistan military which said that it has no evidence to suggest that the Biden administration had threatened or was involved in any conspiracy, seeking the ouster of the Imran Khan's government. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) - the media waing of Pakistan's

army - Director-General Major General Babar Iftikhar on Thursday said that the word "conspiracy" was not used in the statement issued after a meeting of the National

Security Committee convened last month to discuss a controversial letter, which according to then prime minister Khan threatened to topple his government.

The powerful Pakistan Army, which has ruled the coup-prone country for more than half of its 73 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy.

Khan had brandished a 'threat letter' on March 27 at a public gathering before his ouster claiming that his government had been threatened by the US government and opposition were involved in a conspiracy to topple him.

PAK-NAWAZ-PASSPORT

Pak High Court moved to stop Govt from issuing diplomatic passport to ex-PM Nawaz

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) was moved on Friday to stop the new government from issuing diplomatic passport to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and direct the authorities to immediately arrest him upon his return to Pakistan from London.

After the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president and Nawaz's younger brother Shehbaz Sharif was elected the prime minister, there were reports that the Ministry of Interior has been directed to renew the passports of Nawaz Sharif and his brother-in-law Ishaq Dar.

Nawaz's passport expired in February this year and the previous Imran Khan-led government refused to renew his passport.

Several corruption cases have been launched by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government against 72-year-old Nawaz since his ouster from office by the Supreme Court in July 2017 in the Panama Papers case.

The three-time former premier who is convicted in a corruption case has been living in London on the pretext of ill health since November 2019, when the Lahore High Court had allowed him to leave the country for four weeks for medical treatment after Shehbaz, the new prime minister, gave an undertaking that he would return within the stipulated time. Later, Nawaz sought extensions to prolong his stay in London on medical grounds.

A lawyer, Naeem Haider Panjutha, filed a petition in the IHC, referring to media reports that Nawaz could be issued a diplomatic passport on the instructions of the newly elected prime minister.

He claimed that the instructions for the issuance of the diplomatic passport have been given to the interior and foreign affairs secretaries, the Dawn newspaper reported. The petitioner said that Nawaz is a proclaimed offender and the government should not



issue a diplomatic passport to him. He prayed to the court that Nawaz Sharif should be arrested upon his arrival. The petitioner requested the court to hear the case on Friday, however, Chief Justice Athar Minallah approved the petition for hearing on April 18, the report said.

The petitioner contended that as Nawaz Sharif was "a court absconder who was convicted by learned NAB (National Accountability Bureau) Court for corruption ... It is violative of law, a mockery of the justice system and disgrace to the nation if a diplomatic passport is issued to a convict".

The petition stated that the country's courts had held that a fugitive would lose all rights a normal person was entitled to, adding that Article 25 of the Constitution had set clear standards against discrimination against citizens.

"And all the ordinary citizens will be discriminated against if a convict is issued a diplomatic passport which has so many privileges and immunities, far more than the ordinary passport," it said.

Advocate Panjutha highlighted that diplomatic passports were issued to heads of states, highest officials and dignitaries, and that holders of these passports enjoyed certain immunities and privileges outlined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961.

In this connection, he also cited Passport Rules 2021, which, he said, limit issuance of diplomatic passports to a certain class of state officials so long as they held office.

Clashes erupt at Jerusalem holy site, 152 Palestinians hurt

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinians clashed with Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem 'before dawn on Friday as thousands gathered for prayers during the holy month of Ramadan. Medics said that at least 152 Palestinians were wounded.

The holy site, which is sacred to Jews and Muslims, has often been the epicenter of Israeli-Palestinian unrest, and tensions were already heightened amid a recent wave of violence. Clashes at the site last year helped spark an 11-day war with Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. The clashes come at a particularly sensitive time. Ramadan this year coincides with Passover, a major weeklong Jewish holiday beginning Friday at sundown, and Christian holy week, which culminates on Easter Sunday. The holidays are expected to bring tens of thousands of faithful into Jerusalem's Old City, home to major sites sacred to all three religions.

Hours after the clashes began, the police announced that they had put an end to the violence and arrested "hundreds" of suspects. They said the mosque was reopened and that Friday's midday prayers would take place as usual. Tens of thousands of people were expected. Israeli authorities said they had earlier held negotiations with Muslim leaders to ensure calm

and allow the prayers to take place, but that Palestinian youths hurled stones at police, triggering the violence. Palestinian witnesses, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns, said a small group of Palestinians threw rocks at police, who then entered the compound in force, setting off a wider conflagration.



Videos circulating online showed Palestinians throwing rocks and fireworks and police firing tear gas and stun grenades on the sprawling esplanade surrounding the mosque. Others showed worshippers barricading themselves inside the mosque. Later in the morning, Israeli police entered the mosque and were arresting people.

Imran sold valuable Toshakhana gifts worth ₹140 mn in Dubai: PM Shehbaz

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has accused ousted premier Imran Khan of selling valuable Toshakhana gifts, including diamond jewellery, worth Rs 140 million in Dubai, inflicting a loss to the national exchequer.

As per the country's law, any gift received from dignitaries of a foreign state must be put in the state depository or the Toshakhana. Shehbaz made the claim during a meeting with senior journal-

ists at the Prime Minister's House here, The News International reported on Friday. "I can confirm that Imran Khan took gifts from Toshakhana and sold them in Dubai for Rs 140 million (USD 7.6 lakh). Valuable gifts include diamond jewellery, bracelets, watches and sets," he said. Shehbaz said that he also got a watch once which he had deposited in the Toshakhana. "I don't need to hide anything," the newly-elected premier said. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government led by Khan had

been reluctant to share details about gifts retained from Toshakhana.

An inquiry has been initiated against Khan by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for selling a precious necklace from Toshakhana, inflicting a loss to the national exchequer. The necklace was sold to a jeweller in Lahore through Zulfi Bukhari, former Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development for Rs 180 million, while only a fraction of

that amount was paid to Toshakhana, the report said. In response to the allegations, Bukhari said that there was no truth in reports about the selling of a necklace.

Talking to Geo News, he said that there never had been any talk about the necklace and the allegations were ill-founded and baseless. Meanwhile, former information minister Fawad Chaudhry said that Khan purchased the watch from the government which was received as a gift from a foreign country.

Mental health may impact chances of breakthrough Covid: Study



PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

People who are vaccinated against COVID-19, and have a history of certain psychiatric conditions, face an increased risk of breakthrough disease, according to a study. The researchers from the

University of California (UC) San Francisco, US, noted that the risk may be related to impaired immune response as well as risky behaviours associated with some disorders.

The study, published in the journal JAMA Network Open on Thursday, found that patients over 65 with substance abuse, psychotic disorders, bipolar disorder, adjustment disorder and anxiety, faced increased risks of up to 24 per cent for breakthrough COVID. For those under 65, risks were up to 11 per cent higher than for those without a psychiatric history, the researchers said. They tracked data from more than 2.5 lakh

US Department of Veterans Affairs patients, who had completed their vaccine regimen and had at least one test for SARS-CoV-2.

Just over a half (51.4 per cent) of patients had received at least one psychiatric diagnosis within last five years and 14.8 per cent developed breakthrough COVID, confirmed by a positive test.

"Our research suggests that increased breakthrough infections in people with psychiatric disorders cannot be entirely explained by socio-demographic factors or pre-existing conditions," said senior study author Aoife O'Donovan from UCSF. "It is possible that

immunity following vaccination wanes more quickly or more strongly for people with psychiatric disorders and they could have less protection to newer variants," O'Donovan said in a statement. The average age of 263,697 participants was 66 and 90.8 per cent were male.

Overall, those participants with psychiatric disorders had a 3 per cent increased risk for breakthrough COVID infections in 2021, when adjusted for both demographic factors and pre-existing conditions, compared with participants without a psychiatric history, the researchers said. However, the risk was 24 per cent high-

er for over-65s with substance abuse, 23 per cent higher for those with psychotic disorders, 16 per cent higher for bipolar disorder, 14 per cent for adjustment disorder and 12 per cent for anxiety, they said.

Given greater incidence of breakthrough infections among younger people, study showed significantly smaller effects in under-65s group. Risks were 10 per cent lower in participants with psychotic disorders compared to those without a psychiatric diagnosis, the researchers said. They attribute this decrease to possible lower socialisation among younger people with psychotic disorders compared with older people

who "may be less socially isolated because of their greater burden of ill health and contacts with caregivers."

The higher incidence of breakthrough infection among older participants may be due to "decreased immunological response to vaccine that has been associated with some psychiatric disorders, which may be more substantial in older adults," said study first author Kristen Nishimi from UCSF.

It is also possible that older adults with psychiatric disorders "may require more frequent in-person care, which could increase their interactions with health care system," she noted.

FRANCE-ELECTION

French presidential campaign spotlights Muslim headscarves

AP ■ PERTUIS

Muslim headscarves took center stage in France's presidential campaign on Friday amid far-right candidate Marine Le Pen's push to ban them in the country with western Europe's largest Muslim population.

Both she and rival Emmanuel Macron, facing a tightly contested April 24 runoff, were confronted by women in headscarves who asked why their clothing choices should be caught up in politics.

Macron wouldn't ban religious clothing, but he has overseen closure of several mosques and Islamic groups. And many Muslims feel presidential campaign has unfairly stigmatised their faith.

At a farmers' market in the southern town of Pertuis, a woman in a blue-and-white head covering approached Le Pen as candidate weaved past fishmongers and vendors to greet supporters. "What is the headscarf doing in politics?" the

woman asked. Le Pen defended her position, calling the headscarf a "uniform imposed over time by people who have a radical vision of Islam." "That's not true," countered woman. "I started to wear veil when I was an older woman ... For me it is a sign of being a grandmother." The woman noted that her father served in French military for 15 years.

Le Pen's opposition to the headscarf has encapsulated what her critics say makes her dangerous to French unity, by stigmatising millions of French Muslims. Le Pen would also slash immigration and wants to outlaw ritual slaughter, which would restrict French Muslims' and Jews' access to kosher and halal meat.

Macron too debated a woman in a Muslim headscarf on Friday in a lively exchange on broadcaster France-Info. He sought to distance himself from Le Pen by saying he would not change any laws, but defended an existing ban on headscarves in schools as part of France's secular principles.

In France's election, a meaty issue unites Jews and Muslims

AP ■ PARIS

As she cooks lunch and talks politics, Jewish voter Sarah Gutmann has a nasty feeling - of would-be French president Marine Le Pen invading privacy of her home, reaching directly into her life and plates of chicken and kosher sausages that she is frying for her husband and their eldest son. That's because far-right candidate wants to outlaw ritual slaughter if elected next Sunday. And that could directly impact how Gutmann feeds her family and exercises her religious freedom.

She and her husband, Benjamin, say they would have to think about leaving France if a far-right government interfered with observant Jews' kosher diets. Their fear is that under Le Pen, targeting ritually slaughtered meats could be just start of steps to make French Jews and Muslims feel unwelcome.

"Attacking way we eat impinges on our privacy and that is very serious," Gutmann said as she busied herself in kitchen of their Paris home. "The intention is to target minority populations that bother her and send a message to voters who are against these minorities: 'Vote for me, because I will attack them and perhaps, with time, make them leave.'"

Muslim shopper Hayat Ettabet said her family might be forced to illegally slaughter at home to stay within their religious rules, bleeding out animals "in bathroom, back to way it was." Le Pen says all animals should be stunned before slaughter, and frames the issue as one of animal welfare. That's unacceptable to observant Jews and Muslims who believe stunning causes unnecessary animal suffering and that their ritual slaughters for kosher and halal meats are more humane.

Russia loses warship, vows more attacks on Kyiv

AP ■ KYIV

A day after Moscow suffered a stinging symbolic defeat with the loss of the flagship of its Black Sea fleet, Russia's Defense Ministry promised Friday to ramp up missile attacks on the Ukrainian capital in response to Ukraine's alleged military "diversions on the Russian territory."

The threat of intensified attacks on Kyiv came after Russian authorities accused Ukraine of wounding seven people and damaging about 100 residential buildings with airstrikes on Bryansk, a region that borders Ukraine. Authorities in another border region of Russia also reported Ukrainian shelling Thursday.

Kyiv has gradually displayed some signs of pre-war life after Russian troops failed to capture the city and retreated to focus on a concentrated assault in eastern Ukraine, leaving evidence of possible war crimes in their wake. A renewed bombardment could return the capital's residents to sheltering in subway stations and the steady wail of air raid sirens.

Ukrainian officials have not confirmed striking targets in Russia, and the reports by Russian authorities could not be independently verified. However, Ukrainian officials claimed their forces struck a key Russian warship with missiles on Thursday. If true, the claim would represent an important victory.

The guided-missile cruiser Moskva, named for the Russian capital, sank while being towed to port Thursday after suffering heavy damage under circumstances that remained in dispute. Moscow acknowledged a fire on board but not any attack. U.S. And other Western officials could not confirm what caused the blaze.

The Moskva had the capacity to carry 16 long-range cruise missiles, and its removal reduces Russia's firepower in the Black Sea. If Ukrainian forces took out the vessel, the Moskva likely represents the largest warship to be sunk in combat since the Falklands War. A British submarine torpedoed an Argentine navy cruiser called the ARA General Belgrano during the 1982 conflict, killing over 300 sailors on board.

The Russian warship's loss in an invasion already widely seen as a historic blunder also was a symbolic defeat for Moscow as its troops regroup for an offensive in eastern Ukraine after retreating from the Kyiv region and much of the north.

In his nightly address Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the people of his country should be proud of having survived 50 days under attack when the Russian invaders "gave us a maximum of five."

Zelenskyy did not mention the Moskva by name, but while listing the ways Ukraine has defended against the onslaught, mentioned "those who showed that Russian warships can sail away, even if it's to the bottom" of the sea. It was his only reference to the Moskva.

News about the flagship overshadowed Russian claims of advances in the southern port city of Mariupol, where Moscow's forces have been battling the Ukrainians since the early days of the invasion in some of the heaviest fighting of



the war - at a horrific cost to civilians.

Dwindling numbers of Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol are holding out against a siege that has trapped well over 100,000 civilians in desperate need of food, water and heating. David Beasley, executive director of the U.N. World Food Program, told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday that people were being "starved to death" in

the besieged city.

Mariupol's mayor said this week that more than 10,000 civilians had died and the death toll could surpass 20,000. Other Ukrainian officials have said they expect to find evidence of atrocities committed against civilians like the ones discovered in Bucha and other towns outside Kyiv once the Russians withdrew.

The Mariupol City Council said Friday that locals report-

ed seeing Russian troops digging up bodies that were buried in residential courtyards and not allowing any new burials "of people killed by them."

"Why the exhumation is being carried out and where the bodies will be taken is unknown," the council said in a statement posted on the Telegram messaging app.

Mariupol's capture is critical for Russia because it would allow its forces in the south,

which came up through the annexed Crimean Peninsula, to fully link up with troops in the Donbas region, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland and the target of the looming offensive.

Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in the Donbas since 2014, the same year Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine. Russia has recognized the independence of two rebel-held areas of the region.

Although it's not certain when Russia will launch the full-scale campaign, a regional Ukrainian official said Friday that seven people died and 27 were injured after Russian forces opened fire on buses carrying civilians in the village of Borovaya, near the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Ukrainian law enforcement agencies are working to establish the circumstances of the attack, Dmytro Chubenko, a spokesman for the regional prosecutor's office, told Ukraine's Suspilne news website.

Chubenko said that Ukrainian authorities had opened criminal proceedings in connection with a suspect-

ed "violation of the laws and customs of war, combined with premeditated murder." The claims of an attack

on civilian buses could not be independently verified.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Friday that Russian strikes in the Kharkiv region "liquidated a squad of mercenaries from a Polish private military company" of up to 30 people and "liberated" an iron and steel factor in Mariupol from "Ukrainian nationalists."

The claims could not be independently verified.

On Thursday, the Defense Ministry explained the damage to Russia's Black Sea flagship by a fire had caused ammunition stowed on board to detonate. In addition to the cruise missiles, the warship also had air-defense missiles and other guns.

The ministry did not say what might have caused the blaze but reported that the "main missile weapons" were not damaged and the crew, which usually numbers about 500, abandoned the vessel. It wasn't clear if there were any casualties.

Mariupol holds out against all odds

AP ■ LVIV

Unbroken by a Russian blockade and relentless bombardment, the key port of Mariupol is still holding out, a symbol of staunch Ukrainian resistance that has thwarted the Kremlin's invasion plans.

More than six weeks after the Russian siege began, Ukrainian troops are continuing to fight the vastly superior Russian forces in ferocious battles amid the ruins of what once was a bustling city on the Sea of Azov coast.

The Ukrainians' fight against all odds has scuttled Moscow's designs, tying up significant Russian forces and delaying the start of a planned Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland, Donbas.

The Kremlin hopes that an attack in the east could reverse the battlefield fortunes for Russia after a humiliating failure of its attempt to quickly storm the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Mariupol has been a key objective for Russia since the start of its invasion on Feb. 24.

Capturing the city would allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula that Russia annexed in 2014 and deprive Ukraine of a major port and prized industrial assets.

The giant Azovstal steel mill and other industrial plants have been heavily damaged by the ferocious Russian bombardment that has flattened much of Mariupol, indiscriminately hitting homes, hospitals and other public buildings and killing thousands.

The victims include about 300 people killed in last month's Russian airstrike on the Mariupol Drama Theatre that was being used as a shelter and had the word "CHILDREN" printed in Russian in huge white letters on the pavement outside to ward off aerial attack.

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko told The Associated Press that at least 21,000 people were killed in Mariupol with bodies "carpeted through the streets." He said that the Russians deployed mobile cremation equipment to Mariupol to methodically dispose of the



victims' bodies in order to hide the evidence of the massacre and prevent international organisations from documenting "the horror the Russian army is responsible for."

The discovery of hundreds of bodies of civilians apparently executed by Russian forces in Kyiv's suburbs after the Russian retreat from the area has fuelled global outrage and accusations from Ukrainians and the West

that Russia is committing war crimes in Ukraine.

Moscow has deployed fighters from Chechnya, known for their ferocity, to wage street battles in Mariupol. Chechnya's Moscow-backed leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, has repeatedly boasted on his messaging app channel about defeating Ukrainians in Mariupol, but the fight has continued.

Boychenko said that several Ukrainian units are still fighting the Russians in Mariupol, including the 36th Marine Brigade, the Azov Regiment, some Interior Ministry troops and border guards.

The Azov Regiment, a seasoned volunteer force that is widely considered one of the country's most capable units, is defending the mammoth Azovstal steel plant that covers an area of nearly 11 square kilo-

metres (over 4.2 square miles). It has taken advantage of the plant's sprawling network of concrete buildings and underground facilities to repel continuous Russian attacks.

The 36th Marine Brigade was maintaining defensive positions at the Azovmash and Zavod Ilyicha factories until it ran out of supplies and ammunition and made a desperate attempt to break through the Russian blockade earlier this week.

In a post on the brigade's Facebook page, one of its officers described the unit's heroic resistance, saying that "for more than a month, the marines have been fighting without replenishing ammunition, food and water supplies."

"The wounded accounted for nearly a half of the brigade's strength, but those who still had their limbs and were capable of walking reported back to duty," the post said. Boychenko said that some of the marines managed to join the Azov regiment, while others were captured by the Russians. He didn't give any numbers.

UN food chief says Mariupol is starving

AP ■ KYIV

The head of the UN World Food Programme said people are being "starved to death" in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, and he predicted the country's humanitarian crisis is likely to worsen as Russia intensifies its assault in the coming weeks.

WFP executive director David Beasley also warned in an interview Thursday with The Associated Press in Kyiv that Russia's invasion of grain-exporting Ukraine risks destabilizing nations far from its shores and could trigger waves of migrants seeking better lives elsewhere.

The war that began Feb. 24 was "devastating the people in Ukraine," he said, lamenting the lack of access faced by the WFP and other aid organizations in trying to reach those in need amid the conflict.

"I don't see any of that easing up. I just don't see it happening right now," he said.

The fluid nature of the conflict, which has seen fighting shift away from areas around the capital and toward eastern Ukraine, has made it especially difficult to reach hungry Ukrainians.

The WFP is trying to put food supplies now in areas that could be caught up in the fighting, but Beasley acknowledged that there are "a lot of complexities" as the situation rapidly evolves.

A lack of access is part of the problem, he said, but so is a shortage of manpower and fuel as resources are diverted to the war effort.

"It's not just going to be the

next few days - but the next few weeks and few months could even get more complicated than it is now," he said.

"In fact, it's getting worse and worse, concentrated in certain areas, and the front lines are going to be moving."

Beasley expressed particular concern about the port city of Mariupol, where a dwindling number of Ukrainian defenders is holding out against a Russian siege that has trapped well over 100,000 civilians in desperate need of food, water and heating.

Russian forces that control access to the city have not allowed in aid, even though the WFP has demanded access.

"We will not give up on the people of Mariupol and other people that we cannot reach. But it's a devastating situation: the people being starved to death," he said.

Russia is determined to seize the city so its forces from the annexed Crimean Peninsula can fully link up with troops elsewhere in the eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland and the target of the coming offensive.

The U.N. Food chief warned of disastrous ripple effects due to Ukraine's role as major international grain supplier.

A global food shortage caused by the war could prompt "mass migration beyond anything we've seen since World War II," he said, echoing remarks he made to the U.N. Security Council last month. Russia and Ukraine

together produce 30% of the world's wheat supply and export about three-quarters of the world's sunflower seed oil.

Half of the grain the WFP buys for distribution around the world comes from Ukraine.

Some 30 million metric tons of grain bound for export are unable to be shipped because of the war, Beasley said.

Ukrainian farmers are struggling to access fertilizer and seed, and those who can plant may see their harvest rot in the fields if the war drags on and there's no way to ship it, he warned.

The shipping challenges have forced the WFP to halve rations for millions of people, many in Africa, and more cuts may be needed, he said.

"People are going to be starving to death," he said.

Beasley also visited areas near Kyiv that were ravaged by the Russian invasion, including the town of Bucha, where evidence of mass killings and other atrocities against civilians have shocked the world.

He described neighborhoods "completely decimated by bombings," likening what he saw to a nightmare that was impossible to believe.

But he stopped short of describing the killings a genocide, as U.S. President Joe Biden did this week.

"Well, I know one thing. People are dying," he said when asked about Biden's comments. "But there's no doubt in my mind this is a horror story and it is truly heartbreaking."

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The US Ambassador to the United Nations accused Russia on Friday of making the precarious food situation in Yemen and elsewhere even worse by invading Ukraine, calling it "just another grim example of the ripple effect Russia's unprovoked, unjust, unconscionable war is having on the world's most vulnerable."

Linda Thomas-Greenfield told a UN Security Council meeting on war-torn Yemen that the World Food Programme identified the Arab world's poorest nation as one of the countries most affected by wheat price increases and lack of imports from Ukraine.

Russia's deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky shot back saying, "The main factor for instability and the source of the problem today is not the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, but sanctions measures imposed on our country seeking to cut off any supplies from Russia and the supply chain, apart from those supplies that those countries in the West need, in other words energy."

"If you really want to help the world avoid a food crisis you should lift the sanctions that you yourselves imposed, your sanctions of choice indeed, and poor countries will immediately feel the difference," he said. "And if you're not prepared to do that, then don't get involved in demagoguery, and don't mislead everybody."

The sharp exchange took place a day after a U.N. Task force warned that the war



threatens to devastate the economies of many developing countries that are now facing even higher food and energy costs and increasingly difficult financial conditions.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched their report saying, "As many as 1.7 billion people -- one-third of whom are already living in poverty -- are now highly exposed to disruptions in food, energy and finance systems that are triggering increases in poverty and hunger."

Thirty-six countries rely on Russia and Ukraine for more than half their wheat imports, including some of the world's poorest countries, he said, and wheat and corn prices have risen 30% just since the start of the year.

Rebecca Grynspan, secretary-general of the U.N. Agency promoting trade and development who coordinated the task force, said the 1.7 billion people live in 107 countries that have "severe exposure" to at least one dimension of the crisis -- rising food prices, increasing energy prices and tightening financial conditions.

The task force said 69 of the countries, with a popula-

7 killed near Kharkiv; explosion felt in east

AP ■ KYIV

A large explosion has struck the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, the site of a missile strike on a train station a week earlier that left more than 50 dead and dozens wounded.

Associated Press journalists in the city heard the sound of a rocket or missile and then the blast, followed by sirens wailing early Friday afternoon. It was not immediately clear what was hit or whether there were casualties.

Witnesses to the south of the capital Kyiv earlier reported explosions around 2 a.m, but the source was not clear.

Seven people died and 27 were injured after Russian forces opened fire on buses carrying civilians in the Ukrainian village of Borovaya, near the northeastern city of Kharkiv, a spokesman for the regional prosecutor's office told Ukraine's Suspilne news website Friday.

Ukrainian law enforcement

agencies are working to establish the circumstances of the attack, Dmytro Chubenko said. He added that investigators are also establishing the routes and destination of the vehicles transporting civilians across the Russian-controlled territory around Borovaya.

Chubenko said that Ukrainian authorities had opened criminal proceedings in connection with a suspected "violation of the laws and customs of war, combined with premeditated murder."

The claims could not be independently verified.

The U.N. Human rights office says at least 1,964 civilians have been killed through April 13 since the start of the Russian invasion on Feb. 24. The office believes the number is much higher, information from some areas is delayed by hostilities and other reports are pending corroboration.

Ukrainian officials say thousands and thousands of people have been killed in the war.

'Russians exhuming corpses of those killed in Mariupol'

AP ■ KYIV

Mariupol City Council said on Friday that local residents report Russian troops are digging up bodies previously buried in residential courtyards and not allowing any new burials "of people killed by them."

A watchman has been assigned to each courtyard and is not allowing Mariupol residents to lay to rest dead relatives or friends. Why the

exhumation is being carried out and where the bodies will be taken is unknown," according to a statement on the messaging app Telegram. The claim could not be independently verified.

Earlier this month, Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko told the AP that Russian forces have brought mobile cremation equipment to the city to dispose of the corpses of victims of the siege.

Min relaxes EPCG norms to aid ease of doing biz

New Delhi: The commerce ministry has relaxed various procedures under the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme in order to reduce compliance requirements and facilitate ease of doing business.

Under the scheme, imports of capital goods are allowed duty free, subject to an export obligation. The authorisation holder (or exporter) under the scheme has to export finished goods worth six times of the actual duty saved in value terms in six years.

The objective of the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme is to facilitate import of capital goods for producing quality goods and services and enhance India's manufacturing competitiveness.

"With a view to enhance ease of doing business and reduce compliance burden, certain provisions of chapter 5 related to the EPCG scheme of the Handbook of procedures (2015-20) are amended for EPCG authorisations issued under Foreign Trade Policy (2015-20)," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade has



said in a public notice.

The changes include those related to annual reporting of EO (export obligation) -- instead of by April 30 each year, exporters can file that by June 30 of each year with specified information, but any delay will be subject to a late fee of Rs 5,000.

Requests for export obligation extension should be made within six months of expiry instead of the earlier prescribed period of 90 days. However, applications made after six months and up to six years are subject to a late fee of Rs 10,000 per authorisation.

According to the changes, requests for block-wise export obligation extension should be made within six months of expiry. However, applications made after six months and up to six years will entail a late fee of Rs 10,000 per authorisation. Applications made after six years will be subject to a fee of Rs 5,000 per year.

Earlier, no specified time limit was prescribed, leading to discretionary interpretations.

Further, the facility to pay customs duty through scrips (MEIS /RoDTEP /RoSCTL) for default under EPCG has been withdrawn. **PTI**

Major reshuffle effected in Air India's top management

New Delhi: Air India Chairman N Chandrasekaran Friday effected a major reshuffle in the top management of recently-acquired airline, with Nipun Aggarwal appointed as Chief Commercial Officer and Suresh Dutt Tripathi as Chief Human Resources Officer.

Aggarwal, who is also Senior Vice President at Tata Sons, replaces Air India veteran Meenakshi Malik, while Tripathi, who was Vice President of Human Resources at Tata Steel from 2012 to 2021, succeeds AI's Amrita Sharan.

The order was issued by Chandrasekaran, who is also the chairman of Tata Sons. Malik and Sharan were on Friday appointed as Advisors to the CEO of Air India, according to a company communication.

As the Tata Group is yet to appoint the CEO of Air India, Malik and Sharan will currently be advisors to Chandrasekaran, it mentioned.

Satya Ramaswamy, who has worked at Tata Consultancy Services before, was on Friday appointed as Chief Digital and Technology Officer at Air



India, the order stated.

Rajesh Dogra was appointed as the Head of Customer Experience and Ground Handling at Air India, it mentioned. Air India veteran R S Sandhu will continue to hold the charge of Chief of Operations at Air India, it noted.

Another Air India veteran Vinod Hejmadi will continue to hold the charge as Chief Financial Officer, it mentioned. "The new appointees will

exercise the powers of functional/departmental heads as per the delegation of authority. We wish them all the very best in their new role," Chandrasekaran stated in the order.

After a competitive bidding process, the government had on October 8 last year sold Air India to Talace Private Limited -- a subsidiary of the Tata group's holding company -- for Rs 18,000 crore. **PTI**

Mobile retailers' body to seek Government intervention against e-commerce onslaught

Kolkata: A leading mobile retailers' body has claimed that "unethical and monopolistic business practices" of online sales platforms are 'jeopardising' the future of 1.5 lakh brick and mortar smartphone retailers across the country and that it will seek govt intervention.

In such a situation, the survival of small retailers is at stake, the All India Mobile Retailers Association (AIMRA), an apex body of smartphone retailers, said.

"The situation is extremely fragile due to the unethical, discriminatory, and monopolistic business practices by online sales platforms. Several shops are closed and now retailers are even taking an extreme step like suicide.

"We will approach the Government with a charter of demands to ensure the protection of over 150,000 mobile phone retailers across the country who are struggling to compete with the tech giants and unethical business practices by many online sales channels



and portals," AIMRA, West Bengal president, Mohan Bajoria told PTI.

The association will hold a two-day AGM from April 16 in the city to work out a counter-strategy and action plan for survival.

"The USD 38 billion Indian smartphone market is the biggest and fastest-growing mobile phone market in the world. Some of the top global

mobile phone brands have registered their highest shipments to India in 2021. Due to the fallout of the COVID impact, the online platform currently accounts for 50 per cent of the smartphone sales in India," Bajoria said.

The GST regime, he said, remains a matter of concern for small mobile retailers who find it complicated and not conducive for doing business. **PTI**

Finmin invites applications for the position of CERSAI managing director

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry has invited applications for the post of managing director of Central Registry of Securities Asset Reconstruction and Security Interest of India (CERSAI).

The Central Registry of Securities Asset Reconstruction and Security Interest of India (Central Registry) has been incorporated in 2011 as a government company under Section 25 of the Companies Act 1956.

The Government of India owns 51 per cent while remaining stake is with select public sector banks and the National Housing Bank.

The object of the company is to maintain and operate a registration system for the purpose of registration of transactions of securitisation, asset reconstruction of financial assets and creation of security interest over property, as contemplated under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act).

Applications are invited for the post of Central Registrar and Managing director of Central Registry, Department of Financial Services under the Finance Ministry said in a public notice said.

According to eligibility criteria, the applicant should be below the age of 59 years as on October 17, 2022. General managers or above of nationalised banks and chief general managers of of Reserve Bank of India, Nabard, Sidbi and India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd are eligible for the position, it said. **PTI**

Maruti Suzuki drives in new Ertiga tagged at ₹8.35 lakh

New Delhi: The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said it has launched a new version of its multi-purpose vehicle Ertiga, priced between Rs 8.35-12.79 lakh (ex-showroom).

The model comes with a 1.5 litre petrol engine paired with both manual and automatic transmissions.

The auto major has also launched CNG trims of the vehicle.

The model comes with hybrid technology and driven by an all-new advanced six-speed automatic transmission with paddle shifters.

"Ertiga's launch ten years ago was a significant moment in the Indian automobile industry, as it created a new segment that has been growing at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 4.7 per cent," MSI Managing Director & CEO Hisashi Takeuchi noted.

The next-gen Ertiga with advanced technology features comes with a new engine and an

all-new transmission, he added.

"As it stays true to its brand vision of providing comfort, technology, and safety features, while being fuel-efficient for customers, the next-gen Ertiga will surely continue to be India's go-to MPV. We are confident that the next-gen Ertiga will be widely embraced by our customers," Takeuchi stated.

Available both in petrol and CNG options, Ertiga offers a mileage of 20.51 km/l (petrol) and 26.11km/kg (CNG).

In an interaction with PTI, MSI Senior Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said the multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) segment has been witnessing growth over the last few years.

"In 2014-15, it used to be only around 4-5 per cent of the industry but now it has grown to around 8-9 per cent of the industry and the overall volumes have also grown from 1.6-2 lakh units in 2014-15 to almost 2.6 lakh units last fiscal year," he noted.

With the growth in the segment, MSI has also been able to increase its market share from 33-34 per cent to around 61 per cent, Srivastava noted.

"We used to do 5,000 units a month earlier till 2019 but after we introduced Ertiga and XL6, it has grown to 13,500 units a month. The total MPV market roughly per month is around 22,000," he stated.

Srivastava noted that with the segment growing, the company is updating Ertiga and also bringing in a new version of XL6 later this month.

"We would like to increase the market share further provided we have availability of the parts. The pending bookings for the company has already risen to 3 lakh units. We are hoping to increase production to reduce waiting periods," he stated. Srivastava noted sales of Ertiga has increased despite the lack of a diesel powertrain, which used to be there when the model was launched initially. **PTI**

Govt invites EoIs to set up manufacturing zone for power, renewable energy sector

New Delhi: The Government has invited EoIs from interested parties for setting up a manufacturing zone on pilot basis for the power and renewable energy sector.

The last date to submit the proposal is June 8, 2022, according to a notification on the website of Ministry of Power.

"Expression of Interest (EoI) for setting up a manufacturing zone on pilot basis for the power and renewable energy sector is on the website of Ministry of Power and MNRE and it is requested to consider participating for submission of EoI by June 8, 2022," the notification dated April 13, said.

Ministry of Power had earlier issued orders for implementation of a scheme to set up a manufacturing zone for the sector on pilot basis with a budgetary outlay of Rs 400 crore over a period of five years. **PTI**

Rapido raises USD 180 mn in funding round led by Swiggy

New Delhi: Bike taxi platform Rapido on Friday said it has raised USD 180 million (over Rs 1,370 crore) in a Series D round of funding led by new investor Swiggy.

The round also saw investment from TVS Motor Company, along with existing investors Westbridge, Shell Ventures and Nexus Ventures, the company said in a statement.

The funds would be used to bolster technology, amplify and strengthen teams across diverse sets of capabilities, and increase overall supply to create an enhanced consumer

experience across a larger audience base in metros, tier I, II and III cities, it added.

Rapido said it will be investing these funds in all its three categories -- bike-taxi, auto and delivery -- to enhance its drive partners' earnings and improve customer experience in over 100 cities that it operates in.

"Swiggy's participation in this round will build on the synergies between the two companies," the company said.

Commenting on the fundraise, Rapido co-founder Aravind Sanka said, "We look forward to learning from



Swiggy's experience to scale up throughout the country and enhance our captains' (driver-partners) / customers' experi-

ence, who are the backbone of our business."

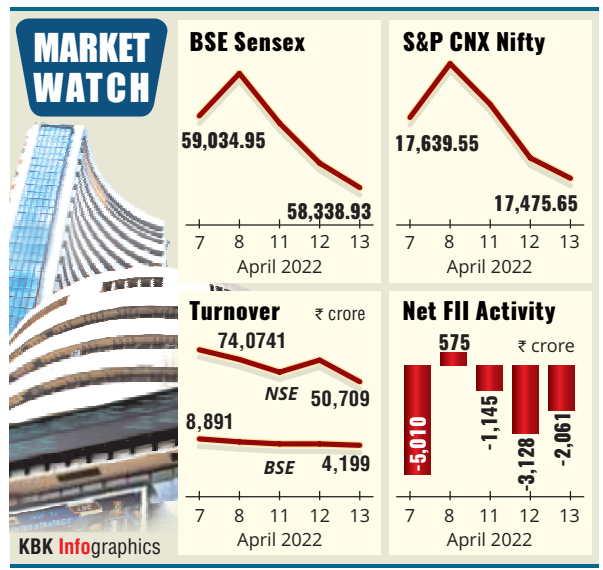
Besides, he said, "TVS Motor, who are very passionate about EVs and the future of mobility, will help us in further expansion. We hope to accelerate our pace of becoming a household name as we increase our geographies and services, on the backbone of our robust, global-standard technology."

On the company's investment in Rapido, Swiggy co-founder and CEO Sriharsha Majety said, "Swiggy and Rapido share a vision to build a logistics platform that empowers riders through more

opportunities and higher earnings."

"While we've already been working together, this investment facilitates closer alignment to leverage the synergies between the platforms and improve the value we provide to both consumers and delivery executives/captains across the country," Majety added.

In the past, Rapido had raised USD 130 million from various investors. It is currently present in around 100 cities across the country with over 25 million customers and over 1.5 million driver-partners. **PTI**



Senco Gold files ₹525-cr IPO papers with Sebi

New Delhi: Jewellery retailer Senco Gold Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 525 crore through an initial public offering (IPO).

The IPO comprises fresh

issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 325 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of equity shares to the tune of Rs 200 crore by selling shareholder - SAIF Partners India IV Limited.

Besides, the company may consider a pre-IPO placement of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 65 crore. If such placement is undertaken, the fresh issue size will be reduced.

The company proposes to

utilise Rs 240 crore of net proceeds from the fresh issue towards funding working capital requirements and rest towards general corporate purposes.

At present, Senco Gold has

127 showrooms -- 70 company-operated and 57 franchisee -- in 89 cities and towns across 13 states in India.

Some of its franchisee showrooms are located in areas other than metros and tier-I,

providing a greater reach in tier-2 and tier-3 locations.

The company also sells products through various online platforms. It also undertakes wholesale exports of its

jewellery primarily to Dubai, Malaysia and Singapore.

Its revenue from operations grew at a CAGR of 9.92 per cent from Rs 2,420 crore as of March 31, 2020 to Rs 2,660 crore as of March 31 2021. **PTI**

Fund raising via debt placement hits 6-year low at ₹5.88 lakh cr in FY-2022

New Delhi: Fund raising by listed companies through private placement of corporate bonds plunged to a six-year low in 2021-22 to Rs 5.88 lakh crore owing to good performance of the equities and aggressive fund disbursement by banks at lower interest rate.

This was 24 per cent lower from a record Rs 7.72 lakh crore mobilised in 2020-21, data with Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed. Unless the high government borrowings and adverse interest rate cycle play spoilsport, the ongoing financial year is

expected to be robust in terms of fund raising activities through the debt route on account of higher demand for credit from corporates in light of the improving economic outlook, experts said.

"During FY23, there should be some increase in raising of debt through bonds as corporate India presses the pedal on the next major phase of the capex cycle. Also, with a potentially rising interest rate scenario, these bond issuances should evince good interest from risk seeking investors," Ricky Kirpalani, Lead Sponsor,

First Water Capital Fund (AIF) said.

Vibhor Mittal, Chief Business Officer, CredAvenue, believes issuance volumes in the private debt market are improving on account of higher demand for credit from issuers in light of the improving economic outlook.

However, dampeners to the cause could be high government borrowings that may crowd out private placements and adverse interest rate cycles. In FY22, fund raising through the private placement of corporate bonds was subdued at

Rs 5.88 lakh crore.

This was the lowest level since 2015-16, when listed companies had raised Rs 4.58 lakh crore, the data showed.

In terms of issuance, 1,405 issues were witnessed in the just concluded fiscal year as compared to 1,995 issues in 2020-21. The debt markets are mostly tapped by the financial sector companies who use funds for onward lending (as the economic cycle gathers pace) and boost capital buffers.

The non-financial bunch deploys the funds mainly for general corporate expenses, cap-

ital expenditure and for inorganic growth opportunities apart from refinancing existing debt.

The lower fund raising through private placement route in FY22 compared to the preceding fiscal could be attributed to good performance of the equities in the stock market last year, Kamlesh Shah - MD Share India Securities, said.

Explaining the reasons for highest-ever fund-raise through the route in 2020-21, Shah said low interest rates and measures by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), boosting liquidity, helped the cause despite

the pandemic.

According to CredAvenue's Mittal, bond issuances have seen a steep decline in FY22 principally due to the lack of any explicit support from the government or RBI, unlike last year, when programmes such as LTRO (long-term repo operation) and various credit guarantee schemes led to an overall boost in the market.

"Banks and NBFCs have been aggressive in disbursing funds through the loan route at lower rates due to abundant systemic liquidity; this has made it difficult for capital

market investors to compete with the loan market on yield offering," he added.

Another factor for the decline could be subdued working capital requirements /utilizations of the companies in spite of growth in the top line, Abhijit Shrivastava, Managing Partner at Azalea Capital Partners, said.

"There has been ample liquidity available with banks and undrawn limits with various corporate borrowers. So, it didn't make sense for a lot of corporates to tap the higher cost bond debt," Kirpalani said.

Apart from the capital raised via private placement of corporate debt, a total of Rs 11,589 crore came from public issuance of corporate debt in the past fiscal year.

Higher to constant liquidity in the system and overall lower credit offtake, would still keep the dependence low on public issuance of corporate debt. However, the first half of FY23 could see an uptick through this route of fund raising, Shalibhadra Shah, Chief Financial Officer, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. **PTI**

FRANKFURT DUMP OUT BARCA

AP ■ BARCELONA

Favourites Barcelona were dumped out of the Europa League by Eintracht Frankfurt in the quarter-finals on Thursday, while West Ham United and Rangers joined RB Leipzig in qualifying for the last four.

Serbian international Filip Kostic scored twice either side of a Rafael Santos Borré strike at the Camp Nou for Frankfurt, who survived a late fightback to win 3-2 on the night and 4-3 on aggregate.

Sergio Busquets scored a late consolation before Memphis Depay's even later penalty for Barcelona but Eintracht held on, to the delight of the estimated 30,000 German supporters who travelled for the game.

They go through to their second Europa League semi-final in four seasons, having lost on penalties to Chelsea at the same stage in 2019.

"I am speechless. Nobody expected this, if you are honest. Everyone expected us to suffer," said Frankfurt goalkeeper Kevin Trapp.

Barcelona's recent revival under Xavi Hernandez has been remarkable but this defeat means they have won just once at home all season in Europe, and their campaign is now set to end without silverware.

"It's a hammer blow for us. They deserved to go through," admitted Xavi.

After conceding three penalties in their weekend win over Levante, Barca fell behind to another spot-kick inside four minutes against Eintracht, as Kostic converted after a foul by Eric García to the delight of the enormous away support.

The visitors scored again in the 36th minute as Colombian forward Borré fired



high into the net from range, and Kostic's low finish into the far corner made it 3-0 midway through the second half.

Busquets had a late goal disallowed for offside before he found the net with a fantastic strike from 20 metres in the first minute of injury time.

The game carried on into an 11th added minute when Depay netted a penalty after Evan Ndicka was sent off, receiving a second caution for a foul on Luuk de Jong.

WEST HAM BEAT LYON

Yet Eintracht maintained their record of not having lost to Spanish opposition since the 1960 European Cup final against Real Madrid, and they will face West Ham in the semi-finals.

The English side are through to their first European semi-final since losing the 1976 Cup Winners' Cup final to Anderlecht after they outclassed Lyon in France, winning 3-0 on the night and 4-1 on aggregate.

The Hammers took the lead in the 38th minute of the return when Craig Dawson headed in a Pablo Fornals corner.

Captain Declan Rice slotted in their second just before the break, his sidefoot effort from the edge of the area beating Lyon goalkeeper Julian Pollersbeck with the aid of a deflection.

The outcome was put beyond doubt when West Ham scored again three minutes after the restart as Fornals sent Jarrod Bowen away to make it 3-0.

Pedri out after sustaining hamstring injury

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona midfielder Pedri sustained a hamstring injury in his side's defeat by Eintracht Frankfurt in the Europa League quarter-finals, the Spanish club announced on Friday.

"Tests on Friday morning have revealed that Pedri has ruptured the femoral biceps in his left hamstring," Barca said.

"It means he will be unavailable for selection until he recovers from the injury."

According to Catalan media, the 19-year-old Spain international will likely be out for at least one month.

Pedri sustained the injury at the end of the first-half of the shock 3-2 defeat to Frankfurt, manager Xavi



replacing him with Frenkie de Jong for the second-half.

"The journey in two years, we were talking about relegation, and now we're talking about getting to the semi-final of a European tournament. It's fabulous, and we're all going to look forward to it," said West Ham manager David Moyes.

RANGERS THROUGH IN ET

There was drama in Glasgow as Rangers were taken to extra time by Braga before winning 3-1 on the night and 3-2 on aggregate as the Portuguese side finished the game with nine men.

James Tavernier gave Rangers a second-minute lead to level the tie on aggregate, and they had another goal disallowed and then hit the woodwork before winning a penalty just before the interval.

Vitor Tormena was sent off for a foul on Kemar Roofe, and Tavernier netted from the spot.

David Carmo's 83rd-minute header took the tie to extra time, but Roofe's 101st-minute finish put Rangers back in front on aggregate and Braga then had Iuri Medeiros dismissed.

Rangers will now face Leipzig in their first European semi-final since reaching the 2008 UEFA Cup final.

French international Christopher Nkunku scored both goals as Leipzig beat Atalanta 2-0 in Italy to win their last-eight tie 3-1 on aggregate.

Nkunku opened the scoring in the 18th minute in Bergamo and then added a late penalty, his 30th goal of the season in all competitions.

AS Roma set up Leicester semi



AP ■ LONDON

Leicester battled back to beat PSV Eindhoven 2-1 on Thursday in the Europa Conference League to reach a European semi-final for the first time in their history, where they will face Jose Mourinho's Roma.

After a goalless draw in the first leg in England last week, PSV took the lead in the quarter-final tie through Éran Zahavi.

But late goals from James Maddison and Ricardo Pereira sent Brendan Rodgers' Premier League side through and stunned the Philips Stadion crowd.

Leicester will play Roma for a place in the final in Tirana on May 25, after the Serie A side

overturned a 2-1 first-leg deficit against Norwegians Bodo/Glimt with a 4-0 thrashing.

"We are a team that is so young in European football," Leicester manager Rodgers told *BT Sport*.

"PSV have an incredible history in Europe and for us we are so young — these are great experiences for us and I am so happy for the players."

PSV did forge ahead shortly afterwards the first 25 minutes

Goetze intercepted Youri Tielemans' loose pass just outside the Leicester box, before laying the ball off for Zahavi to drill a fine strike into the bottom corner.

The visitors pressed in the second half but had to wait until

the 77th minute to equalise.

Substitute Ayoze Pérez did brilliantly to get to the byline and pull the ball back for Maddison, who picked out the roof of the net to score for the 14th time this season.

A PSV fan threw a cup at the celebrating Leicester players, before a two-minute delay.

The Foxes completed their comeback with just two minutes of normal time remaining, as Pereira pounced on a rebound after Patson Daka's shot was saved.

ROMA THROUGH

Nicolò Zaniolo scored a brilliant hat-trick as Roma cruised past Bodo/Glimt at the Stadio Olimpico to win 5-2 on aggregate.

It was revenge for the capital club after an embarrassing 6-1 thumping by Bodo/Glimt in the group stage and the defeat last week in an ill-tempered clash.

England striker Tammy Abraham gave Roma the perfect start with his 24th goal of the season in the fifth minute.

Zaniolo scored three excellent finishes with his left foot, all coming at the end of sweeping moves from the home side.

Marseille also booked their place in the last four as Dimitri Payet scored for the second time in the tie — a 1-0 victory over PAOK in Greece sealing a 3-1 aggregate success.

Marseille may have to play the home leg of their semi-final behind closed doors after UEFA opened an investigation into violence before last week's first leg.

The Ligue 1 club will take on Feyenoord in the semis, after the Dutch outfit won 3-1 against Slavia Prague in the Czech capital after a 3-3 first-leg draw, with Cyriel Dessers netting twice.



AP ■ MONACO

Third-ranked Alexander Zverev beat Pablo Carreño Busta 6-2, 7-5 at the Monte Carlo Masters to reach the quarter-finals of the clay-court season opener in Monaco.

Carreño Busta broke Zverev to open the second set and built a 3-1 lead before the German rallied, setting up a quarterfinal match against Jannik Sinner.

Defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas advanced by beating Laslo Djere 7-5, 7-6 (1). The fifth-ranked Greek will meet Diego Schwartzman of Argentina in the quarter-



finals.

Sinner beat eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev 5-7, 6-1, 6-3 to advance, winning six straight games in the second set and dominating the decider before wrapping it up with his seventh break.

"I tried to win every

Liverpool face Man City in FA Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool will put their unprecendented quadruple bid on the line against treble-chasing Manchester City on Saturday in an FA Cup semi-final that will make or break one club's dream of football immortality.

Jürgen Klopp's men are in contention to become the first English team to win all four major trophies in one season.

They lifted the League Cup in February and advanced to the last four of the Champions League after surviving a late scare in their quarter-final second leg against Benfica on Wednesday.

With Liverpool expected to see off Spanish side Villarreal in the semi-finals of Europe's elite club competition, it is Premier League leaders City who will provide the major obstacle to their ambitions.

City are just one point ahead of their title rivals in the Premier League with seven games left after

last weekend's 2-2 draw.

Pep Guardiola's team are also in the hunt for the Champions League crown and could face Liverpool in the final if they beat Real Madrid in the semis.

City have a rare feat of their own to aim for as they seek to become only the second English side to win the prized treble of the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup.

The grand goals of both City and Liverpool mean the stakes could not be higher when they clash for the second time within a week, this time at Wembley for a place in the FA Cup final.

One team will leave the national stadium on a high, the other having to quickly refocus.

Having closed the gap to City from a 14-point margin in January, Liverpool are living up to Klopp's desire to be as "annoying as possible" to the Premier League champions.

Their two league meetings

this season both ended in 2-2 draws and it could take extra-time and penalties to separate them this weekend.

As Klopp concedes, Liverpool were slightly fortunate to escape the Etihad Stadium unscathed last Sunday but they could have a significant advantage for the rematch.

Klopp was able to start with Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mané and Virgil van Dijk on the bench for Wednesday's 3-3 draw against Benfica, keeping his three key players fresh for the latest City showdown.

In contrast, City were left battered and bruised after an ill-tempered 0-0 draw against Atletico Madrid in their Champions League quarter-final second leg.

Although City progressed to the last four, Guardiola said they are in "big trouble" after Kevin De Bruyne and Kyle Walker limped off injured and Phil Foden finished the game with a bandaged head.

Burnley sack manager Dyche

AP ■ BURNLEY

Relegation-threatened Premier League club Burnley on Friday announced they had sacked long-serving manager Sean Dyche.

The Clarets are 18th in the Premier League, four points adrift of safety having won only four matches all season. "Results this season have been disappointing and, while this was an incredibly difficult decision, with eight crucial games of the campaign remaining, we feel a change is needed to give the squad the best possible chance of retaining its Premier League status," chairman Alan Pace said in a statement.

The 50-year-old Dyche, who signed a new contract due to run until 2025 in September, had been the longest-serving manager of any club in the Premier League, having taken charge in October 2012.



He twice led the Clarets to promotion and brought European football to Turf Moor in 2018 despite a limited budget, but his side have been in the bottom three virtually all season and last week's 2-0 defeat at fellow strugglers Norwich was a major setback in their survival bid.

Latest face-off with BAI could well end Saina's 'India' journey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saina Nehwal's decision to skip the selection trials for the CWG and the Asian Games could well be the beginning of an end to what has been an illustrious journey in international badminton for more than a decade and half.

A former world No 1, Saina has been the torch-bearer of women's badminton in the international arena, having represented the country thrice at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (2018), New Delhi (2010) and Melbourne (2006).

While there shouldn't be an iota of doubt that the Hisar-born shuttler can still work her magic with some stunning performances in the professional circuit but her reluctance to appear for BAI trials could well end her chances of representing the flag at multi-discipline

events like CWG, Asiad, Olympics and Uber Cup.

A two-time Commonwealth Games Gold medallist, Saina did harbour hopes of defending her title at Birmingham but call it a hasty decision or a miscommunication, the dream is now looking like a distant one.

On Thursday, an upset Saina took to Twitter to slam the Badminton Association of India for not responding to her e-mail, also questioning the logic behind hosting the trials.

The federation, however, has maintained radio silence, indicating that the transition phase in women's singles has started and the focus from now on will be solely on the younger crop of players, allowing them to showcase their talent at the international stage.

"She has achieved a lot for the country but in the last two

years, she hasn't done anything worth mentioning. She has also not been able to sort out her injury issues," a former coach said.

"It is tough to play at the international level with consistent niggles, so she needs to accept it and shouldn't get hyper over these issues. No one can deny her contribution to the game but I don't want to see her being so bitter about it," the acclaimed coach said.

BAI seems to have set the wheels of change into motion when they called for the selection trials on April 2 to pick teams for Commonwealth Games, Thomas and Uber Cup and Asian Games.

While the top 15 players were exempted from the trials, the rest of the top Indian players, including Tokyo Olympian B Sai Praneth and three-time CWG medallist Ashwini

Ponnappa, who are ranked from 16 to 50, agreed to participate in the trials which began here on Friday.

But Saina, who is currently ranked 23rd, pulled out as she didn't want her body to go through the rigours since she had just returned after playing three-back-to-back events in Europe and Asian Championships is set to begin on April 26.

Saina's reasons are valid as she hasn't been in the best physical shape of late. Recurring injuries played its part in delaying her return to peak fitness and it showed in the results as she made early exits from a series of tournaments.

The 32-year-old did show signs of her old self during her narrow three-game loss to Japan's world No 2 Akane Yamaguchi in the opening



BAI SEEMS TO HAVE SET THE WHEELS OF CHANGE INTO MOTION WHEN THEY CALLED FOR THE SELECTION TRIALS ON APRIL 2 TO PICK TEAMS FOR COMMONWEALTH GAMES, THOMAS AND UBER CUP AND ASIAN GAMES.

round of All England Championships.

Saina is still finding her way back and doesn't want to go through the rigours of playing 6-7 matches in the trials.

But it is understood that BAI doesn't want to make any concession for the London Games Bronze medallist and made it clear that participation in the trials is a must to be selected for the big-ticket team events.

"She could have taken it as just another week-long tournament and played. I understand two-week time is not ideal but where is the window in a crammed schedule?," the former coach said.

"It is a new administration and I don't think they are being unfair by hosting the trials," he added.

Saina's decision to play India Open in January without achieving full fitness also backfired as she suffered a straight-game loss to fast-rising Malvika Bansod.

This along with her recent poor show raised doubts on

her ability of ensuring a medal at the multi-discipline games.

On the other, BAI, also, is eager to blood in the next generation of players — the Malvika Bansods, Akarshi Kashyaps and Tasnim Mirs, who are waiting in the wings and are all almost in the same level.

While Saina might not walk on to the court in team championships anymore, but her journey in international badminton is far from over.

"Make no mistakes, she can still be a formidable player. Now she should concentrate on the open events, and if she is pain free, she can still play well," the former coach added.

"She had a decent performance in the first round of the All England championship against Akane and it shows that she still has the hunger in her."

3rd win in a row for SRH

Mumbai Indians search 1st win of IPL 2022

points table

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	GT	5	4	1	0	8	0.450
2.	RR	5	3	2	0	6	0.389
3.	PBKS	5	3	2	0	6	0.239
4.	KKR	6	3	3	0	6	0.223
5.	LSG	5	3	2	0	6	0.174
6.	RCB	5	3	2	0	6	0.006
7.	SRH	5	3	2	0	6	-0.196
8.	DC	4	2	2	0	4	0.476
9.	CSK	5	1	4	0	2	-0.745
10.	MI	5	0	5	0	0	-1.072

boundary meter

4s	703
6s	383

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rahul Tripathi and Aiden Markram's effortless batting display along with the pacers magnificent show formed the cornerstone of Sunrisers Hyderabad's comfortable seven-wicket victory over Kolkata Knight Riders in their IPL match here on Friday.

The SRH pace unit comprising the likes of T Natarajan (3/37), Umrans Malik (2/27), Marco Jansen (1/26) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (1/37) restricted KKR for 175 for 8.

Tripathi, who smashed 71 off 37, and Aiden Markram (68 not out of 36) then produced hostile knocks to take SRH to their third successive win with 13 balls to spare.

For KKR, Nitish Rana scored 54 while Andre Russell was unbeaten on 49.

SRH now have three wins from five games while it was KKR's third loss in six games.



With the green track not aiding the spinners, Sunrisers' Tripathi took the KKR's spin-heavy bowling unit to the cleaners.

Playing against his previous franchise, Tripathi smashed Varun Chakravarthy for a four followed by two back-to-back sixes in the eighth over, that yielded 18 runs. He brought his maiden fifty this season off just 21 balls.

Tripathi found an able ally in Markram, who smashed six fours and four sixes and when the former was out he took the onus upon himself to take his side over the line.

Earlier opting to field, South African Jansen used the bounce and swing on offer really well to draw first blood as he sent Aaron Finch (7), who is playing his first match of the season,

back to the hut in the second over. Natarajan then bowled a sensational fifth over, snaring two wickets.

Natarajan first bowled a brilliant length ball, pitching just outside off to account for Venkatesh Iyer (6), who looked unsettled during his stay, with the flamboyant Sunil Narine (6) following his teammate a couple balls later as KKR slumped to 31 for 3.

Kane Williamson introduced spin but left-armers Jagadeesha Suchith (1/32) looked rusty and struggled with his line.

Young Malik then struck twin blows, snapping the wickets of Shreyas Iyer (28) in the 10th over and Sheldon Jackson (7).

Noticing Iyer, who looked uncomfortable facing Malik's raw pace, shuf-

fling across the pitch, the 22-year-old fired a scorching 148.8kmph yorker in the blockhole to cut short the Knight Riders captain's innings.

However, Rana kept the score board ticking, hitting singles and boundaries alike in his 36-ball knock.

Rana smashed six fours and two maximums. He was involved in 39-run stands with skipper Iyer and Russell each.

However, his stay in the middle was cut short by Natarajan in the 18th over as SRH broke the potentially dangerous partnership.

Russell, whose 25-ball innings was laced with four boundaries and as many six, including two in the final over. The West Indian helped KKR add 55 runs in the last five overs.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

An auction botched up by poor planning, Mumbai Indians will continue to grope in the dark in search of an ideal playing eleven with an aim to end their five-match losing streak against Lucknow Super Giants in an IPL match on Saturday.

This is not the first time that MI have had a losing streak of five matches but this is probably the first time that it seems that the team's think-tank do not have an idea of how to stem the rot that has set in.

It is certainly not skipper Rohit Sharma's fault that the five-time champions had bungled big time at the auction table with below-par domestic signings save NT Tilak Varma, which is coming to bite them.

Against Lucknow in the afternoon Mumbai heat, Rohit and his chosen ten would have to put their best foot forward in order to tame the likes of Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul, Krunal Pandya, Ayush Badoni to name a few.

Krunal and De Kock, in particular, would like to pose some serious challenges for the MI brigade and may be compel them to think whether not putting enough efforts to get them back in their roster was a prudent enough thing to do.

There had been some inexplicable team selections and dropping a million dollar plus buy like Tim David after two games is one of them.

Such has been MI's plight that they haven't been able to field their full quota of foreign players in order to have enough bowlers in their ranks.

However, David might be given a go in place of a Jaydev Unadkat, who has once again come short in the highest level of cricket and is an example of the yawning gap between standards in domestic cricket and IPL.

One among Unadkat and Basil Thampi need to make way for David as they don't have too many options at the table.

In case of Murugan Ashwin, the only plausible replacement at this time looks to be leg-spinner Mayank Markande, who not so many moons back had some decent performances for the five-time champion outfit.



Not having a quality spinner like Rahul Chahar or Krunal, who can at times stem the flow of runs is also hurting MI.

Head coach Mahela Jayawardene had already said and rightly so that Rohit's performance isn't a worrying factor.

One of the reasons being his touch which is not out of place but perhaps he needs to curtail down on a few shots and bat deep along with Suryakumar Yadav to put up a challenging score which the weak bowling line-up can defend.

For Lucknow, mentor and brains behind the strategy Gautam Gambhir needs to think whether both Marcus Stoinis and Jason Holder could be a part of same eleven or they would be better off dropping one of them and playing the hard-hitting Evin Lewis in the top-order alongside Rahul and De kock.

Deepak Chahar ruled out of IPL, DC physio tests positive for COVID-19



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Chennai Super Kings all-rounder Deepak Chahar was on Friday ruled out of the IPL with a back injury, while Delhi Capitals physio Patrick Farhart tested positive for COVID-19.

Chahar had also suffered a hamstring injury during the home series against the West Indies in February.

KKR pacer Rasikh Salam is also out of the IPL with a lower back injury with young Delhi pacer Harshit Rana named as

his replacement.

"Chennai Super Kings bowler Deepak Chahar has been ruled out of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2022 owing to a back injury," said the IPL in a statement.

"Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have signed fast bowler Harshit Rana as a replacement for pacer Rasikh Salam for the rest of the TATA IPL 2022 season. Salam, who played 2 games for KKR this season, has been ruled out owing to a lower back injury and will take no further part in the tournament.

"His replacement, Harshit Rana, from Delhi will join KKR at his base price of INR 20 Lakh."

On Farhart, a former physio of the Indian cricket team, the statement added: "Delhi Capitals physio Patrick Farhart has been tested positive for COVID-19. He is being closely monitored by the DC Medical Team at the moment."

With cases gradually rising, COVID threat has increased during the two-month-long IPL.

Last year, the tournament had to be suspended at the peak of the second wave in May and was later completed in the UAE.

RCB need Harshal boost to get campaign back on track against DC



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Their winning streak halted by the defending champions, Royal Challengers Bangalore will hope Harshal Patel returns to the playing XI and contribute in bringing their campaign back on track when they face Delhi Capitals in an IPL match here on Saturday.

RCB were flying high with three successive wins before Chennai Super Kings outwitted them by 23 runs in their last outing. It was absence of Harshal which hurt the team as skipper Faf du Plessis looked out of options to control the rampaging duo of Shivam Dube and Robin Uthappa, who took the bowlers to the cleaners as CSK posted

a huge total on board.

Known for his variations and death bowling skills, Harshal is a vital cog in RCB's wheels and Du Plessis had admitted that the team missed his services after he left the bio-bubble on Sunday following the death of his cousin.

The 31-year-old from Haryana, who had taken 32 wickets in the 2021 edition, has emerged as one of the best T20 bowlers with his variations, which include off-cutters and slower ones, bowled with variable arm speed.

This season too, Harshal has snapped six wickets from four games at an economy of just 5.50 and remains the go-to-man for du Plessis whenever the going gets tough.

Among others, pace duo of Mohammad

Siraj and Akash Deep has been taken for runs, while Wanindu Hasaranga claimed two wickets but he bled 35 in three overs in the last match.

Spin duo of Glenn Maxwell and Shahbaz too was blown away and skipper Du Plessis will expect a better show from his bowlers on Saturday.

In batting, Du Plessis and young left-hander Anuj Rawat have given the team good starts, while Dinesh Karthik has played the role of the finisher well. Engineer-turned cricketer Shahbaz Ahmed too has impressed with his batting so far.

Former skipper Virat Kohli has blown hot and cold with two 40 plus scores but lacked consistency.

The Capitals, on the other hand, are heading into the match after a massive 44-run win over Kolkata Knight Riders.

With two back-to-back fifties, opener Prithvi Shaw has been in sensational form, while seasoned Australian opener David Warner has provided the team solidity at the top as he provided the fireworks to set DC's massive win over KKR.

The number three spot, however, remains a concern with none of the batter tried by the team able to grab the chance. Skipper Rishabh Pant too will expect more runs from his batting.

Spinner Kuldeep Yadav has emerged as their top bowler with 10 wickets so far, while pacer Khaleel Ahmed too has taken seven scalps in three games.

South African Anrich Nortje, who looked rusty in his only outing, also remains an option, while Delhi also have plenty of bowling all-rounders such as Axar Patel, Shardul Thakur and Lalit Yadav to count on.

However, Rowman Powell has looked subdued so far and DC would expect more from him.



Hardik has kept amazing team environment: Rashid

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Hardik Pandya has been leading from the front with inspirational performances and is also going out of his way to create a happy team environment leading to a good start by Gujarat Titans in its maiden IPL campaign, feels Rashid Khan.

Gujarat are now on top of the table with four wins from five games and Hardik is currently second in list of run-getters and is also bowling well in every game.

"The way he (Hardik) has led the team, the way he has kept the team environment, inside and outside the field has been amazing so far," Rashid said at the virtual post-match press conference.

Rashid, the ace spinner

from Afghanistan, said Hardik was someone who always takes brave decisions.

"He (Hardik) is someone who always takes that brave decision, always has confidence and he is someone who is very clear in mind on what he is going to do.

"This is an important thing as a captain when your mind is clear, and you take right decisions, the result will take (care) by itself," added Rashid.

Ability to take right decisions at right time makes him a good leader, feels Rashid.

"You take right decisions with confidence, that is something which makes him the best and he has been delivering the best so far and leading from the front - (be it) batting, bowling and fielding," said Rashid.

Root resigns as England Test captain

AP ■ LONDON

Joe Root resigned as England's Test captain on Friday after a five-year term that ended in a torrid run of results including an Ashes drubbing and defeat in the West Indies.

The Yorkshireman, appointed as Alastair Cook's successor in 2017, holds the record for the highest number of wins as England skipper, his 27 victories putting him one ahead of Michael Vaughan and three in front of Cook and Andrew Strauss.

The 31-year-old led his side to a number of notable series victories, including a 4-1 home win over India in 2018 and a 3-1 triumph away to South Africa in 2020.

But the past 12 months have been dismal. After winning their opening three Tests of 2021, England have won just one since,

losing 11 and drawing five of their past 17.

Root's decision comes after the 1-0 Test series defeat to West Indies last month, which followed a humiliating 4-0 Ashes loss in Australia.

"After returning from the Caribbean tour and having time to reflect, I have decided to step down as England men's Test captain," Root said in a statement released by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

"It has been the most challenging decision I have had to make in my career but having discussed



this with my family and those closest to me, I know the timing is right.

"I am immensely proud to have captained my country and will look back on the past five years with enormous pride. It has been an honour to have done the job and to have been a custodian of what is the pinnacle of English cricket.

"I have loved leading my country, but recently it's hit home how much of a toll it has taken on me and the impact it has had on me away from the game."

Root is already England's second-highest Test run scorer of all

Mithali to play in Women's Sr T20 Trophy



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Speculations rife about her international future, India's Test and ODI skipper Mithali Raj will be turning up for Railways at the Women's Senior T20 Trophy beginning on April 18 in what will be her first competitive event since the Women's World Cup.

The future of stalwarts Mithali and Jhulan Goswami have been a subject of debate since

India's early exit from the World Cup in New Zealand last month.

While Jhulan is recovering from a side strain that she suffered during the global event, Mithali will groom the next generation of players in the Railways squad. Both are 39 and are at the business end of their illustrious careers.

"Mithali will be there to guide the younger players. As a senior player, she understands her role really well. Anyway, she never misses domestic assignments when not on national duty," a BCCI source said.

Mithali, who is the leading run-getter in international cricket, had captained the Railways team to the title in the T20 competition last year. Her international T20 career came to an end in 2019.

As far as her ODI and Test future is concerned, the source added: "There is no international cricket lined up in the near future. She has a lot of time to think over her future."

India's next confirmed international assignment is in September when they play three T20s and as many ODIs in England after the Commonwealth Games in July-August.