

OPINION 6

BUDGET FOR SKILLING &
DIGITAL EDUCATION PUSH

WORLD 8

PARL TO DECIDE AID
NEEDED FOR NEPAL: MIN

MONEY 9

DEVAS RECOVERY SUIT: A-I CAN
APPEAL AGAINST SEIZURE RULING

NEW DELHI, MONDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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INDIA BEAT
WINDIES BY 17
RUNS IN THIRD T20I
12 SPORT61% voting in 3rd
phase of UP pollsOne person shot
in Mainpuri in
poll-related violenceVIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■
LUCKNOW

One person was shot dead in Mainpuri in poll-related violence, but elsewhere the third phase of the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election ended peacefully on Sunday with a voter turnout of around 61 per cent.

The seats for which voting took place on Sunday are located in the west, central and southern parts of UP. In 2017, the BJP won 49 of these 59 seats while the Samajwadi Party (SP) won just nine. The Congress won one seat and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), none.

The polling ended at 6 pm on Sunday with an average 61 per cent turnout of voters till 6 pm. An average of 48.81 per cent voting was recorded till 3 pm in 59 Assembly constituencies spread in 16 districts in the third phase of Assembly elections in the State.

In Mainpuri, a BJP work-

er was shot near a polling station. The accused, identified as a SP worker, is in custody.

Among the key constituencies where polling was held on Sunday are Karhal where former Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is contesting his maiden Assembly election. The BJP has pitted Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Law and Justice Satya Pal Singh Baghel against Akhilesh Yadav.

According to the Election Commission, the average polling percentage till 5 p.m. was 59 per cent in Hathras, 57.14 per cent in Firozabad, 59.11 per cent in Kasganj, 63.58 per cent in Etah, 60.80 per cent in Mainpuri, 54.55 per cent in Farrukhabad, 60.28 per cent in Kannauj, and 58.35 per cent in Etawah. The voter turnout was 57.55 per cent in Auraiya, 58.48 per cent in Kanpur Dehat, 50.76 per cent in Kanpur Nagar, 53.847 per cent in Jalaun, 57.71 per cent in Jhansi, 67.38 per cent in Lalitpur, 57.90 per cent in Hamirpur and 62.02 per cent in Mahoba.

The districts where polling was held on Sunday are



People check their names in voters' list as they arrive to cast votes at a polling station, during the third phase of UP Assembly polls, in Kanpur, on Sunday. PTI

Hathras, Firozabad, Etah, Kasganj, Mainpuri, Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Etawah, Auraiya, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar, Jalaun, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Hamirpur, and Mahoba.

The third phase polling will also seal the fate of the SP chief's uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav, who is contesting from his traditional Jaswantnagar seat. Before the campaigning ended for the third phase on Friday, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra undertook a door-to-door march in Kanpur, Kalpi, Jalaun, and Hamirpur.

Continued on page 2

SP, Cong are soft on terror, says Modi

PREETAM SRIVASTAVA ■
HARDOI/ UNNAO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday launched a fresh attack on the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress for being soft on "terror" and pointed out that the previous SP Government had withdrawn cases against terrorists responsible for 14 incidents.

Addressing election rallies in HarDOI and Unnao in Uttar

At 65.32%, Punjab sees
decline in voter turnoutState had witnessed
a turnout of 78%
in the 2017
Assembly electionsMONIKA MALIK ■
CHANDIGARH

Punjab saw a sizeable decline in voters' turnout when the State recorded 65.32 per cent polling on Sunday in comparison to a voters turnout of 78 per cent in the 2017 Assembly polls. Sunday's voting will seal the fate of as many as 1,304 candidates, including 93 women, in the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).



AAP CM candidate Bhagwant Mann shows his inked finger after casting his vote for Punjab Assembly polls, in Mohali, on Sunday PTI

Even though the polling continued even after 6 pm, and the Election Commission of India released the figure of 65.32 per cent by 9:30 pm, the

Office of Punjab Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) did not come out with the updated official data.

The State's CEO Dr S Karuna Raju claimed that the polls remained peaceful with "not a single case of disruption of poll and inducement of voters that was brought to the Commission's notice during the day".

However, several complaints were made and allegations were levelled by some party leaders and candidates over malfunctioning of EVMs, while reports of firing, clashes between two groups, skirmishes, arguments, attack on candidates, were also reported from different places.

Continued on page 2

There is need for
parivartan in India,
say KCR-Uddhav2 CMs discuss
ways to cobble
anti-BJP front for
2024 LS elections

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI



Having deliberated at length on the need to float an Opposition front to take on the ruling BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Chief Ministers of Telangana and Maharashtra said here on Sunday that "there is need for *parivartan* (change) in the country" and that they had made a "new" and "good beginning" at their meeting. After a length-lengthy luncheon meeting with Uddhav Thackeray — at which the two leaders discussed inter-State and political issues — KC Chandrashekhara Rao (KCR) also met NCP chief Sharad Pawar at the latter's Silver Oak residence in south Mumbai

and discussed the ways to cobble an anti-BJP front for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. At a joint interaction with the media after their meeting, the Telangana Chief Minister said, "We have made a good beginning. You will get to see a good result of our meeting very soon. Uddhav and I have been talking to the leaders of like-minded regional and national parties. Both Uddhav and I feel that there is need for *parivartan* (change) in the country. In the coming days, we will all meet in Hyderabad or some other place to prepare a joint road map for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls."

Continued on page 2

State of border will
determine state of
ties with China: MEA

PTI ■ MUNICH

India's relationship with China is right now going through a "very difficult phase" after Beijing violated agreements not to bring the military forces in the border, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said, emphasising that the "state of the border will determine the state of the relationship".

Speaking at a panel discussion on Saturday at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2022 here, Jaishankar said that India was having a problem with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

"For 45 years, there was peace, there was stable border management, there were no military casualties on the border from 1975. That changed because we had agreements with China not to bring military forces to the border and the Chinese violated those agreements," the Minister said in response to a question from

‘Quad 21st century
way of responding
to more diversified,
dispersed world’

Munich: Dismissing the notion that the Quad is an Asian NATO, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that there are "interested parties" who advance such analogies and one should not slip into it, underlining that the four-nation grouping is a kind of 21st century way of responding to a more diversified and dispersed world. Continued on page 2

moderator Lynn Kuok.

"Now, the state of the border will determine the state of the relationship.

That's natural. So obviously, the relations with China right now are going through a very difficult phase," he added. Continued on page 2

India asks its citizens, students to leave Ukraine immediately

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst continuing tension in Ukraine, India on Sunday asked all its citizens there, including students to leave the country immediately. This was the second advisory in the last five days by the Indian Embassy in Kyiv. The families of Indian Embassy officials, too, were ordered to return to India immediately in view of the growing danger.

In the latest caution, the Embassy, which has set up a 24X7 control centre there to help its citizens, urged Indian nationals and students to temporarily leave the country as tensions escalate.

"In view of continued tensions in Ukraine, all Indian nationals whose stay is not deemed essential and all Indian students are advised to leave Ukraine temporarily. Indian students are advised to also get in touch with respective student contractors for updates on charter flights," the advisory read.

Continued on page 2



An instructor, right, shows a grenade during a training of members of a Ukrainian far-right group train, in Kyiv, Ukraine on Sunday. AP

Indian nationals were also urged to avail of the commercial and charter flights for orderly and timely departure from there. The advisory on February 15 had asked the students to leave the country as soon as possible.

There are more than 20,000 Indian students studying in various universities there. Since tension mounted with Russia, the air fares shot up. However, till now there was no plan to evacuate Indians from Ukraine.

US: Prez Biden ready to engage
with Prez Putin to prevent war

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is prepared to engage with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in any format at any place and time to prevent a war, top US diplomat said on Sunday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's comments came amid heightened tensions between Russia and the US, fuelled by fears that Moscow plans to invade Ukraine.

Significantly, Ukraine and Russia both called Sunday for intensified diplomatic efforts to avert all-out war, but blamed each other for a sharp escalation in shelling on the frontline separating Kyiv's forces from Moscow-backed separatists. After separate calls with France's President Emmanuel Macron, both Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Ukraine's Volodymyr

Zelensky pressed for more talks.

Later Blinken told CNN in an interview: "As we have described it, everything leading up to the actual invasion appears to be taking place. We believe President Putin has made the decision, but until the tanks are actually rolling and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President Putin from carrying this forward. President Biden is prepared to engage President Putin at any time, in any format, if that can help prevent a war. I reached out to my Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister to urge that we meet next week in Europe.

The plan is still to do that, unless Russia invades in the meantime," Blinken said in response to a question.

Continued on page 2

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Har Pal Aapke Saath

9, including bridegroom, killed in accident in Kota

Kota: Nine people, including the bridegroom, were killed after a car carrying a wedding party fell into the Chambal river here in the early hours of Sunday as the driver lost control of the vehicle due to drowsiness, police said.

They were on their way to Madhya Pradesh for the wedding in a Maruti Ertiga, they said.

The state government has announced a compensation of Rs 2 lakh for the dependents of the deceased and Rs 5 lakh for families that have lost two or more members in the accident.

The car fell into the river from a bridge early in the morning in Nayapura police station area after the driver lost control of the vehicle due to drowsiness, Superintendent of Police (city) Kesar Singh Shekhawat said. He said police received information about the accident around 7.50 am, following which a rescue operation was launched.

Initially, seven bodies were

pulled out from the car that had plunged seven-eight feet into the water. Two more bodies were recovered later, Shekhawat said.

The wedding party was going from Chauth Ka Barwara village in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur district to Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, he said.

The deceased have been identified as Avinash Valmiki (23), the bridegroom, his brother Keshav (30), car driver Islam Khan (35), Kushal (22), Shubham (23), Rohit Valmiki (22), Rahul (25), Vikas Valmiki (24) and Mukesh Gochar (35), the police said.

The accident occurred around 5.30 am. The wedding party reportedly left along with a bus carrying other guests from Chauth Ka Barwara around 2.30 am, District Collector, Kota, Harimohan Meena told PTL.

The bodies have been sent to the respective native places of the deceased in government ambulances after a post-

mortem examination at MBS Hospital, he said.

Lok Sabha Speaker and Kota-Bundi MP Om Birla and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot expressed grief over the loss of lives in the accident.

In a tweet in Hindi, Gehlot said, "The death of nine 'baratis', including the bridegroom, after their car fell into the Chambal river is very sad and unfortunate. (I) spoke to the collector and took stock of the situation. My deep condolences are with the aggrieved families. May God give them the strength to bear this loss and may the departed souls rest in peace."

"PWD Minister Shri Bhajanlal Jatav has been asked to visit the spot. Orders have been issued to provide a compensation of Rs 2 lakh to dependents of every person killed in the Kota accident and Rs 5 lakh to the families that have lost two or more of their members," he said in another tweet. **PTI**

FIR against Wankhede for false information in affidavit

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In fresh trouble for former director of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Sameer Wankhede, the Thane police on Saturday night registered an FIR against him for allegedly giving false information in an affidavit filed to seek liquor shop licence. Three months after Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik went to town alleging that Wankhede was - in violation of Central Civil Services (CCA) Rules, 1965 - running a liquor bar in Navi Mumbai which violates DoPT rules, the Kopri police station at Thane booked the NCB's former director under sections 181 (false statement), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 420 (cheating), 467, 468 and 471 (forgery) of the IPC for providing false information to obtain liquor shop licence.

The police said that the IRS officer had misled the State excise department by submitting a false affidavit about his age in order to obtain the

liquor sale licence. While submitting the application for the licence in February 1997, no date was mentioned but the application merely said that Wankhede was an adult. However, the excise department said that Wankhede was not 18 years old at the time and misled the department.

It may be recalled that on November 19, 2021, Malik had alleged that Dnyande Wankhede, who was working in the State Excise Department earlier had managed to get a permit room licence for his son Sameer Wankhede, when the latter was a minor in 1997-1998.

"As per the law, minors cannot be issued such liquor bar licence. Sameer Wankhede was only around 17 years 10 months old at that time, when he was issued the liquor licence. This was a big fraud perpetrated by his father," the minister had alleged.

"Sameer Wankhede's 'Sadguru Restro Bar' is located at Vashi in Navi Mumbai. The licence has been continuously renewed, without fail

and is currently valid till 2022," Malik had said.

"Sameer Wankhede had concealed the information about his owning a liquor bar while joining the central government services. It was only in 2017 that Wankhede declared that he owns the inherited property along with his father, which is a hotel but is on a lease, Malik had alleged.

"At that time, Sameer Wankhede declared that he owned a bequeathed property jointly with his father Dnyande, where a 'hotel' is running from which he gets an annual rental income is Rs. 240,000 for the huge 1,600 sq feet premises and the property was worth just Rs. 1 crore," Malik had said.

The Maharashtra Minister had also alleged that Sameer Wankhede had clearly flouted central service rules that prohibit any officers from running businesses. "I am filing complaints with the DoPT, Vigilance Commission and the IT Department as he belongs to the IRS cadre.

India asks...

From Page 1

However, till now there was no plan to evacuate Indians from Ukraine.

Air India, which was recently sold to Tata group by the Government, will fly three special aircraft to Ukraine on February 22, 24 and 26. The flights will operate to and from Boryspil International Airport, Ukraine.

India has all along reiterated its stand of a "quiet and constructive diplomacy" to resolve the crisis and said so in the United Security Council last week. Russia appreciated the Indian viewpoint and said in a tweet, "We welcome #India's balanced, principled and independent approach."

Desperate diplomatic efforts were now on to prevent the Russian invasion according to some Western countries and the United States of America.

However, Ukraine has maintained there is reason to panic and Russia has also maintained it will not take any armed action.

A telephone conversation between French President Emmanuel Macron and President Vladimir Putin about the situation in Ukraine got

underway on Sunday, according to agency reports.

Russia, according to Western leaders, has more than 150,000 troops along with missile batteries and warships massed around Ukraine, poised to strike.

Insisting that it has no intention to attack Ukraine, Russia, as per some reports, has done little to defuse tension. Its state media reportedly accused Kyiv of plotting an assault on rebel-held, pro-Russia enclaves in eastern Ukraine in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has charged Russia of preparing to plunge Europe into its worst conflict since World War II. Warning that any invasion of Ukraine would freeze Moscow out of global finance, he said Russian invasion plans would see its troops not just enter Ukraine from the rebel-held east, but from Belarus to the north and encircle the capital Kyiv.

The G7 Foreign Ministers have also expressed their grave concern about Russia's "threatening" military build-up around Ukraine, in "illegally annexed" Crimea and in Belarus and warned Moscow of 'massive consequences' upon any further aggression against Ukraine.

At 65%...

From Page 1

"As far as the law-and-order situation is concerned, some minor poll-related incidents were witnessed in the State and a total of 18 First Information Reports (FIRs) have been registered on the day of polling to avert any untoward incidents," said Dr. Raju in the official statement released after the completion of polling time, which is till 6 pm.

The commission's spokesperson maintained that compiling the final figure "is a long and manual process as the figures are being collected from all 24,740 polling stations and will be matched with statutory papers, which is taking time and the data is being compiled to assure that there should not be an error in the final figure".

The maximum polling percentage was witnessed at 77.8 per cent in Gidderbaha, while the lowest at 50.1 per cent was recorded in Amritsar West.

The State has recorded a dip in the total voter turnout this time as compared to 65.96 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, 77.37 per cent in the 2017 Assembly polls, and 70.89 per cent in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. However, the election authorities claimed that the final figure is expected to surpass 70 per cent, which will be shared by Monday evening.

The fate of many stalwarts, including Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu, former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, five-time Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, SAD president Sukhbir Badal, Aam Aadmi Party State unit president Bhagwant Mann, and many others, is now locked in the EVMs and would be declared along with others on March 10.

The CEO said that in the

morning during the mock poll, 146 ballot units, 152 control units, and 433 VVPAT machines were replaced, while 72 ballot units, 64 control units, and 649 VVPATs were replaced during the conduct of the poll.

Earlier during the day, AAP leader Raghav Chadha alleged EVM glitches at several booths across Punjab, while also accusing SAD and Congress of booth capturing. In a series of tweets, Chadha accused the rival parties of impairing EVMs and has asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to take immediate action.

"Reports coming in from Guru Har Sahai AC, Booth No. 23. Capturing attempted by SAD workers. They entered booths & are asking polling officers to let their NRI family members to vote (through someone on their behalf) else they won't allow anyone to vote," Raghav Chadha wrote in a tweet.

Lashing out at Cong's 'polling agent' for not letting voters freely exercise their franchise, he said, "In Bhoo AC's Booth No 95, a polling agent of Congress has placed his chair next to EVM so that he has a clear view of who is voting for which party. He isn't removing his chair despite complaints."

He further went on to accuse the poll officers of 'not applying ink' on voters who have cast their votes. "This is a serious issue and can lead to bogus voting," he added. However, no calcification on the same was provided by the Commission.

Besides, two sons of Ferozepur Urban BJP candidate Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi and Bollywood actor Mahie Gill besides an aide of the constituency's Congress nominee were booked for poll code violation. A clash was also reported to have taken place between workers of BJP and AAP at a border village in Ferozepur (urban).

'Quad 21st century...

From Page 1

Jaishankar was speaking during a panel discussion on 'A Sea Change? Regional Order and Security in the Indo-Pacific' at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2022 on Saturday evening.

"Quad is a grouping of four countries who have common interests, common values, a great deal of comfort, who happen to be located at four corners of the Indo-Pacific, who found out that in this world no country, not even the US, has the ability to address global challenges all on their own," Jaishankar said.

Jaishankar dismissed the notion that the four-member grouping is an Asian-NATO as "completely misleading term" and said "there are interested parties who advance that kind of analogies."

"I would urge you not to slip into that lazy analogy of an Asian-NATO. It isn't because there are three countries who are treaty allies. We are not a treaty ally. It doesn't have a treaty, a structure, a secretariat, it's a kind of 21st century way of responding to a more diversified, dispersed world," he said on the Quad grouping which has the United States, India, Australia and Japan as its members.

The incarnation of the Quad started in 2017. It's not post-2020 development, he said, referring to the tension along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh with China.

"Our relations with the Quad partners -- the US, Japan and Australia -- have steadily improved in the last 20 years. The quad has a value in itself. It is four countries who recognise today that the world would be a better place if they cooperated. And that's essentially what's happening," the minister said.

He said that the Quad has a range of views on its COVID-19 vaccine project, including on the TRIPS waiver, and observed if it was right to conduct "business as usual" when it comes to producing vaccines to contain the once-in-a-century pandemic with such horrific consequences.

"The Quad has agreed to do a vaccine project. I don't think the quad necessarily has an identical view on all subjects, including on the TRIPS waiver. I think we have a range of views on that. Perhaps ours are, in my view, the most progressive.

There is...

From Page 1

Describing Uddhav as his brother, KCR said, "We are like brothers. Our two States share a border of 1,000 km. I felt very happy to meet him. We had a lengthy discussion on various issues. There was an agreement between us many of the issues. With an aim to bring about progress, increase the pace of development, make some structural changes in governance and policies in the country, we have decided to work together in future.

I invite Uddhav to come to Telangana." "With the cooperation of the Maharashtra Government, we built the Kaleshwaram project. Telangana has benefited immensely from the project," KCR said. The TRS chief -- who has been criticising the ruling BJP on various issues for the past few weeks and had recently demanded the immediate dismissal of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for making unsavoury

remarks about former Congress president and MP Rahul Gandhi -- slammed the Modi Government for "misusing" Central investigating agencies against its political opponents. "We condemn the manner in which central probe agencies are being misused. The Centre must change its policies or it will face the consequences," KCR said. Accusing the BJP of practising "vindictive politics", Uddhav said, "The atmosphere prevailing in the country is not good.

The vindictive politics practised by some people is not good. It is not part of our Hindutva culture. It does not augur well for the country. It does not matter who becomes the Chief Minister or Prime Minister. We have to think about what will happen to the country..." "Hitting out at the Modi Government for its failure to address the "fundamental issues" facing the country, Uddhav said, "What we are witnessing is that some people are not bothering to deal with the fundamental issues facing the country.

Instead, they are trying to defame others." Stressing on the need for

States co-operating with one another, Uddhav said, "There is a need for the States have cordial relations between them. States cannot function in an ad hoc manner without bothering about national interest." The Maharashtra Chief Minister said that "a new beginning" had been made at the meeting between him and KCR. "It will take some for things to take shape. We all have to work hard.

But, I am confident that our effort will yield results. We will keep posted about the progress that we will make in the coming days." Talking about the meeting he had with KCR, Pawar said, "Our discussions were based on principles and the problems confronting the country. It's our responsibility to show the way to the countrymen, solve the problems of farmers and commoners." On his part, KCR said, "Pawar is our senior leader.

He supported our agitation (for Telangana State) right from 1969 till its birth (2014). We feel the country is not being run properly, development is stalled and the expected

progress has not taken place." At Sunday's Uddhav-KCR meeting, several of Maharashtra Ministers, Sena MPs Sanjay Raut and Arvind Sawant, the Chief Minister's son Tejas Thackeray were present. Senior NCP leaders, including Praful Patel, were present at the meeting between Pawar and KCR. The Telangana Chief Minister was accompanied among others by his MLC- daughter K. Kavitha, MPs Tamil Nadu Reddy, Santosh Kumar, B.P. Patil, MLAs Palla R. Reddy, TRS General Secretary Shravan Reddy and southern actor Prakash Raj.

The TRS chief, who has taken the lead in forging an alliance among the non-BJP parties for the 2024 Lok Sabha, is expected to meet the Chief Ministers of non-NDA States like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and RJD's Lalu Prasad in the days ahead. While former Prime Minister and JDS leader HD Devegowda has already extended his support to KCR for the initiative, Mamata Banerjee and MK Stalin have also evinced interest in floating an anti-BJP front for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

61%...

From Page 1

While BSP chief Mayawati addressed election meetings in Jalaun and Auraiya.

The BJP had approached the Election Commission seeking deployment of paramilitary forces at all booths in Karhal. Among other prominent faces in the fray in this phase are BJP's Satish Mahana (Maharajpur in Kanpur) and Ramvir Upadhaya (Sadabad in Hathras), and Louise Khurshid, who is contesting on the Congress ticket from Farrukhabad Sadar. Louise Khurshid is the wife of senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid.

Former IPS officer Asim Arun is contesting from Kannauj Sadar on the BJP ticket while UP Minister Ramnaresh Agnihotri is also in the fray from the Bhogaon seat in Mainpuri district.

In the third phase of polls as many as 627 candidates are in the fray, of which 97 are women. Over 2.16 crore voters were eligible to exercise their franchise at 25,794 polling places and

15,557 polling stations. Districts, where polling was held, are Hathras, Firozabad, Etah, Kasganj, Mainpuri, Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Etawah, Auraiya, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar, Jalaun, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Hamirpur, and Mahoba.

In Etawah city one person Krushnkant Tewari at the Kokpura polling booth died of cardiac arrest. He was rushed to the hospital. Later his body was handed over to family without a post-mortem.

In Mainpuri an incident of group clash leading to stone pelting was reported from the Kishni Assembly seat. Police later controlled the situation.

The SP and BJP workers clashed at a polling booth of the Babina Assembly seat in Jhansi district over fake voting. One person was injured in the incident. In the Kanpur Cantt Assembly seat many voters could not cast their vote as their name was missing from the electoral rolls.

The name of the entire family of Brijesh Shukla who had contested the municipal election in 2012 was missing from the voters' list. In the Kasganj Assembly seat five people were taken into custody for attempting to cast vote with fake identity papers.

SP, Cong are soft on...

From Page 1

Modi also cautioned voters against the venom of casteism being spread by Opposition parties, adding that they do not belong to any caste, or community and all that matters to them is their families' development rather than the development of the State and its people.

"It's time to give a fitting reply through your votes to those who played havoc with the State by giving patronage to the mafia and gangsters; who withdrew cases against terrorists responsible for the killings of innocent people for their vote bank politics; and those who spread rumours against Covid-19 vaccines that protected people's lives during the pandemic," the PM said.

Hitting out at SP leader Akhilesh Yadav and Priyanka Gandhi the PM said that their politics revolved around their mafia friends and families respectively, and they had nothing to do with development and the welfare of the people.

Modi said: "SP's CM candidate himself is unsafe on his seat. That's why he had to call his father, who had a humiliating ouster from the party, to campaign for him."

He added: "People of UP are saying, 'Jo suraksha laye hain, jo samman laye hain, hum

unko layenge.' The people of UP will celebrate Holi twice this year, first on March 10 when the BJP gets a thumping majority in the Assembly polls."

He said that the Opposition parties were not concerned about the welfare of poor people, farmer's uplift, safety and security of girls and women and employment of the youth, adding that they were best at making false promises to the people.

Modi remarked: "When they were in power, they could never ensure adequate supply of electricity. In fact, during the previous Government power cuts were normal and power supply was news in UP. When a transformer got burnt down in an area, it remained without power for months. So, they can never give you electricity, but they can give you electric shocks."

"They could hardly give houses to the poor and built only 34,000 toilets while the Yogi Adityanath-led Government has built 70,000 houses and 5 lakh toilets in Hardoi alone in the last five years. A total of 23 lakh people have got property cards in UP under the double engine Government, he pointed out.

"The Yogi Government has also made record purchases of wheat from farmers and record payments to sugarcane farmers, which the SP and BSP could never do. Besides, farmers are getting money transferred to their accounts under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. I believe that small farmers can play a big role in alleviating poverty in villages. The previous Government shut down 21 sugar mills in UP," he said.

State...

From Page 1

The eastern Ladakh border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry. The tension escalated following a deadly clash in the Galwan valley on June 15, 2020.

Jaishankar, who was in Melbourne last week, had said that the situation at the LAC has arisen due to the disregard of written agreements by China in 2020 not to mass soldiers at the border and noted that Beijing's actions have become an issue of 'legitimate concern' for the entire international community. "When a large country disregards written

commitments, I think it's an issue of legitimate concern for the entire international community," he had said in response to a question during a joint press conference with his Australian counterpart Marise Payne in Melbourne.

Jaishankar participated in the panel discussion on the Indo-Pacific at the MSC which is aimed at extensively deliberating on the escalating tension between the NATO countries and Russia over Ukraine.

The panelists included Australian Foreign Minister Payne, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, US chairwoman of the Senate Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation Jeanne Shaheen and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian. When moderator Lynn Kuok asked how India is contributing to

European security and compared the Ukraine crisis with the situation in the Indo-Pacific, Jaishankar said, "Well, I don't think the situations in the Indo Pacific and the transatlantic are really analogous."

"Certainly, the assumption in your question that somehow there is a trade-off and one country does this in the Pacific so in return you do something else, I don't think that's the way international relations work."

"We have quite distinct challenges, what is happening here or what is happening in the Indo-Pacific. In fact, if there was a connection by that logic, you would have had a lot of European powers already taking very sharp positions in the Indo-Pacific. We didn't see that. We haven't seen that since 2009," Jaishankar said, amidst an aggressive China flexing its muscles in the region.

Fresh UG curriculum to be ready in 4 months: DU

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University is preparing the curriculum of its various undergraduate courses and the process will take another three to four months, according to officials.

The Undergraduate Curriculum Framework (UGCF), prepared in accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP), was approved by the executive council of the university on February 11.

"We are now moving to get the courses done. The work has just begun. We will put the course content up for public feedback. The process will take another three to four months," an official said.

The UGCF includes two features of the NEP — the multidisciplinary approach and the multiple entry and exit scheme (MEES). Under MEES, students can exit at the end of an acade-



mic year with a degree. According to the draft, students will stand to earn a total of 176 credits at the end of the fourth year of their undergraduate degree. They need to earn a minimum of 50 per cent credits in a discipline to get the degree with a major in that discipline.

The official said the courses will be drafted accordingly. The new batch of students that will be admitted to Delhi University through the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CU CET) will be studying the revised courses. The university will get a nearly four-year window to work out the modal-

ities of the postgraduate courses. "The university will start work on framing the postgraduate curriculum after the undergraduate curriculum work is completed. It doesn't mean we are deferring it. It's just that the first batch of students will become eligible for one year Masters' degree after four years so that gives us time to work on the syllabus for postgraduate courses," the official said. A section of teachers has expressed opposition to the implementation of the NEP by Delhi University saying it may lead to several issues, including loss of work hours for teachers and subsequent job losses.

Pleasant Sunday morning in city

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It was a pleasant Sunday morning in Delhi with the minimum temperature settling at 11.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department said.

The relative humidity in the city at 8.30 am was 83 per cent.

The weatherman has predicted mainly clear skies with strong surface winds during the daytime.

The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 25 degrees Celsius.

The air quality index (AQI) of Delhi was recorded in the moderate category. The AQI read 175 around 9 am, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

The AQI of neighbouring Faridabad (171), Ghaziabad (185), Gurgaon (214), Noida (143) and Greater Noida (128) was recorded between poor and moderate categories.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered good, 51 and 100 satisfactory, 101 and 200 moderate, 201 and 300 poor, 301 and 400 very poor, and 401 and 500 severe. On Saturday, the maximum temperature in the national capital settled at 25.6 degrees Celsius, a notch above the season's average.

The minimum temperature was recorded at 10.8 degrees Celsius.

Seminar to discuss group housing society problems

It is likely to be organised in Gurugram on February 25, 26

Gurugram: To address problems of group housing societies and licence colonies a seminar will be organised in Gurugram reportedly on February 25 and 26 in association with Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (HREERA), Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP), Haryana Shethri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) and the district administration with the different Resident Welfare Association (RWA's) said a district administration's spokesperson in a statement.

According to officials, during seminar issues related to safe group housing society, problems of structural, sewerage connection, road and other issues will be discussed.

Meanwhile, representatives of different RWA's met the Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, during his visit to Gurugram on Sunday. Khattar also assured them necessary steps will be taken to resolve the issues related to housing societies. "The CM has listened group housing societies problems very carefully and assured that appropriate action will be taken at the earliest to resolve problems.

Also, we will put our problem as well as suggestions in the seminar," a representative of RWA said.

Dance teacher loses livelihood to Covid, Delhi Police helps him find job

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Distraught after he lost his livelihood in Mumbai due to the Covid-19 pandemic last year, 44-year-old dance teacher Balaji Sawalkar arrived in Delhi to start life afresh. But he found no takers for his dancing skills in the national Capital.

When he ran out of money, he started to live in 'Rain Basera', a night shelter for homeless people in the city. It was here the Delhi Police found him and helped him to get a job at a restaurant.

Talking to PTI, Sawalkar said he is a professional dancer and had been performing for the past 20 years. He said he had opened a dance academy called 'Bali Step of Dance Classes' at Saki Naka in Mumbai in 2013. Sawalkar said he also has a registered company named 'Bali Events and Entertainment LLP' but it has been closed for now.

"I had a dance institute in Mumbai which has been closed due to the COVID-19 as the

premises were on rent and I did not have funds to run it anymore. I was running out of money and left Mumbai. When I moved out of Mumbai, I went to four to five students' homes at different places, including Odisha and Bihar. "I was exploring whether I can open a new academy, but I saw the situation as same there," Sawalkar said.

He reached the national capital by train on Diwali, November 4, last year to explore more possibilities. "I reached here and initially was living at Bangla Sahib Gurudwara. Later, I shifted to a nearby Rain Basera. The arrangements at the Rain Basera are good and we get food. The SHO sir came at the Rain Basera and chose some persons, including me, to help in getting some livelihood. "I have joined Sandoz at Connaught Place on Friday (January 18) in food packaging department. I was informed that I will get Rs 18,000 salary per month. My aim is to continue as a dance teacher.

29-year-old youth dies in Uttam Nagar workshop fire, brother critical

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 29-year-old man was killed while his brother is critical after a drum containing chemical exploded inside their workshop due to short-circuit in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar area on Sunday.

The injured men have been identified as Talib and his younger brother Sahil (24). Both of them worked with their father Allauddin at the workshop where they repair sofa and other furnitures, police said. The incident took place when the two men were at the workshop, a drum which is used to store chemical foam exploded due to a short circuit following which a fire broke out inside their work station.

The fire department said they received the call at 10.14 am and two fire tenders were

rushed to the spot. "There was a blast in the chemical drum. We removed two men from the house. They had over 90 per cent burn injuries and were immediately rushed to the hospital. The fire was doused by 10.55 am," said Atul Garg, Director of Delhi Fire Service.

Injured Sahil was taken to the Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital where the doctors declared him dead. Talib was shifted to Safdarjung hospital for treatment and is stated to be critical, said a senior police official. According to Shankar Chaudhary, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Dwarka district, police received a call about a fire at Om Vihar in Uttam Nagar area and rushed to the spot. "The fire was extinguished. Two CAT ambulances and a fire tender was on spot" said the DCP.

G'gram roof collapse: Residents demand CBI probe, arrest of promoters, directors

Gurugram: Days after the roof collapse incident at Chintels Paradiso residential society here in Sector 109 which claimed two lives, hundreds of residents on Sunday staged a demonstration and organised a protest march demanding a CBI probe into the incident, the "immediate arrest" of the promoters & directors of Chintels India Ltd and the involved government officials who gave occupation certificate (OC) for these apartments.

The residents who were carrying placards also protested against the police and the district administration.

The protest was also supported by the other adjoining housing society residents.

The protest march was started from protest site

Chintels Paradiso condominium main gate towards ATS chowk (through Chintels Serenity, Brisk Lumbini, Raheja Chowk, ATS Chowk, and later the residents were returned to back to the main gate of Chintels Paradiso.

The residents have also demonstrated at ATS Chowk. "Two innocent lives were lost, and one fellow resident was seriously injured. Our fellow residents of D tower have been displaced from their homes, and the residents of other Chintels Paradiso towers have been staying in a state of fear & anguish in an unsafe environment, so we need immediate actions those guilty," Lalit Kapoor a resident said.

"The protest was against the inaction of government and administration because

Renovated creche welcomes kids at Mandoli Jail

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wearing fresh uniforms, young kids looked about excitedly at their newly renovated creche at the Mandoli women's prison here when it reopened after a long hiatus imposed due to Covid-19.

Dropped off by their mothers at 9 am, the little ones are eager to meet their friends and teacher after a long time and they are as enthusiastic about playing with new toys at the creche-cum-playschool which was set up when the prison was established in 2017.

Officials at Mandoli Jail no 16 said that as coronavirus cases came down and restrictions were removed in the outside world, the prison authorities also decided to open the creche again for children.

They said that all activities were suspended in the prison earlier due to the pandemic, and even NGOs and welfare organisations were not allowed access. This impacted the youngsters as they could not attend their classes, the officials said.

When PTI visited the playschool, the kids danced with their friends as a music



system blared out their favourite songs and animatedly introduced themselves to this correspondent. They pointed out their toys, two of which they have named "Patlu" and "Moto".

The two-room creche is painted in bright, welcoming colours and walls are adorned with vivid paintings and posters in a stark contrast to the rest of the jail premises, where the mothers of these children are inmates.

The officials said this was part of the new renovation carried out by the BYPL, which also provided 10 cots and new toys for all the 10 children who are part of it.

Sandeep Goel, Director General (Delhi Prisons) said, "We try to provide a positive and free environment to the

PIL filed in Delhi HC for direction to AAP Govt to appoint Lokayukta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A public interest litigation has been filed before the Delhi High Court seeking a direction to the AAP Government here to appoint within one month a Lokayukta as promised by it in its election manifesto of 2020.

Petitioner Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, a lawyer, has stated that the political party came into existence after the historic anti-corruption movement but the same party is not appointing the Lokayukta which confirms State's poor performance on many fronts," the plea submitted. "The AAP promised a stringent and effective Jan Lokpal Bill in 2015 and 2020 election manifesto but rather enacting the Law, it is not even appointing the Lokayukta under outdated ineffective 1995 Act and hundreds of serious complaints relating to corruption against MLAs are pending in Lokayukta Office," the petition has submitted.

Peddlers held in Ghaziabad with drugs worth ₹4 cr

Arrests were made on Saturday after a tip-off

PTI ■ GHAZIABAD

Two alleged interstate drug peddlers were nabbed in a joint operation of Delhi and Ghaziabad Police with 105 kg contraband worth Rs 4 crore, a senior officer here said on Sunday.

The arrests were made on Saturday with the help of a tip-off when police searched a suspicious car on Delhi-Meerut Express way near Ganga canal, SP (rural) Iraj Raja told reporters in a press conference.

The accused were identified as Sanjit and Ankur, both got married in October last year.

The mountain warfare trained ITBP is primarily deployed to guard the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and many of its units are deployed for rendering law and order duties in various parts of the country including in the national capital.

ITBP jawan shoots himself dead in central Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) jawan deployed for security duty at the Teen Murti Bhavan here allegedly shot himself dead on Sunday using his service rifle, officials said.

Constable Y Reddy was found dead around 5 am with his INSAS rifle lying next to him, they said. Reddy was from Karnataka and had returned from a 30-day leave just about two weeks back. A purported suicide note was recovered from his bed in which he has accused his wife and father-in-law of mentally harassing him, officials said.

The jawan got married in October last year. The mountain warfare trained ITBP is primarily

deployed to guard the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and many of its units are deployed for rendering law and order duties in various parts of the country including in the national capital.

NDMC to implement '100% mechanical sweeping' to make city pollution free

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the aim of making New Delhi area pollution, dust-free and making it environmentally friendly, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) will implement "100 per cent mechanical sweeping" in its areas.

Talking about the development, Vice Chairman-NDMC, Satish Upadhyay said "It is the need of the hour that there should be comprehensive planning of housekeeping through the mechanical process instead of manual process on the lines of Airport housekeeping. It is observed during the inspection with Market Traders Associations of NDMC."

Upadhyay further said that the first phase of this mechanical sweeping work will cover the 14 Block and 7 Radial Roads of Connaught Place, as it is a biggest and prominent commercial market situated in the heart of Capital City where more than one lakh visitors, traders come for carrying out day to day business and commercial activities.

He further informed that in the second phase, it will be implemented for Hanuman

training children in language right from the beginning, they said. They spend the day learning new things using play tools. From plays to rhymes and poems to alphabets in Hindi and English, they are trained by inmates who work in shifts. They also have a number of colouring books and slides. The creche closes at 4 pm. Students are provided five pairs of uniform for each day of their classes from Monday to Friday, the officials said, adding that their uniforms are washed on the same day to maintain hygiene. The children are provided a healthy diet which is rich in proteins and includes fruits, sprouts along with seasonal vegetables. Children younger than two years do not attend the creche as they need their mother's care 24X7 at that age, they added.

Jail Superintendent, Mandoli Jail no 16, Anita Dayal said they wanted kids to have pleasant memories of their childhood, like any child living beyond these walls. "We enable this through our small setup through the creche being run by jail staff, aided by NGOs and CSR project of companies... All efforts become worthwhile when you

see these little faces smiling," she told PTI.

Tulika Kiran, from India Vision Management, takes classes for children at alternate days at Mandoli and at Tihar prison on the remaining days. She was also in BBC's list of 100 inspirational and influential women of 2017. The inmates who teach the children have been trained by 'mobile creches' of the NGO. They have taught the children about coronavirus and the measures required to safeguard themselves. "Corona is bad. We have to keep ourselves safe from the infection and always wash our hands. We also have to maintain distance from each other," chant the students seriously.

One of the inmates taking classes is a BA graduate who has worked as a teacher at a playschool before. She is in jail along with her family since 2013 in connection with a case of murder. She is assisted at the creche by an inmate who is a Nigerian national and was arrested under the NDPS Act after landing at the airport in India. The first inmate says teaching is her passion and it motivated her to teach at the creche here.

Former Special Commissioner of Delhi Police made DERC ombudsman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's power regulator DERC has appointed Delhi Police's former Special Commissioner Pardeep Kumar Bhardwaj as its ombudsman to examine grievances of the city's electricity consumers.

A 1987-batch IPS officer of the AGMUT cadre, Bhardwaj had earlier held several prestigious posts in the central government and had retired as a special commissioner of Delhi Police. He was administered the oath of office by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission Chairman Justice (Retd) Shabihul Haseen earlier this week, said a DERC statement. The institution of the Electricity Ombudsman was established by the Commission under the provisions of Sections 42(5) and 42(6) of the Electricity Act, 2003 and the DERC (Forum for redressal of grievances of the consumers and ombudsman) Regulations, 2018.

Four consumer grievances redressal forum (CGRF), one each for consumers of discoms BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd (BRPL), BSES Yamuna Power Ltd (BYPL), Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd (TPDDL) and New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) have been functioning since 2004. Any aggrieved electricity consumer may approach the appropriate forum seeking redressal of his grievance related to metering, billing, grant of a new connection, disconnection, reconnection, change of name of the registered consumer. But these forums cannot be moved in matters related to the unauthorised use or theft of electricity and meter tampering among others.

AAP's stand against corruption exposed, says BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party questioned the Aam Aadmi Party leader for not expelling its councilor Geeta Rawat who was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for allegedly accepting bribes for permitting laying of a building roof unhindered.

Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the baseless campaign of leveling a series of allegations against BJP councilors being run by Aam Aadmi Party leaders, has fallen flat and the dual character of AAP leaders towards corruption too stands exposed now. For the last 2-3 years AAP leaders have been alleging that BJP Councilors patronize illegal construction but the same AAP leaders have gone underground after their party Councilor was caught red handed, he said.

The central probe agency booked Rawat, municipal councillor, Ward 10-E, East Delhi Municipal Council (EDMC), and an unidentified person on the allegations of demanding a bribe of Rs 20,000 from the complainant for extending him a favour to lay the roof of his building in an unhindered manner.



Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta, along with party MPs, MLAs and workers, stages a protest against Arvind Kejriwal at Rajghat in New Delhi on Sunday, Ranjan Dimri/THE PIONEER

Govt ends need for empanelment of DIGs from IPS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has done away with the need for empanelment of DIG (Deputy Inspector General) from the Indian Police Service (IPS) for Central deputations. The move is aimed at filling shortage of such officers on Central deputation as also to relieve the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by the Prime Minister, for approving such empanelment at the Centre. Technically, senior positions in the Government are from the rank of joint secretary which is Inspector General in the IPS hierarchy. The Inspector General is one rank higher than a DIG, officials said. "The Appointments Committee of Cabinet has approved proposal of Ministry of Home Affairs for dispensing with empanelment at level of DIG with immediate effect and carrying out corresponding stipulated amendments, in the existing IPS Tenure Policy," reads a recent order of

Secretariat of ACC under the Personnel Ministry. The Union Home Ministry being cadre-controlling authority for IPS officers mooted the proposal for dispensing with the empanelment of DIGs through office memorandums dated April 16, 2021 and December 31, 2020. The empanelment process entails selection of officers from the States for deputation with the Centre which is often tedious and time consuming as a batch of IPS officers are first selected for empanelment and then individual officers are shortlisted for Central deputation. With the change in the tenure policy of IPS officers relating to the DIGs, the Central can now select such officers from a wider pool of officers without having regard to the batch of IPS officers who are in the rank of DIG in different States. Also, the Centre will not need to wait for empanelment of a batch of officers or individual officers before shortlisting them for Central deputation.

Cong plans Opp meet after poll results to take on BJP in 2024

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress is closely watching the growing bonhomie between some regional parties and the Chief Ministers' interactions in the midst of the ensuing Assembly elections in five States, including the crucial Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Sources in the party said Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who is hopeful to retain Punjab and wrest Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur from the BJP and its alliance partners, is contemplating to call on a grand opposition meeting post the assembly election results on March 10 and before the second part of the budget session resumes in the Parliament. Party sources said all including TMC will be invited to formulate a common intention strategy towards taking on the BJP in the 2024 General Elections. "We held two meetings earlier. On both occasions, all opposition parties were invited. This time, too, they will be invited," said Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, a key person behind the initiative. The last when the opposition parties met was on August 20 last year with participation of 19 political parties during which Sonia Gandhi had urged the leaders to rise above individual compulsions in the interest of the nation and start formulating for the single objective to oust BJP and bring back a government that "believes in the values of the freedom movement and in the principles and provisions of our Constitution". The unification continued until the Trinamool Congress launched an offensive against the grand old party probably devised by poll strategist Prashant Kishor who is now thrown out from all the close quarters of parties he worked with. "The message is loud and clear after Prashant Kishor made efforts to re-establish his relations with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar now. As politically all is aware the sour relations of Nitish and his major partner BJP in Bihar it is certain that post results if the UP and other results don't meet BJP's expectations then Nitish may look for a different shore to tide with," said a very senior Congress leader,

requesting not be named. Congress, which is anticipating a massive gain as compared to the other non BJP parties in poll fray now, may flex its muscles against TMC, which in recent months has been questioning its supremacy. Sonia in her last meeting with opposition parties, which was boycotted by TMC, had mentioned she was looking beyond the TMC when she invited DMK, NCP, RJD, SP, BSP, CPI (M) and Shiv Sena for a strategy meeting during the winter session of Parliament. Sources said TMC supremo West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee had expressed her annoyance over the way the draft was prepared by CPI M leader Sitaram Yechury regarding which she had suggested for a core group of a few leaders to monitor regularly. Congress has swung into action after Mamata took a lead in roping DMK, TRS, Shiv Sena and Samajwadi Party early this month leading to the latest meeting of Telangana CM KCR and Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray. Congress is in alliance government with Thackeray in Maharashtra and with DMK in Tamil Nadu.

Raja urges PM to reconsider move on NALCO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India general secretary D Raja on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the move to privatise the National Aluminium Company Ltd (NALCO). In his letter to Modi, the CPI leader said that profit making NALCO should not be divested and Government must concentrate on technology upgradation of the public sector company. "We vehemently oppose the disastrous plan of your government to implement 100 per cent strategic disinvestment in National Aluminium Company Ltd (NALCO) by way of privatisation. NALCO is a Navaratna company under the Ministry of Mines, Government of India. Nalco, established in January 7, 1981, has been the top most CPSE, producing and exporting high quality Alumina and Aluminium for the last 40 years. I want to draw our attention to the fact that there is widespread resentment among the people and workers in particular to the anti-worker and anti-people move.

EC restores number of star campaigners parties can field in ongoing polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Sunday restored the number of star campaigners a party can field for campaigning in the ongoing polls in five states. Now, recognised national and State parties can field a maximum of 40 star campaigners. Other parties which are registered but not recognised can now have 20 star campaigners. "... The numbers of both active and new COVID-19 cases are receding and the restrictions put in place both by the central government and state governments to check the spread of pandemic are being lifted gradually..." The Election Commission after due deliberation has decided to restore the maximum limit on number of star campaigners..." the Commission said in a letter to political parties. The letter said now the maximum limit on the number of star campaigners for recognised national and state political parties "shall be 40 and for other than recognised political party it shall be 20." The Commission further added that the list of Star Campaigners shall be communicated within a period of 7 (seven) days from the date of the notification. The Commission had in October 2020 reduced the number of star campaigners for recognised national and state parties from 40 to 30, as large gatherings were witnessed during campaigning in Bihar assembly elections and bypolls in several states amid the coronavirus pandemic. For unrecognised registered political parties, the maximum number of star campaigners was brought down to 15 from 20. It said for both phases of Manipur assembly polls, phase 5, 6 and 7 of Uttar Pradesh elections and assembly bypoll to Majuli seat in Assam, the list of additional star campaigners can be submitted to the Election Commission or the concerned Chief Electoral Officer by 5 PM on February 23. The expenditure of star campaigner is borne by the party and not the candidate or candidates for which he or she campaigns.

President's Fleet Review today at Visakhapatnam

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

The stage is all set for grand President's Fleet Review on Monday in Visakhapatnam. The maritime fleet review is conducted once in tenure of President and upcoming event is 12th since Independence. Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar reached Visakhapatnam on Saturday and reviewed overall preparations for President's Fleet Review, officials said here on Sunday. The 12th edition is part of 75th anniversary of India's Independence, being celebrated as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. President Ram Nath Kovind, who is also Supreme Commander of Armed Forces, embarked on 'Presidential Yacht INS Sumitra' will review Indian Naval Fleet comprising over 60 ships and submarines, and 55 aircraft. It is pertinent to mention that 47 out of 60 ships and submarines participating in event have been constructed in Indian shipyards, thus showcasing indigenous capabilities and progress towards Atmanirbharta. Ships from all Naval Commands and Andaman and Nicobar Command are anchored in four columns. The Presidential yacht will sail past 44 ships anchored in four lanes, and will be accorded ceremonial salute, one by one. The participating platforms in review includes newly inducted combat platforms, latest stealth destroyer INS Visakhapatnam and INS Vela, a Kalvari class submarine commissioned into Indian Navy recently. Warships Chennai, Delhi, Teg and three Shivalik class frigates and three Kamorta class ASW Corvettes will also form part of review. Ships from Coast Guard, Shipping Corporation of India and Ministry of Earth Sciences are also taking part.

SC stays death sentence awarded to man in case of gangrape of minor in MP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has stayed the operation of death sentence awarded to a man in a case of gang-rape of a seven-year-old girl in Madhya Pradesh in 2018. While hearing an appeal filed by the convict against the Madhya Pradesh High Court verdict of September last year affirming the capital punishment, a bench headed by Justice U U Lalit said that pending further consideration, the operation of death sentence awarded to him shall remain stayed. The apex court, which said that psychological evaluation report of the convict be placed before it, directed that report of the jail administration concerned about the nature of work done by the appellant while in jail be also placed. "Pending further consideration, the effect and operation of death sentence awarded to the appellant shall remain stayed. Let an intimation in this regard be sent to the prison concerned immediately," the bench, also comprising Justices S R Bhat and P S Narasimha, said in its February 14 order. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by the appellant challenging the high court judgement which had affirmed the death sentence awarded to him and one other convict in the case by the trial court. The bench said the state shall place before it the reports of all probation officers relating to the appellant before the next date of hearing. "We also feel that the interest of justice dictates that we obtain a psychological evaluation of the appellant. We direct the Director, Mental Care Hospital, District Indore, Madhya Pradesh to

constitute a suitable team for psychological evaluation of the accused/appellant in this case and send a report before the next date of hearing," it said. The bench directed that authorities of jail, where the appellant is presently lodged, shall render complete co-operation in facilitating access to and due evaluation of the convict in all respects. The apex court has posted the matter for further hearing on March 22. In its verdict, the high court had confirmed the death sentence awarded by a trial court in August 2018 to the two convicts in the case. In June 2018, the grandmother of the girl had lodged a report at a police station in Mandsaur that the child was missing from her school premises after the classes were over for the day. The police registered the case and on the next date, the girl was found in an injured condition and was taken to a hospital. The girl was provided treatment and she narrated the incident to the police about how she was taken to a secluded spot and was sexually assaulted. After considering the evidence, the trial court had awarded death penalty to the two convicts. "The facts of the present case reveal an ominous plot hatched by the appellants seeking to satiate their lust by breaching the confidence of the minor prosecutrix girl and then heaping miseries upon her by committing such forceful aggravated penetrative sexual assault which is most ruthless in nature," the high court had said in its judgement. The high court had also observed that rights of the victim cannot take a back seat while considering the rights of the accused persons.

UNHRC slams India for illegally detaining French national

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The UN's Human Rights High Commissioner's office (UNHRC) office has admonished India for illegally detaining a French national and trying to extradite to Chile. In a six-page order uploaded on Saturday, the UN Human Rights body observed that India totally violated the norms by arresting a French national Marie Emmanuelle Verhoeven who visited on valid visa in February 2015 and illegally detained in Tihar prison for 17 months, even after the Delhi High Court ordered to release her. Verhoeven was a UN staffer in Chile during 1985 to 1995 and was a suspect in a political killing happened during the end days of military dictatorship of Pinochet regime. She was visiting India's Buddhist places from 2011 on

travel visa from her home country France. In February 2015, the 55 year old French national was arrested from India-Nepal border and placed in Tihar jail as per a Red Corner Notice issued by Chile. Earlier, she was not allowed to communicate with the French Embassy in India and later senior lawyer Ramni Taneja took up her case and Delhi High Court ordered her release in September 2015. But within hours Ministry of External Affairs officials visited jail and she was re-arrested showing RCN issued by Chile. The case went up to Supreme Court and then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and PMO intervened and she was discharged from all cases and allowed to go back to home country France in July 2017. The six page order of UNHR body narrates the ordeal of Verhoeven in Indian prison.

Heavy rainfall events increased from 43 in 2015 to 115 in 2021:IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There has been an increase in heavy rainfall events since 2015 over Kerala, and the worrisome part is that these incidences are occurring not just during the southwest monsoon but also the north-west monsoon months, making it nearly 10 months in a year. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) data showed that the total incidents of very heavy rainfall increased from 43 in 2015 to 115 in 2021. Very heavy rainfall events are categorised as days that experience rainfall between 115.6 and 204.4 mm. The data showed that 43 incidences of very heavy rainfall were registered in 2015, of



which 19 were in June; year 2016 registered 23, of which 16 alone were in June; 2017 registered 38 such events, with September witnessing 14 incidences. The year 2018 registered 163 such events, with August recording 74 such events, June 35 and June 34. Next year, there were 117 incidences, with 71 being registered in August and 22 in July

Advisory to all airline operators to implement child restraint system

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has sent an advisory to all airline operators to implement a Child Restraint System specifically designed to protect and restrain an infant or child during all phases of flight. "It is advised that airlines may encourage and increase the use of Child restraint system by passengers, wherever feasible, travelling by air with infants or children. The airlines may develop the processes, relevant policies, procedures and training programmes, standard operating procedures (SOP), as well as guidelines for managing change through their safety management systems to allow and enable the use of CRS on board their aircraft," the DGCA said in its advisory to all airlines. CRS is any device, other than a seat belt, that is designed specifically to protect and restrain an infant

or child during all phases of flight. It typically has an internal harness and belt combination. The device needs to interface with the aircraft seat. This includes devices that are secured using the aircraft seat belt as well as systems that secure the device to the aircraft seat. This is one of the recommendations of a sub-committee set up after the Air India Express airline accident in Kozhikode in August 2020. The advisory further said that proper use of restraints is one of the most basic and important factor in surviving an accident. "It is not possible for a parent to physically restrain an infant or child, especially during a sudden acceleration or deceleration, unanticipated or severe turbulence, or impact. The safest way to secure an infant or child on board an aircraft is child restraint system (CRS), in a

dedicated seat, appropriate for that infant or child," the advisory said. Airline operators were also told to make available on their websites the width of the narrowest and widest passenger seats in each class of service for each make, model and series of airplane used in passenger-carrying operations, and prohibit the use of certain types of Child Restraint Systems during ground movement, take-off, and landing. An Air India Express flight from Dubai to Kozhikode landed in extreme weather conditions on August 7, 2020 after aborting two attempts and overshot the runway in its third attempt to land. Due to this, the aircraft that had 184 people on board including 10 children, was broken into two. It also claimed the lives of 21 passengers including two pilots and left several others injured.

35% Indians suffer from fatty liver, unaware

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least one out of four people have fatty liver disease (FLD) or hepatic steatosis, a condition when too much fat is deposited on the liver. But most are unaware of it. In India, a significant percentage ie 35 per cent of population in India suffers from FLD and number is on increase, one of the main reasons for non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension, according to doctors. Dr Shiv Kumar Sarin, Head, Department of Hepatology & Director, Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences in Delhi explained, "When lipids accumulate in liver, it limits its insulin capability, and to compensate, the pancreas organ produces insulin, which is insufficient to cope with regular biological processes. As a result,

the body undergoes insulin resistance, and a person develops pre-diabetic symptoms. "Those fats start to go into bloodstream and get deposited in arteries directing to risks of heart stroke or heart attack. Ample evidence suggests that elevated Gamma-GT enzyme activity is associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease," he said at a webinar on "Managing Liver Care," organised by ASSOCHAM, as a part of its "Illness to Wellness campaign." Dr Rajesh Kesari, Founder, and Director Total Care Control, Delhi-NCR, added "Liver is termed as the chemical factory of our body hence our liver must bear brunt of our modern-day lifestyle. The role of liver in maintaining health was known for ages- but has once again caught attention as liver is unable to handle excess fat which is there in our diet and

is becoming reason for many diseases like Diabetes, Hypertension, Atherosclerosis, etc. "Human liver is one of most important organs in our body performing more than 500 vital functions like detoxification of drugs, resisting infections by making immune factors, converting poisonous ammonia to urea, processing haemoglobin," said Dr Sakshi Karkra, Head - Pediatric, Gastroenterology & Hepatology, Artemis Hospitals, Gurugram. Liver disease can be genetic (inherited) or acquired. The symptoms range from fatigue, irritability, headaches, difficulty concentrating, vomiting, anxiety, and in advanced stages yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), itchy skin, swelling of lower abdomen, and dark urine. "The liver can repair itself up to a certain point so damage can be reduced

if liver disease is detected at an early stage," she said Dr Bhavin Bhupendra Vasavada, Surgical Gastroenterologist, Hepato Biliary and Liver Transplant Surgeon, Shalby Multi-Specialty Hospitals, said "Due to some of great regeneration capacity of liver, symptoms are not seen unless damage is severe and generally when alarming symptoms are seen, liver transplant remains only curative treatment. "Hence, liver disease treatment should include screening, early identification, and prevention. If hepatitis is identified early, there are numerous effective oral therapies available, and a transplant can be avoided. "The major preventive approaches are an emphasis on reducing alcohol addiction, a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and obesity prevention."

Patient with leukemia, virus infection cured post stem transplant

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adopting a newer approach that may make the treatment available to people afflicting with HIV, scientists have cured a US patient with leukemia and virus infection after attempting a stem transplant on her from a donor. The US patient has become the first woman and the third person to date to be cured of HIV after receiving a stem cell transplant from a donor who was naturally resistant to the virus that causes AIDS. The case of a middle-aged woman of mixed race, presented at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Denver, is also the first involving umbilical cord blood, a newer approach that may make the treatment available

to more people. As in two other successful cases that have been reported, the transplanted donor cells bore a mutation that makes them resistant to HIV infection. Since receiving the cord blood to treat her acute myeloid leukemia - a cancer that starts in blood-forming cells in the bone marrow - the woman has been in remission and free of the virus for 14 months, without the need for potent HIV treatments known as antiretroviral therapy. The two prior cases occurred in males - one white and one Latino - who had received adult stem cells, which are more frequently used in bone marrow transplants. "This is now the third report of a cure in this setting, and the first in a woman living with HIV," Sharon Lewin, President-Elect of the

International AIDS Society, said in a statement. The case is part of a larger U.S.-backed study led by Dr. Yvonne Bryson of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and Dr. Deborah Persaud of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. It aims to follow 25 people with HIV who undergo a transplant with stem cells taken from umbilical cord blood for the treatment of cancer and other serious conditions. Patients in the trial first undergo chemotherapy to kill off the cancerous immune cells. Doctors then transplant stem cells from individuals with a specific genetic mutation in which they lack receptors used by the virus to infect cells. Scientists believe these individuals then develop an immune system resistant to HIV. Lewin said bone

marrow transplants are not a viable strategy to cure most people living with HIV. But the report "confirms that a cure for HIV is possible and further strengthens using gene therapy as a viable strategy for an HIV cure," she said. The study suggests that an important element to the success is the transplantation of HIV-resistant cells. Previously, scientists believed that a common stem cell transplant side effect called graft-versus-host disease, in which the donor immune system attacks the recipient's immune system, played a role in a possible cure. "Taken together, these three cases of a cure post stem cell transplant all help in teasing out the various components of the transplant that were absolutely key to a cure," Lewin said.

URBAN CIVIC POLLS TN registers 60% voting, Chennai lowest of 43%

Chennai: Tamil Nadu registered a poll percentage of 60.70 per cent in the February 19 urban local bodies election that witnessed an interesting multi-cornered contest with the constituents of the opposition AIADMK alliance contesting on their respective party's own strengths, rather than remaining together, against the DMK combine.

Among the 21 corporations, which went to polls, the Greater Chennai Corporation registered the lowest turnout of 43.59 per cent while Karur polled the maximum of 75.84 per cent on Saturday, according to the Tamil Nadu State Election Commission (TNSEC).

The single-phase election was held to fill up 12,838 posts in 21 corporations, 138 municipalities, 490 town panchayats and 649 urban local bodies in the state. A total of 74,416 can-

didates including many inderep- dented entered the fray.

Among the municipalities, Dharmapuri registered an impressive turnout of 81.37 per cent and Nilgiris recorded the lowest voter turnout of 59.98 per cent, the SEC said.

On the whole, the town panchayats and municipalities recorded a good voter turnout of 74.68 per cent and 68.22 per cent respectively, while the highly urbanised corporations saw a low turnout of 52.22 per cent.

The electoral fortunes of the candidates of various political parties and independents, as well, will be known on February 22 when the SEC takes up the counting of votes.

The local body elections in TN were held after more than a decade. The polls were last conducted in 2011 when the AIADMK was in power in the state. **PTI**

Didi to meet Stalin, KCR, Uddhav in Delhi in March To hold TMC national working committee meeting

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is likely to meet her counterparts from Opposition parties in Delhi in the second week of March when she would be in the national Capital, sources in the Bengal's Trinamool Congress said.

In Delhi, Mamata is likely to meet the leaders like Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, his Telangana counter- part K Chandrashekhara Rao and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

With this purpose in mind the TMC supremo has also lined up the second Trinamool Congress national working committee meeting in Delhi. Party spokesperson and Rajya Sabha Member Sukhendu Sekhar Roy said that the Chief Minister was likely to hold the NWC meeting in Delhi.

He would not dwell on whether the timing of the proposed NCW meeting had any- thing to do with the Chief Minister's meet. Inside sources however said that Banerjee



wanted her entire party lead- ership by her side during her presence in Delhi during the Chief Minister's conclave.

"Considering the domi- neering attitude of the BJP Government and the regular interference in the State Government's affairs through the Governor's office Mamata Banerjee proposed to take up this issue with the other Chief Ministers and they have responded to her call," said a Bengal TMC leader who is also a part of the newly constituted TMC NCW.

Banerjee had spoken to Rao and Stalin soon after Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar prorogued the State Assembly allegedly without- consulting the State Government weeks ahead of

the commencement of the Budget Session.

Following his conversations with her the Tamil Nadu Chief Ministertweeted, "Beloved Didi ... telephoned me to share her concern and anguish on the Constitutional overstepping and brazen misuse of power by the Governors of non-BJP ruled States. She suggested for a meet- ing of Opposition CMs." He further said that he had "assured her of DMK's commitment to uphold State autonomy," adding "Convention of Opposition CMs will soon happen out of Delhi."

On whether the Congress or Left Chief Ministers would join the meeting the Bengal Trinamool leader said "any opposition Chief Minister who thinks that the BJP Government is trying to break the federal structure of the country is welcome in the meeting ... because it is not the concern of the TMC or DMK or Congress but it is the con- cern of all the political parties who want to preserve the democratic federal structure of the country."

Trinamool expels 61 party rebels from North 24 Parganas

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Sunday expelled 61 party leaders from North 24 Parganas district alone for filing nomi- nation defying its diktats ahead of the February 27 municipal elections. The party is consid- eringsimilar steps in cases of other municipal boards too, sources said.

"In consultation with the top leadership the district party has decided to expel the 61 leaders who have gone against the party line and filed nomi- nation either independently or on the tickets of other parties," district party president Partho Bhowmick said.

Election to 108 municipal boards will be conducted on February 27.

Hundreds of sitting TMC councilors from various dis- tricts had revolted and their supporters have been protest- ing on the streets after they were denied party tickets to contest in the coming elections.

"Discipline is primary in the party and anyone who

61 leaders have gone against the party line and filed nominations either independently or on the tickets of other parties

defies the party decision will be considered to be defying the orders of our party supremo Mamata Banerjee ... for such people TMC is not the right place," said Bhowmick.

BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said that "the TMC is a party of syndicates where elected posts are a major source of earning ... now new- faces have been given tickets because they also want their shares inthe booty ... those who have been denied tickets have descended on the streets because they will now lose their source of earning."

CPI(M)'s Sujana Chakrabarty said that "the TMC will come to an end a sit was born ... it rose by corrup- tion and chit fund money and it will die by corruption."

Bengal Min dies at Mumbai hospital

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Veteran Trinamool Congress leader and senior Bengal Minister Sadhan Pande on Sunday died at a Mumbai hospital after prolonged ill- ness, State Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said.

The 71-year-old leader who is survived by his daugh- ter Shreya Pande,also a politi- cian had been a seven-time MLA from North Kolkata's Burtolla area.

The Chief Minister got the information from North Kolkata MP Sudip Bandopadhyay tweeted: "Our senior colleague, party leader and Cabinet Minister Sadhan Pande has passed away today morning at Mumbai.

Had a wonderful relation for long. Deeply pained at this loss. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, followers."

In another condolence message, the Chief Minister said that she has lost an elder and would miss his advice on various matters.

BJYM gen secy shot dead in Hathras

Hathras: The General Secretary of Bharatiya Janata Party Yuva Morcha has been shot in a suspicious condition in Sikandrau of Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. The leader of BJYM in injured condition was found in the upper room of the house. The injured leader was admitted to the hospital from where he was referred to Aligarh JN Medical College. But he succumbed to death on the way to Aligarh. On getting the information, the police reached the spot. The case is being investigated.

District General Secretary of BJP Yuva Morcha, Krishna Yadav was shot in suspicious circumstances on Sunday after- noon. He was found in an

injured condition in the upper floor at the residence located at Sikandrau. There have been reports of bullets being fired near the temple. Police is prob- ing the incident. Krishna Yadav has been working in the Gau Raksha Dal for a long time. About six months ago, he was made District General Secretary in the executive com- mittee of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. On Sunday afternoon, the police received information that Krishna Yadav had suf- fered an injury. He is lying injured in a critical condition on the top floor of the house located at Gausganj Sikandrau. Before the arrival of the police, relatives took them to Aligarh where he succumbed to death

on the way. Police have found a pistol and a cartridge shell from the upstairs room. It is being told that Krishna has been shot near the forehead. Police is trying to find out the reason behind the incident and the case is being investi- gated and the dead body has been sent for post-mortem.

Voting percentage in Hathras58.95% of votes were casted in Hathras till 5 pm where on the other hand peo- ple boycotted voting in the vil- lage bheem nagariya stating if there is no road constructed then we will not vote.

People of nagla bihari of sikandrau of hathras also boy- cotted voting due to unhygien- ic conditions in the village. **PNS**



Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and his wife and former MP Dimple Yadav pose for photos holding their identification cards, during the third phase of UP Assembly elections, in Saifai

Suspected LeT terrorist arrested in J&K's Doda

Bhaderwah/Jammu: A sus- pected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist was arrested in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Sunday.

Adil Iqbal Butt, a resident of Sazan-Bajarni village, was apprehended by a joint search party of police, Rashtriya Rifles and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) during checking of vehicles at Thathri on Saturday, the officials said.They said a pistol, two magazines and nine rounds were recovered from the pos-

session of the suspected ter- rorist.

Preliminary investigation revealed that he was being handled by Mohd Amin alias "Muzamil" alias "Haroon" alias "Umar", a terrorist from Doda who is presently operating from Pakistan, the officials said.

They said a case under re- levant sections of law has been registered at police station Thathri and further investiga- tion is on. **PTI**

Army pays tributes to soldiers killed in Shopian encounter

Srinagar: The Army on Sunday paid floral tributes to soldiers killed in an encounter with militants in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Two Army soldiers and a Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist were killed in the gunbattle in the Zainpora area of Shopian on Saturday.

"Army today paid tributes to Sep Chavan Romit Tanaji and Sep Santosh Yadav, who made the supreme sacrifice on 19 February 2022 at Chreymarg in Shopian district," Defence spokesman Col Emron Musavi said.

In a solemn ceremony at Badami Bagh Cantonment here, Chinar Corps Commander Lt Gen D P Pandey and all ranks paid homage to the gallant soldiers on behalf of the proud nation,

he said.

Sepoy Tanaji (23) had joined the Army in 2017. He hailed from Lokmanya Nagar village in Thane district of Maharashtra and is survived by his mother, the spokesman said.

Sepoy Santosh Yadav (28) had joined the Army in 2015. He belonged to Tadva Village in Deoria District of Uttar Pradesh. He is survived by his wife, he said.

"The mortal remains of Sep Tanaji and Sep Yadav will be taken for last rites to their native places, where they would be laid to rest with full military honours."

"In this hour of grief, the Army stands in solidarity with the bereaved families and remains committed to their dignity and well-being," the spokesman said. **PTI**

2008 AHMEDABAD SERIAL BLASTS VERDICT

‘38 deserve death as allowing them in society akin to releasing man-eater leopard’

Ahmedabad: The 38 convicts in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts case deserve the death sentence as allowing them to remain in society is akin to releasing a "man-eater leopard" in public that consumes inno- cents, the special court has said in its order.

In the judgement, a copy of which was made available on Saturday, the court also said that in its opinion, the death sentence will be reasonable as the case falls in the "rarest of the rare" category.

The special court had on Friday sentenced to death 38 members of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM) for the Ahmedabad bombings which killed 56 people and injured over 200 on July 26, 2008. The court also gave life terms to 11 other IM convicts in the case.

It was for the first time in the country that the maxi- mum number of death sen-

tences were handed down by a court in one go.

"The convicts created unrest in a peaceful society and carried out anti-national activi- ties while living here. They have no respect for the consti- tutionally-elected government at the Centre and in Gujarat, and a few believe only in Allah and not in the government or the judiciary," special judge A R Patel said in the order.

There is no need for the government to keep the con- victs in jail, especially those who said they believed only in their God and none others, the court said, adding there is no jail in the country that can keep them lodged forever.

"If such people are allowed to remain in the society, it will be like releasing a man-eater leopard in public. Such convicts are like a man-eater leopard that eats innocents in society, including children, youth, elderly, women, men, new-

borns, and people of different caste and communities," the judge said in the order.

The prosecution had sought death sentence for all the 49 convicts in the blasts case, including those who hatched the conspiracy and those who planted the bombs.

"For the people carrying out such terrorist activities, death sentence is the only option, for the sake of peace and safety of the country and its people," the court said about the 38 convicts.

Handing down life sen- tences to 11 other convicts till the end of their natural life, the court said their crime was less severe compared to the main conspirators.

"They took part in the conspiracy along with the main conspirators, and took part in terror training camps in the jungles in Halol-Pavagadh in Gujarat and Vaghmon in Kerala on their own accord, but

their role in the crime does not involve death sentence," the court observed.

"But, if they get anything less than imprisonment till their last breath, then these convicts will again commit similar crimes and will help others, is also certain," it said.

Responding to arguments of some convicts that they were framed because they were Muslims, the court said it can- not accept this, because in India, there are crores of Muslims who live as law-abid- ing citizens.

"Why did the investigating officers arrest only these peo- ple? Others should have been arrested had they also been involved in the case. The inves- tigating officers are responsible people," the court said.

The police had claimed that members of the IM, a rad- icalised faction of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), were behind the

Ahmedabad blasts which were planned to avenge the 2002 post-Godhra riots in Gujarat that claimed the lives of over 1,000 people, most of them from the Muslim community.

While 38 accused were convicted by the court under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 302 (murder) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) and provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 11 others were held guilty for criminal conspiracy and also under various sections of the UAPA, the prosecution had said.

The court imposed a fine of Rs 2.85 lakh on 48 convicts and Rs 2.88 lakh on another convict.

It also awarded compensa- tion of Rs one lakh to the kin of those who died in the blasts, Rs 50,000 to those who were seriously injured and Rs 25,000 to those who received minor injuries. **PTI**

Hijab isn't choice but obligation in Islam, says Zaira

Srinagar/Mumbai: Former actor Zaira Wasim of "Dangal" fame has expressed her disap- pointment over the hijab row and said it is an unjust choice to make between education and hijab, which is an obliga- tion in Islam.

The hijab row began last month when six students at Government PU College in Udupi, who attended the class wearing the headscarf were prohibited from entering the college as it was in violation of the stipulated dress code.

Wasim penned a lengthy note on social media, which she posted on her Twitter and Instagram accounts, voicing her opinion on the backlash hijab-wearing girls and women are facing in the country.

"The inherited notion of hijab being a choice is an ill- informed one. Hijab isn't a choice but an obligation in Islam. **PTI**

K'taka Cong continues protest over Min's removal demand

Bengaluru: The Congress in Karnataka continued its agita- tion inside the Karnataka Assembly for the past three days demanding removal of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister K S Eshwarappa for his alleged statement on the national flag.

The Congress legislators have been camping in the Vidhana Soudha inside the Assembly Hall and have been sleeping there in the night.

"The agitation is happening because of the adamant stand of the BJP. Who is asking for Eshwarappa's resignation? No one. We want his dismissal. Our appeal is also to Governor Thaaarchand Gehlot to dis- miss him," KPCC chief D K Shivakumar said.

He was confident that the minister would be dismissed from office in the next two days.

Stating that Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai is under pressure from within the party,

Shivakumar said if the CM has self-esteem then he would have thrown out "foul-mouthed" Eshwarappa from the govern- ment when the latter had said Medium and Large Industries Minister Murugesh Nirani would become the next chief minister.However, the Chief Minister said on Saturday that the Congress has lost the moral- ity to be the opposition party.

Reacting to a question about the protest and camping inside the Karnataka Assembly by Congress party members, Bommai said they had lost morality to be either the ruling party or even sit in the oppo- sition.

"D K Shivakumar and other Congress legislators go home for a while to come back again. The agitation will con- tinue either till the dismissal of Eshwarappa or till the end of the current assembly session," a source close to Shivakumar told **PTI**.

The source said the legis-

lators have been sleeping at night inside the Assembly, per- form yoga under the rising sun and jog and walk around the Vidhana Soudha in the morn- ing. The Congress in Karnataka has been demanding the resig- nation of the minister and that he be booked for sedition regarding his statement about the national flag.

The party's agitation led to chaos in the assembly and council proceedings for three days. Eshwarappa had said on February 9 that 'Bhagwa dhvaj' (saffron flag), may become the national flag some time in the future.

The senior party leader, however, had said the tricolour is the national flag now, and it should be respected by every- one.

"Hundreds of years ago, the chariots of Sri Ramachandra and Maruthi had saffron flags on them. Was the tricolour flag there in our country then?," Eshwarappa had said. **PTI**

SFI to organise protests across Bengal over mysterious death of anti-CAA leader in Howrah

Kolkata: CPI(M)'s student wing SFI is scheduled to organ- ise protests across West Bengal over the "mysterious" death of Left leader Anish Khan in Howrah district.

Khan's family alleged that people donning police uniforms entered their residence in Amta on Friday night, dragged the Left leader, who had gained promi- nence during the anti-CAA stir, to the terrace and threw him down, causing his death.

Police, however, denied the allegation that any law enforcer had gone to Khan's residence, and said that he was found dead near his residence.

The incident has triggered widespread protests, with Congress, CPI(M) and BJP accusing local Trinamool Congress leader of master- minding the killing, while the ruling party claimed it was a "deep-rooted conspiracy" which could have been hatched outside West Bengal.

Over 500 students of Aliah

University, cutting across party lines, had fought a pitched battle with the police in Kolkata during a candle light vigil on Saturday night.

They demanded that the killers of Khan, a prominent face during the agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and initiatives to help the poor during coronavirus-induced lockdowns, be nabbed and given exemplary punishment.

"In solidarity with Khan's family and protesting students of Aliah University, the Students' Federation of India (SFI) will take out protest ral- lies across the state on Sunday and Monday," SFI state com- mittee member Subhajit Sarkar told **PTI**.

"An SFI delegation led by joint national secretary Dipita Dhar and state president Pratikur Rahman has visited Khan's residence. We strongly believe it was not an isolated incident. **PTI**



Bollywood actress Rakul Preet Singh with police personnel, visits the Taj Mahal, in Agra on Sunday

PTI

Exchange marriage

Owing to certain pressures, women are forced to marry without having a say in the matter

A sweeping statement of the Gujarat High Court about the skewed sex ratio in that State throws light on the problem of exchange marriages. This concept of marriage makes the girl a tool of exchange wherein one family agrees to give their son in marriage to a girl from another family in exchange of the son of the second family marrying a girl from the first. This usually happens with sister-brother pairs. It is an age-old custom not exclusive to Gujarat, but in recent decades practised in States where brides are said to be scarce. The case is about a man petitioning for the return of her wife he claims has been confined by her parents to their house. The couple got married recently, but her father was unhappy about it. He wanted his daughter to divorce her husband so that he could get her married and in exchange his son would also get married. If she did not comply, her brother would remain unmarried; that was the father's worry. The court cautioned the father and allowed the couple to unite. The two-judge Bench hearing the case observed: "Depletion of sex ratio in...Gujarat results into more and more such cases coming up to the court where on one hand birth of the daughter is not acceptable and on the other hand with depletion of the ratio, the marriages are essentially the exchange marriages which take place regardless of will, wish, emotion and the age."

India's sex ratio — calculated in terms of women per 1,000 men — is quite healthy, even comparable to developed countries. The fifth National Family Health Survey says for every 1,000 men there are 1,020 women. However, the sex ratio is positive in the rural areas, not so in urban areas. The sex ratio at birth (SRB) is another cause for concern because it continues to be lower than the average.

The analysis of the data reveals that 13 States and Union Territories have more males than females. The skewed ratio exists in urban areas in 22 States and rural areas of 14 States. The Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu have the worst urban sex ratio: 775 women per 1,000 men. It is not just female foeticide that is causing the problem. Male selective migration from rural to urban areas is also a reason why the latter end up with more men. Thirdly, low SRBs since the 1970s have led to "surplus men" in countries like India and China. Fourthly, educated women in rural areas are not willing to marry illiterate men. As a result, some men end up remaining unmarried. In some regions fraternal polyandry is practised. Or, brides are "imported" from "surplus" States. Or, exchange marriages become the solution. In all these cases, the women have no choice and face problems of alien cultures and customs. Unless the SRBs normalise, the courts will keep facing such sad stories.

PICTALK



A visitor admires a painting on Uttarakhand's lesser known folk dresses at Pahad Ke Rang exhibition, in New Delhi

Not looking good

Russia seems headed for a conflict with the West, and retribution is likely

As the European countries have stepped up efforts to avoid what now looks like an inevitable war, Russia is heading for an open confrontation with the West. With tension running high over Russia's military build-up near Ukraine, and Russian separatists stepping up offensive, peace stands on a razor's edge on that border. The ceasefire monitors have already reported that ceasefire violations are rampant. Britain's Minister for Europe said the Russian invasion of Ukraine is "very, very imminent", in a way summing up the western assessment. The western nations have urged their citizens to leave Ukraine, yet another indication that the West is giving up hope of any peaceful solution. A security conference in Germany had top US and European officials, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and US Vice-President Kamala Harris deliberating on the possibilities. Meanwhile, last-ditch diplomatic efforts were underway on Sunday to prevent what western powers warn could be the imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine which could escalate into a full-fledged European war. With hundreds of artillery shells exploding along the contact line between Ukrainian soldiers and the Russia-backed separatists, and thousands of people evacuated in eastern Ukraine, the stage is all but set for a Russian invasion.

Should that happen, it would be yet another catastrophe on the global scale. The world has not even fully recovered from the damage that the pandemic has inflicted on humanity; the Russian invasion would mean another bigger, perhaps even more deadly, challenge to humanity. The chances are the West would not let it pass and would resort to retaliatory measures as hinted by Joe Biden and his administration. Unfortunately, world bodies like the United Nations and others are ill-equipped to resolve such conflicts even after 75-odd years of its existence. Equally unfortunate is that democracy has not taken roots across the world and large portions of humanity are still governed by despots, tyrants and overbearing leaders like Putin. Meanwhile, India is under pressure to take a clear stand which is difficult for it as Russia-India relations are historic. But an ambiguous stand puts it at odds with the US, Europe and others. It was okay for India to not join others in publicly condemning the Russian military build-up which has been appreciated by Russia but, at the same time, India can appeal to Russia for peacefully resolving the issue and avoiding confrontation.

Budget for skilling & digital education push

The Budget justifiably ascribes an enhanced allocation to education as it strives to fulfil the vision of NEP-2020 and Digital India Mission

Education is a key contributor to the economic growth and prosperity of any country. Skilled, innovative and specialised human capital, coupled with technological innovations, propels the economy by causing higher employment generation and increased productivity. The 2022 Budget had education as a prime focus area and was marked by an allocation of a record ₹1,04,278 crore to education for 2022-23, with a jump of 11.86 per cent compared to the allocation of ₹93,224 crore in 2021-22. This progressive Budget, with a digital push, has been widely lauded by the educationists as it endeavours to fulfil the vision of National Education Policy (NEP-2020) and Digital India Mission by strengthening online education and skilling the youth. With a strong digital education network, inclusivity as well as accessibility of quality education throughout the country can be ensured.

Digital education, with the integration of ever-evolving technology with powerful e-content materials has made the teaching learning very innovative, motivating, interactive and attractive. In the 21st century, where our life and work activities are dominated by digitisation, digital education methodologies shall enable need-based acquisition of cognitive skills to learners. Their knowledge and skills will increase with variety of interesting e-materials.

Like other countries, India has faced disruption in traditional classroom teachings due to the closure of educational institutions during the last two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To minimise offline teaching loss and to maintain regular academic calendar, schools and higher educational institutions of the country shifted to the online mode of teaching, learning and evaluation marked by extensive use of online platforms and e-content. All stakeholders in education sector realised the potentials of e-learning during the pandemic and got accustomed with it.

A robust digital infrastructure across the country, coupled



with the availability of variety of online programmes to learners, will substantially contribute to achieving 50 per cent GER in higher education by 2035 as envisaged in NEP-2020. The Budget lays major emphasis on digital learning and proposes for development of e-content for schoolchildren and expansion of 'one class one TV channel' programme to 200 TV channels in regional languages under the PM e-vidya scheme. This will ensure delivery of high-quality teaching materials to schoolchildren coming from all sections, more especially those from Government schools, rural areas and deprived sections where proper internet connectivity is still an issue.

Education in regional languages will enhance literacy in rural India that constitutes nearly 65 per cent of the total population. In the long run, it will lead to a technology empowered transformation in socioeconomic scenario of the country. The Budget focuses on creating an education ecosystem that is employment-centric with the launch of a digital skilling platform

EMPOWERING THE YOUTH WITH ENTREPRENEURIAL OR JOB SKILLS WILL MAKE THEM SUITABLE TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR OR CAPABLE OF GETTING A DESIRED JOB. INDIA HAS ENORMOUS POTENTIAL TO EMPLOY SKILLED YOUTH IN VARIOUS SECTORS

DESH-Stack e-portal for skilling, upskilling and reskilling of youth through online training. It is a welcome move to fulfil the demands of employment sectors.

Talent requirements of the industry and other sectors can only be bridged by skilling the youth in respective areas. The move of aligning National Skill Qualification Framework with the demand of industries will enthuse youth to regularly upskill themselves and to keep them always skilling and relevant as professionals matching the demands of the jobs in the changing times. Further, according to the Budget, to promote skill in youth, ITIs will be entrusted to take up new skilling courses to promote skills as well as critical thinking.

Aligning with the Digital India Mission to transform the nation into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, the Budget proposes to setup a Digital University, which will be a Central university in a digital mode to provide world-class quality education to students from across the country. The university will come up with hub and spoke



RAMA SHANKER DUBEY

model where from a centralised 'hub' online education materials can be accessed from different location 'spokes' of the country. The best universities of the country will collaborate with the digital university. Students from remote areas will be in a position to get online access to quality education in different Indian languages sitting at their doorstep.

In this digital era, when education is not confined to only classrooms and textbooks, digital learning with powerful e-content in Indian languages will boost up enrolment in school and higher education. It will democratise education by extending its reach up to all strata of the society, bridging the prevailing gaps and paving the way towards building a vibrant knowledge economy. The Budget proposals for skilling the youth and giving digital push to education are perfectly aligned with the vision of NEP-2020 and United Nations SDGs to make available high-quality education to all.

(The writer is the Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHEN THE CANADA DREAM SHATTERS

Sir — This refers to '2000 Indian students left in lurch in Canada as 3 colleges shut shop' (Sunday Pioneer, Feb 20). The abrupt closure of these colleges in Montreal has left the students high and dry. The institutions have cited financial problems triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic for their decision to shut shop. Some of the students had paid the pending fee, running into lakhs of rupees, before the colleges closed for the winter vacation late last year. The Quebec Government suspended the licence of these colleges following the detection of financial and academic irregularities.

Most students take admission in Canadian institutions with the long-term objective of working and settling down in the Maple Country. Disruption of their studies adversely impacts their career prospects and families which have taken hefty loans or sold/mortgaged their property to send their children abroad find themselves on the brink of ruin. The Trudeau Government should make alternative arrangements for the completion of their studies or ensure that their tuition and visa fee is refunded. It's unacceptable to abandon these young people who are contributing handsomely to Canadian economy. At the same time, the system of checks and balances needs to be firmed up.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

SPEED UP ALL PENDING TRIALS

Sir — The verdict of the special court awarding death penalty to the 38 convicts in the Ahmedabad serial blasts case is quite remarkable and appreciable. It has been a long wait for the people of Ahmedabad since 2008. The serial blasts took place on July 26, 2008, and killed 56 people and injured over 200. The very next day, a few suspects were arrested. The trial began within a couple of years. Unfortunately, it took almost 12 years to announce the final verdict. Genocide is always an unpardonable crime. The 2008 serial blasts were the outcome of an assiduous, deliberate and shrewd attempt of conspiracy by a group of anti-social elements intending to ruin

Kisan drones for speedy progress



With Prime Minister Narendra Modi launching 'Drone yatra', an initiative to help agriculture and agriculturists, a milestone has been created in the nation's history. The PM had flagged off 100 Kisan drones in various States across India, linking modern technology and our traditional farming. The PM aptly said that though earlier drones were considered only as a weapon of the defence forces and geographical survey, a new chapter in technological development of farming has taken place. The 'Kisan drone yatra' no doubt will create more job opportunities in the technological sector. The usage of these flying machines can help farmers in time effi-

ciency, more products and healthy growth of crops.

Engineering technology in creating more hi-tech drones gives opportunity to our youth to learn and create more efficient machines and more companies can help provide employment. During the Union Budget, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had talked vividly about drones and their incorporation in the agricultural sector. The Budget announced a special push for Kisan (farmer) drones. Anand Mahindra, the chairman of Mahindra Group, has rightly said drones are destined to become a part of our daily lives but nowhere will they be more beneficial than in farmlands. Bringing in drones as an instrument would pave the way for new technologies in the agriculture field and also give rise to innovation in IT, engineering and communication; thereby bringing a world of opportunities for farmers and the youth.

M Pradyu | Kannur

the lasting legacy of secularism and pluralism of our great nation.

We Indians should not tolerate anything that endangers the harmonious existence of people. Such acts of sabotage should be nipped in the bud so as to ensure a peaceful life to the people of our subcontinent. The long delay in completing the trial indicates the inefficiency of our judiciary system in handling such sensitive cases. Trials of scores of such cases have been moving at a snail's pace. Our judicial system must speed up the pending trials.

Prabhakaran Vallath | Kozhikode

MORE MPs WITH CRIMINAL CASES

Sir — According to an analysis last year by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the number of MPs with declared criminal cases has been increasing over the last decade. Of the 543 winners analysed by ADR in 2009 Lok Sabha elections, 162 (30 per cent) had declared criminal cases against them, with 76 (14 per cent) facing serious criminal

charges. The share of MPs with criminal and serious criminal cases increased to 43 per cent and 29 per cent, according to an analysis of 539 winners in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. India's law bars a person convicted of any offence and sentenced to an imprisonment of two years or more from contesting election.

Those facing charges are free to run as our overburdened judicial system can take decades to decide a case. Also, it is noteworthy that only 48 per cent candidates are graduates. The eligibility criteria for MPs and MLAs should be modified on two grounds: One, to be at least a graduate; and two, any candidate with any criminal record (pending or ongoing case) would be disqualified. This amendment is necessary according to the need of the hour as well as to teach a lesson to those indulging in unlawful acts.

Ishita Patidar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The eyes of the world are on the SP in these elections.



SP founder —Mulayam Singh Yadav



US Vice-President —Kamala Harris

Categories are made... Like a fat woman to make you laugh.



Actor —Seema Pahwa



Indian batter —Rishabh Pant

The BSP is the only party that doesn't work with the money of capitalists.




BSP supremo —Mayawati

FIRST COLUMN

DID COVID-19 HIT STROKE PATIENTS' TREATMENT?

There are other diseases as well, which need proper policy implementation and attention



KALPESH SHAH

With the emergence of the pandemic, the healthcare service, medical staff and infrastructure have been weighed down by innumerable challenges that they have not faced before. The medical safety of the frontline workers has been risked because their work was necessary to combat the disease. If they stopped working the entire nation's situation would have deteriorated.

The current state of healthcare industry has neglected and side-lined the presence of other non-communicable and lifestyle diseases like hypertension, diabetes, colon cancer, heart problems and stroke. These diseases contribute to around 60 per cent of deaths in India. We must not overlook the fact that as time has passed, SARS-CoV-2 has begun having a bi-directional impact on the people suffering from it.

While rest of the diseases affect patients over a period of time, the stroke patients can incur a sudden impact and potentially have life-long



paralysis. This kills about 2 million brain cells in under a minute. Due to this the brain ages by 3.6 years as an hour pass.

A stroke is the second leading cause of death and comes fourth on the list of causes of disability worldwide. Currently, the neural effects of the virus are apparent. This is mostly because of the lack of oxygen to the brain. The others cover increased immune response, clots and the virus invading the brain. As a result, the condition needs precise treatment and prompt decision-making.

As per reports, about three per cent of the global population are at the risk of developing a brain aneurysm. Furthermore, 5 in every 100,000 people worldwide experience a ruptured intracranial aneurysm. In India, around 76,500 to 204,100 cases of subarachnoid haemorrhage (SAH), which involves slight bleeding in the membrane occur every year. These circumstances arise because of high blood pressure and trauma.

It is high time that we educate the masses about aneurysms and change or alter policies around this issue., which would result in reduced stroke burden on the country. There is an immediate necessity to legislate schemes and frameworks regarding stroke care. Healthcare facilities across the country should be capable enough to form a regional task force including nurses, stroke coordinators, neurologists, neuro-interventionalists, EMS personnel, community physicians and hospital administrators who are experienced to deal with a high volume of stroke cases.


The brain requires 20 per cent of the body's blood supply to flow to it exclusively. Having a blockage or a rupture in even a small blood vessel leads to irreversible changes like paralysis, speech issues, visual impairment, losing control of bladder and bowel movement, coma and loss of life. A common cause of this disease is abnormally ballooning of the vessel, also called an aneurysm. This condition makes the blood vessels' walls thin and making them more likely to burst.

Until recently all of these treatments were being done by open surgery. But currently, endovascular interventions are commonly being used for managing aneurysms. These are non-surgical procedures. The treatment is done through an artery present in the thighs called the femoral artery. This novel method has reduced death rates and complications. Unfortunately, being only available in developed countries, Indians are deprived of this revolutionary cure.

"Better three hours too soon than a minute too late" - This saying deems fit here as every second counts. A slight delay in treatment can lead to 30,000 brain cell death. The rising cases of brain aneurysms in one of the most populous countries have highlighted the lack of equipment and awareness. If we pay requisite attention to this, we would be able to deliver better results.

(The writer is an M.S., M.Ch. in Neurosurgery, and Fellow in Endovascular Neurointervention (Japan). The views expressed are personal.)

The steel frame of cooperative federalism



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL


Consultation and consensus, and not unilateralism, must inform decision making

The phrase, 'minimum government, maximum governance', is obviously not making the desired impact for want of adequate senior officers at the Centre. The move of the central government to make certain changes in the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 aims to avail the services of IAS on deputation with the central government from the respective state cadres. However, there is an avalanche of opposition from many states.

The States, especially non-NDA ruled States, are apprehensive that the proposed changes would confer overarching powers to the Union Government in the posting of IAS officers. This may be followed by similar changes in the service rules of other All India Services (AIS) like IPS and the Indian Forest Service Officers. Under the extant Rule 6(1) of the IAS Cadre Rules, 1954, 'A cadre officer may, with the concurrence of the State Government concerned and the Central Government, be deputed for service under the Central Government or another State Government or [...] body [...] wholly or substantially owned or controlled by the Central Government or by another State Government'. But the proviso to the rule says, 'Provided that in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central Government and the State Government concerned shall give effect to the decision of the Central Government.'

The fierce tussle is over the changes proposed in Rule 6. The proposed amendment has a new proviso thus- 'Provided that each State Government shall make available for deputation to the Central Government, such number of eligible officers of various levels to the extent of Central Deputation Reserve (CDS) prescribed under Regulations referred to in Rule 4(1), adjusted proportionately by the number of officers available with the State Government concerned vis- a-vis the total authorised strength of the State Cadre at a given point of time. The actual number of officers to be deputed to the Central Government shall be decided by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government concerned'. The original proviso under Rule 6(1) has been retained with this addition-'within a specified time'. That means, in case of disagreement between the State and the Central Government, the decision of the Central Government shall be effected within the time line stipulated in the deputation order, which may be in the nature of a 'marching order' for the officer.

The argument of the State Governments is that an officer, whom the Central Government may choose to take out of a State without the agreement of the State Government under whom he/ she is serving, will stand released from his/ her current assignment forthwith. Some non-NDA ruled states find "the revised amendment proposal more draconian



THE AGREED FORMULA OF CDS MUST BE IMPLEMENTED WITH DUE CONSULTATION WITH THE STAKEHOLDERS SO THAT AIS OFFICERS REFRAIN FROM DEVELOPING A PROVINCIAL OR FEUDAL MINDSET AND BROADEN THEIR PERSPECTIVE BY SERVING, IN THEIR DIFFERENT STINTS, BOTH THE UNION AND THE STATES, BEING THE SHARED ASSETS OF THE NATION

(The writer is former Additional Secretary, Lok Sabha and a member of Delhi Bar Council. The views expressed are personal.)



than the former, against the basic structure of India's Constitutional scheme, destructive of nation's federal polity and apprehend that it will create 'fear psychosis', promote arbitrariness and would 'completely render' the officers and all State governments 'at the mercy of the Central Government'. There is lurking fear of immense potential for harassment and vendetta politics. Many retired civil servants have publicly forewarned about the adverse consequences and appealed for stalling the move.

The DoPT has denied that the Centre was trying to accord itself undue powers and clarified that the States have not been sending officers for central deputation as per fixed ratio. It has also been reiterated that officers would be posted on central deputation only in consultation with the States but also made it clear that 'Once the number of officers to come on deputation to the Centre is fixed after mutual consultation, the Central Government should have overriding powers to get those officers'.

But oft, between the precept and the practice, there falls the shadow. There have been instances when orders were issued by the Central Government without consulting the State Governments. In June, 2001, Tamil Nadu police raided former chief minister M Karunanidhi's home and arrested him along with his DMK colleagues Murasoli Maran and T R Baalu, both then Ministers in NDA Government. Piqued, the Central Government asked the State Government to send on central deputation the three IPS officers connected with the raids. Jayalalithaa not only refused but also wrote to other Chief Ministers canvassing support to protect the rights of the States.

The plea of the Central Government is that a rising shortfall in civil servants deputed by State Governments to the Centre impelled the Centre to amend deputation rules to give itself power to transfer officers without the consent of States. According to regulations, the States must earmark 40 per cent of senior posts in every cadre to meet central requirements, but there is a CDR shortfall across States ranging between 61 to 95 percent. There is particularly shortage for joint secretaries, directors and deputy secretaries. Also, there is shortage of IPS officers with the Central Government. A year ago, Home Secretary wrote to Chief Secretaries reminding of insufficient nominations of IPS officers to fill up vacant central police posts. The Centre maintains that the actual number of officers to be deputed will be decided only after due consultation with the State Government, even after the amendment to the AIS rules.

Officers of AIS-an Act of Parliament enacted in 1952- are recruited by the UPSC and placed in various State cadres. They are expected to serve both the Central and State Government (home cadre) in various stints being the 'shared asset' of both the Union and the States. However, if the officers are taken away on central deputation without prior consultation with the State Government and without ascertaining the willingness of the officer concerned, the Central Government may take away-the States fear- a star performer or a bold and upright officer from the State abruptly. Arbitrary central deputation is bound to disturb the planning and developmental work of the States and affect the service morale. Upright officers too, as evident from some instances cited, could be subjected to punitive central posting if their action ruffles political feathers. On the contrary, it's also a fact that generally IAS and IPS officers do not prefer to go on central deputation to below Joint Secretary level posts as they do not get those coveted facilities which they get as DM or SP. But certainly, there is an imperative need to bring middle level officers on central deputation under a standing consultative machinery. To quote Sardar Patel, what he said in 1948, an 'all India service[....] must remain above party and we should ensure that political considerations either in its discipline or in its control are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether'. He had famously referred to the civil servants as the 'steel frame of India'. Given the evolving nature of electoral politics which tends to turn arbitrary, and at a time vindictive, vile or petty, 'the steel frame' must be preserved in its pristine purity. The agreed formula of CDS must be implemented with due consultation with the stakeholders so that AIS officers refrain from developing a provincial or feudal mindset and broaden their perspective by serving, in their different stints, both the Union and the States, being the shared assets of the nation. Consultation and consensus, and not unilateralism, must inform decision making, being the bedrock of our cooperative federalism.

POINT COUNTERPOINT


THIS IS RAE BARELI, THE SEAT OF GANDHI PARIVAR. BUT DID YOU GET 24-HOUR POWER BEFORE BJP? —SENIOR BJP LEADER AMIT SHAH



MY FAMILY HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU FOR YEARS. (BUT) IT GETS DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE YOUR ISSUES WITHOUT THE PARTY'S GOVERNMENT. —CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA

No Mr Gandhi, the country is not at risk

Had the BJP been ruling with an iron hand, it would have been relegated to the dustbin of history after its first 5-year term. This did not happen



VIVEK GUMASTE

(The writer is an academic and political commentator based in the US. The views expressed are personal.)

Rahul Gandhi's scathing invective against the government during the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address has garnered accolades in certain quarters.

In his speech, he makes sweeping generalizations about the incompetence of the current government, speculates on its malevolence and comes to the frightening conclusion that India today is in a near state of collapse-isolated from the outside, crumbling from the inside, as he puts it.

But do his arguments validate his conclusion?

First, he reiterates the usual cliché about two India's- one rich and the other poor but provides no proof to back his claim. He totally overlooks the poor centric projects of the



government listed by the President namely the PM Awas Yojana, which has constructed 2 crore pucca houses or the 'Har Ghar Jal initiative', which has brought tapped water to 6 crore additional households since 2019; neither does he mention the digitalization that provided prompt monetary relief to crores of needy Indians during the pandemic.

The credibility of his pontifications hits a new low when he elaborates on the unemployment rate without factoring in the gargantuan impact of the pandemic.

Next he hectors the government on national administration invoking the concept of 'Union of States'.

He avers, "It is a partnership, not a kingdom.... Congress smashed the idea of

with an iron hand, it would have been relegated to the dustbin of history after its first 5-year term. This did not happen. In fact, the people returned the BJP to power under Modi with an even greater majority (303 vs 282) and a 37.4% vote share-the highest vote share by a single party in 30 years. Such spectacular results can only be attained by the people's concurrence not by a stick.

Next Rahul Gandhi rambles incoherently about suppression of languages and cultures with repeated references to Tamil Nadu. He says: "you people are confused. The problem is, you think that you can suppress these languages, these cultures, these histories.... You have no idea of history, you have no idea what you are dealing with, because the people of Tamil Nadu have inside their heart, the idea of Tamil Nadu, the idea of Tamil language and then the idea of India"

What exactly he is trying to convey beats me. It is undeniable that the current government is a strong advocate of our indigenous cultures and vernacular languages.

Also, Rahul Gandhi needs to know that it was the Congress Government's decision (under his great grandfather) to impose Hindi as the sole official language at the cost of Tamil that provoked the deadly anti-Hindi riots of 1965.

Shifting his attention to external affairs, Rahul sanctimoniously hypothesizes: "The strategic goal of India should have been to keep China and Pakistan separate. But what

you have done is to bring them together."

Rahul Gandhi is clearly unaware that the unholy alliance between China and Pakistan is as old as the hills.

His unabashed sense of entitlement filters through when he tells us his great grandfather spent 15 years in jail, his grandmother was shot 32 times and his father was blown to bits.

Finally, he concludes on with a grim premonition of a doomsday scenario: "The nation is at risk from outside. The nation is at risk from insidecompletely isolated on the outside, fighting on inside, institutions captured, States not able to speak to each other. This worries me. It frightens me for my country....."

What we see here is a bizarre alarmist rant. One man's desperation, frustration, ignorance and insecurities imprinted on a nation to project a picture of gloom and doom.

Our country was at risk in 1962 when the pacifist policies of the Congress Party almost resulted in China annexing the North East. The country was at risk from inside during the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984. And the country was at risk in 2008 when a paralyzed Congress government did nothing while terrorists attacked Mumbai and held our nation hostage.

Today India is stronger, more confident and more secure of its place in the world than it was nine years ago.

Shelling in east Ukraine, Russia nuclear drill raise tension

Kyiv: Hundreds of artillery shells exploded along the contact line between Ukrainian soldiers and Russia-backed separatists, and thousands of people evacuated eastern Ukraine, further increasing fears Sunday that the volatile region could spark a Russian invasion.

Western leaders warned that Russia was poised to attack its neighbour, which is surrounded on three sides by about 150,000 Russian soldiers, warplanes and equipment. Russia held nuclear drills Saturday in neighbouring Belarus and has ongoing naval drills off the coast in the Black Sea.

The United States and many European countries have alleged for months that Russia is trying to create pretexts to invade. They have threatened massive, immediate sanctions if it does.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to choose a place to meet where the two leaders could meet to try to resolve the crisis.

"Ukraine will continue to follow only the diplomatic path for the sake of a peaceful settlement," Zelenskyy said Saturday at the Munich Security Conference. There was no immediate response from the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy spoke hours after separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine ordered a full military mobilization and sent more civil-



People from Donetsk, the territory controlled by a pro-Russia separatist government in eastern Ukraine, line up to get a train into Russia after evacuating in the Rostov-on-Don region, near the border with Ukraine, Russia, Sunday. AP

ians to Russia, which has issued about 700,000 passports to residents of the rebel-held territories. Claims that Russian citizens are being endangered might be used as justification for military action.

In new signs of fears that a war could start within days, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine. German air carrier Lufthansa canceled flights to the capital, Kyiv, and to Odesa, a Black Sea port that could be a key target in an invasion.

NATO's liaison office in Kyiv said it was relocating staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv.

"They are uncoiling and are now poised to strike," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday of Russia's readiness to launch an attack.

U.S. President Joe Biden said late Friday that based on the latest American intelligence, he was now "convinced" that Putin has decided to invade Ukraine in coming days and assault the capital.

Belarus-Russia exercises to go on amid Ukraine stress



Kyiv: The Defense Minister of Belarus says his country's joint exercises with Russian troops will continue because of rising tensions in Ukraine.

The exercises, which were to end Sunday, brought a sizable contingent of Russian forces to Belarus, which borders Ukraine to the north. The presence of the Russian troops raised concern that they could be used to sweep down on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Russia and Belarus have tight cooperation under an alliance referred to as the Union State, which stops short of the countries' actual integration.

Defense Minister Viktor

Khrenin said Sunday that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin decided "to continue testing the response forces of the union state."

Khrenin cited "the increase in military activity near the external borders of the union state and the aggravation of the situation in Donbas" - the region of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russia separatists.

Lukashenko joined Putin at the Kremlin on Saturday to observe Russian forces conduct nuclear drills, according to Russian officials.

AP

Ukraine's Zelenskyy calls on Putin to meet as tensions soar

Moscow: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, facing a sharp spike in violence in and around territory held by Russia-backed rebels and increasingly dire warnings that Russia plans to invade, on Saturday called for Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet him and seek resolution to the crisis.

"I don't know what the president of the Russian Federation wants, so I am proposing a meeting," Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference, where he also met with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Zelenskyy said Russia could pick the location for the talks.

"Ukraine will continue to follow only the diplomatic path for the sake of a peaceful settlement"

There was no immediate response from the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy spoke hours after separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine ordered a full military mobilisation on Saturday while Western leaders made increasingly dire warn-



ings that a Russian invasion of its neighbor appeared imminent.

In new signs of fears that a war could start within days, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine. German air carrier Lufthansa canceled flights to the capital, Kyiv, and to Odesa, a Black Sea port that could be a key target in an invasion.

NATO's liaison office in Kyiv said it was relocating staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv. Meanwhile, top Ukrainian military officials came under a shelling attack during a tour of the front of the nearly eight-year separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine. AP

Calm prevails at Poland-Ukraine border despite growing fears

Warsaw: As tensions soar in Ukraine's east and Western leaders issue dire warnings that a wider war could be coming, calm persists along Ukraine's western border with European Union nation Poland.

A sports centre painted with the Olympic rings in a small Polish community directly on the border stands ready to house Ukrainian refugees. For now, the centre in Medyka is empty. At the nearby border crossing, there is no sign of

Ukrainians fleeing.

Many Ukrainians do just the opposite: cross the border back into Ukraine after working or shopping in Poland, some defiantly vowing to defend their country in case of a larger Russian invasion.

"Russia expected everyone to panic and flee to Europe, to just buy buckwheat and pasta, food, but we all bought machine guns and weapons and cartridges," Volodymyr Halyk, 29, said.

"No one is afraid, no one



will abandon their homes, no one will flee."

Halyk and a friend, Volodymyr Yermakov,

described themselves as veterans of the war against Russia-backed separatists that began in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Yermakov, 34, said he was prepared to take up arms again should Russian President Vladimir Putin launch an invasion.

"Putin is an aggressor and does not allow anyone to live a normal life," he said. "They want to take our territory, and that's the truth."

Russia has denied plans to invade Ukraine, but Western

officials have said that with an estimated 150,000 troops and equipment surrounding the country on three sides, an attack could happen at any time.

People in Poland, which was controlled by Moscow during the Cold War, are following the news of Russia's military buildup with concern.

The Polish government last year became embroiled in a migration dispute with another eastern neighbour, Russian ally Belarus.

Poland and the European Union accused Belarus of assisting people from the Middle East to cross the border into Poland.

The Polish government called the migration part of an effort of hybrid war aimed at destabilising central Europe and the EU more widely.

Mariusz Gumienny, the town council chairman in Medyka, said the thousands of additional US troops who arrived in the area are helping to maintain a sense of securi-

ty. "It calms the mood," he said.

The US deployed nearly 5,000 more troops to Poland in recent weeks. They come in addition to 4,000 rotational troops the US began sending after Russian actions against Ukraine in 2014.

The job of the American soldiers is to reassure NATO ally Poland and to be in place to help evacuate US citizens or Ukrainians should that be necessary.

Hong Kong says anti-virus controls might be tightened

Hong Kong: Stringent anti-virus controls that ban public gatherings in Hong Kong of more than two people might be tightened to stop a surge in infections, the territory's top health official said Sunday, as 14 deaths and more than 6,000 new cases were reported.

Health Secretary Sophia Chan, speaking on a radio program, gave no details of possible new restrictions and called on the public to stay at home.

Hong Kong already is operating under its strictest curbs on travel, business and public activity since the pandemic began. In place since Feb. 10, they also prohibit gatherings of more than two households. Restaurants, hair salons and religious sites were ordered closed.

The territory had 6,067 confirmed cases in the previous 24 hours. That was close to Thursday's 6,116 cases, its highest daily total yet.



Chief Executive Carrie Lam said last week the rapid spread of the omicron variant was overwhelming Hong Kong hospitals. The government said Thursday that 90% of hospital beds were filled.

To ease the pressure, construction crews from mainland China will build isolation units for 10,000 people after crowding at hospitals forced patients

to wait outdoors in winter cold.

Also Sunday, the government said Environment Secretary Wong Kam-sing would work from home after his driver received a preliminary positive virus test result. Wong tested negative but he and his driver will undergo additional testing.

AP

UN court hearings set to resume into Rohingya genocide case

The Hague: An international case accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority returns to the United Nations' highest court Monday amid questions over whether the country's military rulers should even be allowed to represent the Southeast Asian nation.

Four days of public hearings at the International Court of Justice start Monday into Myanmar's preliminary objections to the case that was brought by Gambia, an African nation acting on behalf of an organization of Muslim nations that accuses Myanmar of genocide in its crackdown on the Rohingya.

In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched what it called a clearance campaign in Rakhine state in the country's west in response to an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group.

The campaign forced more than 700,000 Rohingyas to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh and led to accusations that security forces



committed mass rapes and killings and burned thousands of homes.

Gambia argues that the campaign amounted to a breach of the genocide convention and wants the court to hold the country responsible.

The figurehead who led Myanmar's legal team in court last time there were

tions. Critics of the military rulers say that the National Unity Government — a shadow civilian administration — should be representing the country at hearings in The Hague.

The group says it has appointed an "acting alternate agent," U.N. Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, and says it's withdrawing the country's preliminary objections.

"This is a shameful double-whammy. Myanmar is being represented at the ICJ by people sanctioned for gross human rights abuses and violating the rule of law," said Chris Gunness, director of the Myanmar Accountability Project.

"But in any case, this illegal junta should not be representing Myanmar, it should be the NUG."

The court didn't respond to a request for comment on Myanmar's representation at the hearings.

"What's really important here is that ... If it is the junta that's in court, this is not something that should be

taken to confer legitimacy on the junta," said Akila Radhakrishnan, president of the Global Justice Center.

At public hearings in late 2019, lawyers representing Gambia showed judges maps, satellite images and graphic photos to detail what they called a campaign of murder, rape and destruction amounting to genocide perpetrated by Myanmar's military.

That led the court to order Myanmar to do all it can to prevent genocide against the Rohingya. The interim ruling was intended to protect the minority while the case is decided in The Hague, a process likely to take years.

Since that ruling, the military has seized control of the nation.

The takeover prompted widespread peaceful protests and civil disobedience that security forces suppressed with lethal force. About 1,500 civilians have been killed, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

UK to drop self-isolation rule in 'living with Covid' plan

London: The UK is set to drop the legal requirement to self-isolate for up to 10 days on testing positive for coronavirus as part of the government's so-called "living with Covid" plan, Downing Street indicated on Sunday.

On being asked about the plan, Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged the public to not "throw caution to the wind" as he attempts to move beyond state mandated rules for tackling the spread of the deadly virus.

He told the BBC that he wants to focus on addressing the health crisis with a "vaccine-led approach", rather than "banning certain courses of action".

"Now is the moment for everybody to get their confidence back. We think you can shift the balance away from state mandation," said Johnson. "COVID will not suddenly disappear, and we need to learn to live with this virus and continue to protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms," he said.

"We've built up strong protections against this virus over the past two years through the vaccine rollouts, tests, new



treatments, and the best scientific understanding of what this virus can do. Thanks to our successful vaccination programme and the sheer magnitude of people who have come forward to be jabbed we are now in a position to set out our plan for living with COVID," he added.

According to reports, Johnson is set to announce the end of the quarantine requirement on Monday.

Special coronavirus laws enacted at the peak of the crisis in 2020 and renewed over the course of subsequent waves of the pandemic are due to expire on March 24, but last week Boris Johnson had sug-

gested that all of England's remaining measures could end sooner if the data remained encouraging.

The latest official figures show that the country recorded 34,377 COVID cases on Saturday.

Meanwhile, about 91 per cent of people in the UK aged 12 and over have had a first dose of the vaccine, 85 per cent a second dose, and 66 per cent a booster or a third dose.

Under the next stage of the UK's coronavirus strategy, local authorities will have to manage outbreaks using pre-existing public health powers, similar to other diseases.

The Opposition Labour

Party said Johnson was "declaring victory before the war is over", while some experts and charities expressed concern over the early lifting of all restrictions.

"It clearly hasn't been guided by data or done in consultation with the healthcare profession," warned Dr Chaand Nagpaul, Indian-origin chair of the British Medical Association (BMA).

Widespread community PCR testing for people with symptoms is expected to stop under the new plan. It remains unclear whether the distribution of the quicker and cheaper lateral flow tests will be scaled back.

Since the COVID law was enacted in March 2020 with a strict "stay at home" lockdown to help the country's health service cope with the crisis, changing levels of restrictions on daily life have been in place across all parts of the UK.

The curbs have included the "rule of six" for indoor gatherings, regional tier systems, as well as so-called "Plan B" measures after the fast-spreading Omicron variant emerged last year. PTI

Parl will decide what development assistance is needed for Nepal: Foreign Ministry

Kathmandu: Nepal has always been pursuing an independent, balanced and non-aligned foreign policy and its sovereign Parliament will decide what development assistance is needed for the country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said here on Sunday, in response to the contentious USD 500 million Millennium Corporation Challenge (MCC) programme.

The Nepal government presented the aid grant for approval in Parliament on Sunday, triggering vociferous protests from members of smaller factions of the Communist Party and several pro-left youth outfits who staged rallies and chanted anti-US slogans, causing police to use tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protesters.

"The decision to accept development assistance is taken by Nepal in terms of our national interest and priorities," Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Sunday. "It is the sovereign Parliament of Nepal alone that decides what development assistance is needed in the best



interest of Nepal and its people," it said.

Nepal's political parties are sharply divided on whether to accept the US grant assistance under the MCC agreement, which is under consideration in the House of Representatives. Nepal's Leftist political parties have been opposing the pact, saying it was not in national interest and that it was meant to counter China.

"Nepal has always been pursuing an independent, balanced and non-aligned foreign policy. In pursuance to this policy, as a sovereign country, Nepal has accepted and utilised development assistance as per her national requirement and priority," the statement added.

On Friday, Chinese

Pak arrests 31 Indian fishermen

Islamabad: Pakistan's maritime authorities have arrested 31 Indian fishermen and seized five of their vessels for allegedly fishing in the country's territorial waters, officials said on Wednesday.

The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) said that it apprehended the intruding vessels on Friday during patrolling in the Pakistan Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) announced that it made the arrest from Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on 18 February.

The PMSA said that one of its "ship apprehended five Indian fishing boats along with 31 crew."

The boats were towed to Karachi for further legal proceedings as per Pakistani Law and UN Convention on Law of the Sea, it said. Pakistan and India regularly arrest fishermen from either side for violating the maritime boundary which is poorly marked at some points. PTI

NSE fraud: CBI grills former CEO Ravi Narain

IAN S ■ MUMBAI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Saturday grilled former NSE director Ravi Narain who served as the CEO of NSE before Chitra Ramakrishna in connection with the probe into certain irregularities at the NSE.

Earlier, it was speculated that he had fled to London but the CBI source confirmed that Ravi Narain is very much in Mumbai and his statement was recorded.

"Ravi was asked to join the investigation. He responded to our summon. He was called at a Mumbai office where he was grilled. He is also a suspect in

the case," said the CBI source. Ravi was too evasive and tried to evade a lot of questions. He also requested that his LoC should be closed.

Now CBI will record the statement of Anand Subramanian who was hired in NSE by flouting all rules by Chitra Ramakrishna as a Chief Strategic Advisor.

Chitra Ramakrishna, the ex MD and CEO of National Stock Exchange (NSE) was recently grilled by the CBI in Mumbai.

On February 18 she got her statement recorded with the federal probe agency.

The CBI had asked her around 50 questions. She had tried to play victim card by

claiming she didn't know a lot of things. She also had claimed that she was innocent and somebody was trying to frame her.

CBI had asked her, for how long she had been sending mails to Yogi Baba, was she given any cut for sharing classified information, if yes, where did she invest the money.

The CBI had already issued Look Out Circular (LoC) against Chitra, Anand Subramanian, the former Group Operating official and Ravi Narain, the ex-NSE CEO (before Chitra).

Sources told IANS that Chitra and two others involved in the case were

flight risk and hence the LOCs were issued. Arrests in the case is now more likely.

The CBI has lodged an FIR against Chitra on the basis of the 192 page report of the SEBI in which she has been accused of leaking classified information to a Yogi Baba who lived in the Himalayas.

"There was a flight risk, there were possibilities that they may flee abroad and taking preventive steps we issued the LOC," sources had told IANS.

On February 17, the Income Tax Department had conducted raids at the house of Chitra in Mumbai and Chennai during which icrim-

inating documents were recovered.

The I-T department scanned various transactions and digital records. They also recorded the statements of a few of her employees.

Recently, SEBI had imposed a fine of Rs 3 crore on her. SEBI had uploaded a 192-page order on its official website narrating how Chitra was allegedly involved in suspicious activities by leaking information.

Chitra had said that a sage, who lives in the Himalayas, was giving her directions. She also sent him emails regarding the NSE. She quit SEBI in December 2016.

Devas recovery suit: Air India wins nod to appeal against seizure ruling

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India has won a nod of an appeals court in Quebec to challenge a Canadian court order that allowed foreign investors in Bengaluru-headquartered Devas Multimedia to seize its funds to recover compensation for a failed 2005 satellite deal with Antrix Corporation, a commercial arm of ISRO.

In a February 11 ruling, Judge Christine Baudouin agreed with Air India that the court should take a closer look at the claim brought by three Mauritius investors and the German major Deutsche Telekom to identify the airline as an alternative to Government of India to facilitate recovery of compensations awarded by international tribunals over the failed satellite deal.

"Without expressing an opinion on the merits or on the chances of success in appeal, I am satisfied that the present

matter is one that should be submitted to the court," Judge Baudouin wrote in a brief order. She set a hearing in the case for May 13. Earlier this month, a US federal court for the southern district of New York stayed proceedings to identify Air India as an alter ego of India and to find its assets in the US to facilitate recovery of compensation awarded by international tribunals. The shareholders - CC/Devas (Mauritius) Ltd, Devas Employees Mauritius Pvt Ltd and Telecom Devas Mauritius Ltd - have been targeting government assets abroad to recover a total of USD 1.3 billion compensation they won in three different arbitrations initiated over the nixed deal to deliver communications services throughout India. They have got an attachment order from a French court for the Indian government's properties in upmarket Paris. On January 8, 2022, they got a ruling from a Superior Court in the

Quebec region of Canada to seize 50 per cent of Air India's funds being held by the International Air Transport Authority, a Montreal-based trade association for the world's airlines that facilitates payment of air navigation charges billed to airlines and countries.

The same judgment was also cited in the New York court by the Mauritius investors to seek seizures of the carrier's assets in the US to recover compensation over the failed 2005 deal. "According to Air India Ltd... The matter raises a new issue of law, namely: whether the assets of a state-owned company with a distinct legal identity and no involvement in the original claim between the Plaintiffs (Devas shareholders) and the Republic of India, can be validly seized ex parte before judgment in hands of another third party (IATA), to pay the debt of the State itself," Judge Baudouin wrote in the order.

EPFO adds 14.6 lakh subscribers in Dec 2021

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO added 14.6 lakh subscribers on a net basis in December 2021, an increase of 16.4 per cent compared to the year-ago period, according to the latest payroll data.

The provisional payroll data of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) released on Sunday showed that the EPFO had added 12.54 lakh net subscribers during December 2020.

The net subscriber addition in December has increased by 19.98 per cent as compared to the previous month of November 2021, a labour ministry statement said.

The net subscriber addition in November 2021 was revised downwards to 12.17 lakh from 13.95 lakh provisional estimates released in January 2022.

Of the total 14.60 lakh net subscribers added in December, 2021, 9.11 lakh new members have been enrolled under EPF & MP Act, 1952 for the first time. Approximately 5.49 lakh net subscribers exited but rejoined EPFO by opting to continue their membership with EPFO by transferring

their PF accumulations from previous to present PF account instead of opting for final withdrawal. Further, it stated that the number of members exiting EPFO has been on a declining trend since July, 2021.

According to the data, the age-group of 22-25 years registered the highest number of net enrolments with 3.87 lakh additions during December 2021. The age-group of 18-21 also registered a healthy addition of around 2.97 lakh net enrolments. The age-groups of 18-25 years have contributed around 46.89 per cent of total net subscriber additions in December, 2021. This indicates that many first-time job seekers are joining the organised sector workforce in large numbers.

A state-wise comparison of payroll figures highlighted that the establishments covered in the states of Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are in lead by adding approximately 8.97 lakh subscribers during the month, which is around 61.44 per cent of total net payroll addition across all age groups.

Gender-wise analysis indicated that net female payroll addition during the month is

approximately 3 lakh.

Share of female enrolment is approximately 20.52 per cent of the total net subscribers addition during the month of December, 2021.

Industry-wise payroll data indicated that 'expert services' category (consisting of manpower agencies, private security agencies and small contractors etc.) constitutes 40.24 per cent of total subscriber addition during the month. In addition, growing trend in net payroll additions has been noted in industries like building and construction industry, textiles, restaurants, iron and steel etc. The payroll data is provisional since the data generation is a continuous exercise, as updation of employee record is a continuous process, the ministry noted.

The previous data hence gets updated every month. From the month of May-2018, EPFO has been releasing payroll data covering the period December 2017 onwards, it stated. The EPFO provides provident fund, pension benefits to the members on their retirement and family pension & insurance benefits to their families in case of untimely death of the member.

Govt to soon decide on giving additional charge of New India Assurance CMD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government will soon decide on giving additional charge of the post of chairman cum managing director (CMD) of state-owned New India Assurance as the term of incumbent Atul Sahai comes to an end later this month.

The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has not started the process for selection of the head of the country's largest public sector general insurance firm as the Delhi High Court had observed that the Bureau is not a competent body in this case.

The court held that circulars enabling BBB to select the GM and directors of government-owned general insurers are not legally valid. The next hearing on the matter is scheduled for March 21. BBB, the headhunter for state-owned banks and financial institutions, is the advisory body formed by the government in 2016 for selection of

candidates for top-level board appointments. In absence of direction from the high court, the additional charge for New India Assurance would be given to someone effective March 1 as regular appointment would take some time, sources said.

The finance ministry had proposed to give additional charge to Oriental Insurance Chairman Anjan Dey till the appointment of a new CMD of the Mumbai-based New India Assurance, sources said.

However, the sources added, insurance sector regulator IRDAI has sought clarification from the government on the proposal of giving additional charge to Dey, citing some provisions of the Companies Act. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) also pointed out that New India Assurance is a listed entity on the stock exchanges and has to follow all listing norms, sources said.

BIZ-TELECOM-REVENUE

Govt telecom revenues to be higher than BE next fiscal: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government's revenue collection from telecom services will be significantly higher than the projection of Rs 52,806.36 crore made in the union budget after adding the collection from the proposed spectrum auction, a top telecom department official said.


The government has lowered its revenue estimate from the telecom segment to Rs 52,806 crore for the next financial year, according to the budget document.

"Some people are making advance payments and since spectrum auction is proposed we expect this to go northwards. It will be significantly higher but at this stage we won't be able to give any estimates because we don't have recommendations in hand," Telecom Secretary K Rajaraman told PTI. The telecom revenue collection is expected to be higher than the budget estimates of Rs 53,986.72 crore for the current financial year at Rs 71,959.24 crore.

Rajaraman said that the DoT has already collected Rs 69,559 crore as of February 3.

The receipt from communication services includes licence fees from telecom operators and receipts on account of spectrum usage charges which are charged at the rate of 8 per cent of their adjusted gross revenue.

"We will not be able to guess 5G spectrum auction estimates till we have Trai's recommendations in hand. These recommendations will undergo some changes," Rajaraman said. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) is currently working on firming up recommendations on 5G spectrum price and allocation rules which it is likely to submit in March. Trai had earlier recommended the base price of 5G spectrum in 3,300-3,600 MHz band at about Rs 492 crore per Mhz unpaired spectrum on pan-India basis.

<div>  Registered Office Address: Unit No.601, 6th Floor Piramal Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Kamani Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kurla (West), Mumbai- 400 070. CIN: L65910MH1984PLC032639, Website:www.piramalfinance.com Branch Address : Dhiraj Baug, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Agra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West) - 400 602. </div>		
DEMAND NOTICE Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL) [formerly known as Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd. (DHFL)] under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writes, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to PCHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.		
Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Description of secured asset (immovable property)
(LC No. 00002591 of Gurgaon Branch) Ananya Enterprises (Borrower) Kamlesh Kumari Gupta (Co Borrower 1) Sumit Gupta (Co Borrower 2) Suprabhata Enterprises (Guarantor 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 1241579 /-₹ Twelve lakh Forty One Thousand Five Hundred Seventy Nine) NPA (09-11-2021)	M. MACHINE. NAME :- Coating Machine / Tape Making Coating Machine With Accessories AP_MODEL_NO :- Machine- 70*52
(LC No. 00000343 of Raj Nagar Branch) Narendar Kumar (Borrower) Roop Chand (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 1229747 /-₹ Twelve lakh Twenty Nine Thousand Seven Hundred Forty Seven) NPA (12-11-2021)	Flat No.- U-G F-4, (L I G) Plot No.- A-169, Ground Floor, Rear Rhs Shalimar Garden Extension- 2, Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201010
(LC No. 00000332 of Dwarka Branch) Digambar Mandal (Borrower) Pinki Mandal (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 1179048 /-₹ Eleven lakh Seventy Nine Thousand Forty Eight) NPA (12-11-2021)	Rz 175.3rd Flr (rear Side)kh No 15/12 Maa Yamuna Apartment,vll Mirzapur Mahavir Enclave, New Delhi New Delhi Delhi :- 110045
(LC No. 00042021 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Gopal Kumar (Borrower) Fulio Devi (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 1121433 /-₹ Eleven lakh Twenty One Thousand Four Hundred Thirty Three) NPA (10-12-2021)	Property No. B-632, Old No. Wz-213/1 2nd Floor, Part Of Khasra No. 2741/616 Village Basal Darapur Sudershan Park Extn Delhi New Delhi Delhi :- 110015
(LC No. 00001616 of Gurgaon Branch) M N Overseas (Borrower) Mukesh Kumar (Co Borrower 1) Nisha Kumari (Co Borrower 2)	18-01-2022 /₹ 658189 /-₹ Six lakh Fifty Eight Thousand One Hundred Eighty Nine) NPA (09-06-2021)	M. MACHINE. NAME :- Embroidery Machine- Two Machine AP_INVOICE_NO :- KSA-918 & 636(250*850) 1200 AP_INVOICE_NO :- AES/16-17/P/99A & Inv. 007
(LC No. 00001830 of Gurgaon Branch) A.u Incorp (Borrower) Raman Kumar (Co Borrower 1) Preeti Sachdeva (Co Borrower 2) Parvesh Sachdeva (Guarantor 1) Sachdeva Plastic Industries (Guarantor 2)	18-01-2022 /₹ 441881 /-₹ Four lakh Forty One Thousand Eight Hundred Eighty One) NPA (09-11-2021)	M. MACHINE. NAME :- Reprocessing Extruder Machine / Re-processing Plant For Ldhld/ pp-extruder 7 Mixture AP_MODEL_NO :- Model S-090-90-110 AP_INVOICE_NO :- Inv. 230
(LC No. 00002216 of Ghaziabad Branch) Anurag Kumar Jain (Borrower) Parul Jain (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 3438444 /-₹ Thirty Four lakh Thirty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Forty Four) NPA (10-12-2021)	Appt. No. I-1005, 10th Floor, Tower I Assotech Windsor Court, Plot No. Gh-04 A Sector-78, Noida Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 201301
(LC No. 00041371 of Noida -sector 2 Branch) Amit Kumar (Borrower) Rakhi Rawat (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 2906536 /-₹ Twenty Nine lakh Six Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Six) NPA (12-11-2021)	Flat No:507, 5th Floor Tower-e, Oxy Homez, Village Bahla Hazipur, Loni Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh :- 201014
(LC No. 00041542 of Noida -sector 2 Branch) Bharat Ghanshyam Lalwani (Borrower) Mamta Bharat Lalwani (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 1716131 /-₹ Seventeen lakh Sixteen Thousand One Hundred Thirty One) NPA (10-12-2021)	Flat No: 2008 , 20th Floor Tower- T-26 , Paras Tieraia Noida , Sec-137 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh :- 201301
(LC No. 00004535 of Haldwani Branch) Gulab Singh (Borrower) Tulsi Devi Singh (Co Borrower 1)	18-01-2022 /₹ 316047 /-₹ Three lakh Sixteen Thousand Forty Seven) NPA (10-12-2021)	Part Of Khasra No 79 Min Pnt Plot No P1-30, Dev Homes Phase 9 Village Bigwara Rudrapur Udhamsinghnagar Uttaranchal :- 263153
If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of PCHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.		
<div> Date : 21-02-2022 Place: Delhi </div> <div> Sd/- (Authorised Officer) Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited </div>		

Semicon India Programme receives proposals worth \$20.5 bn

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has received 5 proposals for 'Semiconductor' and 'Display Fabs' manufacturing worth \$20.5 billion. Accordingly, the proposals were received during the first round of application submission for the Centre's 'Semicon India Programme'.

Last year, the Union Cabinet approved the Semicon India Programme with an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore to ensure development of 'Semiconductor and Display' ecosystem in the country.

"India Semiconductor Mission, which has been set up as a dedicated institution for 'Semicon India Programme', has received 5 applications for Semiconductor and Display Fabs with total investment to the tune of \$20.5 billion," the Ministry of Electronics & IT said.

As per the ministry, three companies -- Vedanta in JV with Foxconn; IGSS ventures PTE, Singapore; ISMC, have submitted applications for 'Semiconductor Fabs'.

"The applications have been received for setting up 28 nm to 65nm 'Semiconductor Fabs' with capacity of approx. 120,000 wafers per month and the projected investment of \$13.6 billion wherein fiscal support from the Central Government is being sought for nearly \$5.6 billion." In 2020, the Indian semiconductor market stood at \$15 billion and is estimated to reach \$63 billion by 2026.

कार्यालय—कार्यपालन अभियन्ता,				
लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी, खण्ड बलरामपुर जिला बलरामपुर (छ.ग.)				
निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना				
एकीकृत पंजीयन प्रणाली अन्तर्गत सक्षम श्रेणी में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु ऑनलाईन (Online) निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है:— कार्य का नाम SVS OF PIPED WATER SUPPLY SCHEME under Jal Jeevan Mission as per NIT निविदा डाउनलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि 09-03-2022				
स. क्र.	सिस्टम क्रमांक	निविदा सूचना क्र. /दिनांक	ग्राम का नाम	अनुमानित लागत
1	93087	87 / 16.02.2022	MITHILAPUR	132.74
2	93089	88 / 16.02.2022	VRENDRANGAR-1	188.77
उपरोक्त कार्य की निविदा की सामान्य शर्तें, धरोहर राशि विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञप्ति दस्तावेज व अन्य जानकारी ई-प्रोक्वोरमेंट वेब पोर्टल http://eproc.cgstate.gov.in से डाउनलोड की जा सकती है।				
हस्ता /— कार्यपालन अभियंता लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खण्ड बलरामपुर (छ.ग.)				
Ro.No.: 67983/7				

PUBLIC NOTICE									
Whereas M/s Vatika Limited is in the process of undertaking of development of a residential plotted colony in Sector 88A & 88B, over an area measuring 112.60625 acres in Village Harsaru, Gurugram, Haryana in accordance with the provision of Licence No. 94 of 2013 dt. 31-10-2013 and Licence No. 11 of 2015 dt. 01-10-2015 granted by the Director General, Town & Country Planning (Haryana), Chandigarh.									
And whereas several individuals have made bookings/entered into purchase agreements for allotment of plots / property in the said colony (hereinafter referred to as allottees).									
Whereas a revision of the said layout plan of the said colony to 98.60 acres is proposed to be effected wherein some unutilized areas are proposed to be de-licensed and migrated for better and organized planning of the colony.									
And whereas the o/o Director General, Town & Country Planning (Haryana), Chandigarh, while granting the in principle approval of the proposed revised layout vide Memo No. LC-2781/Asstt.(MS)/2022/4071 dated 17-02-2022, has required seeking of any objections from the allottees against the proposed revision in the layout plan as a pre-condition in allowing the proposed revision as per drawing no. XPC/LAY/R4/104 dt. SEP. 2021.									
Accordingly, vide this public notice, objections are hereby invited from any of the allottees in the said colony on the proposed revision of the layout plan. The earlier approved layout plan & in principle approved revised layout plan are available for perusal on our website www.vaticacollections.com and at our site office and in the office of Senior Town Planner, Sector-14, Gurugram, Haryana.									
Objections, if any, may be filed in the o/o Senior Town Planner, Sector 14, Gurugram, Haryana, or may be filed in our Corporate Office within 30 days of this notice, failing which it shall be assumed that there are no objections to the proposed revision of the layout plan.									
Place: Gurugram Date: 21.02.2022								For VATIKA LIMITED Authorised Signatory	



For the last two years, Mamta Goswami and her friends have packed their bags with notebooks and tiffin boxes not to go to school but to a place where they can find a network to attend their online classes. They leave in the morning before classes begin and return in the evening. However, there is no guarantee that the network will be stable for the entire day. While few girls are lucky enough to at least attend classes online, many are not allowed by their parents as they have to walk quite a distance. “Many times, we walk one kilometre away from our homes where we can access network only for some time. It also gets very difficult to submit our assignments on time due to a lack of network. If there are any questions regarding our studies neither we can Google it nor talk to any teacher,” expressed Mamta. She emphasised if only she had a network so that access to educational apps or keeping herself updated with current affairs would be easier.

Mamta is a resident of Rolyana village, located 20 kilometres away from Baijnath in Garur Block in Bageshwar

NETWORK WOES

Poor connectivity in Bageshwar, Uttarakhand has severely impacted the education of girls, says HEMA GOSWAMI



district of Uttarakhand. Although the absence of a network is not new for the villagers here, education being shifted to online mode has left the students of this village has affected the girls especially. The majority of the households own one mobile phone which is made available to the son in the family. The girls are able to use the phones for online classes only when the brothers are over with their classes.

According to a report, a study shows how boys had more access to digital infrastructure such as mobile phones, internet services, radio and

media. This highlights how the lack of digital schooling has deprived girls of education in the last few years. Besides, girls are more involved in household chores leaving them very little time to themselves and even time or energy to walk to a place where they can access a network to use their phones.

Preparing for the board examination, Sarojini, another resident of the village, said, “Everyone knows the importance of board examinations. Understanding its importance, our teachers are available online. But because of a poor network, I am not able to contact them and get answers to my questions. It is impacting my education.” She emphasised that if the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and network companies had paid any attention to improving the network in these remote rural areas, many students like her would not have been affected negatively. Likewise, teachers are also worried about the impact. Neeraj Pant, a teacher from the village, is concerned about how the students, especially the ones appearing for the boards, will cope with online classes without any network. “The absence of a network makes it extremely difficult for us to guide and stay in touch with the students. How is it possible for the students to appear for the boards without attending classes? It should be a matter of concern for both the school and the education department,” he informed.

On the other hand, villagers have been facing this issue for ages now. According to Manju Devi, the phone is the only means of contacting family members who have migrated to the cities in search of employment. But due to a lack of network, contacting them is a challenge. “Nowadays, everything is digital. Many tasks can be easily completed through the internet. But we cannot even make calls without troubled network, let alone access to the internet,” she lamented.

Time and again, the people of this village have been trying to raise this issue of the poor network as it is very crucial to carry out several important tasks. While poor network infrastructure influences the villagers in accessing various services, it certainly impacts girls’ education and access to information.

(The writer is a resident of Rolyana village, Bageshwar and an advocate for equal rights for girls and women.)



A leader of co-operation

Rather than finding faults, working together with the opposition can lead to real progress, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JJ

In a democratic system, there always has to be an opposition party and a leader of the opposition who keep a vigilant eye on the policies and day-to-day functioning of the government and try to find out shortcomings, discrepancies or defects in the policies and performance of the ministers or the departments under them. In a way, it is the duty of the opposition to find faults and criticise the ruling regime by all possible means. Such is the zeal and enthusiasm of these parties, that they are ever ready and well-prepared to dislodge the party in power to occupy the ministerial seats if such an opportunity comes their way. This is why democracy is generally lauded for these functions of the opposition as these are considered as its plus points. But, not many of us realise the fact that however good these democratic values of eternal vigilance, criticism and readiness, these have their roots in rivalry, group selfishness, lust-for power and fault-finding. So, even if the fruits of vigilance, criticism and constant chase of the rival look attractive at first, the habit of finding the shortcomings of others and speaking always negative of them in one’s public speeches and writings, leads to the devaluation of the person who practises these negative values as state-of-the-art.

Further, the media which articulates and, in the process, accentuates these, knowingly or unknowingly creates an environment of rivalry, non-co-operation, narrow mindedness, group interests, unfriendly criticism and more. As a result, the whole social and economic climate becomes negative among members of the civil society. One must understand that these values are in sharp contrast to the qualities of ‘a person with a balanced and stable mind’, as described in Shrimad Bhagwad Gitā and in all the spiritual literature which, because of its immense and perennial value, has been preserved for posterity through all the ravages of time. The ancient spiritual culture draws our attention, repeatedly, to the human qualities or the moral values of love, co-operation, friendliness, forgiveness, kindness, looking at the virtues of others, having humility and the spirit of sacrifice and more.

Recently a spiritual organisation, during an international project called Global Co-operation for a Better World, invited various leaders from all over the world for a healthy debate on the subject. During the debate, most of the leaders extended their full support and co-operation for the project in their respective countries. Towards the end when the moderator proposed the following: “In keeping with the spirit of this worldwide project of co-operation in which more than a hundred countries are participating, we wish to propose it to all concerned countries that, an ‘Opposition Leader’, hence onwards, be called a ‘Co-operation Leader’. After hearing this proposal there was laughter everywhere among those leaders of opposition as well as those from the ruling government. Most of the opposition leaders said that if this proposal is accepted by our country, then, “We will all lose our jobs and our party would suspect that we have an intention to cross over to the party in power and are making a subtle attempt to lead all other members also into the party that is running the government.” This clearly shows that the parliamentary system of government will continue to have these negative values and would, therefore, have the negative results, which these values give birth to. But let us hope that a really brave and wise leader would come upon the scene one day and will catalyse a change in these values and the system based on these.



Create an efficient hybrid workplace

Working from home has changed the dynamics of employees and companies. SUDHIR NAIDU lists ways to ensure that the transition is seamless

The world has been moving two steps forward, one step back and another few steps forward, circling back and forth and navigating in ways that seem big and small. And in this has come a change that was unexpected but spread like wildfire for employees worldwide — Hybrid working.

With several pushbacks and delays over office openings, many offices have settled for the hybrid model. About 66 per cent of the organisations have pushed back the opening dates due to the pandemic and 9 per cent of the workers have moved during the lockdown which has made it virtually impossible for them to travel to the office every day. But how does one make hybrid smoother? How does one keep the employees more engaged and willing to work? Here are a few tips on hybrid working and boosting productivity.

Plan your weekly roster

Not being in proximity can sometimes lead to a new set of challenges. It is important to make up for the lack of face-to-face communication with a well-planned week of work and activities. This means assigning reasonable but well-maintained deadlines, having a fixed amount of people on a certain project, having brain dump sessions and so on.

Work together as a team

When staying connected is a task, it is important to ramp up on the importance of not just connections but working together as a team. The team needs to communicate not just on time but also in the most effective manner possible. It is also important to have standardised meeting times and follow time limits as closely as possible. At the same time, micro-managing is mostly avoidable as should allow the employees to set a mutually agreeable time where working together



is beneficial for them.

Train the managers right

About 71 per cent of the employees and managers were surprised by how efficient the employees were when working in a hybrid model, but the best way to boost productivity is to let the work be interactive. This is why investing in great managers and training them the right way is extremely important. The right kind of manager is the one who is not only effective at assigning work and managing teams but is interactive and able to foster a sense of growth and friendliness amongst the team.

Get to know your employees

Assigning the right people to the right role is one thing, and

involving them in an interactive environment is another. There’s a lot of fatigue, burn-out and apprehension surrounding the current climate and how it’s affecting work which is why it is important to let them know that they can talk to the people around them and the higher-ups. Spending just 10 minutes with the team to talk about non-work-related happenings helps them ease up and find a small sense of community which in turn helps boost productivity. In 2019, a study was conducted about belongingness and how it affects work and there was about a 56 per cent increase in work turnover when the employees felt connected to their work and workplace. Getting to know your employees is a good way of tracking team productivity and giving feedback freely.

Invest in digital infrastructure

There’s been a massive yet predictable rise in the use of business communication platforms that have taken place over the last two years. But investing in digital infrastructure is not just about communication software, but also finding ways to rely less on emails, sharing files effectively, tackling network and connectivity issues, finding ways to boost in-department communication, and a lot more. About 74 per cent of people have reported that they’ve lost files shared between them which makes us realise how important it is to share not just in large volumes, but in an effective manner too. It also is important to ensure timely work which is why keeping boundaries and maintaining time frames are important when assigning work.

Skill building

Having an emphasis on growth and skill acquisition makes a person see more worth in their job. By providing training, the attrition rate can be lowered by 53 per cent depending on how they see the training relevant to their skills. Building skill is now also a lot more about how to use skills in a way that works effectively, but also about how to adapt them to any mode of work. Communication in itself is a skill that is cultivated over time. There are also ways to increase skill building amongst groups. This could be in the form of team activities and solving hypothetical problems and analysing issues together or giving them a product and pitching it together.

Workplace productivity has been rapidly evolving and hybrid



workspaces have quickly redefined what productivity even means. Productivity is boosted when the workplace is innovative, communicative, mental and physical well-being. Now that there’s no other way of adapting to the new environment other than with hybrid work forms, it is time to take small steps to see a big difference.

The world changed so much and gone are the days when all the work can only be on-site, but with immense digitisation comes a whole new barrage of issues. This is why finding ways to motivate your team to avoid burnout and therefore ensuring productivity is so important.

(The author is the founder & CEO of Troop Messenger, a team collaboration and business communication platform.)

“ If you have to convince someone to stay with you then they have already left. —Shannon L Alder ”

BIO-BASED PLASTICISERS LESS HARMFUL

Synthetic plasticisers add stress to water- and soil-based organisms, while bio-based plasticisers are less harmful to the environment, revealed recent research published in *Springer – Ecotoxicology* journal online.

The research was conducted by Chaitali Shaha, a student of the zoology department, under the guidance of Dr Radhakrishna Pandit from Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU).

Shaha said that phthalates are used as plasticisers in products made of polyvinyl chloride to increase the flexibility of polymers. “Unfortunately, these are known to cause adverse effects on living organisms, and also, fast depletion of petroleum resources calls for the exploration of alternatives as replacements. Recent developments in bio-based plasticisers have led to their use as additives for various applications. In my study I found that when these bio-based plasticisers are used they harm these organisms less,” said she.



SUBSIDISING ECO-UNFRIENDLY INDUSTRIES

Governments across the world are spending at least \$1.8 trillion every year, or about 2 per cent of the global GDP, on subsidising industries that are harmful to wildlife and environment, promoting a belief that humanity is funding its own destruction, said a new study.

The new research, published by Massachusetts-based organisation Earth Track, showed that though the scale of these subsidies varied across sectors and countries, most of the government support was heading towards polluting industries such as fossil fuels, construction, mining, transport, agriculture, forestry, water and fisheries.

These include tax breaks on beef production in the Amazon and financial support for unsustainable groundwater pumping in the Middle East, the first assessment in over a decade to estimate environmentally-harmful government subsidies globally, said.



AIR POLLUTION MAY AFFECT SPERM QUALITY

Air pollution may affect sperm quality, specifically sperm motility — the ability of sperm to swim in the right direction — according to a new study analysing the sperm of over 30,000 men in China.

The research, published today in the journal *JAMA Networks*, also suggests that the smaller the size of the polluting particles in the air, the greater the link with poor semen quality.

“Our findings suggest that smaller particulate matter size fractions may be more potent than larger fractions in inducing poor sperm motility,” wrote the authors of the paper. The researchers believe that these findings highlight yet another reason for the need to reduce exposure to air pollution among men in their reproductive age.

Researchers have long been trying to establish whether there’s a link and there seems to be reason to believe that pollution may negatively affect fertility as suggested in this international literature review.



DEPRESSION & ALZHEIMER'S GENETIC ROOTS

A new study has identified common genetic factors in both depression and AD. The researchers found that depression played a causal role in AD development, and those with worse depression experienced a faster decline in memory. The study was published in the journal *Biological Psychiatry*.

The authors performed a genome-wide association study (GWAS), a technique that scans the entire genome for areas of commonality associated with particular conditions. The GWAS identified 28 brain proteins and 75 transcripts - the messages that encode proteins - that were associated with depression. Among those, 46 transcripts and seven proteins were also associated with symptoms of AD. The data suggest a shared genetic basis for the two diseases, which may drive the increased risk for AD associated with depression.



PHARMA DRUGS POLLUTE RIVERS

Humanity’s drugs have polluted rivers across the entire world and pose “a global threat to environmental and human health”, according to a study.

The scientists measured the concentration of 61 active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) at more than 1,000 sites along 258 rivers and in 104 countries, covering all continents. Only two places were unpolluted — Iceland and a Venezuelan village where the indigenous people do not use modern medicines. The most frequently detected APIs were an anti-epileptic drug, carbamazepine, which is hard to break down, the diabetes drug metformin, and caffeine. All three were found in at least half of the sites. Antibiotics were found at dangerous levels in one in five sites and many sites also had at least one API at levels considered harmful for wildlife, with effects such as feminising fish.



ATLÉTICO BEATS OSASUNA 3-0 BEFORE MAN U TEST

AP ■ BARCELONA

Struggling like never before under Diego Simeone, Atlético Madrid got the convincing win it needed before facing Manchester United and old nemesis Cristiano Ronaldo.

The class of João Félix and Luis Suárez - combined with some team defending finally living up to Simeone's standard - gave Atlético reasons to feel better about its upcoming Champions League clash after a 3-0 win at Osasuna on Saturday in the Spanish league.

Karim Benzema, Marco Asensio and Vinicius Júnior all scored in the second half to give league leader Real Madrid a 3-0 win over Alavés. Second-place Sevilla trails Madrid by seven points before it visits Espanyol on Sunday.

Atlético's first away win in the league since late November came after an embarrassing home loss to bottom side Levante. The win in Pamplona saw Atlético move ahead of Barcelona into fourth place.

Félix smashed in a poor clearance by Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera for the third-minute opener. Felix's pass in the 59th launched

a counterattack that Suárez capped with an exquisite left-foot strike - from 40 yards out - over the head of Herrera, who was caught off his line.

Ángel Correa rounded off the win in the 88th with his team-high 12th goal of the season.

"We are happy with the win today after coming from such a bad game, but we knew how to turn the situation around," the 22-year-old Félix said after his 100th appearance in all competitions for Atlético.

"This gives us confidence after scoring three and not conceding once."

United is the next test for Atlético when it visits Wanda Metropolitano Stadium on Wednesday in the Champions League round-of-16 first leg. Ronaldo will return to face a team whose fans learned to fear and loath the striker who helped Real Madrid beat Atlético in two Champions League finals, as well as in domestic league matches, in his nine seasons in the Spanish capital.

The win comes amid Atlético's worst run of results since Simeone took over the club and turned it



into a winner a decade ago. Beyond the goals against Osasuna, Atlético finally showed the same defense that Simeone has made the foundation of its success by keeping its first clean sheet in eight games.

"We had been struggling in these types of games for quite some time," Simeone said.

"Today we restored that defensive security and from there the team showed it has talent and can produce goals."

SECOND-HALF SURGE

Despite the lopsided score, Madrid still showed the same problems behind its poorest run of an otherwise strong campaign. Madrid was outclassed in its last game by Paris Saint-Germain and was fortunate to only lose 1-0 in their Champions League match.

Alavés, a team in the relegation zone, got the opportunities it needed to dream of an upset at the Santiago Bernabéu, but it was left to rue some jittery finishing. Both Jason Remeseiro and substitute Pere Pons were gifted balls near the area from Casemiro and Asensio, only for both players to shoot well wide.

Once Asensio broke through with a superb curling strike from

outside the box in the 63rd, it was all Madrid the rest of the way.

Vinicius finished off a slick passing combination between Federico Valverde, Asensio and Benzema to double the lead with his 13th league goal of the season with 10 minutes left.

Benzema added a third from the penalty spot late after Rodrygo was fouled, taking his league-leading tally to 18 goals.

"It takes us time to get to get into games, it is a weakness (that we have)," said coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"Recently it has been tough for us to score. Today Karim was feeling better, Vinicius too, and our second half was much better than the first. Now we have a week to improve this aspect."

DANJUMA TREBLE

Villarreal warmed up for Juventus after striker Arnaut Danjuma scored a hat trick to lead his team to a 4-1 win at Granada. The Netherlands forward got two of his goals from penalties.

Unai Emery's side also moved ahead of Barcelona and into fifth place before it hosts Juventus in their Champions League match on Tuesday.

Leader AC Milan drops points after 2-2 draw



AP ■ MILAN

Italian league leader AC Milan dropped crucial points in the title race after drawing 2-2 at last-place Salernitana. Milan is two points ahead of defending champion Inter Milan, which has played two fewer games, and three points ahead of third-place Napoli, which has one game in hand.

It could have been worse for Milan coach Stefano Pioli's side, as Croatia forward Ante Rebic rescued a point with a powerful strike from outside the penalty area in the 77th after being set up by striker Olivier Giroud on Saturday.

Five minutes earlier, striker Milan Djuric headed Salerintana ahead. The game started well for Milan.

Brazilian midfielder Junior Messias put Milan ahead in the fifth minute but striker Federico Bonazzoli equalized for the home side in the 29th with a fine scissor kick after goalkeeper Mike Maignan failed to properly clear a cross.

Inter hosts midtable Sassuolo on Sunday and Napoli goes to play Cagliari on Monday. Veteran Franck Ribery captained Salernitana and the former France winger missed a good chance in the second minute.

Milan punished the home side

moments later when defender Theo Hernandez made a typically surging run from near the halfway line and played a clever pass into the path of Messias, who curled the ball confidently into the left of the net.

Jose Mourinho's seventh-place Roma scraped a 2-2 home draw with Verona after trailing 2-0 inside the first 20 minutes.

Czech Republic midfielder Antonin Barak gave Verona a fifth-minute lead and Frenchman Adrien Tameze made it 2-0.

But Mourinho drew on his experience to make telling changes, as forward Cristian Volpato and midfielder Edoardo Bove scored

after coming off the bench.

The 18-year-old Volpato netted in the 65th, three minutes after coming on, and the 19-year-old Bove did so six minutes after his entry to make it 2-2 in the 84th. It was Bove's first goal for the club.

Veteran striker Fabio Quagliarella hit both goals as Sampdoria beat midtable Empoli 2-0 at home to move further away from the relegation zone.

Quagliarella, who turned 39 last month and made his league debut 22 years ago for Torino, netted twice inside the first 30 minutes to reach 90 career goals for Sampdoria.

Taiwan athlete to be punished for wearing China suit

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's premier wants a Taiwanese Olympic speed-skater to be punished for wearing what appeared to be a suit from China's team during training.

Symbols of the two sides are especially sensitive at a time when China's ruling Communist Party, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory even though the island has long operated with its own national government, is trying to intimidate the democracy by flying fighter jets and bombers nearby.

Huang Yu-ting, one of four Taiwanese athletes at the Winter Games, posted a video on her social media page Jan. 23 showing her training in what appeared to be a Chinese suit, the Central News Agency reported. It said Huang apologized and removed the video.

Premier Su Tseng-chang asked the Ministry of Education and the Sports Administration to investigate so Huang would "receive an adequate punishment," CNA reported, citing a Cabinet spokesperson, Lo Ping-cheng.

The Olympics are one facet of a wide-ranging campaign by Beijing to isolate Taiwan.

The International Olympic Committee requires Taiwanese athletes to compete under the name "Chinese Taipei," which obscures the island's longstanding self-ruled status.

Taiwan's Sports Administration said Huang would face no penalty but should be "more aware of the sensitivity of cross-Taiwan Strait politics," according to CNA.

Former India coach Rustam passes away

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Indian football team coach Rustam Akramov, who introduced the legendary Bhaichung Bhutia to the international game in 1995 and took the Blue Tigers to their highest-ever FIFA ranking, has died at his native place in Uzbekistan.

He was 73. The legendary Uzbek coach died on February 15, according to the official website of the National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan.

"The National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan, the Council of Sports Veterans of Uzbekistan express their condolences to the family and friends of Rustam Akramov in connection with his death," the Uzbekistan Olympic body said.

During his career, he made a huge contribution to the development of Uzbek and former Soviet football.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) condoled the death of Akramov who was in charge of the national team from 1995 to 1997. "We mourn the passing away of former India National Team head coach Rustam Akramov. May his soul



rest in peace," the AIFF's official Twitter handle said.

Akramov did not have any major trophy to show for during his short tenure with the Indian team but it was he who gave then Sikkimese teenager -- Bhaichung Bhutia - his debut in a Nehru Cup match against Thailand in March 1995. Akramov helped Bhutia to shape up as a striker instead of playing as an attacking midfielder at club level.

Beijing's Olympics close, ending safe but odd global moment

AP ■ BEIJING

A pile of figure-skating rubble created by Russian misbehavior. A new Chinese champion — from California. An ace American skier who faltered and went home empty-handed. The end of the Olympic line for the world's most renowned snowboarder. All inside an anti-COVID "closed loop" enforced by China's authoritarian government.

The terrarium of a Winter Games that has been Beijing 2022 wound to its end Sunday, capping an unprecedented Asian Olympic trifecta and sending the planet's most global sporting event off to the West for the foreseeable future, with no chance of returning to



this corner of the world until at least 2030.

It was weird. It was messy and, at the same time, somehow sterile. It was con-

trolled and calibrated in ways only Xi Jinping's China could pull off. And it was sequestered in a "bubble" that kept participants and the city around them

— and, by extension, the sporadically watching world — at arm's length.

By many mechanical measures, these Games were a success. They were, in fact, quite safe — albeit in the carefully modulated, dress-up-for-company way that authoritarian governments always do best. The local volunteers, as is usually the case, were delightful, helpful and engaging.

"The Chinese people embraced these Games. Even in the closed loop, we could make this experience of excitement, of warmth, of hospitality and of friendliness," International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said Friday.

There was snow — most of it fake, some of it real.

Indian boxers handed tricky draws at Strandja Memorial



PTI ■ SOFIA

Indian boxers were handed tricky draws at the Strandja Memorial tournament here even as Nikhat Zareen will begin her campaign in the quarterfinals.

Sumit and Anjali Tushir are set to face tough opponents in their respective opening-round bouts.

Zareen, who clinched a gold medal in the 2019 edition, has received a bye in the 52kg opening round.

Apart from Zareen, Nandini (+81kg) is another Indian boxer to feature directly in the last-8 stage.

However, in the 66kg category, Tushir will face a stiff challenge from two-time World Championships medallist Russia's Saadat Dalgatova in the opening round.

Among men, Akash has been given a bye in the 67kg opening round while Sumit (75kg) is drawn to start his campaign against the World Championships silver medallist Russia's Dzhambulat Bizhamov on Sunday.

A 17-member Indian team of seven men and 10 women is participating in the tournament which is the first of the Golden Belt Series and also a testing event for International Boxing Association's World Boxing Tour format.

Varinder Singh (60kg) will begin India's challenge on Sunday against Russian Artur Subkhankulov in the men's 60kg category. Sumit, Lakshya Chahar (86kg) and Narender Berwal (+92kg) are the other Indians to be seen in action on Day 1.

Europe's oldest international boxing tournament, which was first held in 1950, will be played till February 27.

Finland win 1st Olympic hockey gold

AP ■ BEIJING

Sheets of paper rained down like super-sized confetti on the bench, which players leapt off at full speed to pile on top of goaltender Harri Sateri with such force that they knocked the net off its moorings.

After finally accomplishing what so many Finland teams before were unable to do, there was plenty of strength to go around. Finland, known as Suomi in Finnish, is now synonymous with gold.

The Finns knocked off the favored Russians 2-1 Sunday to win the men's hockey tournament without NHL players at the Beijing Games, capturing an Olympic gold medal for the first time in the nation's history.

"We got what we came here for," Finland defenseman Sami Vatanen said.

"We battled hard, and we got the first Olympic gold medal in Finnish ice hockey history. It's something something special, and nobody can ever take it away from us."

Finland had never won at the Olympics on the men's or women's side. It last reached the final in 2006 and lost to Sweden, matching the silver from



1988.

The defending champion Russians had to settle for silver instead of going back to back.

"Life doesn't end with this," coach Alexei Zhamnov told Russian TV.

"There's still a lot of competitions ahead of us."

After winning gold in 2018 as the Olympic Athletes from Russia, the Russians competed this time as ROC, short for Russian Olympic Committee. The ROC and OAR names were the result of sanctions for doping and cover-ups across multiple Olympic sports.

The tournament unfolded in the shadow of another Russian doping saga, this time involving 15-year-old figure skater Kamila Valieva. Word emerged after the Russian

team won gold that Valieva tested positive for a banned substance in December. She was allowed to skate in the individual event, finishing a disappointing fourth.

Players and coaches from the Russian hockey team and others at the rink faced questions about the scandal and the IOC's ruling not to hold a medal ceremony if she finished on the podium.

For the Russian hockey players, no matter the name, the silver in the men's tournament was the 32nd medal the country's athletes earned in Beijing. Just not the gold they expected.

"On this day, we're the best country in the world in hockey," Finland forward Harri Pesonen said.

While the Russians looked like the new

favorites when the NHL withdrew because of pandemic-related schedule disruptions in late December, the Finns were actually the big winners.

With recent NHL players such as captain Valtteri Filppula, forward Leo Komarov and defensemen Sami Vatanen and Mikko Lehtonen on the team, Finland had the firepower to go along with its hallmark of strong structure, defense and goaltending.

That combination helped Finland go through the Olympics undefeated in six games, including a three-goal comeback to beat rival Sweden in the preliminary round. Finland beat Switzerland, Slovakia and the Russians to roll through the tournament in efficient, business-like fashion with longtime coach Jukka Jalonen behind the bench. This game ended better for the Finns than the last final 16 years ago, when national stars Teemu Selanne, Kimmo Timonen, Mikko and Saku Koivu and Jere Lehtinen almost got the job done. The Finnish Olympic heroes this time included Sateri, leading goal-scorer Sakari Manninen, defenseman Ville Pokka, alternate captain Marko Anttila, and winger Hannes Bjorninen.

Bengaluru, Odisha lock horns in must-win game

PTI ■ BAMBOLIM

Former champions Bengaluru FC and Odisha FC will lock horns in a must-win game for both the teams in the Indian Super League (ISL), here on Monday.

Bengaluru are sixth in the points table with 23 points from 17 games, four adrift of fourth-placed Kerala Blasters. Odisha are a spot below them at seventh position having 22 points from 17 encounters.

The Blues saw their nine-game unbeaten streak coming to a halt against leaders Hyderabad and then suffered another defeat to lowly NorthEast United FC, derailing their fresh hopes of a semi-final berth to a certain extent.

"We need to focus only on this game. There are three points to win, and we need to improve. We played well for 20 minutes against NorthEast United, then we gave up. It was the same in the second half and that's why we conceded two goals," Bengaluru head coach Marco Pezzaiuli said at the pre-match press conference.

"Odisha is a very good team on the counter-press and if you give them space like we saw in the first game that we lost, they can score goals," he said of their opponents. Bengaluru rely on set pieces more for their goals while Odisha are one of the highest scorers from open play in Hero ISL 21-22. Bengaluru are the joint top scorers from set-pieces in Hero ISL 21-22 scoring 17 from dead ball situations this season, sharing the record with Jamshedpur FC.

When it comes to open play, Odisha have scored 21 goals from open play,



more than half of the goals.

The Blues will also bank on in-form forward Cleiton Silva to help the team with the goals, as will Odisha who will depend heavily on Jonas Cristian to deliver the goods upfront.

The two Brazilians are the leading scorers for their respective teams and find themselves among the top scorers this season.

Jonathas has scored in each of his last 5 league games. After his goal against Chennaiyin FC in Odisha FC's last league game, he became the first Odisha FC player to score in 5 straight league games.

Cleiton Silva, on the other hand, has scored in two of his last three league games. Only Greg Stewart (7) has scored more goals from set pieces this season than Cleiton Silva (6).

"It's normal in football that you need other teams to give you results. But we can only control ourselves, but if I am going to think about opponents to help us, that won't help. I need to focus on my team and our own results," Pezzaiuli further said.

SURYA, VENKATESH SHINE AS INDIA SEAL 3-0 SWEEP

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Indian seamers fired in unison after Suryakumar Yadav's bel-ligerent fifty as the hosts coasted to a series-sweeping 17-run win over the West Indies in the third and final T20I here on Sunday.

After Deepak Chahar limped off the field after failing to complete the third over due to a hamstring injury, Harshal Patel (3/22), Venkatesh Iyer (2/23 from 2.1 overs) and Shardul Thakur (2/33) performed their tasks impressively to defend India's 184/5.

Wicket-keeper batter Nicholas Pooran continued his fine form slamming a third successive fifty (61 off 47 balls; 8x4, 1x6) but it was not enough as West Indies managed just 167 for nine.

For Rohit, it was his third suc-cessive clean sweep as fulltime skip- per, having earlier defeated New Zealand (0-3) in T20Is and West Indies (0-3) in ODIs. The win also matched their 2020 record of nine successive victories on the trot.

For the West Indies, this was their third successive bilateral series defeats away from home -- 0-2 to New Zealand in 2020-21 and 0-3 to Pakistan 2021-22 -- as they capped a forgettable India sojourn losing six matches on the trot (including three in the ODI leg).

Though ebutant pacer Avesh



Most successive wins in T20Is for India:

9 wins: Jan	Dec 2020
9 wins: Nov 2021	Feb 2022 *
7 wins: Dec 2012	Apr 2014
7 wins: Feb	Mar 2016
7 wins: Mar	Jul 2018

Most successive wins as captain in T20Is (Full Member sides):

12 Asghar Afghan	(2018-20)
9 Sarfaraz Ahmed	(2018)
9*Rohit Sharma	(2019-22)

Note: Asghar Afghan led Afghanistan to 11 successive wins between 2016 & 2017 but they did not have a Full Member status then

Most defeats in T20Is (including Super Over losses):

83 West Indies
82 Sri Lanka
78 Bangladesh
76 New Zealand

India vs WI - last four T20I series:

2018 (Ind):	India won 3-0
2019 (WI):	India won 3-0
2019 (Ind):	India won 2-1
2022 (Ind):	India won 3-0

Khan (4-0-42-0) struggled with his line, Chahar made early inroads for India early on removing both the openers -- Kayle Mayers (6) and Shai Hope (8) -- in the space of 11 deliveries inside the powerplay.

Chahar swung the ball both ways and also smartly changed his

pace to deceive the Windies open-ers and gave the first breakthrough in the fifth ball after India reviewed it successfully to dismiss Mayers.

In his next over, he took the out-side edge of Hope with a peach of an outswinger and looked on fire before he sustained an injury and

limped off the field without com-pleting his over.

In absence of Chahar, Harshal stepped it up displaying his brilliant cricketing mind as he executed his slower ones to perfection to be the wrecker-in-chief.

Earlier, Suryakumar Yadav unleashed his brute power on way to a 31-ball 65, and was well sup-ported by all-rounder Venkatesh (35 not out off 19) as India posted a challenging 184 for five after being put in to bat.

Suryakumar smashed seven sixes and one boundary in an excep-tional display of power-hitting before getting out for his career-best T20 score in the final delivery.

Pace bowling all-rounder Venkatesh smashed four fours and two sixes at the other end as the duo put together 91 runs from 37 balls for the fourth wicket to help India recover from a mini middle order collapse.

The rejigged Team India lost three wickets for 55 runs in the mid-dle overs including that of skipper Rohit Sharma, who batted at num-ber four, to be struggling at 98/4 in 15 overs.

Surya cruised to his fourth T20 fifty in just 27 balls with a massive inside-out six over covers off Romario Sheperd in the final over as India stepped up in style smash-ing 86 runs in the final five overs.

Mendis, Shanaka guide Sri Lanka to 5-wicket win

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Kusal Mendis and captain Dasun Shanaka shared an 83-run partnership to guide Sri Lanka to a consolation five-wicket win against Australia in the fifth and final Twenty20 match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Mendis made 69 off 58 balls, with five boundaries and a six, and batted throughout the innings to help Sri Lanka overcome some early wobbles, including two run-outs, before he and Shanaka (35 off 31 balls) ran down Australia's 154-6 in the final over.

It was Mendis' highest score in a T20 international match and helped break an eight-match los-ing streak for the tourists in Australia to the delight of the thousands of Sri Lanka fans at the MCG.

Shanaka played a near flawless supporting role and made the

result all but certain with a tow-ering six over midwicket in the final over off Kane Richardson to level the scores. He was bowled next ball but Chamika Karunaratne was able to bring up the winning run off Daniel Sams, who replaced an injured Richardson for the final two balls.

"The boys played really well throughout the series, made a statement that when we come for the World Cup (in October) we'll be prepared," Shanaka said. "(Kusal) has been an outstanding player throughout.

"We should keep on giving opportunities to the right players,"

Matthew Wade's unbeaten 43 off 27 balls and a 64-run partnership with allrounder Daniel Sams (18 off 15 balls) helped Australia recover from a sluggish start to get to a competi-tive 154-6 after captain Aaron Finch won the toss and decided to bat first.



Australia lost both Finch (8) and Ben McDermott (3) early as Sri Lanka's bowlers dominated the power play overs before Glenn Maxwell (29) and Josh Inglis (23) helped the home side generate some momentum.

Dushmantha Chameera returned 2-30 and Lahiru Kumara had 2-34 to lead Sri Lanka's attack.

The tourists gave debuts to opening batsman Kamil Mishara and allrounder Janith Liyanage, with veterans Dinesh Chandimal and Danushka Gunathilaka missing out.

Australia won the series 4-1, having won the first game by 20 runs and the second in a Super Over in Sydney after the scores were level at the end of the regu-lation overs.

Australia won the third game by six wickets on Tuesday in Canberra and again by six wick-ets in Friday's match at the MCG.



ACA to look into match fixing allegations

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam Cricket Association (ACA) has decided to hold an enquiry into match-fix-ing allegations raised by the Silchar team in J K Baruah U-19 Inter-District Tournament 2021-2022.

The allegations were raised over a group match between Jorhat and Northeast Frontier Railway Sports Association (NFRSA) teams at Golaghat on February 16-17.

The Silchar District Sports Association has claimed that the NFRSA team allowed Jorhat to improve its net run rate towards the end of the match on the second day of the match to ensure Jorhat dislodges Silchar from the top position in the group.

The match ended in a draw between Jorhat and NFRSA, thus knocking out Silchar from final round.

ACA secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI that the matter is being looked into and appropri-ate follow-up action will be taken.

"The Apex Council of the ACA will hold a meeting with the stakeholders in the mat-ter on February 23. We will give each side appropriate opportunity to place their ver-sions," Saikia said.

"The Apex Council will then come at its decision within 48 hours," he added.

The ACA has also invited Rajya Sabha MP Sushmita Dev, who had previously rep-re-sented Silchar Lok Sabha constituency, to the hearing.

RANJI TROPHY UPDATES

Dhull caps off dream debut with consecutive hundred

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

India U-19 star Yash Dhull capped off a dream first-class debut by scoring his second hun-dred of the game as the Ranji Trophy Group H match between Delhi and Tamil Nadu ended in a draw here on Sunday.

With his unbeaten 113 off 202 balls on the fourth and final day, Dhull became only the third batter after Nari Contractor (1952/53) and Virag Awate (2012/13) to score a hundred in each innings on Ranji Trophy debut.

After Shahrulkh Khan got Tamil Nadu the all-important first innings lead with a sensa-tional 194 off 148 balls on day three, Dhull and his senior opening partner Dhruv Shorey (107 off 165) batted for 60.5 overs to take Delhi to 228 for no loss in the second innings before the play-ers shook hands for a draw.

Dhull, who came into the game straight from the U-19 World Cup triumph in the Caribbean and with no recent red ball cricket under his belt, instantly showed that he belonged to the first-class level.

His second hundred of the match came in easier batting conditions. With Delhi under pres-sure at seven for two on day one, the 19-year-old showed remarkable skill and maturity to bail the team out of trouble and help them to 452 along with Lalit Yadav.

Courtesy Shahrulkh's display of brutal hit-ting, Tamil Nadu gained three points compared to Delhi's one after reaching 494 in their first innings.

Delhi face Jharkhand in their second game from February 24.

all out in 107.5 overs.

Vasisht, Thakur slam tons, Himachal eke out hard-fought draw vs Punjab

Himachal Pradesh showed strong fightback lower down the order with centuries from Akash Vasisht and Praveen Thakur to salvage a draw against Punjab in their Ranji Trophy group F opener at the Kotla here on Sunday.

Having conceded a 172-run first innings lead, Himachal Pradesh resumed the final day on 151/5 with left-handed all-rounder Vasisht on overnight 36 as he along with Praveen Thakur stitched a match-saving 172 run partnership for the seventh wicket to eke out a hard-fought draw.

Vasisht slammed 15 boundaries en route to his career-best 140 from 196 balls, while wick-etkeeper-batter Praveen Thakur struck a fine 103 not out batting at number eight.

Punjab settled for three points by virtue of their first innings lead, while Himachal Pradesh returned with one point.

Bengal bounce back to stun Baroda after



Shahbaz, Abhishek's fifties

All-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed and debutant wicketkeeper Abhishek Porel struck unbeaten fifties as Bengal bounced back after their first-innings debacle to secure a dramatic four-wick-et win over Baroda in their Ranji Trophy Group B opener here on Sunday.

Chasing 349 on the fourth day after being shot out for a paltry 88 in the first innings, Bengal rode on the duo of Ahmed and Porel, who stitched an unbroken 108-run partnership for the seventh wicket to steer their team home.

Resuming on 146/2, Bengal received an early jolt when skipper Abhimanyu Easwaran got out without any addition to his overnight total of 79 in the fourth ball of the day.

There were familiar jitters in the middle with Bengal losing three quick wickets including the duo of Sudip Chatterjee (18) and overnight bat-ter Anustup Majumdar (33) in the space of four balls to be 176/5.

Medium pacer Abhimanyusingh Rajput (3/73) revived Baroda's hopes with the double blow.

But Bengal's deputy sports minister and for-mer skipper Manoj Tiwary, who made a return to cricket after his foray into politics last year, arrested the slide with a fighting 37 from 61 balls before becoming Rajput's third victim.

Tottering at 242/6, Bengal unearthed a future star in the 19-year-old Abhishek, who showed utmost maturity and matched his senior part-ner, Shahbaz.

WI name 15-member squad for women's WC

PTI ■ ST JOHN'S

West Indies named a 15-member squad, to be led by star all-rounder Stafanie Taylor, for the women's World Cup to be played in New Zealand between March 4 and April 3.

Off-spinner Anisa Mohammed, who will be playing in her fifth World Cup, has been named vice-captain.

Anisa, who is one wicket shy of 300 international scalps across for-mats, had led the side in the final match of the ODI series in South Africa earlier this month after Taylor sustained a concussion.

Experienced leg-spinner Afy Fletcher is also in the squad as she made her comeback after maternity leave.

The squad includes five young players who could be making their debuts at the marquee event -- spin-ner Karishma Ramharack, pacer Aaliyah Alleyne, seamer Cherry Ann Fraser, all-rounder Chinelle



Henry and opening batter Rashada Williams.

West Indies have also named three travelling reserves as part of the tournament's COVID-19 protocols - Kaysia Schultz, Mandy Mangru and Jannillea Glasgow.

"The squad selected shows a blend of youth and experience. We have Anisa Mohammed who's play-

ing in her fifth World Cup and will help guide the younger ones select-ed. We have five players who have had their maiden Cricket World Cup selection," selector Ann Browne-John said in a statement.

"The team just completed a series against South Africa where the players got good preparation before the tournament.

Dismal Karachi Kings exits PSL with 9 defeats

AP ■ LAHORE

Karachi Kings ended its dismal run in the Pakistan Super League with a 23-run defeat to Quetta Gladiators on Sunday.

Karachi, led by Pakistan all-format captain Babar Azam, became the first team in the history of Pakistan's premier Twenty20 league to finish with just one win as the 2020 champion lost nine of its 10 games. Without injured fast bowler Mohammad Amir, Karachi lost all five of its home games before notching a solitary 22-run win against Lahore Qalandars last Friday.

Englishman Jason Roy's 82 off 64 balls rallied Quetta to 166-4 after captain Sarfaraz Ahmed won the toss and elected to bat in a game between the two bot-tom-placed teams.

Karachi's brittle middle order falter yet again to finish on 143-8 despite the opening pair of Joe Clarke (52) and Babar (36) providing a solid platform of 87 runs.

Fast bowler Khurram Shahzad, play-ing his first game this season, grabbed 4-22 to pull back Karachi's run chase.

Saha slams Dravid, Ganguly after being dropped from Test team

AGENCIES ■ KOLKATA

Wriddhiman Saha, the veteran wicketkeeper who has been left out of India's Test squad for the home series against Sri Lanka, has said that head coach Rahul Dravid told him after the series defeat in South Africa that the team management would look at playing new wicketkeepers going forward in the longest format. In an interview with Sportstar, Saha said he was told that the team was keen to give chances to younger talents.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India announced the squad for the upcoming series against Sri Lanka that comprises three T20 Internationals and two Tests on Saturday. The big talking point, besides the appointment of Rohit



Sharma as captain of the Test team, remained the exclu-sion of veteran players Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ishant Sharma and Wriddhiman Saha.

"Rahul bhai said, I don't know how to tell you this, but for a while, a few selec-tors and the team manage-ment are thinking of trying a new keeper," Saha was quoted as saying.

"I asked him whether it

is because of my age or fit-ness, but Rahul bhai told me that it is not just because of age or performance. They were looking at younger tal-ents, and since you are not playing in the eleven, we thought of looking at other talents." Saha added that he he isn't thinking of retire-ment at the moment and with the Indian Premier League coming up, there's still plenty of cricket left in

him. It was reported on February 8 that the Bengal wicketkeeper had pulled out of Ranji Trophy as he had already been informed that he is unlikely to be selected in the Indian team against Sri Lanka. Saha revealed in the interview that he had to skip the ongoing leg of Ranji Trophy to be with his fam-ily. While announcing India's squad for the Sri Lanka Tests on Saturday, Chetan Sharma, head of the senior selection committee, said that age is not a criteria for selection to the team.

"I can't tell you on what grounds he [Saha] has been dropped. That's for selectors. All I can tell you is that he was told before and asked to play the Ranji trophy, which is the ladder for the Indian team. What we discussed between ourselves we can't tell you," said Chetan.