

OPINION 6

INDIA NEED TO CONNECT
WITH RUSSIAN PEOPLE

WORLD 9

PAK PM SHEHBAZ, PUTIN EXCHANGE
LETTERS TO ENHANCE BILATERAL TIES

MONEY 10

INDIA'S OIL IMPORT BILL
DOUBLES TO \$119 BN IN FY22

NEW DELHI, MONDAY APRIL 25, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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12 SPORT

Modi invites youth to participate in growth story of Kashmir

Inaugurates,
lays foundation
of infra projects
of over ₹20k cr

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
PALLI, SAMBA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his first visit to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A on Sunday attempted to woo the younger generation and invited them to participate in the growth story of India to secure their future without facing any hardships. On the occasion, the Prime Minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of various infrastructure projects worth over ₹20,000 crore. He also launched the Amrit Sarovar initiative. The Lieutenant-Governor of J&K Manoj Sinha, Union Ministers Giriraj Singh, Dr Jitendra Singh, and Kapil Moreswar Patil were among those present on the occasion.

Addressing an impressive gathering of representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at Palli Panchayat falling in the Samba district of Jammu province, the Prime Minister



A video grab of Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating infrastructure projects in Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday PTI

said it is a matter of great pride that democracy has reached the grassroots level in the Union Territory (UT).

“This year’s Panchayati Raj Day, being celebrated in J&K, marks a big change. It is a matter of great pride that when democracy has reached the grassroots level in J&K, I am interacting with you all from here”, Modi said amid thunderous applause from the audi-

ence. The UT administration of J&K had also invited top business leaders from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other parts of the country to witness the historic day as the Prime Minister attended the groundbreaking ceremony for launching investment proposals worth ₹38,000 crore in different sectors.

To give a further boost to the investment opportunities in

the region, Modi also interacted with the business delegation from the UAE and representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Prime Minister said that a new story of development is being written and many private investors are interested in J&K.

“After seven decades of Independence, private investment of only ₹17,000 crore

could be made in Jammu & Kashmir. But now it is reaching around ₹38,000 crore. Tourism is also thriving once again,” the Prime Minister noted.

Thanking the people of J&K for their enthusiasm, the Prime Minister said due to his long association with the State, he understands the issues involved and expressed happiness about the focus on connectivity in the projects inaugurated and for which the foundation stone was laid today.

He also expressed hope that these efforts would provide employment to a large number of youths of J&K. “Today many families have also got property cards for their houses in the villages. These ownership cards will inspire new possibilities in the villages. The 100-odd Jan Aushadhi Kendras will become a medium to provide affordable medicines and surgical items to the poor and middle-class families of Jammu & Kashmir,” he said.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the change in the work culture by giving an example of the 500 KW solar plant that is being established in three weeks whereas earlier even the movement of files from Delhi used to take 2-3 weeks. **Continued on Page 2**

‘Pak academic degrees won’t be valid in India anymore’

UGC, AICTE joint circular asks Indian students not to go to Pak for higher education

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Centre has said that Pakistani academic degrees will not be valid anymore and students are not to go to the neighbouring country to pursue any kind of studies.

In a joint circular, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) asked Indian students not to go to Pakistan for higher studies, failing which, they would not be eligible to pursue higher studies or find a job in India. The notification comes within a month of the higher education regulator warning Indian students planning to pursue higher studies in China that it did not recognise “degree courses done only in online mode without prior approval.”

The UGC and the AICTE have urged students not to enroll themselves in any educational institution in Pakistan,



The circular, however, makes an exception for Pakistani migrants who have been granted Indian citizenship.

But the advisory against travelling to China for education came after the Chinese Government suspended all visas since November 2020 because of Covid-19.

“All concerned are advised not to travel to Pakistan for pursuing higher education. Any Indian national or Overseas Citizen of India who intends to take admission to any degree college or educational institution of Pakistan shall not be eligible for seeking employment or higher studies in India on the basis of such educational qualifications (in any subject) acquired in Pakistan,” says the advisory.

“However, migrants and their children who have acquired higher education degrees in Pakistan and have been awarded citizenship by India would be eligible for seeking employment in India after obtaining security clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs,” it added.

According to AICTE Chairman Anil Sahasrabudhe, Indian students need to be advised to which institutions and countries they should travel for education so that they don’t land up with a degree without parity with Indian regulations.

On his part, UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar said, “UGC and AICTE issue such public notices in the interest of Indian students who would like to pursue higher studies outside the country.”

“In the recent past, we have seen how our students had to face difficulties because they could not go back to the foreign countries to continue their studies,” he said.

The UGC issued an advisory in 2019 against studying in institutes in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

Macron wins 2nd term as Prez

Le Pen concedes defeat; Emmanuel first after Chirac to win re-election

AP/AFP ■
PARIS

French far-Right leader Marine Le Pen has conceded defeat in the presidential runoff, handing victory to incumbent Emmanuel Macron. She said her unprecedented score in a presidential election represents “a shining victory in itself.” “The ideas we represent are reaching summits,” she said.

French polling agencies are projecting that centrist Macron has won the runoff against Le Pen that took place on Sunday.

A victory by Le Pen, accused by opponents of having cosy ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, would have sent shockwaves around the world comparable to the 2016 polls that led to Brexit in Britain and Donald Trump’s election in the United States.



The outcome, expected to be confirmed by official results overnight, will cause immense relief in Europe after fears a Le Pen presidency would leave the continent rudderless following Brexit and the departure of German chancellor Angela Merkel.

Left-leaning EU leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had pleaded with

France in the run-up to the vote to choose Macron over his rival, in an unusual intervention published in Le Monde newspaper.

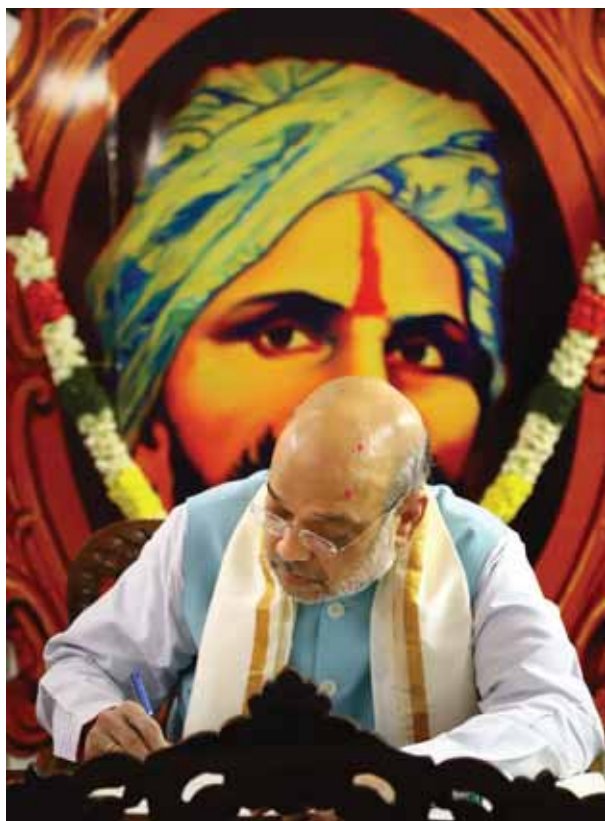
Macron will be the first French President to win re-election since Jacques Chirac in 2002 after his predecessors Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande left office after only one term.

The 44-year-old is to make

a victory speech on the Champ de Mars in central Paris at the foot of the Eiffel Tower where flag-waving supporters erupted in joy when the projections appeared at 8:00 pm local time (1800 GMT).

Macron will be hoping for a less complicated second term that will allow him to implement his vision of more pro-business reform and tighter EU integration after a first term shadowed by protests, then the pandemic and finally Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. But he will have to win over those who backed his opponents and the millions of French who did not bother to vote. On the basis of the official figures, polling organisations estimated that the abstention rate was on course for 28 per cent which, if confirmed, would be the highest in any presidential election second-round runoff since 1969.

Earlier report on Page 9



Union Home Minister Amit Shah signs the book for visitors at the Poet Bharathiur Museum located in Aravindar Street, Puducherry on Sunday PTI

Kishor’s firm signs contract with TRS

Cong expected to announce decision on PK joining party soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The poll strategist Prashant Kishor’s Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) has signed up a contract with Telangana Rashtriya Samiti (TRS) for the next year’s Telangana Assembly elections. Kishor, who is holding talks with the Congress leadership apparently for joining the party and has said the Congress cannot be allowed to die, was seen at the Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu’s Hyderabad residence on Saturday. While some Congress leaders wanted that Kishor’s IPAC should exclusively work for their

party once PK joined it, apparently the poll strategist is in no mood to give up his wide-ranging political contacts.

The Congress leadership is expected to announce on Monday its decision on the prospect of Kishor joining the party and playing a lead role in preparing it for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Of late, KCR has been highly critical of the BJP and holding talks with regional parties to firm up a third Front to take on the saffron outfit in 2024. While West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was not in favour of keeping the Congress on board, it’s believed that Kishor would try to prevail upon KCR to work out a strategy for greater unity of the Opposition parties where the Congress remained an important player.

However, it has to be seen how TRS and the Congress deal with each other in the State Assembly poll.

CAPSULE

3 ULTRAS KILLED IN PULWAMA ENCOUNTER

Srinagar: Three ultras were killed after an encounter broke out between militants and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir’s Pulwama district on Sunday. Based on specific inputs about the presence of militants in Pahoo area of Pulwama in south Kashmir, security forces launched a cordon and search there, a police official said.

BEIJING ON ALERT AS COVID CASES RISE

Beijing: China’s capital Beijing has gone on high alert as the situation turned “grim” following the emergence of clusters of Covid, while its financial hub Shanghai reported 39 more deaths due to the virus, the highest in a day so far during the outbreak since last month.

PM: ₹20 K CR DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS DAILY

New Delhi: Prime Minister Modi on Sunday said digital transactions worth ₹20 K crore are taking place daily in India and this is not only increasing facilities but also encouraging an environment of honesty.

India in Covid alert mode

2,000+ infections reported daily in last few days; PM to talk to CMs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is now in Covid-19 alert mode amid a gradual rise in cases. Over 2,000 infections have been reported daily in the past few days and 2,593 new Coronavirus cases were recorded on Saturday. Concerned at the rise in the infections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a high-level meeting with Chief Ministers on Wednesday through video conference.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan will make a presentation on the matter in the meeting, said a senior official in the Union Health Ministry.

In fact, various States have already started strengthening the Covid-19 appropriate behaviour with the majority of them making



the wearing of masks mandatory and enhancing virus surveillance and genome sequencing.

With 2,527 Coronavirus infections reported in a day, India’s total tally of cases rose to 4,30,54,952, while active cases increased to 15,079, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Saturday.

The death toll has climbed to 5,22,149 with 33 fatalities, the data updated at

8 am on Sunday stated. The active cases comprise 0.04 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 98.75 per cent, the Health Ministry said.

Puducherry, which was maintaining a Covid-19 free record for some days, reported three new cases.

The daily positivity rate was recorded as 0.59 per cent and the weekly positivity rate as 0.54 per cent, according to the Ministry.

Delhi on Sunday reported 1,083 fresh Covid-19 infections with a positivity rate of 4.48 per cent and one death due to the disease, according to the Health Department.

On Saturday, the national Capital had reported 1,094 Covid-19 cases, its highest daily spike since February 10, with a positivity rate of 4.82 per cent and two fatalities.

A total of 25,177 Covid tests were conducted in the city a day ago, the latest data by the department showed.

US officials will visit Ukraine, says Zelenskyy as Putin continues to attack

AP ■ KYIV

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the planned visit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin during a lengthy Saturday night news conference held in a Kyiv subway station, even as the Russian forces continued to pound more Ukraine cities. The White House has not commented so far.

Zelenskyy said he was looking for the Americans to produce results, both in terms of arms and security guarantees. “You can’t come to us empty-handed today, and we are expecting not just presents or some kind of cakes, we are expecting specific things and specific weapons,” he said.

The visit would be the first by senior US officials since Russia invaded Ukraine 60 days ago. Blinken stepped briefly onto Ukrainian soil in March to meet with the country’s Foreign Minister during a visit to Poland. Zelenskyy’s last face-to-face meeting with a US leader was February 19 in Munich with Vice President Kamala Harris.

Continued on Page 2

Malcha Mahal may be on Delhi’s tourist map soon

Delhi Govt to hire consultant to restore Tughlaq era hunting lodge

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government is mulling to bring Malcha Mahal, the 14th Century Tughlaq-era hunting lodge located in the central ridge, on the city’s tourist map after renovating the heritage structure.

Malcha Mahal was the abode of self-proclaimed descendants of the Nawab of Awadh, and lies neglected since the death of the last member of the royal family in September 2017.

“A request for the proposal is being prepared and it will be issued soon to hire a consultant for the restoration work of Malcha Mahal. We are planning to invite agencies who have expertise in this field to carry out the restoration work,” said the sources, adding that if everything



goes as per plan the restoration work should begin in the next five-six months. “Once the restoration work begins, it is likely to take a few years to complete the project,” sources said.

Hidden behind thick foliage in the central ridge along Sardar Patel Marg, the ancient structure is neither an ASI-protected monument nor has the State Government paid any attention towards its conservation.

The hope to conserve its heritage value has been rekindled as, the sources said, the State Government’s Archaeology Department is making an effort to hire a consultant to prepare a detailed plan for its restoration.

According to sources, most of the people are unaware about this hidden historical monument in the city, so the Government is also planning to put it on the city’s tourist map by developing tourist-friendly activities there. They, however, said this plan is at a very nascent stage and it is too early to predict what sort of facilities or activities will be planned there for tourism purposes. “Let us first work on the restoration of the heritage site then we can plan tourism activities there,” the official sources said. According to officials, Malcha Mahal was built by Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq and was used as a hunting lodge by him.

Min's son surrenders, sent back to Kheri jail

SC had terminated Ashish Mishra's bail earlier this week and had given him a week to surrender

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra's son Ashish Mishra, who is an accused in a murder case, surrendered before the police on Sunday. He has been sent back to the Lakhimpur prison. Ashish Mishra, the accused in the Lakhimpur Kheri incident in which eight people died, surrendered in the court on Sunday, ahead of the one-week deadline set by the Supreme Court earlier this

week. The Supreme Court had terminated Ashish Mishra's bail earlier this week and had given him a week to surrender. On April 4, the Supreme Court had reserved its decision on a petition filed by farmers seeking the termination of Ashish Mishra's bail. He was granted bail in the case by the Allahabad High Court. The Supreme Court has asked the Allahabad High Court to reconsider its judgement on Ashish Mishra's bail application. Senior counsel Dushyant Dave, representing the farmers, petitioned the Supreme Court to direct the High Court to transfer the case to a different division. However, the chief justice of India denied the plea, stating that it was inappropriate. "In every procedure, vic-

tims have the right to be heard.... We hold that the victims have been denied the opportunity to have an effective hearing in this matter," the bench ruled. On October 3 last year, eight persons were killed in Lakhimpur Kheri following protests against Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's visit to the town. According to the Uttar Pradesh Police FIR, four farmers were killed by an SUV in which Ashish Mishra was seated. Following the event, enraged farmers allegedly lynched the driver and two Bharatiya Janata Party activists. A journalist was also killed in the clashes, which sparked fury among opposition parties and farmers' organisations protesting the Centre's now-repealed agricultural reform policies.

FIR against Hindu Sena for posters outside Cong HQ

3 people were bound down as per legal procedure: Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Sunday has registered an First Information Report (FIR) against Hindu Sena members for allegedly putting up posters outside the Congress Headquarters at National Capital's 24 Akbar Road. According to Amrutha Guguloth, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), New Delhi district, the FIR has been registered against unidentified persons and further investigation is on. "The posters have already been removed by someone," she added. Meanwhile, Hindu Sena

chief Vishnu Gupta said its members had put up the series of posters outside the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters, questioning the party's 'silence' on the alleged attacks on Hindus. "Why is the Gandhi family silent on the attacks on Hindus in the country?" he asked. The development comes in the backdrop of clashes between two communities in northwest Delhi's Jahangirpuri during a procession on 'Hanuman Jayanti' on April 16, which left eight police personnel and a local injured. Earlier, on April 15, several posters and saffron flags were put up by the Hindu Sena near the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) main gate following the clashes that broke out in a hostel over allegedly serving non-vegetarian food during Ram Navami.

Police had said that three people were bound down as per legal procedure and the vehicle used in commission of the crime was also seized by the police. The posters also warned of "stringent steps" if there is an "insult to saffron". A video of Gupta was also doing rounds on social media that time. Gupta in the video had said that the posters reading "Bhagwa (saffron) JNU" have been put up by the right-wing outfit's national vice-president Surjit Singh Yadav. "Saffron is being insulted on the JNU campus on a regular basis. We want to warn those who are doing this. Mend your ways. We won't tolerate this. We respect your ideology and every religion. But insult to saffron will not be tolerated and we might take stringent steps," Gupta had said in the video in Hindi.

After Stalin, Mann to visit Govt schools, Mohalla clinics in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will visit Government schools and Mohalla clinics in the national Capital on Monday. Mann was also scheduled to visit the Delhi government schools on April 18, but it was later postponed.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, along with Delhi CM and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, will visit Delhi government schools and mohalla clinics on April 25. Education and Health Ministers, as well as top officials of both the states, will also be present during the visit," said the Delhi Chief Minister office. Chief Minister Shri Arvind

Kejriwal will personally present to explain to the Punjab CM how 'Delhi's transformation has taken place under him. He will be accompanied by the concerned ministers and officials of Delhi. Earlier, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Thiru M.K. Stalin came to see the schools and Mohalla Clinics of the Kejriwal Government.

Will meet Azam soon: BJP MP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bharatiya Janata Party MP Brij Bhushan Singh said he would soon meet Samajwadi Party MLA Mohammad Azam Khan, who is lodged in Sitapur jail for the last 26 months. The BJP MP also hailed Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) president Shivpal Singh Yadav for meeting Azam Khan in jail. "Shivpal Yadav is a grounded leader and he has become leader after a lot of struggles and hardships. Akhilesh is doing wrong; I welcome the step taken by Shivpal Yadav in meeting Azam Khan. I will also go to Sitapur to meet Azam Khan soon. Azam Khan is 10 term MLA of UP assembly and also an MP of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha," the BJP MP from Gonda, Brij Bhushan Singh, said.

On April 22, Shivpal Yadav had met Samajwadi Party MLA Azam Khan in Sitapur jail. The meeting lasted for about 50 minutes. After the meeting, Shivpal Yadav said "The UP chief minister is a saint and a soft-hearted person. I will meet him and request help for Azam Khan. The Samajwadi Party has done nothing to help Azam Khan. Ideally, the SP chief should have sat on a dharna in the Lok Sabha along with Netaji (Mulayam Singh Yadav) and other opposition parties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi respects Netaji and he would have definitely taken cognisance of the issue." Shivpal Yadav had contested the recent UP assembly elections on SP symbol from his traditional Jaswantnagar seat in Etawah district.

SP is with Azam, will work for his release: Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has broken his silence on the issue of Mohammad Azam Khan, saying the party is with the jailed leader and MLA from Rampur and will make efforts for his early release on bail. The response of Akhilesh Yadav has come two weeks after the Muslim leaders of the SP had attacked Akhilesh Yadav for doing nothing to help Azam Khan in his hour of crisis. Akhilesh Yadav said here on Sunday that the party was aware of its obligations and duties and would extend all possible legal help to the

Rampur MLA Azam Khan. Azam Khan, the Muslim face of the SP, is in jail for the last 26 months. Akhilesh Yadav had gone to Gosaiganj on Sultanpur road to meet the family members of woman Sub-Inspector Rashmi Yadav, who had committed suicide. Akhilesh Yadav alleged that there was political pressure on the police department and policemen were being used politically and with their help the government was hiding its failures on law and order. On Sunday, Azam Khan refused to meet a delegation of the Samajwadi Party led by its MLA Ravidas Mehrotra in Sitapur jail. The SP delegation

had gone to meet Azam Khan in the jail. The jailer however informed the SP leaders that Azam Khan was not feeling well and was not willing to meet their delegation. Ravidas Mehrotra however alleged that the jail administration was working under the pressure of the Bharatiya Janata Party led Yogi Adityanath government and the jailer had not allowed them to meet Azam Khan. Akhilesh Yadav, when asked about the delegation, feigned ignorance saying, "I have no information that a delegation led by Ravidas Mehrotra had gone to Sitapur to meet Azam Khan in district jail."

Temp soars to 39.5 deg in Delhi, two notches above normal for this time of yr

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The maximum temperature of the national capital on Sunday settled at 39.5 Degree Celsius, which is two notches above the normal for this time of year, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature in Delhi was recorded as 22.2 degree Celsius, which is one notch colder than the normal for this season, stated the IMD data. The relative humidity recorded at the Safdarjung observatory, in the morning at 8:30 A.M was 37 per cent and 18 per cent in the evening at 5:30 P.M. The weather stations at

Ridge, Ayanagar, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, Palam and Lathi Road recorded maximum temperatures of 40.6 degrees Celsius, 40.6 degrees Celsius, 40.9 degrees Celsius, 41.5 degrees Celsius, 41.6 degrees Celsius, 39.6 degrees Celsius and 39.8 degrees Celsius respectively, stated the IMD data. The IMD predicted, "Heat wave conditions over Gujarat state during next five days, likely to commence over central and east India from 25th and over northwest India from 26th April, 2022." Rain and thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds over Northeast India during 24th to 28th April, 2022," said IMD.

The Delhities have to face hardship in the upcoming week as the temperature in the upcoming week will climb up to 44 degree Celsius. From 26th April to 30th April the national capital will witness the heat-wave, said the IMD data. Delhi will witness the partly cloudy sky with possibility of development of thunder lightning on 25th April and the maximum temperature will shoot up to 41 degree Celsius. The maximum power demand in the capital city on Sunday recorded at 5033 MW, a few seconds after 12 midnight, said sources. According to the sources, the power demand in the city is less on the weekends as compared to the other days.

Govt working towards holistic dev of gram panchayats: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

On National Panchayati Raj Day, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that his Government was working towards empowerment and holistic development of gram panchayats through proper utilisation of resources to realise Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj. While launching development projects worth over Rs 1,100 crore at Airi Rampura in Jalaun on Sunday, Yogi said, "Gram Swaraj, put forward by Gandhiji, will be realised only when our panchayats are empowered to become 'Atmanirbhar'. If all 58,000 gram panchayats work with a positive development-oriented approach, then every citizen, every village will contribute towards prosperity of the new India."

Emphasising on transforming the villages into 'smart villages', the chief minister said that his government was working towards establishment of village secretariats (gram sachivalaya) for effective implementation of various government schemes at grassroots level, and providing facilities of optical fibre and WiFi in every gram panchayat as per Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision. Urging all the village representatives to work similar to the award-winning panchayats, Yogi said, "There is no shortage of funds today, with farsightedness, positive intent and determination, each gram panchayat should strive towards development." Speaking on the occasion, Yogi further said that under Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava, the exercise of excavation/rejuvenation of 'Amrit Sarovars' (ponds) would encourage the villagers towards conservation

of rain water, its better management, usage and plantation of trees. "The Amrit Sarovars will emerge as tourist destinations and will serve as a spot for the villagers to celebrate national events together," he added. Among the inaugurated projects were as many as 39,000 panchayat secretariats with internet connectivity, built at a cost of Rs 682.50 crore, as many as 7,10,000 LED lights installed in panchayats at a cost of Rs 306.72 crore, 2,000 community toilets built at a cost of Rs 90 crore and 16 District Panchayat Resource Centres and Training Centres (DPRCs) constructed at a cost of Rs 33.60 crore. Uttar Pradesh secured the third spot for the e-Panchayat award nationally for ensuring maximum use of information technology for monitoring the works of panchayats.

Most wanted ultra held in Punjab

Newly-formed task force got Babbar Khalsa man absconding since 2010

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police's newly-constituted Anti-Gangster Task Force (AGTF) on Sunday arrested one of the most wanted terrorists Charanjit Singh alias Patialavi — an active member of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI). Patialavi had been evading arrest for the last 12 years using various identities and hide-outs. Charanjit Singh alias Patialavi was an active member of the BKI terrorist module which was busted by the Punjab Police in 2010 for its involvement in the Shingar Cinema Ludhiana bomb blasts in 2007, and other blasts at Kali Mata Mandir, Patiala, and Ambala in 2010. All the other associates of Patialavi were arrested in 2010 by the Punjab Police. AGTF Deputy Inspector-General Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said that following



AGTF Deputy Inspector-General Gurpreet Bhullar addresses a press conference

reliable information that Patialavi was visiting the area, AGTF teams comprising AIG Gurmeet Singh Chauhan and DSP Bikramjit Singh Brar arrested him from near Gurudwara Sahib at Lali Village in the State's Dera Bassi. Bhullar said that accused Patialavi, a resident of Butta Singh Wala Village in Patiala, was declared a Proclaimed Offender

(PO) in a case (FIR No. 154 dated July 23, 2010), registered under Sections 4 and 5 (attempt to cause an explosion, or for making/keeping explosive to endanger life/property) of the Explosive Act, and Sections 17 (raising funds for the terrorist act), 18 (conspiracy) and 20 (being member of a terrorist gang) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) at Machhiwara

Police Station. However, Patialavi's other associate — deceased terrorist Gurmil Singh Boba of Butta Singh Wala — was arrested in the same case along with recovery of detonators and RDX, he added. "Patialavi, disguising himself as a granthi (priest) was staying in the Gurudwara Sahib at Kharagpur in West Bengal and was not using any communication device," said Bhullar, adding that different identification cards on West Bengal addresses have been recovered from his possession. Further investigation is in process, which may lead to more arrests and important disclosures, Bhullar said. The Punjab Government recently constituted an AGTF, headed by ADGP Promod Ban, under the supervision of the Director General of Police (DGP) VK Bhawra to intensify action against gangsters.

Modi invites youth to...

from Page 1

He said all houses of Palli Panchayat are getting solar power, which is a perfect example of Gram Urja Swaraj. The changed way of working will take Jammu and Kashmir to new heights, he said. The Prime Minister also gave an assurance to the youth that they will not inherit the problems faced by their parents and grandparents. "I want to promise the young generation of Jammu and Kashmir that the hardships your parents, and grandparents had to live with, you will never have to live such a life," he said. Referring to India's leadership on international environmental and climate change platforms, Modi expressed pride in the strides that Palli Panchayat is making towards becoming the first carbon-neutral panchayat. "Palli Panchayat is moving towards becoming the first Carbon Neutral Panchayat in the country. Today, I have also got an opportunity to interact with the people's representatives of the villages of the country, in the village of Palli. Many congratulations to Jammu and Kashmir for this big achievement and development works," he said. Referring to the process of inclusion of Jammu and Kashmir in the development journey of the nation, the Prime Minister informed that more than 175 central laws have become applicable in Jammu and Kashmir. The biggest beneficiaries of this have been the women, poor and deprived section of the area. The Prime Minister said that 75 sarovars will come up in every district by 15 August in 2023. He urged that these sarovars should be lined with trees named after the martyrs and freedom fighters. Reiterating his push for natural farming, the Prime Minister said that it is critical to free mother earth of chemicals as it is harming the land and groundwater.

'Operation Kayakalp' in UP to transform schools

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With an aim to consistently improve education facilities in the state, the Yogi Adityanath government in its second term under 'Operation Kayakalp' will transform the primary and secondary schools into 'smart schools'. To fulfill the quality education resolution and make the state-run schools at par with the private schools in terms of facilities and infrastructure, the government has chalked out an action plan. About 30,000 secondary schools will be equipped with smart classrooms, playgrounds, proper toilets, libraries, computer laboratories, art rooms and other modern facilities. An official spokesman of the government claimed here on Sunday that owing to the sustained efforts of the Yogi Adityanath government in the past, the state-run schools were amalgamating traditional teaching methodology with tech-based learning to improve the quality of education as a result of which the number of students who had enrolled in these schools had also risen. It is noteworthy that Yogi Adityanath government's 'Operation Kayakalp' which aims at transforming the primary schools of the state, was started in the year 2019. Under this, efforts are being made to provide a clean and safe environment with modern facilities to 1.64 lakh children studying in 1.33 lakh council schools.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

THANKSGIVING

Thankyou holy spirit for all blessings Celine.

PD(9176)C

Court sends Mevani to one-day judicial custody

PTI ■ KOKRAJHAR (ASSAM)

A local court here on Sunday sent Gujarat Independent legislator Jignesh Mevani, arrested from the western state by Assam Police on Wednesday for a purported Tweet against the prime minister, to one day's judicial custody, a police official said. Hearing in his case, including his bail petition, will be taken up on Monday, he added. Additional superintendent of police of Kokrajhar Surjit Singh Panesar told reporters here that the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) decided to remand him to one day's judicial custody. Mevani's three day police custody had ended on Sunday, after which he was produced before the court late in the evening and arguments in the case continued for over two hours till around 9.30 pm. Panesar also said Mevani will be produced again before the court on Monday morning and his hearing will continue,

including on his bail petition. Mevani, seen with an Assamese gamocha (traditional towel) around his neck, was taken to the Kokrajhar jail from the residence of the CJM, where the hearing was held. Meanwhile, the Congress continued to stage protest here in support of Mevani. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhupen Borah and MLAs Diganta Barman and SK Rashid led a silent march from the party office here to Kokrajhar Police Station, where Mevani was kept during his police remand. Congress MLAs and leaders have been staging daily protests demanding Mevani's release. Other Opposition parties, including AIUDF and CPI (M), as well as the state's lone Independent legislator had also called on Mevani during his police remand and pledged their support to him. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday had termed as "undemocratic"

DDC, Dept of industries to hold meet of stakeholders

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To seek inputs from representatives of various cloud kitchens operators for the development of Delhi's Cloud Kitchen Policy, the Dialogue and Development Commission (DDC) of Delhi along with the Department of Industries, will be convening a stakeholder consultation on April 26 in Delhi Secretariat. The proposal to boost cloud kitchens was part of Delhi government's recently announced Rozgar Budget 2022-23 plan to create 20 lakh jobs in five years in Delhi. According to officials, the consultation will be aimed at understanding the various pressing challenges faced by Delhi's cloud kitchen operators and exploring the potential and viability of setting up cloud kitchen clusters across Delhi. Jasmine Shah, the Vice Chairperson, DDC Delhi said cloud kitchens have a huge potential to attract investments, increase the market size of the

F&B sector and generate large-scale direct and indirect jobs. "The number of cloud kitchens in Delhi is growing at a rate of over 20 per cent every year. There are over 20,000 cloud kitchens currently active in the city, which provide direct employment to around 2,00,000 and indirect employment to at least 50,000 people," said Shah. "Cloud kitchens are set to be a two billion dollar industry in India by 2024, up from \$400 million in 2019. As cloud kitchens prepare and deliver food at the customer's door step by taking orders via food aggregators/online ordering platforms, they can operate at a fraction of the traditional restaurant space," said an official. "The segment witnessed a significant boom during the coronavirus pandemic, with many restaurants pivoting to focus on cloud kitchen setups, which are built on food delivery rather than dine-in," the official added.

US officials will....

From Page 1

The meeting was set to take place as Ukrainians and Russians observed Orthodox Easter, when the faithful celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, considered the most joyful holiday on the Christian calendar. Speaking Sunday from the ancient St Sophia Cathedral, Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, highlighted the allegorical significance of the occasion to a nation wracked by nearly two months of war. "The great holiday today gives us great hope and unwavering faith that light will overcome darkness, good will overcome evil, life will overcome death, and therefore Ukraine will surely win!" he said. Still, the war cast a shadow over celebrations. Residents of rural villages battered by the war approached the day with some cautious defiance.

City sees 1,083 Covid cases

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday reported 1,083 fresh Covid-19 cases and one death, while the positivity rate stood at 4.48 per cent, according to data released by the Health Department of the Delhi Government. According to the health bulletin, the total number of home isolation cases stand at 2,812. The number of containment zones is 656 on April 24. A total of 25,177 Covid-19 tests were conducted in the city a day ago. The infection tally in the national Capital now stands at 18,74,876 and the death toll at 26,168.

The capital had reported 1,094 Covid-19 infections on Saturday, highest since February 10, with a positivity rate of 4.82 per cent and two deaths. It had logged 1,042 cases with a positivity rate of 4.64 per cent and two fatalities due to the infection on Friday. On Thursday, the city reported 965 Covid cases and a single fatality with a positivity rate of 4.71 per cent.

With Delhi witnessing a spurt in Covid-19 cases in the past few days, the number of

active cases of the disease in the city has now increased to 3,975 from 601 on April 11. However, the hospitalisation rate has so far been low, accounting for less

than three per cent of the total active cases, according to the data. There are 80 Covid-19 patients admitted at hospitals in Delhi at present, while 2,812

are recuperating in home-isolation. Of the 9,379 beds available for Covid-19 patients in various hospitals, just 107 (1.14 per cent) are occupied.

‘CT scan facilities soon at Indira Gandhi Hospital’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to provide special treatment to each and every common resident of the national Capital, the Delhi Government on Sunday has decided to provide CT scan facilities at Delhi’s Indira Gandhi Hospital.

According to the Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain, more than 22 lakh people living in and around South-West Delhi are expected to benefit from the installation of this machine. Emergency services will be made available to the people as well, he said.

“All of these healthcare services will be provided under

one roof. The machinery is expected to be made available for public use around August after all the necessary tests are carried out,” he said.

Elaborating on the developments, Jain said, “Modern machines will further strengthen the health system of Delhi Government hospitals.

People will also be able to avail various types of health facilities like consultation, check-up, and treatment, all in one day, under one roof, he said. “We will provide special VIP quality treatment to every common person in Delhi. A CT scan or computerised Tomography, is a form of X-ray, also known as computerised

axial tomography. It shows images of various organs and systems in the body. Most CT scan machines are used to detect the symptoms of diseases related to different parts of the body,” he said.

With its help, soft tissue, blood vessels and bones of different parts of the body can be examined.

Crucial information related to many internal parts of body, such as head, shoulders, spinal bones, heart, stomach, knees, chest and other internal parts can be derived using a CT Scan machine, which helps doctor to understand and treat patient’s disease and provide better treatment.

‘Key conspirator of Jahangirpuri riot has a criminal record’

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police dossier has revealed that to earn quick money, the prime accused of the Jahangirpuri violence — Sheikh Mohammad Ansar — joined the crime world years ago and on February 13, 2009, he was arrested for the first time under Arms Act and remanded to judicial custody.

According to Delhi Police dossier, a copy accessed by *The Pioneer*, Ansar, who had studied up to Class 4, was born in 1980 in JJ cluster of Jahangirpuri area.

The focus of the probe into the April 16 Jahangirpuri communal clashes is currently on Ansar, which has even forced the Delhi Police to seek Enforcement Directorate’s (ED) help in the matter.

“He left his studies and started working as a child labourer. He also came in contact with bad elements of the society and to earn quick money he joined the crime world. He had committed several crimes. Later on he start-



ed keeping a knife,” stated the dossier. “On 13 February, 2009, Ansar was arrested for the first time under a case of Arms Act and the investigation in the case is still pending.

“A second case was lodged against him in 2018. It was lodged under sections 186/353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Jahangirpuri police station,” the dossier added.

Ansar was also arrested repeatedly under preventive sections and booked under the Gambling Act. He is originally from Assam and married into a family which had been living in Haldia. Ansar has a philanthropist image in Haldia,

West Bengal, and he also owns a luxurious mansion there.

The dossier also explained about another accused, the 37-year-old Sheikh Salim alias Chikna, who has also been slapped with National Security Act (NSA) along with Ansar and three others, was born in Jahangirpuri in 1985 and due to economic problems he was not able to study and remained illiterate. He was arrested on April 20 in connection with the violence in Jahangirpuri.

“Later as he grew up, he started working as a ragpicker but finally fell into bad company and started committing crime to earn more money,” stated the dossier.

Chikna was arrested on April 18 for allegedly firing shots during the clashes. In the video he was seen wearing a blue shirt and firing rounds.

Sources said he was arrested at Mangal Bazar, where he had gone to take money from some person to flee from the city. Imam owns a chicken shop in the Jahangirpuri area.

Two days after his arrest,

the man who supplied illegal arms — Ghulam Rasool alias Gilli — was also nabbed by the police. Sources said on interrogation, he confessed to supplying illegal weapon to Imam. Gilli is also addicted to smoking beedis.

Born at Jahangirpuri in 1995, the accused Gilli is an illiterate and was selling fish before falling into bad company and the world of crime.

Another accused, 30-year-old Sheikh Hasan alias Chora, has been found previously involved in several cases. Police had arrested him seven times in the past eight years. Hasan is brother of another arrested rioter Chikna.

In 2011, he was arrested for snatching mobile phone and was also subsequently held by the police on the spot. Despite that, his criminal activities didn’t stop and he has been involved in various crimes including theft, robbery, forgery, assault and Arms Act. In August 2021, he was arrested under Arms Act, the case is still pending.

Ashram underpass opened for public

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



underpass connects Bhogal with New Friends Colony on Mathura Road. After its opening, motorists travelling to ITO and other parts of central Delhi from New Friends Colony and Badarpur will have a smooth ride through the busy Ashram crossing.

Ashram Chowk is an important link between central and south Delhi and also with Faridabad. The junction connects Mathura Road and Ring

Road (linking Lajpat Nagar-Sarai Kale Khan and the DND flyover). Addressing a small gathering, Sisodia, said the underpass will not only save time of commuters but will also result in daily saving of 1,550 litre fuel. “I am told by engineers here that nearly 1,550 litre fuel is burnt by commuters daily while waiting at the Ashram crossing only.

It will also reduce the emission of 3,600 kg of carbon gas. Now all this fuel and money along with travelling time will be saved. It will benefit lakhs of commuters of Delhi,” Sisodia said. He said it was a complex construction and it was very difficult to build the underpass during heavy traffic.

Tiranga yatra taken out in Jahangirpuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Members of both Hindu and Muslim communities take out a Tiranga yatra at the communal violence-hit Jahangirpuri area, in New Delhi on Sunday

RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

members of both communities.

They proposed to organise a Tiranga yatra in Jahangirpuri and appeal to people to main-

tain communal harmony. Fifty people each from both communities participated in yatra,” Usha Rangani, DCP North-West said.

3 held for making and circulating counterfeit Indian coins

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the arrest of five people, the Special Cell of Delhi Police claimed to have busted a Haryana-based module allegedly involved in manufacturing and circulating counterfeit Indian coins. Police said the coins were being circulated in different parts of Delhi and Haryana.

Police have also recovered counterfeit Indian coins worth around Rs 10-12 Lakh in the denomination of Rs 20, Rs 10 and Rs 5 from the possession of the accused. According to Rajeev Ranjan Singh, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, police team collected information about manufacturing and circulating of counterfeit Indian coins at a huge scale by an interstate syndicate being run by noted illegal counterfeit coins peddler Naresh Kumar.

“On April 22, a raid was conducted and Naresh was apprehended. A total 10,112 counterfeit Indian coins in the denomination of Rs 10 amounting to a face value of Rs. 1,01,120 were recovered,” he said. During interrogation, he disclosed about an illegal counterfeit coin factory at Imlotha village in Charkhi Dadri district of Haryana.

NDMC to develop theme-based stretch from Africa Avenue Road to Satya Marg



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to beautify New Delhi area and to achieve seven-star ranking in the forthcoming ‘Swachhta Survekshan 2022’, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Sunday said it will develop a theme-based stretch from Africa Avenue Road to Satya Marg Roundabout with beautiful painting of freedom fighters and develop a view cutter side wall and railing at Safdarjung Flyover by displaying 75 Freedom Fighters and their quote.

While giving the details, the Vice Chairman of NDMC Satish Upadhyay said both side walls approaching to underpass and pillars of railway bridge have been beautifully

painted with theme-based artistic work by the renowned artist and NGO. The long stretch area covered from Africa Avenue Road from Sarojini Nagar Depot to Satya Marg Roundabout has been developed as ‘AKAM’ chowraha.

“The painting area has been divided into various themes such as pictures of prominent Freedom fighters, Dandhi March, Historical Monuments of Delhi.

Yoga and ancient mudra (pose) are displayed in beautiful artistic designs on the railway bridge’s pillars to motivate the masses for its health benefits,” Upadhyay said.

He further informed that the total estimated cost of the project is Rs. 24 Lakhs approximately. The work has been

started at site. While giving the details of the project of Safdarjung Flyover, Upadhyay said that the photographs and quotes of 75 Freedom Fighters will be made on digital painting on retro-reflective sheets pasted on Aluminum composite material board as a view cutter over the Flyover.

He said the existing acrylic sheet view cutters at Safdarjung Flyover Railing are installed for the safety and security of the VVIP movements but these are vandalised frequently.

“The proposed view cutters will not only enhance the aesthetic of the area but are also durable and long lasting. The state of art view cutter will be viewed by the public passing from there,” he said.

“The total estimated cost of project is Rs 75 lakhs approximately. The work will be awarded soon once the tender formalities are completed in a time-bound manner” Upadhyay said.

The Vice Chairman of NDMC said that this initiative will help bring stories of unsung heroes whose sacrifices have made freedom a reality for us and also revisits milestones, freedom movements etc. in historical journey to 15 August, 1947.

140 birds rescued from stressful heat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With heatwave pushing several birds in the national Capital into stressful conditions, a Wildlife NGO said it has rescued around 140 birds suffering from exhaustion and dehydration since March.

According to the NGO, its members saved around nearly 120 birds, including 30 kites and more than 70 pigeons, in March and 20 black kites this month in Delhi-NCR.

The national Capital has witnessed an unprecedented hot and humid weather since March this year.

“Rising temperature causes dehydration and heat exhaustion. Wildlife SOS has rescued numerous birds from such distress situations and provided necessary medical aid to the city’s avian popula-

tion,” the NGO said in a statement. Earlier this week, its Rapid Response Unit rescued a black kite fledgling from a private garden in Chanakyapuri. “The young bird was unable to fly and was seen lying motionless on the ground.

The excessive heat further aggravated the situation and made its condition even more critical. Upon reaching the location, the Wildlife SOS team first provided drinking water and hydrated the bird, after which it was carefully transferred to a transit facility,” the NGO said.

The kite is currently under medical observation and will be released once declared fit by the Wildlife SOS veterinarians, it added. In another incident, a black kite was found caught in glass-coated nylon strings, popularly known as ‘manja’, hang-

ing from a tree inside a residential complex in Sheikh Sarai Phase-I, south Delhi.

The bird was rescued through a collaborative effort of the Wildlife SOS Rapid Response Unit and the Delhi Fire Service. It was suspected that the bird had been stuck there for two days and dehydrated, it said. “We get a lot of calls for rescue of kites during the summer months.

The rise in temperature makes birds sick and the major cause is dehydration due to heat stroke. Kites have a tendency to fly at higher altitudes and are more prone to the excessive heat.

“While descending in search of prey or water, they very often collapse on the ground due to exhaustion. Summer is a difficult season for birds and dehydration can turn


fatal for them.

That is why when we rescue birds from such stressful scenarios, the first thing we do is to provide them with water,” Kartick Satyanarayan, co-founder and CEO, Wildlife SOS said. Commenting on the impact of weather on birds, Wasim Akram, Deputy Director-Special Projects, Wildlife SOS said, “With maximum temperatures reaching 42 degrees Celsius during the day, a large percentage of the avian population in Delhi-NCR is becoming a victim of dehydration, heat exhaustion and lack of shade.”

They are often found lying on the ground unconscious and some even suffer from heatstroke, which can lead to death if appropriate measures are not taken, he said.

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Campus
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Source: Industry Report titled “Report on Footwear Retail in India” dated April 7, 2022, issued by Technopak Advisors Private Limited (“Technopak Report”). “Largest sports and athleisure footwear brand in India, both in terms of value and volume in Fiscal 2021 and fastest growing scaled sports and athleisure footwear brand (scaled brands being brands with over ₹ 2 billion of revenue in Fiscal 2019) in India over Fiscal 2019 to Fiscal 2021.” As of December 31, 2021.

Top 5 Risk Factors as per the RHP :

- The Offer Price, market capitalization to revenue multiple and price to earnings ratio based on the Offer Price of our Company, may not be indicative of the market price of our Company on listing or thereafter.**
- There have been volatile fluctuations in our revenues and financial parameters such as profit after tax margin, Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (“EBITDA”) margin and Gross margin in the past. There is no guarantee that these will improve in the future and our Company will be able to generate higher returns.**
- 3. We may not be able to maintain our financial parameters such as Return on Capital Employed (ROCE) in the future.**
- 4. We are reliant on our trade distribution and our direct-to-consumer channels for a majority of our sales, any disruptions to the operations of these channels or our limitations on our ability to expand and grow this channel may adversely affect our sales, cash flows and profitability.**
- 5. The sports and athleisure footwear industry is highly competitive, and if we fail to compete effectively, our business, results of operations and financial condition may be adversely affected.**

Campus Activewear Limited is proposing, subject to receipt of requisite approvals, market conditions and other considerations, an initial public offering of its equity shares (the “Equity Shares”), and has filed a draft red herring prospectus dated December 24, 2021 (the “DRHP”) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (“SEBI”) and a red herring prospectus dated April 18, 2022 (“RHP”) with the Registrar of Companies, Delhi & Haryana at New Delhi. The DRHP and RHP is available on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in and the website of the Book Running Lead Managers, JM Financial Limited, BofA Securities India Limited, CLSA India Private Limited and Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Limited at www.jmfi.com, www.mfi-india.com, www.india.clsa.com and www.investmentbankkotak.com, and the websites of BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited at www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com, respectively. Any potential investor should note that investment in Equity Shares involves a high degree of risk. For details, potential investors should refer to the RHP, including the section titled “Risk Factors” on page 32 of the RHP. Potential investors should not rely on the DRHP for any investment decision.

The Equity Shares offered in the Offer have not been, and will not be, registered under the U.S. Securities Act and may not be offered or sold within the United States, except pursuant to an exemption from, or in a transaction not subject to, the registration requirements of the U.S. Securities Act and accordingly, the Equity Shares are being offered and sold (i) within the United States solely to persons who are reasonably believed to be “qualified institutional buyers” (as defined in Rule 144A under the U.S. Securities Act) in transactions exempt from the registration requirements of the U.S. Securities Act, and (ii) outside the United States in “offshore transactions” as defined in and in reliance on Regulation S under the U.S. Securities Act and the applicable laws of the jurisdiction where those offers and sales occur.

Indian Navy top brass to review operational readiness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

With the growing aggressive stance of China in the Indo-Pacific and the strategically important Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy top brass will review its operational readiness to meet any challenge in the four-day commanders' conference beginning Monday.

The commanders will also draw appropriate lessons from the ongoing Russian military action in Ukraine and prepare the Indian Navy to fight modern day war in all domains including conventional and unconventional.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will address and interact with the commanders on matters pertaining to the national security. Chief of Army and IAF will also interact with the brass to address convergence of the three Services vis-à-vis a common operational environment, as well as discuss avenues of augmenting Tri-Service synergy and readiness, officials said here on Sunday.

The Chief of the Naval Staff, along with other Naval



Commanders' meet

Commanders will review major Operational, Materiel, Logistics, Human Resource Development, Training and Administrative activities undertaken by the Indian Navy in the last six months and further deliberate upon future plans for important activities and initiatives. The conference will also dwell upon dynamics of the geostrategic situation in the backdrop of security scenario in the neighbourhood as well as changes emerging due to ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, they said.

The Indian Navy is

focused on being a combat ready, credible and cohesive force with a future-ready outlook and continues to assiduously execute its mandate. The Navy has witnessed a significant growth in its operational tasking over the years in consonance with India's growing maritime interests.

Indian Navy's standing as the 'Preferred Security Partner' has also grown concomitantly in recent times. In 2020-21, Indian navy ships have undertaken multiple Covid related outreach missions to provide food and medical aid to Indian

Ocean Region littoral nations and beyond as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in Region).

The conference is held twice a year and serves as a platform for Naval Commanders to discuss important maritime matters at the military-strategic level as well as interact with senior government functionaries through an institutionalised forum. The Army and IAF held their commanders' meet earlier this month.

Modi calls for all-round efforts towards water conservation

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■
NEW DELHI

Stating that "jal se Juda pryas Skal se Juda hai", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for all-round efforts towards water conservation as he appreciated the rapid growth of the digital economy in the country "recording transactions worth Rs 20,000 crore daily."

Addressing the nation in his monthly radio talk 'Mann ki baat', Modi touched on a rain-bow of issues ranging from Museums to Vedic maths.

The Prime Minister said the importance of water conservation becomes more so crucial during the summer season and particularly in the water-starved areas.

"The Bhil tribe of Madhya Pradesh used their historical tradition 'Halma' for water conservation. Under this tradition, the people of this tribe gather at one place to find a solution to the problems related to water", he said.

"It is clearly stated in our scriptures: 'Paniyam paramam loke, jeevaanaam jeevanam samritam (Water is the basis of life of every living being and water is also the biggest resource in the world)," he said.



The Prime Minister said 75 'Amrit Sarovars' are to be built in every district of India during the ongoing celebrations of 75 years of the independence.

"In the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, water conservation is one of the resolves with which the country is moving forward, he said.

Moving on to the rapid growth of the digital economy, Miodi cited examples of girls who moved around Delhi for 24-hours and did not have to use cash as digital UPI transactions were accepted in the market, including by the street vendors.

He said daily transactions have reached worth 20,000 crore and at times going much higher."Last March, UPI transactions reached around Rs 10 lakh

crores. Due to this, convenience is also increasing in the country and an atmosphere of honesty is also being created, said Modi.

"The facility of payment through UPI has reached even places where there was no good internet facility till a few years ago," the Prime Minister said.

Modi also spoke about the 'Pradhanmantri Sanghralaya' inaugurated by him in Delhi recently and sought people to visit it to know more about the country's history and its 14 Prime Ministers.

He said there are several kinds of museums in the country including those of kites and coins. The Prime Minister also asked a few general knowledge questions relating to museums and sought them to submit

answers in the NaMo app .

Museums are being encouraged to adopt new ways in view of changing times and Covid protocols, he said as he appealed that all should continue to wear masks to prevent further spreading of the coronavirus in the country.

Prime Minister also talked about Vedic mathematics as he said students in their classes are mostly scared by the Maths. He said unlike in modern maths, Vedic maths could count till infinite.

"Mathematics is a subject with which we Indians should be most comfortable. After all, the people of India have given the most research and contribution to the whole world regarding mathematics", he pointed out to his radio listeners.

"From Calculus to Computers - all these scientific inventions are based on Zero. Zero, that is, you must have heard a lot about the discovery of zero and its importance. Often you will also hear that if zero was not discovered, we might not have even seen so much scientific progress in the world", said the Prime Minister about the contribution of ancient India to Mathematics and the discovery of Zero by ancient Indian geniuses.

Political vendetta: Congress on Yes Bank co-founder's MF Husain painting charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday termed as "political vendetta" the allegation by Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor who has told the Enforcement Directorate that he was "forced" to buy an M F Husain painting from party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and questioned his and the ED's credibility.

At AICC Press conference Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said, "This is absolutely astonishing. I don't want to use a strong word, it is absolutely disgusting that a 2010 transaction, a person who is behind bars for years, whose 20-30 bail applications have been rejected, who is called a crook and a fraudster, makes allegations about dead people and the government is jumping with joy only because it suits their political angle."

"The government wants to keep the pot boiling for 2022, for a transaction in 2010, when neither Murli Deora is here to deny it nor Ahmed Patel is here to deny, Singhvi said.

Kapoor has told the ED that he was "forced" to buy the M F Husain painting from Priyanka Gandhi and the sale proceeds were utilised by the Gandhi family for the medical treatment of Congress president Sonia Gandhi in New York, according to the charge sheet filed by the federal anti-money laundering agency in a special court in Mumbai.

He told the Enforcement

Directorate (ED) that he was told by the then petroleum minister Murli Deora that the refusal to buy the painting will not only prevent him from building a relationship with the Gandhi family but also prevent him from getting the 'Padma Bhushan' award.

Kapoor also told the agency that Ahmed Patel, a close confidante of Sonia Gandhi, had told him that by supporting the Gandhi family at an opportune time for medical treatment of Sonia Gandhi, "I (Kapoor) had performed a good deed for the family and it would be duly considered for the 'Padma Bhushan' award".

"What is the objective of this, is it the result of your (government) pressure tactics and coercion on a person behind bars eager to get his freedom to record statements against political opponents and to keep a 12-year-old thing boiling just for convenience of politics," the Rajya Sabha MP said, hitting out at the government.

In his response to the allegations, Singhvi cited that in March 2014, the Yes Bank loan book stood at Rs 55,000 crore and in March 2019, it had increased nearly five times to Rs 2.41 lakh crore.

"The loan book of Yes Bank also showed a very dramatic increase between two other dates which are very inconvenient for the Modi government about which neither the government nor the prime minister talk about anymore. In March 2016, it was Rs 98,000 crore and in March 2018, it became 2.03 lakh crore, about more than double.

Remember when demonetisation happened, November 2016," he said.

Singhvi also pointed out that the BJP-led Haryana government invested Rs 2,500 crore as government money into accounts of a "sinking" Yes Bank.

"They are trying to create a fear psychosis to scare people to do political vendetta, they should know better than that. At least spare the dead. At least don't defame people like Deora and Ahmed Patel," he said.

"We all know the credibility of the ED and more than that the credibility of the person accused in this case who is supposed to have made this statement," he added.

The statements of Rana Kapoor are part of the second supplementary charge sheet (overall third) filed in the special court recently against the Yes Bank co-founder, his family, Dewan Housing Finance Limited (DHFL) promoters Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhawan, and others in a money laundering case.

Stating that he had paid a cheque of Rs 2 crore, Kapoor claimed that "Milind Deora (son of the late Murli Deora and former Congress MP) later conveyed to him confidentially that the sale proceeds were utilised by the Gandhi family for the medical treatment of Sonia Gandhi in New York."

Kapoor is currently in judicial custody following his arrest in the case in March 2020. The Wadhvans too are in jail custody after their arrest in another case.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is planning to set up 'Garima Greh' or shelter homes for transgenders across the country. This is aimed at rehabilitating the members of the community whose parents or immediate family are unable to take care of them.

The scheme will be named "Support for Marginalised Individuals and livelihood Enterprise" (SMILE) and will be funded by the to safeguard the rights of transgender persons and protect the interest of the community.

A senior official said the Section 8(4) of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, envisages measures for the rescue, protection and rehabilitation of transgender persons to address their needs.

"The establishment of Garima Greh will align with the provision laid down under Section 12(3) of the Act which states that whether any parent or a member of his immediate family is unable to take care of a transgender, the competent court shall by an order direct such person to be placed in the rehabilitation center," he said..

Such shelter homes will ensure that the community has access to a safe and secure environment, livelihood opportunity and a means to reintegrate into the society, the official said adding that it will cater to the primary need of providing shelter to transgender persons with basic amenities like food, medical care and recreational facilities facing social, psychological and economical constraints.

Besides, it will provide support for the capacity-building/skill development of Transgender persons. Steps will also be taken to liason to provide legal care and psychological counseling to enable Transgender persons to take steps for their reintegration into their families /society.

At the home shelter, it will

also be ensured that skill-development, training to develop and enhance livelihood skills and create an alternative livelihood for the transgender persons for economic independence are undertaken.

To assist transgender persons residing in Garima Grehs in getting Identity cards, PAN cards, Ration cards, passports, etc., and improve overall living conditions of Transgender persons by providing a positive environment for their holistic development.

"We have asked the interested NGOs/CBOs owned by the Transgender community for the expression of interest," the official added. The shelter home

will be managed and executed by the Project Management Committee (PMC). The Secretary of the organization running the Garima Greh must be a person from the Transgenders community and would be the Project Director of that Garima Greh . The Committee shall be expected to meet every month and record the progress of the community. The Garima Greh should be located in a reasonably quiet and residential locality so that there are no unscrupulous elements disturbing the residents. Moreover, the center should be easily accessible and connected through public transport, the official shared.

NIA files chargesheet against 20 CPI(M) cadres in Kerala's Edakkara case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against 20 CPI (Maoist) cadres in the Edakkara Maoist Case of Kerala before the NIA Special Court, Ernakulam.

The case relates to conspiracy for conducting physical and arms training, conducting Zonal Committee meeting of Western Ghats Special Zonal Committee of the proscribed outfit in the Nilambur forest in Malappuram district, Kerala in 2016 in order to strengthen the CPI (Maoist) with the intention to commit terrorist acts and waging war against the Government.

Those charged include Kalidas alias Mani alias Sekhar of Ponnayyapuram, Parambakkudy Taluk, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, Sreemathi BP alias Unnimaya alias Savitha of Belagodukodige, K Masige of Chikamangaluru, Karnataka, Savithri

alias Rajitha of Kalsa Hobli, Chickamangaluru, Karnataka.

Others charged are S Danish alias S Danish of Puliyaakulam, Ramanathapuram, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, Vikram Gowda of Udupi, Karnataka.

The remaining chargesheeted accused are Soman alias Shahid, Sharmila, R Ragavendran, P Thiruvengadam, B G Krishnamurthy, Rajan C G, Deepak alias Chandru, Karthik alias Kumar, Ramesh alias Chinna Ramesh, T K Rajeevan Ramesh, Iyyappan and Anness Babu alias Thambi.

The accused have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

The case was initially registered as FIR No.249/2017 by Edakkara Police Station, Malappuram, Kerala on September 30, 2017 and taken over by



Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), Kerala. Subsequently, the NIA re-registered the case on August 20, 2021. Investigation conducted by NIA established that the accused in the case were members of the proscribed terrorist organisation CPI (Maoist), and had trespassed into the reserve forests of Nilambur in Malappuram, Kerala.

The accused conspired for conduct-

ing training camps, organised meetings of the Zonal Committee of the banned terror outfit. They also observed Commemoration Week and celebrated the formation day of CPI (Maoist), collected men and arms, conducted and participated in the arms and physical training by using prohibited arms in order to carry out terrorist acts for furthering the activities of CPI (Maoist).

Pandemic restrictions impacted mental health, lowered life evaluations: Studies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Strict pandemic restrictions adversely impacted mental health and lowered life evaluations, according to two new studies reviewing data from 15 countries between April 2020 and June 2021.

Published in The Lancet Public Health journal, the studies pointed out that mental health impacts associated with lockdowns were worse for women and women living in households with dependent children when compared to men of all ages.

At the national level, countries that aimed to eliminate community transmission of Covid-19 within their borders (eliminators) experienced fewer deaths and equivalent or better mental health trends during the pandemic than countries that aimed to control rather than eliminate transmission (mitigators).

Over the course of the pandemic, governments

across the globe employed diverse strategies and issued a variety of guidelines to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

Also, physical distancing restrictions were more closely linked to mental health than were closures of schools, workplaces, public transport, cancellations of public events, and restrictions on domestic travel.

Similarly, larger effects of stringency on reduced deaths than those observed on adverse mental health avoid a trade-off between psychological distress and saving lives.

"Governmental responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have been widely debated. At first sight, it may seem that eliminator countries implemented much harsher strategies than other countries because of their widely reported international travel bans.

"But, in reality, people within these borders enjoyed more freedom and less restrictive domestic contain-

ment measures overall than citizens in mitigator countries," said Dr Lara Akin, Simon Fraser University (Canada), author of the first study. [1]

While the first study indicates that the type and timing of pandemic restriction plays a factor in determining mental health impacts, the second study suggests that these were felt disproportionately by different groups.

Together, the findings strengthen the notion that stricter policy measures may lead to adverse mental health outcomes and that effective policies to contain the pandemic must go hand in hand with strategies and resources to address mental health for the general population and those most at risk.

Study author Dr Rafael Goldszmidt, said, "Our research demonstrates that in addition to the intensity of the pandemic itself, the type of the pandemic response pursued makes a difference to

people's mental health.

"Mitigation strategies may be associated with worse mental health outcomes at least in part because containment measures such as long periods of lockdowns and physical distancing can impede social connections.

"Nevertheless, as stricter policies are proven to be effective at reducing deaths, they may help offset the effects they have on psychological distress and life evaluations."

He added, "Strategies that aim to eliminate transmission while promoting early actions and targeted stringency can reduce deaths while also protecting people's mental health in the process.

"At the same time, governments need to provide clear and consistent information about policy measures to increase residents' confidence in the government's handling of the pandemic."

Ola Electric recalling 1,441 units of electric two-wheelers

PTI ■
NEW DELHI

Ola Electric is recalling 1,441 units of its electric two-wheelers in the wake of incidents of vehicles catching fire. The company said its investigation into the fire incident on March 26, in Pune, is ongoing and preliminary assessment found that it was an isolated one. However, it said, "As a pre-emptive measure we will be conducting a detailed diagnostic and health check of the scooters in that specific batch and therefore are issuing a voluntary recall of 1,441 vehicles."

Ola Electric further said, "These scooters will be inspected by our service engineers and will go through a thorough diagnostics across all battery systems, thermal systems as well as the safety systems."

The firmsaid its battery systems complies with and is tested for AIS 156, the latest proposed standard for India.

Agriculture Ministry to start drive to highlight farm sector achievements

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Ministry will organise a campaign during April 25-30 to highlight the achievements made in the farm sector since Independence and also create awareness about the various programmes run by the Centre for the benefits of farmers.

The campaign 'Kisan Bhagidari, Prathamika Hamari' is being organised under 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' in association with various other ministries, according to an official statement. More than one crore farmers and stakeholders are expected to participate in the campaign through direct (offline) and virtual (online) medium across the country.

To create massive awareness and wider publicity, the outreach of the campaign will be carried out through print, electronic and social media, production of audio video clips,



jingles, and short video films. The agriculture ministry has worked out a roadmap for organising various farmer-centric campaigns, workshops, programmes, seminars and webinars during Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.

In this connection, the ministry is organizing the Kisan Bhagidari, Prathamika Hamari campaign from April 25-30, 2022, the statement said. The ministry will highlight milestones of agriculture development in 75 years of India's Independence during the campaign.

The milestone includes green revolution and self-sufficiency in food grain produc-

tion; largest producer of horticulture crops; improvement in crop irrigation; use of ICT in agriculture; application of remote sensing/GIS/Drones in agriculture. Application of biotechnology in agriculture; advancement in farm mechanization; soil health management and effective management of pests will also be highlighted.

The campaign will also highlight the activities and achievements under various flagship schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana. The ministry during this campaign will also create mass awareness and talk about achievements in schemes such as Kisan Credit Card; agriculture credit; e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM); Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs); Soil Health Card; Organic and Natural Farming.

Rana couple sent to 14-day judicial custody

The couple was arrested for threatening to chant ‘Hanuman Chalisa’ in front of Maha CM’s house

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after their arrest over their threat to chant “Hanuman Chalisa” in front of Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray’s Bandra residence, a holiday court on Sunday remanded Independent MP from Aravati Navneet Rana and her husband Badnera MLA Ravi Rana in judicial custody for 14 days.

Rejecting the Prosecution’s plea for police custody, Metropolitan Magistrate AA Ghaniwale sent to judicial custody till May 6. While Navneet will be lodged at Byculla women’s jail, Ravi Rana will remain at Arthur Road Jail.

The city court will hear the bail application filed by the Rana couple on April 29.

Navneet and Ravi Rana have been booked under sections 34 (common intent) and 153 A (Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) of the IPC and sections 37(1) and 135 of the Bombay Police Act.

Earlier, Public Prosecutor Pradip Gharat sought custody of the Rana couple for 7 days.

Senior advocate Rizwan Merchant, appearing for the Rana couple, opposed the Prosecution’s plea for police custody and said that the police had booked his clients on “fake” charges. He said that his clients had not flouted any law.

Navneet Rana and her husband Badnera MLA Ravi Rana were arrested on Saturday evening after they threatened to

recite the Hindu devotional hymn in front of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray’s private residence “Matoshree” at Bandra in north-west Mumbai.

Though the Rana couple withdrew their plan of reciting “Hanuman Chalisa” in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the metropolis on Sunday, the police went ahead and arrested Navneet and Ravi.

On Saturday, a high-voltage drama was witnessed in front of Ranas’ Khar residence where hundreds of Shiv Sainiks had gathered to prevent the couple from stepping out of their home to head towards Thackerays’ nearby residence “Matoshree” at Bandra’s Kalanagar locality.

Interestingly enough, the Shiv Sainiks recited “Hanuman Chalisa” in front of Ranas’ Khar residence. The Shiv Sena workers also threatened to perform “abhishhek” and give “maha-prasad” to the couple.

3 LeT terrorists eliminated by forces in J&K



PNS ■ JAMMU

Three Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) terrorists were eliminated by the joint team of security forces in Pahoo area of South Kashmir’s Pulwama district on Sunday.

This is the fourth straight encounter in the last three days in which a total number of 10 terrorists have been gunned down.

According to police, “three terrorists were killed in Baramulla on April 21, two in

Kulgam on Saturday while two other Jaish-e-Mohammad suicide bombers were neutralised in Sunjuwan on April 22 in Jammu”. According to a tweet of Kashmir Zone police, “one of the slain terrorists has been identified as Arif Hazar @Rehan”. He acted as deputy of LeT’s top commander Basit. According to police records, Arif was involved in the killings of Inspector Parvez in front of a mosque, SI Arshid and one mobile shop owner in downtown.

Bengal BJP chief takes a swipe at predecessor’s ‘new’ leader remark

PTI ■ KOLKOTA

Days after BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh said that Sukanta Majumdar, who succeeded him as the party’s West Bengal unit president, is relatively new for his post, the incumbent State chief on Sunday asserted that none becomes seasoned overnight.

Majumdar, the MP of Balurghat in north Bengal, said that every person is new when appointed to a post and Ghosh was no exception when he became the state party president for the first time in 2015.

Ghosh, however, struck a conciliatory note during the day saying he had meant that being new for the post, Majumdar will be able to impart a fresh approach and give a dynamic leadership to the state BJP.

Majumdar, who had declined to comment initially, said: “Dilipda is a senior leader, but let me point out that when

someone first takes over, he is new to the post. None becomes experienced overnight.”

“When Dilip-da had been appointed as the state BJP head, he was relatively new. It happens to every occupant of every post,” he told reporters to a question.

Ghosh had said on Thursday that Majumdar should take everyone along and the party should work as a united force to be able to fight against the alleged misrule of the Trinamool Congress.

“Sukanta Majumdar is comparatively new; it is quite obvious that he is taking time to adjust,” he had said.

His comments were preceded by the party’s recent debacle in by-polls in the state, following which several senior BJP members hit out at the state unit leadership for allegedly failing to identify the “lacunae” plaguing the party.

CBI arrests 3 more people in Hashkhali gang rape

PTI ■ HASHKHALI

The CBI on Sunday arrested three people in connection with the gang rape and death of a 14-year-old girl in Hashkhali in West Bengal’s Nadia district, an official said.

The three people were arrested as their involvement in the incident became clear during the course of the investigation, the official said.

The CBI had earlier arrested one person, and got custody of two more people from the state police after taking over the investigation on the direction of the Calcutta High Court.

The girl, a student of class 9, died after she was allegedly gang-raped at a birthday party in the house of a local TMC leader on April 4. Her family has alleged that the body was taken away from them at gun-point and cremated.

AMU professor gets one-year jail for molesting Iranian research scholar

PNS ■ ALIGARH

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) professor has been sentenced for one year imprisonment for molesting Iranian student (research scholar). Aligarh Muslim University MBA Faculty Professor Dr Bilal Mustafa, who is implicated in double meaning dialogue and molestation with an Iranian student (research scholar), has been sentenced by the court. The court of ADJ-III Rajesh Bhardwaj, while hearing the appeal filed against the acquittal of Dr Bilal of the lower court, has sentenced him to one year. Along with this, Dr Bilal has also been released on interim bail. After this decision of the court, this eight-year-old case has once again come into

the limelight.

According to the prosecution advocate ADGC Krishna Murari Johri, a case was filed in 2014 Civil Lines by Irani student of Business Management of AMU, in which Professor of AMU MBA Faculty Dr Bilal, resident of Sakina Manzil Friends Colony, was named as the accused. It was alleged in the lawsuit that she is a PhD student under Professor Bilal. She was registered in March 2013, but joined in October 2013 for Ph.D. under professor Mustafa. Since then, the professor started sending double meaning messages to the girl student on WhatsApp and started harassing her in various ways.

A complaint was made to the AMU arrangement and a



complaint was made to the SSP. The SSP handed over the investigation to the SP City in the matter. Based on the investigation, a case was registered under the sedition and IT Act. The court heard it as a case of molesting section and on 17 September 2018, the lower court acquitted the professor in

its decision. Criminal appeal against the decision of the lower court was filed in the Sessions Court, hearing of which the court of ADJ III, set aside the decision of the lower court, convicted the accused professor and punished with imprisonment of one year and fine of ten thousand rupees. Along with this, orders have been given to give 5 thousand rupees to the victim girl out of the fine. According to Court, “Foreign students come only for studies on the basis of national image.

The offense of the accused is sufficient to adversely affect the image of India at the international level. In the opinion of the Court, the order of release of the accused on probation of good conduct or after reprimand cannot be made in the facts of the case in order to fulfill the intent of justice to the victim.” Krishna Murari Johri, ADGC told that in the case, it was mentioned in the decision of the lower court that the FIR of the girl student was delayed. At the same time, it was also said that the accused has been acquitted in the departmental inquiry of AMU. On this, the court has held that the student is a foreigner and is not familiar with Indian legal nuances. She was under mental pressure.

At the same time, the departmental inquiry order of AMU cannot be made the basis of the decision of the court. On these two grounds, the court, while pronouncing the sentence, released the accused on interim bail.

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9 people booked for stripping, assaulting tribal woman in Karnataka

PTI ■ MANGALURU (K’TAKA)

In a shocking incident, a tribal woman was allegedly stripped and assaulted by a group of nine people in a village in Karnataka’s Dakshina Kannada district, police sources said. They said the incident occurred on April 19 in front of several villagers at Guripalla village in Belthangady taluk of the district. Cases have been registered against all the accused.

The nine persons were booked based on a complaint from the 35-year-old woman, who alleged that the gang tore

her clothes, made her semi-nude and shot a video of the incident. Her elder sister and mother were also assaulted, the woman said in the complaint.

The accused have been identified as Sandeep (30), Santhosh (29), Gulabi (55), Suguna (30), Kusuma (38), Lokayya (55), Anil (35), Lalitha (40) and Chenna Keshava (40), all belonging to the victim’s village, police said. Sources said the incident occurred when a team of revenue department officials reached the village to measure the government land where the complainant and her elder sister were staying.

Active case count hits zero, Nagaland turns Coronavirus free

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Nagaland became a Coronavirus-free state on Sunday with the lone active COVID patient from Dimapur district recovering from the disease, a senior health department official said.

The active case count hit zero for the first time in the northeastern state since the detection of three COVID patients on May 25, 2020, he said.

The first three coronavirus patients in Nagaland were among returnees from Chennai.

Some people creating atmosphere for Prez Rule: Maha Min

PTI ■ NASHIK

Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil on Sunday said efforts were on by some people to create atmosphere conducive for imposition of President’s Rule in the State.

He also termed as “appropriate” the arrest of Independent MP Navneet Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana in connection with their announcement to recite Hanuman Chalisa outside the residence of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai.

The couple’s plan had angered the Shiv Sena workers, who held strident protests against them on Saturday. The Ranas were later arrested for “creating enmity between different groups”. Earlier on Sunday, senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnis said people of Maharashtra feel there should be President’s Rule in the state. Although he made it clear that BJP will not demand

President’s Rule in the state, his party colleague and Union minister Narayan Rane said the same should be imposed as the state government has failed to maintain law and order.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event in Nashik, Walse Patil said, “...It does not seem that anyone has made the demand for the President’s Rule, but efforts are on by some people to create such an atmosphere.”

Talking about the alleged attack on BJP leader Kirit Somaia in Mumbai on Saturday outside Khar police station and the incident in which an empty water bottle was thrown in the direction of the Rana couple when they were taken to the police station, he said, “There is no need to give different orders to police, they know their job well. Investigation on who hurled stones at the vehicle of Kirit Somaia is on as well as the attack on the Ranas.”



Members of LGBTQIA+ community take out the pride parade in Guwahati, Sunday

PTI | Photo

UP cop suspended for misbehaving with seer

PTI ■ BULANDSHAHR (UP)

A police Sub-Inspector (SI) was suspended on Sunday for allegedly misbehaving with a seer in Bulandshahr district, officials said.

Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Singh said the matter came to light on

Sunday through a Twitter post, following which the Sikandrabad Circle Officer (CO) was asked to look into the matter. The matter was thoroughly investigated, the SSP said, adding that the preliminary investigation found SI Pawan Kumar guilty. Pawan Kumar has been suspended

with immediate effect for misbehaving with the seer without any reason, he said.

Citing the seer who lives at the temple in Kamalpur village under Kakod police station area, the SSP said he was going to some place on a cycle a few days ago, when he was stopped by the police.

Kerala CM goes to US for medical treatment

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his entourage has reached Minnesota for his three-week long medical treatment at the world famous Mayo Clinic. This is Pinarayi Vijayan’s third trip to Mayo Clinic for medical treatment since he assumed the post of Chief Minister in 2016.

The United States, which is termed Yankee, imperialist, capitalist and anti-people country by the comrades of the CPI(M) have over the years have become a medical pilgrimage destination particularly for the top CPI(M) leaders.

Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, party’s Kerala secretary is also flying off to USA for medical treatment in a few days time. Balakrishnan has said that he was suffering from cancer and the ailment was under control. But Vijayan’s medical problem is a closely guarded secret and nobody is willing to speak about it.

Vijayan and health minister Veena George do not miss even a single opportunity to eulogize the world class health

care offered by Kerala to other countries.

Gone are the days when the top leaders of the CPI(M) and its poor cousin the CPI used to emplane for East Germany and Romania way back in the 1960s and 1970s. “E M S Nambodirippadu, the former chief minister always preferred hospitals in Berlin.

While he was chief minister during 1967-1969, his favorite destination was Berlin. I had arranged for his medical treatment in Berlin though the ailment could have been treated well in Thiruvananthapuram itself” “Berlin” Kunhanandan Nair, who was the Berlin correspondent of “Blitz”, the weekly tabloid published from Mumbai, told *The Pioneer*.

C Achutha Menon, who succeeded Nambodirippadu, chose Bucharest, the capital of Romania for medical care. Both Nambodirippadu and Menon were competing with each other in praising the health care system in their fatherlands. “Now that there is no Soviet Union or the Socialist Republics, the

Communist countries have lost their pre-eminent position to the USA,” said Nair.

There are no records of top Communist leaders in Kerala preferring China or Cuba as medical destination. “Students who pass out of medical colleges in China or from the former socialist countries in Europe (like Ukraine) have to write a qualifying examination by paying Rs 1,20,000 to get approval for practicing in India,” said S Jayashankar, political commentator.

Though there are left-fellow travelers who have authored books on China, Cuba and even Russia, the truth is that comrades prefer USA, UK or West Asian countries for their livelihood. The queue in front of the US consulate general in Chennai and the British Deputy High Commission office in Chennai are proof of the changing tastes of comrades. One will come across hundreds of CPI(M) and CPI leaders standing in the scorching Sun for their turn to fly off to USA and Britain.

PM Modi receives first Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Award

Says Lata a ‘melodious manifestation’ of ‘Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat’

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Availing that that there was a strand of patriotism in the Mangeshkar family, Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Sunday described Lata Mangeshkar as a “melodious manifestation” of ‘Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat’, as she sang thousands of songs in more than 30 languages and showed how music can be “immortal with Indianness”.

Speaking after receiving the first-ever Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Award at a ceremony held at Shanmukhananda Hall at Sion in north-central Mumbai, Modi said that there was a strand of patriotism in the



Mangeshkar family. “Along with the song, the consciousness of patriotism that was within Lata Didi, her father, was the source of it,” he said.

Dwelling upon Lata Didi’s illustrious career, the Prime Minister said “Lata ji was like a melodious manifestation of ‘Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat’.

She sang thousands of songs in more than 30 languages. Whether it was Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit or other Indian language, her sur was equally at home everywhere”.

Instituted by the Pune-based Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Smruti Pratishthan in memory of Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar, the Lata Deenanath

Mangeshkar Award – beginning from this year -- is given every year exclusively to one individual for exemplary contribution towards nation building. Governor of Maharashtra Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari and members of Mangeshkar Family were among those present on the occasion.

“From culture to faith, from east to west, from north to south, Lata ji’s notes worked to unite the whole country. Globally too, she was India’s cultural ambassador. She was ingrained in the minds of people in every state, in every region. She showed how music can be immortal with Indianness,” Modi said.

Dedicating the Lata

Mangeshkar award bestowed on him to “all the countrymen”, Modi said: “As Lata Didi belonged to people, this award given to me in her name also belongs to people”.

“Lata ji’s physical journey was completed at a time when our country is celebrating Amrit Mahotsav of its freedom. She gave voice to India before independence, and the country’s journey of these 75 years was also associated with her voice”, Modi said.

Admitting that he did not have not too deep a knowledge of music but by cultural appreciation, Modi said: “Sangeet is both a ‘sadhna’ and an emotion.... the one that expresses the unexpressed is world. One that fills the expressed with energy and consciousness is ‘naad’. And the one that fills conscious with emotions and feelings and takes it to the extreme of creation and sensitivity is ‘sangeet’. Music can fill you with valour, motherly affection. It can take one to the pinnacle of patriotism and sense of duty. We are fortunate

to have seen this capability and strength of music, in the form of Lata Didi”.

“On a personal note, for me Lata Didi was the ‘Sur Samragyi’ as well as my elder sister. What can be a greater privilege than to have received the love of a sister from Lata Didi, who has given the gift of love and emotion to generations”, he said.

Touching his government’s philosophy ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas’, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas” and the concept of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, Modi said that such a notion of development could not be achieved by just material capabilities. “For this spiritual consciousness is critically important. That’s why, India is providing leadership in areas like yoga, Ayurveda and environment. I believe, our Indian music is also an important part of this contribution of India. Let us keep this heritage alive with the same values and carry it forward, and make it a medium of world peace”, the Prime Minister said.

Asha recalls childhood days with Lata didi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Though she briefly turned emotional as she spoke at the first Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Award function, noted playback singer Asha Bhosle on Sunday came up with several interesting anecdotes about her elder sister Lata Didi.

With tears in her eyes, Asha said that each year the family gathered on this day (April 24) for the Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Awards function.

“Today is our father’s 80th death anniversary and even Lata Didi recently completed 80 years of her singing career in the Indian film industry, before her death”.

“I never imagined that a day would come when I would have to stand and speak about Lata Didi like this...” Asha said as she wiped tears from eyes. Asha recalled that Lata Didi always used to say that

drinking the water washed off the parents’ feet is the greatest blessing.

“To prove her point, one day, when their parents slept at home, Lata Didi poured some water on their feet, collected some water and drank it from her palms and asked me to follow her suit. That was the kind of parental devotion Lata Didi had and taught us,” she said.

“Lata Didi was very attached to her family, all of us sisters and brother since she had supported us from 1942, when our father passed away... She was proud of the family name ‘Mangeshkar’ and made it like a daunting wall to safeguard our interests... Like a family head, she would often act rough to discipline her siblings, grab their hair, and they too would pull her plaits (choti) and she would run...!”

“At times she would shout at us and our mother (Shevanti) would chide her to lower her volume or she would

become hoary... and she retaliated by screaming even louder...” Asha reminisced.

Regaling the Prime Minister and audiences present at the function with some interesting anecdotes, Asha said: “As children, we five siblings Lata, me, Usha, Meena and brother Hridaynath used to play ‘gilli-danda’ and other games on the streets of Kolhapur.

Though she used to play games on the streets, she was dedicated to her work which she started when she was barely in her teens,” she said.

“My sister had Saraswati in her voice, was very sharp with a mind like Chanakya, she could think long into the future, knew when to keep her mouth shut and always used to chide me for doing ‘baddadd baddadd’, and I used to dote her, always listen to her, and she knew well how to get what she wanted,” Asha said.

Coal Crisis

Industrial states want to import coal to make up for the shortfall

Summer temperatures are soaring and so is the power demand. Some States have already scheduled planned outages. And we are now told that the power companies face shortage of coal. Industrial states want to import coal to make up for the shortfall. That is a costly proposition beyond the reach of smaller states. Is there a coal crisis? Remember, there was a similar hue and cry a few months ago too. Uttar Pradesh says it is left with only 26 per cent of its coal stock. In Maharashtra, the coal-fired power stations have stocks worth 6.5 lakh metric tonnes whereas 1.4 lakh metric tonnes of is needed for optimal generation. The Madhya Pradesh government says its stocks will barely last 1.5 to 3.5 days. Stocks in a majority of the thermal plants are reaching the critical mark. The Union government says over 70 million tonnes of coal is at present available with Coal India Limited, Singareni Collieries, Limited, coal washeries, and other. The plants between them have over 20 million tonnes. The railways is chipping in with additional rakes to speed up the transportation of coal. The problem has everything to do with planning issues involving the coal producers and transporters. That is why coal supplies at thermal plants deplete.



This needs an immediate remedy for the simple reason that coal-based power production is the mainstay of the country's power sector. This March, for instance, 210 gigawatts of the total 396 gigawatts generated in India was from coal-fired plants. That is a 53 per cent share. Those who understand the situation say the problem is a mix of production issues at Coal India and other logistics. The power plants are supposed to store coal upto 15 days and that is built into the tariff. However, for various reasons, including reducing inventory, it is not strictly followed. Previously, power plants were operating at around 70 per cent plant load factor. Now, due to summer and increased industrial activities, the power plants are expected to run at above 95 per cent load factor. The complete revival of economic and manufacturing activities after the Covid restrictions were lifted has also added to the growing power demand. Freebies such a promising free power only adds to the burden. The problem is how to bridge this gap between the load factors. The agreement with Coal India is for supply of coal that is calculated on the basis of 85 per cent load factor. The usual practice is for the gap to be filled by imported coal. The National Thermal Power Corporation, which produces nearly a quarter of India's total power output, has plans to import a record 16 million tonnes of coal to blend with domestic coal in the current fiscal. But the import rates are very high. The NTPC has also started coal mining in Odisha and Jharkhand. Stocks are being sought from whichever private mines are operable. It is a wait and watch situation for now.

PICTALK



Smoke billows from a forest fire in Shimla

India need to connect with Russian people

It will be in India's long-term interest to make an effort to ameliorate the suffering of the common Russian

Nations are not their leadership alone. Crises and national failures often bring to the fore the chasm between the rulers and the ruled. Irrespective of the extent of democracy in a polity, people do not often forgive rulers whose actions result in direct hardship to common citizens. If the original decision itself did not have popular support, the negative fallout leads to the hardening of this stance.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis is a case in point. Russia's military campaign against Ukraine has received near universal opprobrium. Within Russia, too, there is no overwhelming support for the move. The urban, educated and the rich do not seem have seen large protests. Defying the authorities, TV reporters have held on-air protests, too. Clearly, not every Russian is ready to accept the arguments posited by President Putin. On the other hand, there is a significant base of traditional Soviet loyalists who do not take kindly to Ukraine's machination to disown its Russian heritage. This group supports the actions against Ukraine enthusiastically.

The common Russian, especially those who can appreciate the implications, are concerned about the economic fallout of this intervention and the retaliatory sanctions by the Western powers. The economic and other sanctions announced by Western powers and their allies can potentially devastate the Russian economy. At present, Russia, by all accounts, is the most sanctioned country. Some of these sanctions are far more rigorous than those applied to Pakistan, the fountainhead of global terrorism. It's obvious that the everyday hard-working citizens are going to be affected in a big way by these turn of events. The devaluation of the rouble will certainly affect consumer inflation. As the real household incomes shrinks, the average Russian citizen will pay the price for this war. Inflation, as it normally happens, will hit the poor harder.

The scale of sanctions is being applied differently by the



US and EU. Raw material exports are currently exempt and there is the possibility of payments in euros. Russia has offered deep discounts to India for the purchase of oil in addition to promising continuation of other commercial transactions.

While India will weigh strategic logic and self-interest to lend a helping hand to Russia through these transactions, it should make an effort to ameliorate the suffering of the common Russian. After all, India contributes to the welfare of the Afghan people even though it doesn't recognise the Taliban dispensation. Similarly, New Delhi continues to engage with the military government in Myanmar while supporting the people's movement for democracy in the country.

India could create a special program, say on the lines of the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme of the government, to invite medium and small enterprises as well as start-ups from both Russia and Ukraine to set up shops. A Russia-Ukraine, or maybe Belarusian team of founders, is not uncommon among start-ups. If it means facilitating the relocation of business, India should identify sites and provide the initial hand-



INDIA SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO HELP THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES. AFTER ALL, INDIA CONTRIBUTES TO THE WELFARE OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE EVEN THOUGH IT DOESN'T RECOGNIZE THE TALIBAN DISPENSATION

holding to re-set-up the enterprise. The current conflict has not only damaged the Ukrainian economy, but the Belarusian economy is also in terrible shape—partly because of its policy and partly because of the sanctions.

The rupee-rouble trade can help overcome issues that may come with the sanctions. Running an extra mile for the people who are going to become your great supporters should not be difficult for a global power aspirant.

Significant advantages will accrue to India if it chooses to give a helping hand to Russians. Russia's technology prowess is well known, and its thriving start-up ecosystem could bring innovation to India. As India looks to expand its manufacturing base, besides attracting Russian start-ups, it could also attract medium and small enterprises to set up base. Many Russian technologies will become commercially viable if they cannot be manufactured economically. India could attract technology directly from this region instead of waiting for them to reach maturity in the Silicon Valley before they come to India.

In addition to the improved terms of trade,

MANAVENDRA PRASAD ANDREI MISURA

Russia's deep discounted prices will positively impact India's fiscal deficit.

Another, but strategically important gain for India will be its perception in the minds of common citizens of Russia. While some of us continue to look at Russia from a Soviet Union lens, the reality is that over the last decade or so India has lost the goodwill that once existed amongst the people. India needs a proactive strategy to undo this loss. The current crisis presents an apt opportunity.

Russians now believe that Indians are complicated, unreliable, and not very generous. While they might not agree with many things that China does, a large section of the population is confident that China will invest in their economy and will help Russia. India must not underestimate the implications of the vows of friendship and support both Russia and China announced for each other earlier this year.

There are benefits to Russian business beyond the obvious of bypassing the sanctions because for Russia's youth and small businesses India presents a compelling opportunity in its own right. They can benefit from opportunities of low-cost manufacturing, fast trials, and on-the-ground implementation of new technologies. India undoubtedly provides access to a large market.

The whole situation is a disaster for common Russian, but if New Delhi could extend direct support, it can become a win-win for people of both nations. This could result in exponential benefits once the current difficult times are behind.

Manavendra Prasad is a public policy advisor. Andrei Misura is an ex-diplomat and currently, the Managing Partner (International) at Moscow based HIC Capital Group. He also Heads the Eurasian Office of MSME Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India.

Messengers go berserk

In good old days, , journos didn't play communal clashes and never identified religious affiliation

The Government's decision to caution the TV channels against misleading and provocative reporting is a welcome step indeed. Belated though it may be, yet the Information and Broadcasting ministry has done the right thing by reminding these channels and some of their "bahubali" anchors — hit men let loose on the small screens — that they were in the business of dissemination of news and not "cooking up" stories. The ministry has acted in the backdrop of their coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war and Delhi communal clashes. The way some of these anchors took it upon themselves to predict the Russian course of action, including how and when Putin was going to press the Nuke button, was sick, ridiculous, and dangerous. Equally sick was their coverage of the recent communal clashes in the national capital.

There was a time when journalists were told not to play up communal clashes and never identify people involved by their names in such situations. Journalists were expected to help in promoting peace during conflict and not adding fuel to fire. Today, Indian TV has

changed it all. Who cares if inflammatory reports could trigger communal clashes or social unrest? It's not a question of the pursuit of TRP alone that motivates such scandalous coverage. The malaise runs much deeper and could be easily seen in their coverage of political events and personalities. Today, Indian TV media is dominated by "supari" journalists whose prime task is to round-the-clock execute the political agenda of their masters. The rot first set in with corporate ownership of the media, considerably destroying its credibility. With the visual media fast becoming a subject of ridicule, viewers are shifting to YouTube channels—which are no less scandalous. The erosion of faith in media could have dangerous consequences. Once people start disbelieving the media, then such skepticism will impact every organ of the democracy. The evolution of media from a watchdog to a barking fiend could not be brushed under the carpet. Today, a TV reporter has not only become a courier of a story/event, but also a dispenser of justice. The reach of the visual media gives him/her a sense of empowerment that turns him into "a macho man" on the screen. He screams, rants, and pirouettes to terrorize his rivals and to tell the viewers that he and he alone was the superman of the small screen. While this sickness existed for a long, the government has taken notice of it when it realized that these reckless "couriers" could do more harm than good if they are not restrained.

RUSSIA IGNORES WORLD OPINION

Sir — Russia's aggressive forces have destroyed a logistics terminal at a military airfield near Ukraine's Odesa, where foreign weapons were stored, the Russian Defence Ministry has confirmed. The high-precision, long-range air-based missiles fired by the Russian Aerospace Forces disabled a logistics terminal at a military airfield near Odesa, where a large batch of foreign weapons received from the US and European countries was stored. Russia is continuing its special military operation in Ukraine in full force without bothering the US and Western countries with India being the mute spectator.

As per reports, the Russian military has destroyed 141 aircraft and 110 helicopters, 264 anti-aircraft missile systems, 541 unmanned aerial vehicles, 2,479 tanks, and other armored combat vehicles, 278 multiple launch rocket systems, 1,081 field artillery and mortars, and 2,321 special military vehicles. With this, the world countries have no guts and courage to dare Russia which wants to destroy Ukraine and capture it in the coming days.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

RETURN OF DEFRAUDED AMOUNT NO EXCUSE

Sir — "No leniency to employee merely because he deposited defrauded amount and no loss was caused" is the right view taken by the Supreme Court in the case titled Union of India and Ors vs. M. Duraisamy, CA 2665/2022. The respondent serving as a Postal Assistant confessed before the departmental inquiry panel that he had fraudulently taken away ₹16,59,065. When the fraud was detected, he deposited the amount as a damage control exercise and also to avoid stringent punishment. After the inquiry, the Disciplinary Authorities imposed the penalty of removal from service. The order of removal by the Disciplinary Authority was challenged in the Tribunal. The Tribunal took a lenient view on the employee on the ground that there was no loss caused since he deposited the

Media must be reined in



The Central Government's decision to come down heavily on TV news channels for inciting, scandalous and misleading reporting stands justified. In a democracy, the responsibility to maintain peace and communal harmony rests with every section of the society along with the ruling dispensation. Ironically, the way some channels are presenting the news of the 'Russian invasion of Ukraine' and the

Jahangirpuri violence at home is worrisome and condemnable. On the face of it, there's a rat race among the TV channels to go up the ladder of the TRP, throwing all norms to the winds. Many channels went even to the extent of presenting some unreliable and sensational reports with false claims loaded with communal overtones under scandalous captions. The Government, while asking them to stick to the Programme Code and provisions of the Code Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, has read these channels the Riot Act with a warning. In this way, the anti-social elements and the vested interests must be discouraged from fishing in troubled waters. This will be in national interests at this crucial hour and help preserve the uniqueness of our country's 'unity in diversity'.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur (UP)

amount taken by him fraudulently. The punishment of removal was reduced to compulsory retirement. Dismissal from service would deprive the delinquent employee of several benefits whereas compulsory retirement paves way for payment of terminal benefits in proportion to the duration of the service rendered by the employee. By setting aside the order of the Madras High Court upholding the order passed by the Central Administrative Tribunal, the Supreme Court has sent a strong message that the return of the money is no reason to take a lenient view on the dishonest employees.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

MARIUPOL KEY TO RUSSIA ADVANCE

Sir — This refers to the news report, "Ukrainian counterattacks slowing Russian offensive in the east", The Pioneer, April 24. President Vladimir Putin's troops are fighting their most destructive battle in the port city of Mariupol, located between Crimea in the south and the Donbas region in the east. Reports suggest artillery, rockets, and

missiles have damaged most of Mariupol, where at least 160,000 civilians are trapped without electricity, water, food, and medical supplies.

But why does Putin want Mariupol so desperately? Mariupol is a link between a territory Russia controls and another territory it controls in part with help from Putin-backed rebels. Russian forces are bursting out of Crimea. They need to join their comrades and Putin-backed rebels in Donbas, a vital coal mining area. Another reason is that Mariupol's capture will allow Russia to control most of the Black Sea coastline. This will hit Ukraine's maritime trade and the remnants of the larger economy and further isolate the country.

Add to this, Mariupol, which also played a key role in pushing higher education and various other businesses, has been an important export center for Ukraine's steel, coal, and corn going to the Middle East and beyond.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

"New dimensions of development have been created in Jammu and Kashmir in the last two to three years,"



Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



What is the use of interim governments when people with varying policies can't see eye to eye? There has to be accord which is not possible.

Sir Lanka Prime minister — Mahinda Rajapaksa

Plant smiles, grow laughter, harvest love



Actor — Kiara Advani



This is a new team, a young team. It may take a little more time to settle down, you have to ride through these phases.

Mumbai Indians — Sachin Tendulkar

BJP leaders allowed illegal constructions and encroachments to come up in Delhi after taking bribes.




AAP leader — Atishi

FIRST COLUMN


POPULISM VS PUBLIC WELFARE

Fiscal discipline must replace irrational freebies culture



SHSHANK SAUROV

Few weeks back top bureaucrats of the country gave a presentation to the Prime Minister and highlighted that announcements and schemes in several states are economically unsustainable. They went on to the extent of saying that the financial situation of some of the states is really bad. The politics of freebies has grappled our democratic process and it is common across the political spectrum. AAP leaders promised free electricity during Punjab elections but CM Bhagwant Mann and his party supremo Arvind Kejriwal passed the buck to the Centre when it came to fulfilling the promise. Punjab CM demanded a whopping sum of Rs.1 lakh crore as assistance from centre over a period of two years to fulfil a poll promise he made well aware of the dire fiscal situation of his state. Same thing



happened when Congress-ruled Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh announced thereintroduction of old pension scheme. None of the chief ministers have set out any plan to fund the additional liability on transition from the new to the old system. The old pension scheme had inherent deficiencies and therefore it was replaced with a more pragmatic one but vote bank politics has prevailed over prudence. RBI latest data on state finances indicates that fiscal deficit of state governments have consistently exceeded the threshold of three percent of GDP for FY 2020-21 (4.7%) and FY 2021-22 (3.7% as per budget estimates). It is interesting to see that total revenue receipts were estimated at Rs. 34.55 lakh crore for FY 2021-22 while revenue expenditure alone was for Rs. 35.72 lakh crore. These numbers reveal the gross fiscal mismanagement at state level where large part of taxpayer's money goes on funding the non-productive expenses. It is worthwhile to note that current fiscal situation of state governments is despite the constant revenue growth of fourteen percent assured under GST for a period of five years. This revenue guarantee is going to expire in June 2022 and many states chief ministers have already asked the centre to extend this time frame for another five years. The Union government should not fall into this trap again and revenue guarantee must not be extended beyond the initial period of five years which was agreed at the time of GST transition. Necessity of continuing the GST compensation cess is only till the time government is able to recover the amount which was borrowed by centre and passed to states as back-to-back loans for GST shortfall of FY 2020-21 and FY 2021-22 due to Covid pandemic. Economic prosperity of the country cannot be impacted by levying new taxes to fund the Robin Hood image of politicians.

The Election Commission has told the Supreme Court that it cannot regulate offering/distributing freebies by the political parties as it will amount to overreach. Promising freebies is akin to buying votes in a legally approved manner. India is a welfare state and freebies cannot be eliminated completely out of the electoral process but there has to be a legal check on this phenomenon because politicians are hardly bothered about moral compass. It should be understood, however, that the free ration to poor families and free Covid vaccination are schemes operating under exceptional situations. International experience shows that mindless populism leads to bankruptcy and no country can afford the freebies culture just to brandish the pro-people image of the politicians. It is time for a national debate on this issue and legislative changes should be brought in to bar this practice of offering irrational freebies which is leading us towards financial breakdown. Let the legislative changes kick-in which will automatically ensure the much-needed fiscal discipline.

(The writer is a Chartered Accountant, author and public policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Blending Multialignment with Multilateralism

India has maintained its strategic autonomy on critical issues and increased its leverage vis-a-vis the other essential powers

The logic put forward by various experts regarding Quad and BRICS as opposing groupings should be seen differently and from an Indo-centric perspective. Indeed, Quad is centred on the Chinese belligerency and focuses on the Indo-Pacific region. BRICS speaks volumes on various issues from the developing world's perspective and has Russia and China as prominent members. Strategic partnerships and multilateralism should be parallel to each other as both are critical geopolitical markers for a comprehensive foreign policy. One should appreciate that India's participation in both overlaps the objectives of multi-alignment and multilateralism. India stands with a firm commitment to the advocacy of multilateral diplomacy, with the objective of reforming the UN to face new global challenges. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to attend the BRICS summit virtually is a testimony to these efforts.

So how does India's multilateral policy have a convergence of objectives with the multi alignment policy? The multilateral policy projects India's soft-power approach to handle contentious geopolitical issues. India's emerging role and contribution to the New Development Bank (NDB - BRICS Bank), which support projects in areas such as clean energy, social safety, public health, etc., indicate India's priorities. On the other hand, the multi-alignment policy ensures continued support of both the US and Russia on various issues such as the reform of the UNSC and a vital distinction between internal and international issues. Both the policies seek to overcome the trust deficit and the resultant crisis of international cooperation with the larger objective of India's external security insight.

From a geo-economic perspective, China's debt-trap policy jeopardises the recipient's sovereignty. The case of Sri Lanka has only highlighted it. Thus, the Lankan experience has made it imperative for the Afro-Asian nations to look towards India for multilateral as well as bilateral aid through NDB and other Multilateral Development Initiatives such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), an Indian-Japanese collaborative vision regarding development, connectivity and cooperation between Asia and Africa that was announced in 2017. The NDB has a geographically global scope, enhancing India's standing amongst the developing countries. The test for the success of India's foreign policy lies in cooperating with the development partners without letting the core security objectives being jeopardised. To put India's multilateral diplomacy at stake because of China's aggressiveness or the Sino-Russo grievances against the West would harm India's credibility and fulfil China's ulterior motives of restricting India to South Asia. Thus, in light of the above arguments, India's virtual presence will ensure 'presence' and be an excellent diplomatic response to Beijing's strategies to sow dissent amongst the Quad members.

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THE CURRENT INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY IS A BLEND OF MULTI-ALIGNMENT AND MULTI-LATERALISM, WHICH IS STRONGLY TIED TO THE COMMITMENT OF ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT TO THE DEFENCE SECTOR AND HENCE REQUIRES A STRONG SUPPORT

Further, a critique of Indian aid might argue on the thickness of the cheque-book that India and China have, but, given the long-term intentions and respect for sovereignty, India scores much higher than China. Also, India's initiatives to convince the IMF to bail out Sri Lanka will encourage others like Nepal and Sub Saharan African countries to be more open to various international donors, thereby denting the Chinese strategies and furthering the promotion of the liberal world order.

A multilateral approach, either through the BRICS or Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), will ensure intentions being translated into confidence that can result in India's favourable position as far as the reforms of the UNSC are considered. One can recall that in 2010, despite the best attempts, India was unable to get even a two-thirds majority of UN members for the purpose mentioned above. Through various agencies, India's multilateral and bilateral aid might have a pay-off of gaining those critical votes in India's favour. The MEA should not hesitate to put India's expectations across the recipient nations in geopolitics and geo-economics.

Further, evolving issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery have huge potential for India. This is particularly important given that geopolitically one can foresee more pandemics in the future. Already India's credentials in vaccine diplomacy have been established. Recently, in March, BRICS Vaccine R&D Centre was launched through which India will explore initiatives in joint research and development of drugs and vaccines. Indian scientists involved in such Projects can make the country proud in other multilateral platforms. Moreover, such participation

can also help develop vaccines and medicines for the country, apart from identifying mutual priorities with other nations.

Nevertheless, BRICS never encourages deliberations on the bilateral issues concerning Russia and China with the West. BRICS is not a platform for a strategic alliance, but an international cooperation mechanism wherein developmental issues dominate discussions and decisions. There have been instances where India and China have cooperated despite disagreements and bilateral issues as both had a shared vision of a new global economic order. Previously, the US acknowledged mushrooming the various "hubs of power" and their respective "networks and coalitions in a multipolar world". Similarly, there have been instances when China and the US have cooperated in multilateral institutions despite their rivalry. The US recently had called for the new issuance of Special Drawing Rights worth \$650 billion in the IMF. As China supported this demand in the IMF and is not an isolated case wherein multilateral cooperation remains unaffected, India should not hold its multilateral policy a hostage of a Thucydides trap between the US and Russia-China. Thus, India should confidently pursue both policies simultaneously and set limits to its cooperation in case of open hostilities from the side of China. Overall, the international community has a very positive outlook towards the new multilateral institutions, for they had given a hope of cooperation that could have helped the world in terms of bringing the countries closer to each other.

Unfortunately, that 'moment' is rapidly running down fast, given the continuation of a Chinese aggressive

behaviour towards India and Taiwan apart from the ongoing Ukrainian crisis. With no signs of an upcoming peace, Russia and China may utilise the platform to reiterate an anti-West stand. Modi's decision regarding his physical presence is well comprehended from this perspective. The initiatives taken by India through various multilateral forums are somewhat similar to that of Japan in the early 1950s when it first initiated ODA through the Colombo Plan. It had treated its participation in various regional and multilateral institutions as platforms first to enhance its geostrategic outreach and second to counter Beijing's influence and power. It was parallel to its military security being taken care of by the US owing to its n-war clause Article 9 of its constitution. Thus, it was a mix of "entrenched bilateralism" and "incipient multilateralism". Washington's support to help Japan become an important regional player through Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has been well established. In terms of a differential approach, India has strategic partnerships with the US and its allies through Quad but has not formally committed itself to any security alliance, is an active importer of the Western and the Russian arms and seeks to pursue indigenous production in the defence sector. It has maintained its strategic autonomy on critical issues and increased its leverage vis-a-vis the other essential powers. Thus, the current foreign policy is a blend of multi-alignment and multilateralism, which is strongly tied to the commitment of Atmanirbhar Bharat to the defence sector and hence requires a strong support.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

“(CONG) EXTORTIONIST BUT WERE ALSO SELLING THE COUNTRY'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN HONOUR TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER OR DURBARIS, WHO DID THEIR BIDDING”.
— BJP LEADER AMIT MALVIYA



“THIS IS POLITICAL VENDETTA... AT LEAST SPARE THE DEAD PEOPLE LIKE DEORA AND PATEL...”
— CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON ABHISHEK MANU SINGHVI

Ukraine: Nuclear end-game?

Russian escalation won't help anyone

Last Sunday Vladimir Soloviev, the anchor of Russia's most popular current affairs show, 'Sunday Evening', was delivering his usual 'all is going splendidly' take on the war in Ukraine when he suddenly went off-piste. The United Kingdom, he suggested, is planning to use nuclear weapons against the Russian forces in Ukraine.

How did he know that? Well, Britain has been accusing Russia of committing a genocide in Ukraine, and since that can't be true - Russians never behave badly, even in wartime - the evil Brits must be creating a pretext for launching a nuclear strike.

"It's the perfect option," Soloviev explained. The Americans don't want to do it themselves, because they might be hit in retaliation by Russian



GWYNNE DYER

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

nukes. It's the British who will be ordered to use their tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, and suffer the Russian retaliation if necessary. (Everybody knows that the UK is an American-controlled colony.)

Maybe it's just the standard propaganda nonsense. After all, it would sound perfectly plausible to anybody who gets all their information from Russian mass media. But Vladimir Putin's regime has the weird but deeply ingrained habit, whenever it is preparing to commit some dastardly deed, of accusing the other side of doing it, or planning to do it, first.

It's like a boxer who always telegraphs his punches: it doesn't make any practical sense, but maybe it makes sense psychologically. At any rate, it definitely got my attention, and I'll bet it did



the same in strategic circles in a number of Western capitals.

Maybe it was just idle speculation to fill talk-show time, or maybe it was an attempt to discredit the many reports of crimes committed by Russian troops in Ukraine - but maybe it was an opening bid to justify and normalise the eventual use of Russian tactical nuclear weapons against Ukrainian forces.

I am inclined to give more weight to the former two possibilities, simply because forward planning has not been the hallmark of Russian military behaviour in this war. But here's what the people charged with contingency planning would be telling Putin right now if there is anybody home in the strategic foresight department of the Russian armed forces.

The big Russian offensive starting this week in eastern Ukraine could capture enough territory for Putin to freeze the

situation and declare a victory, but it would take many weeks and involve further huge casualties. And it might not succeed, even after all that.

In fact, there is an equal or bigger chance that the Russian offensive will stumble to a halt, or even that the Russian army will lose heart and melt away (like it did against the Japanese in 1905, against the Germans in 1917, and against the Poles in 1920).

To admit defeat against a much smaller opponent like Ukraine after deliberately starting the war would put the Putin regime at mortal risk, so what are the Great Leader's best remaining options? There is only one, actually. Escalate.

This is what Putin always does when he's in trouble, and the only escalation that could

change the course of events at that point would be nuclear. Just tiny nukes, of course: this would be a bluff to squeeze some concessions out of the Ukrainians and hold NATO at bay, not a decision to commit national suicide (including personal extinction for Putin).

Russia does have some very tiny 'tactical' nuclear weapons - one kiloton or less. Nobody else bothers to make them that small, but then nobody else's army still reflexively sees nuclear weapons, regardless of formal deterrence doctrines, as just a bigger kind of artillery.

Use one in an airburst over a small Ukrainian town or even a Ukrainian military position, and you'll kill just a few thousand people, including even the fall-out victims. And maybe - just maybe - that will frighten the

Ukrainians and NATO into giving Putin a face-saving partial victory.

So, if it comes to that - I'm not predicting that it will, but it could - what should NATO do? The answer, almost certainly, is: DO NOTHING NUCLEAR.

Condemn the Russian first use of nuclear weapons, of course, and watch the entire world join the chorus. Ukraine should continue military operations as if it didn't happen, except that at this point it could ask NATO forces again to provide air support within its borders and NATO should agree. And everybody hopes for the best.

What's the alternative? Get into a tit-for-tat tactical nuclear war on Ukrainian soil? Nuke Moscow? Don't be stupid.

Russian forces bomb Ukrainian steel plant in Mariupol

AP ■ KYIV

Russian forces called in airstrikes on a besieged steel factory in the southern city of Mariupol to try to dislodge the last Ukrainian troops holding out in the strategic port, Ukrainian officials said Sunday, while President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would meet in Kyiv with two top American officials.

Zelenskyy gave few details about the logistics of his talks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on what was the 60th day since Russia invaded Ukraine. But he told reporters he expected results - "not just presents or some kind of cakes, we are expecting specific things and specific weapons."

The visit would be the first to Kyiv by high-level U.S. Officials since the invasion began Feb. 24. While visiting Poland in March, Blinken stepped briefly onto Ukrainian soil to meet with the country's foreign minister. Zelenskyy's last face-to-face meeting with a U.S. Leader was Feb. 19 in Munich with Vice President Kamala Harris. The meeting was set to take place as Ukrainians and Russians observed Orthodox Easter, an occasion Zelenskyy highlighted the allegorical significance of during his nightly address to his country's people after nearly two months of war.

"There will be a Resurrection. Life will defeat

death. The truth will defeat any lies. And evil will be punished," he said. "And Russia will have to learn these truths again, it's only a matter of time."

Russia has been trying to take Mariupol for nearly two months, and the city on the Sea of Azov has seen some of the war's worst deprivations. Its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, free up Russian troops to fight elsewhere, and establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized in 2014.

Some 2,000 troops have been fighting tenaciously to hold on to the last remaining Ukrainian outpost in the city, the Azovstal steel plant, which also has civilians taking refuge in its labyrinthine tunnel system. Russian forces have continued to pummel the plant, hitting it with air strikes, including by long-range aircraft, Oleksandr Shtupun, spokesman for the Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff, said Sunday. Mariupol has been blockaded for most of the war. Ukrainian officials have said they expect to find thousands of dead civilians and evidence of war crimes there when the fighting ends. Satellite images have shown what appear to be mass graves dug in towns to the west and east of Mariupol. In the last day, Russia also pressed its attacks elsewhere in the eastern Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists controlled some territory before the war and the



Russians are aiming to gain full control over Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland. Shtupun said Russian forces intensified their assault operations toward the cities of Popasna and Siverodonetsk in Luhansk, and Kurakhiv in Donetsk. Luhansk regional Gov. Serhiy Haidai said Sunday that eight people were killed and two others were wounded in a Russian barrage on Saturday.

The Russians also have shelled the Dnipro region west of Donbas, where at least one person was killed by a Russian missile, according to regional Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko.

Russia has pulled back forces from Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and the north of the country to feed into the Donbas offensive, but the

British Ministry of Defense said Sunday that Ukrainian forces had repelled numerous assaults in the past week. "Despite Russia making some territorial gains, Ukrainian resistance has been strong across all axes and inflicted significant cost on Russian forces," the ministry said in an intelligence update.

"Poor Russian morale and limited time to reconstitute, re-equip and reorganize forces from prior offensives are likely hindering Russian combat effectiveness," it said.

The Ukrainian military said Saturday it destroyed a Russian command post in Kherson, a southern city that fell to Russian forces early in the war. The command post was hit on Friday, killing two

generals and critically wounding another, the Ukrainian military intelligence agency said in a statement. The Russian military did not comment on the claim, which could not be confirmed.

If true, at least nine Russian generals have been killed since start of the invasion, according to Ukrainian reports. On Saturday the Azov Regiment of Ukraine's National Guard, which has members holed up in Mariupol steel plant, released a video of around two dozen women and children sheltering there.

Its contents could not be independently verified, but if authentic, it would be first video testimony of what life has been like for civilians trapped underground there.

Switzerland rejects German arms export request

AP ■ BERLIN

Switzerland has rejected two requests by Germany to export Swiss ammunition to Ukraine, citing the Alpine nation's strict neutrality.

The decision was first reported Sunday by Swiss weekly Sonntagszeitung. Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs confirmed that "both requests from Germany, whether the ammunition received from Switzerland can be passed on to Ukraine, were answered negatively with a reference to Swiss neutrality."Germany needs Switzerland's consent for arms delivery as part of original sale contract. The Swiss office declined to specify what type of ammunition Germany had sought to export to Ukraine.

Ukraine says it hit Russian command post

AP ■ KYIV

The Ukrainian military said on Saturday it destroyed a Russian command post in Kherson, a southern city that fell to Russian forces early in the war.

The Ukrainian military intelligence agency posted a statement saying the command post was hit on Friday and two generals were killed and one was critically wounded.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said in an online interview that 50 senior Russian officers were in the command center when it came under attack. He said their fate was unknown. The Russian military did not comment on the claim, which could not be confirmed.

Russia strikes Ukrainian explosives factory

AP ■ MOSCOW

The Russian military says it has struck a Ukrainian explosives factory, several artillery depots and hundreds of other targets. Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov on Sunday said Russian military used precision-guided missiles to destroy a factory making powder and explosives near Pavlohrad in Dnipro region in central Ukraine.

Konashenkov said Russian forces also struck several depots with artillery munitions and rockets in Barvinkove, Nova Dmytrivka, Ivanivka, Husarivka and Velyka Komyshevukha in Kharkiv region. He added that Russian artillery hit 423 Ukrainian targets overnight, including fortified positions and troops concentrations.

Air raid sirens heard in northern Donbas

AP ■ SLOVIANSK (UKRAINE)

The sound of outgoing artillery and air raid sirens were heard Saturday in Sloviansk, a town in northern Donbas that had come under Russian attack the day before.

Two servicemen were brought to a hospital from a nearby town, but one of them was mortally wounded and could not be saved.

The Russian strike early Friday had damaged several buildings, including a school.

The war has brought back painful memories for residents of Sloviansk, where in 2014 Ukrainian government forces repulsed Russia-backed separatists after a fierce battle. In the years since, the separatists maintained control over part of the Donbas, and Moscow has now set out to capture the entire region.

Anna Direnaskaya, 70, said she and her son and daughter-in-law decided to remain in Sloviansk.

"I lived through 2014. I was also here. I didn't go anywhere and I don't want to go anywhere. I am not hiding from myself," she said while sitting in a wheelchair outside her damaged apartment building. "I want peace."

Direnaskaya, who like many

in eastern Ukraine is a native Russian speaker, said she wishes the Russians would understand that Ukrainians are not bad people and there is no enmity between them. "Why did this happen? Why is this happening? I don't know. Tell everyone I want peace and quiet," she said.

Poland and Ukraine have signed an agreement increasing cooperation in the railway transport sector, aiming to help Ukraine maintain its trade exchange with foreign countries as the Russian invasion affects its ports. Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Poland's premier, Mateusz Morawiecki, met on Saturday in Krakow, Poland.

Morawiecki said on Facebook that they both agreed that current sanctions on Russia are insufficient, which can be seen by the condition of the "Russian currency, bonds or inflation."

They appealed to the international community for tougher steps that would stop Russia's aggression on Ukraine and for more military aid to help Ukraine.

Morawiecki drew special attention to the plight of civilians seeking protection in a steel plant in Mariupol, as he called for the assistance.

UK promises more military aid to Ukraine to combat Russia

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government will send more military aid in the form of much-needed defence equipment to Ukraine in its fight against Russia, Prime Minister Boris Johnson told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In one of many regular phone calls between the two leaders on Saturday, Johnson said Britain would provide more mobility vehicles, drones and anti-tank weapons as he condemned ongoing attacks by Russian forces against civilian targets, including in Mariupol, Odessa and Lviv.

He also updated Zelensky on new UK sanctions imposed against members of the Russian military and confirmed that the UK would be reopening its embassy in Kyiv next week as a show of "support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people."

"The Prime Minister confirmed that the UK is providing more defensive military aid, including protected mobility vehicles, drones and anti-tank weapons. President Zelenskyy thanked the Prime Minister for the training of Ukrainian military personnel currently taking place in the UK," a spokesperson for 10 Downing Street said in a readout of the



call. "The Prime Minister said that Russia would be held to account for its actions and that the UK government was helping collect evidence of war crimes," Downing Street said.

"Both leaders discussed how the UK will work with partners to develop a long-term security solution for Ukraine and the Prime Minister noted the discussions taking place with international partners to provide further financial support, including at the G7 Finance Ministers' meeting last Wednesday," the statement added.

Zelensky updated Johnson on the situation in the Donbas, where Russia is now seen concentrating its military efforts in a conflict that broke out in February. In a press conference in a Kyiv metro station later on Saturday, Zelensky said he was "satisfied" with the level of military support coming from the UK.

"We want more than we're being given, but we're satisfied," he told reporters. "We cannot refuse or reject anything during the war from the biggest military aid, which is coming from the United States and the United Kingdom. There are many other friends in Europe, but I'm talking about volumes of help and I'm grateful for it," he said.

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Russian officer: Our new missile can carry several hypersonic weapons

AP ■ MOSCOW

A new Russian intercontinental ballistic missile is capable of carrying several hypersonic weapons, a senior Russian military officer said on Sunday.

Col. Gen. Sergei Karakayev, the commander of the Russian military's Strategic Missile Forces, said in televised remarks that the new Sarmat ICBM is designed to carry several Avangard hypersonic glide vehicles.

Russia's Defence Ministry said the Sarmat was test-fired for the first time on Wednesday from the Plesetsk launch facility in northern Russia and its practice warheads have successfully reached mock targets on the Kura firing range on the far eastern Kamchatka Peninsula.

The test launch came amid soaring tensions between Moscow and the West over the Russian military action in Ukraine and underlines the Kremlin's emphasis on the country's nuclear forces.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed the Sarmat launch as a major achievement, claiming that the new missile has no foreign equivalent and is capable of penetrating any prospective missile defence.

"This really unique weapon

will strengthen the combat potential of our armed forces, reliably ensure Russia's security from external threats and make those, who in the heat of frantic aggressive rhetoric try to threaten our country, think twice," Putin said on Wednesday.

The Sarmat is a heavy missile that has been under development for several years to replace the Soviet-made Voevoda, which was code-named Satan by the West and forms the core of Russia's nuclear deterrent.

The military has said that the Avangard is capable of flying 27 times faster than the speed of sound and making sharp maneuvers on its way to target to dodge the enemy's missile shield.

In anticipation of the deployment of the Sarmat, the new hypersonic vehicle has been fitted to the existing Soviet-built ICBMs, and the first unit armed with the Avangard entered duty in December 2019.

The director and the designer-in-chief of the Makeyev missile-maker that developed Sarmat, Vladimir Degtyar, said in televised remarks that its range allows it to fly along any trajectory across north or south poles to hit any target around the world.

Turkey closes its airspace to Russian civilian and military flights between Russia, Syria

AP ■ ANKARA

Turkey's top diplomat says Ankara has closed the Turkish airspace to Russian civilian and military flights between Russia and Syria.

Mevlut Cavusoglu told a group of Turkish journalists during a visit to Uruguay that Russia had permission to use the Turkish airspace for flights to Syria until April. But Haberturk television reported that Cavusoglu said Saturday that he asked Moscow to stop using the airspace during a visit there in March, and that Moscow agreed to the Turkish request.

Cavusoglu did not elaborate and it was not clear if the move aimed to prevent the possible transfer of Syrian fighters to Ukraine.

NATO-member Turkey has been trying to balance its close relations with Moscow and Kyiv and has positioned itself as a mediator between the two. It has not joined international sanctions against Russia but has closed the straits at the entrance of the Black Sea to some Russian warships.

The country has hosted a meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers as well as talks between the two countries' negotiating teams.

Pope Francis renews call for Easter truce



AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis has renewed his call for an Easter truce as Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter Sunday, when the faithful mark the resurrection of Jesus.

Without naming countries, Francis urged aggressors to "stop the attack to help the suffering of the exhausted people."

Francis told a crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square that two months had passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and said that "instead of stopping, the war got worse."

It is said that in these days that are the holiest and most solemn for all Christians, the deadly clamour of arms is louder than the sound of bells announcing the Resurrection."

Joe Biden marks 'Armenian genocide', aims to stop 'atrocities'

AP ■ WILMINGTON

President Joe Biden on Sunday commemorated the 107th anniversary of the start of the "Armenian genocide", issuing a statement in memory of the 1.5 million Armenians "who were deported, massacred or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination."

The statement did not reference the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which Biden has called a genocide.

Yet Biden used the anniversary to lay down a set of principles for foreign policy as the US and its allies arm Ukrainians and impose sanctions on Russia.

"We renew our pledge to remain vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all its forms," the president said. "We recommit ourselves to speaking out and stopping atrocities that leave lasting scars on the world." In 1915, Ottoman officials arrested Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople, now Istanbul. The Biden statement notes that this event on April



24 marked the beginning of the genocide. Fulfilling a campaign promise, Biden used the term "genocide" for the first time during last year's anniversary.

Past White Houses had avoided that word for decades out of a concern that Turkey — a NATO member — could be offended.

Turkish officials were angered by Biden's declaration a year ago, with the foreign ministry issuing a statement that said, "We reject and denounce in the strongest terms the statement of the President of the US regarding the events of 1915 made under the pressure of radical Armenian circles and anti-Turkey groups".

OSCE concerned about detained members



AP ■ BERLIN

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe says it is extremely concerned about the detention of several Ukrainian members of its monitoring mission in the east of the country.

The Vienna-based body said in a brief statement Sunday that it is "using all available channels to facilitate their release." A spokesperson declined to specify how many national mission members were detained, when or by whom.

Several OSCE observers have been killed or injured since the body's 57 participating states established a mission to monitor the conflict in eastern Ukraine eight years ago. Russia recently vetoed an extension of the mission.

Ukraine marks Orthodox Easter with prayers for its warriors

AP ■ KYIV

The sun came out as Ukrainians marked Orthodox Easter in capital Kyiv on Sunday with prayers for those fighting on the front lines and others trapped beyond them in places like Mariupol.

St. Volodymyr's Cathedral in Kyiv was ringed by hundreds of worshippers with baskets to be blessed. Inside, a woman clutched the arm of a soldier, turning briefly to kiss his elbow. Other soldiers prayed, holding handful of candles, then crossed themselves.

An older woman bent slowly made her way through the crowd and stands of flickering candles. One young woman held daffodils.

Outside the cathedral, a soldier who gave only his first name, Mykhailo, used his helmet as an Easter basket. He said he didn't have another.

"I hope I'll only have to use the helmet for this," he said. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a service elsewhere in Kyiv urged Ukrainians not to let anger at the war overwhelm them. "All of us believe our sunrise will



come soon," he said. With the Orthodox church split by the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, some worshippers hoped the holy day could inspire gestures of peacemaking. "The church can help," said one man who gave only his first name, Serhii, as he came to a church in Kyiv under the Moscow Patriarchate. He and others brought baskets to be blessed by priests for Easter,

with flicks of a brush sprinkling holy water over offerings of home-dyed eggs, lighted candles and even bottles of Jack Daniels. Residents of rural villages battered by war approached holiday with some defiance. "We'll celebrate Easter no matter what, no matter much horror," said Kateryna Lazarenko, 68, in the northern village of Ivanivka outside Chernihiv, where ruined

Russian tanks still littered roads. "How do I feel? Very nervous, everyone is nervous," said another resident, Olena Koptyl, as she prepared her Easter bread. "The Easter holiday doesn't bring any joy. I'm crying a lot. We cannot forget how we lived." She and 12 others spent a month sheltering from Russian soldiers in basement of her home before soldiers withdrew.

Macron vs Le Pen: France votes in tense presidential runoff

AP ■ PARIS

France voted in a presidential runoff election Sunday with repercussions for Europe's future, with centrist incumbent Emmanuel Macron the front-runner but fighting a tough challenge from far-right rival Marine Le Pen.

The centrist Macron is asking voters to trust him for a second five-year term despite a presidency troubled by protests, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

A Macron victory in this vote would make him the first French president in 20 years to win a second term.

The result of voting in France, a nuclear-armed nation with one of the world's biggest economies, could also impact the conflict in Ukraine, as France has played a key role in diplomatic efforts and support for sanctions against Russia.

Le Pen's support in France's electorate has grown during this campaign to her highest level ever, and much will depend Sunday on how many people turn out to vote.

Participation was 26.1% at midday, slightly higher than at the same point in the first-round vote April 10.

Many of those expected to choose Macron are doing so to keep out Le Pen and ideas seen as too extreme and anti-democratic, such as her plan to ban the Muslim headscarf in public, or her ties to Russia.

"I am serene," she said as she cast her ballot in the northern town of Henin-Beaumont. "I have confidence in the French." She took selfies with fans, as Macron greeted crowds with handshakes and embraces in the English Channel coastal



town of Le Touquet.

Both candidates are trying to court the 7.7 million votes of leftist candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, who was defeated in the first round on April 10.

For many who voted for left-wing candidates in the first round, the runoff presents an unpalatable choice between a nationalist in Le Pen, and a president who some feel has veered to the right during his first term.

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

Voting west of Paris in the suburb of Le Pecq, Stephanie David cast her ballot for Macron "without much joy." She had voted for the Communist Party candidate in round one.

"It was the least worst choice," said the transport logistics worker. Le Pen was anathema to her: "Even if she tries to soften her rhetoric, I can't stomach it."

All opinion polls in recent



days converge toward a win for the 44-year-old pro-European Macron - yet the margin over his 53-year-old far-right rival varies broadly. Polls also forecast a possibly record-high number of people who will either cast a blank vote or not vote at all.

Retiree Jean-Pierre Roux voted to keep out Le Pen's father Jean-Marie in the 2002 runoff and again against his daughter in 2017.

But Roux could not bring himself to vote Macron again this time. He put an empty envelope in the voting box.

He said he regarded Macron as too arrogant to vote for again, citing a common complaint of the president that Le Pen echoed, too. "I am not against his ideas but I cannot stand the person," he said.

Le Pen has sought to appeal to working class voters struggling with surging prices amid the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine -- an approach that even Macron acknowledged has found resonance in the wider public. She said bringing down the cost of living

would be her priority if elected as France's first woman president, and she portrayed herself as the candidate for voters unable to make ends meet. She says that Macron's presidency has left the country deeply divided.

She has repeatedly referenced the so-called yellow vest protest movement that rocked his government before the COVID-19 pandemic, with months of violent demonstrations against his economic policies that some thought hurt the poorest.

France's presidential campaign has been especially challenging for voters of immigrant heritage and religious minorities, notably because of Le Pen's proposed policies targeting Muslims.

Macron has also touted his environmental and climate accomplishments in a bid to draw in young voters popular with far left candidates.

Citizens and especially millennials voted in droves for Melenchon. Many young voters are particularly engaged with climate issues.

Although Macron 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. Macron has said his next prime minister would be placed in charge of environmental planning as France seeks to become carbon neutral by 2050.

Le Pen, once considered a climate-change sceptic, wants to scrap subsidies for renewable energies.

She vowed to dismantle windfarms and invest in nuclear and hydro energy.

Pak PM Shehbaz, Putin exchange letters to enhance bilateral ties

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin have quietly exchanged letters to strengthen bilateral relations, a media report said on Sunday, amidst allegations by Imran Khan that his maiden visit to Moscow, much against Washington's wishes, led to his ouster.

The letters were exchanged after the election of Shehbaz as prime minister but both the sides kept development away from the media glare in what seemed to be a move aimed at avoiding any public attention, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

A senior Pakistan foreign office official confirmed to the newspaper that President Putin wrote a letter to the prime minister, congratulating him on his election.

The official, who requested not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue, said

Putin expressed his desire to deepen cooperation between the two countries.

A day after his appointment as Pakistan Prime Minister, President Putin sent a congratulatory message to Sharif which was made public by the Kremlin Press Office.

"Our countries share friendly and constructive relations. I hope that as Prime Minister you will seek to further promote closer multifaceted cooperation between Russia and Pakistan, as well as partnership in the Afghan settlement and countering international terrorism," it quoted Putin as saying on April 12.

Shehbaz wrote back to Putin thanking him for his felicitation message and expressed similar sentiments on bilateral ties between the two

countries as well as cooperation on Afghanistan, The Express Tribune reported.

The exchange of letters took place as the former prime



minister Khan is adamant he was ousted from power through an alleged US-backed vote of no-confidence since Americans did not like his visit to Moscow to meet President Putin on February 24, the day the Russian president ordered the invasion of Ukraine.

Khan has repeatedly said that the US did not want him to visit Russia and the National Security Advisor of President Joe Biden called his National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf, urging him to call of the prime minister's visit to Moscow.

On Saturday, Khan again alleged that Pakistan's former ambassador to the US Asad Majeed Khan held a meeting with senior American diplomat Donald Lu, where the latter used undiplomatic language.

"I will go a step forward and say that he (Donald Lu) was arrogant... the Joe Biden administration official told our ambassador that Imran Khan will have to be removed through a no-confidence motion," he said, adding that the meeting took place before the no-trust motion was filed by the Opposition parties.

New Pak Govt removes PM Shehbaz from no-fly list among several high-profile people

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's new government has removed names of several high-profile personalities, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, from the no-fly list, it emerged on Sunday.

The Cabinet in its maiden meeting last week had authorised the Ministry of Interior, headed by Rana Sanaullah, to review the Exit Control List (ECL), dealing with the people not allowed to leave the country. The interior ministry start-

ed issuing notifications for removal of those names from the ECL which had been in effect for 120 days without any compelling reason, reported the Express Tribune.

Those allowed to move out of the country without any hindrance include Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, his wife Nusrat Shehbaz, his niece Maryam Nawaz, former premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, his son Abdullah Khaqan and Finance Minister Miftah Ismail.

Sanaullah on Friday said that names were put on the ECL for political revenge.

There are 4,863 people on the ECL blacklist and 30,000 people in the Provisional National Identification List (PNIL).

"Yes, the ECL rules have been amended which will directly benefit 3,500 people," the minister had said.

Pakistan authorities maintain different categories of people who are banned from leaving the country for various reasons, including those who face corruption cases. But these lists had been used in the past by the governments to muzzle opposition.

Slovenians vote in tight race between populists, liberals

AP ■ LJUBLJANA

Slovenians are casting ballots on Sunday in a parliamentary election that is expected to be a tight race between the ruling right-wing populist party of Prime Minister Janez Jansa and opposition green-liberals in the politically divided European Union nation.

About 1.7 million voters will choose from an array of parties running for seats in the 90-member legislature.

The ruling conservative Slovenian Democratic Party and newly formed Freedom Movement have led polls ahead of the vote.

Surveys, however, have suggested that there will be no clear winner in the election and that a coalition government will have to be formed after the vote, made up of at least three or four parties.

"Today is an important day as these elections decide how Slovenia will develop not only in the next four years, but in the next decade," Jansa said upon voting on Sunday. "Expectations are good."

Jansa became prime minister a little over two years ago after the previous liberal premier resigned.

An admirer of former US

President Donald Trump, Jansa has pushed the country to the right since taking over at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main challenger Sunday is US-educated former business executive Robert Golob and his Freedom Movement party. The party has advocated green energy transition and sustainable development over Jansa's nation-centred narrative.

The two blocs are projected to win an almost equal number of votes - around 20-25 per cent - which would mean the composition and course of the future government could depend on which smaller groups pass the four per cent election threshold.

Observers have given Golob better chance than Jansa of gathering a post-election alliance.

Jansa's SDS won the most votes in an election four years ago, but couldn't initially find partners for a coalition government.

He took over after lawmakers from centrist and left-leaning groups switched sides following the resignation in 2020 of liberal Prime Minister Marjan Sarec.

Jansa has since faced accu-

sations of sliding toward authoritarian rule in the style of his ally, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Jansa came under EU scrutiny amid reports that he pressured opponents and public media, and installed loyalists in key positions for control over state institutions.

Liberals have described Sunday's election as a referendum on Slovenia's future.

They argue that Jansa, if reelected, would push the traditionally moderate nation further away from "core" EU democratic values and toward other populist regimes.

The Freedom House democracy watchdog recently said that "while political rights and civil liberties are generally respected (in Slovenia), the current right-wing government has continued attempts to undermine the rule of law and democratic institutions, including the media and judiciary".

The 63-year-old political veteran Jansa has denied this, portraying himself as a victim of an elaborate leftist smear plot. In order to polish his image before the election, Jansa has distanced himself from Orban and adopted a tough stance toward Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.

10 of 26 people from sunken Japan tour boat confirmed dead

AP ■ TOKYO

Rescuers said that 10 people who were retrieved on Sunday from the frigid sea and the rocky coast of a northern Japanese national park had died, a day after a tour boat with 26 aboard apparently sank in rough waters, triggering questions why it was allowed to sail.

The search for the others is still ongoing after the boat sent a distress call on Saturday afternoon saying it was sinking.

The location near the Kashuri Waterfall is known as a difficult place to maneuver boats because of its rocky coastline and strong tide.

There were two crew and 24 passengers, including two children, on the 19-ton Kazu 1 when it ran into troubles while travelling off the western coast of the Shiretoko Peninsula. The coast guard said the 10 victims - seven men and three women - were adults.

The Transport Ministry launched an investigation into the boat's operator, which had two accidents last year.

The ministry said it was looking into safety standards and the decision to conduct the tour despite rough weather on Saturday. The operator, Shiretoko Pleasure Cruise, had been instructed to take steps to improve its safety following earlier accidents in which it ran aground in June without causing injuries, and another in May, when three passengers suffered minor injuries when the boat collided with an object. "We will thoroughly inves-



tigate what caused this situation and what kind of safety oversight was involved to allow the tour in order to prevent another accident," Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito, who visited the area on Sunday, told reporters.

Following an intensive search involving six patrol boats, several aircraft and divers that went through the night, rescuers on early Sunday found four people near the tip of Shiretoko Peninsula and later six more in the same area, about 14 kilometers north from where the boat sent a distress call.

Some of them were plucked from the sea, while others were washed onto the rocky coast. An orange-coloured, square-shaped life-saving float with the boat's name on it was also found near the rocks, the coast guard said.

Footage on public broadcaster NHK showed one of the victims arriving on a helicopter and being transferred to an ambulance on a stretcher. Rescuers held up blue plastic shields to protect the victim's privacy.

Singapore celebrates Tamil with 44 historical programmes

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

A month-long festival to celebrate and promote Tamil, one of the four official languages in Singapore, is being held here this month with 44 programmes such as dramas, music and competitions, predominantly on virtual platforms.

The programme will encourage everyone to 'Love Tamil, Speak Tamil', embrace their mother tongue and use the language at home and in their daily lives, said S Manogaran, who is the chairman of the government-established Tamil Language Council.

Tamil is one of Singapore's four official languages along with Chinese, Malay and English. It is used in Parliament and also in schools as a mother tongue

subject. Tamil is also printed on the country's currency notes.

"...Such programmes are important for Tamil to be a living language," Vikram Nair, a Member of Parliament, said.

"When the students take part in such Tamil related programmes, then the language will continue to live over generations," said Nair.

"This year's Tamil Language Festival celebrates the future of Tamil in Singapore. Having the festival officially launched by children and youths represents our vision for the younger generation and our hopes for them to be empowered to take the lead in promoting the use of our mother tongue," Manogaran said. A song and dance presentation titled 'KadayaluVallalgal' was streamed live on Friday.

WHO: 1 child has died in mystery liver disease outbreak

AP ■ BERLIN

The World Health Organisation says at least one death has been reported in connection with a mysterious liver disease outbreak affecting children in Europe and the United States.

The UN health agency said late on Saturday that it has so far received reports of at least 169 cases of "acute hepatitis of unknown origin" from a dozen countries. The cases were reported in children aged one month to 16 years old, and 17 of those who fell ill required liver transplants.

WHO didn't say in which country the death occurred. The first cases were recorded in Britain, where 114 children have been sickened. "It is not yet clear if there has been an increase in hepatitis cases, or an increase in awareness of hepatitis cases that occur at the expected rate but go undetected," WHO said in a statement.

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SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd.

Address Unit No: 103, First Floor C&B Square, SangamComplex, 127, Andheri-Kurla Road, Village Chakala, Andheri (East), Mumbai 400059 |
Telephone: +91 22 67875300 |
Fax: +91 22 67875334 | www.sbfcl.com |
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PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd. on 28th April/22 at Delhi District Branch D-7, 1st Floor, above Look Saloon, Lajpat Nagar 2, New Delhi-110024, Faridabad District branch D-2, First Floor J.I.T. Near I-2 Chowk, Faridabad, Haryana-121001 and Gurugram District : branch First Floor, Property No. 342/3, Subhash Nagar, New Railway Road, Gurugram -122001, District : Gautam Budh Nagar : Branch add: Plot No. 5, Ground Floor, Opposite White Castle Hotel, Main Dabri Road, Salarpur, Bhangal, Sector-101, District Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida 201304 (UP),Ghaziabad District : branch add- B2, BASEMENT, RDC RAJ NAGAR, GAZIABAD -201002, Hapur District : add- First Floor, Above PC Jewellers, Garah Pargana, Garah Road, Tensli & District Hapur - 245101, (U.P.)

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FARIDABAD: AP00018003, AP00075761, AP00086255, AP00151584, AP00183344, AP00207108, AP00256793, AP00273700, AP00282120, AP00308814, AP00313577, AP00320279, AP00327421, AP00345730, **GAZIABAD:** AP00352349, AP00397811, GURUGRAM: AP00166333, AP00188890, AP00193977, AP00217785, AP00327218, AP00334143, AP00339384, AP00346954, AP00389564, **HAPUR:** AP00346213, AP00346551, AP00362484, **LAJPAT NAGAR:** AP00332820, **LAXMI NAGAR:** AP00359799, **NOIDA:** AP0029802, AP0029967, AP00337564, AP00377905, AP00378807, AP00384565, AP00392513, AP00395559, **ROHINI:** AP00393569, **TUGHLAKAABAD:** AP00096929, AP00202015, AP00203273, AP00302191, AP00352197, AP00371206, AP00376772, AP00385803, AP00398000

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Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
National Competitive Bidding (E-Tendering)

Letter No. : 1905/962C-03/2022 **Short Term E-Tender Notice** **Dated : 21/04/2022**

The Superintending Engineer, 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering **(Two Bid System)** on behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from date **02-05-2022** & onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (in Rs.)	Validity of Tender	Period of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	Improvement and Hotmix work of Dangoli -Sailani-Darimkhet - Dharamghar-kotemanya-Pankhu Thal Satsiling Motor road (S. H. 60) in km 112.00 to 114.00 in Vidhan Sabha Gangolihat constituency Dist- Pithoragarh under State Sector (Kotemanya To Baradend prabha)	5.76	5000.00 + 18% GST	120 Days	12 Month	Category "A" and Above for Road works in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/ Govt. Undertaking
2	Improvement and Hotmix work of Dangoli -Sailani-Darimkhet - Dharamghar-kotemanya-Pankhu Thal Satsiling Motor road (S. H. 60) in km 115.00 to 117.00 in Vidhan Sabha Gangolihat constituency Dist- Pithoragarh under State Sector (Kotemanya To Baradend prabha)	5.72	5000.00 + 18% GST	120 Days	12 Month	Category "A" and Above for Road works in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/ Govt. Undertaking

Estate Manager
For & behalf of
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Dev. Corpn. Ltd.
Branch Office Industrial Estate Kundli
Ph.0130-2370846

India's oil import bill doubles to \$119 bn in FY22



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's crude oil import bill nearly doubled to USD 119 billion in the fiscal year that ended on March 31, as energy prices soared globally following the return of demand and war in Ukraine.

India, the world's third biggest oil consuming and importing nation, spent USD 119.2 billion in 2021-22 (April 2021 to March 2022), up from USD 62.2 billion in the previous fiscal year, according to data from the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC).

It spent USD 13.7 billion in March alone, when oil prices surged to 14-year high. This compared with USD 8.4 billion spending in the same month last year.

Oil prices started to surge from January and rates crossed USD 100 per barrel in the following month before touching USD 140 per barrel in early March. Prices have since receded and are now around USD 106 per barrel.

According to PPAC, India imported 212.2 million tonnes of crude oil in 2021-22, up from 196.5 million tonnes in the previous year. This was,

however, lower than pre-pandemic imports of 227 million tonnes in 2019-20. The spending on oil imports in 2019-20 was USD 101.4 billion.

The imported crude oil is turned into value-added products like petrol and diesel at oil refineries, before being sold to automobiles and other users.

India, which is 85.5 per cent dependent on imports to meet crude oil needs, has a surplus refining capacity and it exports some petroleum products but is short on production of cooking gas LPG, which is imported from nations like Saudi Arabia.

The nation consumed 202.7 million tonnes of petroleum products in 2021-22, up from 194.3 million tonnes in the previous fiscal, but lower than pre-pandemic 214.1 million tonnes demand in 2019-20.

Import of petroleum products in 2021-22 fiscal was 40.2 million tonnes worth USD 24.2 billion. On the other hand, 61.8 million tonnes of petroleum products were also exported for USD 42.3 billion.

Besides, India also spent USD 11.9 billion on import of 32 billion cubic meters of LNG in 2021-22. This compared to

USD 7.9 billion spent on import of 33 bcm of gas in the previous fiscal and USD 9.5 billion on import of 33.9 bcm in 2019-20.

Net oil and gas import bill, after adjusting for exports, came to USD 113 billion, up from USD 63.5 billion in 2020-21 and USD 92.7 billion in 2019-20.

India had spent USD 62.2 billion on the import of 196.5 million tonnes of crude oil in the previous 2020-21 fiscal, when global oil prices remained subdued in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Higher crude oil import bill is expected to dent the macroeconomic parameters.

The country's import dependence has increased owing to a steady decline in domestic output. The nation produced 32.2 million tonnes of crude oil in 2019-20, which fell to 30.5 million tonnes in the following year and to 29.7 million tonnes in FY22, the PPAC data showed.

According to PPAC, India's oil import dependence was 85 per cent in 2019-20, which declined marginally to 84.4 per cent in the following year before climbing to 85.5 per cent in 2021-22.

Markets may face volatility amid derivatives' expiry; global trends, earnings major drivers: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity markets may face volatility this week amid monthly derivatives' expiry, and global trends along with the ongoing quarterly earnings by corporates would continue to play a major role in trading movement, analysts said.

Markets would also keenly track foreign fund movement amid unabated outflows.

"It is expected that this week will also kick off on a sombre note on the back of sharp fall in the US market on Friday after hawkish commentary by the US Fed and weak earnings. The global cues may dominate this week along

with April month F&O expiry and Q4 earnings.

"In terms of Q4 earnings, market will react to the results of ICICI Bank on Monday while HDFC Life, Bajaj Auto, HUL, Ambuja Cement, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Vedanta, IndusInd Bank, Maruti Suzuki, Ultratech Cement and Wipro will be other key results which are scheduled this week," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

FIIIs are continuously selling in the Indian equity market and their behaviour will be important amid concerns of aggressive rate hikes in the USA, Meena added.

There are still uncertainties about the Russia-Ukraine war whereas the market will also have an eye on crude oil prices, he said.

"The still persistent war situation in Eastern Europe, likely rate action from the ECB, and also an enhanced rate response from the Fed are factors that will guide the markets in the coming week, and may also put pressure on prices," Joseph Thomas, Head of Research, Emkay Wealth Management, said.

Last week, the Sensex lost 1,141.78 points or 1.95 per cent, while the Nifty shed 303.70 points or 1.73 per cent.

"Global cues like hawkish

Fed commentary, rising inflation and bond yields, slowing economic growth, prolonged war in Ukraine and volatile crude prices are keeping markets uncertain. Continuous selling by FIIs and weak results by few heavyweights has further added pressure to the market," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

Milind Muchhala, Executive Director, Julius Baer, said investors might prefer to wait out for more results to be announced and hear out the accompanying commentaries to gauge in case there are any concerns of earnings cuts

creeping in.

"Also, the impending concerns of elevated commodity prices due to geopolitical situation and supply chain challenges, and with increasing expectations of a harsher hike by the US Fed, the market may continue to witness higher volatility in the near term," Muchhala added.

Ajit Mishra, VP - Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, markets will react to ICICI Bank numbers in early trade on Monday.

"Besides, global cues like updates on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and China's COVID situation will also remain on participants' radar," he added.

Private sector to drive growth of NPS, says PFRDA study paper

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The private sector is expected to drive growth of the National Pension System (NPS), which has witnessed exponential rise over the last five years, in terms of number of subscribers as well as assets under management, a study paper of PFRDA said.

Led by the Atal Pension Yojana (APY), the number of subscribers between 2017-18 and 2021-22 have multiplied over three-fold, while the assets under management rose by over four-fold led by NPS, said the paper written by PFRDA member Deepak Mohanty.

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) regulates the flagship Atal Pension Yojana (APY) and the National Pension System (NPS).

"The annual rates of return in various NPS schemes since inception in the range 9.0-12.7 per cent and for APY at 9.4 per cent have been very competitive vis-à-vis alternate saving instruments besides the primary benefit of steady income," as per the paper.

Since the introduction of NPS in 2004, and more recently APY in June 2015, the pension sector has expanded in India.

Total number of subscribers have increased over three-fold from 1.5 crore in March 2017, to over 5.2 crore by March 2022, which is dominated by APY. Total number of APY subscribers has risen by over four



times from 93 lakh to 4.05 crore. Of this, APY subscribers account for over 78 per cent of the pension subscriber base.

Looking at AUM, the pension assets under management have increased over four-fold from ₹1,75,000 crore to Rs 7,37,000 crore during this 5-year period.

In this, the majority of the assets is held by NPS, rising from ₹1,70,000 crore to ₹7,11,000 crore, accounting for 96 per cent of total assets. The rest of 4 per cent is contributed by APY.

Mohanty said India's pension-sector (NPS plus APY), provides a flexible mode of old age income-security not only for salaried employees but also to the common person.

"The future expansion in NPS is expected to emanate from the private sector – both the salaried and self-employed. "Steps at enhanced pension-literacy, both of the subscribers and the intermediaries, coupled with a nudge from the regulator and the government along with encouragement to young-adults to join a pension scheme would accelerate our

greater usage of technology. While there is a mechanism for quick redressal of pensioner grievances, it is being further strengthened," the paper added further.

It also highlighted the importance of financial literacy for people to reap the benefit of the formal financial sector. Having reading or writing ability is not enough for financial literacy, it said.

Further, financial inclusion and empowerment will remain incomplete without each member in a family having got a pension account.

In this direction, given the nature of the pension product where the payoff is not immediate, it needs a nudge by all concerned – the employers, intermediaries, the government and the pension regulator – to induce people, particularly young adults to join a pension scheme.

"There is immense merit in joining young, as with small contributions sizable corpus could be accumulated given the power of compound interest rate, providing substantial steady income in one's post-working life."

NPS mainly caters to the pension needs of the organised sector employees, including the government staff, while APY is targeted for those working in the unorganised sector.

PFRDA said the views expressed in these papers are those of the author and not necessarily that of the institution.

Exports of ceramics, glassware products touch \$3.5 bn in FY22



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Exports of ceramics and glassware products touched a "record" USD 3.5 billion in 2021-22, the commerce ministry said on Sunday.

It said the exports rose because of increase in shipments of ceramic tiles and sanitaryware products.

India is the world's second largest manufacturer of tiles. The main items for export under glassware include articles of glass packing, sanitary fixtures of porcelain, glass mirror, tinted non-wired glass, glass bead and glass wool.

India exports to more than 125 countries and top destinations are Saudi Arabia, the United States, Mexico, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Oman, Indonesia, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Over the years, the industry has been modernizing through new innovations and product profile, quality and design to emerge as a modern world class industry ready to take on global competition," it said.

Springfit aims ₹1,200 cr turnover in next 5 yrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Luxury mattress brand Springfit aims a turnover of ₹1,000-1,200 crore in the next five years, helped by growth from domestic and exports markets, said a company official.

As part of its expansion strategy, Springfit is investing to double its manufacturing capacity to meet the growing demand, expand its distribution network and add more exclusive showrooms.

Besides, the Delhi-based company may try to get listed on the stock exchange in the next 2-3 years, said Springfit Executive Director Nitin Gupta. For the fiscal year

ended March 31, 2022, Springfit achieved a turnover of around ₹250 crore and aims to grow almost double this fiscal year to ₹450-500 crore.

"We are confident of doubling our revenue to Rs 1,000 to 1,200 crore, over the next five years with our expansion. Most of the new incremental revenue should come from the upcoming Meerut and Vadodra plants. If our plans go as planned, we should be over ₹1,000 crore entity by FY27," Gupta told PTI.

Besides, the company is expanding its distribution footprints and plans two-fold jump in the total count of exclusive showrooms.

Britannia unveils 'Marie Gold Jeera' to serve customers in TN

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Food major Britannia Industries Ltd has unveiled its first ever co-created biscuit to serve Tamil Nadu market with the launch of Britannia Marie Gold Jeera, the company said on Sunday.

The brand ahead of its region-specific launch has worked with various women homemakers in the state to co-create a biscuit which has 'jeera' (cumin) as its key ingredient given its health benefits, according to company Chief Marketing Officer Amit Doshi.

Britannia wanted to celebrate the state's love for the brand by launching an innovative product that is specially

curated to suit the local tastes of the region, he said, adding the brand has an impressive penetration in Tamil Nadu besides holding a dominant market leadership.

Tamilians have a preference for spices and masalas in their food, and taking inspiration from this, Britannia Marie Gold has collaborated with online portal Momspresso by partnering with 300 women homemakers to co-create Marie Gold Jeera for the state, he said in a statement.

"This is Britannia's first ever co-created product with consumers for a specific region," the company said.

Tamil Nadu is one of Britannia's largest markets in



terms of affinity and market share. Marie Gold is one of our largest brands and has the trust of millions of consumers, espe-

cially in TN. At Britannia, we strive towards incessant innovation of our product lines with the inclusion of new flavours,

ingredients to cater to local audiences," Doshi said.

The "Marie Gold Jeera" takes the special bond of

Britannia Industries with the customer to an all new level, by launching its first ever co-created biscuit, he said.

Momspresso co-founder Prashant Sinha said, "We studied the requirements of moms in Tamil Nadu through our wide network of bloggers and influencers and came up with the popular choice of ingredient Jeera for Britannia Marie Gold."

"We are delighted that Britannia partnered with us and we were able to contribute to their journey of building a new product for Tamil Nadu," Sinha said.

The new Marie Gold Jeera is priced at ₹10 for 73.5 grams and ₹30 for a 200 gram pack in Tamil Nadu.

Maruti Suzuki looks to ride SUV wave to drive to 50% market share

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) will keep consolidating its existing product line-up, including hatchbacks, while bolstering presence in the fast growing SUV segment to power its way back to 50 per cent market share in the domestic passenger vehicle market, as per a senior company official.

The country's largest car-maker, which has seen its market share drop to 43.38 per cent in FY22 from 47.7 per cent in FY21, aims to bring in multiple SUV products with focus on new technologies like hybrid powertrains in order to enhance fuel efficiency, making them comparable or better than diesel-powered models that are currently being sold in the market, especially by its Korean rivals.

With no intention of mak-

ing a comeback in the diesel segment, MSI is also focusing on increasing its play in the CNG segment to bring in additional volumes.

The company had a market share of 51.22 per cent in 2018-19 and 51.03 per cent in 2019-20. In an interaction with PTI here, MSI Senior Executive Director (Marketing and Sales) Shashank Srivastava noted that the company will pull out all the steps to gain back the lost market share.

"It's a war cry..It is there in our organisation..It is like constructive paranoia...Which means you cannot rest easy..It doesn't take much time for the market dynamics to change, so we are always on our toes as how to improve efficiency, productivity etc," he noted when asked about the company's thinking on regaining the 50 per cent market share.

Srivastava said that in the



non-SUV segment, the company's market share was at 67 per cent level, with leadership positions in both hatchback and MPV segments.

He acknowledged that lack of products in the fast growing SUV segment had impacted its overall market share.

Elaborating on the segment dynamics, Srivastava noted that while the company led the entry-level SUV seg-

ment with Brezza, it was only in the robustly growing mid-SUV segment where it lagged behind the competition with tepid response for S-Cross.

"So, overall our market share in the SUV vertical is just 12 per cent. This is where we are now making efforts to bolster our presence," Srivastava said. He noted that while the company struggled with sub par performance in the seg-

ment, some of the competing companies were getting as much as 60 per cent of their sales from SUVs.

When asked if the lack of diesel powertrain option could also be a part of low offtake in the vertical, with competitors already offering their products with both petrol and diesel powertrains, Srivastava replied in the negative. He pointed out that the share of diesel vehicles has come down drastically to about 18 per cent from the highs of 58 per cent a few years ago.

"In the hatchbacks it is less than 0.5 per cent, in sedans it is about 1.5 per cent, in MPVs it has come down to 20 per cent, so overall it is 18 per cent, which is coming from the mid-sized SUVs. In this segment we believe there is acceptance for diesel as it lacks a good petrol-powered vehicle," Srivastava said.

Citing the example of

Brezza, he noted that in the entry-level SUV segment the share of diesel trims used to be in the range of 88 per cent which has now come down to about 20 per cent.

"We discontinued the diesel and brought Brezza with 1.5 litre petrol. This suddenly changed the dynamics and 88 per cent became 20 per cent..We believe this will happen in mid-SUV as well..," Srivastava stated.

He noted that in the hatchback segment it was a clear leader with a dominant market share of 70 per cent while in the MPV segment also, it was way ahead with its market share growing from 35 per cent in 2019 to 61 per cent last fiscal.

When asked specifically about the entry-level hatchback segment, Srivastava noted that out of the total 16-17 hatchbacks in the industry, seven belonged to MSI.

RCL likely to share RFRP with bidder by Wed; all cash bids to get highest score

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lenders of debt-ridden Reliance Capital Ltd (RCL) are likely to share the Request For Resolution Plan (RFRP) document with bidders by Wednesday or Thursday and bids with a high upfront cash payment component will get the maximum score as a part of the resolution process, sources said.

The RFRP document sets the guidelines for the submission and evaluation of the resolution plan and is shared with all the companies that have submitted Expression of Interest (EoI) for the submission of financial bids.

RCL had offered two options to all the bidders. Under the first option, companies could bid for Reliance Capital, including its eight sub-

sidiaries or clusters. The second option gave the companies freedom to bid for its subsidiaries, individually or in a combination.

As per the RFRP document finalised by the lenders, companies bidding for RCL's different businesses under option 2, can only make all-cash bids and they will not be permitted to make deferred payment structure, sources said.

Companies bidding for RCL under option 1, will have the choice of making an all-cash bids or combination of upfront cash cum deferred payment bids, sources said.

As per the evaluation criteria, as proposed in the RFRP, all cash bids or bids with high upfront cash payment component will get maximum scores from the lenders, sources said.

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich were crowned Bundesliga champions for the 10th consecutive season on Saturday after a 3-1 home win over second-placed Borussia Dortmund.

First-half goals by Serge Gnabry and Robert Lewandowski put Bayern in control at a sold-out Allianz Arena before Emre Can converted a penalty after the break for Dortmund.

But teenager Jamal Musiala fired in a late goal to spark early celebrations in the home crowd.

This is the first time a club has won 10 straight titles in one of Europe's top five leagues.

The Bavarian giants' eighth successive win over Dortmund leaves Bayern an unassailable 12 points clear with three games left.

Bayern dominated the opening half and Gnabry fired a magnificent volley into the top corner from the edge of the box to give them a 15th-minute lead.

Gnabry had a second effort disallowed before Lewandowski doubled the advantage 11 minutes before half-time.

It was the Poland striker's 27th goal in 26 matches against Dortmund, who he left for Bayern in 2014.

Dortmund responded early in the second half as Can converted a penalty after Marco Reus was brought down



BAYERNLIGA

Bayern Munich beat Dortmund 3-1 to win 10th straight Bundesliga title

in the area.

The visitors had their appeals for another spot-kick waved away with 30 minutes left when Lucas Hernandez brought Jude Bellingham down in the area.

Lewandowski won the battle of the Bundesliga's star strikers as Erling Haaland, who has been linked with big-money move to Manchester City, failed to score despite forcing Bayern goalkeeper Manuel

Neuer into two late saves.

Musiala put the result beyond doubt when he slotted home seconds after his initial shot was saved by Dortmund keeper Marwin Hitz.

Late Union goals stun

Leipzig

Earlier, Union Berlin scored two late goals to poach a 2-1 win at RB Leipzig, which kept alive their Champions League qualification hopes.

Bayern Leverkusen

thumped bottom club Greuther Fuerth 4-1 to take third place from Leipzig and move three points clear of fifth-placed Freiburg in the race for the top four.

Freiburg missed the chance to draw level on points with Leipzig, conceding a late equaliser in a 3-3 draw with Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Eintracht Frankfurt, who visit West Ham on Thursday in their Europa League semi-final first leg, conceded a late equaliser to draw 2-2 at home to Hoffenheim.

Something will happen soon: Lewa leaves Bayern future open

AP ■ MUNICH

Robert Lewandowski left his future at Bayern Munich open on Saturday when he said: "Something will happen soon."

The 33-year-old, who is out of contract next year, scored his 33rd league goal this season in 3-1 win over Dortmund.

Barcelona reportedly want to sign Lewandowski, who was cagey about his Bayern future.

"Something will happen soon. The only thing I know is that there will be a meeting (with Bayern)", Lewandowski told Sky.

Lewandowski has won back-to-back FIFA best male player awards for the last two years and lifted every available title with Bayern.

He has scored 342 goals in 372 games since he joined on a free transfer from Dortmund in 2014.

Bayern bosses have made it clear they want to keep him, but club CEO Oliver Kahn admitted last Sunday that the Poland star is "considering his future". Lewandowski added



that "nothing special" has happened yet, with his agent in talks with Bayern, and he will "see" how things develop.

"It is not easy for me," he admitted.

Bayern captain Manuel Neuer and Thomas Mueller are also out of contract in 2023, but both players said they plan to extend their contracts.

"We'll see what happens, but the feeling today is that it's hard to leave," said Mueller.

Neuer said he feels "well" at Bayern. "We have the team with the potential to play for the Champions League title."



PSG seal record-equalling 10th Ligue 1 title

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain secured a record-equalling 10th Ligue 1 title on Saturday, drawing level with Saint-Etienne, despite being held to a 1-1 home draw by 10-man Lens.

Lionel Messi looked to have curled in a fine winner in the 68th minute, but Lens dampened the already muted title party at the Parc des Princes through Corentin Jean with two minutes left.

PSG have an unassailable 16-point lead over second-placed Marseille with four matches remaining.

Mauricio Pochettino's men reclaim the crown from Lille, who were shock champions last season.

It is the capital giants' eighth Ligue 1 triumph in the last 10 seasons, powered by the investment of their Qatari owners.

This season will still be seen as a failure for PSG, though, after collapsing to a dramatic loss to Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16, after also suffering a surprise French Cup loss to Nice.

On Saturday, an inevitable league title was confirmed in a strangely non-celebratory atmosphere in Paris.

Attention in the French capital will now turn to the future of Kylian Mbappe, with the star forward still to decide whether to stay at PSG or

leave for Real Madrid before next season.

PSG's hopes of wrapping up the title with a win were given a boost in the 57th minute, as Danso was shown a second yellow card for a tackle on Neymar.

Messi almost found the corner of the net with the resulting free-kick, but Leca plunged to his right to make another good save.

Sergio Ramos should have scored midway through the second half, but the veteran centre-back scooped over from eight yards out.

It was Messi who finally gave the match a moment to remember, bending a trademark finish over Leca from the edge of the box.

The Argentinian has now scored four Ligue 1 goals in a disappointing first season for PSG since leaving Barcelona.

But, perhaps fittingly, the hosts conceded a late equaliser as Jean slid in at the back post to divert home Deiver Machado's low cross.

European hopefuls Lens pushed for a winner which would have kept PSG waiting for at least another 24 hours, but the home side held on and almost won it themselves when Mbappe dragged horribly wide.

The final whistle brought bizarre scenes, with the Lens players celebrating and PSG's newly-crowned champions looking sheepish.

Betis beat Valencia on penalties to win Copa del Rey

AP ■ SEVILLE

Real Betis won the Spanish Copa del Rey on Saturday, beating Valencia 5-4 on penalties after a thrilling final finished 1-1 after extra time.

Valencia's Yunus Musah blazed over in the shoot-out, allowing Juan Miranda the chance to score the winning penalty at La Cartuja as Betis claimed their fourth major trophy in the club's 115-year history. Borja Iglesias had headed Betis in front but Hugo Duro equalised for Valencia before half-time and neither side could find a winner, either in the second period or extra time.

But Musah's error and Miranda's cool head gave Betis

the cup for a third time, following the club's two previous triumphs in 1977 and 2005.

Joaquin, the 40-year-old winger, who made his debut for Betis aged 19 in 2000 and played in the final 17 years ago, came on in the 86th minute and scored a penalty. It remains to be seen whether Joaquin decides this is a fitting end now to what has been a remarkable career.

Many had billed this a clash of styles, with the swashbuckling style of Real Betis tasked with breaking down the grit and resilience of Valencia but in reality both teams contributed equally to an open and enthralling final.

It was only the second in 14 years not to include any of Real



Madrid, Barcelona or Atletico Madrid and while Betis and Valencia are hardly minnows in Spain, there was no doubting the weight of the occasion for both clubs.

Valencia won the Copa del Rey in 2019, beating Barca in the final, but a fire-sale of key players under the controversial ownership of Peter Lim means the team have been more concerned about relegation in recent seasons than winning trophies.

Betis, meanwhile, have spent three seasons in the second tier since they last won it in 2005, the same year they finished fourth in La Liga, which they still hope to replicate this season but have never managed to repeat since.

Pulisic helps Chelsea win at the death

AP ■ LONDON

Christian Pulisic settled Chelsea's top four nerves as his late goal sealed a dramatic 1-0 win against West Ham, while Burnley climbed out of the Premier League relegation zone with a 1-0 victory against Wolves on Sunday.

With Liverpool looking to close the gap on leaders Manchester City to one point with a win against Merseyside rivals Everton later on Sunday, the focus in the early games was on the top four race and the relegation battle.

At Stamford Bridge, Thomas Tuchel's side looked set to endure more angst on home turf when Jorginho's penalty was saved by Lukasz Fabianski in the final minutes.

But Pulisic came off the bench to inspire third placed Chelsea, lifting them seven points clear of fifth placed Tottenham in the fight to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

A 4-2 defeat against Arsenal on Wednesday condemned Chelsea to three successive losses at the Bridge for the first time since 1993.

Tuchel admitted he had "no solution" for the "fragile" Chelsea defending that saw them concede 11 goals in their last three



home games.

Concerned about Chelsea's ability to hold onto their top four berth, Tuchel made three changes from the Arsenal game as Thiago Silva replaced Malang Sarr in that creaky defence.

Silva helped solidify Chelsea's rearguard and Pulisic's

last-gasp strike should ensure they hold onto a top four place.

West Ham boss David Moyes left Declan Rice, Jarrod Bowen and Michail Antonio on the bench as he prioritised the club's first European semi-final since 1976, against Eintracht Frankfurt in the Europa League

on Thursday.

Timo Werner twice went close as he fired into the side-netting, then stretched to poke his shot straight at Fabianski.

In the 87th minute, Silva flicked a header towards Romelu Lukaku, prompting Craig Dawson to concede a penalty

with a pull on the substitute.

Dawson was initially booked before being sent off after a VAR check, but West Ham avoided further punishment as Jorginho's weak spot-kick was easily saved by Fabianski.

But Pulisic sparred Jorginho's blushes in the 90th minute as the US forward met Marcos Alonso's cross with a clinical low finish from 10 yards.

Burnley boosted their bid for a remarkable escape act as they moved into 17th place thanks to Matej Vydra's second half strike.

Since Sean Dyche's surprise sacking after 10 years in charge, Burnley's caretaker boss Mike Jackson has taken seven points from three games to revive their hopes of beating the drop.

Vydra had a second half goal disallowed for offside, but he didn't have to wait long to celebrate as he netted in the 62nd minute with a composed close-range finish from Wout Weghorst's cross.

Burnley moved two points above third bottom Everton, who have two games in hand as they look to avoid playing outside the top tier since 1954.

James Ward-Prowse scored twice as Southampton came from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Brighton.

Ten Hag has 'no opinion' on Man Utd's slump

AP ■ AMSTERDAM

Erik Ten Hag on Saturday said his "head and energy is for Ajax" and refused to comment on the latest defeat for Manchester United, the English giants he will coach next season.

Ten Hag saw his Ajax team take a step closer to the Dutch league title with a late 1-0 win against NEC just hours after United had slumped to a 3-1 defeat at Arsenal in the Premier League.

"I don't have any opinion about Man United's results because I show respect for people who are at Man United, and I am responsible for Ajax and that is what I comment on," the 52-year-old Ten Hag told Sky Sports.

"I always keep focused on the job I have to do, it doesn't matter what's around me."

However, he did admit that he has considered some of the challenges that will face him next season in England.

"You always spend time on the future, but my head and my energy is for Ajax," he added.

AP ■ EMPOLI

Napoli's hopes of winning the Serie A title this season suffered a huge blow as they surrendered a two-goal lead at Empoli in seven stunning second-half minutes to lose 3-2 on Sunday.

With Empoli without a victory in their previous 16 league games before Napoli's visit, Luciano Spalletti's side were expected to get the victory that would have seen them keep pace with league leaders Inter Milan.

They were even more overwhelming favourites after a fine finish from Dries Mertens in the first half, and skipper Lorenzo Insigne's arrowing effort eight minutes into the second period put them in firm control.

Napoli held the lead until the 80th minute, until they inexplicably left Liam Henderson all alone to get the hosts back in the game, before a goal-keeping howler from Alex Meret let Andrea Pinamonti in to level three minutes later.

Napoli slip in Scudetto race



The drama, however, was not done there, as Pinamonti slid in at the far post three minutes from time to send the home fans into raptures, and leave Napoli defenders looking at each other wondering how they had thrown this encounter away.

The defeat leaves Napoli third in the standings, without a win in three league games, and five points behind Inter having played a game more. Empoli stay 14th despite that rare victory.

On Saturday, reigning Serie A champions Inter Milan reclaimed top spot after beating Roma 3-1 at home to move one point clear of AC Milan.

Denzel Dumfries and Marcelo Brozovic scored first-half goals at San Siro before Lautaro Martinez headed in a third shortly after the break to earn Inter a fourth consecutive win.

Djoker loses in Serbia final

AP ■ BELGRADE

World number one Novak Djokovic was denied his first title of the year on Sunday, falling in three sets to Russia's Andrey Rublev in the final of the Serbia Open.

Second seed Rublev won through 6-2, 6-7 (4/7), 6-0 against the top seed who had been looking to regain winning form before his French Open title defence.

The Belgrade event was only Djokovic's third of 2022 after he was deported from Melbourne — and denied the chance to defend his Australian Open title — after entering the country unvaccinated.

However, the 20-time Grand Slam winner was let down by his lack of physical form.

The 34-year-old, who lost in the



quarter-finals in Dubai and suffered a shock second-round defeat in Monte Carlo, battled past Laslo Djere, Miomir Kecmanovic and Karen Khachanov in three sets before the court time caught up with the top seed against Rublev.

Swiatek wins Stuttgart title

AP ■ STUTTGART

World number one Iga Swiatek won her fourth consecutive WTA title this year as she swept aside Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets to win the Stuttgart final on Sunday.

The 20-year-old picked up her 23rd straight victory to add Stuttgart to her collection after her title wins in Doha, Indian Wells and Miami this year.

Swiatek was relentless, breaking Sabalenka's serve twice in the opening set, then greeting every point won with a clenched fist of celebration to seal a 6-2, 6-2 win.



the pioneer

INDIAN

PREMIER LEAGUE 2022

12

RO (ROHIT) HAS BEEN HITTING THE BALL REALLY WELL, HE GETS GOOD STARTS, 15-20 RUNS, LOOKING GOOD AND THEN NOT BEING ABLE TO CONVERT

— MAHELA JAYAWARDENE

Battle of the Kings

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Chennai Super Kings would look for inspiration from the talismanic Mahendra Singh Dhoni once again while eyeing improvement on multiple fronts when they take on Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Monday.

CSK have won two out of their seven matches so far while Punjab Kings are a touch better with three victories from seven outings.

While PBKS are placed eighth, CSK occupy the penultimate slot in the IPL points table.

Defending champions CSK have faltered in all departments this season. They haven't played the cricket they are known for under skipper Ravindra Jadeja, who has not been able to lead from the front.

However, they will approach the next match embolden by their three-wicket win against bottom-placed Mumbai Indians courtesy Dhoni, who yet again proved he is the best finisher in the business.

The wicketkeeper-batter turned back the clock to script a memorable three-wicket victory, following a heart-stopping finish that saw him hit a six and two fours in the final over to finish the game.

Bowling has been a major concern for CSK but the former champions produced a good show against Mumbai with rookie pacer Mukesh Choudhary, who has struggled under pressure all season, wreaking havoc with the new ball, bagging three wickets.

Old war horse Dwayne Bravo continues to be a reliable servant for the team, picking up wickets whenever he is entrusted with the ball.

Skipper Jadeja is having an underwhelming season with



Punjab vs Chennai
Live from 7:30 pm IST
STAR SPORTS 1

bat and ball, while the addition of Sri Lanka spinner Maheesh Theekshana has bolstered the severely depleted bowling unit, which is missing Deepak Chahar and Adam Milne.

Young Ruturaj Gaikwad, who has had a miserable season so far apart from the 73 against Gujarat Titans, will need to step up and deliver with the bat.

All-rounders Moeen Ali and Shivam Dube will also have to take more responsibility.

Hanging in the playoffs race by the skin of their teeth, a defeat on Monday will send CSK on the brink of elimination.

On the other hand, Punjab will be smarting from the nine wicket loss to Delhi Capitals. Punjab batting unit has

been plagued by inconsistency all season. While they boast of power-hitters like Shikhar Dhawan, Liam Livinstone, and Shah Rukh Khan, consistency is something they would aim for.

Jonny Bairstow has failed to fire in the four games he has played and it will be seen if he is replaced by Sri Lankan Bhanuka Rajapaksa, who fared much better than the Englishman.

Punjab have a strong and varied bowling attack led by South African quick Kagiso Rabada, who has been right on the money.

Arshdeep Singh has also been brilliant. Although the 23-year-old hasn't snared too many wickets, he has bowled economically but Vaibhav Arora needs to step up.

The role of pace-bowling all-rounder Odean Smith will be crucial. The West Indian has not been at his best so far in the IPL.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians (MI) returned to the Wankhede Stadium after 1083 days but there was no change of fortunes for them as they sank to their eighth defeat in a row, losing to Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) by 36 runs on Sunday (April 24). The five-time champions are out of contention to reach the playoffs while LSG climbed to fourth place on the 2022 Indian Premier League table.

Rohit Sharma won the toss and chose to bowl first. Jasprit Bumrah helped MI get a brilliant start as ex-MI player Quinton de Kock departed for just 10 runs with skipper Rohit taking a sublime catch at short cover. Manish Pandey's struggles continued with the Indian batter as he managed to score only 22 runs in as many balls.

LSG's decision to promote Marcus Stoinis to the number four position terribly backfired as he was dismissed for a duck by Daniel Sams. Krunal Pandya failed to make a mark against the team he won 3 IPL titles with as Kieron Pollard sent him back to the dressing room for just one run.

Both Deepak Hooda and Ayush Badoni failed to give LSG a strong finish as skipper Rahul kept running out of partners. However, the LSG captain continued his onslaught to score his second century of the season vs MI. Rahul's sensational knock of 103 in 62 balls helped his side put up a score of 168 on the board. Pollard and Riley Meredith book took two wickets each while Bumrah and Sams picked up one wicket each.



In reply, Rohit Sharma showed signs of returning to

form after a horror run in IPL 2022 so far with a knock of 39 in 31 balls. He put up a 49-run

opening partnership with Ishan Kishan but MI's 15.25 crore signing scored just 8

► pointstable

aPo. TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1. GT	7	6	1	0	12	0.396
2. SRH	7	5	2	0	10	0.691
3. RR	7	5	2	0	10	0.432
4. LSG	8	5	3	0	10	0.334
5. RCB	8	5	3	0	10	-0.472
6. DC	7	3	4	0	6	0.715
7. KKR	8	3	5	0	6	0.080
8. PBKS	7	3	4	0	6	-0.562
9. CSK	7	2	5	0	4	-0.534
10. MI	8	0	8	0	0	-1.000

► boundarymeter

4s	1037
6s	542

runs after playing 20 deliveries. Kishan's dismissal led to a series of wickets as Dewald Brevis, Rohit, and Suryakumar Yadav departed in quick succession to leave MI in huge trouble.

With all hopes looking lost for MI, teenager Tilak Varma once again stepped up for the five-time champions and kept them alive in the game. The youngster produced a breathtaking array of shots to get the Mumbai crowd on its feet and lead the game to a grandstand finish.

However, LSG were in no mood to let MI win their first game of the season as pacers Mohsin Khan, Jason Holder, and Dushmantha Chameera put up an exceptional display of death over bowling. Krunal finished the job in style for LSG to ensure a comfortable victory for Rahul & co.

Moody credits SRH's recent success to role clarity

PTI ■ MUMBAI

After a couple of losses in their opening games, Sunrisers Hyderabad have enjoyed a five-match winning streak and head coach Tom Moody has attributed role clarity for the recent success.

Sunrisers cantered to a nine-wicket win against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Saturday to rise to the second spot in the points table.

"We are very specific in our training as to where we are playing, who the opposition is," Moody said at the post-match press conference.

"We make sure that the players have the understanding of what their roles are and when they are called upon in certain stages (they deliver)," he added.

Sunrisers pace attack led by Marco Jansen (3/25) and ably supported by Umran Malik (1/19) and T Natarajan (3/10) left the star-studded RCB lineup rattled with pace, swing and seam.

"We knew the ball would swing today and knew Bhuvu (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) and Marco can use it to their



advantage. Swinging the ball provides a challenge in the early overs especially when the opposition is trying to get

a reasonably positive start," Moody said.

Left-arm pacer Jansen bowled a

fiery second over to claim the wickets of Faf du Plessis, Virat Kohli and Anuj Rawat and Moody felt those first six balls by the South African was the turning point of the game.

"It was a superb first over, taking three top wickets and opening the game so early for us in the powerplay was the difference in the game, RCB struggled to recover from it.

"He took advantage from there, put pressure on the opposition from the get go. It was a great performance."

After an underwhelming season last year, Natarajan is back to picking up wickets for SRH at crucial junctures and Moody was full of praise for the left-arm pacer.

"Nataraj is fit now, last year he wasn't. He has worked extremely hard in the last 6 months. He understands his role, he has a very particular role and one of the best at doing it.

"He is always under pressure, bowling the tough overs at the back of the powerplay and at the back of the innings when teams are looking to go after you. He has the skillset to manage that."

Pant is showing few glimpses of Dhoni: Kuldeep

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant's captaincy has certainly played a huge role in his redemption and Kuldeep Yadav finds shades of the great Mahendra Singh Dhoni in his current Delhi Capitals skipper's characteristics as he enjoys his new-found "freedom of expression".

The 27-year-old Kuldeep has taken 13 wickets in this IPL so far, including a four wicket haul against his former team Kolkata Knight Riders.

"I feel Rishabh is showing a few glimpses of MS Dhoni's characteristics behind the stumps. He guides well and stays calm on the field," he said during the fourth episode of The DC Podcast.

"Wicketkeepers play a big role in the success of spinners. The credit for my performance in this IPL goes to Rishabh as well. We have a good understanding now."

The Uttar Pradesh spinner, who was bought by DC at the IPL mega auction,

said the freedom and security that he got from his new franchise helped him to perform this year.

"When you are given the freedom to express yourself then you start to enjoy everything," said Kuldeep, who played for KKR for seven years from 2014 to 2021.

"When I spoke to Ricky during my first practice session with the team, he told me that I am bowling very well and that he's looking to play me for all 14 league matches.

That conversation with him motivated me a lot." Kuldeep, who has taken 53 wickets in 52 IPL matches so far, also attributed his success to working closely with assistant coach Shane Watson.

"Shane Watson has also helped me a lot. I am very lucky to have worked with Watson for three-four seasons.

He has particularly helped me with the mental aspect of the game.



KIUG kicks off with glitzy opening ceremony

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President of India M Venkaiah Naidu on Friday declared open Khelo India University Games 2021 in a glitzy opening ceremony in Bengaluru.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared his message at the inauguration. Governor of Karnataka Thaaavar Chand Gehlot; Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai; Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Singh Thakur; Minister of State, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Nisith Pramanji; Secretary Sports Sujata Chaturvedi were among those present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the Vice President emphasised the need to encourage sporting activity upto village level. He called for developing the necessary sports infrastructure at the grassroots level, with concerted efforts of the centre, state and local bodies. Together, these will take the Indian sporting potential to new heights, he added.



The Vice President also called for awarding some extra marks to sports persons in college admissions and promotions in various departments. "Incentives like this will go a long way in encouraging the sports in the country," he said.

In his message, the Prime Minister said that Bengaluru symbolizes the youthful enthusiasm of the country and is pride of the professionals. He said that it is significant that a confluence of startups and sports is happening here.

"Holding of the Khelo India University Games in Bengaluru will add to the

energy of this beautiful city," he said. The Prime Minister saluted the resolve of the organizers as organization of the Games amidst the challenges of the pandemic epitomizes their determination and passion. This youthful passion is driving New India in every field with new momentum, the Prime Minister added.

On his part, Anurag Singh Thakur said, when the first KIUG took place in Odisha, there was great pride and enthusiasm among people. But then, Covid spread and the Games could not take place

for two years.

"After two years, it is the first opportunity for us to assemble together for the University Games and I see a similar passion among the youngsters this time around. With close to 4000 participants from nearly 200 Universities, this is the largest multi-discipline event taking place in the state of Karnataka. I visited the hosts, Jain University, and met over 500 enthusiastic athletes who will be taking part in the competition. I was also very happy to see that world-class facilities have been provided for the Games there, which are truly one of the best all-around in the world," he said.

Breath-taking performances depicting Karnataka's rich cultural heritage, Mallakhambha, Yogasana and a captivating sound and light show added to the grandeur of a sparkling opening ceremony of the 2nd Khelo India University Games 2021 at the Sree Kanteerava Indoor Stadium on Sunday, 24th April 2022.



Deepak settles for Silver again

PTI ■ ULAANBAATAR

Deepak Punia could do nothing against the solid defence of Kazakhstan's Azmat Dauletbekov and settled for a Silver medal while Viky Chahar grabbed a Bronze in the 92kg competition on the concluding day of the Asian Championship, here on Sunday. Eyeing his maiden Gold medal at the continental event, Deepak reached the final without conceding a single point as he first blanked Iran's Mohsen Miryousef Mostafavi Alanjagh (6-0) and then humbled Korea's Gwanuk Kim (5-0).

However, Dauletbekov did not let the Indian play his aggressive game, foiling a few of his attacks with remarkable ease.

Deepak usually stuns his rivals with his speed and agility but Dauletbekov was up for the task and smartly foiled the Indian's leg attacks by maintaining distance. Dauletbekov grabbed his chances on counter-attacks and kept building his lead to eventually win the final by a comfortable 6-1 margin.

It is Deepak's fourth medal at the Asian Championship, having won a Silver (2021) and two Bronze (2019, 2020) before.

Adding to India's medal tally was Viky, who won the Bronze medal bout against Uzbekistan's Ajiniyaz Saparniyazov 5-3.

Verstappen wins Emilia-Romagna GP



AP ■ EMILIA-ROMAGNA

World champion Max Verstappen rekindled his title defence on Sunday with an accomplished victory ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez in a dominant one-two triumph for Red Bull at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

In a rain-affected race, the pole-sitting 24-year-old Dutchman came home more than 16 seconds ahead of his team-mate as Charles Leclerc and Ferrari endured a disappointing day in front of passionate home support at the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari.

Leclerc, who started second on the grid, finished sixth after making a poor start and spinning in the closing laps while running third, allowing Lando Norris to take the final podium place for McLaren.

George Russell produced a stirring drive for Mercedes to come home fourth after starting 11th, fending off Valtteri Bottas's Alfa

Romeo at the finish, while team-mate and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finished a distant 14th.

It was Verstappen's second win this season after Saudi Arabia, which has also included two retirements, and the 22nd of his career.

He reeled off a grand slam weekend with pole position, victory and fastest lap as well as victory in Saturday's sprint race.

He moved up to second in the title race behind Leclerc, reducing his deficit from 45 points to 27 to set up the prospect of an intense duel this year.

"Today, you never know with the weather how competitive you are going to be but I think we did very well and this one-two is very deserved," said Verstappen.

"The start was very important but afterwards, judging the conditions and when to swap to the slick tyres, because in the lead you have to always dictate the pace."