

## OPINION 6

THE DILEMMA OF  
NEW VERSUS OLD

## WORLD 8

RUSSIA CLAIMS CAPTURE OF  
PIVOTAL CITY IN EASTERN UKRAINE

## MONEY 10

NATIONAL MEET ON PDS  
REFORMS ON JULY 5

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JULY 4, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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12 SPORTDays of family-run parties  
are numbered, says Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with party leaders on the last day of the BJP's National Executive Meeting in Hyderabad on Sunday PTI

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

Cautioning “family-run parties” across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said “people are fed-up” with such parties and their “days are numbered.” Addressing the concluding address to the party's National Executive Meeting, the Prime Minister (PM) also said the BJP has moved the country away from politics of “appeasement” to “fulfillment for all.”

Modi said parties that have ruled India for long are now in “terminal decline” but “we should not mock them but learn from their mistakes.”

In the same breath, Modi said: “Those who accuse us need to understand that we live with the philosophy of *sarvjan hitaye, sarvjan sukhaye*” and talked of the “eternal spirit and strength of India”. Modi said there is a need to go from “P2- Pro-Poor- to G2 - Good Governance” — and “further expand our organisation in all States.”

“The BJP's struggles are on”, he said while mentioning States like West Bengal, Telangana, and Kerala, and reminded party workers of their recent victories in “many States.”

Making a sharp attack on “dynamic parties”, the Prime Minister said: “*Vanshadi*”

Continued on P2

Next 30-40 years  
will be the era of  
BJP: Amit ShahPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday predicted that the next 30 to 40 years will be the era of the BJP during which India will emerge as a “*Vishwa guru*” (world leader). While proposing a political resolution in his address at the BJP National Executive Meeting at Hyderabad, the Home Minister called for ending the politics of “dynasty, casteism, and appeasement.” The Home Minister called them the “greatest sores” (*nasur*) and said they were the “reason behind the country's sufferings over the years.” “Communalism and fundamentalism are products of appeasement,” he added.

The political resolution was seconded by Assam and Karnataka Chief Ministers Hemanta Biswa Sarma and SR Bommai respectively. The party's *Continued on P2*



Home Minister Amit Shah addressing the BJP's National Executive Meeting in Hyderabad on Sunday PTI

Maha BJP-led alliance wins  
battle for Speaker's postShinde should  
have no trouble  
in clinching  
today's  
trust vote

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The BJP-led alliance on Sunday succeeded in having its nominee and first-time MLA Rahul Narwekar elected as the Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly, thus giving a clear indication that new Chief Minister Eknath Shinde should have little difficulty in clinching the confidence vote on Monday.

Given the comfortable manner in which the BJP's Narwekar trounced Rajan Salvi of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) by a margin of 57 votes, it became amply clear that Shinde will have smooth sailing in the confidence vote scheduled for Monday.

In the Speaker's election, of the 271 total votes, Narwekar secured 164 votes, while Salvi managed to get 107. Of the 17 MLAs who did not take part in the election, one MLA has passed away, two are in the Enforcement Directorate's custody, and three abstained from voting.

The remaining 11 MLAs did not make it to the State Assembly for various reasons, including illness.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde along with rebel Shiv Sena MLAs arrives for a special session of the Maharashtra Assembly, at the Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai on Sunday. PTI

Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal announced the election of Narwekar as the new Speaker amid cheers from the Treasury Benches. Later, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, NCP leader Ajit Pawar, State Congress president Nana Patole and other senior leaders of various political parties, escorted Narwekar to the prestigious Speaker's chair.

The Speaker's election had been necessitated to fill the

vacancy caused by the resignation of Nana Patole of the Congress as the Speaker on February 4, 2021.

Patole had resigned from the post to engage himself in the party's organisational work. The post had remained vacant for the last 17 months.

Now with the election of Narwekar as the new Speaker of the State Assembly, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde will seek a confidence vote on the floor of the Lower House of the State *Continued on P2*

Narwekar India's  
youngest Speaker

**Mumbai:** After he was elected as the Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly, first-time MLA Rahul Narwekar on Sunday became the youngest ever in India to hold this august Constitutional post. Incidentally, 45-year-old Narwekar is the son-in-law of NCP leader Ramraje Naik-Nimbalkar who is the Chairman of the Maharashtra Legislative *Cont on P2*

Pilgrims take a break on the way to the Amarnath cave shrine, near Chandanwari base camp, at Pahalgam in Anantnag district on Sunday. Till now 40,000 people have completed the *darshan* while five people have died during the yatra due to various causes. PTI‘Social media attacks  
on judges for verdicts  
is dangerous trend’PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Supreme Court Judge Justice JB Pardiwala has called for regulating digital and social media to preserve the rule of law under the Constitution.

He termed as “dangerous” the crossing of “*Lakshman rekha*” on these platforms for “personalised, agenda-driven attacks” on the judges.

Justice Pardiwala was speaking at the second Justice HR Khanna Memorial National Symposium organised by Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow & National Law University, Odisha along with the Confederation of Alumni for National Law Universities (CAN Foundation).

The remarks by Justice Pardiwala at an event here come amid an uproar by a sec-



tion over the strong oral observations of a vacation Bench, in which he was a member, against suspended BJP leader Nupur Sharma for her controversial comments against Prophet Mohammed.

The apex court had said her “loose tongue” has “set the entire country on fire” and she should apologise.

The observations of the Bench, which had also refused to club the FIRs lodged against Sharma across the country, sparked

Continued on P2

55% of IndiGo's  
domestic flights  
delayed, DGCA  
seeks explanation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Several IndiGo flights were delayed on Saturday due to the non-availability of crew members. Taking note of the delayed flights, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has sought an explanation from the airline for massive delays in flights.

As per the Ministry of Civil Aviation data, 55 per cent of the IndiGo's domestic flights were behind schedule as a significant number of cabin crew members took sick leave.

IndiGo, India's largest airline, currently operates approximately 1,600 flights — domestic and international — daily.

The on-time performance of the budget carrier may have seen its lowest on Saturday with the Ministry putting IndiGo's figures at 45.2 per cent — at the bottom of the list. In comparison, the on-time performances of Air India, SpiceJet, Vistara, Go First *Continued on P2*

Study: Elephants in U'Khand forests  
eating plastic, glass, metal pieces

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Plastic and other human-made materials like glass, metal pieces, rubber bands, clay pottery and tile pieces are what the elephants in the forests of Uttarakhand are consuming.

A team of researchers made this disturbing revelation in their study after they found these non-biodegradable toxic materials in the dung samples collected from four sites — three near the Haridwar Forest Division (Laldhang, Gaidikhata, and Shyampur), and one near Lansdowne Forest Division (Kotdwar).

The first systematic documentation published in the latest *Journal for Nature Conservation* underlines the vulnerability of wild animals to plastic ingestion risk.

It also provides proof that elephants, an endangered mammal species, ingest non-biodegradable, toxic anthropogenic waste, and that it is moving through their digestive systems.

Gitanjali Katlam, the lead author of the study, noted that about one-third (32 per cent) of the elephant dung samples showed the presence of anthropogenic waste.

“About one-third of all elephant dung samples collected from the areas showed



An elephant eating plastic waste

the presence of anthropogenic waste. Roughly 85 per cent of this was plastic (ranging in size from one millimeter to 35 centimeters), with each sample containing on average as many as 35-60 pieces of plastic.”

Macroplastics (larger than five millimeters) were more common than microplastics (one to five millimeters), said the study titled ‘Plastic ingestion in Asian

elephants in the forested landscapes of Uttarakhand, India.’

Plastics consumed by the elephants are carried deep into the forests, thereby increasing the chances of other animals consuming plastics, said the experts.

Over the last few years, there have been alarming photos and reports of wildlife, including snow leopards, tigers, leopards, and deer, feeding at garbage dumps or carrying plastic waste.

In fact, recently Union Environment Minister, Bhupendra Yadav, too, had said that during his visit to the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, he found a herd of Cheetal feeding on plastic.

Ironically, the case is just the tip of the iceberg. The problem of plastic litter is at almost all national parks, tiger reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries.

Ahead of the ban on identified single-use plastic (SUP) items, Yadav had said, “We will ensure that such plastic is not littered in our national parks or wildlife sanctuaries as plastic, especially micro-plastic has an adverse impact not just on humans but also on the animal world.”

High plastic presence in elephant dung highlights its widespread use near protected habitats *Continued on P2*

## CAPSULE

TEJAS IS MALAYSIA'S  
TOP CHOICE FOR JETS

**New Delhi:** India's Tejas light combat aircraft has emerged as the top choice for Malaysia as the Southeast Asian nation looks at replacing its ageing fleet of fighter jets and the two sides are holding negotiations to firm up the procurement. Malaysia has narrowed down on the Indian aircraft notwithstanding the stiff competition from China's JF-17 jet, South Korea's FA-50 and Russia's Mig-35 as well as Yak-130. Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, R Madhavan said. **P5**

SP DISSOLVES STATE,  
NATIONAL EXEC BODIES

**Lucknow:** Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday dissolved the party's all national, State and district executive bodies including the youth and the women's wing, days after the SP lost two Lok Sabha seats considered its bastions to the BJP in bypolls. Though the party has not given any reason for the decision, which comes into effect immediately, it is seen as an attempt to revamp the organisation after the drubbing on Rampur and Azamgarh seats. **P5**

‘64% NEW ULTRAS IN  
J&K KILLED IN A YEAR’

**Srinagar/New Delhi:** The youths joining the terror ranks in Jammu and Kashmir have a “short shelf life” with more than 64 per cent of them being killed by security forces within a year, officials said on Sunday. Security forces, aided by a strong on-ground intelligence network, have scaled up anti-terror operations in the first five months of this year. **P5**

DEATH TOLL IN MANIPUR  
LANDSLIDE RISES TO 37

**Guwahati/Imphal:** The death toll in the landslide at a railway construction site in Manipur's Noney district rose to 37 on Sunday with the recovery of three more bodies, while search operations were underway for another 25 people, an official said. Heavy rains and fresh landslides in the Tupul area since Saturday night have affected the search operations, he said. Bodies of 37 people have been found so far. **P5**



# Amravati killing: NIA invokes UAPA against 7, gets custody of mastermind

T N RAGHUNATHA ■  
MUMBAI

A district court at Amravati in eastern Maharashtra on Sunday remanded Shiekh Irfan, the prime accused in the murder of a chemist Umesh Pralhadrao Kolhe, in the custody of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) till July 7, even as the NIA invoked the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against the seven accused in the case.

Irfan, who was arrested by

the Nagpur police late on Saturday in the sensational murder of Kolhe allegedly over a WhatsApp message posted by him in support of suspended BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma, is the seventh accused in the case.

Irfan, whose arrest came hours after the Centre handed over the investigation into Kolhe's murder on Saturday, was produced before an Amravati district court on Sunday. The court remanded him to the NIA custody for four days.

The other arrested accused in the case are: Mudassir Ahmed (22), Shahrukh Pathan (25), Abdul Taufiq (24), Shoib Khan (22), Atib Rashid (22), Yusuf Bahadur Khan and finally Sheikh Irfan (35).

The NIA has booked the seven accused in the case under Section 16, 18 and 20 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Section 34, 153 (A), 153 (B), 120 (B) and 302 IPC has been filed based on a complaint by Kolhe's son Sanket

The incident took place between 10 pm and 10.30 pm on June 21 when Kolhe was on his way home after closing his shop -- Amit Medical Store. Sanket (27) and his wife Vaishnavi were accompanying him on another scooter.

Two motorcycle-borne assailants waylaid Kolhe. One of them stabbed him on the left side of his neck with a knife. "My father fell and was bleeding. I stopped my scooter and started shouting for help. Another man came and the three fled the spot on the motorcycle.

With help from passers-by, I rushed my father to nearby Axon Hospital where he died during treatment," Sanket said.

School's gate. Two men on a motorcycle suddenly came in front of my father's scooter and stopped him. One of them stabbed him on the left side of his neck with a knife.

"My father fell and was bleeding. I stopped my scooter and started shouting for help. Another man came and the three fled the spot on the motorcycle.

With help from passers-by, I rushed my father to nearby Axon Hospital where he died during treatment," Sanket said.

The investigations have revealed that Kolhe had circulated on WhatsApp a post supporting BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma, Police Vikram Sali said that prima facie Umesh Kolhe's murder was an off-shoot of a social media post supporting Nupur Sharma, who had made controversial comments on the Prophet in a television debate.

Kolhe inadvertently posted the message in a whatsapp group where there are Muslims who were also his

customers. One of the arrested accused reportedly said that Kolhe's post was an insult to the Prophet and hence he must die.

In an FIR registered in the case, NIA stated: "The said incident of a cold-blooded murder of deceased Umesh Kolhe was an act of larger conspiracy of a group of accused persons and others who have conspired among themselves to strike terror amongst a section of people of India and with their assertions attempted to promote

enmity on the grounds of religion and thereby commit a terrorist act on June 21 between 10.00-1030 pm".

Kolhe's murder is akin to that of the killing of tailor Kanhaiyalal Teli who was hacked to death by some miscreants in Udaipur on June 28.

On Saturday, a special court Jaipur on Saturday sent the four persons accused in the murder of Udaipur tailor Kanhaiya Lal Teli to 10-day custody of the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

## Maha BJP-led alliance...

**From Page 1**  
Legislature at 11 am on Tuesday.

Shinde has claimed that he enjoys the support of 170 MLAs in the 288-member House. His claim should be seen in the light of the fact that while Shinde himself claims to have the support of 46 MLAs, including the Sena MLAs, and the BJP which is supporting the Shinde government has a strength of 106 MLAs and in addition, it claims it has the support of 14 MLAs - both Independents and those belonging to the smaller parties.

Tuesday's confidence vote will be done on the basis of a voice vote and not as per the secret ballot. This is an advan-

tage for Shinde, as no Sena MLAs - supporting him - dare switch sides on the floor of the House, a thing that would have happened had there been a secret ballot.

On its part, the parent Shiv Sena -led by Uddhav Thackeray - is banking on the verdict of the Supreme Court where it has filed a petition seeking suspension of 39 party MLAs owing allegiance to Eknath Shinde for allegedly violating the party whip. The apex court will hear the pleas along with other pleas on Friday.

The two-day special session of the State Legislature - convened to hold the Speaker's elections and the facilitate Shinde seek confidence vote on the floor of the State Assembly

-- preceded a high drama, as the Eknath Shinde-led rebel Shiv Sena faction sealed the legislative party office in the Vidhan Bhavan. A notice pasted by the rebel Shinde faction on the closed doors of the Sena legislative party office in the Vidhan Bhavan carried a message in Marathi that read: "The office is closed as per instructions of the Shiv Sena legislative party."

The development took place after rebel Shiv Sena MLAs supporting Shinde returned to Mumbai from Goa on Saturday evening.

By closing down the Sena's legislature party at the Vidhan Bhavan, the rebel Sena has staked claim for the office on the ground that it has a major-

ity of 55 MLAs on its side.

The closure of the Shiv Sena legislature party office is an off-shoot of the on-going power tussle that erupted between the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and rebel group after senior Sena leader Eknath Shinde rebelled against Uddhav, walked out the party with a majority of the Sena MLAs and teamed up with the BJP to form a new government in the state.

Meanwhile, the police have made elaborate security arrangements in and around Vidhan Bhavan in south Mumbai to ensure against any untoward incident during or after the confidence vote being sought by Eknath Shinde on Tuesday.

## Narwekar India's youngest...

**From Page 1**  
Council. He is married to Sarojini, the daughter of Nimbalkar.

Speaking about happy familial coincidence, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP said: "Now the relation between the Upper House and Lower House is akin to a father-in-law and son-in-law.

In the past, Narwekar had served as a Governor-nominated MLC (Upper House) from 2016 before becoming an MLA in 2019.

Coming from a political

family, Narwekar began his political career with the Shiv Sena. He quit the Shiv Sena after he was denied a party ticket to contest the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and joined the NCP which put him as its candidate from the Maval Lok Sabha constituency in 2014. He was defeated in the polls.

Ahead of the 2019 Assembly polls, he switched sides from the NCP and joined BJP which fielded him as its candidate from Colaba in south Mumbai. He won the polls.

## Trial to begin in 10-year-old graft case held up by delay in forensic report by CBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The trial in a corruption case against a CONCOR executive will begin soon, after a decade-long delay, as the CBI has now submitted a crucial forensic report and the sanction for prosecution before a court in a chargesheet filed in 2011, officials said.

The delay in the case against Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) executive Priyabrata Mitra was mainly attributed to getting the sanction for prosecution but during a review, it also came to light that a CBI official had kept a crucial forensic report furnished by the Central Forensic Science

Laboratory (CFSL) in 2012 under wraps. Departmental proceedings against the erring officer have been initiated.

The case seems to have finally taken off after a pause of 10 years when a special court on Saturday set the date of August 14 for further proceedings, underlining the need for "expeditious hearings" from now on. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had filed the chargesheet in the case of alleged abuse of official position for personal gains in 2011 against seven people, including Mitra, the then managing director of Bharat Oil Company Naresh Manglani and customs department officials.

## LeT ultra was...

**From Page 1**  
showed extreme courage in apprehending two most wanted terrorists of Lashkar-e-Taiba who had reached that area to take shelter after continuous pressure from Police and Army".

"They have been identified as Talib Hussain of Rajouri and Faisal Ahmed Dar of Pulwama". 2AK rifles, 7 Grenades, and a Pistol along with a huge quantity of ammunition was recovered from their possession", ADGP added.

Singh said, Talib Hussain was in constant touch with Pakistan-based LeT terrorist Qasim and was involved in at least three cases of IED blasts at Rajouri district besides civilian killings and grenade blasts.

Working as a political worker in the region, Talib Hussain had won the confidence of senior J&K BJP leaders and was seen standing next to them in several party functions at the party headquarters located in Trikuta Nagar area of Jammu. In May 2022, Talib Hussain was appointed as IT and social media in charge of the BJP Minority Morcha by the President of the Morcha Sheikh Bashir.

Interestingly, Talib Hussain, according to Sheikh Bashir, had tendered his resignation from the post and the primary membership of the party on May 27. He remained on the post for a total number of 18 days. His images with sitting BJP MP Jugal Kishore

Sharma, and Ravinder Raina, attending a function in the auditorium at party headquarters, surfaced in social media after his arrest. Hussain was also working as a reporter for a local news portal.

Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha and Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh both applauded the courage of the villagers and said that with this kind of determination shown by the villagers, the end days of terrorism is not far.

Manoj Sinha also announced a cash reward of Rs 5 lakhs for the villagers. Meanwhile, the Director-General of J&K Police announced a reward of Rs two lakhs for them.

**From Page 1**  
a debate, including on digital and social media platforms, leading to some uncharitable comments against the judges also.

"In India, which cannot be classified as mature and an informed democracy, social and digital media is employed frequently to politicise purely legal and constitutional issues," Justice Pardiwala said and gave the illustration of the Ayodhya land dispute case.

News agency PTI quoted the judge as saying the trials by digital media are an undue interference in the justice dispensation system. "Crossing that 'Lakshman rekha' many times, this is especially more

worrisome," the judge, who has recently been elevated to the top court, said.

"Digital and social media needs to be mandatorily regulated in the country to preserve the rule of law under our Constitution..."

"Attacks attempted at our judges for the judgements will lead to a dangerous scenario where the judges will have to pay greater attention as to what the media thinks rather than what the law actually mandates. This puts the rule of law on the burner ignoring the sanctity of the respect for the courts," he said.

Speaking on the subject of 'Vox Populi vs. Rule of Law: Supreme Court of India',

Justice Pardiwala said, "Judicial verdicts cannot be the reflection of the influence of public opinion."

Observing that the rule of law has to prevail over the popular public sentiment, the apex court judge said that balancing the intent of the majority populace on one hand and meeting its demand and affirming the rule of law on the other is an "arduous exercise".

"It requires extreme judicial craftsmanship to walk the tightrope between the two that is where people think 'log kya kahenge, log kya sochenge' (What will people say, what will people think) is an enigma which haunts each and every judge whenever he is to

pen down a judgement," he said. Talking about digital and social media, he said these sections possess only the half-truth and start scrutinising the judicial process.

They are also not aware of the concept of judicial discipline, binding precedents and inherent limitations of judicial discretion, he said.

"This section of people, the half-truth knowledgeable, is the real challenge to the dispensation of justice through the rule of law," he said.

"Social and digital media is nowadays primarily resorted to expressing personalised opinions more against the judges per se rather than a constructive critical appraisal of their

judgements. This is what is harming the judicial institutions and lowering this dignity," he said.

Justice Pardiwala said the constitutional courts have always graciously accepted informed dissent and constructive criticism and the legal ethos always barred the "personalised, agenda-driven attacks" on the judges.

He said the judges must not participate in social media discussions as "judges never speak through their tongue, only their judgements." He concluded his address by saying "judiciary cannot exist independent of society but the rule of law is insurmountable."

## Next 30-40 years will be the era of BJP...

**From Page 1**  
political resolution also praised the 'Agnipath scheme' for the four-year short-term recruitment in the armed forces and lauded the Government's courage for taking a host of initiatives for the country's development.

Claiming that the BJP will end family rule in States like Telangana and West Bengal, Shah said it will come to power in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Odisha, States which have so far remained out of the saffron party's march since it formed the Government at the Centre in 2014.

Hitting out at Congress, Shah said it has become a

party of a family with the Gandhi family not letting internal organisational elections happen because it fears losing its control of the party.

The opposition is disjointed and has been opposing everything good the government does, he said, referring to issues such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, construction of the Ram temple, surgical strikes, and abrogation of Article 370.

"The Congress has been affected by 'Modi phobia' and opposes every decision of the Modi government taken in the national interest," he said.

Lauding the Prime Minister's leadership, the Home Minister said he is now

considered "one of the top leaders" in the world and is sought out for his views on a host of issues ranging from the environment to terrorism.

Referring to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's presidential candidate Droupadi Murmu, he said the saffron party under the Modi government chose a Dalit, incumbent President Ram Nath Kovind, and now a Scheduled Tribe during the two elections for the top constitutional post and asked party members to publicize the story of Murmu's life and struggle.

With the BJP in power in all the northeastern states either on its own or as part of

alliances, Shah said the region will remain a stronghold of the party. All disputes in the region will be resolved by 2024, he added, a reference to boundary conflicts and militancy there.

Nearly 350 delegates, including members of the party's top brass, attended the two-day national executive meeting in Hyderabad which began on Saturday.

He cited the party's win in a string of recent polls as an endorsement of its "politics of development and performance". Shah also Shah termed as "historic" the Supreme Court's recent clean chit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Gujarat

riots case and said the judgement also "exposed the conspiracies" by "certain parties, journalists and NGOs" to malign the PM.

He identified southern India as the region for its next round of growth and said the opposition had become disjointed and dispirited with members of the Congress fighting for democracy within their organisation as its ruling family clung to its position.

Shah also hailed as "historic" the recent Supreme Court verdict dismissing a plea challenging the Special Investigation Team's (SIT) clean chit to 64 people, including then chief minister

Narendra Modi, in the 2002 Gujarat riots case. The court had also come down hard on the petitioners.

The apex court has exposed opposition parties, a section of media, and some NGOs for their conspiracy to defame Modi, he said.

The BJP leader said Modi received insults, maintained silence while facing the SIT, and kept his faith in the Constitution while contrasting this with the Congress' attempt to spread "anarchy" after its leader Rahul Gandhi was summoned by the Enforcement Directorate in the National Herald case.

The opposition party had launched nationwide protests,

blaming the ruling party's vendetta for the probe against its top functionaries.

Briefing reporters on Shah's speech, Assam Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Modi never did the kind of "drama" that Gandhi has done while facing a lawful investigation. The home minister said Modi drank all the poison thrown at him like Lord Shiva and faced the probe. Sarma parried queries on whether the killing of Udaipur tailor Kanhaiya Lal, who was hacked to death by two Islamic fanatics, or the row involving suspended BJP member Nupur Sharma over her objectionable remarks against Prophet Mohammad

was part of deliberations at the national executive meet, but added that specific incidents are generally not discussed at such a conclave where the focus is on "macro" issues.

He, though, alleged that had Congress not started politics of appeasement, incidents like the Udaipur killing might not have happened.

Shah said Modi received insults, maintained silence while facing the SIT, and kept his faith in the Constitution while contrasting this with the Congress' attempt to spread "anarchy" after its leader Rahul Gandhi was summoned by the Enforcement Directorate in the National Herald case.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to inform the general public at large that my clients Mohd Shahid S/o Mohd Ayyub, Saif-ul-Islam, Mohd Adil and Mohd Sajid all sons of Mohd Shahid all R/o 9952, First Floor, Nawabganj, Main Bazar, Azad Market, Delhi-110006, have severed all their relations with their son/brother Mohd Imran who is running his business separately for last about 15 years. His behavior towards my clients have turned hostile and due to his misconduct, errant, quarrelsome behavior & non-cooperative attitude, my clients do hereby separate and break their relations from him. My clients are not responsible for the liabilities of Mohd Imran or any person dealing with him, shall deal with his own risk, responsibility & my clients shall not be responsible for his any act, deal or transaction, in any manner.

Sd/-

Manish Goyal Advocate  
Chamber No. D-404,  
Karkardooma Courts  
Delhi-110032

## Days of family-run parties are numbered...

**From Page 1**  
*parivaron ke liye tikee*

**THE PIONEER**  
**CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**I, Santosh Kumari Sharma** W/o Ex. SGT G.M Sharma R/o H No.-527, Sector-37, Faridabad 121003, Haryana, declare that Santosh Kumari Sharma & Santosh Sharma both names are one and the same person. Now I, have changed my name from Santosh Kumari Sharma to Santosh Sharma. by Affidavit dated 24.06.2022 at Faridabad.  
**PD(90121)C**

*rahna sambhav nahin hain."* He said this in Hindi without explicitly mentioning the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Trinamool Congress, National Congress and the Telangana Rashtriya Samiti, which are considered "dynastic" parties by the BJP.

BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad who gave details of Modi's address in the meeting said Modi demanded to know "what is the situation in the political parties who question us on internal party democracy.

Accusing opposition parties of "opposing BJP for the sake of opposition" and pointed to Congress criticism of "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav" celebrations saying "BJP has taken the contract of it. ' ' As if it is only our Independence not theirs ", he said.

Modi said the country is

moving forward with the spirit of "Sabka saath, sabka vikas and sabka prayas" and referred to the selection of Droupadi Murmu, a tribal, as NDA presidential nominee and praised the outgoing president Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit , who ran his tenure with "great dignity without inviting any controversy ".

He asked all BJP MPs and MLAs to ensure that they vote correctly and in strength on July 18 Presidential election.

The Prime Minister said with "India first" aim, the country achieved 8.2 growth rate even though post-corona global order is reeling under economic crisis. "

Exports are rising, there is record Foreign Direct Investment and poverty level has dropped ", he said.

The Prime Minister asked BJP workers to visit con-

stituencies of all states and establish direct connections with people.

He gave a mantra of "seva, santulan, Samanvay aur samvad" (service, balance, coordination and Dialogue) to party workers.

Later in the evening, Prime Minister addressed a public rally "Vijay Sankalpa Sabha" at Parade Grounds in Secunderabad, where he spoke about "double engine governments of BJP delivering development in several states" adding "people of Telangana too are making way for double engine government in the state", he said.

Amidst a cheering crowd, Modi said support to BJP and its "vote share is increasing in Telangana since 2019" and good reflection of "your appreciation and BJP's success came in Greater

Hyderabad Municipal elections", Modi said.

The Prime Minister reeled off infrastructure, road , textile, and fertilizer projects laid out by the center for Telangana.

On the concluding day of the two-day National Executive Meeting at Hyderabad, BJP passed a political resolution that asserted that Telangana and West Bengal would soon show doors to family-oriented ruling parties.

The resolution was moved by Union Home minister Amit Shah and seconded by Assam and Karnataka Chief Ministers Hemanta Biswa Sarma and S R Bommai.

"BJP has established itself in the northeast region and politics will be free of dynastic politics including that in West Bengal and Telangana," said Sarma quoting Shah.

**Study: Elephants in U'Khand forests...**

**From Page 1**  
and the lack of waste segregation practices underlining the vulnerability of wild animals to plastic ingestion risk. "We provide recommendations for developing a comprehensive solid waste management strategy to mitigate the threat of plastic pollution around critical elephant habitats in India," said the team of researchers namely Soumya Prasad from Nature Science Initiatives, Dehradun, Anant Pande from Wildlife Conservation Society, Bangaluru, and Nirala Ramchiarya from JNU, Delhi.

**55% of IndiGo's domestic...**

**From Page 1**  
and AirAsia India was 77.1 per cent, 80.4 per cent, 86.3 per cent, 88 per cent and 92.3 per cent, respectively.

The phase-2 of Air India's recruitment drive was conducted on Saturday and the majority of IndiGo's cabin crew members who took sick leave went for it, the sources in the industry added. Air India has started a recruitment drive for fresh cabin crew members as it is planning to buy new planes and improve its services.

The airline had earlier received backlash for denying boarding to a child with a disability at Ranchi airport on May 7.

The DGCA had fined the airlines of Rs 5 lakh and in its report said that the handling of the child by IndiGo ground staff was deficient.

Last month, actor Pooja Hegde also expressed displeasure over the behaviour of a member of the airline staff.



# City Govt likely to hike MLAs' salary; Bill today

AAP likely to bring resolution against Agnipath in Delhi Assembly Session

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP Government is bringing a Bill to hike the salary and allowances of Chief Minister, Ministers and MLAs in the upcoming two-day Session of the Delhi Assembly beginning from Monday. The Government is also likely to bring a resolution against the Centre's Agnipath defence recruitment scheme.

The AAP Government in Punjab on Thursday passed a resolution against the controversial scheme which was announced by the Centre on June 14 and had triggered protests in several parts of the country. As per the Delhi Assembly business listed, the Minister for Law, Justice and Legislative Affairs, Kailash



Gahlot will introduce the five Bills related to salary of Ministers, MLAs, Chief Whip, Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Leader of the Opposition on Monday.

The two-day Delhi Assembly session will begin from July 4. The session will begin at 11 am on Monday. As per the proposal Bill, the existing monthly salary and allowances from Rs 54,000 to Rs 90,000.

The Kejriwal Government had proposed a salary of Rs 54,000 for the MLAs at par with other states, however, the

MHA did not allow this to happen and restricted it to Rs 30,000.

The constituency allowance has been increased from Rs 18,000 to Rs 25,000, secretarial allowance from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000, telephone allowance from Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000 and conveyance allowance from Rs 6000 to Rs 10,000.

The salary and allowances of Delhi MLAs were last revised in 2011. Several BJP, Congress and regional party ruled states provide much more monthly salaries to their MLAs,

even though living costs in Delhi are higher than most parts of India, the Delhi government said citing examples of Uttarakhand (Rs 1.98 lakh), Himachal Pradesh (Rs 1.9 lakh), Haryana (Rs 1.55 lakh), Bihar (Rs 1.3 lakh), Rajasthan (Rs 1.42 lakh) and Telangana (Rs 2.5 lakh).

On the resolution against Agnipath, sources said that it would be in the lines of the Punjab government. "Such a resolution and discussion is most likely in the Delhi Assembly too," the sources said.

The Agnipath scheme seeks to recruit in the armed forces youths in the age bracket of 17-and-a-half to 21 years for only four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years. For 2022, the upper age limit has been extended to 23 years.

AAP National Convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had earlier backed youths protesting against the scheme and appealed to the Centre to give them the chance to serve the

country throughout their life and not just for four years.

Durgesh Pathak, newly elected AAP MLA from Rajinder Nagar, will also be administered the oath of office during the session.

Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said a two-day session was not adequate and accused the Kejriwal government of running away from answering questions on public issues.

Bidhuri also challenged the government to debate in any issues related to waterlogging, poor public transport, education, health, pollution and liquor shops in residential areas. He accused that the Delhi government has failed on all fronts.

In view of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, the MLAs will require to wear face mask compulsorily. "They will also compulsorily carry final certificate for COVID-19 vaccination or a negative report of the coronavirus test issued not earlier than 48 hours prior to the commencement of the session on July 4," bulletin said.

## 'Over 10 L got jobs through Govt's Rozgaar Bazaar portal'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Sunday claimed that their Government's job portal 'Rozgaar Bazaar' launched by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has helped 10.21 lakh jobseekers get employed so far in the national Capital. The Rozgaar Bazaar portal was launched by the Delhi Government on July 27, 2020 to help entry-level and blue-collar job seekers connect with employers.

This comes after media report that only 12588 people had actually secured jobs through the portal till May 1. This figure of 12588 is also an estimate of the government's as it's based solely on phone calls with people who posted the job openings without cross checking with people who actually got the jobs.

According to report, the Delhi Government does not have names or any other details of people who actually got jobs. The Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday shared data and said until June 30, 2022, a total of 10,21,303 verified jobs across 32 job categories have been generated in Delhi. "These jobs have been generated by a total of 19,402 unique employers. Rozgaar Bazaar portal



deploys a stringent verification process to ensure no fake jobs are posted. Each new job posted is individually verified and only after this process are the jobs posted on the portal," said an official. "The official figures from Rozgaar Bazaar show that over 10 lakhs jobs has been generated in Delhi in the past two years.

Everyone will see very soon how CM Arvind Kejriwal lives up to his promise of providing another 20 lakhs jobs in Delhi as announced in our Rozgaar Budget this year," claimed Sisodia.

As per official data, a total of 15,23,536 unique job seekers are registered on Rozgaar Bazaar portal as on June 30, 2022. "The portal tracks active connections initiated through phone calls, whatsapp etc. between job-seekers and job providers. Over 53 lakh such

connections have been made until June 30, 2022 showing the extent to which the portal has become a lifeline for job-seekers and job-providers in the entry level and blue collar job sectors in Delhi," said an official. Priyanshi runs IZS Technocrats, an internet & technology solutions company based in Delhi. While talking about her experience of using the portal, she enlisted a variety of merits she discovered while searching for employees.

"As an employer we, like most other companies, saw many employees leave and head for their hometowns. This brought us into a fix about our day to day functioning. I approached several private companies and their portals seeking their aid in hiring employees but to no avail," Priyanshi said.

She then learnt about Delhi Government's Rozgaar Bazaar portal from news channels and immediately registered for the same. "Within 24 hours I had applicants reaching out to me to work for our company. Because of the large pool of candidates my vacancies were fulfilled in no time. The best part of the portal is that it is completely free and I did not have to pay a penny for its services," she added.

## Rain brings relief from heat but waterlogging, snarls choke Capital



Commuters ply on a waterlogged road near Pragati Maidan after a Monsoon shower in New Delhi



RANJAN DIMRI | PIONEER

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Parts of the Capital witnessed heavy rainfall on Sunday, bringing a much needed relief from oppressive and sultry weather. The heavy rainfall caused waterlogging low lying

areas. According to reports and videos shared on social media, traffic snarled in Mandi House, Tilak Marg, Pragati Maidan, Wazirabad road, Kashmeri Gate, Subhash Marg road. Videos shared on social media also showed flooded streets in

areas like Mandi House, Tilak Marg, and Pragati Maidan. According to the the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the maximum temperature in the national capital on Sunday settled at 35.7 degrees Celsius, a notch below

the average. The minimum temperature was recorded at 26.2 degrees Celsius, two notches below the average, it said. The relative humidity oscillated between 83 per cent and 63 per cent. The weather office has predicted generally cloudy skies

with light rain and thunder-showers on Monday. The national capital previously received heavy rain on Thursday morning, bringing temperature below 30 degrees Celsius. Vehicular traffic movement went for a toss and Delhi

traffic police were kept busy on Friday as well in several parts of the city — especially south, west and north Delhi — owing to religious processions, waterlogging, as well as road repair works being carried out by civic agencies.

## City Govt to urge Centre to reduce GST on raw materials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Sunday said the city Government will request the Centre Government to reduce GST on raw materials for production of alternatives to single-use plastic items. Rai appealed to all the citizens of Delhi to join hands with government to encourage and promote start-ups/entrepreneurs producing other single use plastic alternatives and to make Delhi a plastic free city for citizens.

Rai, who chaired a roundtable with stakeholders to discuss SUP alternatives on Sunday, said that there is a lot of confusion among public and even some government agencies regarding the items covered under the ban. "We will conduct a training session for our enforcement teams so that there is no confusion while implementing the ban," said the minister.

The government will also issue a helpline number to register complaints if action is taken for using products that are not banned, Rai said. After some stakeholders drew minister's attention towards high GST rates on raw material for green alternatives, Rai said the city government will write to the Centre on issue. "The Delhi government will request Centre to reduce GST rates on raw material to manufacture alternatives to single-use plastics.

People think a ban on SUP items mean a ban on plastic carry bags and that is why there is an urgent need to create awareness among public," said Rai. The Delhi government is also working on a website which will contain all information related to banned SUP items.

## 4 held as cops bust gang of hi-tech cyber criminals

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the arrest of four men, the Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have busted a gang of hi-tech cyber criminals who used to cheat gullible people on pretext of facilitating online loans.

Police said that accused got this idea of cheating from YouTube and later they came in touch with some Chinese national on telegram who used to cheat innocent persons on pretext of facilitating online loans. Police have also recovered 15 debit cards and a BMW car from possession of accused. The accused have been identified as Deepak Patwa (23), Dev Kishan (32) and Suresh Singh (45), all residents



of Chittorgarh district in Rajasthan and Sunil Kumar Khatik (34), a resident of Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh.

According to Pranav Tayal, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Rohini district, a complaint was received at Cyber Police Station Rohini in which complainant alleged that he received a text message on his phone that "LIGHT your applied loan is approved, you can choose loan limit ranged from Rs. 2,00,000, please login App to get https://bit.ly/3jpHfEV".

## Govt to send elderly for Jagannath Puri Yatra under its free pilgrimage scheme

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Arvind Kejriwal Government will be sending elderly pilgrims for Jagannath Puri Yatra in Odisha under its free pilgrimage scheme the "Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana". A train carrying senior citizens will depart on July 11. Another train will depart on July 28. Meanwhile, Delhi Government's scheme to offer its senior citizens free pilgrimage to Velankanni Church in Tamil Nadu has received a dull response.

The general public was not allowed to take part in the Rath Yatra in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, but the restrictions were later lifted. This year, the yatra

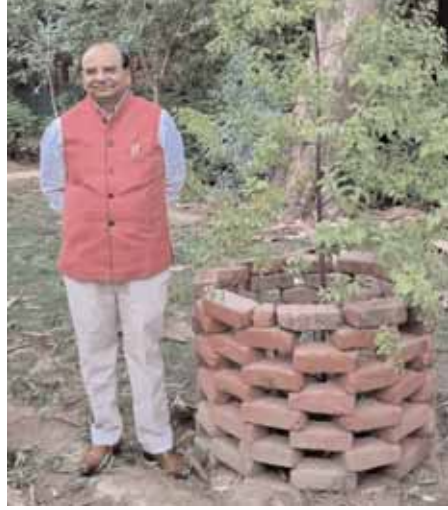
kicked off from July 1. Kamal Bansal, chairman of the Delhi government's Tirth Yatra Vikas Samiti, said, "The Jagannath Puri Yatra is very popular. On the instructions of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, free pilgrimage is being provided to senior citizens and now they will get an opportunity to visit the historic yatra. In the month of July, specially two trains will leave for the yatra."

Meanwhile, Delhi government's scheme to free pilgrimage to Velankanni Church in Tamil Nadu has received a dull response. According to officials, they have only received 500-600 applications ever since the scheme resumed following a disruption due to the third wave of coronavirus

in January this year. "There need to be at least 1,000 applicants for the pilgrimage," the officials said. Last November, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced the addition of the popular church in its list of pilgrimage sites under the Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana.

"We were getting requests from our Christian brothers to add some pilgrimage sites to the scheme. We have decided to include Velankanni Church to the scheme," Kejriwal had said. Also known as the 'Lourdes of the East', the church is one of the most revered sites for Christians in the country. However, officials close to the development said there have been fewer applications.

## Plant 10K chandan trees: LG



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor (L-G), V K Saxena, has directed all land owning agencies to undertake horticultural activities to plant 10,000 sandalwood (chandan) trees across the national Capital, so as to effectively monetise their land resource. The L-G has also appealed to farmers and small land holders apart from farm house

owners in the city to plant at least four chandan trees. According to officials, the agencies like DDA, MCD, Delhi Parks and Garden Society, Delhi Biodiversity Society and others have been advised to complete the plantation of these trees during the on-going monsoon season itself.

"By doing so, the often resource deficient farmers could easily depend on two trees for the education of their children and the remaining two could be utilized for aiding their future careers," said Saxena.

"Plantation of Sandalwood, apart from adding to the flora diversity of the city and enriching the general environs, will lead to monetization of government land and create immense financial assets for the land-owning agencies and farmers and land-holders in the city," said the official.

"A sandalwood tree matures in 12 to 15 years and as per the current rates, sells at Rs 12- 15 lakh each. At this rate, around 10,000 sandalwood trees are estimated to fetch between Rs 12,000 -15,000 crores upon maturity," said the official.

The L-G informed that contrary to refrain in certain circles that chandan trees cannot come up in climatic conditions present in Delhi and other locations in the country, all these trees, including the ones that he got planted at Rajghat in Delhi, had in an year not only survived, but robustly grown to a height of 9-10 feet.

## DU English teachers fear job loss, workload

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University's English teachers have raised concerns over the loss of jobs/workload with changes to be brought in by the four-year undergraduate programme structure as the next academic session approaches.

They have also pointed out that English has been removed as a Core Language course in the BA Programme and BCom programme courses. Around 100 teachers are "slated" to lose their jobs following the removal of English as an AEC under the UGCF, claims teacher.

Earlier this year, more than 400 English teachers had also petitioned the Vice-Chancellor asking that English remain in the Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC) pool and as a Core Language course in the BA and BCom programme courses. "I have given prime years of my life to the university and now I am living in the

constant fear of losing my job," says a Delhi University teacher, summing up the plight of hundreds of English teachers who are fearing job loss due to the implementation of Undergraduate Curriculum Framework (UGCF) from the 2022-23 academic session.

The Delhi University's Executive Council in February approved UGCF-2022 formulated in accordance with the National Education Policy.

Several teachers opposed the proposed structure of the UGCF, saying that the Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC) are offered only in the languages included in the eighth schedule of the Constitution and that does not include English.

They also said the UGCF singles out the English department in particular for a massive reduction, almost in the range of 30 to 40 per cent, of its existing workload.

"I have been teaching in the Department of English at a DU

college since 2010 on an ad hoc basis. Since it is a science college, our workload is mainly dependent on the AEC paper," said the English teacher who did not wish to be named. "After having worked sincerely for 12 years, I am now living under the constant threat of losing my job. What will be done for people like me who have given their prime years to the University in the hope of being permanent one day?" the teacher added.

As the university is set to reopen soon, teachers have argued that there is a clear indication that the workload of the English department across colleges will get reduced by at least one-third.

Rudrashish Chakraborty, professor at Kirori Mal College, said: "In my college, there is a loss of 60 lectures in the next semester; in Hansraj College, it is 50, in Ramjas, it's almost 60+, and so is the story in colleges across the university." The situation will be worse for teach-

ers working in colleges which do not offer English (hons) or BA programme like Keshav Mahavidyalaya, GGS College of Commerce, Institute of Home Economics (IHE), Lady Irwin College, Bhaskaracharya, and Rajguru College of Applied Sciences, believes Chakraborty. "Their entire workload used to be primarily of AEC which is gone now: rendering the permanent teachers almost redundant, forget the ad hoc ones.

This assault on workload has been made systematically to make sure that ad hoc teachers working in the English department lose their jobs after teaching for the last eight-nine years in the university in the hope of getting absorbed," alleged Chakraborty.

A member of DU Academic Council, Mithuraj Dhusiya, said that the English departments across DU colleges are staring at mass level displacements of existing ad hoc and guest teachers.



# Cong to contest K'taka Assembly poll on 'Kannadiga pride' plank



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In an attempt to galvanise votes in the name of region and language, Congress is strategising to contest the Assembly elections in Karnataka due early next year by invoking 'Kannadiga pride'. He also declared that Congress will go alone in the polls. The party will give job reservations to the people of the State and reduce the influ-

## interview

ence of Hindi speaking (read North Indians) in the jobs sector. Former Chief Minister K Siddaramiah said if the Congress comes back to power there will be domicile-based reservation in Class III and IV Government jobs for Kannadigas.

"We shall go to voters vowing to re-establish the Kannadiga pride and expose the ruling BJP which is imposing Hindi at the behest of the RSS.

We are in a very good and there is no question of partnering with any other political party for the elections," Siddaramaiah said in an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*. He was in the national Capital to discuss election strategy with former Congress

President Rahul Gandhi. Siddaramiah was accompanied by Karnataka Congress president D. K. Shivakumar—both contenders for the Chief Minister's post.

To a question on whether he will be the CM's face, Siddaramiah said it will be decided by the elected party legislators and approved by the high command.

"There is no tussle, no faction or frictions and Congress will give a resounding victory in the state and wrest power from the incumbent corrupt BJP government which itself was formed by very dubious means," said the Leader of Opposition in Karnataka assembly.

Siddaramaiah argued that the BJP Government in the State is run by Delhi and is

seeking to indirectly impose Hindi and Hindutva on Karnataka. To drive this campaign, Congress is planning to resurrect the 1984 Sarojini Mahishi report, which recommends a certain percentage of jobs to Kannadigas in public sector undertakings, private companies, and multinational companies.

"The BJP Government at the Centre and the State are taking away the jobs of Kannadigas. What did Prime Minister Narendra Modi do? He merged four Karnataka-based banks — State Bank of Mysore, Syndicate Bank, Vijaya Bank, and Corporation Bank to steal jobs from Kannadigas," Siddaramaiah added.

As part of its election manifesto the party will also announce holding a caste-based census that was carried out during his tenure but since

then has been put in a cold basket. Commenting on the current political scenario, Siddaramiah said BJP has fanned communal tension to divert attention from its failure and keep the political narrative focused around "hijab, halal, and azaan".

On the alliance structure, Siddaramiah asserted that there is no need of any alliances as Congress is in a very strong position, and the only thing it lacked is "good marketing".

The former CM blamed the Janata Dal (S) and its leadership for backstabbing Congress. "We always supported them. Even in the Rajya Sabha elections, Congress did not field any candidate to pave the way for JDS patriarch HD Deve Gowda to get into the upper house. Still, they let us down on every occasion."

# I hang my head in shame: Sibal on state of judiciary

Says journalist Zubair denied bail by a court for tweet that he had posted 4 years ago without any communal outcome

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern over the current state of the judiciary, Rajya Sabha MP and senior advocate Kapil Sibal on Sunday said some members of the institution have "let us down" and "I hang my head in shame" for what has happened in the recent past.

In an interview with PTI, Sibal also said that in recent years, free speech, and how it has been interpreted by the Supreme Court, unfortunately, is not allowed the space that is constitutionally permissible to it.

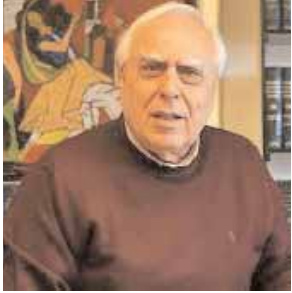
Attacking the BJP-led Government at the Centre, he said there is a "de facto emergency" in place with "throttling" of institutions. The rule of law is "infringed" on a daily basis, he alleged. Sibal also said the present dispensation wants an 'Opposition-mukt Bharat' not just a 'Congress-mukt Bharat'.

Asked about the arrest of Alt News co-founder Mohammed Zubair, Sibal said that the more worrying larger issue was that some members of the judiciary have "let us down".

"Some members of the institution (judiciary) of which I have been a part for 50 years have let us down. I hang my head in shame that this has happened. When the judiciary turns a blind eye to ex facie violations of the rule of law one wonders why an institution designed to protect the rule of law allows the rule of law to be infringed with open eyes," Sibal told PTI over phone from the UK.

Talking about the arrest of Zubair and the denial of bail to him by a Delhi court, he said that for a tweet four years ago without any communal outcome, it is "unthinkable" for that person to have been arrested.

"More than that, now having realised that the arrest cannot possibly be sustained, the investigating agency is looking for other matters which have nothing to do with



the original arrest. Clearly what we are witnessing is a mala fide arrest and a subsequent fishing inquiry," Sibal said. What the investigating agencies now do is to arrest a person, then start investigating as to what he might have violated. For that they seek access to other records and then come back to court to allege commission of other offences in an attempt to deny bail to the accused, he charged.

Asked about the criticism from certain quarters of the Supreme Court ruling in the Zakia Jafri case in which the top court upheld the SIT's clean chit to the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and 63 others in the 2002 communal riots matter, Sibal said since he was a lawyer for Jafri it was not proper for him to comment at this stage.

"But I can say this to you that we have seen in the recent past, judges rendering findings on matters that were not argued before them, judges rendering findings in matters which are not appealed against and some judges disregarding patent illegalities and upholding executive actions that are indefensible," Sibal said.

"I don't want to make a comment on any particular case but as I said having been a part of this institution, for what has happened in the recent past, I hang my head in shame," he said.

On the UN Human Rights office expressing concern over the arrest of Zubair and activist-lawyer Teesta Setalvad, Sibal said "undoubtedly" India's image was being affected internationally but asserted that people must rely on courts

in India to protect human rights. "Our people in the profession, people who are part of the institution, including judges who are wedded to the rule of law, it is time for all of us to speak frankly, openly and without fear about the state of affairs prevailing today," he said.

Referring to Nupur Sharma's controversial remarks on Prophet Mohammad, Sibal said this is the result of the culture of intolerance and hatred that has crept into our national discourse.

"All this is happening, why, because hate has become an instrument for electoral gain. If hate becomes part of a political strategy to divide society to win elections then you will have many such instances including the one that just happened in Udaipur where a tailor was beheaded.

These unacceptable inhuman and ghastly acts are the result of an agenda which targets communities; an agenda which divides rather than unites," he said. On the BJP's recent critical comments on the Emergency imposed in 1975 by the then Indira Gandhi government, Sibal said Emergency was declared by virtue of powers that were provided for in the Constitution.

"That particular act of declaration of emergency was unfortunately held to be valid by the Supreme Court. This only shows that courts are not infallible. We would like to forget that 'black day' when that judgement was rendered," said the former Union minister, who recently quit the Congress.

Sibal said today situation is much worse because, without the authority of law, there is a "de facto emergency". "What we are witnessing is de facto throttling of all institutions which are designed under Constitution to protect it. With executive capturing almost all such institutions what prevails is a de facto emergency wherein rule of law is infringed on a daily basis," he said.

# Edu Ministry to invite views on National Curriculum Framework

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Ministry of Education is planning to invite an online public consultation survey regarding the development of a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in the National Education Policy 2022.

In a statement on Sunday, the MoE said multiple and diverse views are likely to provide a practical road map for the smooth implementation of the vision of the NEP 2020.

"Given the diversity in the country, providing an opportunity to every stakeholder, who may or may not be a parent or a teacher or a student and willing to participate in the transformation of the education system in India, by sharing views on common concerns related to education, is the need of the hour.

Such multiple and diverse views are likely to provide a practical road map for the smooth implementation of the vision of the NEP 2020," the Ministry said.

The Union government on July 29, 2020 had announced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which suggested the development of a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for improvement of that the quality of the education system.

The stakeholders—teachers, headmasters/principals, school leaders, educationists, parents, students, community members, NGOs, experts, public representatives, artists, artisans, farmers, and anybody who has an interest in school education and teachers' education—have been invited to participate in this online survey being conducted in 23 languages, including the ones placed in the Eighth Schedule of our Constitution.

"It is in this context that

the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSE&L), Ministry of Education, Government of India has planned to invite views of various stakeholders through an online public consultation survey, which will be instrumental in collating very useful and crucial inputs for the formulation of National Curriculum Framework and also subsequently designing the syllabus, textbooks, and other instructional materials" the statement added.

The ministry further said that a tech platform for the website and mobile application has been developed for the execution of the work at scale and in a paperless manner

According to the ministry, the National Focus Groups and National Steering Committee have been engaged at the national level as well to deliberate on various issues and concerns, including the interaction with various ministries, autonomous bodies, NGOs, Corporates, Philanthropic agencies, etc for collecting and collating valuable inputs for formulation of National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

"A mandate document for the formulation of NCF has been developed for guiding the stakeholders in the process," it said.

The process of the NCF was started through the constitution of the District Consultation Committees, State Focus Groups, State Steering Committee, National Focus Groups, and National Steering Committee.

# 2 booked for conspiring to open regional office of anti-corruption organisation in Chennai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked two persons for allegedly conspiring to open the so-called regional office of Anti Corruption and Anti Crime Wing of India (ACAC Wing of India) in Chennai and showing former Chief Justice of India R.M.Lodha as its national president. The accused persons also forged letterheads of the President of India Ram Nath Kovind and Minister of State in the PMO Jitendra Singh.

The accused persons, identified as Renington Sales and R.Vincent Raju, were also committing the fraud in the name of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC).

The duo has been booked under Indian Penal Code Sections relating to criminal conspiracy, cheating, forgery, using forged documents as genuine and forgery for cheating besides relevant provisions of the State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act, 2005.

According to the FIR, a complaint was received through the Central Vigilance Commission portal and the matter was then taken up for enquiry after registration of a Preliminary Enquiry dated.

In the enquiry, it was revealed that during the year 2017-2018, Renington Sales and R.Vincent Raju conspired together and opened a Zonal Office of the Anti Corruption and Anti Crime Wing of India (ACAC Wing of India) in Chennai. They purportedly showed an address in the national capital as their Head Office, which is found to be fictitious.

They also unauthorisedly showed former Chief Justice of India R.M.Lodha as National President of ACAC Wing of India. It is further revealed that in the pursuance of the crimi-

nal conspiracy to show that the ACAC Wing of India was a reputed organisation, they fraudulently and dishonestly printed the letterheads, rubber stamps, identity cards and visiting cards of the ACAC Wing of India by mentioning "Central Vigilance Commission Recognised" with the country's National Emblem.

They also forged the letter purportedly issued by Minister for State Dr Jitendra Singh, PMO and Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), Government of India, intimating all the Chief Secretaries of the state governments about the appointment of Lodha as the President of ACAC Wing of India, as per the FIR.

It is also revealed that the accused persons dishonestly used the forged letter purportedly issued by the President of India Ram Nath Kovind addressed to R.M.Lodha, congratulating him for accepting the position of National President of Anti Corruption and Anti Crime Wing of India.

They also used the forged certificate in the Anti Corruption and Anti Crime Wing of India including the registration marks purportedly issued by the Trade Marks Registry, Mumbai and a Certificate of Registration purportedly issued by the Inspector General of Registration in Tamil Nadu, according to the FIR.

It is also revealed that the accused persons fraudulently and dishonestly opened a Current Account in the name of Anti Corruption and Anti Crime Wing of India at the Indian Bank in Chennai by enclosing a forged Resolution using the name of R.M.Lodha as its President, forged Trade Marks Registration certificate. They also used forged Certificate of Registration and Aadhar Card in the name of ACAC Wing of India, reads the FIR.

# MHA OK's proposal for diversion of IPS quota posts of CRPF, BSF in rank of DIG to cadre officers

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has approved a proposal for the temporary diversion of IPS quota posts of CRPF and BSF in the rank of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) to cadre officers for vacancies in the ongoing year.

As many as 15 posts in Border Security Force (BSF) and 30 such posts in Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will be filled by cadre officers for the vacancy year 2022.

"A proposal was referred to DoPT (Department of Personnel and Training) for temporary diversion of DIG from deputation quota of IPS (Indian Police Service) officers to quota of cadre officers of CRPF and BSF for the vacancy year 2022. DoPT has agreed to the proposal of the Ministry," reads an order issued on Wednesday by the Ministry.

The order also stated that 15 posts of DIG from deputation quota of IPS officers to promotion quota of cadre officers of BSF and 30 posts in a similar category in CRPF will be taken from cadre strength. The proposal is subject to reversal of the posts to IPS quota immediately after such officers are available for post of DIG in these two forces.

"As empanelment at level of DIG has been dispensed with and more officers should now be available, necessary steps may be taken to evolve a permanent solution so as to avoid any such situation of diversion of posts, from one quota to another, 2023 onwards," Ministry further stated in its order.

The cadre review of BSF/CRPF which became due in 2021, must be initiated at earliest. "The cadre review proposal may also contain a permanent solution to the issue of posts earmarked for IPS quota," it added.

# US researchers develop rapid test that identifies Covid variants in hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A team of US researchers has developed a rapid Covid-19 test that might help in identifying different variants of the SARS-CoV-2 in just hours.

After developing 'CoVarScan', a rapid Covid-19 test that detects the signatures of eight hotspots on the SARS-CoV-2 virus, last year, the team now tested that on more than 4,000 patients' samples.

The researchers reported that their test is as accurate as other methods used to diagnose Covid and can successfully differentiate between all current variants of SARS-CoV-2.

"Using this test, we can determine very quickly what variants are in the community and if a new variant is emerging," said researcher Jeffrey SoRelle from the University of Texas Southwestern in the US. "It also has implications for individual patients when we are

dealing with variants that respond differently to treatments," SoRelle added.

Compared to whole-genome sequencing, CoVarScan had 96 per cent sensitivity and 99 per cent specificity, the researchers said, in a study, published in the journal Clinical Chemistry It identified and differentiated Delta, Mu, Lambda, and Omicron variants of Covid-19, including the BA.2 version of Omicron, once known as "stealth Omicron" because it did not show up on some tests designed to detect only the Omicron strain.

While several other tests for Covid-19 exist, they generally detect either a fragment of SARS-CoV-2 genetic material or small molecules found on the surface of the virus and don't provide information to identify the variant. In addition, many researchers worry that these tests aren't accurate in detecting some variants—or may miss future strains. To determine which variant of



Covid-19 a patient has, scientists typically must use whole-genome sequencing, which is time-consuming and expensive, relying on sophisticated equipment and analysis to spell out the entire RNA sequence contained in the viruses, the team said.

In early 2021, SoRelle and his team wanted to track how well current tests were detecting emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2. But they realised that sequencing a lot of specimens

would not be timely or cost-effective, so they designed their own test.

A common critique of this kind of test is that it requires constant adjustment for new variants, but CoVarScan has not needed any adjustment in more than a year; it is still performing very well," said SoRelle. "In the future, if we did need to adjust it, we could easily add as many as 20 or 30 additional hotspots to the test," he added.

# ED freezes ₹8.5 cr funds of firm in illegal mining case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After conducting search operations under Prevention of Money Laundering Act against persons and entities in a case of illegal mining of iron ore in Odisha, the Enforcement Directorate has frozen funds to the tune of Rs 8.52 crore of accused Seraj Yusha, Meraj Yusha and Yazdani International Pvt Ltd as 'proceeds of crime'.

Seraj Yusha and Meraj Yusha are Joint Partners of Serajuddin & Co. They are also directors of Yazdani International Pvt. Ltd. and assets of both entities have also been frozen under PMLA.

Serajuddin & Company obtained the mining lease without satisfying the conditions as prescribed and has accordingly extracted manganese ore illegally from Guruda Manganese ore mines to the

tune of 14,73,697.99 MT from the forest area without having approved the De-Reservation proposal. Further, the firm has also produced more iron ore during the different years in comparison to the approved quantity of iron ore by the Indian Bureau of Mines, the ED said in a statement.

The ED has already attached Proceeds of Crime held in the form of movable properties amounting to Rs 622 crore of Serajuddin & Company, under the provisions of PMLA which has already been confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority.

Subsequently, a Prosecution Complaint (charge sheet) has also been filed before the Special Court under PMLA, Khurda at Bhubaneswar praying for confiscation of the said properties. The cognizance of the offence of money laundering has been taken by the Court.

# Retail prices of 84 medicines fixed by NPPA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The country's drug pricing regulator NPPA has fixed the retail prices for 84 drug formulations, including those used for the treatment of diabetes, headache, and high blood pressure.

Prices of formulations used to reduce increased cholesterol and triglycerides levels, among others, have also been fixed.

In exercise of the powers conferred by the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013, the NPPA has fixed the retail prices of the medications, the regulator said in a notification.

As per the order, a single tablet of Voglibose and (SR) Metformin Hydrochloride will cost Rs 10.47, excluding GST.

Similarly, the price of Paracetamol and Caffeine has been fixed at Rs 2.88 per tablet. Besides, the price of one



Rosuvastatin Aspirin and Clopidogrel capsule has been fixed at Rs 13.91.

In a separate notification, NPPA said it has extended the revised ceiling price of liquid medical oxygen and oxygen inhalation (medicinal gas) till September 30 this year.

The NPPA is mandated to fix/revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and enforce the prices and availability of the medicines in the country. It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari & Piyush Goyal, BJP National President J.P. Nadda and other dignitaries during a public meeting, in Hyderabad

PTI Photo



# SP dissolves national, State executive bodies

DAYS AFTER BYPOLL JOLT

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday dissolved the party's all national, State and district executive bodies including the youth and the women's wing, days after the SP lost two Lok Sabha seats considered its bastions to the BJP in bypolls.

Though the party has not given any reason for the decision, which comes into effect immediately, it is seen as an attempt to revamp the organisation after the drubbing on Rampur and Azamgarh seats.

The SP's Uttar Pradesh president Naresh Uttam will, however, continue to remain in his position, the party said.

In a tweet, the SP said Yadav has dissolved the nation-



al, state and districts units of all party cells including the youth and women wings. "He has also dissolved the national, state and district executives." A senior SP leader said, "The party is gearing up for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the focus is to strengthen the organisation to take on the BJP with full force."

The BJP on the other hand said it was the SP's internal matter, but asked why Yadav did not take the responsibility himself.

"The party should tell people why it lost elections under

Akhilesh Yadav. Why Yadav himself did not take responsibility for the defeats," BJP spokesman Rakesh Tripathi said.

"The SP lost Lok Sabha polls in 2014 and 2019 and assembly elections in 2017 and 2022 under Akhilesh Yadav. He should also take the responsibility," Tripathi said.

Azamgarh and Rampur, Lok Sabha seats considered the SP's pocket boroughs owing to their caste and religious compositions, went to bypolls recently after they were vacated by Yadav and senior leader Azam Khan. The BJP came out as victorious.

Analysts put it down to the failure of the SP's time-tested MY (Muslim-Yadav) against the BJP's MY (Modi-Yogi) phenomenon. The SP has, however, attributed its defeat to the alleged misuse of official machinery.

# Tejas emerges as Malaysia's top choice for fighter jet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Tejas light combat aircraft has emerged as the top choice for Malaysia as the Southeast Asian nation looks at replacing its ageing fleet of fighter jets and the two sides are holding negotiations to firm up the procurement.

Malaysia has narrowed down on the Indian aircraft notwithstanding the stiff competition from China's JF-17 jet, South Korea's FA-50 and Russia's Mig-35 as well as Yak-130, Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, R Madhavan, told PTI in an interview.

As part of the package, India has offered to set up an MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) facility in Malaysia for its Russian-origin Su-30 fighter fleet as it is facing difficulties in procuring spares for the aircraft from Russia in view of western sanctions against Moscow.

"I am very confident about

it unless some political shift takes place," Madhavan said when asked whether the deal would be closed soon.

The top executive of the state-run aerospace behemoth said if the deal is sealed, it will give a "very good signal" to other prospective buyers of the aircraft and boost its overall export potential.

"It (the negotiation) is almost in the final stages. We are the only country which is offering them the support for their Su-30 aircraft as other than Russia, we are the only one who can support them to the extent that they require for the Sukhoi fleet," Madhavan said.

It is learnt that the Chinese JF-17 was cheaper but could not match the technical parameters of the Tejas Mk-1A variant and the offer of maintenance of the Su-30 fleet as proposed by India.

A team of high-ranking officials and experts is expected to visit India soon to take forward the procurement

process.

Malaysia is procuring the aircraft to replace its ageing fleet of Russian MiG-29 fighter planes. The number of aircraft that Malaysia is looking at procuring is not immediately clear.

Madhavan said Tejas is a much superior aircraft compared to JF-17 and FA-50 and that the selection of the Indian aircraft would provide Malaysia with the option to go in for future upgrades of the fleet.

Tejas, manufactured by HAL, is a single-engine and highly agile multi-role super-sonic fighter aircraft capable of operating in high-threat air environments.

In February last year, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF).

India has started work on the MK 2 version of the Tejas as well as on an ambitious USD 5 billion project to develop a fifth-generation Advanced



Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

"We actually are the only one who covered everything that they require and we met their budget requirements as well," Madhavan said.

"Nobody will offer them upgrades so fast as we would offer. They will have an alternative available in Tejas Mark 2 and they can even think of AMCA," the HAL chief added.

He said HAL is going to maintain the same level of services to Malaysia as it has been giving to the IAF.

Asked whether the supply

of Tejas jets to the IAF will be impacted if HAL wins the Malaysian contract, Madhavan said the production of the aircraft would be ramped up depending on the requirement.

According to the plan, the HAL would start delivering the jets (Mk-1A variant) to the IAF in 2025 and all 83 jets will have to be handed over by 2030.

Madhavan said if the deal with Malaysia is sealed, it will signal the acceptability of the aircraft, which would result in the opening up of many other options.

# Amarnath Yatra: 40K pilgrims visit holy cave shrine, 5 dead

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Five pilgrims have died since the commencement of the Amarnath Yatra this year, even as over 40,000 devotees have so far visited the holy cave shrine in south Kashmir Himalayas, officials said on Sunday.

A pilgrim by the name Virinder Gupta is missing from the yatra's Chandanwari-Sheshnag route, they said.

Of the five deceased, three passed away due to cardiac arrests: Jai Prakash from Delhi died at Chandanwari, Devender Tayal (53) from Bareilly collapsed at Lower Cave and Lipo Sharma (40) from Bihar died at Qazigund camp, the officials said.

Jagannath (61) from Maharashtra lost his life due to some health condition at Pisutop while another person Ashu Singh (46) from Rajasthan died after he fell down from a horse at MG top, they mentioned.

Till 10 am on Sunday, 40,233 pilgrims visited the holy cave shrine and had 'darshan' of the naturally formed ice-shivlingam.

The yatra, which began on June 30 and will



culminate on August 11, passes through two routes - the Pahalgam route in south Kashmir's Anantnag district and the Baltal route in Sonamarg tourist resort in Ganderbal district in central Kashmir.

# BJP real parivaarwadi party, says TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has sharply reacted to BJP's views — that States like Bengal had gone into the hands of Parivarwadi (dynastic) outfits — saying saffron outfit itself is a part of a (Sangh) Parivaar and that it stood on the Parivaarwadi ideology.

Hours after Assam Chief Minister Hemanta Biswa Sarma quoted Home Minister Amit Shah as saying that the BJP would end dynastic rule in States like Bengal Telangana, TMC leadership hit back saying that instead of dreaming to win Bengal the BJP should first remember the humiliating defeat it suffered in the last year's Assembly elections.

Saying that BJP itself was a Parivaarwadi entity being the part of Sangh Parivaar

Bengal TMC vice president Jayprakash Majumdar said that the dreams of the saffron outfit to come to power in Bengal would remain unrealised.

"The BJP does not believe in multi-party democracy, they are against pluralism... they pursue the philosophy of one-party and one-religion ... they are themselves a part of the Sangh Parivaar," Majumdar said adding instead of dreaming to come to power in Bengal the BJP should in fact think of taking measures to reduce prices and provide employment.

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said that the BJP should first remind itself of the humiliating defeat it suffered at the hands of Chief Mamata Banerjee who defeated the entire battery of the topmost BJP national leadership in the last year's Assembly elections.

# Trespasser hid in Bengal CM's residence whole night, arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a scary development a suspicious trespasser on Saturday night entered the residential premises of Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee by breaching the Z-category security rings and remained hidden inside for the entire night before being caught by Banerjee's personal security staff on Sunday morning.

He was promptly taken to Kalighat Police Station from where he was shifted to Lal Bazaar Police headquarters sources said without disclosing his name and other identities.

While top officials said that the man could either be a thief or a mentally deranged person the police were "ruling out nothing and investigating

all the angles."

Even as Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Goyal and Joint CP, Crime rushed to the Chief Minister's residence

Murmu to visit Kolkata on July 9

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

National Democratic Alliance presidential candidate Droupadi Murmu is likely to visit Kolkata on July 9 to campaign for herself, State BJP sources said.

Murmu would go to Sikkim after meeting the Bengal MLAs and MPs from all parties in Kolkata. She is also likely to meet Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and appeal to her for her support in the presidential elections.

sources said adding the police were trying to find out how the person dodged the CCTVs put all around the Chief Minister's residence.

Banerjee had earlier pushed the opposition parties including the Congress, SP, NCP and the Left into fielding a combined opposition candidate following which former TMC national vice president and ex-Union Minister Yashwant Sinha filed his nomination.

Subsequently however, the Chief Minister said that had she known about BJP's plans to field Murmu she would have considered supporting her as she had personal liking for women and tribal people.

# George gets bail in sexual assault case

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ruling CPI-M's efforts to corner veteran legislator P C George in a sexual assault case came a cropper late Saturday as a Trivandrum court released him on bail within hours after he was arrested following a complaint filed by the solar scam fame Saritha Nair.

Nair had stated in her complaint that George had tried to sexually molest her and used obscene language against her in the Government Guest House at

Thiruvananthapuram last February. When George was produced before the judicial first class magistrate, his advocates moving the bail application told the court that the alleged incident took place in February 2022 in the Government owned Guest House which had all security system in place and the delay of more than five months in filing the complaint remained a mystery.

Furthermore, Saritha Nair, while speaking to reporters as recently as last month had given a clean chit to George. She has filed a series of such

complaints against political leaders and it has to be noted seriously, said the counsels appearing for George.

George, who came out of the court, said that the arrest was a conspiracy hatched by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. "Vijayan is upset and shocked over the disclosures made by the Opposition MLAs in the legislative assembly that his wife and daughter too were engaged in improper activities misusing the position of power. These charges are in addition to the disclosures made by the gold smuggling scam accused Swapna Suresh,"



said George who declared that he would take the fight against Vijayan to its logical conclusion.

Within hours of the court releasing George on bail, K Sudhakaran, president of Kerala Pradesh Congress

Committee, demanded that the chief minister file a defamation case against Swapna Suresh for the allegations she had levelled against Vijayan. "Swapna through her disclosures has cast aspersions on the Chief Minister of Kerala. If Vijayan does not file any defamation case against Swapna, the KPCC would file it because the allegations have been made against our own chief minister," said Sudhakaran.

The arrest of George and its fiasco come at a time when the CPI-M is already in the dock for the vandalization of

Rahul Gandhi's constituency office at Kalpetta and the desecration of the statues of Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi along with attacks on the Congress offices in the State.

Though the ruling LDF acceded to the demands of the Opposition for a discussion on the revelations made by Swapna against the chief minister, it brought out more unanswered questions in the House itself. A visibly upset chief minister warned the Congress MLA Mathew Kuzhalaadan against dragging the names of his daughter

ter Veena Riyaz and wife Kamala into controversies. "You better keep away from dragging the names of persons who sit in their homes to the Legislative Assembly. If you continue doing this, I don't know what would be the repercussions," said Vijayan while answering to the allegations.

"The Chief Minister seems to have lost his cool on many occasions. The Opposition's disclosures that his daughter and wife were part of the high level corruption has upset the chief minister," said P Sujathan, chronicler of Kerala's

politics.

The failure of the Police in arresting the persons behind the attack on the CPI-M's State head quarters on Thursday night and the security blanket thrown around the people in venues visited by Chief Minister Vijayan have put the LDF Government in a shadow. "The chief minister is emblematic of a mobile internal emergency in the State. His motorcade and the security arrangements are frightening," said K K Rema, MLA, widow of T P Chandrasekharan who was murdered by CPI(M) leaders.

# Death count in Manipur landslide rises to 37, more rains hit search for missing 25

PTI ■ GUWAHATI/IMPHAL

The death toll in the landslide at a railway construction site in Manipur's Noney district rose to 37 on Sunday with the recovery of three more bodies, while search operations were underway for another 25 people, an official said.

Heavy rains and fresh landslides in the Tupul area since Saturday night have affected the search operations, he said.

Bodies of 37 people have

been found so far from under the debris. Among them are 24 Territorial Army personnel and 13 civilians, a defence spokesperson in Guwahati said.

"Relentless effort to find the remaining six missing Territorial Army personnel, and 19 civilians will continue till the last individual is found," he said.

The Army, Assam Rifles, Territorial Army, SDRF and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are part of the search operations.

"The search operation is continuing despite adverse weather conditions, owing to heavy rains and fresh landslides last night," the spokesperson said.

So far, 13 Territorial Army personnel and five civilians have been safely rescued.

Through Wall Imaging Radar (TWIR) technology is being used to find the missing persons under the debris. A search and rescue dog has also been brought in to assist the efforts, the official said.

A massive landslide hit

Tupul yard railway construction camp on Wednesday night. The debris blocked the Ijoi river, creating a reservoir that threatens to inundate the low-lying areas. At present, work is underway to clear the debris to let the water flow out.

Bodies of seven Territorial Army personnel were sent to their hometowns -- Kolkata and Bagdogra in West Bengal, and Agartala in Tripura -- on Sunday, the spokesperson said.

Full military honours were given to them at Imphal, he said.

# FIR registered in Jaipur as Cong warns BJP, section of media of legal action over Rahul's doctored video

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday warned the BJP and a section of the media to desist from doctoring facts to "defame" the party and its leaders, and said an FIR has been registered in Jaipur against a TV channel for airing a doctored video of Rahul Gandhi.

Congress leader and head of media and publicity Pawan Khara said more such action will be taken against the BJP and its leaders for propagating fake news and sharing the doc-

tored video of Gandhi in which his comments about SFI leaders, who allegedly ransacked his Wayanad office were "mischievously" used as if it looked like he was condoning or forgiving the killers of tailor Kanhaiya Lal in Udaipur.

The purported video has since been taken off air and the channel has apologised after admitting its mistake, he said, but added that a lot of damage has already been done.

Khara warned that the Congress will take stern and a befitting legal action against all

those indulging in fake news against its leadership as its "decency should not be mistaken as its shackle".

The Congress leader alleged that former information and broadcasting minister Rajyavardhan Rathore, who hails from Rajasthan, shared the video "irresponsibly" and some others in the BJP followed suit.

Noting that this particular episode acquires a very serious dimension as it involves communal harmony of the country, Khara said, "You cannot aggra-

vate passions by doctoring videos and provoking people, provoking communities."

"This FIR was registered against the channel, against the MPs and the senior leaders of the BJP. Bigger action will follow. "Because anybody who thinks that our decency is our shackle, he has sadly mistaken. It is our ornament and we are free to take that ornament off and take legal action. Gone are the days we continued to be decent because we have been watching the BJP, its IT cell," he said.

# Policeman targeted by terrorists in Anantnag

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A selection grade constable of the Jammu and Kashmir police was targeted by 'unidentified' terrorists near his house at Hugam Srigufwara area of Anantnag late Sunday evening.

Till the time of filing the report the said police officer, identified as SgCt Firdous Ahmad, was undergoing treatment at 92 Base hospital in Srinagar.

This is the first incident of targeted strike on a policeman after the start of the Amarnath

yatra 2022 since June 30.

According to a police spokesman, "at about 7.30 p.m terrorists fired upon a police personnel at Hugam Srigufwara area of Anantnag. In this terror incident, he had received gunshot injuries. Subsequently, he was shifted to SDH Bijbehara for treatment from where he was referred to 92 Base Hospital Srinagar.

Police have registered a case in this regard under relevant sections of law. The entire area has been cordoned off and search in the area was going on to track down the footprints of terrorists.

# Over 64% of youths joining terrorism in J&K killed within a year: Officials

PTI ■ SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI

The youths joining the terror ranks in Jammu and Kashmir have a 'short shelf life' with more than 64 per cent of them being killed by security forces within a year, officials said on Sunday.

Security forces, aided by a strong on-ground intelligence network, have scaled up anti-terror operations in the first five months of this year, though frequent violence in south Kashmir remained a cause for concern, they said.

Citing data of terrorists

neutralised between January 1 and May 31 this year, the officials said 64.1 per cent of the new terror recruits were eliminated within a year. Only 26.6 per cent of the terror recruits lasted more than 12 months, while the fate of 9.3 per cent of them was not known, they said.

Giving further details, the officials said 28.1 per cent of the terror recruits were killed within one month, 54.7 per cent within six months and 59.4 per cent within nine months.

The officials said 70 to 75 youths have joined various ter-

ror groups in Kashmir Valley in the first five months of this year. The corresponding figure of last year was near equal.

They said south Kashmir continued to be the hotbed of terrorism in the valley as the region saw 59 terrorist killings by security forces in the first five months of this year compared to 31 such killings in central and north Kashmir.

Out of the total 90 terrorists killed in the valley between January and May, 26 were Pakistani nationals and the number is much more than that of the whole of previous year when 182 terrorists,

including 20 foreigners, were killed in 100 anti-terror operations, the officials said.

The officials said 45 terrorists were arrested during the period along with huge cache of arms and ammunition, with analysis and intelligence inputs suggesting a large supply of pistols aimed at target killings besides AK assault rifles, improvised explosive devices and sticky bombs.

Six of the 90 terrorists killed in 47 encounters were eliminated on the Line of Control (LoC) while trying to infiltrate into the valley from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir,

the officials said, adding the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) suffered the major setbacks as 52 of its terrorists were eliminated and 18 others apprehended since January this year.

The Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) was the second on the chart with 20 of its terrorists being killed and four others arrested, followed by the Hizbul Mujahideen (11 dead and one arrested) and Al-Badr (four dead and three arrested). The identity of three remaining slain terrorists could not be ascertained, the officials said.

The officials said the four districts of south Kashmir -- Pulwama, Anantnag, Kulgam and Shopian -- recorded the killing of 59 terrorists and arrest of 10 others, while summer capital Srinagar witnessed the killing of 11 terrorists, including four Pakistani terrorists, and arrest of four others. Pulwama district recorded the highest number of 27 killings of terrorists, including seven foreigners, followed by Anantnag (12), Kulgam (11) and Shopian (nine). Among the 11 terrorists killed in Kulgam, five were foreign terrorists, the officials said.







FIRST COLUMN

SUJOY GHOSE’S IDEALS ENLIVEN COLLECTIVES

Remembering the activist on his 25th death anniversary


ASHUTOSH TOSARIA

Two hours from Kolkata, a group of 30 young girls and women, all in the age group 16-22, had gathered in a village in Baruipur. They were told that the visitor from Bengaluru would like to understand their work as the leaders of girls’ collectives they manage in their villages. Language was a potential barrier in our communication, but none of them seemed worried. Two of the leaders spoke English and Hindi and decided to help me converse.

To make sure I leave with a thorough understanding of the Federation’s work, they started by explaining how villages are dispersed and often have hamlets on the periphery. Fearing that girls from these hamlets might be left out due to lack of representation in the panchayat, cluster and block groups, the girls had decided to have a separate collective for each hamlet.

As I listen to these girls talk passionately about their work as a collective, I am transported to my days at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), where emphasis on collectivisation and cooperation was extensive. I think of Sanjoy Ghose, a visionary social activist, and an alumnus of IRMA’s first batch of Rural Management programme who understood the power of collectives, of equipping people with tools and processes to find their voice and shape their development discourse. Today, 25 years after he was abducted and killed by ULFA, I wonder how these 30 girls in Baruipur, without knowing him or his work, exemplify the same spirit.

As they were talking about rights and fighting patriarchy, I enquired what they would like to do in terms of vocation or higher education. There were quite a few responses, with many wanting to be lawyers or police personnel. The latter is something I’ve heard in several girls’ collectives, but I was quite intrigued to see so many aspiring lawyers.



Their response was straightforward—“if we have to keep ourselves safe, we’ll need to do this, no one listens to us otherwise.” They narrated an incident about a girl who was raped and how the police refused to file an FIR. The federation, along with some women’s groups, sat outside the police station for hours and through the night, before the officers relented. They also advised the cops on specific sections of IPC that should be used.

The Federation was acutely aware of their realities and how systems were not geared to support them. Each one knew how patriarchy creates barriers for them, at every step. They also had a good sense of how to untie some of these knots. Once they got into collectives, they found a space to discuss their issues. They realised there are several girls who face similar problems.

This open and fearless space was facilitated by a local NGO, which also conducted sessions on their rights, gender, discrimination, etc. Armed with this perspective and facts (the Constitution, IPC, etc.), the collectives went on to create knowledge for themselves. That’s when they decided to act together and mount a resistance to patriarchal overreach in their own lives and their neighbourhood.

Collectives have done wonders across contexts. For girls and young women, these create a much-needed space to discover, dream, connect and cut through the restraints that dot their lives. Intrigued by the power of collectives, I keep looking for examples where theory meets practice to create transformative experiences for people. That’s something Sanjoy did really well. His work and ideas are far more valuable today perhaps when we’ve become weapons to rip apart our social fabric. The way these thirty girls in Baruipur are raising uncomfortable questions, speaking up and working together, Sanjoy would have loved to spend time with them and learn from them.

*The author is a development worker (Charkha Features)*

India faces sharp fiscal deficit slippage

International crude and fertiliser prices disturbed Government’s budget calculations; welfare expenses are adding to fiscal stress



UTTAM GUPTA

The Modi government has taken a number of measures, including tax cuts and increase in subsidy, to give protection to consumers from the steep rise in international prices of fuel, fertilisers, and food. But it could come at a huge cost in terms of impairing the Centre’s ability to achieve the fiscal deficit (FD) target of 6.4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) set for the current financial year (FY).

Before analysing the numbers for the current FY, let us see how things panned out during 2021-22 when India was confronted with rising international prices of the aforementioned commodities.

During 2021-22, thanks to a steep increase in prices of fertilizers and raw materials (RMs) such as phosphoric acid and ammonia used in their production (the price of di-ammonium or DAP more than doubled while the price of urea and muriate of potash or MOP went up almost three times each), the actual outgo on fertilizer subsidy – being the excess of cost of supply over the price paid by farmers – was ₹162,000 crore against the budget estimate (BE) Rs 80,000 crore.

Likewise, payment on food subsidy, being the excess of the minimum support price (MSP) plus handling and distribution cost over the issue price of food to the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other welfare schemes, was ₹286,000 crore against BE of ₹243,000 crore. This slippage was primarily due to the fifth extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana or PMGKAY (October 2021 – March 2022). It was started in March 2020, to mitigate the consequences of pandemic, by giving five kg of rice or wheat per person per month to each of the 800 million persons for “free”.

The excess of expenses on fertilizer and food subsidy over their respective BE adds up to ₹125,000 crore.

A third major area of slippage during the year was proceeds from disinvestment of Government’s shareholding in public sector undertakings (PSUs). The actual proceeds were only ₹13,500 crore against BE of ₹175,000 crore, resulting in a shortfall of ₹161,500 crore. Put together, the total slippage in expenses and receipts when compared to the BE was ₹286,500 crore.

On the other hand, the gross tax revenue of the Union government was about ₹27,10,000 crore against the BE of ₹22,17,000 crore. After mandatory transfers to the states (as per the Finance Commission, 41 percent of tax receipts of the Centre - excluding cess collections which are not part of the divisible pool - are shared with the States), the amount remaining with the Centre was ₹18,50,000 crore against the corresponding BE of ₹15,50,000 crore.

It is this excess tax receipts of ₹300,000 crore (₹18,50,000-₹15,50,000) that has helped the Centre in making up for the slippage in expenditure and other



THE MODI GOVERNMENT IS SET TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE TARGET OF THE FISCAL DEFICIT, AS THE PROLONGED RUSSIAN-UKRAINE WAR KEEPS THE COMMODITIES OVERHEATED, WHILE EXTENSION OF THE FREE-FOODGRAIN SCHEME STRAINS THE EXCHEQUER

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areas of revenue. It was able to restrict FD to 6.7 percent against a target of 6.8 percent.

For 2022-23, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the hope that prices would decline allocated ₹105,000 crore for fertilizer subsidy (against RE ₹162,000 crore for 2021-22). But thanks to the Ukraine crisis, the international price of fertilizers continues to stay heated. To protect farmers from these hikes, she has already taken approval for an additional ₹110,000 crore.

As for food subsidy, Sitharaman allocated ₹207,000 crore for the current FY – down from ₹286,000 crore for 2021-22 (RE). Now, in view of the extension of PMGKAY by six months till September 30, 2022, the Centre will have to spend ₹80,000 crore more under this head. Put together, the additional expenses on fertilizers and food subsidy over BE will be ₹190,000 crore.

On the other hand, the Centre was expected to garner gross tax revenue (GTR) of around ₹30,50,000 crore against the BE of ₹27,40,000 crore. The cushion of about ₹300,000 crore in GTR – after mandatory transfer to the States - should leave an extra about ₹180,000 crore with the Centre to make up for the slippages in expenses on fertilizers and food.

Modi is contemplating to extend the PMGKAY for another six months till March 2023 despite the caution sounded by the officials of the finance ministry due to State elections. This will increase food subsidy further by ₹80,000 crore.

Besides, given the continuing high prices due to prolonged Ukraine war, fertilizer subsidy is unlikely to settle at anything less than ₹250,000 crore. This means another ₹35,000 crore over and above ₹215,000 crore already provided for. Put together, these two heads will consume additional ₹115,000 crore. Adding an extra ₹6000 crore due to reintroduction of subsidies on cooking gas, we get a total excess of ₹121,000 crore over BE.

At another level, on May 21, 2022, the government announced reduction in the central excise duty (CED) on petrol and diesel by ₹8 per litre and ₹6 per litre, respectively, besides slashing import duty on edible oils and other items of mass consumption. Put together, these cuts will cause revenue loss of ₹120,000 crore (₹100,000 crore loss due to cuts in duty on fuels alone).

On account of the excess subsidy payments (₹121,000 crore), the Centre will be staring at a slippage of ₹240,000 crore or close to 1 percent of GDP.

Against a target of 6.4 percent of GDP for the fiscal deficit, it could end with 7.4 percent in the current fiscal.

While fixing the FD target for 2022-23 at 6.4 percent of GDP in her budget speech, Sitharaman had described this as ‘advancing on the road to fiscal consolidation’, citing the target of 4.5 percent to be achieved by 2025-26.

This was amusing.

A committee on Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act under Dr NK Singh set up by the Modi government (2016) had asked it to aim at an FD of 2.5 percent during 2022-23. In the budget for 2021-22, it brushed aside this recommendation; instead, the FM dished out a revised trajectory of FD aiming at 4.5 percent and that too in 2025-26.

With the current FY likely to end with FD of 7.4 percent - against the target of 6.4 percent - the government won’t be able to stick to even this substantially relaxed fiscal trajectory.

This is dangerous as it will lead to an increase in Centre’s debt to unsustainable levels. Already, it has climbed to 62 percent of GDP against 46 percent set by Singh committee (for the Centre and State put together, this has hit 90 percent). The Government should make efforts to avoid this horrendous scenario.

Even as Modi dispensation is doing its best to increase tax collection (but for this the fiscal situation could have been much worse) and the momentum should be maintained, there is an urgent need to rein in

Expenses, particularly on ‘welfare schemes’. Here, substantial savings are possible by restricting coverage, cutting costs, improving efficiency and minimizing leakages.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS HAS SHOWN LARGE-HEARTEDNESS BY DECIDING TO JOIN THE GOVERNMENT IN THE INTERESTS OF PEOPLE. —UNION HOME MINISTER AMIT SHAH



IN THE BJP, ONCE THE ORDER COMES FROM EITHER DELHI OR NAGPUR, IT’S FOLLOWED WITHOUT ANY COMPROMISE. —NCP LEADER SHARAD PAWAR

High GST rates, gold levies will add to inflation

Decisions of the GST Council and the Government to push tax rates upwards will only give speed to runaway inflation

Developments in the domains of economics and politics are not easy to decipher for common people. If the change of government in Maharashtra was for an ideology, how did Arrey Colony metro depot and a water project take precedence? In times of high inflation, the GST Council and the direct tax board decided to raise the rates on many items. This is a repeat of what was done in January even while the wholesale price index has touched 1588.

In January this year, the rates on critical textiles, handloom and shoes were raised from 5 to 18 per cent. Now, the Reserve Bank, SEBI works are defined as services and brought under tax net. Even a cheque book, normal for a



SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

banking transaction, invites tax at 18 percent rate. Cumulatively, they would add additional cost to all business activities.

Similarly, it is irrational to propose taxes on post office services other than postcards, inland letters, book post and envelopes weighing less than 10 gm, which have cascading effects.

The RBI will be in a bind, and may resort to hiking the repo rate by August to calm the inflationary pressures. The government and the RBI don’t seem to be on the same page.

It’s puzzling why the two projects in Mumbai, virtually stalled by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for environmental and other concerns, became a priority for the new dispensation despite

a court ruling. It seems the considerations are more than ideological. Depleting forest covers have an adverse impact. The floods in the North-East is attributed to felling of trees for various ‘developmental’ projects.

The bullet train project worth Rs 1.08 lakh crore seems a priority for the new Maharashtra government. Now, land acquisition may be expedited.

On the tax front, the government raised taxes on gold to cool off demand. The import duty has been raised to 12.5 percent from 7.5 percent. If the surcharge is added the precious metal effectively comes under 15 percent tax rate from the existing 10.5 percent. The gap between local and overseas prices is more

than 15 percent. There may be a marginal fall in imports but historically high duty makes smuggling more remunerative.

About half of the gold imports are re-exported. With an adverse cost competitiveness, India will lose a lucrative overseas market. India’s May trade deficit widened to \$ 24.29 billion against \$ 6.53 billion in April. The gold imports surged to \$ 6 billion from \$ 678 million. During May, 107 tonnes of gold were imported.

The new rates will adversely impact banking services, milling machinery for cereals and petroleum products. It would impact family budgets as these cover wider ranging goods like LED lamps, ink, knives, blades, power-driven pumps, and dairy

machinery, which will attract 18 percent tax rate against previous 12 percent. Milling machinery for cereals will be taxed at 18 per cent, up from five percent. Tax rates for solar water heaters and finished leather have gone up from five percent to 12 percent. The rate for work-contract services supplied to governments and local authorities are proposed to be increased to 18 percent.

The GST Council allows GoM recommendations on withdrawing exemptions for services such as transport of passengers in business class from airports in the North-east. Hotel accommodation costing under Rs 1,000 per day will be taxed at par with the industry (12 per cent). Hospital rooms, except ICU, with a daily rent of Rs 5,000, could be taxed at five percent. The hospitality sector hasn’t yet come out of the Covid-19 pandemic induced slowdown.

A cautious but proactive step is the move to impose cess on export of petrol and diesel. The refiners export petro-products at globally prevailing prices. The domestic crude producers sell in the home market at the prevailing international prices and make windfall gains. Certain refiners for purposes of exports keep their pumps in the country dry. To check it, cess of Rs 6 on petrol and Rs 13 per litre on diesel or Rs 23,250 per tonne have been imposed, with the rider that not more than 50 percent of the total crude production can be



# RUSSIA CLAIMS CAPTURE OF PIVOTAL CITY IN EASTERN UKRAINE

AP ■ KYIV

Russia's Defence Minister said Russian forces took control Sunday of the last major Ukrainian-held city in Ukraine's Luhansk province, bringing Moscow closer to its stated goal of seizing all of Ukraine's Donbas region.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told President Vladimir Putin that Russia's troops together with members of a local separatist militia "have established full control over the city of Lysychansk," Russian news agencies reported.

Ukrainian fighters spent weeks trying to defend Lysychansk and to keep it from falling to Russia, as neighboring Sievierodonetsk did a week ago. A presidential adviser predicted late Saturday that the city's could be determined within days.

Ukrainian officials did not immediately provide an update on its status.

Earlier Sunday, Luhansk's governor said Russian forces were strengthening their positions in a grueling fight to capture the last stronghold of resistance in the province.

"The occupiers threw all their forces on Lysychansk. They



attacked the city with incomprehensibly cruel tactics," Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai said on the Telegram messaging app. "They suffer significant losses, but stubbornly advance. They are gaining a foothold in the city."

A river separates Lysychansk from Sievierodonetsk. Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to the Ukrainian president, said during an online interview late Saturday that Russian forces had managed for the first time to cross the river from the north, creating a "threatening" situation.

Arestovych said they had not reached the center of the city but that the course of the fighting indicated the battle for Lysychansk would be decided by Monday.

Luhansk and neighboring Donetsk are the two provinces that make up the Donbas, where Russia has focused its offensive since pulling back from northern Ukraine and the capital, Kyiv, in the spring.

Pro-Russia separatists have held portions of both eastern

provinces since 2014, and Moscow recognizes all of Luhansk and Donetsk as sovereign republics. Syria's government said Wednesday that it would also recognise the "independence and sovereignty" of the two areas.

Taking Lysychansk would open the way for the Russians to move west into Donetsk province, where the sizable Ukrainian-held city of Slovyansk has come under rocket attacks several times since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Elsewhere in the war, the exiled

mayor of the Russia-occupied city of Melitopol said Sunday that Ukrainian rockets destroyed one of four Russian military bases in the city.

The Russian Defence Ministry said Ukraine also launched missile and drone attacks in western Russia, on the cities of Kursk and Belgorod, but that the aerial weapons were shot down. Kursk regional governor Roman Starovoit said the town of Tetkino, on the Ukraine border, came under mortar fire.

The leader of neighbouring Belarus, a Russian ally, claimed Saturday that Ukraine fired missiles at military targets on Belarusian territory several days ago but all were intercepted by an air defence system. President Alexander Lukashenko described the alleged strike as a provocation and noted that no Belarusian soldiers were fighting in Ukraine. There was no immediate response from the Ukrainian military.

Belarus hosts Russian military units and was used as a staging ground for Russia's invasion. Last week, just hours before Lukashenko was to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian long-range bombers fired missiles on Ukraine from Belarusian airspace for the first time.



## Splintered Ukrainian city braces for new battle with Russia

AP ■ SLOVYANSK (UKRAINE)

A group of young off-duty Ukrainian soldiers gathered at a military distribution center to enjoy a rare respite from the fighting that has again engulfed their fractured home in eastern Ukraine.

As they shared jokes and a pizza, artillery explosions could be heard a few kilometers away - a reminder of the looming battle that threatens to unfold here in the city of Slovyansk, which was occupied by Russian proxy fighters in 2014.

"Everyone knows that there will be a huge battle in Slovyansk," said one of the soldiers, who could not be named for security reasons.

Now, eight years after their city was last occupied, the war has returned. Slovyansk could become the next major target in Russia's campaign to take the Donbas region, Ukraine's predominantly Russian-speaking industrial heartland, if Moscow captures Lysychansk - the last remaining Ukrainian stronghold in Luhansk province, 70 kilometers (43 miles) to the east.

Another soldier, a 23-year-old accountant who joined up when the invasion began, said Ukrainian forces simply do not have the weapons to fight off the superior arsenal of the approaching Russian army.

"We know what's coming" he said with a sad smile.

These soldiers were still teenagers when pro-Russian separatists captured and held the town for three months. The brief occupation in 2014 terrorised Slovyansk, where dozens of officials and journalists were taken hostage, and several killings took place.

Fierce fighting and shelling broke out when the Ukrainian army laid siege to the city to recapture it.

"Actually, the war never left Slovyansk. It didn't leave people's heads" said Tetiana Khimion, a 43-year-old dance choreographer who converted a fishing store into a hub for local military units.

"On the one hand, it is easier for us because we know what it's like. On the other hand, it is more difficult for us since we've been living like this for eight years in a suspended condition."

Slovyansk is a city of splintered loyalties. With a large retired population, it is not uncommon to hear older residents express sympathy towards Russia or nostalgia for their Soviet past. There is also distrust of the Ukrainian army and government.

After a recent shelling of his apartment block, one resident named Sergei said he believed that the strike was launched by Ukraine.

"I'm not pro-Russian, I'm not pro-Ukrainian. I am somewhere in between" he said. "Both Russians and Ukrainians kill civilians - everyone should understand that."

On Thursday, a group of elderly residents couldn't hide their frustration after a bomb blast slashed open their roofs and shattered their windows.

Ukraine "says they are protecting us, but what kind of protection is this?" asked one man, who did not provide his name.

"They kneel to that Biden - may he die!" exclaimed his neighbour, Tatyana, referring to U.S. President Joe Biden.

After 2014, Khimion said, it became easier to know "who is who" in Slovyansk. "Now you can easily see: These people are for Ukraine, and these people are for Russia."

She said not enough was done after 2014 to punish people who collaborated with Russian proxies to prevent a repeat of the situation.

"That is why we cannot negotiate, we need to win. Otherwise it will be a never-ending process. It will keep repeating" she said.

The mayor of Slovyansk, Vadim Lyakh, reflects the city's new trajectory. Taking his cues from Ukraine's wartime leader, President Volodymyr Zelensky, the mayor has decorated his office with Ukrainian flags, anti-Russian symbols, portraits of national poets - even a biography of Winston Churchill.

But before 2014, he was part of a political party that sought closer ties with Russia. Lyakh said that while pro-Moscow sentiment in the city has faded in past years - in part because of the horrors witnessed in 2014 - there are still "people who are waiting for the return of the Russian troops."

As the front line creeps ever closer, attacks on the city intensify. Three-quarters of Slovyansk's pre-war population has fled, but the mayor said there are still too many people here, including many children. He encourages them to evacuate. He spends his days coordinating humanitarian aid and strengthening the city's defenses.

More and more, he is among the first responders at the scene of bombardments. The Associated Press followed Lyakh and recently witnessed what authorities described as a cluster bomb attack on a residential area. One person was killed and several others wounded.

The mayor says that shelling now occurs at least four or five times a day, and the use of cluster munitions has increased in the last week. Although he remains optimistic that Ukrainian forces can keep the enemy at bay, he is also clear-sighted about his options.

## From one July Fourth to the next, a steep slide for Biden

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Last Fourth of July, President Joe Biden gathered hundreds of people outside the White House for an event that would have been unthinkable for many Americans the previous year. With the coronavirus in retreat, they ate hamburgers and watched fireworks over the National Mall.

Although the pandemic wasn't over yet, Biden said, "we're closer than ever to declaring our independence from a deadly virus." Across the country, indoor masking requirements were falling as the number of infections and deaths plummeted.

Within weeks, even some of the president's allies privately admitted that the speech had been prema-

ture. Soon the administration would learn that the delta variant could be transmitted by people who had already been vaccinated. Masks went back on, then came polarizing vaccination mandates. The even-more-contagious omicron variant would arrive months later, infecting millions and causing chaos during the holiday season.

"We were hoping to be free of the virus, and the virus had a lot more in store for us," said Joshua Sharfstein, vice dean of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The number of people in the United States who died from COVID-19 nearly doubled, from 605,000 to more than 1 million, over the past year.

That sunny speech one year ago marked a cross-



roads for Biden's presidency. The pandemic appeared to be waning, the economy was booming, inflation wasn't rising as quickly as today and public approval of his job performance was solid.

As Biden approaches his second Fourth of July in the White House, his stand-

ing couldn't be more different. A series of miscalculations and unforeseen challenges have Biden struggling for footing as he faces a potentially damaging verdict from voters in the upcoming midterm elections. Even problems that weren't Biden's fault have

been fuel for Republican efforts to retake control of Congress.

The pandemic's resurgence was swiftly followed last summer by the debacle of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, when the Taliban seized control of the country faster than the administration expected as the U.S.-backed regime collapsed.

Then, negotiations over Biden's broader domestic agenda stalled, only to collapse altogether in December.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February caused a worldwide spike in gas prices, exacerbating inflation that reached a 40-year high. Another blow came last month, when the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion under Roe v. Wade

and curtailed the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

Suddenly a reactive president, Biden has been left trying to reclaim the initiative at every step, often with mixed results.

The coronavirus is less of a threat than before and infections are far less likely to lead to death, but Congress is refusing to supply more money to deal with the pandemic.

He signed new gun restrictions into law after massacres in New York and Texas, and he's leading a reinvestment in European security as the war in Ukraine enters its fifth month. But he has limited tools at his disposal to deal with other challenges, such as rising costs and eroding access to abortion.

## Russian diplomats to leave Bulgaria amid soaring tensions

AP ■ SOFIA

Two Russian airplanes were set to depart Bulgaria on Sunday with scores of Russian diplomatic staff and their families amid a mass expulsion that has sent tensions soaring between the historically close nations, a Russian diplomat said.

Filip Voskresenski, a high-ranking Russian diplomat, told journalists at the airport

in Bulgaria's capital Sofia he was among the 70 Russian diplomatic staff declared "persona non grata" last week and ordered to leave the country before Monday.

Bulgaria's expulsion decision was announced by acting Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, who took a strong stance against Russia after it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Petkov, who lost a no-confidence vote on June 22, has claimed

Moscow used "hybrid war" tactics to bring down his government. Petkov has said that Russia will retain 43 of its employees after the expulsion and noted that Bulgaria has just 12 diplomatic staff in Moscow.

"Anyone who works against the interests of Bulgaria will be called to go back to the country from which they came," he said.

On Friday, Russian

Ambassador Eleonora Mitrofanova issued Bulgaria an ultimatum to reverse its decision and threatened that Moscow would fully sever diplomatic ties. "I intend to urgently raise before the leadership of my country the issue of the closure of the Embassy of Russia in Bulgaria, which will inevitably lead to the closure of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Moscow," she said in a statement.

## Palestinians give bullet that killed journalist to US team

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Palestinian Authority on Saturday said it has given the bullet that killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh to American forensic experts, taking a step toward resolving a standoff with Israel over the investigation into her death.

The announcement came just over a week before President Joe Biden is to visit Israel and the occupied West Bank for meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. It signaled that both sides may be

working to find a solution to the deadlock.

Abu Akleh, a veteran correspondent who was well known throughout the Arab world, was fatally shot while covering an Israeli military raid on May 11 in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinians, along with Abu Akleh's colleagues who were with her at the time, say she was killed by Israeli fire. The Israeli army says that she was caught in the crossfire of a battle with



Palestinian gunmen, and that it is impossible to determine which side killed her without analyzing the bullet.

Israel says it has identified the rifle that may have shot her,

but that it cannot draw any conclusions unless it is compared to the bullet. The Palestinians have refused to turn over the bullet, saying they don't trust Israel. Rights groups

say Israel has a poor record investigating shootings of Palestinians by its troops, with probes languishing for months or years before they are quietly closed.

The Palestinian attorney general, Akram al-Khateeb, said the bullet was given to U.S. experts "for technical work."

He reiterated the Palestinian refusal to share the bullet with the Israelis but said the Palestinians welcome the participation of any international bodies to "help us confirm the truth."

## Texas clinics halt abortions after State High Court ruling

AP ■ AUSTIN

Clinics were shutting down abortion services in the nation's second-largest state Saturday after the Texas Supreme Court blocked an order briefly allowing the procedure to resume in some cases, the latest in legal scrambles taking place across the U.S. following the reversal of Roe v. Wade.

The Friday night ruling stopped a three-day-old order by a Houston judge who said clinics could resume abortions up to six weeks into pregnancy. The following day, the American Civil Liberties Union said it doubted that any abortions were now being provided in a state of nearly 30 million people.

Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman's Health, said the ruling forced an end to abortions in its four Texas clinics, and workers there were winding down abortion operations and having "heartbreaking conversations" with women whose appointments were canceled.

"I ache for us and for the people we have dedicated our lives to serve with the fabulous abortion care we provide, many who will be denied that right in the months and possibly years to come," Hagstrom Miller said in a statement.

Planned Parenthood's multiple affiliates in Texas had not resumed

abortion services even after the restraining order was put in place Tuesday.

At issue was a long-dormant 1925 criminal law that targets individuals who perform abortions. Clinics had argued that it was invalid after abortion became a constitutional right across the U.S. in 1973. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, struck down the landmark Roe decision June 24, leaving abortion policy to states.

"Pro-life victory! ... Litigation continues, but I'll keep winning for Texas's unborn babies," said Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, who had asked the state Supreme Court to intervene.

Separately, Texas has a 2021 law

that was designed to ban abortion in the event that Roe were overturned. It takes effect in the weeks ahead.

"Extremist politicians are on a crusade to force Texans into pregnancy and childbirth against their will, no matter how devastating the consequences," said Julia Kaye of the ACLU.

Providers and patients across the country have been struggling to navigate the evolving legal landscape around abortion laws and access.

In Florida, a law banning abortions after 15 weeks went into effect Friday, the day after a judge called it a violation of the state constitution and said he would sign an order temporarily blocking it next week.

## Google to erase more location info as abortion bans expand

AP ■ MOUNTAIN VIEW

Google will automatically purge information about users who visit abortion clinics or other places that could trigger legal problems now that the U.S. Supreme Court has opened the door for states to ban the termination of pregnancies. The company behind the internet's dominant internet search engine and the Android software that powers most of the world's smartphones outlined the new privacy protections in a Friday blog post.

Besides automatically deleting visits to abortion clinics, Google also cited counseling centers, fertility centers, addiction treatment facilities, weight loss clinics, and cosmetic surgery clinics as other destinations that will be erased from users' location histories. Users have always had the option edit their location histories on their own, but Google will proactively do it for them as an added level of protection.

"We're committed to delivering robust privacy protections for people who use our products, and we will continue to look for new ways to strengthen and improve these protections," Jen Fitzpatrick, a Google senior vice president, wrote in the blog post. The pledge comes amid escalating pressure on Google and other Big Tech companies to do more to shield the troves of sensitive personal information through their digital services and products from government authorities.

## Heavy rains, floods prompt evacuations of Sydney suburbs



AP ■ SYDNEY

Thousands of residents in Sydney suburbs were told to evacuate their homes on Sunday after heavy rains caused floodwaters to rise and rivers to overflow in what authorities called life-threatening emergencies.

The Bureau of Meteorology issued a severe weather warning for heavy rain and flash floods and winds of up to 90 kilometers (55 miles) per hour along the coast of Australia's most populous city and other parts of New South Wales state.

Authorities said that Warragamba Dam in western Sydney began overflowing overnight and the peak spill would be comparable to devastating flooding in March last year.

Residents in a number of suburbs have been ordered to evacuate, but Emergency Services Minister Steph Cooke said people don't need to wait to be told to leave.

"If you are feeling uncomfortable or unsure about your circumstances, and there is an opportunity for you to leave earlier, don't necessarily wait for an evacuation order," she said. "If you were safe in 2021 do not assume you will be safe tonight. This is a rapidly evolving situation and we could see areas impacted that we haven't seen before."

Emergency services said they conducted over 100 flood rescues and responded to over 3,000 requests for assistance in the past 24 hours. Evacuation centers have opened in several areas in western Sydney.

About 100 Australian Defense Force personnel were helping by putting up sandbags and knocking on doors to warn of flood threats.

The weather bureau's hazards preparation and response manager Jane Golding said a coastal trough lingering since Friday deepened while an east coast low-pressure system formed off the Mid North Coast.



# ABOUT HALF SAY TRUMP SHOULD BE CHARGED FOR 1/6: AP-NORC POLL

AP ■ WASHINGTON

About half of Americans believe former President Donald Trump should be charged with a crime for his role in the U.S. Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021, a new poll shows.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 48% of U.S. adults say the Republican former president should be charged with a crime for his role, while 31% say he should not be charged. An additional 20% say they don't know enough to have an opinion. Fifty-eight percent say Trump bears a great deal or quite a bit of responsibility for what happened that day.

The poll was conducted after five public hearings by the House committee investigating Jan. 6, which has sought to paint Trump's potential criminal culpability in the events that led to deadly insurrection. But it was taken before Tuesday's surprise hearing featuring

former Trump White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson. Her explosive testimony provided the most compelling evidence yet that the former president could be linked to a federal crime, experts say.

Views on Trump's criminal liability break down predictably along party lines, with 86% of Democrats but only 10% of Republicans saying Trump should be charged with a crime. Among Republicans, 68% say he should not be charged and 21% say they don't know.

Still, the fact that nearly half the country believes he should be prosecuted is a remarkable position for the former president, pointing to the difficulties he could face if he makes another run at the White House in 2024.

For Ella Metze, a South Carolina Democrat, Trump's culpability has been clear from the beginning, when he urged his supporters to march to the Capitol on the morning of Jan. 6 and "fight like hell."

"It was meant to provoke violence



because he kept encouraging them," the 86-year-old told The Associated Press. "As it happened, I watched it all and I just thought why doesn't somebody stop this? Why doesn't he stop this?"

Chris Schloemer, a Texas independent, agreed Trump holds responsibility for egging on the crowd with his baseless claims of election fraud. But, the 61-year-old doesn't lay the blame solely on Trump.

Schloemer feels Republicans in Congress have a hand in what happened that day, too: "I feel like people were afraid of Donald Trump, especially Republican politicians,

and so they wouldn't rein him in, and I think that just emboldened him."

And he's not alone. While views of Trump's role have not changed since December, Americans are somewhat more likely now than they were then to say Republicans in Congress were significantly responsible for the events of Jan. 6.

Forty-six percent say that now, up slightly from 41% in December. An additional 21% say GOP lawmakers had some responsibility and 30% say they were not responsible. The change in the share saying Republicans in Congress have a large amount of responsibility was driven mostly by Democrats and independents.

Ulysses Bryant, a Democrat from Florida, said while he always believed Trump and the rioters should be charged with a crime, he hadn't known of the involvement of congressional Republicans until he began to follow the hearings.

Close to 6 in 10 Americans -

56% - say they followed news about the congressional hearings. A smaller but still sizeable share -- 42% -- say they watched or listened.

The nine-member panel, comprising seven Democrats and two Republicans, has worked around the clock for the past year to investigate the connection between Trump and his allies and the violence and chaos that ensued on the Capitol. The public hearing phase of their investigation is meant to put all of that investigative work on display to the American public in an effort to create a historical record of what occurred.

Seventy-five percent of Democrats and 42% of Republicans say they followed news about the hearings. More Democrats than Republicans also say they tuned in, 58% to 27%.

The first of the public hearings, which began in early June, received high ratings for TV viewership, though subsequent hearings have received more modest ratings.

## 19 killed as bus falls into ravine in southwest Pakistan

PTI ■ KARACHI



At least 19 people were killed and 11 others injured when a speeding passenger bus veered off a mountain road in heavy rain and fell into a ravine in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province on Sunday.

The bus carrying more than 30 people was heading to Quetta from Islamabad when it plunged into the ravine in Zhob.

Television footage showed rescue workers assisting bloodied passengers.

"As the bus neared Quetta, the driver lost control at a sharp bend and the bus plunged into a ravine. We have recovered 19 bodies so far while 11 injured have been admitted to hospital," Assistant Commissioner Syed Mehtab Shah said.

"Rainfall and speeding led to the incident," The Express Tribune newspaper quoted Shah as saying.

Rescue teams rushed to the scene soon after receiving information, Shah said, adding that the bodies had been taken to the hospital

where the process to identify them was underway.

The medical superintendent of Civil Hospital Zhob, Dr Noorul Haq, said that the injured were in critical condition and the death toll could rise.

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo expressed grief over the accident. He ordered an emergency be declared in Civil Hospital Zhob to ensure treatment for the injured.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also expressed sorrow over the tragic accident and offered his condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families of the deceased.

The premier directed the authorities concerned to provide immediate medical aid to the injured.

## India gifts 75 ambulances, 17 school buses to Nepal

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

India on Sunday gifted 75 ambulances and 17 school buses to Nepal as part of its ongoing efforts to build on the "robust and long-standing" partnership between the two countries and help the Himalayan nation bolster its infrastructure in healthcare and education sectors.

India's newly-appointed Ambassador Naveen Srivastava handed over the keys of the vehicles in the presence of Devendra Paudel, Nepal's Ministry of Education,

Science and Technology.

The gifting of 75 ambulances also marks 75 years of India's Independence, the Indian Embassy here said. "The gifting of ambulances and school buses is part of the very robust and strong development partnership between the two countries," Srivastava said.

This initiative has been one of the long-standing traditions of the Indian government under the Nepal-India Development Partnership Programme to bolster efforts of the Nepal government to strengthen its infrastructure in health and educa-



tion, he added.

Paudel appreciated India's various ongoing developmental projects in Nepal and said these initiatives will continue to strengthen people-to-people linkages and improve relations between the two countries.

The 75 ambulances and 17 school buses will be handed over to various governmental departments and NGOs working in healthcare and education sectors in various districts in Nepal, the Indian mission said. In 2021, India had gifted 39 ambulances equipped with ventilators to Nepal as part of its efforts to help Kathmandu in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, in 2020, India had gifted 41 ambulances and six school buses to Nepal on the occasion of the 151st birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

## 'Lankan Navy nabs 51 people illegally migrating to Australia to escape eco crisis'

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday nabbed 51 people who were planning to illegally migrate from the island nation to Australia through the sea route, according to an official statement, a fourth such incident in the last one week owing to the ongoing economic crisis in the nation.

According to the Sri Lankan Navy, all those attempting to illegally migrate were arrested after a

fishing trawler carrying them was seized in the eastern seas.

"A search operation carried out by the Navy in the eastern seas this morning (03rd July 2022) led to the seizure of a local multi-day fishing trawler carrying 51 persons, who are suspected to be on an illegal migration attempt to a foreign country via sea," the statement issued by the Navy said.

This was the fourth such incident in the last one week.

On Saturday, a team of



the Navy, the Sri Lanka Coast Guard and the Police, arrested 24 individuals, all suspected to be illegally migrating to Australia, in

the island by sea, the Navy said.

Similarly, on June 27 and 28 over 100 Illegal immigrants were arrested.

The police said such attempts to flee the country are due to the ongoing economic crisis and have increased since the early part of this year.

The government of Australia for many years now carried out local media campaigns to deter people from falling victims to immigration rackets.

## West African leaders meet with coup-hit neighbours on agenda

AP ■ ACCRA

West African leaders attended a summit on Sunday as their regional bloc pursues its efforts to resolve the political impasse in the coup-hit nations of Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

A summit last month of the Economic Community of West African States put off imposing further economic and financial sanctions on the three nations.

They were suspended from the bloc following military coups and are under international pressure to hold democratic elections. Malian authorities recently announced a transition roadmap that includes scheduling a presidential election for February 2024 and a March 2023 constitutional referendum. It remains to be seen if participants at Sunday's summit in Accra, the Ghanaian capital will accept the proposal.

ECOWAS sanctioned Mali in January by shutting down most commerce with the country, along with its land and air borders with other countries in the bloc.

## China state museum opens in Hong Kong amid patriotism drive

AP ■ HONG KONG

China's famed Palace Museum opened a branch in Hong Kong Sunday amid a drive to build loyalty to Beijing in the former British colony that reverted to Chinese rule 25 years ago.

Works of calligraphy and

paintings on silk dating back more than 1,000 years featured heavily in the exhibition, housed in a seven-story building in a newly developed harborside arts district. The delicate artworks will be returned to Beijing for safekeeping after 30 days, but China's Communist Party leaders

want the exhibition's cultural and political impact to linger for far longer. The opening of the exhibition came just two days after China's leader Xi Jinping marked the anniversary of Hong Kong's return with a visit to what is officially called the special autonomous region.

## North Korea slams US-South Korea-Japan military cooperation

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Sunday slammed the United States, South Korea and Japan for pushing to boost their trilateral military cooperation targeting the North, warning that the move is prompting urgent calls for the country to reinforce its military capability.

North Korea has long cited what it calls hostility by the United States and its allies as a reason to pursue a nuclear programme. Sunday's statement comes as North Korea's neighbours say the country is ready for its first nuclear test

in five years as part of its provocative run of weapons tests this year.

"The prevailing situation more urgently calls for building up the country's defence to actively cope with the rapid aggravation of the security environment of the Korean Peninsula and the rest of the world," the North Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement, without elaborating how it would boost its military capability. The statement took issue with a trilateral meeting among the US, South Korean and Japanese leaders on the sidelines of a NATO summit last week.

## North Texas shooter kills 2, wounds 3 cops, takes own life

AP ■ HALTOM CITY (TEXAS)

A gunman killed two people and wounded four others, including three police officers, before taking his own life on Saturday evening in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, police said.

Haltom City Police Det. Matt Spillane said early Sunday that all of those wounded in the shooting in a residential neighbourhood had non-life threatening injuries and were expected to recover.

Spillane said the officers returned fire after being shot at while responding to a report of gunshots at a home around 6:45 pm. One officer was hit in both legs, and the other two officers were shot in the arm. The suspect died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

He said the Texas Rangers - the



state's elite police force - would be taking over the investigation. A motive for the shooting was not immediately clear.

"The main focus is on how and why this happened," Spillane told The Associated Press.

A woman was found dead inside a house and a man was found dead outside, Sgt. Rick Alexander told WFAA-TV, speaking at a press conference late Saturday. The older adult woman who had initially called 911 was wounded, he said.

The suspect was found with a "military-style rifle" and a handgun, Alexander said.

## China's top diplomat visits Myanmar amid Opposition protest

AP ■ BANGKOK



China's top diplomat on Saturday arrived on his first visit to Myanmar since the military seized power last year to attend a regional meeting that the government said was a recognition of its legitimacy and opponents protested as a violation of peace efforts.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will join counterparts from Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam in a meeting of the L a n c a n g - M e k o n g Cooperation group in the central city of Bagan, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The grouping is a Chinese-led initiative that includes the countries of the Mekong Delta, a potential source of regional tensions due to an increasing number of hydroelectric projects that are altering the flow and raising concerns of ecological damage.

China has built 10 dams

along the upper stretch of the Mekong, the part it calls the Langkang.

Military government spokesman Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw on Friday that the attendance of the foreign ministers at the meeting was a recognition of Myanmar's sovereignty and its government.

He said the ministers will sign memorandums of understanding and contracts. He did not elaborate.

It's unclear whether Wang would meet Senior Gen. Min

Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government.

Myanmar's military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021.

It was quickly met by non-violent nationwide demonstrations and triggered armed resistance that some UN experts now characterize as civil war.

According to a detailed list compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 2,053 civilians have died in the crackdown on the resistance movement.

Wang last visited Myanmar to meet with Suu Kyi just three weeks before the military ousted her.

China is Myanmar's biggest trading partner and an old ally. Beijing has invested billions of dollars in Myanmar's mines, oil and gas pipelines and other infrastructure and is its major arms supplier, together like Russia.

## Argentine Economy Minister resigns amid peso, diesel woes

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Economy Minister Martin Guzman submitted his resignation Saturday, acting at the end of a week in which Argentina's currency hit an all-time low against the dollar and truck drivers staged protests over shortages of diesel fuel.

Guzman announced on Twitter that he had sent a multi-page resignation letter to President Alberto Fernandez.

"With the deep conviction and confidence in my vision of the path that Argentina should follow, I will continue to work and act for a more just, free and sovereign homeland," Guzman wrote. With the Argentine peso sliding against the dollar, the government on Tuesday made it harder to acquire dollars to pay for imports. It acted as the dollar bought 239 pesos in the informal market used by citizens and companies to bypass official channels.

Argentina has suffered for years from a shortage of dollars, which stems partly from the distrust of Argentines in their own currency amid high inflation. Prices have risen nearly 30% this year, and analysts predict inflation could rise above 70% for all of 2022.

## Israel's caretaker PM Lapid holds first Cabinet meeting

AP ■ TEL AVIV



Israel's caretaker Prime Minister Yair Lapid held his first Cabinet meeting on Sunday since taking over as leader, promising a functional government despite the political instability that is sending Israel to its fifth elections in less than four years.

Lapid, sitting next to his predecessor power-sharing partner Naftali Bennett, also warned that Israel would take any step necessary to defend itself after it shot down three unmanned aircraft launched by the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Lapid took over last week as prime minister as part of an agreement forged last year that created the coalition government.

Bennett led it initially but stepped down following a series of defections and legislative defeats. Parliament dis-

solved itself, triggering new elections and handing power to Lapid.

Israel will head to the polls again on Nov. 1, when Lapid will seek to convince voters to adopt his centrist vision and deny former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was ousted last year after more than a decade in power, a chance to return to lead the country. Bennett will not run in November.

"In the coming months our goal, of this whole table, is to run the government as if there is no election campaign. The citizens of Israel deserve a functioning government at any given moment," Lapid said.

## Uzbek President backs off proposal to prevent secession vote

AP ■ MOSCOW

The president of Uzbekistan has backed off proposed constitutional changes that would have prevented the Karakalpakstan region from holding a referendum on splitting away

from the country.

A large protest against the proposed changes broke out Friday in the region's capital, Nuku. Demonstrators reportedly tried to seize government buildings and clashed with police.

Karakalpakstan is a

sprawling, mostly desert region in northwest Uzbekistan.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev met regional lawmakers the day after the unrest and later announced that a proposed new constitution would retain the

region's right to seek secession. He also imposed a nighttime curfew for the region lasting until Aug. 2.

No unrest took place during the first night of the curfew, Russian news agency Tass quoted a National Guard spokesperson as saying.



# National meet on PDS reforms on July 5

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A national conference of state food and civil supplies ministers is scheduled to be held here on Tuesday to discuss reforms in the Public Distribution System (PDS) and nutritional security.

Union food and consumer affairs minister Piyush Goyal will address the conference. Ministers of state for food Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti and Ashwini Kumar Choubey will also be present at the event.

The key highlights of the conference would include the discussion on the food fortification, diversification of food basket, crop diversification, integrated Annavatran Portal 2.0, reforms in PDS and storage



sector. "Union food and consumer affairs ministry said in a statement.

Best practices being followed in some of the states will also be shared for wide replication, it said.

The conference will serve as a platform to reflect upon the challenges and opportunities in the true spirit of cooperative federalism for achieving the transformation of the food and nutrition security ecosystem in the country.

India's Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 is the largest public food-security programme in the world. This system manages the food security requirements of around 80 crore beneficiaries across India, through the country-wide network of more than 5.33 lakh fair price shops.

The food security response of the government through Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) combined with One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) during COVID-19 pandemic served as a lifeline for the people and is being hailed globally as a shining example for its efficiency and sensitivity towards poor and vulnerable sections of the society, it added.

# Pakistan's trade deficit hits record-high of \$48.66 billion

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Cash-strapped Pakistan's trade deficit has surged to an all-time high of USD 48.66 billion in the outgoing fiscal year, up from USD 30.96 billion a year ago, a significant 57 per cent jump on the back of higher-than-expected imports, a media report said on Sunday.

The trade deficit reached an alarming level despite a ban on more than 800 non-essential luxury items in May by the Shehbaz Sharif government, the Dawn newspaper reported, quoting the provisional official data.

Pakistan's trade gap widened by more than 32 per cent to touch USD 4.84 billion in June, from USD 3.66 billion a year ago, driven largely by almost double the increase in imports compared to exports, the paper said.

The outgoing fiscal year's trade deficit has crossed the USD 37 billion figure in 2017-



18, which was largely led by imports related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In the subsequent years, the trade gap dropped to USD 31.8 billion in 2018-19 and then to USD 23.2 billion in 2019-20, before bouncing back to USD 30.8 billion in 2020-21 and finally to a whopping USD 48.64 billion in the 2021-22 fiscal, according to official data.

The outgoing year's trade deficit is propelled by the highest-ever increase in oil prices and commodities in the international market due to the supply chain disruptions brought about due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The trade deficit has been on the rise owing to an unprecedented increase in imports due to a rise in global commodity prices, while exports have stagnated to around USD 2.5 billion to USD 2.8 billion a month, mostly those of semi-finished products and raw materials, the paper added.

Pakistan's import bill increased 43.45 per cent to USD 80.51 billion during 2021-22, up from USD 56.12 billion, just a year ago.

Last week, the Pakistan government steeply hiked petroleum prices to implement the tough preconditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to revive the stalled USD 6 billion bailout package for the cash-strapped country.

Prices of all petroleum products went up by about Rs 14-19 per litre after the decision came into effect from midnight on Thursday.

This was the fourth hike in petroleum under the incumbent government assumed power in April.

The IMF has set tough preconditions like hiking electricity tariffs and imposing a levy on petroleum products to revive the stalled bailout programme.

The global lender also asked Pakistan to set up an anti-corruption task force to review all the existing laws that were aimed at curbing graft in the government departments.

After implementing the conditions, the IMF would present Pakistan's request for the approval of the loan tranche and revival of the programme to its executive board - a process that may take another month.

Pakistan is facing growing economic challenges, with high inflation, sliding forex reserves, a widening current account deficit and a depreciating currency.

On June 22, Pakistan secured a deal with the IMF to restore the stalled USD 6 billion assistance package and unlock doors for financing from other international sources.

The make-or-break deal was reached following the IMF staff mission and the Pakistani team, led by Finance Minister Miftah Ismail, agreeing on an understanding on the 2022-23 budget after the authorities committed to generate Rs 43,600 crore more taxes and increase petroleum levy gradually up to Rs 50 per litre, according to the paper.

The extended fund facility package of USD 6 billion was agreed upon in July 2019 for a period of 39 months. So far only half of the promised money has been reimbursed.

The revival of the facility will immediately provide access to USD 1 billion, which Pakistan badly needs to buttress its dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

# FPI exodus continues for ninth month; withdraw ₹50,203 cr from equity market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing their massive selling spree for the ninth consecutive month, foreign investors dumped Indian shares worth Rs 50,203 crore in June -- the highest net outflow in over two years -- amid aggressive rate hike by the US Federal Reserve, elevated inflation and relatively higher valuation of domestic equities.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have now pulled out around Rs 2.2 lakh crore from domestic equities in the first six months of 2022 -- the highest-ever net withdrawal by them. Before that, FPIs withdrew Rs 52,987 crore in the entire 2008, data with depositories showed.

The massive capital outflow has also contributed to the depreciation in the rupee, which breached the 79-mark against the US dollar for the first time last week.

Analysts warn that FPI flows are likely to remain volatile in the near term.

"Going ahead, we believe inflation would be the key driver to monitor to decide the

trend, coupled with narrowing yield gap between bond and equities....," said Shrikant Chouhan, Head - Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities.

According to the data, FPIs withdrew a net sum of Rs 50,203 crore from equities in June. This was the highest net outflow since March 2020, when they had pulled out Rs 61,973 crore.

FPIs have been deserting Indian equities since October 2021.

"Aggressive rate hike by US Fed, high inflation as well as relatively higher valuation of Indian stocks continued to keep foreign investors at bay through the month of June," said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India.

According to him, the broader sentiment remained negative towards India, which prompted foreign investors to carry forward their cautious stance on domestic equities. Compared to other emerging markets, India is among the worst hit with respect to net outflows. "The relentless FPI selling has to be seen in the con-

text of steadily rising dollar and bond yields in US. FPIs are selling more in countries with rising current account deficits (CAD) like India because the currencies of such countries are vulnerable to further depreciation," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

Towards the end of June, FPI selling witnessed a declining trend. If the market rises in July, anticipating or responding to good first-quarterly results, FPIs may sell again. This trend will be halted only when the dollar stabilises and US bond yields decline, he added.

Vijay Singhania, chairman of TradeSmart, said the equity markets seem to be impacted by the hammering of currencies, especially Asian market currencies.

"The quarter ended June recorded one of the worst performance since the 1997 Asian currency crisis. As if this was not bad enough, India was the worst performing currency in Asia," he added.

Given the risk emanating

from a prolonged inflation, global central banks are moving towards normalising interest rates and quantitative tightening at a rapid pace, said Kunal Valia, Chief Investment Officer - Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors.

In such a scenario, where not just the cost of capital is going up, but the liquidity tap is also drying up, outflows from emerging market assets are leading to excess volatility and drawdowns, he noted.

Apart from equities, FPIs were net sellers in the Indian debt market too last month. They were net sellers to the tune of Rs 1,414 crore in June, which, however, was significantly lower than May's figure of Rs 5,505 crore.

"Broadly, from the risk reward perspective and with interest rates rising in the US, Indian debt doesn't appear to be an attractive investment option for foreign investors," Morningstar's Srivastava said. In addition to India, FPI flows in June were negative in other emerging markets like Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, he added.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Corrections are now happening in the start-up funding ecosystem, with a higher degree of accountability to show the route to profit, which is a "good step" for the industry, according to Marico Chairman and leading entrepreneur Harsh Mariwala.

With the funding environment tightened, now only the best proposal from start-ups can attract funds.

Now, most of the funders are saying "I just do not want to look at growth, but I also want to see when will you start contributing to the bottom line, which is a good development," Mariwala told PTI.

"Just growing for the sake of growing without any visibility of profit is not a good business in my opinion. At some stage the business has to turn profitable," he added. In the current difficult situation, when the funding environment is tightened, now only the best proposal can attract funds, said Mariwala, adding earlier "too much of funding" was happening.

"In a way, things were too good for entrepreneurs, and many of the entrepreneurs

could easily get funds and they started splurging and burning money. But now I think there is a higher degree of accountability to show the route to profitability," he added.

Mariwala further said the time frames compared to the earlier days have increased, which is fine because the scaling of the business is high and the growth rate is much higher.

"But you can not have indefinite periods of no profitability. There has to be some road map for achieving profitability and I think most of the funders are demanding that, which is a good thing compared to an earlier time when the demand on profit was much, much weaker and lesser," he added. In the earlier environment, everybody was funding because there was a "craze for funding", but that has got some degree of correction now in the recent past, he added.

"Earlier it was too much of funding and maybe now (there is) a correction which is happening. I am sure if you have a good proposition, you will get funds. It is not that the funds completely dried up. But the funds are far more selective

now," he added.

When asked about the difficulties faced by the new-age entrepreneurs, Mariwala said Unique businesses should definitely get funding.

"I would not say (funding has not) dried up, but it is getting tighter in terms of ability to get funds," said Mariwala adding "If you have a unique story, if you have a good story, people will be there to back you. But if you do not have, or have an average story and if you are a me-too player, then you will find it difficult to get funds."

While talking about Marico, he said it has made three acquisitions in D2C space and would help them to scale up.

"The biggest benefit we can get them is in terms of physical distribution. Many times, for these smaller firms, it is too expensive for them to scale up through the physical route and also may be the funds also as there is impact because of the tightened funding Environment. So there are opportunities for FMCG firms to acquire and grow," he added. When asked about his message to the corporate world, Mariwala said it's a highly competitive environment and to

succeed in this, it is important to create a business model with a stronger right to win.

"That right to win will come only out of some unique proposition. It could be pioneering, it could be innovative, it could be some technology, it could be some service orientation. But you can not succeed in today's business environment with a me too business where others are already there and you are one of the additional ones," he said adding "so the need to differentiate is very very high."

Marico Innovation Foundation (MIF), founded by Mariwala, as a not-for-profit arm of the FMCG company Marico, has announced the 9th Edition of its flagship awards platform - Innovation for India Awards 2023. MIF, which aims to nurture and propel innovations has invited applications for two broad categories - India-based "for-profit" organizations including start-ups and corporate innovators and India-based "not-for-profit" individuals or organizations including government entities, philanthropic bodies, charitable trusts, multilateral agencies, community foundations, NGOs, and CSR / corporate funds.

# Banking frauds of over ₹100 cr see significant decline in FY'22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Frauds in the banking sector involving sums of over Rs 100 crore have declined significantly, with banks reporting cases worth Rs 41,000 crore in 2021-22 compared to Rs 1.05 lakh crore in the previous year.

According to official data, the number of fraud cases in private as well as public sector banks dropped to 118 in FY22 from 265 in 2020-21.

In the case of public sector banks (PSBs), the total number of fraud cases of over Rs 100 crore declined to 80 from 167 in FY'21, while for private sector lenders such cases reduced to 38 in FY'22 from 98 earlier, as per the data.

In terms of cumulative amount, it has come down to Rs 28,000 crore from Rs 65,900 crore in FY'21 for PSBs. For private sector banks, the reduction is from Rs 39,900 crore to Rs 13,000 crore in FY'22.

In a bid to check frauds, the RBI has been taking several steps including improving efficacy of Early Warning System (EWS) framework, strength-

ening fraud governance and response system, augmenting data analysis for monitoring of transactions and introduction of dedicated Market Intelligence (MI) Unit for frauds.

During 2021-22, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) carried out a study on the implementation of EWS framework in select Scheduled Commercial Banks, in collaboration with the Reserve Bank Information Technology Private Limited (ReBIT).

Further, the effectiveness of EWS was assessed in select banks by using Machine Learning (ML) algorithms.

Earlier this year, State Bank of India (SBI) reported one of the biggest bank frauds in the country totalling Rs 22,842 crore, perpetrated by ABG Shipyard and their promoters.

This was much higher than the case involving Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, who allegedly cheated Punjab National Bank (PNB) of around Rs 14,000 crore through issuance of fraudulent Letters of Undertaking (LoUs).

Last month, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) booked Dewan Housing Finance Ltd (DHFL), its former CMD Kapil Wadhawan, director Dheeraj Wadhawan and others in a fresh case involving Rs 34,615 crore, making it the biggest bank fraud probed by the agency.

A consortium of lenders led by Union Bank of India has alleged that the company had availed credit facility to the tune of Rs 42,871 crore between 2010 and 2018 from the consortium under various arrangements but started defaulting on repayments from May 2019 onwards.

The accounts were declared non-performing assets at different points of time by banks.

The bank alleged that the promoters along with others siphoned off and misappropriated a significant portion of the funds by falsifying the books of DHFL and dishonestly defaulted on repayment of dues.

This caused a loss of Rs 34,615 crore to the 17 banks in the consortium.

# RBI's deposit insurance arm to pay depositors of two co-operative banks in Aug

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) will pay the eligible depositors of Shankarrao Pujari Nutan Sahakari Bank, Ichalkaranji, and Harihareshwar Sahakari Bank, Wai next month.

DICGC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the RBI, provides an insurance cover of up to Rs 5 lakh on bank deposits.

Depositors of the two Maharashtra-based banks will get the amount credited to the alternate bank account specified by them, or on their consent, to their Aadhaar-linked bank accounts.

Eligible depositors of Shankarrao Pujari Nutan Sahakari Bank will get the payment on August 10, and those of Harihareshwar Sahakari Bank on August 28, according to a DICGC circular.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had imposed several restrictions, including on with-



drawals by depositors, on these two banks in May in the wake of their deteriorating financial positions.

While imposing several restrictions on Shankarrao Pujari Nutan Sahakari Bank, the RBI had said that 99.84 per cent of the depositors are fully covered by the DICGC insurance scheme.

In case of Harihareshwar Sahakari Bank, 99.59 per cent are fully covered by the DICGC insurance scheme, the RBI had said.

Deposit insurance extended by the DICGC covers all commercial banks, including local area banks and regional rural banks as well as co-operative banks in all the states and UTs.

# Fund raising via debt placement drops 39% in Apr-May

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fund raising by listed companies through private placement of corporate bonds dropped 39 per cent to Rs 32,405 crore in the first two months of the current financial year, and outlook for the rest of the fiscal is uncertain too on expectation of further hike in interest rates.

In comparison, Rs 53,253 crore was raised through the route during April-May 2021-22, data with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed.

Notably, fund raising through the route plunged to a six-year low

in 2021-22 to Rs 5.88 lakh crore owing to good performance of the equities and aggressive fund disbursement by banks at lower interest rate.

"Moreover, the outlook for the rest of the financial year is quite uncertain as interest rates are expected to firm up further, liquidity to get tighter and inflation to remain high. In such an environment, aggregate demand is likely to remain sub-



dued thereby suppressing the demand for credit as well," Sandeep Bagla, CEO Trust MF, said.

Several factors will dictate fund raising activities through the mode like peaking interest rate cycle, sentiment revival in capex cycle and peaking currency depreciation cycle, said Divam Sharma, co-founder, Green Portfolio.

Fund raising by companies listed on BSE and NSE was subdued at Rs 32,405 crore in April-May of the current financial year 2022-23.

This was 39 per cent lower compared to the year-ago period.

Listed firms have raised lower amount of funds through bonds and the credit off-take from banks has been slow as well. It is possible that the listed firms are sitting on surplus cash, Bagla said.

"With global central banks doing rate hikes to curb inflation, interest rates have risen and thus, investors in the capital market expect a higher rate of return. This invariably means the cost of borrowings for listed companies through corporate bonds has increased and is not as lucrative as before," Sonam Srivastava, founder, Wright Research, Sebi Reg Investment Advisor, said.

# Delhi-NCR housing market: Sales fall 19%, new supply down 56% in Apr-Jun

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales in Delhi-NCR fell 19 per cent to 15,340 units in April-June compared to the previous quarter on lower demand due to rise in property prices as well as mortgage rates, according to Anarock data.

In January-March 2022, housing sales stood at 18,835 units across NCR.

According to data compiled by Anarock, one of the leading real estate consultants

in India, the new launches or supply declined 56 per cent in Delhi-NCR to 4,070 units in April-June from 9,300 units in the previous quarter.

The unsold housing stocks declined 7 per cent in Delhi-NCR to 1,41,235 units at the end of June quarter from 1,51,500 units as on March 31, 2022.

Giving breakup of the Delhi-NCR data, Anarock said that housing sales in Gurugram fell to 7,580 units from 8,850 units. New launches dipped to

2,830 units from 7,890 units.

In Noida, housing sales declined to 1,650 units in April-June 2022 from 2,045 units in the previous quarter. There were no new launches in the city in June quarter as against 270 units in the previous quarter.

Housing sales in Greater Noida fell to 2,750 units from 3,450 units, while new launches rose to 390 units in April-June from nil in the previous quarter.

In Ghaziabad, housing

sales declined to 1,650 units in April-June from 2,080 in the previous quarter but new launches rose to 740 units from 220 units.

Housing sales in Faridabad, Delhi and Bhiwadi combined fell to 1,710 units during April-June 2022 from 2,410 units in the previous quarter. New launches, too, were down to 110 units from 920 units.

Out of the total unsold inventory in Delhi-NCR, Gurugram currently has the maximum stock of around

59,120 units, a 7 per cent decline from March quarter.

Unsold housing inventories in Greater Noida fell 8 per cent to 28,875 units at the end of June quarter.

Ghaziabad saw its unsold stock decline by 5 per cent to 17,990 units in Q2 2022 from 18,900 units in Q1 2022.

Unsold housing stocks in Noida fell 12 per cent to 12,150 units at the end of June quarter as against 13,800 units in preceding quarter of 2022.

Meanwhile, Delhi,

Faridabad and Bhiwadi together have over 23,100 unsold units as on June 30, 2022.

It was 24,700 units at the Q1 2022-end, the data showed.

The Delhi-NCR is one of the biggest real estate markets in the country, but it has been severely affected due to stalled and significantly delayed housing projects.

Homebuyers who booked flats in NCR are worst affected, as they have not received possession of their flats but almost paid the entire purchase

value to the builders. Flat owners are also paying EMI on their home loans.

According to the Anarock data, 4,79,940 units worth Rs 4,48,129 crore are "stalled or heavily delayed" across these seven cities as of May 31, 2020.

Out of this, Delhi-NCR alone accounts for a whopping 50 per cent with 2,40,610 stalled or delayed units worth Rs 1,81,410 crore.

Noida and Greater Noida region account for nearly 70 per cent of total stuck/delayed

units while Gurugram's share is only 13 per cent.

In Noida and Greater Noida, there are 1,65,348 units worth Rs 1,18,578 crore stalled or delayed. While Gurugram has 30,733 units worth Rs 44,455 crore stuck/delayed, the Ghaziabad market has 22,128 such units valuing Rs 9,254 crore.

Delhi, Faridabad, Dharuhera and Bhiwadi together have 22,401 stuck/delayed units worth Rs 9,124 crore.



# ‘ONE MORE TIME’

## 8-time champion Federer still hopes to play in Wimbledon

AP ■ LONDON

Roger Federer said Sunday he hopes to play Wimbledon "one more time" despite being sidelined for a year with a knee injury.

"I hope I can come back one more time. I've missed it here," said the eight-time champion as he attended a special ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of Centre Court.

The 40-year-old winner of 20 Grand Slam titles has been out of action since a quarter-final loss at the tournament in 2021 before undergoing another bout of knee surgery.

He plans to return to action at the Laver Cup in London in September and then take part in his home tournament at Basel.

"I knew walking out here last year, it was going to be a tough year ahead," said Federer, who received a standing ovation when he entered the court.

"I maybe didn't think it was going to take this long to come back — the knee has been rough on me."

Federer, dressed in a dark suit, was one of a host of Wimbledon champions at the ceremony that preceded the programme of matches on middle Sunday, established from this year as a permanent feature.

The Swiss star broke through at Wimbledon in 2001 with his famous win over Pete Sampras before lifting the first of his eight titles two years later.

"I've been lucky enough to play a lot of matches on this court," he added.

"It feels awkward to be here today in a different type of role but great to be here with all the other champions.

"This court has given me my biggest wins and my biggest losses."

Federer was joined at the ceremony by two men responsible for some of those highs and lows — six-time champion Novak Djokovic and two-time winner Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic defeated Federer in the 2019 final, the longest ever at



## Nadal in last 16 for 10th time

AP ■ LONDON

Rafael Nadal reached the fourth round at Wimbledon for the 10th time on Saturday with a straight sets victory over Italy's Lorenzo Sonego.

Second seed Nadal, the champion in 2008 and 2010, swept to a 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 win.

The 36-year-old had required back-to-back four-setters to make the third round and was expected to be tested by Sonego who made the fourth round last year.

However, Nadal didn't face a break point until he dropped serve in the eighth game of the third set, his focus possibly affected by a stoppage to close the Centre Court roof.

He quickly broke back and sealed the victory.

The Spaniard has already won the Australian Open and French Open in 2022 and is halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam since Rod Laver in 1969.

Nadal will next face Dutch 21st seed Botić van de Zandschulp for a place in the quarter-finals.

The 26-year-old Van de Zandschulp made the last 16 at the All England Club for the first time with a 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-1 win over French veteran Richard Gasquet.

Nadal comfortably defeated the Dutch player in straight sets on his way to a 14th French Open title last month.



the tournament, which stretched over five sets and almost five hours.

"I feel more nervous now than when I'm playing," said Djokovic, who will be back on Centre Court later Sunday for his last-16 tie against Tim van Rijthoven.

"This court has been truly special from my childhood and the first image of tennis I've seen, when I was four or five years old I saw Pete Sampras winning his first Wimbledon.

"This is where dreams come true and I was blessed in 2011, probably the highlight of my career, to win the tournament and so when I step out on this court I relive these memories. Truly an honour."

Other past champions included Billie Jean King, Margaret Court, Petra Kvitová, Martina Hingis, Chris Evert and Venus Williams.

Men's winners included John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg, Chris Evert, Andy Murray and Goran Ivanisevic.

However, nine-time champion Martina Navratilova was unable to join the parade due to testing positive for Covid-19.



## Tsitsipas says Kyrgios is 'a bully' with 'evil side'

AP ■ LONDON

Stefanos Tsitsipas branded Nick Kyrgios "a bully" with an "evil side" after losing a stormy Wimbledon clash on Saturday.

"It's constant bullying, that's what he does," the Greek fourth seed said in his post-match press conference after their third-round match.

"He bullies the opponents. He was probably a bully at school himself. I don't like bullies."

"He has some good traits in his character, as well."

"But... he also has a very evil side to him, which if it's exposed, it can really do a lot of harm and bad to the people around him."

The mercurial Australian prevailed 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7) in the match, during which both players were handed code violations by the umpire.

Kyrgios even demanded the Tsitsipas be defaulted for hitting the ball into the crowd.

Tsitsipas admitted he deliberately hit the ball at Kyrgios at one stage in an effort to quieten the Australian.

"I was aiming for the body of my opponent but I missed by a lot," he said.

"This needs to stop. It's not okay. Someone needs to sit down with him and talk. I'm not used to play this way."

"But I cannot just sit there, act like a robot and act like someone that is completely cold and ignorant."

"It felt like a bit of a circus. You get tired of the constant talking, the constant complaining," he added.

Kyrgios, in his own press conference, said he understood why Tsitsipas would be upset after losing two times in recent weeks, including in Halle.

"Maybe he should figure out how to beat me a couple more times first and then get to that," he said.

Kyrgios claimed he had been the victim of bullying on the court.

"I'm not sure how I bullied him. He was the one hitting balls at me, he was the one that hit a spectator, he was the one that smacked it out of the stadium. I didn't do anything."

"I did nothing towards Stefanos today that was disrespectful."

"He's soft to come in here and say I bullied him. We're not cut from the same cloth. If he's affected by that, then that's what's holding him back," he added.

After sealing his victory, the 2014 quarter-finalist said he had fancied his chances coming into the match after his recent win against the fourth seed on the grass in Germany.

"He's a hell of a player. He knows how to beat me — he's beaten me once," said the 40th-ranked Australian, who now has a 4-1 winning record against the Greek player.

"It's amazing, everywhere I go I seem to have full stadiums. The media loves to say I'm bad for the sport but clearly I'm not."

The Australian star tennis player will play 20-year-old American Brandon Nakashima, the world number 56, in the last 16.

## Japan's Momota thrashed by Axelsen in Malaysia decider



AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Japan's Kento Momota suffered a heavy defeat in the Malaysia Open final on Sunday against world number one Viktor Axelsen, the latest disappointing performance from the once undisputed king of badminton.

The tournament marked the first time Momota has played in Malaysia since he was involved in a car crash there two years ago, which sent his career into free fall.

Denmark's Axelsen, the reigning Olympic champion, outplayed the Japanese star from start to finish, taking only 34 minutes to win 21-4, 21-7.

Momota — playing in his first final of the year after a torrid run of form — received a rapturous welcome as he arrived at the arena in Kuala Lumpur.

But it was a one-sided game, with Axelsen immediately taking control, racking up points with a series of explosive smashes.

The first game was over

quickly, and in the second Axelsen maintained the high tempo to force Momota into numerous unforced errors.

After the match, world number two Momota said that Axelsen's "level was higher than I expected."

"I thought I was getting better in this tournament, but it was a bit too much for me today."

"But I will use the experience of playing in this big final for upcoming tournaments," the 27-year-old added.

Axelsen said he was surprised he managed to play so well.

"I was surprised with my levels today especially that I managed to find explosiveness in my game," he said.

"I was expecting a tough match, but it was great to play Momota in another major final."

It marked Axelsen's fifth victory of the season. The Dane had already won the All England, European Championships and two titles in Indonesia.

## Ronaldo wants to leave Man United

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Cristiano Ronaldo wants to leave Manchester United this summer if the Premier League club receive an appropriate offer, according to multiple reports on Saturday.

The 37-year-old Portugal forward returned to Old Trafford from Juventus last summer but despite being United's top scorer last season, and third in the Premier League, the campaign was overall disappointing.

United finished sixth in the Premier League, missing out on Champions League qualification, leaving the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who has a year left on his contract plus an optional year, facing the prospect of playing in the Europa League for the first time.

Manchester United are adamant Ronaldo, who scored 24 goals in all competitions, is not for sale, according to reports, with new manager Erik ten Hag keen to work with him.



Ronaldo won three Premier League titles and the Champions League during six trophy-laden years with United before leaving for Real Madrid in 2009 and Juventus in 2018, collecting more trophies at both clubs. United's international players are due to report for training in the coming days ahead of flying to Thailand on Friday for the start of their pre-season tour.

## MARIA REACHES FIRST GRAND SLAM QF AT 34

AP ■ LONDON

Germany's Tatjana Maria saved two match points to reach her first Grand Slam quarter-final at Wimbledon on Sunday.

The 34-year-old mother-of-two defeated former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko 5-7, 7-5, 7-5 after battling back from 1-4 down in the second set.

Maria, ranked 103, fired nine aces and exploited Ostapenko's all-or-nothing approach which resulted in 52 winners and 57 unforced errors for the Latvian.

Maria made her Wimbledon debut back in 2007, but had never previously got beyond the third round of a Grand Slam.

"It makes me so proud to be a mum -- that's the best thing in the world," said Maria, who only returned from a second maternity leave less than a year ago.

"I love my kids. To be able to do it together, it makes this



really special."

Maria will face fellow German Jule Niemeier for a place in the semi-finals.

Jule Niemeier beat Heather Watson 6-2, 6-4.

The 97th-ranked Niemeier broke home favourite Watson twice in the first set to establish a firm grip on the match on Centre Court following celebrations to mark the stadium's 100th anniversary.

The pair swapped service breaks at the start of the second

set before a Watson double-fault in the seventh game put Niemeier in the driving seat.

Britain's Watson, playing in the fourth round at a Grand Slam for the first time, battled hard, saving two match points in the 10th game, but Niemeier converted her third match point when Watson netted with a backhand.

The 22-year-old only made her main-draw debut in a major in this year's French Open.

## Zhou involved in frightening 1st-lap crash

AP ■ SILVERSTONE

The British Grand Prix was red-flagged after a horror opening-corner multi-car smash at Silverstone on Sunday, with Zhou Guanyu's Alfa Romeo flipped upside down and hurtling over the circuit's safety barrier.

As Max Verstappen pipped pole sitter Carlos Sainz to the first corner there was "carnage" behind with marshalls rushing into the catch fencing, where it bounced back to finish semi-upright in a stationary position.

Detailed replays of the accident were not available immediately until



Zhou had been rescued from his car.

He was attended by emergency evacuation medical crews and lifted out, transferred on to a stretcher and taken by ambulance to the circuit medical centre.

Albon was also taken to the medical centre before being transferred to Coventry Hospital by heli-

copter for further precautionary tracks.

The sport's ruling body the International Motoring Federation (FIA) advised that both drivers were conscious and were being checked over and evaluated.

The normal speed for Formula One cars in that part of the circuit is

around 240 kph.

In re-runs of the start, it appeared that Russell, starting eighth, moved to his right after a poor start and collided with Zhou's Alfa Romeo as the pair strove to stay ahead of Pierre Gasly.

This triggered Zhou's wild excursion off-circuit and dragged other cars into further less serious multiple collisions around them.

In a separate additional announcement, the FIA confirmed also that several protestors had tried to run on to the circuit following the red flag.

"We also confirm that after the red flag, several people attempted to enter the track," said the statement. "These people were immediately removed and the matter is now being dealt with by the local authorities."

The field filed back to the pits after the collision as a specialist extraction crew attended Zhou, who remained in his car, until he was lifted clear.

Other drivers including Russell climbed from their cars to assist Zhou

following the collision.

The teams involved were all in frantic action repairing their damaged cars after the incident in preparation for a re-start.

In a radio statement, Alfa Romeo said: "Zhou is conscious, he is talking, there are no fractures. Considering the circumstances, he is pretty good, pretty well."

This was not the first collision in which the 'halo' device was instrumental in saving a driver from serious injury - Roy Nissany survived after another car driven by Dennis Hauger landed on top his cockpit in which he was saved by the halo. Both escaped unhurt.

After a near one hour delay the race restarted in the original starting order, with the grid reduced to 17 with the retirements of Zhou, Albon and Russell.

Unlike the original start Sainz managed to hold off Verstappen to the first corner as the Spaniard seeks his first ever F1 win in his 150th start after securing his maiden pole.

## Parul Chaudhary sets new 3000m national record in LA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian runner Parul Chaudhary smashed the national record at the Sound Running meet in Los Angeles as she became the first athlete from the country to clock a sub-nine minute time in the women's 3000m event.

The 27-year-old Chaudhary covered the distance in 8:57.19 to finish third on Saturday night.

With her latest effort, Chaudhary, who specialises in steeplechase, broke Suriya Loganathan's record of 9:04.5s, set six years ago in New Delhi. Chaudhary was trailing at fifth spot in the race, but the Indian gained momentum in last two laps to claim a podium finish.

The 3000m is a non-Olympic event in which the Indians don't often compete in. Chaudhary is also in the



Indian team for the World Championships in Oregon, USA, starting later this month. She will be competing in the women's 3000m steeplechase event.

She had won the Gold in women's 3000m steeplechase at the nationals held last month in Chennai.



# India extend lead by 169 runs

Baristow's third century in a row takes England to 284 in reply to India's 1st innings total of 416

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Mohammed Siraj bowled a hostile spell in the post-lunch session to neutralise a fine hundred by Jonny Bairstow as India bowled out England for 284 to take a sizeable 132-run first innings lead on the third day of the rescheduled fifth Test here on Sunday.

By tea, India scored another 37 runs in their second innings losing Shubman Gill (4)'s wicket, extending the overall lead to 169. Cheteshwar Pujara (17 batting) and Hanuma Vihari (10 batting) were at the crease.

The morning session belonged to Bairstow (106 off 140 balls), who smashed the Indian attack after being extensively sledged by Virat Kohli.

Kohli had something to say to Bairstow about his 'play and miss' game and the England batter wasn't someone to take the stuff lying down.

Post that altercation, Bairstow started chancing his

arms and played a lot of lofted shots over mid-off and clipped a few towards the mid-wicket boundary.

However, Siraj (4/66 in 11.3 overs) came back strongly in the second session to mop up the tail after Mohammed Shami (2/78) finally had some luck going his way.

The England innings lasted only 61.3 overs but their run-rate of 4.61 certainly keeps them in the fight in case they can keep the fourth innings target within 325, something the current set-up under Stokes would be confident of chasing.

Once Bairstow smashed Shardul Thakur (1/48 in 7 overs) through cover point to complete his 11th Test century off 119 balls and third in as many games, he suddenly went into a shell.

Skipper Jasprit Bumrah (3/68 in 19 overs), who has had a dream game as an individual performer, bowled a probing spell, beating the bat time and again.

In the next 20 balls, Bairstow managed only six



runs after his mayhem that saw him get 14 boundaries and two sixes.

Bottled up by Bumrah, Bairstow had no option but to try an expansive drive when a

fuller delivery was pitched on the fourth stump line. The resultant thick edge was smart-

ly taken by a leaping Kohli, who made amends for his needless engagement with the

batter.

Once the Bairstow-Sam Billings (36) stand of 92 runs ended, Siraj bowled fast and quick to get the remaining three wickets for addition of another 43 runs.

In the morning session, Thakur more than made up for dropping a regulation skier by dismissing Ben Stokes, but the in-form Bairstow's brutal yet swift counter-attack did create some worries for the Indian team.

Stokes (25) and England's 'man of the moment' Bairstow added 66 for the sixth wicket before Bumrah produced a moment of inspiration on the field, taking a diving screamer off Thakur's bowling to dismiss his opposite number.

The dismissal couldn't have come at a more opportune time for India after an attacking field proved to be counter-productive as seven boundaries came between overs 33 and 36.

In fact, in a spell of 10 minutes, Stokes was dropped twice, first by Shardul, who couldn't latch on to a skier

when the English skipper had shimmied down the track only to mistime it.

The second chance was off the delivery before the dismissal when he flat-batted Shardul straight to Bumrah at mid-off but, to everyone's horror, he missed a regulation catch.

But instead of being discreet, Stokes did a repeat act, only to find the Indian skipper holding on to a much tougher chance.

Bairstow, who seemed to be struggling during the final hour on the second day, did play and miss during the first 20 minutes in the morning.

While Thakur got the prized scalp of Stokes, Bairstow handed him some harsh punishment with a ramp shot followed by a square drive.

There was also a regal pick-up pull for a maximum off Siraj's bowling.

There were two more sixes off Thakur's bowling as the morning session belonged to England before India made a comeback in the next one.



## 'Century in England is always special'

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Senior India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja feels scoring a hundred in tough English conditions will not only enhance his reputation as a batter but will also serve as a big confidence booster going forward in his career.

Jadeja hit 104 off 194 deliveries and together with Rishabh Pant (146 off 111 balls) shared 222 runs for the sixth wicket to rescue India from 98 for five in their first innings in the rescheduled fifth and final Test against England here.

"I am very happy that I scored a hundred outside India and that too in England. It is a big thing as a player.

"For me, I take this hundred as a confidence booster to score a hundred in England in swinging conditions," Jadeja said after the third's day play at Edgbaston after scoring his first overseas century.

Jadeja, who has come of age in terms of his batting in the last few years, said the key to success for a batter in England is the sheer ability to judge the ball.

"In England you need to play close to your body because if you try to play cover drives and square drives there are chances that you may get out caught behind or in the slips.

"So my focus was to leave balls which are outside off stump. I thought of hitting the ball if it was pitched close to me. Luckily the balls I picked were in my areas. You need to know your off stump and leave the ball which is pitched outside off stump," he said about his knock, only the second Test century of his career."

Jadeja said a disciplined approach is also a vital factor in succeeding on swing-friendly English conditions as a batter.

"In these conditions the ball swings so you need to bring in discipline in your batting. You have to play picking the balls which are on fourth and fifth stumps. In 40, 50 or 70 you can get out to a good ball.

"I was just thinking that if I get a good ball I can do nothing but at least I should try not to play a bad shot and not go in search of boundaries. If the ball is in my range and my areas I will hit that," he said.

The fiery all-rounder from Saurashtra doesn't believe in tags, saying he is a team man first before everything.

## Indian captain Rohit out of isolation after testing negative

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Indian captain Rohit Sharma is finally out of isolation after having tested negative for COVID-19 and will now be available for the opener of the white-ball series against England in Southampton on July 7.

The 35-year-old all-format captain missed out on playing the rescheduled fifth Test against England as he tested positive on the second day of the four-day warm-up game against Leicestershire.

"Yes, Rohit has tested negative and as per medical protocols is now out of quarantine. However, he is not playing today's T20 warm-up game against Northamptonshire as he will need some recovery time and training ahead of first T20I," a senior BCCI official told PTI.

As per medical protocol, any



player, who is out of quarantine, needs to undergo mandatory cardiovascular tests to check the lung capacity and how it is functioning post COVID-19.

The Indian team was desperate to play Rohit but he tested positive thrice before the

game day and hence India had a new captain in Jasprit Bumrah.

While Rohit will play from the first game of the white ball series, the likes of Virat Kohli, Bumrah, Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja will be available from the second game onwards.

## 4 Indian boxers enter finals of Elorda Cup

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Championships Bronze medallist Jamuna Boro got the better of Kazakhstan's Anel Sakys to enter the final of Elorda cup in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan on Sunday.

Jamuna, who hails from Assam, produced a clinical performance against the home boxer to emerge victorious by unanimous margin in the 54kg semi-final.

Apart from Jamuna, three other Indian boxers, Kalaivani Srinivasan (48kg), Gitika (48kg) and Alfiya (81+kg) will play the final on Monday.

Jamuna's speed and footwork were spot on as she managed to evade her opponent's punches several times before freeing herself up to land a few of her own towards the end of the opening round.



While the Indian dominated the proceedings in the second round, Jamuna's determination and composure under pressure gifted her the win in a highly competitive final round.

Among other Indians, two women boxers -- Sakshi (54kg) and Sonia (57kg) ended their campaign with 0-5 and 2-3 defeats against Uzbekistan's Nigina Uktamova and Sitara

Turdibekova respectively. The challenge in the men's section also ended in the semi-finals as all the four pugilists lost unanimously.

While Kuldeep (48kg) and Jugnoo (92kg) lost to kazakh boxers Asilbek Jalilov and Aibek Oralbay respectively, Anant went down fighting against China's Fang Bo.

Sachin (57kg) showed great courage against 2021 World Championships silver medallist Serik Temirzhanov of Kazakhstan but lost the bout eventually. Late on Saturday night, World Youth Champions Gitika (48kg) and Alfiya (81+KG) stormed into the final.

Gitika won her bout against Uzbekistan's Marjona Savrieva 4-1, while Alfiya showed her dominance against Valeria Axenova of Kazakhstan as the referee had to stop the contest in the second round.

## India W look to seal ODI series against SL

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

The Indian women's cricket team would look for some stability from its top-order as the visitors aim to seal the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka in the second game here on Monday.

After clinching the preceding T20 series 2-1, India have taken a 1-0 lead in the ODI series by winning the low-scoring first match by four wickets.

"Our approach will be the same as before, we have to win the series 3-0 and dominate all the matches. Whatever plans and preparations we have made we need to execute," all-rounder Pooja Vastrakar said at the pre-match press conference.

Despite the comfortable win, the Indian think tank would be a little concerned about the opening pair of vice-captain Smriti Mandhana and

young Shafali Verma.

Both the batters have got a few runs but have not been able to translate them into big scores.

The duo has failed to build a decent partnership on the tour so far, denying the team from electrifying starts which it is known for.

And both Mandhana and Verma would be gunning for a big score with just two matches remaining on tour.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, on the other hand, seems to be relishing her role, scoring runs and providing breakthroughs with her part-time off-spin.

The Indian bowlers, especially the slower ones, are simply enjoying the low and slow Sri Lankan tracks and have played a crucial role in the team's victories on the tour.

Right-arm medium pacer Renuka Singh excelled with figures of 3 for 29, however, it was Deepti Sharma's off-



breaks that broke Sri Lanka's backbone and restricted the hosts to 171 all out in the first ODI.

While the Indian bowlers have

excelled on the tour, the batters have been plagued by inconsistencies.

Verma, once again, squandered a promising start as the top order crum-

bled while chasing a modest total in the opening ODI.

The middle order comprising the likes of Harmanpreet, Harleen Deol, Deepti, who showed her all-round capabilities and Pooja Vastrakar bailed India out in the opener.

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, would hope skipper Chamari Athapaththu can inspire the side with the bat after a relative poor show so far.

The likes of opener Hasini Perera, Harshitha Samarawickrama and Nilakshi de Silva have batted well but need to stitch partnerships.

On the bowling front, left-arm spinner Inoka Ranaweera has shone bright but will need more support from her colleagues.

Sri Lanka lost the ODI series against Pakistan last month and would look to avoid a second consecutive series loss in the format.

## RAIN FORCES NO-RESULT IN WEST INDIES' FIRST T20I WITH BANGLADESH IN ROSEAU

AP ■ ROSEAU

Persistent showers spoiled the return of international cricket to Dominica as the scheduled first T20 of the three-match series between the West Indies and Bangladesh at Windsor Park was declared a no-result on Saturday.

Put into bat after a delayed start caused by heavy overnight rain which left damp areas around the pitch, Bangladesh were limited to 105 for eight off 13 overs in a staccato innings interrupted twice as more showers swept down off the mountains surrounding the picturesque ground to eventually wash out any hope of getting a result from a reduced match.

Test captain Shakib Al Hasan (29 off 15 balls) and wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan (25 off 15 balls) were the only players to develop any momentum in the tourists' innings as they lost wickets regularly to a varied home attack mar-



shalled by captain Nicholas Pooran.

Fast-medium bowler Romario Shepherd led the effort with three wickets for 21 runs off his reduced allotment of three overs while

leg-spinner Hayden Walsh claimed two for 24, including the important scalp of Shakib, caught behind by Devon Thomas, the wicketkeeper-batsman making a return to international duty at the same venue

where he made his senior West Indies debut against the same opponents in a ODI in 2009.

Shepherd accounted for Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah to set the tourists back even further at 75 for six in the 11th over, although Nurul's improvisation and aggression, which followed on his unbeaten 60 in the second Test defeat in St Lucia five days earlier, gave his side some hope of a defendable total before falling to a catch on the square-leg boundary off Odean Smith.

Within minutes of his dismissal though the rains returned for another time, leaving the umpires with option other than to declare a no-result as the available time, even allowing for a prompt resumption, would not have permitted the West Indies to face a minimum of six overs, and a revised target on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method, in reply to facilitate a definitive result.

## India to field third team in Open section at Chess Olympiad

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India will field a third team in the Open section of the 44th Chess Olympiad to be held at Mamallapuram near here from July 28 to August 10, the All India Chess Federation (AICF) said on Sunday.

With a record 187 teams registering for the Open section and to even out the number of entries as per norm, FIDE (world chess federation) approved a third team from the host country (India).

The Indian 'A' team will start as the third seeds in the Open section and the 'B' team will be the 11th seeds. In the women's event, the host's 'A' team including Koneru Humpy and D Harika, will be the top-seed, while the 'B' team will be seeded 12th.

Grandmasters Surya Shekhar Ganguly, Karthikeyan Murali, SP Sethuraman, Abhijeet Gupta and Abhimanyu Puranik would form

part of the third Indian team which received a last-minute entry with Gujarat's first GM, Tejas Bakre as the captain, an AICF release said.

As many as 187 teams, the highest-ever for any Chess Olympiad, registered for the Olympiad.

While the India 'A' team comprises Vidit Gujrathi, P Harikrishna, Arjun Erigaisi, S L Narayanan, K Sasikiran and have an average rating of 2696, the 'B' team (average rating 2649) includes Nihal Sarin, D Gukesh, B Adhiban, R Praggnanandhaa, Raunak Sadhwani.

"This is the best gift India could have ever got. Difficult to imagine even in the wildest dreams that 25 Indians would be competing together in an Olympiad," AICF secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan, who is the Olympiad tournament director, said in the release.

Ganguly, a six-time National champion, was the legendary Vishwanathan Anand's second in four World Championships and has represented India in six chess Olympiads so far.

Sethuraman is also a former National Champion and was a part of the Bronze medal winning Indian team at the Tromso Olympiad in 2014.

Ganguly said, "Nothing could be more exciting or thrilling than to be playing in an Olympiad again after a long time and first time in your own country. And personally too, this Olympiad is going to be a very special one as I am a father now and it is a super happy feeling to be very honest."

Gupta, the third Indian to win the World Junior title after Anand and P Harikrishna, is the only Indian to win the Commonwealth title on five occasions. He won an individual Silver medal at the Istanbul Olympiad in 2012.