

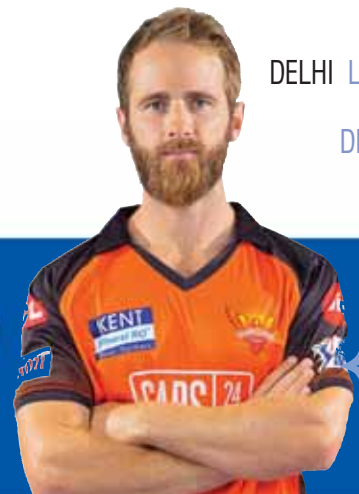
OPINION 6
ADVENT OF DUAL
DEGREE SYSTEM**WORLD 8**
PAK SLIDING TOWARDS CIVIL
UNREST, WARNS CHAUDHRY**MONEY 10**
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Edgy calm in Jahangirpuri day after clash, 20 held

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

A day after clashes broke out during a Hanuman Janmotsav procession in the national Capital's Jahangirpuri, an uneasy calm prevailed in the area on Sunday. 20 people, including two juveniles, have been taken into custody.

The police said the arrested people include a 21-year-old man who allegedly fired a bullet that hit a sub-inspector. The police said the situation is now under control and an adequate police force is deployed there to avert any untoward incident.

The Delhi Police has arrested 35-year-old man named Ansar, a resident of Jahangirpuri, who was involved in conspiring the communal clashes. Ansar was arrested after his name came up during the investigation of the clashes, said the police.

In order to maintain the law and order situation, area domination, foot patrolling, and deep deployment were carried out by the police. Since Sunday morning, the police used drones in communally sensitive areas to carry out intensive rooftop surveillance through aerial patrolling.

On Sunday, senior police officials held a meeting with members of Aman (peace) committees and asked them to appeal to the people to main-



Rapid Action Force personnel keep vigil after clashes broke out between two communities during a Hanuman Janmotsav procession on Saturday, at Jahangirpuri in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

tain peace in their area. Usha Rangnani, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest, held a meeting with the members of the Aman Committee of Jahangirpuri, Mahendra Park, and Adarsh Nagar.

"During the meeting, all the members were asked to appeal to the public in their areas to maintain peace, har-

mony, and tranquility. They were assured of a professional and fair investigation and due legal action on the part of the police," said the DCP.

The Delhi Police has beefed up security in and around C and D blocks near the mosque. Barricades have been put up and police personnel deployed every 200 metres. Despite this, shops

around the mosque were shut, but shops and markets near the Jahangirpuri metro station were functioning as usual on Sunday. According to Deependra Pathak, the Special Commissioner of Police, Law and Order-Zone 1, efforts are being made to identify other accused through CCTV and other video footage.

Continued on Page 2

Huge rise in number of people reporting Covid in Delhi-NCR

Survey: Covid-19 network prevalence marked over 500% hike in last 15 days

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid threat of the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, a survey has claimed a 500 per cent increase in the number of people in Delhi-NCR reporting cases of Covid-19 infection to someone on their nearest social network in the last 15 days.

Around 19 per cent of Delhi-NCR residents in response to a survey disclosed that they have one or more persons in their close network who have contracted Covid-19 in the last 15 days.

The survey result is in line with the national Capital witnessing a sudden surge in the Covid cases. Delhi on Saturday recorded 461 fresh Covid-19 cases — 5.33 per cent of all who were tested — and two deaths, according to the data shared by the Delhi Government health department.

The survey, conducted by social media platform LocalCircles, claimed that the "Covid network prevalence" marked an over 500 per cent increase in the last 15 days.

The survey asked residents of Delhi to respond on "how many individuals (including children) do you have in your



close social network (family, friends, neighbours, colleagues) in Delhi-NCR that have had Covid in the last 15 days?" This question in the survey received 11,743 responses.

The majority, 70 per cent of Delhi residents said "no one in the last 15 days". Breaking down the poll, 11 per cent said "1 or 2", and 8 per cent said "3-5" while 11 per cent could not say. The findings indicate that 19 per cent of residents of Delhi-NCR say they have 1 or more individuals in their close social network who has had Covid in the last 15 days, according to the survey.

A similar question asked on April 2 found that only three per cent of residents had someone in their close social network infected with Covid in the last 15 days.

Around 67 per cent of the respondents were men, and 33 per cent were women, said LocalCircles.

It claimed that the survey was conducted among only validated citizens, who had to be registered with LocalCircles to participate in the survey.

In another survey, LocalCircles claimed that maintaining social distancing and wearing masks diligently prevented eight out of 10 families in India from getting infected with Covid.

The survey has received over 29,000 responses from citizens across 345 districts of India. It also claimed that the survey showed 57 per cent of Indian families had one or more individuals testing Covid positive in the last two years.

CAPSULE

ASSAM CONG'S EX-CHIEF RIPUN BORA JOINS TMC

Kolkata: Former Assam Congress president Ripun Bora on Sunday joined the TMC in the presence of party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee here. Reacting to the development, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that it is natural for ex-MP Ripun Bora to resign from the Congress after MLAs of his own party "worked for his defeat" in last month's Rajya Sabha election.

AIMIM URGES AZAM KHAN TO JOIN PARTY

Prayagraj: Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM has urged Samajwadi Party leader and former Uttar Pradesh Minister Azam Khan to join the party, days after a close aide of the leader accused the Samajwadi Party of ignoring him.

CLASHES ERUPT AT JERUSALEM HOLY SITE

Jerusalem: Israeli police on Sunday entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City to secure the way for Jewish visitors to the flashpoint holy site, fuelling clashes that left 17 Palestinians wounded, as per Palestinian medical workers.

RIISING ATTACK MAY END TALK SCOPE: ZELENSKYY

Kyiv: The continuing siege of the port city of Mariupol, which has come at a horrific cost to trapped and starving civilians, could scuttle attempts to negotiate an end to the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told his country's journalists in an interview.

Mob attacks temple, cops in Hubballi over social media post



Security personnel detain people, after incidents of stone throwing in some areas of Old Hubballi late on Saturday evening, in Hubballi district on Sunday

PTI

PTI ■ HUBBALLI/HARIDWAR

Incidents of communal flare-up during Hanuman Janmotsav processions were reported from Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand while a mob went on a rampage, attacking police, a hospital and a temple in Hubballi in Karnataka over a social media post on Sunday.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 have been clamped in Hubballi city in Karnataka

and 40 people arrested after the violence that left 12 police personnel injured.

According to Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner Labhu Ram, a police complaint had been lodged on an objectionable social media post after which a person was arrested. Not satisfied with the action, some people gathered around the police station but were persuaded to disperse.

Continued on Page 2

Commuters stare at hardship as auto, taxi drivers in Capital on strike today over fare hike call

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters in Delhi are likely to face problems as several unions of auto, taxi and minibus drivers have decided to go on strike on Monday over their demand to raise fares in view of the increasing fuel prices.

The AAP Government on Friday had announced setting up a committee for considering a revision of auto and taxi fares in a time-bound manner. Majority of the unions have said they will be on a one-day strike, but the Sarvodaya Driver Association, Delhi, comprising drivers for cab aggregators, said it will go on an "indefinite" strike from Monday.

"We have decided to go on an indefinite strike from Monday in view of no action by the Government to help us by slashing prices of fuels and revising fares," Kamaljeet Gill, president of the Sarvodaya Driver Association said on Sunday.

General secretary of the Delhi Auto Rickshaw Sangh



Rajendra Soni said the "unprecedented" hike in rates of CNG has taken a toll on auto and cab drivers. "We know that the Delhi Government is forming some committee, but we need solutions to our problems which are not in sight. We are demanding that the Government (Centre and Delhi) provide ₹35 per kg subsidy on CNG prices," he said. Hundreds of auto, taxi, and cab drivers staged a protest at the Delhi Secretariat recently demanding subsidy on CNG prices. We cannot keep plying our autos and cabs bearing losses every day as the CNG prices are galloping. This is a symbolic protest to oppose the price hike," Soni said.

Continued on Page 2

Forced to flee Ukraine, students urge Govt to let them finish MBBS in India

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A group of students who were forced to return from the war-ravaged Ukraine to India gathered along with their parents at Jantar Mantar on Sunday to press their demand for their admission to Indian medical institutes.

Around 300 parents and students from across the nation under the Parents Association of Ukraine MBBS Students (PAUMS) asked the Government to ensure the enrollment of the evacuees in the Indian institutes to complete their education.

PAUMS president RB Gupta told the media persons that the Government was planning to admit these students in Poland, Hungary and European countries where the fees are much higher and more or less similar to Indian private med-



Students who returned from Ukraine gather along with their parents at Delhi's Jantar Mantar demanding admission to Indian institutions

ANI

ical colleges. "We all are from middle-class families who can't afford the fees. So we gathered here to request Prime Minister Narendra Modi that these children should be accommodated in Indian medical colleges," he said.

He said the Government should save their children's

careers the way they saved their lives and brought them back from Ukraine.

Gupta said that the parents' association also went to meet National Medical Council Chairman Sanjeev Sharma last week. "He assured us that once Government allows, the council will adjust the children,"

Gupta said.

A majority of the Indian students who were forced to leave Ukraine were pursuing the MBBS course.

Earlier, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had requested the Prime Minister to assist students who had returned to Bengal from Ukraine. She had requested the Prime Minister to guarantee that these students may enrol in Indian universities and finish their medical studies.

The National Medical Commission, in a notification issued on March 4, had said that foreign medical graduates whose internships were pending due to compelling situations, like war, are eligible to complete the remaining part of their internship in India, but there are no directions for those in the initial years of their courses.

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Yogi: Public participation must for ‘Clean Ganga’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Describing the river Ganga as the country's ‘culture, heritage and identity’, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, urged the people to participate in maintaining the purity of the river and keeping it clean.

While addressing the national workers' conference of Ganga Samagra at a private school, Yogi Adityanath said, “River Ganga has an extreme social, economic and spiritual significance. Even as the ambitious Namami Gange project has so far given some encouraging results as far as cleanliness of Ganga is concerned, greater awareness and public participation is a must to realise the goal.”

Emphasising that Uttar Pradesh has a major role towards ensuring the cleanliness of river Ganga, the chief minister said, “During its 2550-km journey across India, the Ganga covers the maximum distance – 1155 km – in Uttar Pradesh. River Ganga has not only made our land fertile and living easier, but is also the most important factor behind the state having immense resources.”

The chief minister said it was a matter of great concern and disappointment to see the river in such a bad shape in Kanpur. “This has hurt both the faith and the economy of the state. So the real challenge is to clean it up in Kanpur where a huge amount of industrial waste is draining into it,”

he said, and added, “Due to the dedicated efforts today, the Sisamau drain, the largest drain falling into the Ganga, has been converted into a ‘selfie point’.”

Explaining its relevance as the lifeline for central India, the chief minister said the fertile Gangetic plains were feeding the nation. “The state government is taking every possible step to ensure the cleanliness of the Ganga. Public participation is also essential in this resolve. We have to prevent dirty drains from falling into the Ganga through the cities and villages. If we work with commitment by setting goals, then Ganga will become an example in the country and the world,” he said.

Maintaining that his gov-

ernment was working relentlessly to maintain the cleanliness and purity of the river, Yogi said, “In UP, regarding the measures that were to be taken to stop all the sewerage or industrial waste flows, we have completed 25 out of 46 works, 19 are in progress, work on two is going on at a war-footing in a time-bound manner.”

He also urged the people to give up the mentality to harm the river and give up the practices of disposing of dead bodies, dead animals, waste and plastic in the Ganga. “It is our moral responsibility and resolve to keep all the tributaries that connect with the Ganges clean,” he added.

The chief minister said that through the formation of Ganga committees in all 75 dis-

tricts of UP, at both state and district levels the work to ensure no solid waste was disposed into the rivers and the banks of the rivers remained defecation free was being done.

He added that the Uttar Pradesh government had the biggest responsibility in the successful implementation of the Namami Gange project. “The (Uttar Pradesh) government is executing all the plans with full commitment,” he added.

He said that for the first time millions of devotees at the Prayagraj Kumbh had clean, clear and pure water in the Ganga because of the government's unceasing efforts.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday met about 200 complainants

during Janata Darshan at Hindu Sevashram in Gorakhpur.

During this, the chief minister also talked to the complainants about the problems and assured them of solutions. The officers concerned were directed to dispose of the complaints.

Before this, during the morning visit to Gorakhnath temple, Yogi Adityanath stayed amongst the cows in the cowshed and fed them jaggery. After returning from Janata Darbar, he also met Kalu and Gullu (pet dogs) and fed them biscuits.

The chief minister directed timely completion of projects, and asked officers to stay at night at places of their posting.

Delhi Metro augmenting capacity of Mukundpur Depot

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to cater the additional requirements of two of its upcoming Phase 4 corridors such as Majlis Park to Maijpur (Extension of Pink Line) and Janakpuri West to R K Ashram Marg (Extension of Magenta Line), the Delhi Metro is augmenting the capacity of its Mukundpur Depot.

A senior DMRC official said that the metro authorities has decided not to acquire additional land for new depots for phase 4 sections. Rather, the existing depots are being expanded, he said.

“Some of the existing stabling lines in Mukundpur Depot will be further expanded and some new stabling lines

will be added to accommodate more trains for stabling and maintenance,” he said.

The Mukundpur depot currently has 24 stabling lines. Of these, 11 are being extended in length and will be used for stabling and maintenance of rolling stock of Pink Line, while the rest 13 stabling lines will cater to the needs of Magenta Line.

In addition, six new elevated stabling lines will come up at the already operational Majlis Park Metro Station (Pink Line).

The official said that these elevated stabling lines will reduce the burden on Depot and bring down the train induction time once the stabling lines become operational.

Complete construction works in time-bound manner: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed officials concerned to complete the construction works in a quality and time bound manner so that delay in projects does not result in unnecessary increase in expenditure.

Yogi Adityanath warned that the responsibility of the officer concerned would be fixed if the construction works were not completed on time and stern action would be taken against them.

The chief minister was reviewing the development works of the Gorakhpur division in a meeting held at the divisional commissionerate auditorium in Gorakhpur district on Sunday.

He made a district-wise detailed review of the progress of the development programmes, law and order and projects worth more than Rs 10 crore. On this occasion, Yogi provided financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh each from the chief minister's discretionary fund to two beneficiaries of Gayatrinagar, Gorakhpur.

The chief minister asked the officials to nominate a nodal officer for each project.

He said all preparations related to flood control should be completed before time and the sensitive dams should be repaired before the rainy season.

He said to avoid water-logging in the metropolis, cleaning of drains etc. should be done in time and regular monitoring of works should also be done.

The chief minister directed the officers to establish better communication with the public representatives and hold meetings with them at least once a month. He said the phones of public representatives should be properly attended and proper response should be given.

Yogi said it was the responsibility of all to live up to the trust of the people and the officers should be sensitive towards the public and solve their problems. “Everyone has the right to get justice. Therefore, the problems of the people should be resolved on the basis of merit. Also get feedback from the applicant through phone regarding the resolution of the problem,” the chief minister told the officials.

The chief minister said that there was great power in

inter-departmental coordination as it contributed a lot in controlling the problem of encephalitis. “Under the Mission Shakti programme, for the safety, respect and self-reliance of women, an inter-departmental joint team should make a weekly programme and solve the problems sensitively by setting up chaupals in gram panchayats,” he said.

Yogi said that all the officers should be present in the offices on time and ensure the resolution of public problems. He said a register of public problems should also be made, in which the status of the problems should be recorded and officers should take rest at night at their place of posting.

The chief minister said that under the ‘School Chalo Abhiyan’, it should be ensured that no child was deprived of education while creating village-wise awareness about education. He said every child must go to school, and should be provided uniform, shoes-stocking etc. He laid special emphasis on the beautification of schools under Operation Kayakalp, so that some innovation could be seen in the schools. He stressed on cleanliness and provision of pure

drinking water to avoid diseases.

The chief minister said that 75 ponds should be constructed in each municipal corporation and gram panchayat in the district and these ponds should be named ‘Amrit Sarovar’ under the Amrit Mahotsav.

The chief minister said that a playground and a manure pit for solid waste should be made in each gram panchayat, from which compost would be prepared. He said village secretariat should be established in every village and the problems of the villagers should be solved from there. He said that the schemes should be employment-oriented and there should be no complaint of irregularities in any scheme. He said if any complaint of irregularities was found, strict action should be taken against the official concerned. Giving instructions to conduct regular review of communicable disease control and Dastak Abhiyan, the chief minister said that division and district level review meetings must be held to resolve the problems of entrepreneurs and traders. He said that to get rid of the problem of traffic jams,

it was necessary to follow the traffic rules so that the traffic continued to operate smoothly. He gave instructions to the agencies concerned for speedy completion of the construction works of Gorakhpur-Sonauli, N a u s h a d - P a d l e g a n j, Gorakhpur-Varanasi roads.

While directing the collectorate and commissionerate to make integrated offices and promote tourism, the chief minister said that there were many possibilities of tourism in Gorakhpur division. He said that work should also be done for making smart villages like smart cities. He said street vendors should be systematically rehabilitated.

Yogi said along with the widening of roads, drainage and underground cabling should be arranged for drainage. He said basic facilities should be developed in Vantangiya village and Musahar dominated areas.

Reviewing the law and order situation, the chief minister said that strict legal action should be taken against criminals. He said arrangements should be made for sitting, drinking water etc. for the people coming to the police stations.

SDMC organises campaign against mosquito breeding

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Concerned over sporadic cases of vector borne diseases, South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) carried out a special campaign against mosquito breeding, sprayed insecticides on the banks of drains and water bodies.

The civic body has launched campaign from April 11 to 16, nearly 800 corporation employees ensured anti-larval spray even during gazetted holidays.

The SDMC issued 384 legal notices and lodged 104 prosecutions to stakeholder agencies after finding mosquito breeding at their premises.

With the rise in global temperature, breeding of mosquitoes has increased due to increase in high adult mosquito density like Culex mosquito.

A senior SDMC official said that the favourable weather condition, mosquito breeding is mainly detected

in stagnant water, pockets along edges of drains, water bodies, etc.

“The primary reason behind the increase in the breeding of mosquitoes at such sites is that the necessary works like hyacinth/floating material, desilting of drains and water bodies are yet to be done by the agencies authorised to ensure cleanliness of these sites,” he said.

Nearly 800 employees of the department ensured anti-larval spray on the banks of drains using motorized pumps, manual pitthu pumps or through other means, he said.

Major drains where insecticidal spray took place are Najafgarh cut drain, Raghuraj Nagar drain, Vidhya Marg drain, Indira Park drain, Sita Puri drain, Chhawla drain, Kanganheri drain, Rawta Jharoda Kalan drain, Roshan Garden drain, Sahabad Mohammadpur drain, Sector- 11 & 19 drains (Dwarka), Macchi Wala drain, Harswarop Colony drain, B-block drain at GK

and A-1 & A-2, Safdarjung Enclave drain, Agra Canal Colony Drain, NTPC drain, Abul Fazal drain, Jasola village drain, Taimoor Nagar drain, Anna Nagar & Pragati Maidan drains.

During the special campaign of ensuring anti-larval spray, 45 motorized pumps and 931 pitthu pumps were used thrice in a day. The SDMC employees also covered banks of the drains. Four power spray tankers were used twice in a day for spraying insecticides on the banks of major drains, he added.

The department organized a public awareness campaign requesting the land owning agencies to ensure cleanliness of the drains and water bodies falling under their jurisdiction.

During the week-long exercise, SDMC also issued 384 legal notices to various agencies and filed 104 prosecutions for either detecting mosquito breeding or finding water installations at premises.

Fire breaks out in Uphaar Cinema Hall

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fire broke out in Uphaar Cinema Hall, located near Green Park metro station, on Sunday morning after which five tenders were rushed to the spot. No injuries have been reported in the fire that affected the theatre's balcony and a floor.

The blaze erupted in the seats/furniture and garbage in the cinema hall. It is the same cinema theatre that had witnessed a massive fire incident earlier on June 13, 1997, in which 59 people were killed and over 100 others were injured in the subsequent stampede.

According to fire department officials, the incident was reported at around 4.45 am after some of the wood-

en chairs, furniture and waste materials at ground floor and balcony inside the Uphaar Cinema theatre caught fire. “We received a call about the fire incident at 4.45 am in the morning and nine fire tenders rushed to the spot to douse the fire. The fire was doused within two hours by 7.15 am. There was no casualty or injuries,” said a fire department official. The abandoned hall has two floors.

The Uphaar Cinema situated in the heart of South Delhi's Green Park has been shut for more than 20 years. The cinema hall was shut in 1997 after a major fire broke out with nearly about 150 moviegoers trapped inside.

Real estate barons Gopal Ansal and Sushil Ansal, owners of the theatre, were found

guilty of causing death by negligence.

The cinema hall was shut in 1997 after the major fire broke out with nearly about 150 moviegoers trapped inside.

The Delhi High Court had earlier in February this year rejected the plea of the real estate barons for suspension of their seven-year jail term in the Uphaar Cinema evidence tampering case.

Earlier last year, the real estate barons and former court staff Dinesh Chand Sharma and two others — P P Batra and Anoop Singh Karayat — were awarded a seven-year jail term by a trial court and the sessions court had refused to suspend the sentence and release them on bail.

Parents protest against ‘arbitrary’ fee increase by private schools in Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A group of parents in Greater Noida (West) on Sunday staged a demonstration to protest the “arbitrary” hike in fees of private schools and took to polishing boots on the roadside in a symbolic gesture to highlight inflation.

Among those sitting on the road for polishing boots were parents who are professional chartered accountants, managers and engineers in private firms as they protested the “arbitrariness” of the schools in increasing the fees against the Fee Regulation Act norms.

The protest comes in the wake of an Uttar Pradesh gov-

ernment order earlier this month that allowed private schools to hike fee. The protestors said the problems of parents have increased a lot due to inflation and the hike in school fee is a double whammy for them.

They held the demonstration from 11 am under the banner of NCR Guardians' Association and Noida Extension Flat Owners Welfare Association (NEFWA). NCR Parents' Association President Sukhpal Singh Toor wondered what compelled the government that the “schools succumbed to the mafia”.

“When the Uttar Pradesh government had announced

before the elections that school fee would not increase this year, then why this order to increase the fee after the elections are over,” Toor said. NEFWA president Abhishek Kumar said the “arbitrariness” of schools is not ending.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, when the announcement of waiving school fee in private schools was announced in many states, a similar announcement was expected in UP also but nothing like that happened in the state, he said. “Schools collect full fee from parents despite running online classes while the school's by-laws say ‘no profit, no loss,’” Kumar said.

Hardship for commuters....

From Page 1

Vikash Katiyar, general secretary of the NCR Parents' Association, said some schools have increased the fee by adding the “building fee” to the tuition fee. “The cost of items of daily needs has increased so much in recent times, the entire budget of the common man's house has gone haywire and the school fee hike will further break his back,” Katiyar said. The protestors claimed that no action has been taken against any schools which have not adhered to laws that mandate such institutes to making public the account of their income and expenditure, sharing the details of the salary given to the teachers, etc.

Over 90,000 autos and more than 80,000 registered taxis are complementing the public transport system in the city. General secretary of STA Operators Ekta Manch, Shyamal Gola, said RTV buses, numbering around 10,000, will also be off the road in support of the demands to revise fares and bring down CNG prices.

The auto fares were last revised in 2019 while taxi fares were revised in 2013. The Delhi Government in June 2019 had notified new auto-rickshaw fares, effecting more than 18 per cent increase over prevailing rates and raising per kilometer charge from Rs 8 to Rs 9.5.

Edgy calm in Jahangirpuri

From Page 1

“Peace committee meetings were held today and police is also in touch with the prominent residents of the areas. The Aman Committee members gave assurances that they would maintain peace in their respective areas,” said the Special CP.

“Drones and facial recognition software are being used

to identify those involved in creating the ruckus. All mobile footage and CCTV cameras installed in and around the vicinity are being scanned to identify the culprits and trace them,” said the Special CP.

Locals living in C block said the participants of Hanuman Jayanti procession were chanting “Jai Shri Ram” and raising provocative slogans. “Some of the people forcibly entered the mosque and started tying saffron flags in its premises. They were threatening us with swords and even pelted stones. They were not from the area as here everyone knows each other despite any community and lives in peace,” said Shamsad, who lives near the mosque.

Wahid, a resident of C Block, said people in the procession were carrying weapons including gun, swords and sticks. A video of the incident, in which the members of yatra can be seen carrying swords and sticks, was also doing the rounds on social media.

Mob attacks temple....

From Page 1

Around midnight, a large number of people once again started gathering around the police station and indulged in heavy stone-pelting. About a dozen police officers have sustained injuries, the police said, adding several police vehicles, a nearby hospital and a Hanuman temple were damaged.

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai termed it an organised attack and said the State will not tolerate such incidents. He also appealed to the people to look at the incident from the law and order point of view.

“It was a pre-planned attack. The miscreants wanted to create Devara Jeevanahalli and Kadugondahalli like incident in Hubballi,” State Home Minister Araga Inanendra said. The minister was referring to the 2020 riot in Bengaluru where a mob set afire the residence of Congress MLA from Pulakeshi Nagar Assembly constituency R Akhanda Srinivas Murthy and his sister over a

social media post by his relative that was considered offensive by Muslims.

Denouncing Sunday's incident, former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy said, “For the past few days, the communal cauldron is boiling. It hurts everyone. It should not continue. The Hubballi incident shows that we have not learnt any lessons from the past,” he said.

Members of two communities clashed during a Hanuman Jayanti procession at Holagunda village in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday night, police sources said on Sunday.

When the procession reached a mosque in the village, the Jayanti organisers switched off the mike, in reverence to the Ramadan observation. But some devotees allegedly chanted ‘Jai Shri Ram’ slogans, they said.

Irked by this, some people started pelting stones at the procession and the other side retaliated, police said. Additional police force was deployed to prevent any untoward incident.

Yogi Govt's focus on welfare of weavers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Giving fresh focus on the welfare of weavers, the Yogi Adityanath Government 2.0, in consultation with experts, will implement the new Textile Policy 2022 in June.

Under the new policy, an investment of Rs 1,000 crore will be brought in five years. There will be provisions to promote power loom from solar energy. As many as 500 such power looms will be made operational and 100 handloom weavers will be benefitted by the Handlooms and Textiles department every year. Power looms will also be distributed to weavers.

The chief minister has directed officials to extend the benefits of the new policy as part of the promotion of the new scheme to be implemented by the department in the state in June. The benefits of the scheme

should reach the applicants in an expeditious manner to create maximum opportunities for the weavers, he directed.

The Yogi government aims that the weavers should get direct benefits of the schemes in the next five years. The government plans to connect weavers with new technology and schemes so that they may easily keep pace with technology while doing their work faster.

The government also envisages employment to one person from every family in the next five years. With this the economy of the state will become the number one economy of the country. In such a situation, under the new strategy of the department, the work is being done rapidly at the ground level.

According to the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, an action plan for the next 100 days has been prepared by the department.

Delhi witnesses 40.9 degrees C, 4 notches warmer

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital witnessed the maximum temperature of 40.9 degrees Celsius on Sunday, which was four notches warmer than the normal temperature for the season, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD data showed that the minimum temperature of 21.7 degrees Celsius was recorded at Delhi's base station, Safdarjung Observatory, which was normal for this time of the year.

The highest humidity recorded was 47 per cent at 8:30 A.M. in the morning and the lowest humidity recorded was 25 per cent at 5:30 in the evening on Sunday.

The weather stations at Ridge, Ayanagar, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura and Palam recorded maximum temperatures of 42.9 degrees Celsius, 41.6 degrees Celsius, 40.9 degrees Celsius, 41.4 degrees Celsius, 41.1 degrees Celsius and 41.5 degrees Celsius, respectively, stated the IMD data.

The IMD predicted that the heat wave spell in isolated pockets likely over north-west and central India during 17th-19th April, 2022.

“Reduction in rainfall intensity over South Peninsular India from 18th April and heavy rainfall spell likely to continue over Arunachal Pradesh and over Assam-Meghalaya on 17th, 19th, 20th and 21st April, 2022,” the IMD predicted.

Counter rumours, watch anti-socials, peace bodies told

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday held a meeting with members of Aman (peace) committees and asked them to appeal to the people to maintain peace in their area, a day after clashes broke out during a Hanuman Janmotsav procession in the city's Jahangirpuri area.

According to the police, a meeting was organised by Usha Rangnani, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest with the members of Aman Committee of Jahangirpuri, Mahendra Park and Adarsh Nagar to maintain peace in the area. "During the meeting, all the members were asked to appeal the public in their areas to maintain peace, harmony and tranquility. "They were assured of a professional and fair investigation and due legal action on the part of police," said the DCP.

The members of the Aman committees were also urged to counter any rumour, misinformation and asked to be vigilant towards the activities of any mischievous or anti-social elements, said the DCP, adding that they were also requested to keep in touch with the police and immediately report anything suspicious. Situation in Jahangirpuri area is fully under control. Adequate police force has been deployed in the area. Area domination, foot patrolling and deep deploy-



DCP North West at Kushal Chowk in PS Jahangirpuri area with the members of Aman committee of PS Jahangirpuri, PS Mahendra Park and PS Adarsh Nagar during a meeting, after clashes broke out between two communities during a Hanuman Jayanti procession on Saturday, at Jahangirpuri in New Delhi on Sunday, RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

ment has been ensured to assure people and to maintain law and order, the DCP said.

Preventive patrolling and area domination was undertaken throughout the night in southeast and other sensitive areas of different police districts to ensure peace and tranquility. The DCP said an FIR was registered on Saturday under sections 307 (attempt to mur-

der), 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 147 (rioting) and other relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Arms Act sections. She also said nine people in total, including eight police personnel and one civilian, were injured during the clashes, and are being treated at the Babu Jagjeevan Ram Memorial Hospital. The sub-inspector who received the

bullet injury is stated to be stable in the hospital, the senior police officer said, adding further investigation is underway. As on Sunday morning, there is a heavy police deployment in Jahangirpuri area where clashes took place. A team of Rapid Action Force has also been deployed to keep a tight vigil on situation which is now under control, she said.



Jahangirpuri violence: 20 arrested, 2 juveniles apprehended

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested 20 people while two juveniles have been apprehended over the violence during a Hanuman Janmotsav procession in the city's Jahangirpuri. The accused were identified as Zahid (20), Anshar (35), Shahjad (33), Mukhtyar Ali (28), Mohammad Ali (18), Amir (19), Aksar (26), Noor Alam (28), Mohammad Aslam (21), Zakir (22), Akram (22), Imtyaz (29), Mohd. Ali (27), Ahir (37), Sheikh Saurabh (42), Suraj (21), Neeraj (19), Suken (45), Suresh (43) and Sujet Sarkar (38), all residents of Jahangirpuri.

"Three firearms and five swords have also been recovered from the possession of the arrested persons," said Usha Rangnani, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district.

21-year-old who fired at SI among 2 rioters remanded in police custody

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Sunday sent two men, including a 21-year-old who allegedly fired a bullet that hit a Sub-Inspector in the violence during a Hanuman Jayanti procession in the city's Jahangirpuri, to police custody.

Duty Magistrate Divya Malhotra sent Md Aslam and another co-accused Md Ansar to police custody till Monday, while the other 12 accused were sent to judicial custody for 14 days. All the accused in the case were produced before the court and the police alleged

that Ansar and Aslam were the main conspirators who got to know about the 'Shobha Yatra' on April 15 and hatched up the conspiracy.

It said the custodial interrogation of Aslam and Ansar was required to unearth the larger conspiracy and involvement of others. Delhi Police said they took the help of CCTV footage to identify the others involved in the case.

Police said they recovered a pistol from Aslam, a resident of a slum cluster in Jahangirpuri's CD Park, which he allegedly used during the commission of crime. They further told the court that

there was stone-pelting and arson during the clashes between two communities that left eight police personnel and a local injured Saturday evening. Some vehicles were also torched.

An FIR was registered under sections 307 (attempt to murder), 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 147 (rioting) and other relevant Indian Penal Code and the Arms Act sections in relation to the case. This is the first communal flare-up in the national capital since the February 2020 riots in northeast Delhi which had left over 50 dead and scores injured.

Jahangirpuri communal clash conspirator arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a 35-year-old man who was allegedly involved in conspiring the communal clashes in the national Capital's Jahangirpuri area.

The accused was identified as Ansar, a resident of Jahangirpuri. According to Usha Rangnani, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district, the accused Ansar was arrested after his name came up during investigation of clashes. The accused has been also found to be previously involved in two cases of assault. Police said he was also

arrested repeatedly under preventive sections and booked five times under Gambling Act and Arms Act. According to First Information Report (FIR) registered at Jahangirpuri police station, when the Shobha Yatra reached near Mosque in C-block around 6 pm, Ansar along with his four to five associates approached the participants of Shobha Yatra and suddenly both got indulged in arguments.

"While arguing both the parties started pelting stones at each other. Inspector Rajiv Ranjan Singh, tried to pacify the situation and separated the two groups, however, within some time, they again started pelting

stones after which the inspector informed the Police Control Room about the development," stated the FIR.

Meanwhile, the Rohini District Court has sent main accused Ansar and Aslam to police custody till Monday. The Delhi Police has arrested 21 people so far and apprehended two juveniles in connection with the violence during a Hanuman Jayanti procession in city's Jahangirpuri. This includes 21-year-old man who allegedly

fired a bullet that hit a sub-inspector and Ansar who is alleged to be one of main "conspirator" behind the incident, police said.

BJP fails to act against corrupt despite ACB under it: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Admi Party has asked the Centre to explain what action it has taken since the anti-corruption branch (ACB) came under its purview.

In a statement, the Aam Admi Party said it is evident that they (BJP) only wanted to protect a select few in the Centre, Delhi Police & MCD by attacking the very institution of the Government.

It is unfortunate that despite having the police and ACB under them, the BJP fails to act against the corrupt, the AAP said.

"It is a well-known fact that when the 49-day Government of the AAP was formed, the anti-corruption bureau worked to the best of its potential and arrested 75 tainted individuals including several BJP functionaries.

The BJP could not bear to see the Delhi Government set a benchmark through its anti-corruption mission so it bypassed all laws of the land to unconstitutionally and immorally take away the ACB as well as curtail most of the powers of the Delhi Government," the statement said. It went on to ask the BJP to explain what action the

Centre took since the ACB came under its purview. The AAP has been voted to power with a thumping majority because the people know that when well-meaning, educated, progressive people come to power, they do what they say, the party said.

Punjab has shown its faith in the Kejriwal Model and soon, AAP's Punjab Government will stand as an example of how corruption can be eradicated when you have police under the state government itself, the statement said.

"Let us not forget that the BJP and its machinery itself have presented AAP with unbreachable certificates of honesty. Every single MLA, Minister and leader of the AAP has been harassed by the Income Tax, CBI and ED through raids and investigations only for them to fall flat," the statement said.

It claimed that the probe agencies got over 400 files of AAP leaders examined and pointed out that they y raided the bedrooms of CM Arvind Kejriwal, Dy CM Manish Sisodia and Health Minister Satyendar Jain but they couldn't find even a single rupee unaccounted for.

BJP leaders enquire about well-being of 8 injured cops

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

State BJP president Adesh Gupta, LOP in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, MP Hansraj Hans along with senior officials on Sunday visited Jahangirpuri police station and inquired about well-being of eight policemen injured in violence on Saturday.

They met DCP and were assured by him those behind

incident won't be spared. Later talking to media, Gupta said way stones were pelted at peaceful procession, swords were taken out, and bullets were fired is quite shameful and condemnable.

"This incident makes it quite clear whether it is Ramnavmi or Hanuman Jayanti processions taken out since last 15 days on such Hindu festivals were deliberately stoned as part of a conspiracy and done

to vitiate atmosphere," he said.

He alleged that Jahangirpuri incident is an experiment and part of a well-thought conspiracy and police must identify elements behind it. While commending police for timely controlling situation, Gupta said they stood like a wall before rioters or else situation could have turned worse. He said an ASI Meddal got a bullet injury and he is now improving. He urged all to

maintain peace and calm. The party president said the accused Mohd Ansar is an AAP activist whose photograph has been seen with many AAP MLA. He questioned Kejriwal government saying by giving free power water and ration to Rohingiyas and Bangladeshis, the CM is disturbing the peace in Delhi. "It was Kejriwal who gave support to such incidents in Jahangirpuri and in trans Yamuna area," he said.

Punjab CM Mann's visit to city Govt schools postponed

New Delhi: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's April 18 visit to Delhi Government schools has been postponed, the Aam Aadmi Party sources said on Sunday. The fresh date for his visit will be decided in two-three days, they said. No reason was given for the postponement of Mann's visit. Chief Minister

Arvind Kejriwal had on April 14 announced Mann's visit. "And on Monday, April 18, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann will come to visit our government schools along with his many officials. They are coming to see how such improvements are achieved as they have to do the same in Punjab," Kejriwal had said. SR

BJP expels 4 Councillors over graft charges in sting operation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has expelled its four Municipal Councillors in Delhi over charges of corruption following a sting operation conducted by a news channel.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta expelled the councillors — Amarlata Sangwan (Timarpur ward), Saroj Singh (Trilokpuri), Atul Kumar Gupta (Kondli) and Radha Devi (Mongolpuri) — from the party on April 15. Saroj Singh's husband Sher Singh and Radha Devi's husband Raju Rana have

also been expelled from the party as they featured in the sting operation, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said. The sting operation showed the leaders demanding money for various municipal works in their wards. According to the party, the leaders faced "clear" charges of corruption.

"As per constitution of the BJP, your primary membership is scrapped with immediate effect and you are expelled from the party," read the expulsion orders issued by the Delhi BJP president.

National Capital reports 517 new Covid cases in 24 hours

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi continued to witness a spike in Covid cases reporting 517 new cases on Sunday as against 461 cases reported on Saturday.

However, positivity rate dipped slightly to 4.21 per cent from 5.33 per cent day before.

No deaths due to Covid was recorded on Sunday.

Presently 964 patients are under home isolation. There are now 1,518 active Covid-19 cases in national Capital.

Delhi on Saturday reported two coronavirus related deaths

and had logged 461 new cases taking positivity rate to 5.33 per cent. With Sunday's inclusion city's total infection tally has gone up to 18,68,550. The death toll in city, related to Covid-19 now remains unchanged at 26,160.

The number of recoveries totals to 18,40,872 after Sunday's addition.

The daily Covid-19 cases and positivity rate in national capital have seen an upward trend in last few days. The DDMA is set to have a meeting on how to tackle sudden rise in Covid-19 cases in Delhi on 20 April.

EMBARGO IMPOSED...
CAN'T USE FUNDS...
SAHARA IS HAVING ₹ 25,000 CRORE WITH SEBI...

CAN ANYONE RUN WHEN IN SHACKLES?

RUN!

CURRENT SITUATION

Since last 9 years, there has been an Embargo of the Hon'ble Supreme Court on Sahara India Pariwar that if the Pariwar raises any fund out of sale of any asset or out of mortgage, that fund will be deposited in SEBI-SAHARA account and not even a single rupee can be utilised for making repayments to public.

This way SEBI-SAHARA account is having around **₹25,000 Crores**. SEBI SHOULD MAKE THE PAYMENTS TO THE DEPOSITORS FROM THIS AMOUNT. **Why is SEBI not making payments to the public?**

This way how can Sahara make timely payments to its depositors? However, Sahara is still making payments but delayed payments.

Vande Mataram

SAHARA INDIA PARIWAR

CHHAI0202-J04-40-C001P-EN

Govt rejects WHO's Covid death toll estimates in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has taken exception to the World Health Organization's methodology to estimate Covid-19 mortalities in the country, saying using such mathematical modeling cannot be applied to estimate the death figures for such a vast nation of geographical size and population.

The Union Health Ministry issued a statement in response to an article in a foreign publication, saying the country has on several occasions shared its concerns with the global health body over the methodology used.

"India has been in regular and in-depth technical exchange with the global agency on the issue. The analysis, which uses mortality figures directly obtained from Tier I set of countries, uses a mathematical modeling process for Tier II countries (which includes India)," the ministry said.

"India's basic objection has not been with the result (whatever they might have been), but rather the methodology adopted for the same.

"The model gives two highly different sets of excess mortality estimates of when using the data from Tier I countries and when using unverified

data from 18 Indian states. Such a wide variation in estimates raises concerns about validity and accuracy of such a modelling exercise," the Ministry said in the statement.

According to the Ministry, India has shared its concerns with the methodology along with other member states through a series of formal communications, including six letters issued to WHO (on November 17, 2021; December 20, 2021; December 28, 2021; January 11, 2022; February 12, 2022; and March 2, 2022) and virtual meetings held on December 16, 2021, December 28, 2021, January 6, 2022, February 25, 2022 and the SEARO Regional Webinar held on February 10, 2022.

During these exchanges, India raised specific queries long with other member states -- China, Iran, Bangladesh, Syria, Ethiopia and Egypt -- regarding the methodology, and use of unofficial sets of data, said the statement.

The concern specifically includes on how the statistical model projects estimate for a country of geographical size and population of India and also fits in with other countries which have smaller population, the statement said.

Such one size fit all

approach and models which are true for smaller countries like Tunisia may not be applicable to India with a population of 1.3 billion.

"WHO is yet to share the confidence interval for the present statistical model across various countries," the statement said.

"India has asserted that if the model is accurate and reliable, it should be authenticated by running it for all Tier I countries and if the result of such exercise may be shared with all member states," it said.

The model assumes an inverse relationship between monthly temperature and monthly average deaths, which does not have any scientific backing to establish such peculiar empirical relationship.

India is a country of continental proportions, climatic and seasonal conditions vary vastly across different states and even within a state and therefore, all states have widely varied seasonal patterns, the statement said.

"Thus, estimating national level mortality based on these 18 states data is statistically unproven," the statement stated. The Global Health Estimates (GHE) 2019 on which the modelling for Tier II countries is based, is itself an estimate.

The present modelling exercise seems to be providing its own set of estimates based on another set of historic estimates, while disregarding the data available with the country, the statement said.

"It is not clear as to why GHE 2019 has been used for estimating expected death figures for India, whereas for the Tier I countries, their own historical datasets were used when it has been repeatedly highlighted that India has a robust system of data collection and management," it stated.

In order to calculate the age-sex death distribution for India, WHO determined standard patterns for age and sex for the countries with reported data (61 countries) and then generalised them to the other countries (incl. India) who had no such distribution in their mortality data.

Based on this approach, India's age-sex distribution of predicted deaths was extrapolated based on the age-sex distribution of deaths reported by four countries (Costa Rica, Israel, Paraguay and Tunisia), the ministry said in the statement.

Of the covariates used for analysis, a binary measure for income has been used instead of a more realistic graded



variable. Using a binary variable for such an important measure may lend itself to amplifying the magnitude of the variable. WHO has conveyed that a combination of these variables was found to be most accurate for predicting excess mortality for a sample of 90 countries and 18 months (January 2020-June 2021). The detailed justification of how the combination of these variables is found to be most accurate is yet to be provided by WHO, the statement noted.

"The test positivity rate for Covid in India was never uniform throughout the country

at any point of time. But, this variation in Covid positivity rate within India was not considered for modelling purposes."Further, India has undertaken COVID-19 testing at a much faster rate than what WHO has advised. India has maintained molecular testing as preferred testing methods and used Rapid Antigen as screening purpose only. Whether these factors have been used in the model for India is still unanswered," the statement stated.

Containment involves a lot of subjective approach (such as school closing, workplace closing, cancelling of public

events) to quantify itself, the ministry said, adding, but, it is actually impossible to quantify various measures of containment in such a manner for a country like India, as the strictness of such measures have varied widely even among the states and districts of India. Therefore, the approach followed in this process is very much questionable.

"In addition, a subjective approach to quantify such measures will always involve a lot of biasness which will surely not present the real situation. WHO has also agreed about the subjective approach of this measure. However, it is still

used," the statement said.

According to the statement, during interactions with WHO, it has also been highlighted that some fluctuations in official reporting of COVID-19 data from some of the Tier I countries, including the USA, Germany, and France, defied knowledge of disease epidemiology.

Further inclusion of a country like Iraq which is undergoing an extended complex emergency under Tier I countries raises doubts on WHO's assessment in the categorization of countries as Tier I/II and its assertion on quality of mortality reporting from these countries."While India has remained open to collaborating with WHO as data sets like these will be helpful from the policy-making point of view, India believes that in-depth clarity on methodology and clear proof of its validity are crucial for policymakers to feel confident about any use of such data," the statement said.

"It is very surprising that while New York Times purportedly could obtain the alleged figures of excess COVID-19 mortality in respect to India, it was unable to learn the estimates for other countries!" the statement added.

My claim of 40 lakh Covid deaths in India proved correct, says Rahul



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi over a report by The New York Times that claimed that the Indian Government was stalling the efforts by the World Health Organization (WHO) to publish its estimate on excess Covid deaths.

According to the report, the WHO estimate will show that India's death toll related to coronavirus disease cases is almost eight times the official numbers.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in a statement has, however, said the Government has objected to the WHO's methodology for estimating the deaths caused by Covid-19.

Taking to Twitter, Rahul said the Prime Minister neither speaks the truth nor allows others to speak it. Rahul added that his earlier claim of 40 lakh deaths in India due to the virus stands vindicated, and urged the Government to provide Rs 4 lakh as compensation to families of those who died of Covid-19.

"Modi ji does not speak the truth, he does not let (others) speak it," Rahul mentioned sharing a screenshot of the article titled 'India Is Stalling WHO's Efforts to Make Global Covid Death Toll Public'.

"They still lie that no one died of oxygen shortage! I had said earlier also - 40 lakh Indians died, not 5 lakh, due to the government's negligence in Covid. Please, Modi — give compensation of Rs 4 lakh to every victim's family," he added.

Army commanders to discuss LAC standoffs, Pak pol impact on LOC



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The two-year standoffs at the border in Ladakh, and the possible repercussion of the political developments in Pakistan on the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir will figure prominently during the Army Commanders' conference beginning here on Monday.

The five-day conclave will also see the top brass reviewing the changing nature of warfare in the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and lessons learned from it. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the commanders on April 21. The commanders' meet is held twice a year.

The upcoming conference comes weeks after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited New Delhi and discussed the situation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar.

It was the first visit by a Chinese minister to India since trouble erupted at the LAC in Ladakh nearly two years ago. At present, more than 50,000 troops each from both sides are facing each other at some friction points in the Depgang valley, Demchok, and the Gogra valley. The Corps Commanders of the two armies have met 15 times in the last two years to find ways to speed up disengagement and de-escalation at

the friction points. There was limited success as the troops disengaged from the north and south banks of the Pangong Tso (lake) in Ladakh and the Hot Springs.

Not willing to take any chances, the Indian army remained deployed at the front even during the winter months there for the last two years. Earlier, the troops used to retreat to bases some distance away.

India has all along maintained that status quo ante as prevailing in April 2020 has to be restored. Also, complete disengagement is a prerequisite for restoring bilateral ties with China. In fact, Jaishankar said after meeting Wang Yi that relations are not normal since the transgressions took place.

Announcing the schedule and agenda of the conference, officials said here on Sunday the meet is an apex level biannual event which is held in April and October every year. The conference is an institutional platform for conceptual level deliberations, culminating in making important policy decisions for the Indian Army.

During the conference, the senior leadership of the Indian Army will review the opera-

tional situation along the active borders, assess threats in the entire spectrum of conflict and undertake analysis of capability voids to further focus on capability development and operational preparedness plans.

Discussions on aspects pertaining to infrastructure development in border areas, modernisation through indigenisation, induction of niche technology and assessment on any impact of the Russia - Ukraine war are also scheduled.

Various agenda points sponsored by regional commands will be deliberated upon by the senior commanders apart from proposals concerning improving works, financial management, introducing e-vehicles, and digitisation in the Indian Army. As part of the conference, Boards of Governors meetings of the Army Welfare Education Society and Army Group Insurance Fund will be held.

The conference is also a formal forum for senior leadership of Indian Army to interact with the senior functionaries of the Department of Military Affairs and Department of Defence during the ministry of defence interaction session.

Collect data on inadequate representation of SCs, STs, Centre asks Ministers



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked all Ministers and departments to collect data on inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) before implementing the policy of reservation in promotions and carrying out any promotions based thereon," it said.

It has also asked the departments to carefully assess the suitability of officers being considered for promotions. In an order on Friday, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) cited a Supreme Court order issued in January which outlined certain conditions that are to be satisfied by the government for the purpose of implementing the policy of reservation in promotions.

These conditions include the "collection of quantifiable data regarding inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes"

among others.

This judgement currently holds the field, the DoPT order said.

"All the ministries/departments are required to ensure that the above conditions are complied with before implementing the policy of reservation in promotions and carrying out any promotions based thereon," it said.

In order to ensure maintenance of efficiency of administration, the DPC (Departmental Promotion Committee) shall carefully assess the suitability of the officers being considered for promotion, said the order.

The Central Secretariat Service (CSS) Forum had in January urged the DoPT to immediately resume long-stalled promotions for its members. The CSS Forum is an association of officers of the CSS, whose members form the backbone of the central secretariat's working.

Opp's 'ideology of appeasement' responsible for riots, says BJP



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a sharp riposte to a joint statement issued by Congress president Sonia Gandhi and other Opposition leaders over the recent incidents of hate speech and communal violence, the BJP on Sunday said it is their "ideology of appeasement" which is responsible for such riots.

The BJP also said the selective politics of some opposition parties are "harmful to the country" and that the "ideology of appeasement" pursued over the last 70 years is responsible for the communal riots across the country.

Addressing a press conference here, Patra said the clashes in the northwest Delhi locality are under investigation and all should wait for the outcome.

"But, at the same time, we would like to say that a joint statement was issued by Sonia

Gandhi along with other opposition leaders yesterday. This selective politics of some opposition leaders is not appropriate for the country, it is harmful to the country," he said.

"Sonia Gandhi in this letter talked about the ideology...today, the question arises which ideology leads to such riots in the country.

"There is only one ideology from the last seventy years, and its name is the ideology of appeasement," Patra said, adding "this policy and politics of appeasement" is very unfortunate, he said.

Patra, who was accompanied by the BJP's Delhi unit chief Aadesh Gupta, accused chief minister Arvind Kejriwal of doing nothing and only creating a buzz over action against corruption.

"An atmosphere was created in Delhi as if Arvind Kejriwal ji was trying to fight

a big fight against corruption. You will be surprised to know that the anti-corruption bureau officers said that there is no record of all the calls received on 1031, the anti-corruption helpline," Patra said.

He said the helpline was closed down and not a single person was found guilty.

Gupta alleged corruption allegations against the AAP government and its minister Satyendra Jain and claimed the ruling party in Delhi is indulging in corruption in the Jal Board, Delhi Transport Corporation, and other departments.

"Jain is a milch cow and therefore Kejriwal is keeping him close," Gupta alleged.

The recent communal incidents across the BJP and Congress-ruled states have led both sides to accuse each other of fanning riots for electoral benefits.

Alliance Air commences flights from Mumbai to Keshod in Junagarh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Alliance Air said it has commenced flight services to Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport from Keshod in the Junagadh district of Gujarat under the Centre's regional connectivity scheme UDAN. The airline will operate thrice a week flights on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday and deploy its seven-seater ATR 72-600 aircraft. With this, Alliance Air becomes the first airline to connect Keshod to Mumbai under the UDAN scheme. Alliance Air is a government-owned carrier.

In a statement, the Ministry of Civil Aviation said that the inaugural flight on the new route was flagged off by Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia from Keshod Airport, which is near Asiatic Lion's abode Gir.

At present, it takes about 16 hours to travel by road from Keshod to Mumbai but with the introduction of air services between the two destinations, the travel time will reduce to just one hour and 25 minutes, as per the release.

"In the airline's summer schedule this year, Ahmedabad has been connected to three cities—Amritsar, Agra, and Ranchi. Similarly, Porbandar and Rajkot have been connected with Mumbai. Apart from

starting the new flight route today, we will also connect Keshod with Ahmedabad," the release quoted Scindia as saying.

He added that two new greenfield airports are also to be constructed in Hirasar and Dholera with a capacity to handle 23 lakh and 30 lakh passengers per year, respectively, with a budget allocation of Rs 1,405 crore and Rs 1,305 crore respectively.

A special route connecting Porbandar and Delhi will start on April 27, the minister informed. Owned by the Airports Authority of India, the Keshod airport was initially refurbished and revived in the late 1980s to facilitate scheduled operations, said the release, adding that for the last 21 years, commercial flight operations were not being carried out from this airport. The AAI has invested an amount of Rs 25 crores to upgrade the airport for resurfacing of runway, procurement of Aircraft Crash Fire Tender (ACFT), new civil enclave, including the terminal building, apron for two ATR-72 types of aircraft and link taxiway, among others, the release stated. Alliance Air was awarded the route under the 4.1 version of the scheme and with the opening of this new route, a total of 417 routes have been operationalised under the initiative, it said.

Convene timely meetings of DPCs: Union Home Min

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

With the career prospects of scores of paramilitary cadre officers in limbo due to bureaucratic delays by IPS bosses, the Union Home Ministry has directed the forces to timely convene meetings of departmental promotion committees (DPCs) for the elevation of deserving officers to the next level.

On February 23, the Home Ministry had directed the paramilitary forces to convene DPCs for promotion in various ranks in a timely manner saying, "the competent authority has directed that a proper calendar be prepared for holding DPCs in various ranks of CAPFs/Assam Rifles so that no post remains vacant for want of holding DPC."

However, the paramilitary forces like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Border Security Force (BSF) and the like are yet to conduct the DPC. Over 50 Group A officers in CRPF and over 40 such officers in BSF are awaiting DPC despite being entitled to be promoted to the next rank.

Some officers of 1986/87 batch in the CRPF are stagnating in the rank of Deputy Inspectors General (DIsG). Likewise, An Assistant Commandant in the CRPF gets just one promotion in over 18 years. Similarly, despite having served for 26 years, offi-



cers stagnate in the rank of second-in-command and are not made Commandants as against the 15-year timeline prescribed in the recruitment rules, insiders in the forces said.

While the BSF is tasked for securing border guarding roles along the frontiers with Pakistan and Bangladesh, the CRPF is the lead internal security force deployed in Jammu and Kashmir, Northeast and Naxal-hit areas.

"Lack of promotion of officers not only affects the individual prospects of the officers but also hurts their morale, impacting the overall operational efficiency on the ground as the command level officers cross the age of 50 years to get such positions," a senior officer awaiting DPC said on the condition of anonymity.

After the Kargil war, the Army corrected this anomaly and the officers are being promoted to the commanding ranks between 37-40 years of age.

In the Naxal theatre, the operations against the ultras are conducted mostly on foot due to the possibility of the areas being mined and the young age profile of the commanding

officers in the CRPF could be a game changer against countering the menace, another official said.

Department of Personnel and Training, through an order dated May 8, 2017 had prescribed the timelines in the Model Calendar for conducting DPCs in respect of ACC (Appointments Committee of the Cabinet) cases as well as non-ACC cases and also obtaining the approval of competent authority to the recommendations of DPCs for a vacancy year in advance.

As per the rules, the forces are supposed to conduct the DPCs for the next year by the end of the ongoing year so that a panel of officers is ready to promote them as and when vacancy arises.

The delay in DPCs has further created an anomaly in the promotion of officers in various paramilitary forces of the same batch. While an officer of a certain batch in the CRPF and BSF stagnates in the rank of second-in-command, the officer of the same batch recruited to the common examination conducted by the UPSC is promoted to the level of DIG in the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

EOW registers case against 3 ex-CMOs

ALSO AGAINST 4 OTHERS IN DRUG SCAM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The sleuths of Economic Offences Wing (EOW) have registered an FIR in connection with a drug purchase scam. Seven people, including the then three chief medical officers (CMOs) of Budaun, have been named in the FIR. It is alleged that drugs worth several crores of rupees were procured through fake notifications in connivance with the accused named in the FIR. According to reports, the EOW sleuths were probing the alleged corruption in the drug purchase from 2004 to 2006 in Budaun district and recently completed the investigation.

In this case, the agency has registered a case against seven people, including the then three CMOs of Budaun. It is alleged that all these accused had looted government money by purchasing medicines worth crores through fake notifications. The EOW found that the then CMOs of Budaun, Dr Hariram, Dr MP Bansal, Dr Sudhakar Dwivedi and the then SMO of Budaun district hospital, Dr CP Singhal, the then pharmacist Anupam Kumar Dubey, RB Yadav and Suresh Chaurasia, connived to siphon off government money by issuing fake purchase notifications and registered a case against them. The agency found in the investigation of the scam that the CMO, who was posted in Budaun district from 2004 to 2006, in connivance with other officers and employees, issued fake notifications for the sup-

ply of medicines and got medicines worth crores of rupees from the medical stores belonging to their own henchmen. The EOW found that all the medical stores from where the medicines were purchased were not authorised distributors of the Uttar Pradesh Drug and Pharmaceuticals Company Limited (UPDPL). It has also been found in the investigation that between 2004 and 2006, UPDPL had not received any indent for any medicine from the then CMOs of Budaun, nor did UPDPL ask any medical store to supply the medicines. In such a situation, it is clear that the then CMOs along with the officers, employees and medical store operators were involved in corruption. The EOW will now further investigate the matter and charge-sheet all the accused so that legal proceedings can be initiated in the court of law.

MNS Chief's ultimatum to Maha Govt over loudspeaker ban

Exhorts to play Hanuman Chalisa in front of mosques if loudspeakers not removed by May 3, announces to visit Ayodhya on June 5

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Being seen getting increasingly closer to the BJP in the run up to the crucial Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, MNS chief Raj Thackeray on Sunday announced his plan to go to Ayodhya on June 5 and exhorted the "Hindu brothers" across the country to prepare themselves to give a "fitting reply" to the Muslims – in the form of playing Hanuman Chalisa in front of mosques five times a day—if the loudspeakers are not removed from the mosques by May 3. Handing out an ultimatum to the Maharashtra Government and mosque managements across the state that his party would take its "no loudspeakers atop mosques" campaign to a next level after May 3, the MNS chief indirectly revealed its intention to play "Hindutva card" in the coming day, as he announced that he planned to visit Ayodhya on June 5. Talking to media persons in Pune, the MNS chief said: "Playing of Azan through loudspeakers from mosques is more a social issue than a religious issue. It is not just Hindus but people from all sections of the society get disturbed by the playing of azan through loudspeakers" "I appeal to all the Hindu brothers across the country to give a fitting reply if the loudspeakers are not removed from mosques by May 3. We do not want any kind of riots in the country, but they (mosque management) should remove loudspeakers peacefully from the mosques. Otherwise, we will play Hanuman Chalisa in front of mosques five times a day," Raj said. "We are not opposing their (Muslims') prayers. But if they insist on using loudspeakers then they will have to listen to our prayers on loudspeakers," Raj said, claiming that the use

of loudspeakers atop mosques was "illegal". Replying to a question, the MNS chief said that rule had to be "uniform" for religions vis-a-vis use of loudspeakers. "For political rallies and also festivals like Ganpati and Navratri, we take police permission for use of loudspeakers. How come there is a different set of rules for mosques where azan is played through loudspeakers five times a day?," Raj asked. Raj — who is desperately trying to boost the morale of his listless party in the run-up to the BMC and other municipal corporation polls in the state — made two announcements at his news conference. "On May 1, I will address a public gathering at Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad). On June 5, I will visit Ayodhya for darshan of Lord Rama along with MNS volunteers. I also appeal to others to come to Ayodhya". The MNS chief's ultimatum to the state government and Muslims about the removal of loudspeakers from mosques and also his impending visit to Ayodhya comes in the midst of

a war of words being waged between him and the ruling Shiv Sena leaders. Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Minister Aaditya Thackeray had recently ridiculed the MNS chief over his campaign for removal of loudspeakers from mosques, by saying: "They (MNS) are trying to revive their dead party. Our Hindutva is known to everyone. We will fulfil what we have promised to the people". Queried as to what is the purpose of his impending visit to Ayodhya, Raj evaded a direct reply to the question, by merely saying he has not travelled out for a long time. When his attention was drawn to Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut's description of him a "new Hindu Owaisi", Raj said he did not respond to "lavande" (spineless people). Asked to comment on the pelting of stones on a procession organised as part of Hanuman Jayanti celebrations in Delhi on Saturday, the MNS chief said: "If our processions are attacked then we won't stay calm. Our hands are not tied. Don't force us to pick up

weapons". The MNS chief's plans to visit Ayodhya should be seen in the context of an announcement made by Shiv Sena's national spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut on Saturday that Aaditya Thackeray would visit Ayodhya next month. When asked about his proposed visit to Ayodhya, Aaditya Thackeray said on Sunday: "The legal battle relating to Ayodhya has ended. Because of a ruling by the Supreme Court, Ram temple is being constructed at Ayodhya. When the Ram Mandir agitation was going on, we went to Ayodhya. At that time we had said that temple first and then our government. Now that the temple construction work has started, I am going there for the darshan of Lord Rama". "Ayodhya is place of faith for us. That's why I am going there. There's no political motive behind my proposed visit to Ayodhya. I believe in religion and go to temples. Even yesterday, I chanted Hanuman Chalis on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti," Aaditya said.

Kerala Assembly LoP slams Govt for failing to control crimes

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Vijay Sakhare, the additional director general of police, crimes, made it clear on Sunday that the police force in the State is incapable of preventing planned murders though these acts are conceived and executed with precision. Speaking to reporters at Palakkadu which saw the gruesome murder of S K Srinivasan, an RSS leader on Saturday and that too in broad daylight, the ADGP said the investigation team has identified certain people connected with the murder and they would soon be arrested. He said a heavy posse of policemen have been deployed in Palakkadu and prohibitory orders issued too Wednesday. Meanwhile V D Satheeshan, Leader of Opposition, lambasted the State Government for its all-round failure in controlling crimes. "The Police in Kerala have been infiltrated by communal fanatics while there is no such system by name police intelligence network in the State. How come the police

force failed to take note of the intelligence warning that there would be murders in Palakkadu?" asked Satheeshan. Satheeshan said the social engineering being executed by chief minister Vijayan is nothing but an appeasement policy. "The police have become inactive in the State while criminals and extremists are ruling the roost," said Leader of the Opposition. He pointed out that the law and order deteriorated due to militancy of the trade union, particularly the CPI(M) sponsored CITU. "Vijayan should think about the advisability of organising the first year anniversary of the LDF Government's second term. There is nothing to celebrate in Kerala but a lot of issues which is causing heart-burning," he said. Satheeshan further pointed out that Kerala has become a safe haven for drug and narcotic smugglers. "The government has been left clueless about the kind of action it has to take. Yet another factor is the frequent suicides by farmers. The RSS-SDPI violence is going up by the day," he said.

CPM-backed trade union CITU to launch stirs in Kerala from today

Employees of Kerala State Road Transport Corporation are also on a warpath with the Government for non-disbursement of salaries for the last three months

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The week beginning this Monday will see a series of agitations being launched by trade union bosses of three crucial departments of the Kerala Government. What makes these agitations unique is that they are all sponsored by Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU), an employees union promoted by the ruling CPI(M). The officers of the Kerala State Electricity Board, the public sector power producing and marketing service, will lay siege to the head quarters of their office demanding the immediate revocation of the transfer orders of three leaders

of their association. The officers in question were transferred from the capital city to other districts by the Board but the striking officers accuse the Board chairman of acting with a vengeance. The three officers were facing disciplinary proceedings for charges ranging from unauthorised absence from duty to barging into chairman's office abusing and insulting him. The officers also want the chairman to be "shunted out" of the KSEB head quarters. One of the top office bearers of the association went to the extent of demanding the despatch of the chairman to some "Gau Shala" in Uttar Pradesh. He also threatened the chairman, a resected IAS officer, that people in the State would not allow him to live peacefully in the State. The officers association want the chairman to obey their diktats and not that of the power minister or the government. Employees of Kerala State Road Transport Corporation are also on a warpath with the

Government for non-disbursement of salaries for the last three months. Antony Raju, the minister for road transport, said that the Government could not mobilise Rs 50 crore that is needed to pay the salary and pension despite all efforts have made even a soft-spoken Leader of Opposition V D Satheeshan to retort; "How is it possible for a government which could not mobilise Rs 50 crore in three months to raise Rs one lakh crore for the silver line semi speed rail project between Thiruvananthapuram and Kasaragod?". Staff of Kerala Water Authority, the government owned department that is the monopoly agency in distribution of drinking water across the State too have declared strike from this week. The union that has called for the agitation happens to be the CITU, the CPI(M)'s own labour union. "This is nothing but a case of fence installed to protect the crop end up eating the crop," said Satheeshan.

MSME dept in UP plans to double exports to ₹3 lakh crore in 5 years

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government plans to lay the foundation stones of three flatted factory complexes in Agra, Kanpur Nagar and Gorakhpur, a mini industrial area in Aligarh as well as convenience centres at Sant Kabir Nagar and Chandauli in the next 100 days. Besides, the MSME department will start infrastructure improvement works at Farrukhabad and Talkatora (Lucknow), while increasing the cost of Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana from Rs 25 lakh to Rs 1 crore. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Export Promotion department to achieve its ambitious targets in a time-bound manner in order to enhance investments and production, generate employment for the youth on a massive scale and boost exports.

The chief minister's directive follows a presentation by the department to the Yogi cabinet 2.0 on its targets for 100 days, six months, two years and five years. The MSME and Export Promotion department seeks to increase MSME exports to Rs 2 lakh crore in the next couple of years and Rs 3 lakh crore in five years through an array of initiatives. The initiatives include setting up of six MSME parks across the state, setting up of mega leather clusters in Kanpur Nagar and increasing the disbursement of credit to MSME sector to Rs 5 lakh crore in cooperation with banks, which will pave the way for creation of five crore jobs. It is worth mentioning here that Uttar Pradesh has witnessed 41 per cent jump in its export value in the last five years from Rs 88,967 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 125,903.76 crore in 2021-22 (till January 2022), which is expected to reach Rs 150,000 crore by the

The MSME and Export Promotion department seeks to increase MSME exports to ₹2 lakh crore in the next couple of years and ₹3 lakh crore in five years through an array of initiatives

end of this year. Meanwhile, the department aims to distribute tool kits and facilitate loans for five lakh and 1.5 lakh artisans under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana and the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme in the next five years. Furthermore, the department has set the ambitious target of attracting investments worth Rs 8 lakh crore and double sale of ODOP products in the next five years.

AIMIM invites Azam Khan to join party

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Seeking to capitalise on the resentment among the Muslim leaders of the Samajwadi Party, the Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has extended an olive branch to SP MLA from Rampur, Mohammad Azam Khan, to switch over. The move comes in the wake of serious charges leveled against Akhilesh Yadav by Fasahat Khan, a confidant of Azam Khan. SP MP from Sambhal, Shafiqur Rehman Barq had also recently alleged that the SP was not working for Muslims. Barq had said he was not satisfied with the working of the party. A few days ago, media incharge and Khan's close aide Fasahat Khan

also alleged that Azam Khan was being ignored by the SP chief. Sensing an opportunity, AIMIM spokesperson Mohammad Farhan has sent a letter to Azam Khan, who is lodged in Sitapur jail for over two years. The AIMIM spokesperson, in his letter, has alleged that the SP is not sympathetic towards Muslims and treats them only as a vote bank. Farhan said, "Deep resentment prevails in the Muslim community as Akhilesh Yadav has preferred to ignore Azam Khan and has done nothing for his release from jail. People from across the country have been coming to see Azam Khan in jail but Akhilesh Yadav has visited him only once." He claimed that 96 per

cent Muslims voted for the SP in the recent elections but the community was not in the priority list of the Samajwadi Party. "AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi wants Azam Khan to switch over to his party. He should join AIMIM and strengthen it further and take the party ahead in the state. I have written a three-page letter to Azam Khan. Owaisi will also go to meet Khan in Sitapur jail; we have sought time. Before anything else, we pray for his release from jail," the AIMIM spokesperson said. Several Muslim leaders from the SP have voiced their resentment against Akhilesh Yadav and the party for ignoring Muslims even after receiving a majority of votes of the community in state assembly elections.

40th edition of 'HunarHaat' inaugurated in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Youth Affairs & Sports, Anurag Thakur on Sunday inaugurated the 40th edition of the 'HunarHaat' in Mumbai in the presence of Union Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. The 40th edition of the HunarHaat, a credible platform to promote 'Swadeshi' products, is being held at MMRDA Ground, Bandra-Kurla Complex in Mumbai from April 16 to April 27. Speaking on the occasion, Thakur said "Aatmanirbhar Bharat is being strengthened by



initiatives like HunarHaat. In this 40th edition of HunarHaat, more than a thousand craftsmen and artisans coming from 31 states have put up 400 stalls." "There is no lack of talent in India," he said recalling how India responded to PM's clarion call for building an AatmaNirbhar Bharat during the hours of crisis. "We started producing PPE Kits, masks

and even ventilators." The Minister also spoke about 'One District One Product', where each district is recognised for one product. He said this initiative not only allowed people to generate their own income, but also created job opportunities for a few others in the vicinity when economies across the world were affected by the Pandemic.

Nephew hacks uncle, aunt for trying to save his wife

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a brutal double murder in Bahraich, a youth hacked his uncle and aunt with a shovel when they intervened to rescue his wife whom he was assaulting in a drunken state. The local police sent the bodies for autopsy and registered a case against the accused who absconded soon after killing his uncle and aunt. Raids were also conducted to arrest him but he was still at large. According to reports, Shyam Manohar of Chandapur village under Payagpur police station of Bahraich was watering his field when he saw his nephew, Chhotu, who owns the adjacent field, beating his (Chhotu's) wife with a stick early Sunday morning. Chhotu was reportedly

drunk and he started beating his wife after she objected to his drinking habit. Manohar reportedly rushed and tried to rescue Chhotu's wife from his nephew. This agitated Chhotu and he took a shovel and attacked his uncle with it, injuring him critically. Seeing her husband in danger, Manohar's wife Shyama Devi, who was also working in the field, rushed to her husband's rescue. However, Chhotu attacked her also with the shovel and later fled from the field. Both Manohar and his wife were critically injured in the attack and were rushed to a nearby community health centre where the doctors pronounced Manohar dead and referred Shayama Devi to the district hospital.

Coal shortage may hit power generation in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The All-India Power Engineers Federation said that thermal power generation was likely to be affected due to coal shortage as had happened in October last year. The power demand in Uttar Pradesh has reached 21,000 megawatt and the supply is around 19,000 MW to 20,000 MW. Though there is no serious coal crisis in thermal power plants operated by Uttar Pradesh Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam, their reserve stock is only 26 per cent of the standard norm. The situation is likely to turn difficult with the increase in the demand for electricity with the rise in mercury level. The Anpara Thermal Power Project with a capacity of 2,630 MW is at the pit head of the coal mine. Normally there should be coal for 17 days. The other projects are Harduaganj of 1,265 MW, Obra of 1,094 MW and Parichha of



1140 MW. Since the coal is not at the pit head of the mine, there should be 26 days' coal stock as per the standard norm. According to the records, 5.96 lakh metric tons of coal should be in stock in Anpara whereas at present it has only 3.28 lakh MT. Harduaganj should have 4.97 lakh MT of coal in stock but has only 65,700 MT of coal. Obra should

have 4.45 lakh MT while there is only little over one lakh MT of coal stock left with it. There should be 4.30 lakh MT of coal in Parichha whereas only 12,900 MT coal is in its stock. In contrast to about 19.69 lakh MT of coal stock in all four thermal power projects, they have only 5.11 lakh MT of coal which is only 26 per cent of the standard norm.

The daily consumption of coal at Anpara is 40, 000 MT, but only 29,000 metric tons of coal is available with it, Harduaganj has 15,000 MT coal against 17,000 MT requirement, Obra 11,000 MT against 12,000 MT and in Parichha only 4,000 MT of coal is left against requirement of 11,000 MT. Parichha generates 910 MW power and it has only one day's coal so the production has been reduced to 500 MW. Chairman of All-India Power Engineers Federation, Shailendra Dubey, said this situation had arisen due to the lack of foresight of the management. He said in October last year, Parichha thermal power station had to be closed due to coal shortage. Dubey said that Uttar Pradesh got the cheapest electricity from Uttar Pradesh Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam, at only Rs 1.74 per unit from the Anpara project. He said in such a situation, it was neces-

sary that the mistake of September-October 2021 was not repeated and coal stock was ensured in thermal power stations as per the requirement. He said if the state-run power plants were to be closed due to coal shortage then the government would have to buy power at exorbitant rates of over Rs 12 per unit from the power exchange. Union Power Minister RK Singh has blamed the steep rise in the prices of imported coal due to the Russia-Ukraine war for the coal crisis as well as lack of adequate availability of railway wagons to transport coal to power stations. For coal supply to the thermal power stations of the country, 453 rakes are required whereas only 379 wagons were available in the first week of April. Dubey said the demand for coal had increased by 9 per cent as compared to last year and only eight days' coal was left in thermal power stations in 12 states of the country.

Training material for civic bodies in Braille launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj & Gramin Vikas Sansthan (IGPR & GVS) of Rajasthan, under the auspices of the Government of India, in collaboration with Tatsat Foundation, has announced the launch of a series of training material for the benefit of divyangs in panchayati raj institutions. The introductory training book in Braille was launched to provide greater accessibility and all inclusivity to PwDs. This initiative will be a watershed in the empowerment of PwDs, said Ravi Srivastava, DG IGPRS, Rajasthan. "As a signatory to the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, India is committed to implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the country," Sunil Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, said.

Akhilesh's silence on Muslims' plight in UP raises question, says Farooqui

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

All India Muslim Personal Law Board member Kamaal Farooqui lashed out at Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying Muslims of UP were disillusioned with his party and leadership. He said if Akhilesh Yadav remained silent on the plight of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh then questions were bound to be raised over his leadership. Farooqui said Muslims were being used as "political napkins" by the secular parties and Muslims would have to seriously ponder over whether they were under any obligation to perpetually support the SP without getting anything in return. The AIMPLB member said the leaders of the community were seriously thinking over their political options in future

elections. He said Muslim had made the biggest contribution in over 100 seats in UP assembly won by the Samajwadi Party. Criticising the silence of Akhilesh Yadav over the targeting of Muslim leaders by the Yogi Adityanath government, Farooqui said, "It's a classic case of political opportunism. During the elections, the Samajwadi Party makes tall promises and forgets them as soon as the elections are over." He said Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary had at least spoken against the tyranny of the government; but Akhilesh Yadav was conspicuous by his silence. Farooqui said if the present stance of Akhilesh Yadav continued and he remained silent on the issues concerning the Muslims the community must explore other options.

Nobody’s children

Gig economy in India is alive and kicking, but are these workers happy?

A segment of around 15 million people, mostly youth, keeps the highly profitable gig economy ticking in India. They are the gig workers, those boys and girls who deliver you the goods and services you order online. Their problem is they are underpaid, overworked and have no social security. The aggregators, supposed to pay them dignified wages and take care of their well-being, seem to think it is not their problem. They call them partners without partnership rights or, illogically, self-employed. The two are not bound by the employer-employee ambit. So, they are not organised labour. That means they forfeit the statutory social guarantees and benefits. They are not strictly unorganised labour either. They are just different. The COVID-19 pandemic added to their woes: They faced competition from a large number of youth who, rendered jobless, drifted towards the gig world. That made the aggregators happy because the gig worker supply was abundant. The used motorcycle dealers were happy too as sales zoomed. The gig workers have since approached the courts. The Indian Federation of App Based Transport Workers (IFAT) is seeking welfare benefits given for workers under the labour laws. Justice DY Chandrachud of the Supreme Court recently batted for the app-based workers, seeking laws to clarify the minimum obligations of aggregator platforms towards “enhancing worker welfare, especially concerning health, safety and skill development”. The Code of Social Security the Government passed in 2020 recognises the gig workers only as “plant workers”.



They are also not unorganised workers as specified in the Unorganised Workers Social Welfare Security Act, 2008. Most European countries are extending social security benefits to their gig workers. The European Union plans to declare them as regular employees. The crux of the matter is that they are ‘workers’ and should be declared so, the aggregators’ arguments notwithstanding. A large section of the gig workers are graduates, even postgraduates. Gig work for them is de-skilling. Imagine, that goes against the grain of the rational principle of economic progress and people’s empowerment. The gig economy is a grey area though it brings in revenues worth billions. The employee-employer relations are grey. The employment itself is grey because a third party, the vendor, is involved. The workers are not part of any workforce. They get no holidays, no sick leave, no provident fund, no pension. Since they are not workers, they have no avenues of protest. They have been around for nearly a decade, but the laws of the land have not been updated to give them any status. A legislation is required to protect these workers, but not at the cost of the gig economy itself. A balance is needed between giving the workers minimum pay and benefits and ensuring that the businesses are not disrupted. That helps none.



Pope Francis touches a statue of Virgin Mary at the end of the Catholic Easter Sunday mass

Disowned by god?

Kerala is virtually running aground, from the social to political arenas

VD Satheeshan, leader of the Opposition in Kerala, is a young Congressman who chooses his words carefully. When he declares that the State has become a “goondas’ corridor from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram”, it is time for the powers that be to stand up and listen. In an interaction with the media on Saturday, Satheeshan mentioned that law and order in Kerala has deteriorated to the level of an abyss and governance has come to a standstill. Two political murders within 24 hours in Palakkad have sent shockwaves across Kerala. The murders were in continuation of the mutual annihilation being carried out by the Popular Front of India, an organisation engaged in alleged Islamic bigotry, and the RSS. The last six months have seen six RSS workers killed in various parts of the State by PFI while the latter has lost two. But there are other issues which Satheeshan wanted the nation to know. Kerala’s Chief Secretary has said that the health sector is the worst performing department in the State. Suicides by farmers because of crop failure, debt trap and the Government’s callous attitude have become routine.



The Kerala State Electricity Board, the public sector power utility establishment, is on the verge of shutting down as employees and officers have declared their plans to lay siege to the headquarters, demanding the chairman’s ouster. The CITU, the union that calls the shots in KSEB, wants a person of their choice as the chairman. The State-owned Kerala State Road Transport Corporation has not paid salaries and pension to its employees for three months. Hundreds of employees observed a daylong fast in the State capital on April 15, the Vishu day, regarded as an auspicious occasion. “How is this Government going ahead with its plan to lay the semi-high speed silver line connecting Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram that costs more than ₹1 lakh crore when it is incapable of mobilising ₹50 crore towards reimbursing salaries of KSRTC workers?” asks Satheeshan. Despite tall claims by the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front Government that everything is perfect, the truth is that nothing is right in the State. Religious extremism, trade union militancy, breakdown in law and order, ever-increasing cases of drug trafficking, molestation of women and dowry deaths and farmers’ suicide have become the hallmarks of Kerala.

Advent of dual degree system

Success of the new dual-degree programme would depend upon formulating a realistic and inclusive strategic plan for all students

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued new guidelines providing flexibility and choices to college students to opt for dual degrees simultaneously. As per the new guidelines, students can go for two degrees in physical-physical mode, physical-online mode or online-online mode. The full-time programmes can be taken up in physical mode, provided the class timings don’t overlap. For example, a student can pursue BCom classes in the morning and BA classes in the evening. Students may pursue multidisciplinary programmes across domains such as sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities or any other discipline. The programme will be implemented from 2022-23.

According to the UGC, the rationale behind the decision is to help students gain diverse skills. It is aimed at translating the National Education Policy’s vision of breaking down interdisciplinary separations and providing opportunities to the students to expand and enhance their skills. It, however, remains to be seen how the new guidelines would be received by students, parents and academicians going ahead. The initial response has been mixed. Some have welcomed the provisions like making way for multidisciplinary varisities by phasing out domain-specific institutions, enhancing industry participation by allowing practitioners, field experts without a doctorate degree or the National Eligibility Test (NET) to teach and fast-tracking the policy of making vocational skills as an important part of education. Others felt that the decision will boost employability. The dual-degree option will provide them an opportunity to concentrate on one mainstream undergraduate degree while enrolling in another with a vocational focus of their own interest.

However, faculty members at Central Universities have raised the concern that this new practice would dilute the



full-time degrees and their worth. They felt that education is a social activity, students learn through interactions and there has to be time built in for that. For holistic growth, classroom time has to be balanced with time for self-study, extra-curricular activities, summer projects etc. This will reduce the purpose of education to just getting degrees rather than acquiring knowledge. The question raised is “How will it be possible for students to fulfil the requirements of two full-time degrees simultaneously?” There are challenges such as managing time tables of each student across universities, multiple simultaneous exams, rapid switching of focus between subjects and potential repercussions on students who may not be able to cope with the demands arising from the change. While some believe that this may aggravate prevalent challenges such as seat and faculty shortage, others feel that the onus will be on the universities. Experts following another school of thought argue that for a country like India, where there is so much diversity and clear-cut

THE MOST RELEVANT EXAMPLE IS THAT OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM IN THE US. THE 1,400 COMMUNITY COLLEGES ACROSS THE 50 STATES HAVE REVOLUTIONISED AND ADDED VALUE TO EDUCATION, WHICH IS OTHERWISE A COSTLY AFFAIR IN THE US

urban-rural, privileged-underprivileged divides, it would be a mammoth task for the Government because a lot needs to be done at the school level. The policy implementation at the higher education level would not be successful unless backed by improving school education. The new guidelines would not mean much for students coming from rural areas and underprivileged families. Apart from improving educational standards in these neglected areas, guidance and career counselling need to be introduced at an early level in school. As normally happens, this policy would also serve affluent students. The option would be available to the elites or serious students because only they would be able to afford the dual-degree fee. In this context, the most relevant example is that of the community college system in the United States. The 1,400 community colleges across the 50 States have revolutionised and added value to education, which is otherwise a costly affair in the US. These colleges provide an alternative system of affordable education to all,



especially the underprivileged. Community colleges offer two-year associate degrees with free entry and exit options and vertical mobility of accumulated credits to the four-year colleges and universities. Tailor-made courses are designed after conducting a need-based analysis in communities and assessing the employability aspect. Experts from local industries are involved in formulation of curriculum and the faculty comprises experienced professionals. Students of poor-locality schools, low-income groups and leisure learners take full advantage of these colleges, where education is in hybrid form — offline and online. There are small class groups with provisions of writing centres, student counselling centres and availability of career guidance, computers and library facilities. The students have the option of taking additional credits by enrolling in community colleges while studying in school.

The success of a dual-degree programme would depend upon formulating a realistic and inclusive strategic plan for students coming from different strata of society, providing good infrastructure, teaching facilities and recruiting the best faculty. Improvement in school education quality, making students college ready, career counselling and guidance would be a prerequisite to make it a success.

The timeline for the policy’s implementation is till 2036. But we have to make a good beginning. Analysing the community college system in the US and implementing it in consideration of our ground realities would be a worthwhile effort.

(The writer is a senior journalist and Chairman, Panwar Group of Institutions, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REBUILDING THE CONGRESS ISN’T EASY

Sir — This refers to ‘Cong asks poll strategist Prashant to join party’ (April 17). Speculation is rife that successful poll strategist Prashant Kishor, powered by a resounding track record of delivering election victories to several political parties, is about to join the Congress. If at all that happens, he faces a new and formidable challenge, the first of its kind, in his career since 2014 when his maiden championship as a poll strategist delivered a bumper harvest to the BJP. But unlike the parties for which he has worked until now, the Congress’s organisational structure is abysmally poor.

The party’s position in politically significant States like UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, AP, Telangana and Odisha is dismal. It means Prashant’s task is cut out as his work has to begin right from the scratch. Also, reports suggest that Prashant insists on the Congress leadership that the party should contest in about 400 parliamentary constituencies in 2024. For sure, it is imperative for Congress to do so to become a reckoning force at the national level, but the party will be pitted in a triangular or quadrangular contest in many constituencies.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

FOCUS ON WHAT’S IMPORTANT

Sir — Leaders of 13 Opposition parties are “shocked at the silence” of the Prime Minister, who has failed to speak out against the words and actions of those who propagate bigotry and those who, by their words and actions, incite our society. This silence is an eloquent testimony to the fact that such private armed mobs enjoy the luxury of official patronage. Though the Government and the opposition may differ over food, dresses, festivals and language, but it does not justify violence, stone pelting, attacks on other humans, vandalism, destruction of property, stores, burning and pillaging. Those who committed such acts are simply wrong and so are the civilians and law-enforcement authorities who let this happen. Violence in any shape or

Stay harmonious and cordial



It is really shameful that the Hanuman Janmotsav Shobha Yatra was marred by communal violence in Jahangirpuri, Delhi. The orchestrated violence was a desperate attempt to disrupt peace and communal harmony between communities by lumpen elements. The attack on religious processions on Ram Navami and Hanuman Janmotsav in different areas has pushed the country back to medieval times, harming secular democracy and our diverse culture.

Such incidents are unethical, savage, intolerable and divide the social order on communal lines. It also amounts to the police’s failure and weakness of the law and order mechanism.

The police’s incompetence cannot be overlooked, which failed to provide adequate security arrangements. The 14 arrested rioters must be given strict punishment. Within three years, India’s Capital is rocked by another riot. The Opposition parties have correctly and unitedly criticised the Government for alleged bigotry and one-sided treatment meted out to the minority community in different parts of the country. It’s time for the PM to address such sensitive issues that are gradually blowing out of proportion in different States, raising serious concerns and have caught the BJP Government between a rock and a hard place.

Janga Bahadur Sunuwar | Jalpaiguri

form is wrong. Shockingly, 75 years after Independence we are still facing communal and religious issues. As a senior citizen, I still believe that working citizens are least bothered about such riots; they are rather busy striving to earn and to provide for their family. Moreover, people must understand that religion teaches us the way to live and not fight. All political parties should instead bother about the nation’s economic and technological growth, literacy and infrastructure.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Sir — Keeping the TMC’s winning spree going, film star-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha has silenced his political adversaries with his single signature shout ‘Khaamosh!’ Along expected lines, Shatru romped home with an unprecedented margin of over 3 lakh votes against his BJP rival Agnimitra Paul in the Asansol parliamentary constituency. Interestingly, ‘Shotgun’ has also been a

Union Minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpaae-led Government. He was among those BJP leaders who felt disconcerted after the party leadership changed hands, and eventually left it only to briefly flirt with the ‘grand old party’.

Now, politically sagacious TMC supremo and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee cashed in on the actor’s charismatic persona. Even Shatrughan is all praise for Didi with words like the “Bengal tigress”. Singer-turned-politician Babul Supriyo as a BJP candidate in the Asansol election in 2019 had defeated TMC candidate Moon Moon Sen by a margin of 1.97 lakh votes. Later, he also defected to the TMC and has now won the Ballygunge Assembly seat. However, the BJP drew a blank in the just-concluded bypolls while Congress won two seats, one in MP and Chhattisgarh each. This must have boosted the morale of the Congress and TMC.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

India has a proud tradition of strengthening democracy in a democratic way.



Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



Britain PM — Boris Johnson

I will never impose my desires, fears, my upbringing on to my child.



Actor — Priyanka Chopra



Liverpool manager — Jurgen Klopp

Even the PM doesn’t have the right to destroy a person’s house without a probe.



Rajasthan CM — Ashok Gehlot

FIRST COLUMN

TECH ADVERTISING IS WAY COOLER?

Goodwill for the customer is the key



BALAKRISHNAN SATYAM

Any food item, a popular comedy writer has said, that her children haven't earlier seen frolicking and dancing on a TV screen, they utterly refuse to eat! Now this doesn't only speak for the charm of animation characters. The acceptability of any product or service does seem to hinge on the media prestige conferred on it. With touchscreens, joysticks, gesture recognition, visual matching, chatbots and upcoming AI applications - the kind of experiences that advertisers can aim to deliver does quite boggle the mind!

In an earlier era, customers sometimes spoke a good word to others just like they do today. In turn, this brought more customers, and the business was helped to grow. The word that spread was based on first-hand experience of the product or service.



Then around the port cities came trade announcements in the newspapers. The early print ads were about the arrival of cargoes in ships, and lists of newly landed merchandise in the wharf. By then, billboards, banners, buntings and sandwich boards were getting to be common in busy down-town streets. They nudged passers-by to walk into stores or restaurants nearby.

It was only after the telegraph and the radio though that the information gap between the main cities and the rest of the country got bridged. While print newspapers and magazines marched on towards breakthroughs such as colour printing, a new horizon dawned with radio. It could reach the unlettered, and could be attended while going about one's work. It carried the energy and empathy of speech, the evocativeness of sound effects (SFX), and the appeal of music. Radio was a new dimension of advertising power - its novelty and prestige, and its intense engagement of its listeners simply cast an aura of desirability around the brands which took to it early.

We can readily imagine the impact of getting on to the screen in a cinemataalkies and then of beaming TV ads into living rooms. With satellite television, messages could aim at audiences across all shift-hours. Not only product displays and appeals, sky shop television actually offers slots for detailed demonstrations, phone-ins, and user support. In a dedicated shopping channel, you don't have to hope for a receptive or curious frame of mind. That's readily presumed about the viewer.

In other media, advertisers hope to garner some of the viewer's attention even as he or she's consuming content of general or individual interest. But now the concept of interpreting a person's intent or suggestibility has come into sharp focus. This is empowered by the advent of web search engines, tracking of site visitors, information on browser activity, device recognition, identifying current location etc. Depending on age, gender, local temperature outside, and whether you consume soccer league news, you could be shown a beer advertisement or discount coupon, or an easy recipe for a medicinal tea.

In the early days of any media technology, brands cash in merely through sheer presence. Over the months or years, the novelty wears off. Brand clutter catches up. It's a swamp of sameness. We again turn to the psychologists, the creatives, the hybrid innovators who must provide a fresh meaning, experience, and soul. Engineers build robots; artists will conjure sublime purposes for them.

It's been remarked that technology not only alters the production process, it also changes shop-floor relations. It impacts the marketplace, transforms the worker, and even the product's consumer. Likewise, every new medium challenges marketers. The creators and managers of brand advertising have to learn anew, figure out how to adapt, and how to mine relevant value from the pervasive, persuasive and pliable new gizmo.

(The writer is a creative director, advertising faculty, and an amateur epistemologist. The views expressed are personal.)

Multi-alignment: Re-defining diplomacy



The change from NAM in India's relationships is no longer dependent on, or pegged to, the world's interpretation of our country's internal affairs

India's stand vis-a-vis Russia and the US has been hailed by many strategic experts as NAM 2.0. However, differing geopolitical realities such as the new Cold War, the rise of China, the dominance of energy security and the safety of the shipping lanes had made it imperative for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to think beyond the traditional domain of non-alignment. Modi has reoriented the non-alignment into a more positive force known as multi-alignment to achieve India's comprehensive security. Thus, the two policies are not on the same level playing field and are not synonymous. The test of both policies has come from China's direction, first in 1962 and then in the 2020 Galwan Valley clashes. In order to understand the practicality of multi-alignment, one needs to flip back a few pages of history.

Moscow's position in the 1962 war was neutrality, and it urged both sides to resolve their differences bilaterally and amicably. Only later, when Nehru pressed Russia for help, it reaffirmed its promise to supply MIG aircraft to India. When the American aid started pouring in, the Soviets fearing India's tilt toward the US, increased their assistance. Despite giving India a military aid of \$65 million, the US was watchful of potential Indian aggression against Pakistan. The aid was accompanied by 'tutoring' about India's 'true friends'. The US warned of 'appropriate action both within and without the United Nations' if India initiated any open hostilities against Islamabad.

Further, the deceitful conduct of many Afro-Asian nations during the 1962 war, despite India's commendable role in the 1950 Korean War and the 1956 Suez crisis, came as a rude shock for Nehru. The Chinese aggression was not criticised, and India did not even gain their sympathies. Only the then United Arab Republic and Israel supported India's position and supplied arms at the request of Nehru. The policy did not fail India; instead, the over expectations did. There was no balance of interests. The test of non-alignment proved that it is not the intentions that are a deciding factor; instead, pragmatism and realism should be the crucial determinants of any foreign and security policy.

Modi has successfully grasped the foundation of NAM along with its constraints. He has steered India towards a multi alignment policy. The country is no longer chained by "you are either with us or against us" geopolitics. Consequently, during the Galwan Valley clashes, the Russian stand was more or less the same with its focus on 'neutrality' and the US to limit China's influence in the South and East Asian region stood by India. However, despite its strategic alliance with China, Russia could not do anything much to appease Beijing.

The Ukrainian conflict further tested the limits of India's multi-alignment policy. Russia and the US grapple for India's



MODI HAPPENS TO BE THE FIRST PM WHO HAS UNDERSTOOD THE DYNAMICS OF A WAR-BASED ECONOMY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND HAS INITIATED MEASURES FOR BOOSTING INDIGENOUS DEFENCE MANUFACTURING, SUCH AS THE SPECIALISED VEHICLES FOR INFANTRY. ADDITIONALLY, THE DE-LINKING OF INTERNAL ISSUES FROM INTERNATIONAL ONES IS ANOTHER ACHIEVEMENT OF INDIA'S CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY

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



positive overtures towards themselves. Moscow's appreciation of India's current foreign policy and the statement of Dalip Singh that Russia would do little in case of a Chinese belligerency speaks volumes of the competition between the two for India's geopolitical convergences. The acceptance by the US at the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue that Indo-Russo ties developed when the US was unable to be its partner ensures that the Indian interests are now formally acknowledged. The triangular dynamics of Russia, the US and India have been reversed in India's favour.

Russia's actions in Ukraine have attracted economic sanctions. Despite its belligerency against India, China is hesitant to defy the sanctions openly. Moscow looks towards India for its sale of energy resources such as oil. The fact that Germany and other nations cannot immediately halt their energy trade with Russia is indicative of the primacy of national interests over the ideological or other 'like mindedness' factors. On the other hand, Washington has been militarily used by Pakistan -- first as a 'major non-NATO player' through official arms supplies and second by its deceitful support to the Taliban. It has taken around sixty years for the US to truly understand the role of Pakistan in advocating terrorism and creating regional instabilities in South and Central Asia. The prior considerations of an alliance with Pakistan are no longer present, which has paved the way for a robust military trade apart from the US assurances of tactical support in case of Chinese aggression.

So, what are the possible gains from practising a multi-alignment

policy? First, a chance to convince Russia for gaining air basing rights in Ayni and Farkhor air bases in Tajikistan. India can strategically use the Russian leverage in its favour. From 2002-to 2010, India spent \$70 million to renovate the bases under its Connect Central Asia policy. It will be a game-changer for the Indian armed forces in regular warfare and ensure that Pakistan cut short its proxy war against India. Second, Russia would be unwilling to treat Pakistan as a 'zipper of Pan Eurasian integration', possibly nipping the blossoming Russo-Pak strategic proximity. A decreased geopolitical importance of Pakistan would surely benefit Russia, India and the US, for Islamic fundamentalism affects all the three powers, although in varying degrees. During the Galwan clashes, Russia asserted its position of non-interference; yet, India's vote absenteeism ensured that at the right time, the Russians would not delay the spare parts supply for various fighter jets Su-30MKIs and MiG-29s, MiG29K and the T-90 battle tanks apart from the Kilo-class submarines. Russia has already started the delivery of the second squadron of the S-400 missile system. Finally, the new possibilities of low-cost energy trade and Russia's precious vote in the UNSC can strengthen India's position.

Regarding the US, the waivers of purchase of Russian arms and spare parts along with oil ensure the continuation of India's strategic autonomy. The US has further verbally committed itself to stand by India in case of Chinese aggression. Both the countries aim for joint development and production of hi-tech weapons under the Bilateral Defence Technology and Trade

Initiative (DTTI). The government of India and the people are very mindful that both the U.S. and Russia can only provide military support and assure positive overtures in the UNSC. The Ukraine conflict teaches the world the biggest military lesson that a nation has to fight its wars. If imposed on the country, the war has to be fought by the Indians themselves.

Moreover, Modi happens to be the first PM who has broadly understood the dynamics of a war-based economy in international relations and has initiated several measures for boosting indigenous defence manufacturing, such as the specialised vehicles for infantry. Additionally, the de-linking of internal issues from the international ones is another achievement of India's current foreign policy. During NAM, India was assessed by the foreign governments concerning domestic issues. Instead, today, the world understands that abrogation of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act are altogether internal issues and are not open to international politics. Finally, Sino-Pak habitual disrespect to the bilateral agreements has been halted as the government can successfully communicate that only previously signed bilateral agreements would be considered while resolving the issues. Thus, the onus of respecting the LAC and LOC lies on China and Pakistan, respectively. To conclude, Henry Kissinger had once said, "the task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been" and the multi-alignment policy has proved just that.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

IT WAS TOTALLY MY DECISION TO SEND (PUNJAB) OFFICIALS (TO DELHI) FOR TRAINING PURPOSES. —PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER BHAGWANT MANN



THE AAP CHIEF IS RULING PUNJAB VIA REMOTE CONTROL. MANN IS JUST A RUBBER STAMP. —PUNJAB CONGRESS MLA SUKHPAL SINGH KHAIRA

Lessons from Sri Lanka on organic farming

The changeover to organic farming must be phased and implemented over a longer period of time to ease the pressure on food security



SRI RAJ KOTA

(The writer is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

Across the world organic farming is considered as the gold standard in preventing up to 500 million pounds of chemicals and pesticides from entering the environment thereby enriching biodiversity and preserving delicate ecologies. The absence of chemical fertilisers in crop production is not only good for nature and soil but for human health also as many types of auto-immune diseases and cancers have been attributed to indigestion of pesticides and chemicals used in food production. But in spite of its undeniable benefits for the environment, organic farming is also a severely debated concept due to its inherent drawbacks which if ignored have the capacity to bring a nation's economy and food security to its knees. Sri Lanka has been the unfortunate

nation to experience the painful ill-effects of adopting organic farming in a hurry.

The trouble in the tropical paradise has been brewing for a while now. The delicate balancing act by Sri Lanka in its ties with India and China for economic benefits eventually did not pan out as a successful strategy. According to the Sri Lankan Central Bank, the economy has contracted by 1.5 per cent in July-September 2021, these adverse conditions are mainly due to heavy borrowings which require the island state to pay nearly pay \$12.5 billion on international sovereign bonds. This cash crunch has meant that Sri Lanka has severe inflationary conditions and ongoing energy and food crisis leading to violent unrest in the population requiring authorities to



announceturfew in order to rein in the protests. This sudden clamp down by the government has raised human rights issues with the United Nations stepping in and advising the Sri Lankan government to observe the sanctity of human rights of its people.

Food would have not been in the list of shortage items for Sri Lanka had the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa not announced a rapid transition to

organic farming by abruptly stopping import of chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals in April 2021. In just one year, the state of agriculture productivity totally devoid of any fertiliser and pesticide fell into ruins as farmers were unprepared for the sudden shift to organic farming. The government realising the folly revoked the fertiliser ban in November 2021, but by then the damage had already been done as food security of the nation

had totally broken down due to a third of Sri Lanka's agricultural land remaining unused due to lack of timely availability of fertilisers. This led to a rice production falling by a whopping 20 per cent. The sudden shift to organic farming sent shock waves through the food sector of Sri Lanka, but this could have been avoided.

The key to a successful transition from conventional agriculture to organic farming is recognising the fact that organic farming is synonymous with low yield. On an average organic farming yields are 20 per cent lower than conventional farming, these conditions are made worse by the shortage of organic fertilisers. According to estimates, Sri Lanka's paddy, tea and rubber production are dependent on chemical inputs in a

range of 90-94 per cent. In comparison, the country can only produce only 2-3 million tonnes of bio-fertilisers whereas the requirement is at least thrice more. So, the changeover from conventional to organic farming must be phased and implemented over a longer period of time to ease the pressure on food security and ensure a healthy crop yield that is environmentally friendly as well.

In India too, the fad of organic farming has rapidly gained popularity, but thanks to a cross spectrum of environmental expertsaffording a balanced view on the subject has ensured a much-needed sceptical view of the concept. This is essential in maintaining rationality while pursuing the implementation of the same. This rationality helps differentiate

between hype and reality. For instance, Sikkim which earned the tag of 100 per cent Organic State, also happens to be heavily dependent on neighbouring West Bengal for a majority of its food security. This reality check has helped Kerala state, which was itself planning to go "100 per cent organic", slow down and take a more measured and slow approach to adoption of organic farming.

Organic farming can do more harm than good if implemented in a hurry without preparing the infrastructure and the farmer mindset and most importantly ensuring that food security is not adversely compromised due to its adoption. The Sri Lankan crisis is a painful lesson in this regard, which no nation should undergo ever.

Pakistan sliding towards civil unrest, warns Chaudhry



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A senior leader of ousted prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party has warned that Pakistan was sliding towards civil unrest. Former information minister Fawad Chaudhry made the remarks on Saturday in reaction to brawls in the Punjab Assembly in which both speaker and deputy speaker were thrashed by the angry lawmakers.

Police was called to control the rowdy members who were trying to stop acting speaker Dost Muhammad Mazari from holding voting to elect new chief minister of province. "We are inches away from full fledged Civil unrest, Imran Khan has exercised utmost restraint very

soon even he won't be able to stop this very angry mob and we will see country plunging into a civil unrest," Fawad tweeted. The former minister also said that the ongoing political turmoil was linked to the Supreme Court's "failure" to decide the case regarding the fate of rebel lawmakers. Another leader from his party, Zulfi Bukhari, also concurred with Fawad's statement. "These are just a few MPAs (members of provincial assembly), imagine if the awam (public) goes out of control and takes the matter in their own hands... only solution to calm this civil unrest is ELECTIONS. Let the people decide their own fate. CALL ELECTIONS!" tweeted Bukhari.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has condemned the attack on deputy speaker, saying "this blatant display of violence & hooliganism is fascism, pure & simple". The country is bitterly divided into highly charged partisan lines over ouster of Imran Khan through a no-confidence motion on April 9 - a move dubbed by Khan as a US conspiracy to change regime in Pakistan.

IMRAN CLAIMS SHEHBAZ-LED GOVT TRYING TO PUSH HIM OUT OF GAME



PTI ■ KARACHI

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan has claimed that the current "imported government" led by Shehbaz Sharif was trying to push him "out of the game" and called his ouster a "fixed" match to make Pakistanis slaves to foreign powers.

Addressing a huge rally here on Saturday night, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman sought to know from the people whether his government was a victim of "con-

spiracy or interference". The 69-year-old cricketer-turned-politician said that the purpose of his visit to Karachi was not in the interests of his political party but it was for the sake of Pakistan and the future of its children.

Talking about the foreign funding case against the PTI, Khan said that the case has been filed to kick him "out of the game" (political arena). "I want to tell the nation that I've never been against any country. I'm not anti-India, anti-Europe or anti-US. I'm with the humanity of the world. I'm not against any nation. I want friendship with everyone but slavery with no one," Khan said.

"I say foreign funding and his (Shehbaz Sharif's) corruption case should be heard together," said Khan as he alleged that "false cases" would be made against him and his former Cabinet by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)

and National Accountability Bureau (NAB). The foreign funding case has been pending since November 14, 2014, and it was filed by PTI founding member Akbar S Babar who had alleged that there are some financial irregularities in the party's funding from Pakistan and abroad. "If you push us against the wall, then you will be harmed, not the country. We have to remain peaceful," Khan told his followers, adding that he will never approve the "imported government".

He claimed that the "conspiracy" was in the works for the past three to four months as turncoats, who quit his party, as well as some journalists began having meetings in the US embassy. "My Pakistanis, I want friendship with everyone but I cannot allow our country to become a slave to anyone," he maintained, adding that before coming to Karachi, people were telling him that his life is under

"threat" as "mafias" are after him. "[Nonetheless, I decided to come here] as my life is not as important as your freedom. This conspiracy is to make you slaves to foreign powers. One Mir Jaffer has been imposed on us via a conspiracy," he said while referring to Sharif.

Syed Mir Jafar Ali Khan Bahadur was a military general who became the first dependent Nawab of Bengal of British East India Company.

Jafar served as commander of Bengali army under Siraj ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, but betrayed him during Battle of Plassey and succeeded Daulah after British victory in 1757. Explaining the alleged conspiracy against him that led to his ouster from the government, Khan told the people that he learned three to four months ago that US officials had started meeting the leaders of the then Opposition along with PTI's dissident MPs and journalists at American embassy. "A

journalist told me that 'a lot of money is being spent on us'. Thus, the conspiracy had been in the works for a while and then our US ambassador met Donald Lu (US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs)," he alleged. The former prime minister also continued to register his grievances against the judiciary and said he had never broken the laws of land.

He sought to know what crime he had committed that the judiciary felt need to open courts at midnight last Saturday. "I created two of Pakistan's biggest charity institutions.

I created Shaukat Khanum and two universities. I am only politician to have been declared sadiq and ameen (truthful and honest) by Pakistan's Supreme Court," he said. Using cricket terminology, Khan said he knew "match was fixed" when vote of no-confidence motion was moved against him.

Pak asks Afghanistan to take action against terrorists operating with impunity from its soil

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Sunday said its security forces were increasingly targeted in cross-border attacks from Afghanistan in last few days and asked Taliban rulers of neighbouring nation to take action against militants.

The Foreign Office's remarks came in response to media queries regarding recent incidents along the Pak-Afghan border.

"In the last few days, incidents along Pak-Afghan Border have significantly increased, wherein, Pakistani security forces are being targeted from across the border," it said.

The FO said that Pakistan has repeatedly requested Afghan government in last few months to secure Pak-Afghan border region because "Terrorists are using Afghan soil with impunity to carry out activities inside Pakistan."

PPP may not join new Cabinet of Shehbaz, says Zardari

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former president Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday indicated that his Pakistan Peoples Party may not join Cabinet of newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who is still struggling to finalise his core team even after five days in office.

Shehbaz, who took oath of office on April 11, is without any minister as he is unable to convince all of coalition partners on formation of Cabinet.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) co-chair Zardari hinted that his party would prefer that other coalition partners were adjusted. "I don't think we are taking any ministries," he told journalists outside National Assembly (NA).

"We want to give a chance to our friends (coalition partners)," he said. However, the PPP, in a wise move, has already grabbed post of NA Speaker for its leader and former premier Raja Pervaiz Ashraf who was elected unopposed.

The party is also eyeing the post of Senate chairman, which is the second highest office after the President. Reports coming from various political circles show that Zardari is also pushing himself to be elected as president of country once



incumbent Arif Alvi resigns or is removed. The PPP party is also set to get the post of Punjab governor, which is the biggest province of the country.

So, by sacrificing Cabinet positions, Zardari may grab all key constitutional posts for his close cronies.

However, Shehbaz has been insisting that the PPP should join his Cabinet and is ready to offer key ministries, including that of foreign affairs to Zardari's son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, according to various sources.

In another move, the PPP invited applications for party tickets in national and provincial assemblies for forthcoming general elections in country. A statement issued by Farhatullah Babar, secretary general of party, said that each application should be accompanied with a bank draft of ₹40,000 for a NA party ticket and ₹30,000 for a provincial assembly ticket.

Lankan protesters demand justice for victims of Easter terror attacks

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Hundreds of people staged a silent protest in Sri Lanka's capital on Sunday, demanding justice for the victims of the Easter terror attacks that claimed at least 270 lives three years ago.

The protesters joined hundreds of people camping near the President's Office in Colombo seeking resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and all members of his family from the government over the worst economic crisis that has caused critical shortages of fuel, food and medicines in the country.

Local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat linked to the ISIS, had carried out coordinated blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka on the Easter Sunday in 2019, killing at least 270 people, and injuring over 500.

The attack stirred a political storm as the then government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe were blamed for their inability to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence being made available. Displaying banners and placards, protesters called for jus-



tice for the victims of the Easter attacks. "3 years and still no justice," read a banner carried by protesters who walked a 5-mile stretch to the site to be joined by thousands who have been carrying out the protest since April 9 demanding President Gotabaya's resignation over the unprecedented economic crisis - the worst ever in the country's history. The victims' families led by the head of the local church, Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, have been critical of the slow pace of the investigations which they claim is a political ploy for cover up.

Meanwhile, long queues for fuel and cooking gas were seen at most places on Sunday as protests in solidarity of the Galle Face took place at several other provincial towns. In the southern port town of Galle, the police put down the hut-

built by protesters. However, later with the intervention of the legal fraternity the protest started at the same site.

The economic crisis which led to a political crisis with the resignation of the cabinet is yet to be solved.

Rajapaksa is expected to appoint his cabinet on Monday with several senior members of the previous cabinet deciding to stand down in favor of the younger colleagues. The ruling coalition is in disarray with over 40 of its members declaring independence of the SLP coalition. The opposition is contemplating moving a vote of no-trust against the government for its handling of the economic crisis where shortages of essentials and long hours of power cuts have enraged the public. Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis since gaining independence from the UK in 1948.

FRANCE-MACRON-RALLY Macron courts Marseille voters, climate activists in Paris

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron held a major campaign rally on Saturday in Marseille, touting his environmental and climate accomplishments and future plans in a bid to draw in young voters who supported more politically extreme candidates in the first round of France's presidential election.

Citizens and especially millennials in Marseille, a multicultural southern French city on the Mediterranean, favored hard-left presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon over the centrist Macron in the April 10 first round of voting.

Marseille's young voters, who leaned mainly to the far right and the far left last Sunday, are particularly engaged with climate issues - a point which Macron hoped to capitalize on in a rousing speech at the edge of the glistering sea.

"I hear the anxiety that exists in a lot of our young people. I see young people, adolescents, who are fearful about our planet's future," he said. Macron is facing off against far-right challenger Marine Le Pen in France's April 24 presidential runoff after 10 other can-

didates, including Melenchon, were eliminated in the first round of voting.

For many who voted for left-wing candidates in the first round, the presidential runoff vote is an unpalatable choice between a candidate who is anathema to them, Le Pen, and a president who some feel has veered to the right of center during his first term.

The runoff outcome could depend on how left-wing voters make up their minds: between backing Macron or leaving him to fend for himself against Le Pen.

Macron has mixed green credentials, something he hopes to improve on. Although he was associated with the slogan "Make The Planet Great Again," in his first five-year term he capitulated to angry yellow vest protesters by scrapping a tax hike on fuel prices. To cheers on Saturday, Macron said his next prime minister would be placed in charge of environmental planning as France seeks to become carbon neutral by 2050. He also promised more public transport nationwide to wean people off being dependent on cars. Even though Macron came out on top in the first round of voting.

Iran confirms centrifuge workshop moved to underground site

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran has confirmed it relocated a centrifuge facility to its underground Natanz nuclear site, state media reported, days after the UN atomic watchdog said it installed surveillance cameras to monitor the new workshop at Tehran's request.

The late Saturday report by the official IRNA news agency comes as diplomatic efforts to restore Iran's tattered nuclear deal appear stalled. The news agency quoted the spokesman for Iran's atomic energy organisation, Behrouz Kamalvandi, as saying authorities had moved the operation to a safer place.

Iran's centrifuge facility in Karaj found itself targeted in what Iran described as a sabotage attack in June. Natanz itself has twice been targeted in sabotage attacks amid uncertainty over the nuclear deal, assaults that Iran has blamed on Israel.

"Unfortunately because of a terrorist operation that took place against Karaj, we were obliged to intensify security measures under which we moved part of machines and transferred rest to Natanz and Isfahan," said Kamalvandi. Isfahan is location of another Iranian nuclear facility.

Archbishop says UK's Rwanda migrants plan goes against God

AP ■ LONDON

The leader of the Anglican Church strongly criticised the British government's plan to put some asylum-seekers on one-way flights to Rwanda, saying "sub-contracting out our responsibilities" to refugees can not stand up to God's scrutiny.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby made the unusually direct political intervention in his Easter Sunday sermon, saying there are "serious ethical questions about sending asylum-seekers overseas". He said "sub-contracting out our responsibilities, even to a country that seeks to do well, like Rwanda, is opposite of nature of God who himself took responsibility for our

failures". Speaking at Canterbury Cathedral in southeast England, Welby said while "the details are for politics and politicians, the principle must stand the judgment of God - and it cannot".

Britain and Rwanda announced Thursday that they had struck an agreement that will see some people arriving in the UK as stowaways on trucks or in small boats sent 4,000 miles (6,400 km) to the East African country, where their asylum claims will be processed and, if successful, they will stay.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government says the plan will discourage people from making dangerous attempts to cross the English Channel.

Clashes erupt again near flashpoint Jerusalem holy site

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli police on Sunday entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City to secure the way for Jewish visitors to the flashpoint holy site, fuelling clashes that left 17 Palestinian wounded, according to Palestinian medical workers.

The unrest happened just two days after clashes with Palestinians at the same site. Violence in Jerusalem between Israeli security forces and Palestinian demonstrators a year ago escalated into an 11-day Gaza war. The hilltop compound housing the mosque is the third-holiest site in Islam, while it is the holiest place for Jews, who refer to it as the

Temple Mount. The competing claims to the site have sparked numerous rounds of violence.

This year the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Christian holy week culminating in Easter Sunday and the week-long Jewish Passover are all occurring at the same time, with tens of thousands of visitors flocking to the city after coronavirus restrictions have been mostly lifted.

Israeli police accused Palestinians of "defiling and desecrating" a holy site, while Palestinian officials accused Israel of trying to divide the sensitive holy site. "What happened in Al-Aqsa Mosque is a dangerous escalation, the repercussions of which are to be borne by the Israeli gov-

ernment alone," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Police said they entered the compound to facilitate the routine visit of Jews to the holy site. They said Palestinians had stockpiled stones and set up barriers in anticipation of violence.

Omer Barlev, the Israeli minister in charge of the police, said it was important to ensure freedom of worship "but we will not compromise when violence and terror take place".

The police cleared Palestinians out of the sprawling esplanade outside the mosque itself early Sunday, while dozens of Palestinians remained inside the building chanting "God is Greatest".

Video released by police showed small groups of youths throwing stones, as well as fireworks being fired from inside the mosque.

Palestinians reported brief clashes with Israeli police just outside the mosque compound, while police said Palestinians had thrown stones at buses outside the Old City. Paramedics said five people riding in buses received treatment for minor injuries in the attacks.

Police released a video showing a crowd of youths pelting a passing bus with stones just outside the Old City. Another video from the police, taken inside one of the buses, showed Jewish families sitting on the floor of the vehicle as it continued on its way.

North Korea says it tested new tactical guided weapon

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea has test-fired a new type of tactical guided weapon designed to boost its nuclear fighting capability, state media reported Sunday, days after it passed its biggest state anniversary without an expected military parade, which it typically uses to unveil provocative weapons systems.

The test, the 13th round of weapons launches by Pyongyang this year, came amid concerns that North Korea may soon conduct a larger provocation like a nuclear test in an effort to expand the country's weapons arsenal and increase pressure on its rivals amid stalled diplo-

macy. The official Korean Central News Agency said leader Kim Jong Un and other top officials observed the launch.

It said the weapon tested has "great significance in drastically improving the firepower of the frontline long-range artillery units, enhancing the efficiency in the operation of (North Korea's) tactical nukes and of diversification of their firepower missions."

KCNA didn't elaborate, but the mention of word "tactical nukes" suggested weapon is likely capable of carrying a battlefield nuclear warhead that could hit strategic targets in South Korea, including US military installations.

Unrest sparked by far-right demos continues in Sweden

AP ■ HELSINKI

Unrest broke out in southern Sweden late Saturday despite police moving a rally by an anti-Islam far-right group, which was planning to burn a Quran among other things, to a new location as a preventive measure.

Scuffles and unrest were reported in southern town of Landskrona after a demonstration scheduled there by Danish right-wing party Stram Kurs party was moved to the nearby city of Malmo, some 45 kilometers (27 miles) south. Up to 100 mostly young people threw stones, set cars, tires and dustbins on fire, and put up a

barrier fence that obstructed traffic, Swedish police said. The situation had calmed down in Landskrona by late Saturday but remains tense, police said, adding no injuries were reported in the action.

On Friday evening, violent clashes between demonstrators and counter-protesters erupted in the central city of Orebro ahead Stram Kurs' plan to burn a Quran there, leaving 12 police officers injured and four police vehicles set on fire. Video footage and photos from chaotic scenes in Orebro showed burning police cars and protesters throwing stones and other objects at police officers in riot gear.

Covid surge hits China's shipbuilding industry

PTI ■ BEIJING

The massive surge of Covid-19 cases in Shanghai city has hit China's shipbuilding industry, including the launch of the third aircraft carrier scheduled for April 23.

For over a fortnight, Shanghai -- China's business and industrial hub with over 26 million people -- has been literally shut down with strict lockdown as the city experienced rampaging spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Shanghai reported 3,590 confirmed locally transmitted COVID-19 cases and over

21,500 local asymptomatic carriers on Saturday, the city municipal health commission said on Sunday.

The lockdown has slowed China's shipbuilding plans and may affect the launch of the country's third aircraft carrier, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Sunday.

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was widely expected to launch the aircraft carrier around its 73rd anniversary on April 23.

"But the plan faces delay as the rampant pandemic in Shanghai has delayed the transport of some key components,"

the Post quoted a source as saying. Construction of the Type 003 aircraft carrier has been underway at the Jiangnan Shipyard on Shanghai's Changxing Island since 2017 and was expected to be ready for launch early this year.

Recent satellite images from Google Earth showed construction of the nearly 320-metre-long platform is almost complete.

According to the photos, covers have been put over the vessel's three catapults, indicating they are ready, but the two elevators to lift aircraft from the carrier's hangars have not been fitted fully.

China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, a refit of the Soviet-era ship which was commissioned in 2012 is so far the only Chinese aircraft carrier with initial operational capability or the basic level of combat readiness.

China launched its first indigenously built aircraft carrier Shandong in 2019.

However, no official reason has been given for why Shandong has not reached the combat-readiness stage, the Post report said.

The vessel's frame was based on its sister ship, but its interior construction, weapons systems, and training opera-

tions are closer to those of the US' Nimitz-class aircraft carriers, which team up with destroyers, frigates, attack submarines and supply vessels to form a strike group.

Both are conventionally powered carriers - as is the Type 003 - while the country's fourth carrier, on which construction started last year, is likely to be powered by nuclear reactors, the report said.

China plans to build at least four aircraft carrier strike groups by 2030 to become the world's second-biggest modern blue-water navy after the US, it said.

Meanwhile, apart from

Shanghai, 13 other provincial-level regions in China reported new local COVID-19 cases, including 167 in the northeastern province of Jilin, the National Health Commission said on Sunday.

Shanghai has reported 21,582 locally-transmitted asymptomatic infections of the coronavirus virus out of a total of 22,512 local asymptomatic carriers, the Commission said.

As many as 30,170 close contacts were released from medical observation in China on Saturday, it said. No new deaths from COVID-19 have been reported, the Commission said.

Mounting attack may end scope for talks: Zelenskyy

AP ■ KYIV

The continuing siege of the port city of Mariupol, which has come at a horrific cost to trapped and starving civilians, could scuttle attempts to negotiate an end to the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told his country's journalists in an interview.

"The destruction of all our guys in Mariupol — what they are doing now — can put an end to any format of negotiations," he said on Saturday.

Later, in his nightly video address to the nation, Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs more support from the West to have a chance at saving Mariupol. "Either our partners give Ukraine all of the necessary heavy weapons, the planes, and without exaggeration immediately, so we can reduce the pressure of the occupiers on Mariupol and break the blockade," he said, "or we do so through negotiations, in which the role of our partners should be decisive."

Zelenskyy said the situation in Mariupol remains "inhuman" and Russia "is deliberately trying to destroy everyone who is there."

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Ukrainian forces had been driven out of most of the city and remained only in the huge Azovstal steel mill.

Earlier, he estimated that 2,500 to 3,000 Ukrainian troops had died in the war, and about 10,000 had been wounded. The office of Ukraine's prosecutor general said Saturday that at least 200 children have been killed, and more than 360 wounded.

Meanwhile, Russian forces accelerated scattered attacks on Kyiv, western Ukraine and beyond in an explosive reminder to Ukrainians and their Western supporters that the whole country remains under threat.

Stung by the loss of its Black Sea flagship and indignant over alleged Ukrainian aggression on Russian territory, Russia's military command had warned of renewed missile



strikes on Ukraine's capital.

As Russia prepared for the anticipated offensive, a mother wept over her 15-year-old son's body after rockets hit a residential area of Kharkiv, a city in northeast Ukraine. An infant and at least eight other

people died, officials said.

In the towns and villages just outside Kyiv, authorities have reported finding the bodies of more than 900 civilians, most shot dead, since Russian troops retreated two weeks ago. Smoke rose from the cap-

ital again early Saturday as Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported a strike that killed one person and wounded several.

The mayor advised residents who fled the city earlier in the war not to return.

"We're not ruling out fur-

ther strikes on the capital," Klitschko said. "If you have the opportunity to stay a little bit longer in the cities where it's safer, do it."

It was not immediately clear from the ground what was hit in the strike on Kyiv's Darnytskyi district. The sprawling area on the southeastern edge of the capital contains a mixture of Soviet-style apartment blocks, newer shopping centers and big-box retail outlets, industrial areas and rail yards. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said an armored vehicle plant was targeted. He didn't specify where the factory was located, but there is one in the Darnytskyi district.

He said the plant was among multiple Ukrainian military sites hit with "air-launched high-precision long-range weapons." As the U.S. and Europe send new arms to Ukraine, the strategy could be aimed at hobbling Ukraine's defenses ahead of what's expected to be a full-scale Russian assault in the east.

It was the second strike in

the Kyiv area since the Russian military vowed this week to step up missile strikes on the capital. Another hit a missile plant Friday.

The Russian missiles hit the city just as residents were emerging for walks, foreign embassies planned to reopen and other tentative signs of the city's prewar life started resurfacing, following the failure of Russian troops to capture Kyiv and their withdrawal.

Kyiv was one of many targets Saturday. The Ukrainian president's office reported missile strikes and shelling over the past 24 hours in eight regions across the country.

The governor of the Lviv region in western Ukraine, which has been only sporadically touched by the war's violence, reported airstrikes on the region by Russian Su-35 aircraft that took off from neighboring Belarus. In apparent preparations for its assault on the east, the Russian military has intensified shelling of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in recent days. Friday's attack killed civilians and wounded

more than 50 people, the Ukrainian president's office reported. On Saturday an explosion believed to be caused by a missile sent emergency workers scrambling near an outdoor market in Kharkiv, according to AP journalists at the scene. One person was killed, and at least 18 people were wounded, according to rescue workers.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said Saturday's toll was three dead and 34 wounded.

Nate Mook, a member of the World Central Kitchen NGO run by celebrity chef José Andrés, said in a tweet that four workers in Kharkiv were wounded by a strike. Andrés tweeted that staff members were unnerved but safe.

Russian forces also have taken captive some 700 Ukrainian troops and more than 1,000 civilians, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Saturday. Ukraine holds about the same number of Russian troops as prisoners and intends to arrange a swap but is demanding the release of civilians "without any conditions," she said.

Ukraine defiant as Mariupol teeters on brink

AP ■ KYIV

The battered port city of Mariupol on Sunday appeared on the brink of falling to Russian forces after seven weeks under siege, a development that would give Moscow a crucial success in Ukraine following a botched attempt to storm the capital and the loss of the Russian navy's Black Sea flagship.

The Russian military estimated that about 2,500 Ukrainian fighters holding out at a hulking steel plant with a warren of underground passageways provided the last pocket of resistance in Mariupol.

Russia gave another deadline for their surrender, saying those who put down their weapons were "guaranteed to keep their lives," but Ukraine remained defiant.

"All those who will continue resistance will be destroyed," said Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, the Russian Defence Ministry's spokesman.

He said intercepted communications indicated there were about 400 foreign mercenaries along with the Ukrainian troops at the Azovstal steel mill, a claim that couldn't be independently ver-

ified.

Seizing Mariupol would free up Russian forces to weaken and encircle Ukrainian soldiers in eastern Ukraine, where Russia has focused its war aims for now and is deploying personnel and equipment withdrawn from the north after the failure to take Kyiv.

Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar described Mariupol as a "shield defending Ukraine" as Russian troops prepare for a full-scale offensive in Donbas, the country's eastern industrial heartland where Moscow-backed separatists already control some territory.

In a reminder that no part of Ukraine was immune until the war ends, Russian forces carried out new missile strikes near Kyiv and elsewhere on Sunday in an apparent effort to weaken Ukraine's military capacity before the anticipated assault in the east.

After the humiliating loss of the flagship of its Black Sea Fleet, Russia's military command on Friday vowed to step up missile strikes on the capital.

The Russian military said on Sunday that it had attacked an ammunition plant near Kyiv overnight with precision-



guided missiles, the third such strike in as many days.

Russia's stepped-up attacks on Kyiv came after it accused Ukraine on Thursday of wounding seven people and damaging about 100 residential buildings with airstrikes in Bryansk, a region bordering Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials have not confirmed hitting targets in Russia.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a Saturday strike on what Russia's Defence Ministry identified as an armoured vehicle plant killed

one person and wounded several. He advised residents who fled the city

earlier in the war not to return.

The Russian military on Sunday also claimed to have destroyed Ukrainian air defence radars in the east, near Sievierodonetsk, as well as several ammunition depots elsewhere.

Explosions were reported overnight in Kramatorsk, an eastern city where rockets killed at least 57 people at a train station crowded with civilians trying to evacuate

before the expected Russian offensive.

The ongoing siege and relentless bombardment of Mariupol has come at a terrible cost, with officials estimating Russians had killed at least 21,000 people. Just 120,000 people remain in the city, out of a prewar population of 450,000.

Malyar, the deputy defence minister, said the Russians have continued to hit Mariupol with airstrikes and could be getting ready for an amphibious landing to beef up their ground forces.

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis on Saturday invoked "gestures of peace in these days marked by the horror of war" in an Easter vigil homily in St. Peter's Basilica attended by the mayor of the occupied Ukrainian city of Melitopol and three Ukrainian lawmakers.

The pontiff noted that while "many writers have evoked the beauty of starlit nights, the nights of war, however, are riven by streams of light that portend death."

Francis did not refer directly to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but he has called for an Easter truce in order to reach a negotiated peace. That call appeared in vain Saturday, as Russia resumed missile and rocket attacks on Kyiv, western Ukraine and beyond in a stark reminder that the whole country remains under threat.

At the end of his homily, the pontiff directly addressed Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov and Ukrainian lawmakers Maria Mezentseva, Olena Khomenko and Ruslan Umerov, who sat all together in the front row.

"In this darkness of war, in

the cruelty, we are all praying for you and with you this night. We are praying for all the suffering.

We can only give you our company, our prayer," Francis said, adding that "the biggest thing you can receive: Christ is risen," speaking the last three words in Ukrainian.

Fedorov was abducted and held for five days by Russian troops after they occupied Melitopol, a strategic southern city.

Fedorov and the lawmakers have been visiting European capitals asking for more aid for their war-torn country and met earlier Saturday with the Vatican's No. 2, Secretary of State Pietro Parolin.

For Christians, Easter is a day of joy and hope, as they mark their belief that Jesus triumphed over death by resurrection following his crucifixion.

"For with Jesus, the Risen Lord, no night will last forever; and even in the darkest night, the morning star continues to shine," the pope said in his homily.

Francis, who has been suffering from an inflamed ligament, did not participate in a

candle-lit procession up the aisle of the darkened basilica at the start of the Mass. He instead sat in front of the altar on a wooden upholstered chair in white robes. Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re said the Mass instead.

Arrayed before the steps of the altar was a row of cardinals, wearing ivory robes and face masks for the first Easter vigil Mass with the faithful present since the pandemic.

Among those in the basilica were seven adults who were baptized by the pope during the Mass. The Vatican said these new faithful are from Italy, the United States, Albania and Cuba. From a shell-shaped silver dish, Francis poured holy water over the bowed heads of the seven, after they walked up to him one by one and listened to him calling their first names.

On Sunday, Francis celebrates Easter Mass in the late morning in St. Peter's Square and gives a speech from the basilica balcony, known by its Latin name "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and to the world), in which he recounts the trials and conflicts facing the world.

Russia announces general's death in battle

AP ■ NEW YORK

A Russian general whose troops have been besieging the Ukrainian port of Mariupol was buried on Saturday in St. Petersburg after dying in battle, the governor said.

Maj. Gen. Vladimir Frolov was deputy commander of the 8th Army, which Russian media identified as being among the forces battering Mariupol for weeks.

Governor Alexander Beglov released a statement saying Frolov "died a heroic death in battle" without saying where or when he was killed.

Photographs on Russian news websites showed his grave at a St. Petersburg cemetery piled high with red and white flowers. Ukraine has claimed that several Russian generals and dozens of other high-ranking officers have been killed during the war.

In other development of the day, the US Army trainers are using lessons learned from the Russian war against Ukraine as they prepare soldiers for future fights against a major adversary.

The role-players in this month's exercise at a training center in California's Mojave Desert speak Russian and the enemy force is using a steady stream of social media to make false accusations against the American brigade preparing to attack.

In the coming weeks, the planned training scenario for the next brigade coming in will focus on how to battle an enemy willing to destroy a city



with rocket and missile fire in order to conquer it.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Saturday, their second call since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Saudi Press Agency said the two discussed bilateral relations and "ways of enhancing them in all fields."

The Saudi readout of the call said the crown prince affirmed support for efforts that would lead to a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine. The kingdom recently announced \$10 million in humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees.

The Kremlin's statement added the two also discussed the ongoing conflict in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition has been at war for years, as well as their joint work on an oil output agreement, known as OPEC+.

Also, Russian forces shelled an oil refinery in the Ukrainian

city of Lysychansk on Saturday, and a large fire erupted, a regional governor reported.

Luhansk regional governor Serhiy Haidai said it wasn't the first time the refinery was targeted and accused the Russians of trying to "exhaust" local emergency services. He underlined there was no fuel at the refinery at the time of the attack and "the remains of oil sludge" were burning.

Ukraine's presidential office reported on Saturday that missile strikes and shelling over the past 24 hours occurred in eight regions: Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv in the east, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava and Kirovohrad in the central Ukraine and Mykolaiv and Kherson in the south.

Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in televised remarks on Saturday that 700 Ukrainian troops and more than 1,000 civilians — more than half women — are currently being held captive by the Russians.

Those who continue resistance will be destroyed: Russia

AP ■ MOSCOW

The Russian military has warned that Ukrainian troops refusing to surrender in the besieged port of Mariupol will be destroyed.

The Russian Defence Ministry gave the Ukrainians at Mariupol's giant Azovstal steel mill until 1 pm Sunday (1000 GMT) to surrender, saying that those who put down their weapons will be "guaranteed to keep their lives."

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Maj Gen Igor Konashenkov said the Ukrainian military command had banned its troops from surrendering.

He said the Russian military received the information from intercepted communications.

Konashenkov warned that "all those who will continue resistance will be destroyed."

He claimed that along with Ukrainian troops, there are about 400 foreign mercenaries encircled at Azovstal, most of them from European countries and Canada, communicating in six languages, according to intercepts. Konashenkov's claim couldn't be inde-

pendently verified.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi is calling Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion "heroic," depriving Russia of what it expected to be a rapid victory and setting the stage for a "prolonged" war.

Draghi told the Italian daily Corriere della Sera in an interview published Sunday that "what awaits us is a war of resistance, prolonged violence with destruction that will continue. There is no sign that the Ukraine population can accept a Russian occupation."

Draghi noted that Italy remained close to the Ukrainian people, with the reopening of its embassy in Kyiv. The ambassador returned to the capital on Friday, and the embassy is expected to be fully operational on Monday.

Draghi, who spoke to Putin before the war broke out and again at the end of March, said he has come to believe that speaking with the Russian leader "is just a waste of time." Draghi said: "I have the impression that the horror of the war, with its carnage, with what they have done to children and women, is completely independent of the words and the phone calls."

Bulgaria bans Russian ships from entering its sea ports

AP ■ SOFIA

Bulgaria has banned Russian-flagged ships from entering its Black Sea ports as part of expanded EU sanctions, the country's Maritime Administration announced on its website

on Sunday.

"All vessels registered under Russian flag, as well as all vessels that have switched their Russian flag, or flag or maritime register registration to any other state whatsoever after February 24, are forbidden access to

Bulgarian maritime and river ports," the authority said. Exceptions will be made only for ships in distress or seeking humanitarian assistance, or ships transporting energy products, food and pharmaceuticals to EU countries.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PMGSY DIVISION BANIHAL

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS

E-NITNO:-PMGSY/D/B/ 05 OF 2022-23 DATED:12/04/2022

For and on behalf of The Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir UT, the Executive Engineer PMGSY Division Banihal, invites tenders by e- tendering for stage contracts on item Rate Basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with J&K UT, CPWD, MES , Railways or equivalent and other State Govts for the following works.

S.No.1, Name of Work/Package No :- Restoration of road under the jurisdiction of PMGSY Division Banihal on emergency basis i.e. (Motor-able paths only by way of clearance of snow / slips likely to occur during financial year 2022-23 on:-

- 1) Khari Mandakbas To Ardmarg Package No:- JK04-225 Length: 8.00Km
- 2) BB Ramsoo (Ardmarg) to Mohu Package No:- JK04-452 Length: 4.25Km
- 3) Khari Mandakbas To Trigram Package No:- JK04-450, Length: 5.54Kms
- 4) Khari Sarbagani (Hingni Railway Road to Shagan) Package No:- JK04-448, Length: 9.20 Kms Total Length: 26.99 kms

Name of the PIU :- Banihal, Cost of Tender documents (in Rs.) :- 600/-, Earnest Money (Rs.) :- 10000/-, Time Allowed for completion :- 01 Day, Call of tender :- 3", Time and date of opening of tenders :- 20-04-2022 at 12.00 PM, Class of contractor :- Any registered contractor with State PWD/CPWD/Railways or equivalent qualifying eligibility criteria as provided in the Standard Bidding Documents can tender for the works.

S.No.2, Name of Work/Package No :- Restoration of roads under the jurisdiction of PMGSY Division Banihal on emergency basis i.e (Motor-able pathsonly by way of clearance of snow / slips likely to occur during financial year 2022- 23 on :-

- 1) Extension of Ukheral Maligam Pogal Road (Chainage 7500 To 15500), Package No:- JK04-304 Length : 8.00 Kms.
- 2) Shalgadi Panchal Road, Package No :- J K04- 303, Length : 6.30 Kms.
- 3) Alambass to Hochak Road, Package No:- Jk04 - 227 Length : 3.00 Kms.
- 4) Hewagen Bhordhar Road , Km. 6th To Km. 11th. Package No :- Jk04 - 228 Length: 6.00Kms.
- 5) Neel Perhinder Road Package No:- JK04-229, Length :- 4.00 Km. Total Length : 27.30 kms

Name of the PIU :- Banihal, Cost of Tender documents (in Rs.) :- 600/-, Earnest Money (Rs.) :- 10000/-, Time Allowed for completion :- 01 Day, Call of tender :- 3", Time and date of opening of tenders :- 20-04-2022 at 12.00 PM, Class of contractor :- Any registered contractor with State PWD/CPWD/Railways or equivalent qualifying eligibility criteria as provided in the Standard Bidding Documents can tender for the works.

Particulars/Dates :-

- (a) Date of Issue of Tender Notice :- 12-04-2022
- (b) Period of Downloading of Bidding Documents :- 13-04-2022 to 18-04-2022
- (c) Date, Time and Place of Pre Bid meeting :- Nil
- (d) Bid Submission Start Date :- 13-04-2022
- (e) Bid Submission End Date :- 18-04-2022
- (f) Submission Of Hard Copy of Tender Documents :- Only successful bidder who is declared L1 should submit the Hard copy after opening of Financial Bids.
- (g) Date & Time of opening of Technical Bids (online). The date should be one day after deadline for receiving of hard copies :- 20-04-2022 at 12.00 PM
- (h) Date of opening of Financial Bids (online) :- The date and time of opening of Financial-Bids shall be notified on Web Site message on their e-mail address

Sd/-

(Er. Romesh Kumar)

Executive Engineer, PMGSY Division Banihal

No. DIP/J-426/22

Dated: 16-04-2022

GST Council may do away with 5% rate

To move items to 3%, 8% slabs

New Delhi: With most states on board to raise revenue so that they do not have to depend on Centre for compensation, the GST Council at its meeting next month is likely to consider a proposal to do away with the 5 per cent slab by moving some goods of mass consumption to 3 per cent and the remaining to 8 per cent categories, sources said.

Currently, GST is a four-tier structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. Besides, gold and gold jewellery attract 3 per cent tax.

In addition, there is an exempt list of items like unbranded and unpacked food items which do not attract the levy.

Sources said in order to augment revenue the Council may decide to prune the list of exempt items by moving some of the non-food items to 3 per cent slab.

Sources said that discussions are on to raise the 5 per



cent slab to either 7 or 8 or 9 per cent, a final call will be taken by the GST Council which comprises finance ministers of both Centre and states.

As per calculations, every 1 per cent increase in the 5 per cent slab, which mainly includes packaged food items, would roughly yield an additional revenue of Rs 50,000 crore annually.

Although various options are under consideration, the Council is likely to settle for an 8 per cent GST (Goods and Services Tax) for most items that currently attract 5 per cent levy.

Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest rate while luxury and demerit items attract the highest tax. Luxury and sin goods also attract cess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab. This cess collection is used to compensate states for the revenue loss due to GST roll out.

With the GST compensation regime coming to an end in June, it is imperative that states become self-sufficient and not depend on the Centre for bridging the revenue gap in GST collection.

The Council had last year set up a panel of state ministers,

headed by Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, to suggest ways to augment revenue by rationalising tax rates and correcting anomalies in the tax structure.

The group of ministers is likely to finalise its recommendations by early next month, which will be placed before the Council in its next meeting, likely by mid-May, for a final decision.

At the time of GST implementation on July 1, 2017, the Centre had agreed to compensate states for five years till June 2022 and protect their revenue at 14 per cent per annum over the base year revenue of 2015-16.

The GST Council over the years has often succumbed to the demands of the trade and industry and lowered tax rates. For example, the number of goods attracting the highest 28 per cent tax came down from 228 to less than 35.

With Centre sticking on its stand not to extend GST compensation beyond five years, states are realising that raising revenues through higher taxes is the only option before the Council. **PTI**

Awaiting updated data to make gas allocation: Oil Min on fuel price hike

New Delhi: The oil ministry has not made any fresh allocation of natural gas from domestic fields to the city gas sector, sending CNG and piped cooking gas prices to record highs but the ministry insisted that allocations have not been stopped and providing more for the sector would lead to cut in supplies to industries like power and fertiliser.

Despite a decision of the Union Cabinet to give 100 per cent gas supply under 'no cut' priority to the city gas distribution (CGD) sector, current supplies are at March 2021 demand level. This has driven city gas operators to buy high priced imported LNG to make up for the shortfall, leading to a record spike in prices, three sources aware of the matter said.

Commenting on the issue, the ministry said it "is waiting for the updated data for the period October 2021 to March 2022 from CGD entities for the allocations in April 2022. This is yet to be received from the entities."

The ministry is supposed



to make an allocation of domestic natural gas, which costs a sixth of imported LNG, every six months -- in April and October every year -- based on verified demand in the previous six months. But no allocation has been made since March 2021, sources said.

Responding, the ministry said: "Based on data of October 2020 to March 2021 consumption, the allocation for April-

October 21 was revised as per the guidelines in April last year."

CGD operators have been requesting the ministry to maintain the gas supply to the sector under no cut category with last 2 months average to ensure demand of both CNG and piped natural gas (PNG) for homes is fully met but the ministry has not made any fresh allocation for over a year now, the sources said. **PTI**

Return to office, large scale hiring to drive office space demand in 2022: Tata Realty

New Delhi: Bullish on the growth potential of India's office market, TATA Realty and Infrastructure MD and CEO Sanjay Dutt said the total leasing of office space across major seven cities is expected to rise to more than 30 million square feet in 2022 compared to 26 million square feet in 2021 on better demand from corporates. In an interview with PTI, Dutt highlighted that hiring at a large scale is already happening with many sectors bouncing back after the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Commercial activities have gone up already with a sharp fall in COVID cases. 'Return to office' will increase going forward. Early signs indicate that the total net leasing of office space in 2022 across seven major cities will cross last year's number," he said.

The total net absorption of office space will cross 30 million square feet in 2022 as against 26 million square feet in the previous year. **PTI**

UPI to stay on top; BNPL, digi currency to drive digital payments growth in next 5 years: Report

New Delhi: Retail online transaction platform UPI will likely continue to dominate the digital payments space in the country even as newer methods such as BNPL and digital currency are expected to define the future of payments, a study has said.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL), Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and offline payments will drive growth of digital payments in India in the next five years, PwC India said in a report.

UPI is expected to continue to be the major contributor in the digital payments space, followed by BNPL, it said.

The Indian digital payments market saw steady growth at a CAGR of 23 per cent (volume wise), and is expected to reach 217 billion (21,700 crore) transactions in FY26 from 59 billion (5,900 crore) in FY22, said the report titled 'The Indian Payments Handbook - 2021-26'.

In 2020-21, UPI transactions reached a record 22 billion (2,200 crore), and it is expected to reach 169 billion (16,900 crore) by 2025-26, growing at a CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) of 122 per cent, it said.

Partnerships with other countries in Asia to enable low-value transactions and cross-border remittances through UPI will contribute to this growth. BNPL, which is currently estimated at Rs 363 billion (Rs 36,300 crore), is expected to reach Rs 3,191 billion (Rs 3,19,100 crore) by the end of 2025-26, according to the report.

"We expect the payments industry to focus heavily on enhancing customer experience and providing customer options for payment, enhancing security, undertaking innovations in technology like distributed ledger technology (DLT) and emerging tech like IoT (Internet of Things) over the next couple of years.

"With the efforts and ini-

tiatives of key stakeholders such as regulators, banks, payment/fintech companies, card networks and service providers, the industry is going to see tremendous growth in the coming years," Mihir Gandhi, Partner & Payments Transformation Leader, PwC India, said.

Presenting a snapshot of the trends that will contribute to growth of digital payments industry in India, the report said that existing products and emerging use cases such as UPI, Fastag, transit (NCMC) and cards will continue to make inroads and gain additional wallet share of the Indian customers. These methods will continue to drive the growth in adoption and transactions numbers, said the report.

Enabling recurring payments and IPO subscriptions along with cross-border remittances will provide a boost to UPI. Parking and fuel payments are being explored as new use cases for Fastag, PwC report said further. **PTI**

FPIs turn net sellers again, withdraw over ₹4,500 cr from stocks last week

New Delhi: Adopting a cautious stance, foreign investors have pulled over Rs 4,500 crore from the Indian equity market last week on fears of an aggressive rate hike by US Federal Reserve.

This comes following a net investment of Rs 7,707 crore by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) during April 1-8 as a correction in the markets provided a good buying opportunity, data with depositories showed.

Prior to that, FPIs remained net sellers for six months to March 2022, withdrawing a massive net amount of Rs 1.48 lakh crore from equities.

These were largely on the back of anticipation of a rate hike by the US Federal Reserve and due to the deteriorating geopolitical environment following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sonam Srivastava, Founder at Wright Research, a Sebi-reg-

istered investment advisor, said, "We are hoping for FPIs to come back to India in a big way when the Ukraine crisis eases as our valuations have become highly competitive".

According to depositories data, FPIs have pulled out a net sum of Rs 4,518 crore from Indian equities during the holiday shortened April 11-13 week. Markets were closed on April 14 and April 15 on account of Ambedkar Jayanti and Good Friday, respectively.

During the holiday-truncated week, FPIs turned net sellers on fears of an aggressive rate hike by US Fed, which came back to haunt the markets.

This could have prompted investors to again adopt a cautious stance towards their investments in emerging markets like India, until greater clarity emerges, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, said. **PTI**

India's chip manufacturing push timely amid global supply disruptions: HCL

New Delhi: India's manufacturing push, backed by favourable policies, is timely and positions the country strongly to grab a massive opportunity in the electronics hardware space amid Covid-induced supply chain disruptions and global trust deficit around China, according to HCL co-founder Ajai Chowdhry.

Chowdhry -- who is part of the IT ministry-constituted advisory panel of experts that will steer objectives and provide guidance on the semiconductor program -- exuded confidence that India can emerge as a

"reliable partner" for the world when it comes to hardware production and chip-making. The policy push around manufacturing has set a fertile ground for transforming the country into a global powerhouse for electronics and semiconductor production, he believes. **PTI**

Health insurers take 20-46 days to settle patients' claims: Report

New Delhi: Settlement of expense reimbursement claims under health insurance policies on an average takes about 20 to 46 days from the date of intimation to the insurer, said a study conducted by insurtech platform SecureNow.

The company said the industry data tabulated by it also shows that patients are quite prompt in informing the insurers about claims with most of them intimating the concerned insurance firms within a week of hospitalisation.

"However, on the other hand, the insurance companies take on an average between 7 to 108 days to settle the claims related to maternity.

Caesarean sections take the longest time 9 to 135 days and chemotherapy the shortest period - 12 to 35 days," the insurance broker said.

SecureNow said the data makes it clear that "while patients do not take a lot of time in intimating the insurer for a claim reimbursement upon being admitted, the average time for an insurer to settle the claims is way longer. In a typical claim processing timeline, the maximum time is taken between intimation and settlement."

Kapil Mehta, co-founder of SecureNow, said there are close to 10 million health insurance claims each year.

"This in itself is a sign of how the health insurance industry has evolved. The next step is to publish detailed claims information.

This shines a light on the strengths and improvement areas in settling claims. Our report is an important step in that direction," he said. **PTI**

Mutual funds add over 3 cr folios in FY22 on sharp rally in equity market

New Delhi: Increasing awareness about mutual funds, ease of transactions through digitisation and sharp surge in equity markets have aided asset management companies to add a staggering 3.17 crore investor accounts in 2021-22, with experts saying the trend is likely to continue this fiscal as well. This was a significant rise from 2020-21 when 81 lakh accounts (or folios in mutual fund parlance) were opened, data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi)

showed. The ongoing financial year too appears to be promising in terms of folios as increase in investor accounts will enable people to move beyond fixed deposits and savings accounts, said Priti Rathi Gupta, founder of LXME, a financial platform for women. Market conditions, geopolitical situations, inflation rates, financialisation of investments and increasing awareness among the people are some of the elements that may have an impact on this industry, she added.

If the retail investors get spooked by the market turbulence driven by change in interest rates, then folios are expected to decline, said Swapnil Bhaskar, Head of Strategy, Niyo -- a millennial-focused neo-banking fintech.

According to the data, the number of folios with 43 fund houses rose to 12.95 crore in March 2022 from 9.78 crore in March 2021, registering a gain of 3.17 crore during the one-year period. The industry crossed a milestone of 10 crore

folios in May 2021. The number of folios under equity, hybrid and solution oriented schemes, wherein the maximum investment is from retail segment, stood at about 10.34 crore as of March 2022. Folios are numbers designated to individual investor accounts. An investor can have multiple folios.

The mutual fund space has been witnessing consistent growth in folio numbers in the past few years. It saw an addition of 73 lakh investor accounts in 2019-20, 1.13 crore

in 2018-19, 1.6 crore in 2017-18, over 67 lakh in 2016-17 and 59 lakh in 2015-16. Some tailwinds that are supporting the industry include increasing mutual fund (MF) awareness, strong distribution platforms and ease of transactions through digitisation, which was further driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to LXME's Gupta, multiple factors have enabled the growth in MF folios, like an increase in digitisation. **PTI**

Alliance Air commences flight services between Keshod in Guj and Mumbai under UDAN scheme

Mumbai: Government-owned Alliance Air said it has commenced flight services to Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport from Keshod in Junagadh district of Gujarat under the Centre's regional connectivity scheme, UDAN, an official release said.

The inaugural flight on the new route was flagged off by Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia from Keshod Airport, which is near

Asiatic Lion's abode Gir, on Saturday, it said.

At present, it takes about 16 hours to travel by road from Keshod to Mumbai but with the introduction of air services between the two destinations, the travel time will reduce to just one hour and 25 minutes, as per the release.

"In the airline's summer schedule this year, Ahmedabad has been connected to three cities- Amritsar, Agra and Ranchi. Similarly, Porbandar

and Rajkot have been connected with Mumbai. Apart from starting the new flight route today, we will also connect Keshod with Ahmedabad," the release quoted Scindia as saying.

He added that two new greenfield airports are also to be constructed in Hirasar and Dholera with a capacity to handle 23 lakh and 30 lakh passengers per year, respectively, with a budget allocation of Rs 1,405 crore and Rs 1,305 crore respectively. **PTI**

Govt amends FEMA rules to allow 20% FDI in LIC

New Delhi: The government has amended rules of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), paving the way for up to 20 per cent foreign direct investment in the insurance behemoth LIC.

The government is planning to dilute its stake in LIC through the Initial Public Offering (IPO). LIC in February had filed the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) before the markets regulator Sebi for the IPO.

Last month, Sebi gave approval to the draft papers and the insurer is in the process of

filing a request for proposal with changes.

Following the Cabinet approval, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on March 14 had amended the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy to facilitate overseas investment in LIC ahead of the mega public offer.

FEMA notification was required to operationalise the provisions DPIIT issued through a press note, including FDI policy changes that will allow large foreign portfolio investors to subscribe to shares of LIC. **PTI**

Will respond strongly to frauds: Sequoia Capital on controversy-hit BharatPe

New Delhi: Breaking its silence over controversy at fintech firm BharatPe, Sequoia Capital India on Sunday said it has zero tolerance towards proven wrongdoing and will continue to respond strongly to wilful misconduct or fraud so that a few errant founders do not create big setbacks for startup ecosystem.

Sequoia, which is the largest shareholder in BharatPe where co-founder Ashneer Grover was virtually sacked from his role, in a blog on its website said it won't hesitate to act to protect the interest of shareholders and employees even if it costs it financially.

"We will take tough calls where needed in the interest of doing what is right," it said without directly mentioning BharatPe.

Sequoia, which holds 19.6 per cent of BharatPe, did not say if it had insisted on removal of Grover after a third party audit alleged grave governance lapses under him.

BharatPe, which allows shop owners to make digital payments through QR codes, first sacked Madhuri Jain, wife of Grover, for alleged misappropriation of company funds. **PTI**

Products of 30,000 small brands cater to 80% of population: Report

New Delhi: Household products of over 30,000 brands operating at small and medium scale cater to a majority of the country's population, while only 20 per cent use such items sold by big corporate houses, a survey said.

Products of Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCG), consumer durables and cosmetics from over 30,000 small and medium brands are catering to the demand of 80 per cent of India's population, according to the survey by

traders' body CAIT.

The survey was conducted on the basis of use of item including food grains, oil, grocery, personal cosmetics, inner wear, ready-made garments, beauty and bodycare, footwear, toys, educational games and healthcare.

"It's a myth that about 3,000 big brands of corporate houses, particularly in the FMCG sector, consumer durables and cosmetics etc, are catering to the needs of the people of the country. In fact,

more than 30,000 small and medium but regional level brands are the largest contributor in meeting the demand of the people of India," CAIT (Confederation of All India Traders) said.

The survey said the demand of a vast majority is fulfilled by the products of small and tiny manufacturers sold in loose quantity.

Big brands are in demand among people of higher and upper-middle class due to

extensive media and outdoor publicity and endorsements by celebrities, CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said.

On the other hand, brands of small manufacturers are sold through one-to-one contact between customers and shopkeepers, also through word-of-mouth among people of medium, lower-medium income groups and those belonging to economically weaker sections, he added. **PTI**

Godavari Biorefineries to launch over ₹700 cr IPO

New Delhi: Ethanol and bio-based chemicals maker Godavari Biorefineries Ltd on Sunday said it is watching the geo-political situation and will make its share market debut "at the right time".

Godavari Biorefineries Ltd CEO and Managing Director Samir Somaiya told PTI that the company has already received the market regulator Sebi's final approval for its initial public offering (IPO).

"We got Sebi's final com-

ments on our IPO request during November-end (2021). We have one year to get listed. We will look at the right time for the listing," he said.

Stating that the geo-political situation has changed in the last few months, Somaiya said: "We will see how the geopolitical situation changes and if the time is right and the market is once again ready for the listing, then we will plan the listing."

The company has time till

November this year to list the IPO. About Rs 370 crore would be the primary offering, he said.

Sources, however, said the cumulative size of IPO would be over Rs 700 crore from a mix of primary and secondary offerings. "IPO funding is going for the investments that we are doing in Karnataka," Somaiya added. Godavari Biorefineries Ltd has two manufacturing sites -- Bagalkot (Karnataka) and Ahmednagar

(Maharashtra) besides research and development (R&D) units.

As there is huge opportunity in green and sustainable chemistry, Somaiya said the company has begun expansion of ethanol capacity from current 380 kilolitre per day (KLPD) to 570 KLPD and it will be completed by November this year. The company is also in the "development stage" of manufacturing second generation ethanol and energy cane, he said. **PTI**

Danish great Mathias Boe likely to return as India's doubles coach



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Danish legend Mathias Boe is likely to return for a second stint as the doubles coach of the Indian badminton team after Malaysia's Tan Kim Her declined the offer despite the Sports Ministry approving his appointment.

Boe, a London Olympics Silver-medallist and former world No 1 doubles player, had trained the Indian doubles players, including Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, ahead of the Tokyo Olympics.

"We were very keen to get Tan Kim Her and also had got the approval of SAI and ministry but then he refused to accept the offer. So he is not coming as of now," Badminton Association of India (BAI) secretary general Sanjay Mishra said.

"We are currently in discussion with Mathias Boe. He has the experience of training our players and had done well with Satwik and Chirag. Nothing is finalised yet but we are trying to get his services at least till the Asian Games if not beyond."

Boe had wanted to continue coaching the Indian doubles players after the Tokyo Olympics but not on a full time basis, something which was not acceptable to the federation.

BAI then got the approval of the ministry to appoint Tan Kim Her for a five year period till the 2026 Asian Games but the Malaysian refused to return for a second stint due to personal reasons.

It was under Boe's guidance that Satwik and Chirag

won two of the three matches in their group at the Tokyo Olympics but couldn't make it to the knockout stage following a dramatic three-way tie for the two qualifying spots, which was decided on the basis of games won and lost.

Satwik and Chirag are currently in Mumbai for a week-long training stint with Boe to rectify the errors which has crept into their game, affecting their performance in the last few months.

"We have been playing well but somehow we have lost some close games despite being in good position. We were not able to identify where we were going wrong," Satwik said.

"So since Boe is here, we thought to use the opportunity to train with him for a week ahead of Asian Championships. The thing with him is he is very good in analysing the game and telling us exactly how to work on the mistakes. Hope it will help us in ABC and Thomas Cup."

While the BAI is close to sealing the position of doubles coach, it will take some time to fill the position of the Indian men's singles coach, which has been left vacant after the sudden departure of Indonesia's Agus Dwi Santoso in November last year.

"It is an important year with major events lined up, so difficult to find someone as most of the coaches are not too keen to make a change at this juncture. But we are in the process and hopefully we will get a good coach for the singles players," Mishra said.

95TH MINUTE WINNER

Bruno Guimaraes scores his first goals at St James' Park, including a 95th minute winner, to give Newcastle United a 2-1 Premier League win over Leicester City

AP ■ NEWCASTLE

Bruno Guimarães completed Newcastle's comeback by scoring a second goal in the fifth minute of stoppage time to clinch a 2-1 win over Leicester and further ease any Premier League relegation fears on Sunday.

The Brazilian, who had earlier cancelled out Ademola Lookman's first-half opener, headed in Joe Willock's deflected cross to send 14th-placed Newcastle 12 points clear of the relegation zone with six games remaining.

Leicester, which reached the Europa Conference League semifinals on Thursday, remained in ninth place.

Leicester took a 19th-minute lead after Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall sent a low corner into Ayoze Perez's near-post run. When Perez flicked the ball inside, Lookman drove a shot through a crowded penalty area and underneath goalkeeper Martin Dúbravka.

Newcastle leveled in the 30th minute. Defender Dan Burn headed down Jonjo Shelvey's corner and Kasper Schmeichel blocked Guimarães' initial shot. But Guimarães then poked the ball between the goalkeeper's legs and across the line. Referee Jarrod Gillett, after being advised to review his initial decision to rule out the goal, changed his mind.

After Dan Burn denied Kelechi Iheanacho a late winner from Dewsbury-Hall's cross, Guimarães pounced to give Newcastle a fifth suc-



cessive home win.

Burnley began life without Sean Dyche with a 1-1 draw at West Ham on a costly day for the Claretts as they lost midfielder Ashley Westwood to a sickening looking injury.

Westwood's leg buckled underneath him in a routine challenge with West Ham's Nikola Vlasic in the first-half and was given oxygen as he was stretchered off the field.

Vlasic was also in tears as he realised the seriousness of the injury which stopped play for a lengthy period. Once the match did resume, Burnley went in front as Wout Weghorst powered home a close range header from a corner.

However, the visitors were made to rue a missed penalty from Maxwell Cornet before half-time as the Ivorian pulled his effort wide.

The Hammers showed signs of a European hangover but did salvage a point when Tomas Soucek forced home Manuel Lanzini's free-kick 16 minutes from time.

Dyche had been the longest serving manager in the Premier League prior to his sacking on Friday with Burnley's six-season stay in the top flight in peril.

A point closes the gap to safety to three points, but 17th-placed Everton have a game in hand to potentially extend their advantage.

Tsitsipas defends Monte Carlo crown

AP ■ MONTE CARLO

Stefanos Tsitsipas successfully defended his Monte Carlo Masters title with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in Sunday's final.

Third seed Tsitsipas hammered 21 winners and made only 11 unforced errors in the Monaco sunshine to win in an hour and 36 minutes.

It was the 23-year-old Greek's eighth ATP title and first in 11 months as he made the perfect start to the clay-court season.

"I'm very proud of the amount of belief I had in my game," Tsitsipas said.

"He fought in moments I didn't really expect him to fight and hit some incredible winners. I believe that's a great result against him."

He joins an illustrious list of players to win back-to-back Monte Carlo Masters, including Rafael Nadal, Juan Carlos Ferrero, Thomas Muster and Bjorn Borg.

Tsitsipas, who beat Andrey Rublev in the Monte Carlo final 12 months ago, has now won four clay tournaments in his career.

He is gearing up for another tilt at the French Open title after losing last year's final at Roland Garros to Novak Djokovic despite



leading by two sets.

Davidovich Fokina had knocked out world number one Djokovic earlier this week but could not repeat those heroics in his first ATP final, losing for the third time in as many meetings with Tsitsipas.

Bayern restore 9 point BuLi lead with 3-0 win



AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich can secure a 10th straight Bundesliga title next weekend after they bounced back from their Champions League exit in midweek with a 3-0 win at Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday.

An own goal by Bielefeld defender Jacob Laursen and strikes by Serge Gnabry and Jamal Musiala saw Bayern move nine points clear in the table.

There are four games left and Bayern can secure the title by beating second-placed Borussia Dortmund in next Saturday's top-of-the-table clash in Munich.

Bayern returned to winning ways five days after conceding a last-gasp equaliser at home to Villarreal to crash out of the Champions League with a 2-1 aggregate defeat in the quarter-finals.

Bayern were ahead after less than 10 minutes in Bielefeld when a Joshua Kimmich pass found its way to Robert Lewandowski, who got a touch

before Laursen helped it over the line.

Bayern had a let-off when Japan midfielder Masaya Okugawa clipped the ball over Dayot Upamecano before firing past Manuel Neuer, but the goal was ruled offside.

Just before half-time, Bielefeld midfielder Fabian Kunze was stretchered off after being elbowed in the head by Bayern's Tanguy Nianzou, who was booked for the challenge.

It was Bielefeld's third serious head injury in recent weeks.

In the seventh minute of first-half stoppage time, Bayern doubled their lead when Gnabry got on the end of another Kimmich pass to tap home.

Bielefeld kept searching for a goal to get back into the game after the break, but Bayern substitute Musiala secured the points with a late third.

Atlético Madrid lost two players to injury and were reduced to 10-men but found the winner thanks to a 100th-minute Yannick Carrasco penalty against Espanyol on

Sunday.

An uneventful first half had little to note with Jan Oblak being forced into an early save and Atleti losing both João Félix and Thomas Lemar to injury at half-time - with the latter leaving the field in tears.

Diego Simeone's enforced substitutions bore fruit though as Antoine Griezmann, Mathews Cunha and Carrasco combined. Cutting in off the left side Carrasco gave the hosts the lead with a well-placed finish at the near post.

The visitors found their equaliser when de Tomás stepped and scored the resulting free-kick although Oblak will look back and wish he'd done better.

The controversy didn't end there as Atlético Madrid were awarded a penalty in the dying embers of the match for a de Tomás handball after a length VAR check. Carrasco stepped up to the spot and made no mistake, winning the game for Atleti 2-1.

BAI's selection trials: Praneeth out of contention

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top shuttler B Sai Praneeth's hopes of making the Indian team for the upcoming major team events were dashed after he failed to top stage 2A group on day 3 of BAI's selection trials here on Sunday.

Praneeth, ranked World number 19, suffered a 21-23, 21-11, 16-21 loss to fast-rising Kiran George, who had claimed the Odisha Open Super 10 title in January.

Later in the day, Praneeth beat Ansal Yadav 21-16, 21-9 to finish second best in stage 2A group at the KD Jadhav Hall inside Indira Gandhi Stadium Complex.

The trials are being held to pick teams for the Commonwealth Games, Thomas and Uber Cup and Asian Games.

According to the format, only the winners of the four groups in the second stage will compete for rank 1 to 4 in a



round-robin format, while the runners-up from each group will fight for 5-8 positions and third-placed players will aim for 9 to 12 positions.

Praneeth will compete for rank 5 to 8 next.

Badminton Association of India has already handed direct selection to Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth as they are ranked inside top 15 and HS Prannoy on the basis of his recent performance in the inter-

national circuit.

Only one men's singles player will be picked from the trials for the Asian Games and Thomas Cup.

Kiran, who had made it to the team for the Sudirman Cup and Thomas Cup after topping the selection trials in September last year, looks a frontrunner to once again get selected as he continued his unbeaten run on day 3.

A product of Prakash Padukone academy, George outwitted national champion Sourabh Varma 21-15, 23-21 in his second match of the stage 2A group to emerge as winner.

George will now compete with Sameer Verma (winner of stage 2D), Haryana's Ravi (winner of stage 2C) and Priyanshu Rajawat (winner of stage 2B) for rank 1 to 4.

A former world number 11 Sameer, who is making a comeback after recovering from a calf injury, beat Raghu M 21-12, 21-11 but lost to Maisnam Meiraba

21-15, 19-21, 11-21 in the third and last match of his group.

Sameer was tied with Mithun Manjunath with two victories and one defeat but made it through on the basis of difference of games won and lost.

Ditto for Priyanshu, who emerged as group winner after finishing with two wins and a loss like Kartikey Gulshan Kumar in stage 2B.

Ravi, on the other hand, beat Alap Mishra and Arjun Rehani to emerge as winner of stage 2C group.

In women's singles, Aakarshi Kashyap, Ashmita Chaliha, Aditi Bhatt, and Unnati Hooda emerged as winners of Stage 2A, stage 2B, Stage 2C, and Stage 2D respectively and will fight for 1 to 4 positions.

In women's singles, double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu has been handed a direct berth being the world number 7 and one more player will be picked for CWG team.

PTI ■ DERBY

Senior India batter Schetcheswar Pujara redeemed himself with a century for Sussex in the second innings of the 2022 County Championship here on Sunday.

Making his debut for Sussex, Pujara was dismissed for six off 15 balls in his first innings on the second day as his team folded for 174 in 56.3 overs in reply to Derbyshire's 505.

However, Pujara produced a much better show



in his second essay to stay 159 not out at tea. His 336-ball innings was studied with 18 hits to the fence.

He shared an unbeaten 309-run partnership with skipper Tom Haines (233 not out) for the third wicket to bail out Sussex, who were leading by 123 runs at the break.

The veteran batter was dropped from the national following the series in South Africa, which India lost 1-2. Ajinkya Rahane too was ignored for the home series against Sri Lanka.

Mehuli pips Elavenil to win at national selection trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mehuli Ghosh of West Bengal won the women's 10m air rifle competition here on Sunday, thereby sweeping the event in the national selection trials 3 and 4.

Haryana's Anish won the men's 25m rapid fire pistol T3 Gold even as state-mate Nancy in women's air rifle emerged as the star of the day with three medals — in senior, junior and youth categories — including a gold.

On competition day 10, Mehuli, who has now won three of the four trials in women's 10m air rifle this year, was up against



former world number one and Tokyo Olympian Elavenil Valarivan of Gujarat in the Gold medal contest.

She prevailed 16-8 to win her second Gold in the space of two days.

Haryana's Nancy, who won Bronze behind Mehuli and Elavenil in the senior category, went down to Karnataka's

Tilottoma Sen in the junior T4 final with the latter prevailing 17-7.

However, she was not to be denied on the day as she won the youth final over compatriot Ramita with a 16-10 score line in her favour.

In the men's 25m rapid fire pistol T3 competition, Haryana again won Gold with Anish getting 31 hits in the Gold medal match to push Punjab's Vijayveer Sidhu (29 points) to the Silver. Ankur Goel of Uttarakhand won Bronze.

Ghosh shot a total of 262.8 to get the better of Gujarat's Elavenil Valarivan 261.5 in the Gold medal contest.



the pioneer

INDIAN
PREMIER LEAGUE

2022

12

I HAVE A BIGGER GOAL. I HAVE BEEN WORKING REALLY HARD. MY AIM IS TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR THE COUNTRY. THIS IS PART OF MY JOURNEY

— DINESH KARTHIK

4th win on trot for SRH

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Young pace sensation Umran Malik's scorching final over proved to be the difference as Sunrisers Hyderabad slayed Punjab Kings by seven wickets for their fourth successive win in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday. In top gear with Liam Livingstone's counter-attacking 60 off 30 balls (5x4, 4x6), PBKS lost five wickets in seven balls with Malik (4/28) producing a perfect final over — a rare four-wicket maiden — to skittle out the opposition for a below-par 151.

After Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3/22) provided the key breakthrough of Livingstone, the 22-year-old uncapped pacer picked three wickets while the fourth came via run out to derail PBKS.

In reply, Sunrisers Hyderabad did not have a perfect start and lost skipper Kane Williamson (3) early in the fourth over with Kagiso Rabada drawing the first blood.

Opener Abhishek Sharma (31 off 25 balls; 3x4, 1x6) and in-form Rahul Tripathi (34 from 22b; 4x4, 1x6) failed to convert their starts but the modest total meant that SRH did not have to worry much in the end.

Windies wicketkeeper-batter Nicholas Pooran (41 not out from 27b; 4x4, 1x6) and Aiden Markram (35 not out from 30b; 1x4, 1x6) then completed the formalities with an unbroken 75-run partnership from 50 balls.

Playing without their regular skipper Mayank Agarwal, who suffered a toe-injury during training, PBKS were also let down with their sloppy fielding as they missed a runout and conceded easy runs defending a small total.

Markram finished off the chase in the penultimate over



► pointstable

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	GT	6	5	1	0	10	0.395
2.	LSG	6	4	2	0	8	0.296
3.	RCB	6	4	2	0	8	0.142
4.	SRH	6	4	2	0	8	-0.077
5.	RR	5	3	2	0	6	0.389
6.	KKR	6	3	3	0	6	0.223
7.	PBKS	6	3	3	0	6	0.109
8.	DC	5	2	3	0	4	0.219
9.	CSK	6	1	5	0	2	-0.638
10.	MI	6	0	6	0	0	-1.048

► boundarymeter

4s

819

6s

443

4x6) — his third fifty in four matches.

Reduced to 61/4 inside eight overs after being put in, Livingstone found a perfect ally in No 6 batter Shahrux Khan (26 off 28 balls; 1x4, 2x6) as the duo stitched together 71 from 49 balls to revive them in the middle overs.

On a slow pitch where scoring was difficult early on, Livingstone did not have any trouble as he had shots all over the pitch.

But the momentum shifted heavily in favour of SRH after Bhuvneshwar (3/22) provided the key breakthrough of Livingstone as PBKS lost five wickets in seven balls with Malik (4/28) producing a perfect final over.

Malik first had Odean Smith with a slower one before castling Rahul Chahal and Vaibhav Arora in successive deliveries.

hitting Vaibhav Arora for consecutive boundaries and six to seal the issue with seven balls to spare.

The win took SRH to eight points, moving up from the middle-table rush to climb to fourth spot, while PBKS remained on seventh with six points from as many matches.

Earlier Livingstone, who was the most expensive overseas player in this season's IPL auction with a price tag of ₹11.50-crore, resurrected the PBKS innings with a counter-attacking 60 off 30 balls (5x4,

should be ready to be back," Dhawan told the host broadcasters.

"We were 30-40 runs short and lost too many early wickets which put us behind the game. The early wickets meant we had to hold wickets and that's where we had to mould our game. There was a middle order recovery but the early wickets cost us," Dhawan said.

'Mayank doing better, ready to be back'

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Punjab Kings skipper Mayank Agarwal, who missed their IPL match against SRH on Sunday with a toe injury, is doing better and should be back soon, opener Shikhar Dhawan said.

Agarwal injured his toe in training and in his absence, Dhawan led the side against SRH. "Mayank is better and he

KKR seek to bounce back against Royals

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Their confidence severely dented after two comprehensive defeats on the trot, last edition's runner-up side Kolkata Knight Riders would seek to get their inconsistent campaign back on track when they face Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match here on Monday.

KKR were beaten by Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad by 44 runs and seven wickets respectively in their last two matches. They had earlier lost to Royal Challengers Bangalore.

With three wins and three losses, KKR are at the mid-table while the Royals have won three matches and lost two games till now.

KKR had an impressive start to the league with three wins from four matches but the back-to-back losses had taken them down below the top-4 and they would look to regain that slot.

But to do that they will have to pull themselves up in both batting and bowling. None of the batters, except for Andre Russell, has been consistent so far while the likes of spinner Varun Chakravarthy and pacer Pat Cummins have dished out average performances.

Russell is the current top-scorer for KKR with 179 runs from six matches and has also contributed with five wickets with the ball.

Captain Shreyas Iyer has not been in the best of form with just one half-century in his name for a total of 151 runs in six matches. Nitesh Rana and Venkatesh Iyer have been lacking in consistency, while Sam Billings is struggling to get runs.

In the bowling department, none, except pacer Umesh Yadav (10 wickets from 6 matches) has been up to expectations.

Chakravarthy, KKR's highest wicket-taker last season, has been struggling big time with just four wickets from six matches.

Chakravarthy's senior spin colleague Sunil Narine is also



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in the same boat with just four wickets.

Australia Test captain Cummins, who joined late due to national commitment, also need to step up and do better than his current figures of three wickets from as many matches.

The Royals, on the other hand, will start as favourites in Monday's match with the tournament's highest run-getter and wicket-taker in their ranks in Jos Buttler and Yuzvendra Chahal.

Chahal has been in top form with 12 wickets from five matches, also with a fine economy of 6.80 and he would fancy to add more scalps to his name, especially against a struggling KKR batting unit.

Veteran New Zealand

pacer Trent Boult (7 wickets from 4 matches) is the other Royals bowler who has been doing well.

But senior India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is terribly out of form. He picked up just one wicket from five matches while conceding 143 runs and it remains to be seen how long the team management will persist with him.

The Royals, however, have not fired as a batting unit with the likes of captain Sanju Samson (117 from 5 matches) and the hugely talented Devdutt Padikkal (114 from 5 matches) failing to click so far.

Their batting has revolved mainly around Buttler, who has set the IPL on fire with 272 runs from five matches with one hundred and two fifties.

Shimron Hetmyer has been the only other Royals batter who has done well so far with 197 runs from five matches with the help of one half-century.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels his team needs to improve in all aspects of the game after its third defeat in five games in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

DC lost by 16 runs to Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Wankhede Stadium here Saturday night to lie at the bottom half of the IPL table with just four points.

And, Ponting said it's time DC start clicking as a unit in all aspects of the game.

"We haven't had our full strength batting. Mitchell Marsh played his first game and probably didn't quite fit the tempo of



DK has presented very strong case for India comeback: Kohli

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Calling him the man of the IPL so far, Virat Kohli feels his Royal Challengers Bangalore teammate Dinesh Karthik has made a strong case for another India comeback with his stellar run in the T20 tournament so far.

Karthik, who has been playing the role of a finisher for RCB, has had the highest strike rate among the leading run-getters in the tournament scoring 197 runs in six innings at 209.57. He has only been dismissed once in the tournament.

On Saturday night, he smashed an unbeaten 66 off 34 balls as RCB beat Delhi Capitals by 16 runs.

In a conversation with Karthik on *iplt20.com*, Kohli said it has been a joy and honour to watch the wicket-keeper batter go about his business in the competition.

"I am here with the man of the IPL for me so far...It's been wonderful. I won't even say 'long may it continue' because it will and you're in that space and I can see that. It was an honour to watch you bat again. Thanks for getting us across the line," said Kohli.

The former India captain said his long-time RCB teammate AB de Villiers will also be proud of Karthik for finishing

games for the franchise like the South African used to do.

"I am very happy that DK is so clear in his goals. I can surely tell you that you have presented a very strong case for yourself moving forward playing T20 cricket not just for RCB but also I am sure lot of people are taking notice at the highest level as well.

"You mentioned. I think AB will be very proud watching from Pretoria, sitting at home and watching you finish games for us and take the team across the line," he added.

Karthik last played for India in the ODI World Cup in 2019. The 36-year-old is used to making comebacks ever since making his debut in 2004. He has played 36 Tests, 94 ODIs and 32 T20 Internationals.

Miller seals 3-wicket win for Gujarat Titans

PTI ■ PUNE

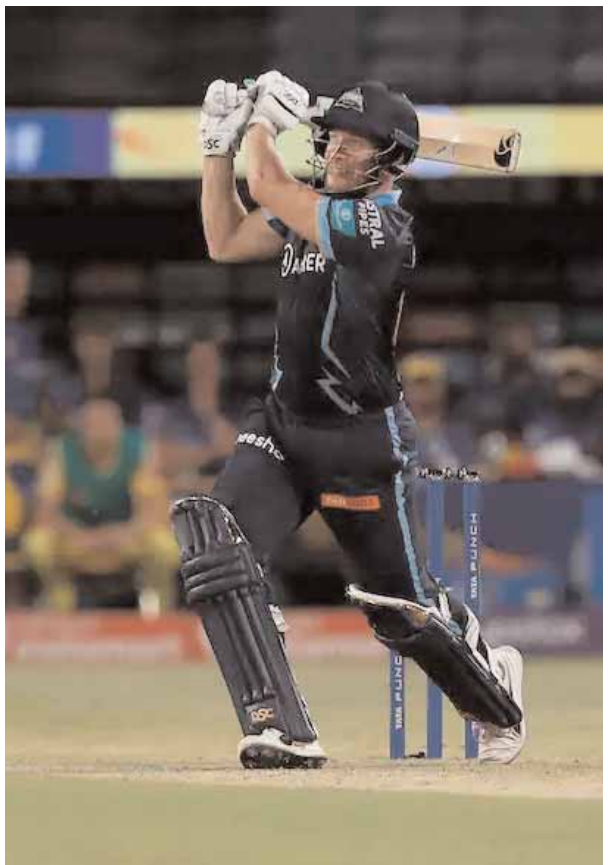
The big-hitting David Miller blazed away to a 51-ball 94 as Gujarat Titans pulled off an incredible come-from-behind three-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in the IPL here on Sunday.

Leading the side in the absence of an injured Hardik Pandya, Rashid Khan supported Miller with a 21-ball 40 as GT recovered from 16 for three, and then 48 for four, to seal one the greatest comebacks in the history of the league.

GT were set a target of 170. Needing 48 in 18 balls after an excellent 17th over by Dwayne Bravo, Rashid, inspired by Miller's monster sixes, hit Chris Jordan for three of his own maximums. GT collected 25 runs from the over to reduce the equation to a gettable 23 from 12 balls.

More drama awaited the seesawing battle as Bravo dismissed Rashid and Alzarri Joseph off successive balls in the penultimate over. Strangely enough, CSK skipper Ravindra Jadeja handed the ball to the battered Jordan for the final over, hoping that his experience and ability to wide yorkers would do the job for the yellow brigade. However, Miller had other ideas as he completed the job with a ball to spare. In all, Miller smashed eight boundaries and six sixes, while Rashid had three maximums and two fours to his name during a match-turning partnership of 70 runs.

Earlier, Ruturaj Gaikwad finally found form with a 48-ball 73 before Gujarat Titans pulled things back to stop Chennai Super Kings at 169 for



five.

Shubman Gill, who has played a few influential knocks this season, was out for a golden duck in the first over before the out-of-sorts Vijay Shankar too joined the former in the dugout. Wriddhiman Saha's (11 off 18 balls) painstaking stay in the middle was brought to an end by CSK skipper Ravindra Jadeja as GT slipped to 48 for four in the eighth over.

But then, Miller and Rashid joined forces to seal the game in favour of their team. This was after the Titans

bowlers did exceedingly well in the last six overs, conceding only 45 after a 92-run third-wicket stand between Gaikwad and Ambati Rayudu (46 in 31 balls).

Invited to bat, Gaikwad, who notched up his maiden IPL fifty of the season, added 92 off just 56 balls with Rayudu, rallying after CSK were in a spot of bother at 32 for two in the sixth over.

Gaikwad's knock was studied with five fours and as many sixes as he anchored the innings.

DC need to get better in all aspects of game: Ponting

the game that we needed. Royman Powell hasn't fired so far in middle order. So we need to fix some things and what we intended to do throughout the tournament," Ponting said at the post-match press conference. "There is definitely some areas for improvement with the bat and ball. In couple of overs, we absolutely have been blown out of the park. We need to get better in all aspects of the game."

Ponting said getting the team combination right will be key for DC in their upcoming matches.

"The next two games are pretty important for us and we need to look at all aspects of our

game, pick the right team and those 11 players we pick, need to stand up and get the job done," the coach said.

The former Australia captain called on his top-order batters to stand up and take more responsibility.

"We want the guys to have the best opportunities to make big scores and obviously if you are batting in the top 4 in T20, you have got the best opportunity to make big scores," said the batting legend.

"Prithvi (Shaw) has been playing exceptionally well but if one of the top-4 go onto to make a big score of 80-plus we know what will happen but that hasn't happened for us so far."

ECB appoint Rob Key as MD of Eng men's setup

PTI ■ LONDON

Former Kent captain and England batter Rob Key has been appointed as the new managing director of England's men's setup, the country's cricket board said on Sunday.

Key, who has made 21 appearances for England and scored over 19,000 First-Class runs, was chosen after a rigorous recruitment process.

He will take up the role immediately, relinquishing his current role with broadcaster *Sky Sports*.

"Key will be responsible for the strategy behind the England Men's cricket teams and the performance pathways leading into them. He will also take a key role as part of the High Performance Review which will shortly begin," the England Cricket Board (ECB) said in a release.

Prior to Key's appointment, Andrew Strauss had undertaken the role on an interim basis following Ashley Giles' departure in February after three years.

Key played 21 times for England across all three formats including making a Test double hundred against the West Indies at Lord's in 2004 which led to him being named one of the Wisden Cricketers



of the Year in 2005.

During a playing career that spanned three decades (1998-2015), Key amassed over 28,000 runs with 60 centuries.

He captained Kent twice from 2006-2012 and then again from 2014-15. During his time as captain the side won the County Championship Second Division title in 2010 and reached three white ball domestic finals.

He was also part of the England side who won the Under-19 World Cup for the first and only time in 1998.

After announcing his retirement in 2016, Key became a successful commentator for *Sky Sports* alongside writing a regular column for the *Evening Standard*. He has remained involved in the

administration side of the game and has previously sat on the ECB's Performance Cricket Committee.

Key said: "It is an absolute honour to take up this role. The chance to have an impact and make a difference is an opportunity given to very few and I will give it everything I have to try shape the next great era of English men's cricket."

"I have absolutely loved my time at *Sky* and I could never have imagined leaving were it not for this incredible opportunity. I'd like to personally thank Bryan Henderson and everyone in the team for their help and support."

"Although at this current moment it has been a challenging time in English cricket, I also think it's as exciting a time as I can remember."