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SEBI MULLS MAKING 'RISK FACTOR DISCLOSURES'

New Delhi: In a global first, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is planning to issue regular 'risk factor disclosures' on market trends, including surges and collapses, to help investors make right decisions sources said.

BABUL APPOINTED TMC's NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON

Kolkata: TMC MLA Babul Supriyo has been appointed as a national spokesperson of the party, sources in the Mamata Banerjee-led camp said.

SHOW CAUSE NOTICES TO 53 SHIV SENA MLAS

Mumbai: Maharashtra legislature secretary has issued show cause notices to 53 out of the total 55 Shiv Sena MLAs in the state — 39 of the faction led by Eknath Shinde and 14 of the Uddhav Thackeray group.

UKRAINE: 15 DEAD IN ATTACK ON BUILDING

Kyiv: At least 15 people were killed when a Russian rocket hit an apartment building in the eastern Ukraine town of Chasiv Yar and more than 20 people may still be trapped in the rubble, officials said on Sunday.

ECHEVERRIA, MEXICO'S FORMER PREZ DIES

Mexico City: Former Mexican President Luis Echeverria, has died at the age of 100, current President Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador confirmed on Sunday.

Lanka Opp agrees to form interim Govt

This will be a Govt where all parties are represented, says SLPP leader; protesters pledge to stay put in Prez house till PM and Gotabaya quit

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Opposition parties on Sunday decided to form an all-party interim Government after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe agreed to resign in the wake of unprecedented street protests during which both leaders' houses were stormed by protesters over the Government's mishandling of the nation's worst economic crisis.

Earlier in the day the anti-Government protesters who stormed Rajapaksa's official residence claimed to have recovered 17.85 million Sri Lankan Rupees inside his mansion. A video was being shared on social media showing the protesters counting the currency notes that were unearthed. Protesters said they had found 17,850,000 Sri Lankan Rupees at the President's official residence on Sunday when they stormed into the mansion after breaking the barricades. They have handed over the cash to the local police and vowed not to leave the place till both the leaders resign.

Meanwhile, throughout the day, Opposition parties held talks to seek ways to steer the country forward amidst the unprecedented economic crisis after President Rajapaksa on Saturday informed Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena from an undisclosed location that he will step down on



Protesters swim as onlookers wait at a swimming pool in the President's official residence a day after it was stormed in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Sunday. AP/PTI

Wednesday.

"We agreed in principle to form a Government of unity with all parties' participation for an interim period," Wimal Weerawansa of the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party's breakaway group said.

"This will be a Government where all parties are represented," he said. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, another leader of the SLPP's breakaway group, said they need not wait for

Rajapaksa's resignation on July 13.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has also offered to resign. The main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya party said they held extensive internal discussions. "We aim for an interim government of all parties for a limited period and then go for a parliamentary election," said Ranjith Madduma Bandara, the SJB general secretary.

The leaders of political parties

represented in Parliament are to meet on Monday afternoon to discuss the convening of the House for the transition of power for a new Government after Rajapaksa said he will resign.

Abeywardena conveyed to Rajapaksa on Saturday that Opposition party leaders want him to resign after anti-Government protesters stormed his offices and the official residence.

Continued on Page 2



People survey the burnt remains of the Sri Lanka Prime Minister's house a day after it was set on fire by protesters demanding the President and Prime Minister's resignation. AP/PTI

Missing Lankan Prez resurfaces; orders gas distribution

Colombo: Embattled Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose location is still unknown since the protesters overran both his office and the official residence, has ordered officials to ensure the smooth distribution of cooking gas after the fuel-starved country received 3,700 metric tonnes of LPG, his office said on Sunday.

In recent months people have been blocking roads across the

country in a desperate bid to force the Government to address the issue of acute gas shortages. President Rajapaksa instructed the officers to carry out the unloading and distribution of gas as the first ship arrived at Kerawalapitiya on Sunday afternoon. A second ship carrying 3,740 metric tonnes of gas is due on July 11 and a third carrying 3,200 metric tonnes of gas will arrive on July 15, according to Sri

Lankan media.

Meanwhile, a large gathering of protesters continue to occupy the President and the Prime Minister's iconic administrative buildings which also function as their official residences. No major breaches of security were reported on Sunday, the police said. President Rajapaksa was not present in the presidential House when a mob stormed the building on Saturday.

'India stands with people of Lanka'

There is no
refugee crisis
right now, says
Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As the island country is witnessing turmoil, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on

Sunday said India has always stood by Sri Lanka. He also said there was "no refugee crisis right now." The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), meanwhile, said India continued to follow closely the recent developments in Sri Lanka.

"India stands with the people of Sri Lanka as they seek to real-



ize their aspirations for prosperity and progress through democratic means and values, established institutions and constitutional framework," the MEA said. Reaching out to Sri Lanka, Jaishankar said in Thiruvananthapuram that the Indian Government has always been supportive of Sri Lanka

and it was trying to help the neighbouring country through its present economic crisis.

Interacting with the media outside the Thiruvananthapuram airport Jaishankar said, "We have been very supportive of Sri Lanka. We are trying to help and we are always very helpful where they are concerned." "They are right now working through their problems, so we have to wait and see what they do," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Man arrested for dressing as Shiva in street play; freed after furore

Guwahati/Morigaon: An activist dressed up as Lord Shiva for a street play on the rising cost of fuels, was arrested for allegedly hurting religious sentiments and later released on Sunday after a storm on social media. The activist Birinchi Bora drove into the venue of the street play dramatically on a motorcycle with another actor dressed as Goddess Parvati for their play on Saturday which had several Hindutva outfits up in arms demanding their arrest.

Disapproving of the arrest, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Twitter that enacting a street play over current issues is not blasphemous and instructions have been issued to the police to release him.

Continued on Page 2

Crisis in Goa Congress

Party sacks LoP amid reports of MLAs planning to go over to BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PANAJI

Amid reports that the Goa Congress unit was rife with dissension and at least half a dozen MLAs were in touch with the BJP, the Congress on Sunday sacked Michael Lobo as the Leader of the Opposition in the Goa Assembly for allegedly trying to engineer defections in connivance with the BJP.

"A conspiracy was hatched by some of our own leaders — LoP Michael Lobo and former Chief Minister Digambar Kamat — with the BJP to weaken the party and engineer defection," said AICC Goa in-

charge Dinesh Gundu Rao.

Rao flew into Panjim on Sunday amid speculation that some of the 11 party MLAs were about to jump the ship.

"Both of them had been working in coordination with the BJP. Digambar Kamat did it to protect himself against corruption cases, while Michael Lobo is eager to share power. The BJP wants to finish the Opposition," Rao said. At least 8 MLAs will have to cross the floor to escape the provisions of the anti-defection law. "Many of our people have been offered huge amounts of money. I'm shocked at the amount offered. But our six MLAs stood firm, I'm proud of them," said Rao, virtually admitting that five MLAs were negotiating with the BJP.

Former Goa Congress president Girish Chodankar alleged that his MLAs were offered ₹40 crore each to join the BJP.

Chodankar claimed that industrialists and people from the coal mafia were calling Congress Legislators on the phone.

The Congress suffered a setback in Haryana, too. Rebel MLA Kuldeep Bishnoi, who has been warming up to the BJP after cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha polls last month, on Sunday met Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda. He is all set to join the ruling side of Haryana.

The Congress is also faced with internal dissension in Jharkhand where it is part of an alliance Government with the JMM(S).

Earlier in Goa, Congress denied any rift, with state unit chief Amit Patkar saying such rumours were being spread by the ruling BJP ahead of the two-week Budget Session of the Assembly. According to sources, Continued on Page 2

'Blessings of Ma Kaali always with India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the blessings of Goddess Kaali are always with India and "everything is pervaded by the consciousness of the mother." He was addressing the centenary celebrations of Swami Atmasthananda, who was the 15th president of the Ramakrishna Math. The PM chose to speak about Goddess Kaali amid a raging controversy over TMC MP Mahua Moitra's controversial comments about the Goddess.

Remembering Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Bengal's Kaali Puja, Modi said, "Swami Ramkrishna Paramhansa was a saint who experienced Ma Kaali in front of his eyes. This whole world, this variable and constant,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi digitally addresses the centenary celebrations of Swami Atmasthananda, in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

everything is pervaded by the consciousness of the mother. This consciousness is seen in the Kaali Puja of Bengal." Modi underlined


that a beam of this consciousness and power was illuminated by Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa in the form of Yugpurushas like Swami Vivekananda.

"The spiritual vision that Swami Vivekananda saw of Ma Kaali, had infused extraordinary energy and power within him", the Prime Minister said.

Modi also referred to Swami Vivekananda. "Swami Vivekananda had such stature but he used to become like a child in his devotion for Goddess Kaali. Such unwavering faith was also there in Swami Atmasthananda," Modi said.


"Maa Kaali's blessings are always with India," he said. The Prime Minister paid his tributes to Swami Atmasthananda by reminiscing the time he spent with the Swami.

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Man burnt alive in Assam post kangaroo court verdict

PTI ■ GUWAHATI/MORIGAON

A man was burnt alive following a verdict by a village kangaroo court in Nagaon district of Assam for allegedly killing a woman, police said on Sunday.

The police have so far apprehended five persons, including three women, for setting ablaze Ranjit Bordoloi, 35, said SP Leena Doley.

The incident took place at Borlalungaon and Barhampur Bamuni under Samaguri police station on Saturday night.

A 'raij mel' (public hearing) was conducted over the death

of the woman (22), whose body was found in a pond few days ago, after another woman claimed of witnessing the murder, a senior police officer said.

The woman allegedly saw five persons killing her, including Bordoloi, he said.

Villagers dragged him out of his home, tied him to a tree and conducted the hearing of the 'gram sabha', officials said.

"He was then beaten up and burnt alive. After that, they buried the charred body," the police officer said.

Bordoloi allegedly confessed to killing the woman.

"The villagers claim that

the man killed the woman by practising witchcraft. So, they decided to mete out the same punishment to him," the officer said.

The body, which was exhumed, has been sent for post-mortem examination and an investigation is underway.

"When we reached the spot last night, most of the men in the village had fled. The 'gaon-burha' (village head) told us that he did not know about the 'gram sabha' and the subsequent murder," he said.

Security has been bolstered in the area to maintain peace, the officer added.

Kuldeep Bishnoi meets Shah, Nadda, sparks speculation he may join BJP

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Congress MLA Kuldeep Bishnoi, who had cross-voted in last month's Rajya Sabha polls, on Sunday met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J P Nadda, triggering speculation that he may join the ruling party.

The 53-year-old legislator from Adampur met with the BJP leaders in New Delhi and later, heaped praises on them. He was expelled by the Congress from all party positions last month.

Since then, he has been warming up to the BJP. Bishnoi also removed his pictures with Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi from his

Twitter profile, replacing them with photos with his father, former Haryana chief minister late Bhajan Lal.

Bishnoi, a four-time MLA and two-time MP, has been sulking ever since the Congress ignored him for the post of its Haryana unit chief during a revamp earlier this year.

The party appointed Uday Bhan, a loyalist of former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, as its Haryana unit chief.

In a tweet in Hindi, Bishnoi said it was a "real honor and pleasure to meet Amit Shah".

"A true statesman, I felt his aura and charisma in my interactions with him. His vision for India is awe-inspiring," he wrote.

Bishnoi added that he felt "very proud" to meet Nadda.

"His easy-going and humble nature sets him apart," he said.

Bishnoi said the BJP has seen unprecedented heights under Nadda, who has ably led the party. "I wish him good health and a long life."

A week after cross-voting, Bishnoi posted a cryptic tweet saying, "I know how to crush a snake's hood. I do not leave the jungle in fear of snakes."

Reacting to being expelled by the Congress from all party positions on June 11, Bishnoi tweeted, "Congress also has rules for some leaders and exceptions for others. Rules are applied selectively. Indiscipline has been repeatedly ignored in

the past. In my case, I listened to my soul and acted on my morals."

Last month, Bishnoi said he was consulting with his supporters to decide on his next course of action.

Asked if he was in touch with BJP leaders, Bishnoi had said his next step would be in the interests of the people of Haryana and his constituency.

The Congress, which is the main opposition party in Haryana, was assured of one Rajya Sabha seat by virtue of the number of MLAs it has in the 90-member assembly.

However, Congress candidate Ajay Maken failed to secure the berth after Bishnoi cross-voted, while the vote of an MLA was declared invalid.

BJP's Krishan Lal Panwar and the saffron party-backed Independent candidate Kartikeya Sharma were elected to the two Rajya Sabha seats from Haryana.

Bishnoi and his father Bhajan Lal had floated the Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) in 2007 after the Congress handpicked Bhupinder Singh Hooda for the chief minister's post following the party's thumping victory in the 2005 assembly polls.

The HJC later entered into a tie-up with the BJP and two other parties, who jointly contested the 2014 Lok Sabha polls in Haryana. They were supposed to contest the assembly polls together as well, but the alliance crumbled.

NDRF carries out nationwide security audit of passenger ropeways, cable cars

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The NDRF has begun a nationwide survey of passenger cable cars and ropeway systems to find out possible security flaws in them and to prepare a structural blueprint that will help it launch effective rescue operations in case of an emergency or accident.

The federal contingency force has also decided to train its rescuers in specific ropeway rescue skills apart from purchasing an assortment of tools like pulleys and carabiners to be used for transporting the salvager and evacuating stranded people from the car hanging in

the air.

The move comes as at least four ropeway-related incidents, including one in Uttarakhand on Sunday, have been reported in the country so far this season.

Three people were killed while 12 were rescued after a 40-hour-long operation conducted by the Indian Air Force, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Army, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and local administration after cable cars got trapped mid-air on a ropeway at Trikut hills in Jharkhand's Deoghar district in April.

Eleven people were strand-

ed for hours after a cable car was stuck mid-air at Parwanoo Timber Trail in Himachal Pradesh's Solan district and they were rescued after a six-hour-long operation undertaken by the NDRF and other agencies in June.

In a similar incident that took place in May, pilgrims visiting the hilltop goddess 'Sharda' shrine in Maihar town of Satna district in Madhya Pradesh were rescued about an hour after they got stuck in the cable cars.

In the latest such incident, over 40 devotees including BJP MLA Kishore Upadhyay remained suspended in the air

for nearly an hour on Sunday when a ropeway connecting the famous Surkanda Devi temple near Mussoorie got stuck midway due to a technical snag.

Ropeway operation to the temple has been resumed, Upadhyay said but suggested that it should be properly examined so that the lives of devotees are not risked.

"We have begun a survey of all the passenger ropeway and cable car systems in the country to understand their operations and suggest remedial action. There are more than 50 such systems in India which are used for transport of pilgrims, tourists and passengers.

Ropeway gets stuck midway; BJP MLA, devotees stranded mid-air for an hour

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Over 40 devotees including BJP MLA Kishore Upadhyay remained suspended in the air for nearly an hour on Sunday when a ropeway connecting Surkanda Devi temple near Mussoorie got stuck midway due to a technical snag.

Upadhyay said the incident occurred when they were returning from the temple by the ropeway.

The devotees had a sigh of relief as they got down from the ropeway trolley after nearly an hour of being suspended in the

air, he said.

Ropeway operation to the famous temple has been resumed, Upadhyay said but suggested that it should be properly examined so that the lives of devotees are not risked.

Ropeway service to the temple situated in Tehri district began in May this year.

It is the first important ropeway project started by the state tourism department after the creation of Uttarakhand. The 502-metre long ropeway was built at a cost of Rs 5 crore and operates between Kaddukhal and Sukanda Devi temple.

Crisis in Goa Congress

From Page 1

Digambar Kamat — the party's Chief Ministerial nominee in the elections held earlier this year — skipped a meeting of MLAs on Saturday.

However, when asked if he was in touch with the BJP, Michael Lobo said these are plain rumours.

Lobo did admit that a couple of MLAs were in touch with the BJP.

"We are also waiting for more news but there aren't more than one or two and these are the ones probably who are spreading rumors that some 10 MLAs of Congress are in touch with

the BJP and planning to jump ship," the Congress leader said.

Meanwhile, Goa Assembly Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar on Sunday canceled the notification for election to the post of Deputy Speaker, which was scheduled for Tuesday.

Goa's 40-member assembly has 25 legislators from the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and 11 from the opposition Congress. Congress had last seen a split in 2019 when most of its MLAs switched to the BJP, leaving the party with only four former Chief Ministers in its ranks.

NDMC developing modular rainwater harvesting pits in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to conserve water resources and to provide an independent water source to the area under its jurisdiction, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Sunday said that it is developing Modular Rainwater Harvesting Pits, in the national capital.

According to the Vice Chairman of the NDMC Satish Upadhyay, the modular rainwater harvesting pits consists of three chambers wherein the rainwater collected from storm water drains enters the underground brick masonry manholes, which are around 1.2-metre wide and 1.2-metre deep. From the middle of a chamber here, a pipe goes to the second chamber called the filter unit, which is around 2-meter deep.

"It has a strainer to catch dirt, silt, and other solids allow-

ing movement of the steel bucket installed on the lower side of this chamber. The bucket has a pipe going to the third and main chamber. The main chamber is made of pre-fabricated polymer-based blocks that are placed in an interlocked configuration. These are laid around the bore well pipe which is 30-35 meters deep and the whole system is wrapped with geotextile fabric to restrict the entry of soil into the system. The chamber allows the percolation of rainwater through the borewell pipe via pores made on the pipe while also storing any excess water," he informed.

Upadhyay said that these pits are not only cost-effective but also take a shorter time to install and require less maintenance.

NDMC's Road Division had already developed 160 modular pits and they are working on 95 more pits at different locations in the NDMC



area, the work order is to be awarded by this month and the project is to be completed by March 2023.

While informing the benefits of the pits, Upadhyay said that the rainwater in its pure form is captured and added to the natural ground water table through a bore-well, the water table will be increased, and the balance of water can be restored in the reservoir for use of irrigation in lawns and other places, etc. if required, optimum space utilization restoring surface to as it was, rainwater harvesting chamber using the modular technology are accidentally free and economic too.

"Less time of construction is required, No dust pollution in the atmosphere during construction as no stone dust coarse sand and aggregate is required for construction as readymade polymer-based blocks are brought at the site and placed in interlocked position," he claimed.

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"Less time of construction is required, No dust pollution in the atmosphere during construction as no stone dust coarse sand and aggregate is required for construction as readymade polymer-based blocks are brought at the site and placed in interlocked position," he claimed.

Kejriwal to visit Himachal Pradesh to participate in Tiranga Yatra

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal will visit Himachal Pradesh this week to participate in a Tiranga Yatra organised by his party's state unit in Palampur in the run up to the assembly polls in the hill state.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will also visit the state to join Kejriwal in the event scheduled to be held in the assembly constituency on Tuesday, the party said on Sunday. This will be the second visit of the AAP supreme and Mann to the poll-bound state within a month.

"AAP's national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal will visit Himachal Pradesh on July 12 to participate in Tiranga Yatra in Palampur on July 12. Punjab Chief Minister Mann will also participate in the event," the

party said in a statement.

The Delhi chief minister and his Punjab counterpart had on June 11 participated in a town hall meeting organised in Hamirpur district to deliberate on the state of education in Himachal Pradesh. While addressing the gathering, Kejriwal and Mann had urged the voters give Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) a chance in the upcoming assembly elections, promising to overhaul the education and healthcare system in the state, currently ruled by the BJP.

"If you want the 8.5 lakh students studying in Himachal Pradesh government schools to have a bright future, give a chance to the AAP," Kejriwal had said.

Having tasted success in the the assembly elections earlier this year, the BJP and the AAP are looking to repeat their strong showing in the Himachal Pradesh polls as well due later this year while the



Congress, having swept the 2021 state bypolls, is hoping for a turnaround after a string of poll losses.

The ruling BJP hopes to retain power in the hill state, as it did in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa. Riding high on its stupendous victory in Punjab assembly polls, the AAP is looking to make inroads into Himachal Pradesh, projecting itself as an alternative to the BJP

and the Congress both.

To woo the voters in the hill state, the party has been showcasing Kejriwal's Delhi model of governance, promising to form "an honest government" in the hill state and overhaul the education and healthcare sector if voted to power.

The AAP has announced that it will contest all 68 seats in the upcoming assembly elections in the state.

Man arrested for dressing as Shiva in street play; freed...

From Page 1

Nagaon Superintendent of Police Leena Doley said Bora, was arrested on under bailable sections on two complaints by Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal.

"We had arrested him for hurting religious sentiments, showing disrespect towards women, attempting to create disharmony among communities and also under Motor Vehicles Act for not wearing shoes and helmet during the play on the road.

"As the sections were bailable, he

was released on Sunday morning," she told PTI.

The woman, who played the character of Goddess Parvati, could not be traced thus far, and another person associated with the play, Dulal Bora, has been asked to appear at Nagaon Police Station, Doley said.

On Saturday afternoon, raising the issues of price rise as well as unemployment, Bora and his associates performed a street play on the road near Nowgong College Clock Tower Point.

In the play, Bora as Lord Shiva slammed the government for

the unabated price hike of almost all goods, including fuels, LPG cylinders and other essential items.

He also highlighted the unemployment woes in the country, reminding people of the unfulfilled job promises made to people.

The district units of Bajrang Dal and VHP, the wake of the symbolic protest, separately lodged two FIRs at Nagaon Police Station, alleging that the play categorically "hurt the dignity of the Hindu gods".

The police immediately picked

up Bora, a former general secretary of Nowgong College Students Union, and later arrested him.

His arrest was widely condemned by many on social media.

Meanwhile, the CM, taking to Twitter, said, "Nukad Natak on current issues is not blasphemous. Dressing up is not a crime unless offensive material is said. We need to stop this! Release that man @himantabiswal!"

"Hey bhagwan... We need to urgently rescue our dharma from these morons... Did he do something offensive in Nukkad Natak!?" Singh said while reacting to media reports over the arrest of Bora.

Singh drew his attention to the matter through a series of tweets and appealed to him to release the activist.

"Nukad Natak on current issues is not blasphemous. Dressing up is not a crime unless offensive material is said. We need to stop this! Release that man @himantabiswal!"

"Hey bhagwan... We need to urgently rescue our dharma from these morons... Did he do something offensive in Nukkad Natak!?" Singh said while reacting to media reports over the arrest of Bora.

‘India stands with people of...

From Page 1

He was responding to a media query on India's stand on the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

In New Delhi, in response to media queries on the situation in Sri Lanka, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "India is Sri Lanka's closest neighbour and our two countries share deep civilizational bonds. We are aware of the many challenges that Sri Lanka and its people have been facing, and we have stood with the Sri Lankan people as they have

tried to overcome this difficult period."

He pointed out that India extended this year over \$ 3.8 billion to tackle the serious economic situation in Sri Lanka.

"We continue to follow closely the recent developments in Sri Lanka. India stands with the people of Sri Lanka as they seek to realize their aspirations for prosperity and progress through democratic means and values, established institutions and constitutional framework," he said.

‘Blessings of Ma...

From Page 1

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister said, "This event is filled with many feelings and memories. I have always been blessed by him, there was an opportunity to be with him. It is my good fortune that I kept in touch with him till the last."

He also highlighted the tremendous relief and rescue operations that were carried out not just in India but also in Nepal and Bangladesh under his directive by Belur Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Modi also remarked on the institutions created by Swami for helping the poor in employment and livelihood.

Lanka Opp agrees to form interim...

From Page 1

Under the Constitution, the incumbent Prime Minister would automatically get appointed as the acting President for a short time until Parliament votes and appoint a successor to the President.

The protesters are also demanding the resignation of prime minister Wickremesinghe. The resignation of both the president and prime minister would mean that Speaker Abeywardena would become the acting president.

Wickremesinghe has expressed

willingness to resign when a new government is formed.

He stressed on Saturday that to deal with the International Monetary Fund on an assistance programme and to deal with shortages of essentials including food and fuel, it was important not to leave a vacuum.

In a statement Saturday night, Wickremesinghe said "this country is gripped with fuel and food shortages. There will be an important visit scheduled by the World Food Programme next week while crucial talks have to be continued with the IMF. So

if the current government is to quit it must be replaced by the next."

Meanwhile, the protesters who have occupied the key administration buildings since Saturday's mass protests said they would not leave until Rajapaksa resigns. Sri Lankans were seen roaming through the ransacked presidential palace on Sunday. There were no reports of violence unlike on Saturday.

The cash-starved island nation witnessed a tumultuous day on Saturday when protesters broke into Rajapaksa's official resi-

dence in Colombo.

The protesters were seen in the bedrooms and splashing around in the swimming pool of the President's House.

Protesters did not spare Prime Minister Wickremesinghe despite his offer to resign and set on fire his private residence in an affluent neighbourhood in the capital.

Police on Sunday arrested three people for setting Wickremesinghe's residence on fire, which caused extensive destruction of the property. More arrests are expected, police

said.

The Criminal Investigations Department took over the investigation into the arson attack.

A video released by the Daily Mirror newspaper showed grim visuals of Wickremesinghe's charred residence and a damaged sedan. Paintings and other artworks were strewn across the house and the compound.

The Speaker would become the acting President in the absence of both the President and the Prime Minister. Later, an election among MPs must hap-

pen to elect a new President.

Meanwhile, five Sri Lankan Cabinet ministers have announced their resignation after the massive anti-government protest.

The Chief of Defence Staff General Shavendra Silva on Sunday called on all Sri Lankans to support the armed forces and the police to maintain peace in the country.

In May, President Rajapaksa's elder brother and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had to quit in the face of massive anti-government protests.

The Rajapaksa brothers, Mahinda and Gotabaya, were hailed by many in Sri Lanka as heroes for winning the civil war against the LTTE but they are now blamed for the country's worst economic crisis.

The expected exit of President Rajapaksa on Wednesday and the resignation of Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister in May is a dramatic fall from grace for a powerful family that has dominated Sri Lankan politics for more than a decade. Sri Lanka, a country of 22 million people, is under the

grip of an unprecedented economic turmoil, the worst in seven decades, crippled by an acute shortage of foreign exchange that has left it struggling to pay for essential imports of fuel, and other essentials.

The country, with an acute foreign currency crisis that resulted in foreign debt default, had announced in April that it is suspending nearly USD 7 billion foreign debt repayment due for this year out of about USD 25 billion due through 2026. Sri Lanka's total foreign debt stands at USD 51 billion.

Rains continue to elude Delhi



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The monsoon embraced Delhi in an impressive manner on June 30 but rains have repeatedly given the capital a miss since then. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had made a series of inaccurate forecasts for the arrival of monsoon in the national capital.

On Sunday, the IMD forecast said that Delhi is likely to get only light or very light rain over the coming week. While an earlier forecast for Sunday indicated moderate rain, it was later modified to light rain.

Delhi is still witnessing a

dry monsoon season with the maximum temperature settled at 34.9 degrees Celsius, and the temperature of wet bulb climbing up to 30 degree celsius, causing discomfort.

In the last 10 days, Delhi's base weather observatory, the Safdarjung Observatory, has recorded just 2.6 mm rainfall. The monsoon in Delhi began on a bumper note with the national capital receiving very heavy rainfall between June 30 and July 1. It has been a dry spell since then.

But IMD has been issuing rainfall warnings for almost every day. On July 1, the weather office issued the orange

alert. It issued the yellow alert for the next six days. The city received only 2 mm rainfall in the next three days.

On July 4, the IMD issued a yellow alert for July 5 and an orange alert for July 6, which was later shifted to July 7.

The IMD later predicted "fairly widespread to widespread rainfall activity" over west Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Rajasthan on July 9 and July 10, and issued a yellow alert, warning of moderate rainfall in the capital on Sunday. But that did not happen either.

"The low pressure area had pulled the trough towards central India, leading to heavy rainfall there," said Mahesh Palawat, vice president (meteorology and climate change), Skymet Weather.

"It was expected that the western end of the monsoon trough would again shift towards the north after the low pressure area degenerated.

However, the development of a cyclonic circulation over southwest Rajasthan and adjoining parts of south Pakistan in the last 24 hours did not let the monsoon trough come near Delhi and neighbouring areas.

It is still stuck south of Delhi and passes through Bikaner and Kota," he said.

Delhi won't get any rain on Monday and Tuesday. Rain is likely on July 13 and July 14 after the low pressure area

crosses Gujarat and the monsoon trough shifts towards the north, the meteorologist said.

According to experts, there are four factors responsible for rain in Delhi: the monsoon trough line passes through the city to north-west UP, Haryana and east Rajasthan; low pressure area development; western disturbance with moisture; and local convective clouds due to local heat and moisture. But, even change in wind or difference in pressure created by local heat can affect any of four factors in a very short time. One of the major reasons being attributed to the continuous faulty forecast this year is the difficulty in predicting the interaction of easterly and westerly winds. Parts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have been receiving moderate to heavy rainfall over the past few days, but Delhi has remained largely dry. July and August are the rainiest months in Delhi.

While July sees around 187 mm of rain, it is usually 232.5 mm in August. Monsoon reached Delhi on June 30 – three days late – and the city received heavy rainfall for a couple of days after.

Since then, however, it has received only light rainfall or traces. According to the IMD, Delhi has received 89.2 mm of rain (city average) since June 1 this year, which is when the monsoon arrives in Kerala. This is a deficit of 15% which, as per the IMD, is a normal deviation.



Children play after offering prayers on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, in old Delhi on Sunday

RANJAN DIMRI | THE PIONEER

40-year-old builder shot dead outside his office in Paschim Vihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a 40-year-old builder was shot dead by unknown assailants outside his office in Paschim Vihar, the Delhi Police Crime Branch has arrested a 24 year old man in connection with the case.

The accused, identified as Deepanshu, is a member of a Kaala Sahuwasia Gang and allegedly claimed that he killed the victim for refusing to sell weapons to him.

He is also a close aide of renowned gangster Bhupender alias Monu Dariapur alias Tampu who was murdered by gangster Sonu Dariyapur, they said.

The incident took place on July 2 around 3 pm on a busy street in Paschim Vihar A-block. The deceased, Amit Goel, had come out of his office and was entering his car when a group of assailants came in a Toyota Corolla car and fired at Goel. Goel was shot at five-six times and succumbed to the injuries.

After firing multiple rounds, the unidentified assailant fled from the spot in a car, which was later found abandoned, a senior police officer said. Goel was previously involved in two cases related to arms.

He was a professional shooter and used to import sophisticated automatic weapons under the guise of weapons imported for sport related shooting, thus misusing the import policy meant for Indian shooters, police added.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Rohit Kumar Meena said that an input was received about the involvement of one Deepanshu in the murder case of the builder.

After technical analysis and scanning CCTV footages, the lead was further developed and the vehicle being used by Deepanshu was identified.

During interrogation, Sharma told police that after failing to deliver one of the two orders, Goel had threatened him with dire consequences, which offended him and he decided to eliminate him.

YouTuber Gaurav Taneja granted bail

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

YouTuber Gaurav Taneja has been granted bail after being arrested for organising his birthday party with wife Ritu Rathee Taneja at Sector 51, Noida Metro Station of the Aqua Line on Saturday.

Taneja is currently one of the most popular YouTubers in the country with millions of subscribers across his three YouTube channels— 'Flying Beast', 'Fit Muscle TV' and 'Rasbhari Ke Papa' where he makes fitness-related videos as well as his daily life vlogs and live streams.

He was arrested on Saturday after his followers gathered at Sector 51 metro station of the Aqua Line in Noida on Saturday to celebrate his birthday upon his request.

The YouTuber, whose friends had booked the metro coach under a scheme of the Noida Metro Rail Corporation that allows renting of coaches for private celebrations.

Taneja's wife Ritu, who has over 1.6 million followers on Instagram, told her fans that she will meet them at about meeting at 1.30 pm for a birthday celebration. An earlier Instagram story on Ritu's account also said: "We will be



restricted by the maximum capacity of a Metro given by NMRC! Lekin sabse mileage zaroor!" However, hours later, another post on the Instagram story informed that celebrations were being cancelled "due to some personal issues."

According to police, after hundreds of people reached the spot, it created a stampede-like situation, following which he was arrested.

He was brought in to the station for questioning and later released on bail late in the night. Restrictions under CrPC section 144 were imposed in Noida in Gautam Buddh Nagar district of UP in view of multiple festivals and other law and order considerations.

"The YouTuber was held under IPC sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by government offi-

cials) and 341 (wrongful restraint) after an FIR was lodged at the local Sector 49 police station," a senior police official said.

"He was arrested around 2 pm, after a large number of people gathered outside the Noida Sector 51 metro station, leading to traffic snarls on the road in front of it. He was granted bail later in the evening," the official said.

The invitation for Taneja's birthday was shared in an open invitation to fans and followers on social media. According to Noida Metro officials, the coach-for-hire scheme on the Aqua Line was aimed at non-fare box revenue for the government-run metro service.

Taneja was an Air Asia pilot and claimed that he was suspended by the airline for pointing out violations at the airline. In a video in 2020, he also pointed out the issues that he had flagged.

His wife Ritu Rathee Taneja is also a social media influencer and a pilot. They got married in 2015 and have two children. She has over 1.6 million followers on Instagram. His YouTube channel Flying Beast has over seven million subscribers. While Taneja has 3.3 million followers on Instagram.

PUC violators to get notices

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government's Transport department is likely to start sending notices to vehicle owners who do not have valid PUC (pollution under control) certificates and follow it up with challans of Rs 10,000 if the certificates are not obtained.

According to transport department officials, the department will also intensify its drive to ensure that vehicles without PUC certificates do not ply on the city roads. Presently, over 17 lakh vehicles, including 13 lakh two-wheelers and three lakh cars, are plying without valid PUC, they said."The

department is working on a system to send notices to vehicle owners at their homes after expiry of PUC certificate. If they do not obtain a valid certificate, challans of fine of Rs 10,000 will also reach them at their home," said officials.

According to Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, every motor vehicle (including those conforming to BS-I/ BS-II/ BS-III/BS-IV as well as vehicles plying on CNG/LPG) is required to carry a valid PUC certificate after the expiry of period of one year from the date of its first registration.

However, the validity of four-wheeled BS-IV compliant vehicles is one year and for

other vehicles it is three months. PUC certification has been made real time and integrated with the vehicle registration database.

This has improved credibility of PUC certification by reducing human intervention and helps in identifying polluting vehicles for necessary punitive action, officials said.

If caught without a valid PUC certificate, vehicle owners may face imprisonment up to six months or fine up to ₹10,000 or both as per Motor Vehicle Act.

Last year, due to strict enforcement of PUC norm by the Transport department, over 60 lakh certificates were issued,

officials said. Vehicles are periodically tested for their emission standards for various pollutants such as carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide after which they are given PUC certificates.

There are over 900 pollution checking centres authorised by the transport department in Delhi. These are set up at petrol pumps and workshops spread all over the city so motorists can get it done easily. The fee for pollution checking in case of petrol and CNG-driven two and three wheelers is ₹60. It is ₹80 for four-wheeled vehicles. The fee for pollution checking certificate of diesel vehicles is ₹100.

Only 14 of 743 women applicants register their e-autos

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Despite the Delhi Government's push for women drivers, only 14 out of 743 women applicants have got their e-autos registered after receiving the letter of intent, with many blaming tedious paperwork and high rate of interest for not buying the three-wheelers.

The AAP Government had issued the letter of intent to 4,261 people, including 2,855 male and 743 female applicants. "Out of these 743 applicants, only 14 women have registered their e-autos, while 273 men have done so," according to official data by the transport department.

Shamshon Nesha, a woman applicant, who got the letter of intent, said, "In the first place, it was difficult to get the loan processed. We had submitted our documents, but they kept dilly dallying it. "We



would check every 15-20 days, but were told that the documents were being processed. We had borrowed Rs 66,000 for the down payment, but after seeing multiple delays, we decided to surrender the letter of intent," she added.

Another woman applicant, requesting anonymity, said the rate of interest for getting an e-auto is quite high and it is unaffordable for them. Government officials said there were supply issues due to some chip problem in the vehicles, which

could be the reason for the low number of takers for the initiative. They also said that since electric autorickshaws are new in the market, the rate of interest is going to be high, and with the passage of time, an equilibrium will be established.

An official said the Delhi government is providing 5 per cent interest subvention on the purchase of e-autos on loans along with a purchase incentive of Rs 30,000 under the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy. The Delhi Transport

Department had in October last year launched the scheme for registration of 4,261 e-autos, of which 33 per cent – 1,406 e-autos – is exclusively reserved for women drivers. Rakesh Aggarwal, president, Chhalak Shakti, an autorickshaw union, said the government should have been better prepared.

"We are in favour of participation of women in economy and in running e-autos. But the Delhi government reserved 1,406 e-autos for women without any preparation, and only a meagre 14 vehicles could be registered so far," he said.

Under the scheme, online applications were invited in October and November last year. A total of 19,846 applications were received from male applicants against the quota of 2,855 e-autos, and 743 applications were received from female applicants against the quota of 1,406 e-autos, officials said.

DPCC constitutes control room to monitor single use plastic ban

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has set up a control room to monitor the implementation of the ban on 19 identified single-use plastic items. The control room will start from Monday.

According to an official, the control room will receive all complaints related to the violation of the SUP ban and direct enforcement teams to take action on them. The revenue department and the DPCC have constituted 33 and 15 teams, respectively, to ensure the enforcement of the ban.

"Though the DPCC's mandate is to keep a check on the manufacturing of SUP items, complaints related to the violation of the ban in markets and other public



places can also be sent to our control room. We will transfer it to the municipal bodies concerned," he said. Grievances regarding the

infractions can also be lodged through the Green Delhi application of the Delhi government or the "SUP-CPCB" application of the Central

Pollution Control Board. "We will start closing down units violating the ban from Monday under relevant provisions of the law. No more

warning will be given," the official said.

On July 1, when the ban on the SUP items came into effect, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said the Delhi government would be lenient towards those violating the ban for the initial 10 days and focus on creating awareness against the use of such commodities and promote their alternatives.

The action will include a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh or a jail term of up to five years or both under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Officials said the DPCC has to ensure compliance with the ban in conforming areas, while the MCD and other local bodies are responsible for its implementation in the informal sector. The MCD and other urban local bodies will act against the defaulting units according to their

bylaws, while the revenue department will take action under the Environment Protection Act.

In the initial 10 days, officials held meetings with industrial associations to educate and guide them about the ban.

Plastic carry bags of thickness less than 75 microns are also prohibited under the Plastic Waste Management Rules. Their thickness will have to be increased to 120 microns from December 31.

Plastic wrapping material less than 50 microns in thickness and plastic sachets used for selling and storing tobacco, pan masala and gutkha are also not allowed.

Delhi generates 1,060 tonnes of plastic waste per day. SUP is estimated to be 5.6 per cent (or 56 kg per metric tonnes) of the total solid waste in the capital.

Govt to launch drive on July 15 for online registration of construction, demolition sites

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government will launch a special drive on July 15 for online registration of construction and demolition sites larger than 500 square metres for self-monitoring of compliance of dust control guidelines.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said on Sunday those who do not register their sites will face action. A portal for the registration of construction and demolition sites was launched

in October last year in a bid to control dust pollution in the capital. A special campaign will be launched for the registration of such sites on the C&D portal between July 15 and July 30. As many as 600 project proponents have registered on the portal so far, Rai said.

"The DPCC (Delhi Pollution Control Committee) will take action against those who have not registered their construction and demolition sites on the portal for self-assessment of dust control norms," he said.

Aircraft carrier Vikrant may be inducted in August

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The fourth phase of sea trials of the first indigenously designed and manufactured aircraft carrier Vikrant was successfully completed on Sunday. The ship is likely to be inducted into the Navy in August by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

With this induction, India will become one of the few countries having the capabilities to design and build its own sophisticated and state-of-the-art aircraft carrier. At present, India has one aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya built by Russia.

Giving details of the ongoing trials, navy officials said here on Sunday, the fourth phase was successfully completed during which integrated trials of majority of equipment and systems onboard including some of the aviation facilities complex equipment were undertaken. The ship's delivery is being targeted in end July followed by commissioning of the ship in August to commemorate 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The Indigenous



India's first made-in-India aircraft carrier Vikrant likely to get commissioned in August

PNS

design and construction of Aircraft Carrier by Indian Navy and Cochin Shipyard Ltd is a shining example in the Nation's quest for 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India Initiative' with more than 76 per cent indigenous content.

This has led to growth in indigenous design and construction capabilities, besides development of large number of ancillary industries, with employment opportunities for

over 2000 Cochin Shipyard Limited(CSL) personnel and about 12,000 employees in ancillary industries, they said. Maiden Sea Trials of the indigenous aircraft carrier were successfully completed in August last year.

This was followed by the second and third phases of the Sea Trials in October last year and January 22 respectively. During these three phases of Sea Trials, endurance testing of

propulsion machinery, electrical and electronic suites, deck machinery, lifesaving appliances, ship navigation and communication systems was undertaken. The aircraft carrier weighs about 40,000 tons and is largest and most complex warship to be built in India. The overall cost of ship is more than ₹23,000 crores. The warship will operate MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31 helicopters, and MH-60R multi-role helicopters.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Agnipath scheme complements the Indian Air Force's long-term vision to become a "lean and lethal" force with the best manpower and the new recruitment model will in no way reduce its operational capability, Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari said on Sunday.

The Chief of Air Staff said the reform initiative will enable the IAF to meet all its national security mandate and the force envisaged its seamless implementation with a restructured training pattern that is contemporary, technology-based and tailor-made for its operational requirements.

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari told PTI that 13 teams will take care of enrolment, employment, assessment and training of recruits within the four-year engagement period.

He said any savings in pensions and other expenditures through the implementation of the scheme are only incidental and not the reason for initiating the reform.

"The Agnipath scheme furthers the IAF's manpower optimisation drive that has been ongoing for a decade wherein we have reviewed many human resource policies and organisational structures," he said.

Nearly 7,50,000 candidates have registered for around 3,000 positions in the IAF under the new scheme.

The scheme complements the IAF's "long-term vision of being a lean and lethal force with the best human resource as we strongly believe that the men and women behind the machine make all the difference when it matters," the Chief of Air Staff said.

The scheme, announced

Agnipath complements IAF's vision of 'lean & lethal' force: Air Chief Marshal

on June 14, seeks to recruit youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 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. Several parts of India witnessed violent protests last month against the scheme with the agitators demanding its rollback as the new model does not provide a job guarantee to 75 per cent of recruits.

"With evolving technology, the basic requirements from an air warrior have also seen a qualitative shift.

We feel that the youth of today brings along a different and much-required set of skills as well as adeptness with technology," he said.

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said the synergy of organisational requirements and the aspirations of the youth shall provide the IAF with an "ideal amalgam" to be an effective force in the future.

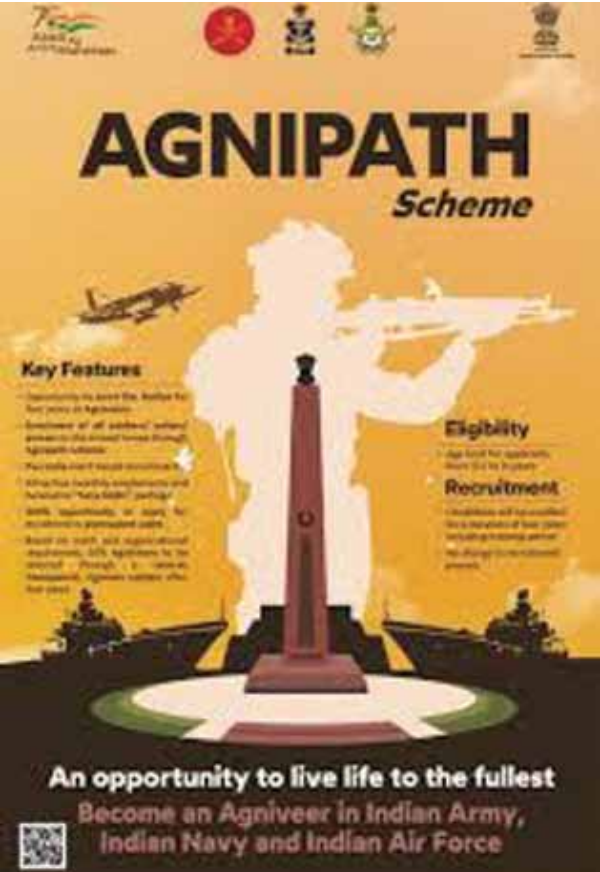
"With a restructured training pattern that is contemporary, technology-based and tailor-made for our operational commitments, we envisage the implementation to be seamless," he said.

The IAF chief noted that the need for transformation in the human resources in the services has been widely deliberated and steps have been taken to gradually address the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee.

"This human resources transformation caters to the requirements of the impact of changing technology, the complexity of machines, automation and optimisation of resources including manpower of the IAF," he said.

Describing the Agnipath scheme as a major "human resources transformation" for the armed forces, he said the IAF has already received an overwhelming response for this scheme.

"The process of selection is in progress. We have formulated 13 teams for seamless enrolment, training, role,



employment, assessment and training of Agniveers within the four-year engagement period," he said.

"The HR transformation in no way reduces the operational capability that we possess. In fact, this would provide the armed forces with the advantage of attracting talent and engaging with the youth who are keen to serve the nation," the IAF chief said.

He said the "objective assessment" of Agniveers shall provide IAF with the best workforce. "In the long term, this scheme will benefit the individual, the Armed forces and the society as a whole," Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said.

"This scheme shall provide a balance to our forces by blending youth with experience and enable IAF to meet all its national security mandates," he added.

"Our experience in modu-

lar training and 'just-in-time' training concepts have given us insightful knowledge to achieve the necessary skills for our air warriors," he said.

The Government has been maintaining that the Agnipath scheme aims to ensure a youthful profile of the armed forces, bring technically adept people and make them future-ready to deal with any challenges facing the nation.

Under the scheme, the three services are planning to recruit 46,000 soldiers this year. The youths to be recruited under the new scheme would be called 'Agniveer'.

A major objective of the scheme is to bring down the average age of military personnel. The announcement of the new scheme came in the backdrop of recruitments into the military remaining stalled for over two years amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Seventh accused in Udaipur beheading case arrested by NIA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested Farhad Mohammad Sheikh alias Babla, 31, in connection with the June 28 Udaipur beheading case. This is the seventh arrest in the case.

The NIA said Farhad Mohammad Sheikh was arrested on Saturday. He is the son of one Azaz Mohammad, resident of House Number 143/24, Patel Circle, Diwan Sah Colony, Udaipur, Rajasthan. The case relates to the killing of Kanhaiyya Lal Teli in Udaipur at his shop in Maldas Street in that city. The case was initially registered as FIR number 81/2022 dated June 28, 2022, at Police Station Dhanmandi, Udaipur.

The NIA re-registered the case on June 29 and took over the investigation into the matter. Earlier, six accused persons were arrested in this case on June 29, July 1, and July 4. "Farhad Mohammad was a close criminal associate of the main accused Riyaz Akhtari and was an active part of the conspiracy to kill Kanhaiyya Lal, the NIA said in a statement.

The probe so far suggests both prime accused in the case —Riaz Akhtari and Ghouse Mohammad— were in touch with the terror group Al Qaeda. One accused, Ghouse Mohammad, visited Pakistan in 2014. Riaz Akhtari and Ghouse Mohammad had hacked Teli to death with a cleaver at his shop in Udaipur and posted videos online claiming they are avenging an

alleged insult to Islam. The two accused had also inflicted multiple injuries to the victim with sharp weapons. The duo was arrested on the day of incident itself and booked under stringent anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and various other sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) including murder, criminal conspiracy, and common intention.

"NIA registers a case in the incident of the brutal murder of Kanhaiya Lal Teli in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The NIA has re-registered a case RC-27/2022/NIA/DLI on 29/06/2022 under Sections 452 (house-trespass after having made preparation for causing hurt and assault, 302 (murder), 153 (A) (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of caste, religion and place of birth), 153 (B) (imputations and assertions prejudicial to national interest), 295 (A) (deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class) and 34 (acts done by several persons for furtherance of common intention) of IPC and Sections 16, 18 and 20 of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 against accused who have conspired, planned and committed heinous murder of Kanhaiya Lal Teli on 28.6.2022 in Udaipur, Rajasthan," the agency had said in a statement after re-registering the FIR.

The NIA is also probing a similar case relating to murder of pharmacist Umesh Kolhe in Amravati on June 21 allegedly on account of certain social media posts.

Cong prez expresses solidarity with Lanka as fresh protests erupt



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday expressed solidarity with Sri Lanka as the island nation plunged into serious trouble when fresh protests erupted in the Capital city over the economic collapse.

As the condition in the neighbouring country deteriorates, Sonia Gandhi on Sunday issued a statement saying the Congress has been following with concern the evolving political situation in Sri Lanka. "The economic challenges, rising prices, and shortages of food, fuel, and essential commodities have caused enormous hardships and distress among the people there," she said.

The Congress president further said the Congress expresses its solidarity with Sri Lanka and its people in this moment of grave crisis and hopes they will be able to overcome it.

"We hope India will continue to assist the people and government of Sri Lanka as they deal with the difficulties of the current situation," she said,



Border Security Force Commandant Jasbir Singh presents sweets to Pakistani Rangers Wing Commander Aamir on the occasion of Eid-al-Adha, at the Attari-Wagah border between India and Pakistan, near Amritsar on Sunday

PTI Photo

Congress calls PM anti-tribal, opposes relaxations in rules related to forest dwellers' rights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "Adivasi Virodhi" (anti-tribal) and objected to the relaxations made in rules related to ensuring forest dwellers' rights, saying that the move for 'ease of doing business' for a "chosen few" will end the 'ease of living' for the 'vast many'.

Party sources said Congress will oppose the changes — allowing settlement of rights of forest dwellers after the government clearance for diverting forest land for projects — in the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament, starting July 18.

Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav clarified in a series of tweets that the allegation by Congress was "an ill-informed attempt to show that the rules don't care about the provisions of other laws and that the government under Narendra Modi remains committed to protecting the rights of the Adivasis".

The new rules go against the August 2009 circular issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests under UPA. It had stipulated that no clearances for diversion of forest land under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 would even be considered by it unless rights provided under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 were first settled.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Modi-Mitr' Sarkar at its crony best! For 'ease of snatching' forest land, the BJP govt has come up with new FC Rules, 2022 diluting UPA's Forest Rights Act, 2006. Congress stands strongly with our Adivasi brothers and sisters in their fight to protect Jal, Jungle, and Zameen."

Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said, "this (new rules) destroys the very purpose of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and its meaningful use while considering proposals for diversion of forest land. Once forest clearance is granted, everything else becomes a mere formality and almost inevitably no claims will be recognised and settled."

Expressing fear that the state governments will be under "even greater pressure from the Centre" to accelerate the process of diversion of forest land, Ramesh said in a statement, "obviously, this has been done in name of 'ease of doing business' for a chosen few. But it will end the 'ease of living' for the vast many."

Responding to the Environment Minister Ramesh responded, "mantri-ji, please don't evade the main issue—that is, are you not making the Gram Sabha irrelevant? You may not have been briefed properly. Your new rules go against the 2015 note of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs of Modi Sarkar..."

"These new rules have been promulgated without any consultation and discussion with stakeholders including Parliament's Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests, and Climate Change," he said.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, popularly known as the Forest Rights Act, is a "historic and most progressive law passed unanimously and enthusiastically by Parliament", he said, adding that it confers land and livelihood rights—both individual and community—to Adivasi, Dalit and other families living in forest areas.

As per the 2009 circular, the rights of tribal and other communities have to be settled before a decision can even be considered on forest and environmental clearance by Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change. It mandated that free, prior, and informed consent of the families affected be obtained for such an exercise to be lawful, Ramesh said.

"This was done to protect and promote the interests of tribal and other communities traditionally living in forest areas," he said, accusing the Modi government of abdicating responsibility to ensure that the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 is implemented in a manner consistent with the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Bhima Koregaon case: SC to hear Varavara Rao's bail plea today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea filed by Telugu poet and an accused in Bhima Koregaon-Elgar Parishad case, P Varavara Rao, challenging a Bombay High Court order that rejected his prayer for permanent medical bail in matter.

A three-judge bench of justices U U Lalit, S Ravindra Bhat and Sudhanshu Dhulia is likely to take up the matter.

Rao, in his appeal against the April 13 Bombay High Court order filed through advocate Nupur Kumar, said, "The petitioner, an 83-year-old renowned Telugu poet and orator who has undergone over two years of incarceration as an under-trial and is currently enlarged on bail on medical grounds by the Bombay High Court.

BA.2.38 has not led to any increase in hospitalisation, disease severity: INSACOG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Omicon sub-variant BA.2's offspring BA.2.38 has not led to any increase in hospitalisation or disease severity, and a few deaths reported recently are due to comorbidities, Insacog said in its June 20 bulletin released on Sunday.

In the bulletin, the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) said many BA.2 cases have been reclassified to BA.2.38. BA.2.38 seems to be the prevalent sub-lineage in the latest sequencing batches, it said.

"However, so far this has not led to any increase in hospitalisation or any report of increase in disease severity. A few deaths that have been reported recently, are due to comorbidities. COVID-appropriate behavior is likely to

reduce the spread of the infection and hence continues to be recommended," it said. In its previous bulletin dated June 13, which was also released on Sunday, the Insacog said BA.2 continues to be the dominant lineage in India.

"However, hospitalisation due to the severity of the disease has not been observed that much. INSACOG is closely monitoring the current situation," it said.

In another bulletin of May 30, the Insacog informed that till then, five cases of BA.4 and three cases of BA.5 had been reported in India.

The Insacog reports genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 across the country through sequencing of samples from sentinel sites and international passengers arriving in India.

Higher salt intake poses higher risk of premature death: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Excessive salt consumption comes with a higher risk of premature death, according to a study involving more than 500,000 people, published in the European Heart Journal. It said that compared to those who never or rarely added salt, those who always added salt to their food had a 28 per cent increased risk of dying prematurely.

In the general population, about three in every hundred people aged between 40 and 69 die prematurely. The increased risk from always adding salt to food seen in the current study suggests that one more person in every hundred may die prematurely in this age group.

In addition, the study found a lower life expectancy among people who always added salt compared to those who never, or rarely added salt. At the age of 50, 1.5 years and

2.28 years were knocked off the life expectancy of women and men, respectively, who always added salt to their food compared to those who never, or rarely, did.

The researchers, led by Professor Lu Qi, of Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, New Orleans, USA, say their findings have several public health implications.

"To my knowledge, our study is the first to assess the relationship between adding salt to foods and premature death," he said. "It provides novel evidence to support recommendations to modify eating behaviors for improving health.

Even a modest reduction in sodium intake, by adding less or no salt to food at the table, is likely to result in substantial health benefits, especially when it is achieved in the general population."

For these reasons, the

researchers chose to look at whether or not people add salt to their foods at the table, independent of any salt added during cooking.

"Adding salt to foods at the table is a common eating behavior that is directly related to an individual's long-term preference for salty-tasting foods and habitual salt intake," said Prof. Qi. "In the Western diet, adding salt at the table accounts for 6-20% of total salt intake and provides a unique way to evaluate the association between habitual sodium intake and the risk of death."

As well as finding that always adding salt to foods was linked to a higher risk of premature death from all causes and a reduction in life expectancy, the researchers found that these risks tended to be reduced slightly in people who consumed the highest amounts of fruit and vegetables, although these results were not statistically significant.

Show cause notice to 53 Shiv Sena MLAs from Legislature's secy

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra legislature secretary has issued show cause notices to 53 out of the total 55 Shiv Sena MLAs in the state - 39 of the faction led by Eknath Shinde and 14 of the Uddhav Thackeray group.

One of the 14 MLAs from the Thackeray side, Santosh Bangar, joined the Shinde camp on the day of the floor test of the latter's government on July 4.

MLAs from both the sides confirmed having received the showcase notice.

Both the sides have accused each other of defying the party whip during the Speaker's election and the trust vote on July 3 and 4, respectively, seeking disqualification of the legislators from both the sides.

The Shinde faction has not

included the name of Aaditya Thackeray, son of former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, in the list of MLAs against whom they have sought disqualification.

The notices have been issued under the Members of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (disqualification on grounds of defection) rules.

The legislators have been asked to explain their stand within seven days, sources said. The Shiv Sena has 55 MLAs in the 288-member Assembly, whose current strength is 287 due to the death of a Sena legislator.

In the trust vote, 164 MLAs voted for the motion of confidence, while 99 voted against it. After winning the trust vote in the state Assembly on July 4, the Eknath Shinde faction of the Shiv Sena had issued a notice to 14 legislators



from the Uddhav Thackeray camp for violating a whip issued by the Sena whip and Shinde loyalist Bharat Gogawale.

A day before the floor test, Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar had recognised Gogawale as the Shiv Sena's chief whip, remov-

ing Sunil Prabhu, who belongs to the Thackeray faction.

On July 3, Rahul Narvekar of the BJP was elected Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly.

He had polled 164 votes, and he defeated Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena candidate Rajan Salvi, who got 107 votes.

No need to lecture us on how to revere Kaali: TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

There were more exchange of barbs between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday invoked Mother Kaali in his speech while delivering a lecture on the centenary of Swami Aatmasthananda ji Maharaj the former president of Ramakrishna Mission.

The TMC quickly hit back wondering how many times the Prime Minister had visited Kalighat or Dakshineswar asserting Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee was herself a great devotee of the Goddess.

"Statements are being made ... with political intent ... but I must ask how many times the Prime Minister has visited Kalighat the seat of Kaali," wondered senior Trinamool



parliamentarian Saugato Roy and reminded "Mamata Banerjee stays beside the Kalighat temple and is a great devotee of the Goddess ... religiously offering prayers during special occasions ... the Bengali New Year's day to begin with ... no one has to teach TMC, Mamata and the people of Bengal how to revere Kaali."

Amid on going row over a Canadian filmmaker's discourteous depiction of Kaali and subsequently an alleged denigrating reference of the Goddess by TMC MP Mahua Moitra, the Prime Minister on Sunday said how India always

enjoyed the "unlimited blessings" of the Mother.

Referring to how Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Guru of Swami Vivekananda had the "clear visions of Mother Kaali" the Prime Minister said Vivekananda himself was inundated in reverence of Kaali.

Finding a "connection" between the timing of the Prime Minister's reference of the Goddess and the "intensely" polarised atmosphere in the country in the wake of certain remarks made by some politicians, another TMC MP Sushmita Dev wondered why it was less necessary for Modi to refer to rising inflation and lack of jobs than certain other issues.

"There are issues like falling rupee, rising inflation, unemployment, Deb said asking why at this juncture the

Prime Minister had to refer to other issues instead of dwelling on those that were more relevant for the country's youth.

Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Chowdhury too attacked the BJP and the TMC for trying to polarise the atmosphere when the country was facing a severe economic crisis.

"Is it the time to raise issues as which God belongs to which State ... Why will it be necessary for one section of the people to shout Jai Shri Ram and others to shout Jai Maa Kaali for political issues ... why someone will claim that Rama belongs to U.P. and Kaali belongs to Bengal ... Gods belong to the entire universe," he said adding the politicians should better concentrate on development of the country rather than creating politically tumultuous issues to garner vote," he said.

Army presses into service heavy machinery to restore Amarnath yatra trek

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

As the ongoing rescue operations in the Amarnath cave shrine area are nearing completion with hopes of finding any survivors fast fading away, the engineering wing of the Indian army supported by jawans drawn from various other agencies Sunday pressed heavy machinery in to service to restore the damaged yatra trek ahead of resuming pilgrimage to the cave shrine at the earliest.

The commitment displayed by the Indian army could be gauged from the fact that over one dozen men from the engineering regiment pulled up an excavator weighing 3 Tons using ropes via

Baltal.

In addition, heliborne operations continued to drop the essential supplies and engineering stores at various locations. In a statement, Srinagar based Defence PRO said, "Indian Air Force had deployed 2 MI-17 and 04 Cheetals for ferrying relief material and equipment". A total number of 43 sorties were flown despite bad weather conditions till 2.00 p.m in the area. 34 pilgrims were shifted and NDRF personnel including 6 canines were transported from Srinagar to the holy cave".

On ground zero, the rescue workers were still looking for any survivors. The locations identified by the dog squad were thoroughly scanned using

sophisticated hand held thermal imagers to detect any sign of life buried under the debris. Around 40 pilgrims remain untraceable ever since incessant rains washed away tents, langars near the cave shrine leaving at least 16 pilgrims dead and over 100 others injured.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha also visited Nunwan base camp in Pahalgam where he interacted with the pilgrims and assured them the yatra would be resumed at the earliest.

Office of LG J&k tweeted, "Visited Nunwan, Pahalgam earlier today. Army, CAPFs, NDRF did a commendable job during the rescue & relief operation. Efforts are underway to repair the road. We are hope-



ful to resume the Yatra as soon

as possible". In a separate tweet,

the LG said, "Interacted with

yatris staying at the base camp. Reviewed the arrangements at healthcare facilities, langars. Providing better facilities to pilgrims is our top priority".

As the yatra remained suspended for the last two consecutive days, a huge rush of pilgrims was awaiting the start of the pilgrimage from both the Baltal and Pahalgam route.

In Jammu, the civil authorities are struggling to cope up with the increasing rush of pilgrims awaiting their turn to embark on the forward journey from the yatri base camp. To prevent assembly of a large number of pilgrims the entry has been restricted at the yatri base camp in Bhagwati Nagar. Pilgrims reaching here in Jammu were directed to visit

other lodgement centres in and around Jammu but they were not ready to go there.

"After reaching here in Jammu the local administration is not allowing us to enter the yatri niwas at Bhagwati Nagar", a pilgrim said.

"The staff deployed here are directing us to visit other lodging centres. We are outsiders and in the absence of any dedicated transport facility we find it difficult to reach there".

"We requested them to allow us to stay here but they refused claiming the yatri niwas is already packed with pilgrims and there is no space left to accommodate more pilgrims", another group member claimed on Sunday even as operations continued.

Madras HC to decide today on legality of AIADMK's general council meeting

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The General Council meeting of the 50-year-old AIADMK scheduled for 09.30 on Monday is going to be a "touch and go" game as the Madras High Court would pronounce its verdict about the legality of the meeting at 09.15 hrs. The court verdict is in response to a petition filed by party coordinator O Panneerselvam challenging the constitutionality of such a meeting. If the verdict is in favour of the GC meeting, the Edappadi Palaniswami faction which has convened it would go ahead with it and declare the dual leadership null and void. The meeting would also elect Edappadi Palaniswami as the interim general secretary.

The tussle for the control of the party between Palaniswami, Panneerselvam and V K Sasikala has reached a crucial level and the results would be known by Monday evening. According to sources in the AIADMK, all senior leaders have dumped Panneerselvam

and rallied behind Palaniswami which has made the former to seek the help of Sasikala.

Sasikala, who is on a State-wide tour to wrest the party is a picture of contradiction pointed out Kolahala Srenivaas, AIADMK watcher and author. "Sasikala had made it known twice that she was not interested in politics and retiring from active politics. But she moves around claiming that she is the general secretary of the party despite the General Council easing her out by abolishing the post in September 2017," said Srenivaas.

Panneerselvam and Palaniswami were appointed coordinator and co-coordinator respectively in an effort to work out a truce in September 2017. But the dual leadership did not yield the result the AIADMK had expected. The party fared poorly in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and managed to win just one out of the 38 seats from the State. The 2021 assembly election too saw the AIADMK losing the battle as the DMK returned to

power. Since then, it was DMK all the way as the party won election to the local bodies with brutal majority.

The sidelining of Panneerselvam that began after the assembly election reached the peak as the latter started singing peans to the DMK and M K Stalin. Panneerselvam also cozierd up to Sasikala in a bid to wrest the party from Palaniswami. But many senior leaders in the party deserted Panneerselvam. "Had he been honest about his respect for Amma (Jayalalithaa) he would not have appreciated Stalin or the DMK. The byelaws of the AIADMK state that no members of the party should approach the Court against the party. Panneerselvam is filing petitions after petitions and violating party guidelines," said a source close to Palaniswami.

K P Munusami, deputy coordinator and a close associate of Panneerselvam dumped him and joined the Palaniswami camp on June 23, when the General Council met. "Having become the Chief minister for a couple of times

thanks to Jayalalithaa's munificence, should Panneerselvam not have been far more virulent in opposing the DMK after her demise?" asked Munusami while speaking to the media. It may be noted that all the former ministers in the previous AIADMK Government who have been raided by the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Department belong to the Palaniswami camp which is being seen as a deal between Chief Minister Stalin and Panneerselvam.

Panneerselvam's grouse is that the BJP leadership was not helping him like they were doing in the past. As on date, the only option before him is to join the Sasikala camp and try to seize the party apparatus from Palaniswami. But the question that remains to be answered is whether Sasikala, who does not have an office to work from and facing series of cases filed by the ED and Income Tax Department has the support of the cadres? "Sasikala is not Jayalalithaa and that is the answer," said Srenivaas.

Kerala LoP Satheeshan in trouble for participating in RSS event

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

VD Satheeshan, the mercurial Leader of Opposition in Kerala Legislative Assembly, suffered a set back on Sunday as the RSS released a picture of the former attending a meeting convened by the Sangh at Thrissur in 2006. The picture featured Satheeshan lighting the traditional lamp in the backdrop of a portrait of M S Golwalkar, former RSS chief.

Of late, Satheeshan has been issuing statements after statements comparing the controversial speech made by Saji Cheriaan last Sunday at a CPI-M party function in which the latter came down heavily on Indian Constitution and termed it a big hoax committed on the people of India. Within three days Cheriaan had to quit as Minister of Fisheries and Culture following State-wide agitation by the BJP and the Congress.

Satheeshan termed Cheriaan's speech as an echo of the views of RSS leader Golwalkar. Upset over the



charge, the RSS leadership in Kerala issued a statement condemning Satheeshan's charge and asked him to furnish reasons and the logic behind such comparison. "I reject the notice with contempt," was Satheeshan's response to the charge made by the Sangh leaders.

This could be the reason behind the Sangh's action of releasing the picture through the social media which has stirred a hornet's nest in

Kerala's political landscape. "It is unfortunate. Had I been in his place, I would not have attended the meeting," Ramesh Chennithala, senior Congress leader who is upset with the party High Command for denying him the coveted position of the Leader of Opposition after the 2021 assembly election.

Things took a turn for the worse when R V Babu, Hindu Aikya Vedi leader came out on Sunday with the charge that

Satheeshan had approached the RSS for help during the 2001 and 2006 assembly elections. "I do not want to disclose what was the outcome of those meetings. Let us keep it for another day," said Babu.

This is being seen as a setback for the Congress leader who has been quite vocal in his attacks on RSS and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Satheeshan was not available for comments till the time of going to Press.

Babul Supriyo appointed TMC's national spokesperson

PTI ■ KOLKATA

TMC MLA Babul Supriyo has been appointed as a national spokesperson of the party, sources in the Mamata Banerjee-led camp said.

Supriyo, the former union minister, took to Twitter to thank the party supremo for giving him the new responsibility.

"My sincere gratitude to Hon'ble Didi @MamataOfficial & @abhishekaite for appointing/including me in the illustrious Team of National Spokespersons of @AITCOfficial. Shall do my very best to live up to the responsibility entrusted upon me," he tweeted. A senior TMC leader said Supriyo's appointment as a national spokesperson was a part of the strategy devised by the party to expand its base outside Bengal.

"He is a well-known face across the country, both as a



singer and a politician. So he can help us place our views and policies on the national stage," the TMC leader said.

Supriyo, a former BJP MP, was dropped from the Union ministry last year, following which he switched over to the TMC.

He gave up his Asansol Lok Sabha seat, which he had bagged on BJP tickets twice.

The singer-turned-politician was then nominated by the ruling TMC for the Ballygunge assembly bypoll in April this year, and he managed to clinch the seat by a comfortable margin.

Impartial judicial system biggest need for democracy: Gadkari

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday said an impartial and fair judicial system is the biggest requirement for a free and fair democracy.

The road transport and highways minister was speaking at the inauguration of an amenities block of the Maharashtra National Law University in Nagpur. Hailing the four pillars of democracy - legislative, executive, judiciary and media, Gadkari said, "An independent, impartial and fair judicial system is the biggest requirement for a free and fair democracy."

Time is the biggest capital, he said, adding that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi many administrative reforms have taken place. "During cabinet meetings, when discussions on tribunals and other things are held, I often tell the law minister and the



prime minister that whatever the decision may be, it is the right of the judiciary to give the decision and it should not be influenced by anybody," the Union minister said.

He also pitched for a time limit for development works and removing delays, which can save thousands of crores of rupees of the country.

Justices Bhushan Gavai and P S Narasimha, both judges of the Supreme Court, and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis were also present on the occasion.

Heavy rains lash south Gujarat, over 700 people evacuated in 2 districts

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Heavy rains pounded many parts of south Gujarat, leading to a rise in the water level of some rivers which caused inundation in various low-lying areas, following which over 700 people were shifted to safer places in Navsari and Valsad districts, officials said on Sunday.

There was flooding in some low-lying areas of Valsad after a rise in the Orsang river level. Authorities in Navsari district were also on alert as the Kaveri and Ambika rivers there were flowing above the danger mark, they said.

Very heavy rains lashed Valsad and Navsari districts on Saturday night and Sunday morning, the officials said.

Chhota Udepur and Narmada districts also witnessed very heavy rainfall, with rivers overflowing and low-lying areas getting flooded, they said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday predicted heavy to very heavy rainfall with isolated extremely heavy showers during the next five days in south Gujarat's districts of Dang, Navsari and Valsad.

Several other districts of south Gujarat and Saurashtra are also likely to receive



heavy to very heavy rainfall during this period, the IMD said.

"The Kaveri and Ambika rivers in Navsari district are flowing above the danger mark. We are carrying out evacuation from low-lying areas. So far, over 300 people have been shifted to safer places and the operation is continuing with the help of a company of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)," district Collector Amit Prakash Yadav said. In Valsad, more than 400 people were evacuated after the Orsang river level rose and caused flooding in low-lying areas, officials said.

On Sunday, there was some respite in

Valsad and the water level receded, following which people started returning to their homes, they said.

Several dams and rivers in south and central Gujarat and Saurashtra region have received heavy rains since Saturday. Many of the rivers are flowing near the danger mark, keeping the respective administrations on alert.

Dharampur taluka in Valsad district and Vandsa in Navsari received 216 and 213 mm rainfall, respectively, in the 24 hour period till 6 am on Sunday, as per the data shared by the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC). In Navsari, Chikhli and Khergam talukas received 197 mm and 194 mm downpour respectively, Kaprada in Valsad recorded 194 mm showers during the same period, the SOEC said.

As per the data, Ahwa, Waghai and Subir areas in Dang district got 180 mm, 160 mm and 141 mm rainfall, respectively, Umarpada in Surat got 179 mm downpour and Vyara in Tapi district got 106 mm rain.

Parts of Dang, Tapi, Narmada and Chhota Udepur districts continued to receive very heavy rainfall till Sunday afternoon, as per the SEOC.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Gota going

Sri Lanka is in economic pits after fiscal mismanagement; its citizens are running wild

As violent protests erupted in Colombo, the parliamentary Speaker said President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will step down on July 13. The protesters stormed the President's official residence and set Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's residence afire in the capital on Saturday. Wickremesinghe also announced his willingness to resign so that an all-party Government could be formed. This, however, hasn't brought normalcy to the island nation. Sri Lankan Army chief General Shavendra Silva on Sunday appealed to people to maintain peace. He issued a statement, saying that "an opportunity has arisen to resolve the current crisis in a peaceful manner". It will take some time for the restoration of order, for the crisis is too deep and intense to subside with a few resignations and earnest appeals. Over the years, the Rajapaksa family had not only become powerful — which, by the way, is not unusual in many countries, including in India — but almost ended up *owning* the Government. Which other country in the world had two brothers as the President and the Prime Minister, plus another brother as Finance Minister? Besides, they showed an astounding lack of wisdom by walking into the debt trap, called the Belt and Road Initiative, laid by China. Sri Lanka was forced to borrow massively to finance the showy infrastructure projects, of which the Hambantota deep sea port also caused concern in the geostrategic community in India. Especially after 2017, when it was given to a Chinese State-owned company on a 99-year lease. Yet, in a gesture of great magnanimity, India has helped the island nation in every possible manner in its moment of crisis.

The COVID pandemic exacerbated the situation, particularly because the Sri Lankan economy depends a lot on tourism. The livelihoods of a lot of people depend on tourism and tourism-related activities. President Gotabaya and his brother, PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, transformed (perhaps the still manageable) crisis into a catastrophe when they imposed organic farming and banned chemical fertilisers on April 29, 2021. The decision made green activists jubilant. The Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva said in June last year at a virtual summit, "This decision will definitely help farmers become more prosperous. Use of organic fertiliser will help provide agri products rich with nutrients while retaining the fertility of the land." As and when biodiversity of the ecosystem improves, the harvest will also improve and crops will be resistant to weeds and various diseases, she added. What, however, happened was the exact opposite of what she and her ilk said. The fall in farm yields was steep. The ban was withdrawn in the wake of extensive protests but the damage was done, with the paddy yields declining by around one-third all over the country. Tea, another major crop, suffered even more. Sri Lanka's woes and the decline of the Rajapaksa family can be viewed as a classic case of nemesis following hubris. You have to pay a heavy price if you take green extremists seriously.



Fuel on fire

Learning from the Lanka experience, it's time for the Govt to exercise financial discipline

Last Wednesday, the Indian oil companies hiked the cooking gas price by ₹50, making the price of the cooking gas soar to ₹1,053 in the Capital. Cooking gas prices directly affect the common man. And it is not just the petroleum products that are on fire, every other essential item is showing an upward trend, be it vegetables, groceries or everyday toiletries, all are going beyond the reach of the commoner. Almost every section of society is finding it hard to manage its spending due to the sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities. LPG, edible oil, pulses, vegetables, petrol and diesel rates, and most commodities that are used in every household, have become too expensive and are burning a hole in the pocket of the common man. Inflation is at an all-time high in the country and showing no sign of plateauing. Retail inflation was 7.04 per cent in May. It remained above the RBI's tolerance level for the fifth consecutive month. The food basket inflation was 7.97 per cent in May 2022, as per the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Inflation in 'oils and fats' in March soared to 18.79 per cent as the geopolitical crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine war pushed edible oil prices higher.



The only respite can come from a normal monsoon. The RBI Governor has projected inflation at 5.7 per cent in 2022-23, with Q1 at 6.3 per cent; Q2 at 5.8 per cent; Q3 at 5.4 per cent; and Q4 at 5.1 per cent. It means that hard times for Indian middle class and lower-income groups are here to stay. While there's little the Indian Government can do about the war in Ukraine that has pushed the prices of edible oils over the roof, it can certainly do something about the fiscal discipline in the country. Limiting its non-plan and wasteful expenditure, it can manage the economy better. It has to check the falling value of the rupee vis-a-vis dollar and also FIIs withdrawals from Indian markets. As they say, you can fake everything except the economy, because when your buying capacity is reduced, you know that there is something wrong with the economy. No one can convince you otherwise. This is exactly what happened in Sri Lanka. We should learn from their mistakes rather than making our own.

Let's go all out to end poverty

The Government must shift the stress to labour-intensive projects; also, all the benefits of economic growth should percolate down to the target groups

Poverty with its penumbra marginalises a nation's growth and development. Since there's Hobson's choice, we must go for its eradication.

Poverty is no longer taken as restricted to economic factors only. A broader view of deprivation indicators of poverty like life expectancy, educational index (years of schooling), standard of living, inequality in distribution of achievement, gender inequality and, lastly, multidimensional poverty index (MPI). MPI states different factors determining poverty beyond income level. Multiple deprivation has manifestations in deprivation and backwardness in health, education and standards of living. It is clear that poverty is (and recognised as) a multidimensional concept based on deprivation.

The Constitution has many provisions which may relate to poverty and its alleviation. While the Preamble mentions the word 'socialist' in it, Art 14 (equality before law), Art 21 (protection of life and liberty: life means a life of dignity, not just an animal life), Art 23 (prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour) also directly or indirectly touches the issue of poverty. Under Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution, Art 38 (social order, welfare of people), Art 39(a) (right to adequate means of livelihood), Art 41 (right to work), Art 42 and Art 43 also touch upon poverty-related issues. But then why after so many years we are still not out of the quagmire of poverty, which has affected the economy, society and all related sectors badly?

A closer look, analysis and understanding would reveal as to which is the right way and thereby we may discern the reason (for our inability also) to wane the effect of poverty. The steps to be taken to alleviate the predicaments of the poverty-stricken may be put into two categories. The two methods can be broadly delineated as prophylactic and curative (in the former, it should be seen that no one from the Above Poverty Line (APL) sinks into poverty trap. This is a way to check aggravation in the living



standards of the impecunious.

The steps for preventive methods would include acceleration of economic growth and rapid infrastructure development. Stress on human resource development, proper functioning of public distribution systems and growth of farm/non-farm employment. Agricultural growth also has a direct bearing on the wane in poverty affected conditions. For a long time in the 50s and 60s, many growth models like the Harrod-Domar growth model and Mahalanobis growth model stressed for rapid economic growth and higher rate of capital formation for speedy economic growth. They stressed that rapid economic growth would address the problem. But though the rate of growth in GDP achieved the range of 5.5-6 per cent per annum in 80s and 90s, it could not have a significant impact on poverty reduction and employment generation.

What is the remedy? The remedy as such lies in shifting the stress to labour-intensive projects and it should be further ensured that the benefits of economic growth percolate down to the target groups (those Below Poverty Line). Montek Ahluwalia had stated that agricultural growth and poverty are inversely related. The higher the agricultural



UNLESS THE MALADY OF POVERTY IS CURED, ALL VISIONS AND REALISATION OF RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH WOULD PROVE TO BE SHALLOW AND THE VISION OF ACTUAL GROWTH WITH EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION WOULD STILL REMAIN A CHIMERA

growth, the lower the poverty ratio. Punjab and Haryana in the sixties showed the way in this direction. But, of late, increased mechanisation of agricultural operations has affected employment generation in this sector. Nevertheless, agriculture being the mainstay of our economy, steps to ensure growth and development in this sector (in rainfed and water scarcity areas through irrigation) would improve the condition of the small and marginal farmers.

Speedy development of infrastructure would give a thrust to growth with direct impact on poverty alleviation. Moreover, growth of non-farm employment like petty trade, transportation, handicrafts, dairying etc can have direct impact on poverty eradication. Poor households spend about 80 per cent of their income on food items. Hence, ensuring food security and proper functioning of public distribution system is a must for a frontal attack on poverty. If these methods are seriously and sincerely implemented and monitored, the condition of the poor would steadily improve and pull them out of the poverty trap.

The curative method is more critical and needs massive endeavour to propel people

out of the poverty net. Broadly speaking, the steps would include access to sustainable livelihood, universal access to basic social services, provision of socio-economic protection system to support those who cannot support themselves.

Solutions have to be found to tackle region-centric poverty syndrome. While short-term solutions may revolve around antipoverty and employment generation programmes of the Government and their speedy implementation, the long-term policy should take factors like population control, regional problems and fulfilment of minimum needs of the poor into consideration. The need of the hour is for a paradigm shift in the approach to eradicate poverty. Economists (like Nobel laureate Amartya Sen) having stressed the concept of deprivation as the prominent symptom poverty (over and above income and consumption-level calculation), a frontal attack to tackle the deprivation factor of the impecunious may increase the momentum to pull those out from below the poverty line.

(This is the last part of the series on poverty.)

(The author is a superannuated senior IAS officer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PLASTICS FROM WASTE BIOMASS

Sir — Scientists from Switzerland have created a brand new plastic that is similar to Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) and can be readily produced from inedible plant parts. The plastic is a promising contender for the food packaging sectors since it is robust, heat-resistant and effective at blocking gases. The new plastic can be chemically recycled because of its structure and can break down in the environment into harmless carbohydrates. Now it is becoming increasingly clear that moving away from fossil fuels and avoiding the accumulation of plastic in the environment is essential to meet the challenge of climate change. In this direction, considerable efforts are being made to develop compostable or recyclable polymers made from non-edible plant material called lignocellulosic biomass.

Of course, there's a reason conventional plastics are so popular; they combine low cost, thermal stability, mechanical strength, processability and compatibility. These all are characteristics that any alternative plastic must match or surpass. And so far, the task remains fraught with difficulty. Researchers have produced packaging films, yarns that can be spun into clothing or other textiles, and fibres for 3D printing. Plastics have very interesting properties, especially for applications like food packaging, and what makes it unique is the presence of an intact road structure.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

HATE CRIME IS THE WORST

Sir — The effect of hate crimes is that people victimised by violent hate crimes are more likely to experience more psychological distress than victims of other violent crimes. Specifically, victims of crimes that are bias-motivated are more likely to experience post-traumatic stress, safety concerns, depression, anxiety and anger than victims of crimes that are not motivated by bias. Hate crimes send messages to members of the victim's group that they are unwelcome and unsafe in the community, victimising the entire group and decreasing feelings of safe-

Muslims on BJP's wish list



With the outcome of results of Azamgarh and Rampur in UP, the BJP has started concentrating on Pasmanda Muslims, who voted the party in large numbers as there is no unity in the Opposition parties. This step by the party will strengthen communal harmony and it will also help enlarge national integration and also uplift the poor and downtrodden members of society and. Now the perception of this society is changing and it is openly supporting the party to get the maxi-

mum benefits for themselves. With the elections of 2024 in mind, the party expects to get a maximum chunk of Pasmanda Muslims to help it to come to power again.

It will also help in the Assembly elections, which are going to be held this year and the next year. Modi's outreach to Muslims is a welcome step and the community should also respond to it positively. It is a pleasant surprise that Modi has exhorted the party cadre to reach out to the "deprived, non-elite" Muslims. One wishes that the BJP cadres abide by his call to care for impoverished Muslims. It will improve the lot of poor Muslims and strengthen interfaith bonds. It doesn't matter whether it is known as 'Muslim appeasement' or 'politics of fulfilment'. It should not be reduced to a game plan to prevail on impoverished Muslims to support the BJP.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

ty and security. Furthermore, witnessing discrimination against one's own group can lead to psychological distress and lower self-esteem.

Hate crimes are an extreme form of prejudice, made more likely in the context of social and political change. Public and political discourse may devalue members of unfamiliar groups, and offenders may feel that their livelihood or way of life is threatened by demographic changes. Offenders may not be motivated by hate, but rather by fear, ignorance or anger. These can lead to dehumanization of unfamiliar groups and to targeted aggression. With this, any form of hate crime is serious and dangerous for society, its people and the country.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

WIMBLEDON'S CENTRE COURT

Sir — The 100th anniversary of the iconic Centre Court is a significant milestone in the history of Wimbledon tennis. Its lush green grass, trimmed with precision, snipped to perfection, and orderly and orga-

nized, all conjure up the image of the pristine beauty of the most popular and prestigious tennis courts of the four Grand Slams. The commencement of Wimbledon, which dates back to 1877, encompasses nearly every aspect of the sport. Perhaps, of all the unfading images of the Centre Court, Jana Novotna's famous cry on the shoulder of the Duchess of Kent after she lost to Steffi Graf in the 1993 Wimbledon final when she looked all set to create history can arguably be counted as the best.

The Czech champion, who later died after a long fight with cancer, found a place in every sports lover's heart even as the royal family at the Centre Court showed its human side, and the moving images during the presentation ceremony are indelibly ingrained in our memory. With the Centre Court being the most storied venue in tennis, commemorating 100 years of it is akin to commemorating the game itself.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

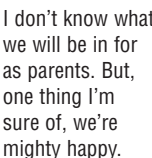
J&K has progressed on the path of peace and progress under the leadership of PM Modi....



Union Home Minister —Amit Shah



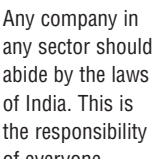
Ukrainian President —Volodymyr Zelenskyy



Actor —Ranbir Kapoor



Former Indian captain —Sourav Ganguly




Union IT Minister —Ashwini Vaishnav

FIRST COLUMN

GITA IS BLUEPRINT OF A NEW WORLD ORDER

It tells us how we can emerge as better human beings



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

These days there is a great interest among the youth to know about the hidden treasures that are locked up in our ancient scriptures. Of all the scriptures and mythological literature that's available in the public domain, Bhagwat Gita is the one which has been the favourite in every age group.

For centuries people, not only in India but also in other parts of the world, have been reading and interpreting the message of the Gita with great devotion. The story of the Mahabharata presents the struggle that takes place on the battlefield of every thinking man or woman's mind, when desires, expectations and vices try to get the better of the innate virtues of the soul. Under these circumstances, the Holy Gita tells us how we can win these inner battles and emerge as better human beings, free from all bondages.

At the individual level, it is a valuable and inspiring handbook for self-transformation. At a higher level, it is a blueprint for a new world order. What will that new order be like? The Almighty Supreme gives hints of that in Chapter 16 of the Gita, where He describes the traits that make one divine. The Gita talks about the Daivi Sampada and Asuri Sampada—the virtuous society and the vicious society.


These traits are the hallmarks of the new world order, just as the demonic qualities, mentioned in the same chapter, characterize the world we live in. When those of a demonic nature are thus transformed into divine beings, the world turns from hell to heaven. It applies to the whole global family of humans. It goes on to show how humans can create the divine society. This great change in the quality and consciousness of humans influences other creatures and the elements of nature too, transforming them in the process.

One of the most quoted and famous verses of the Bhagavad Gita is from Chapter 4: “Yada yada hi dharmasya...” According to this verse, the Almighty says that whenever there is decline of dharma or righteousness, He manifests Himself to destroy evil and re-establish principles of dharma in every cycle of yugas or ages. In essence, He says that He manifests Himself at the end of every cycle for the task of world transformation. He comes to transform the entire world from a degraded state to a pure, virtuous state. Only He can perform this task of world transformation, the task of purifying human souls from vicious to completely divine state, because He is omniscient and omnipotent.

One of the most important teachings of the Gita is about the true identity of human beings, when the Supreme Almighty tells Arjuna: “You are a Soul.” This is a universal spiritual truth that is applicable to all.

The Gita says those of a divine state are fearless, pure of heart, steadfast in yoga and knowledge, harmless, true, peaceful, compassionate towards beings, gentle, modest, straightforward and free from anger, crookedness, hatred and pride. When those of a vicious nature are thus transformed into divine beings, the world turns from hell to heaven. This great change in the quality and consciousness of humans influences other creatures and the elements of nature too, transforming them in the process. This is the way the Supreme Almighty re-establishes the Golden Age in the world. This rejuvenation takes place in every cycle of time, and He the Supreme Master sustains the new world through those individuals who have made themselves capable of this task by following His teachings fully. This is the right time and moment to integrate the message of the Gita in our life and contribute in the re-establishment of a new golden era which is free from violence of the vices.

(The author is a spiritual educator and popular columnist for publications across India, Nepal, and the UK)



Girls in Uttarakhand aspire to live freely

Unequal distribution of household chores impacts girls. A thousand responsibilities virtually kill their aspirations



T*hak chuki hun, Thoda Aaram Chahiye,*” (I am tired, I need rest) are the opening lines of the poem written by Chandni Parihar. She is just a 21-year-old girl who feels exhausted by the discrimination she has to face in her society. A resident of remote Jakhera village in Garur block of Bageshwar district in Uttarakhand, Chandni has been fighting to complete her education.

Chandni was the first girl from her village to score 65 per cent in Class 10. She wanted to pursue science, but due to the unavailability of this stream in the village schools, she could not fulfill her dreams. “I wanted to move out of my village to do higher secondary in science, but my parents objected as they were against idea of spending money by sending me to a school far off from the village,” she said.

Chandni was able to finish her 12th, but more difficulties awaited her. “Soon after finishing school, I had to put up a huge fight to get admission to a college. My parents and extended family members wanted me to focus on housework... They agreed to distance learning after looking at how adamant I was... However, they approved it by making me swear to get married after I graduated from college. Now, I am about to finish my college this year and I dread as the days pass by,” she said.

Her brother, on the other hand, who is currently in the 12th standard, has full support from their parents. He was asked which stream he would prefer to take. In fact, the parents wanted to send him out of the village, as there was no good faculty in the nearby school.

Chandni made the best use of the opportunities available to her in college. Soon, she aspired to join the Indian Army and simultaneously played football. She could not follow her dreams despite being a state-level footballer. “Once, I went to the jungle to mow the grass. I despised doing it but had to go as people considered it our ‘responsibility’. I didn’t realise that I was on the edge of a hill and slipped,” she lamented.

The accident took place during the day, and the villagers and her parents found her in the evening. The back injury caused by this unfortunate incident has shut all doors for Chandni as she can no longer play football and apply for the Indian Army. The villagers consider it problematic when girls step out of the houses without any purpose, but it is completely fine for them to send the adolescent girls to the jungle and risk their lives while mowing grass. Chandni believes the true meaning of freedom is to live without judgment and to at least get a basic education without having to fight so hard for it.

“The struggle is real and keeps getting harder as we grow old,” another 21-year-old girl, Geeta Kumari, said. A resident of



PARENTS CITE DIFFERENT REASONS FOR NOT SUPPORTING THEIR GIRLS’ EDUCATION. FOR SOME, THE WORRY IS SAFETY, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVE THAT INSTEAD OF SPENDING HOURS TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL, GIRLS ARE BETTER OFF LEARNING HOUSEHOLD CHORES

The author is a development worker from Delhi (Charkha Features)

Lamchula village in same district, Geeta is a powerhouse of energy. As she climbs steep mountainous path to junior school where she works as an informal assistant, she tells how despite having great potential, families do not allow girls to get educated.

“I could complete my studies till Class 12 (intercollege) as it took me around 45 minutes on foot to reach nearest school. Other girls had to walk for over one hour to reach school on time. Others residing in faraway villages would drop out mid-year considering the distance and the treacherous route they were required to take even during extreme weather,” said Geeta.

Parents cite different reasons for not supporting their girls’ education. For some, the worry is safety, while others believe that instead of spending hours travelling to school, girls are better off learning household chores. That is what they are born for.

Parents’ regressive thinking is supported by the state’s failure to establish strong infrastructure in far flung areas. After completing her Class 12, Geeta couldn’t pursue higher education despite having great interest and enthusiasm. The degree college is in Bageshwar city—around 25 km from Garur block.

“Reaching Garur is another challenge as the frequency of available private taxi services is quite low. My parents did not see any benefit in the struggle,” she said, adding that she has been given the responsibility to take care of her house and farms. On the other hand, her brothers recently

got selected to serve in the Indian armed forces.

Unequal distribution of household chores impacts girls’ opportunities, and it gets difficult for them to even think for themselves. Burdened with a thousand responsibilities, their aspirations fall to pieces. According to a Unicef report released in 2016, girls between the ages of 5 and 14 spend 40 per cent more time on household chores than boys their age. This sets a stage for creating and confirming the gendered roles of girls and building a certain outlook that limits their potential in life.

Asha Kumari, 18, another girl from Lamchula is never to be seen at home. She is either in the fields or in the jungle gathering fodder. When at home, she, along with her mother, cooks, cleans and takes care of other household chores. “I would prefer to continue my college full time, but it’s far away, so that’s not an option.”

During Covid-19, the pressure of household chores burdened the girls even more in these isolated villages. While boys had all the time to indulge in sports, take up various activities of their interest, girls were sent to mow the grass in the jungle for their livestock.

If there was one smartphone in the house, it was given to boys to attend online classes. It is only when elections are around, political leaders have woken up after a struggle of two years to distribute free mobile, tablet scheme for students.

The lockdown was harsh specifically for girls. The little time they used to spend walking

to school, sharing their lives with their friends, was snatched by the lockdown, said Archana Bahuguna, the head of Space for Nurturing Creativity, a model community and alternative residential learning centre situated in Khumera village in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand.

Having experience of leading several projects focusing on children, Archana emphasised how the absence of vocational centres in villages affects girls. “It is not unknown that taking care of families is considered a ‘duty’ of girls and women,” Archana said.

Not sharing the load of household chores by most men can be seen everywhere in the country. However, in rural areas with rigid cultural and gendered norms, coupled with lack of opportunities, often cut the wings of girls.

Even if some parents want to support their daughters, extreme poverty inhibits them from doing so. “I want to join the Indian Army,” says Manisha Kapkoti, a bright 15-year-old girl from Gairkhet, Kapkot block in Uttarakhand. However, she added, there is no coaching centre for the National Defence Academy here and my parents do not have the resources to support me to pursue coaching outside my village.”

There are several other girls who have dreams—dreams of having a computer centre in their village, a smart phone to attend classes online, a proper transportation service, access to school, freedom to wear whatever they want, time for themselves. Hope one day, they have it all.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

I WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW SAD I AM TO BE GIVING UP THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD. BUT THEM’S THE BREAKS.
—CARETAKER BRITISH PRIME MINISTER
BORIS JOHNSON



HIS OWN PARTY HAS FINALLY CONCLUDED THAT HE’S UNFIT TO BE THE PRIME MINISTER.
—LABOUR PARTY CHIEF
KEIR STARMER

Disruptions and opportunities in financial sector

Following is the edited version of a speech delivered by Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on June 17

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the recent geopolitical crisis and the all-pervasive technological innovations sweeping across economies are challenging the traditional financial intermediation processes...

Over the past few years, the business of banking has witnessed a shift from traditional branch banking to digital banking. This paradigm shift has been possible due to innovations in information technology (IT), growth in mobile and internet connectivity, market-based financial intermediation, and the advent of Fintech. Financial service providers are now devising new products and services and are adopting new business models for reaching out to the target customers.



SHAKTIKANTA DAS

(The author is the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.)

ogy have also enhanced the cause of financial inclusion and tech-enabled public goods delivery. Direct benefit transfer (DBT) through the digital mode is among the best examples of tech-enabled public goods delivery. Digital-mobile-anywhere-anytime banking is becoming the order of the day. The indigenously developed Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Aadhaar Enabled Payment Service (AePS) have become the backbone of our retail payments system.

Alongside these advancements, the Reserve Bank’s regulatory approach has been realigned to support and foster such innovations...

With the advent of new technologies, we are witnessing a new era of disruption. Given the growing role of technology,

data and network effects, there is a feeling among the banks that having an ethos of a technology company, while offering banking services, is the need of the hour. This is an area of opportunity for the banks; but there are associated challenges which need to be mitigated. Greater attention needs to be given to building customers’ trust by (i) offering products and services appropriate and fit for customer’s needs and circumstances; (ii) ensuring robust security controls, reliable and efficient delivery of services, transparency of terms and conditions to customers; and (iii) by handling customer grievances satisfactorily and building necessary awareness among customers. All of these aspects need to be factored in when financial institutions introduce

or enhance technology driven products and services.

Talking about opportunities, it would be relevant to note that what we have seen until now could be just the tip of the iceberg. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to determine the creditworthiness of clients for small ticket loans by analyzing data from a wide range of traditional and non-traditional data sources, has the potential to enhance access to credit for marginalized customers. Here also it would be necessary to understand the associated risks and mitigate them suitably through various safeguards and precautions. Risks relating to cyber security, software development, limitations in transaction capacity, privacy of customer data, and data security

need to be factored in. The methodology of algorithms underpinning digital financial services has to be clear, transparent, explainable and free from exclusionary biases. The credit scoring models using innovative techniques can be useful but they should be subject to a robust model governance framework. Comprehensive assessment of risks has also to be undertaken while planning to move to cloud with customer sensitive data.

In all these digital initiatives, the plan should also factor in those sets of customers who may not be digitally savvy and who may want to engage physically with the bank. It is, therefore, crucial that while driving various tech-enabled initiatives, the existing systems

and processes do not see frequent disruptions and non-availability. We have already seen instances of the damage that disruptions in technology systems can bring and the reputation risk they carry for financial entities...

It has also to be recognised that human resources can turn out to be the weakest link in technology enabled financial services. There is thus a vital need for ongoing training and skill building programmes.

At the end of the day, the bottom-line is how technology improves the financial system in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, resolving bottlenecks in economic functions and providing value addition to the customers.

Large technology companies (Big Tech) which have

entered into provision of financial services could potentially be another source of disruption to the financial system. These companies have an enormous amount of customer data which has helped them to offer tailored financial services to entities and individuals lacking credit history or collateral. Even the banks and other lenders are sometimes utilising platforms provided by fintech companies in their internal processes for credit risk assessment. Such large scale use of new methodologies in credit risk assessment can create systemic concerns like over-leverage, inadequate credit assessment, etc. Authorities and regulators have to strike a fine balance between enabling innovation and preventing systemic risks.

15 dead in rocket attack on apartment in Ukraine

Kyiv: At least 15 people were killed when a Russian rocket hit an apartment building in the eastern Ukraine town of Chasiv Yar and more than 20 people may still be trapped in the rubble, officials said Sunday.

The Saturday night rocket assault is the latest in a recent burst of high-casualty attacks on civilian structures.

At least 19 people died when a Russian missile hit a shopping mall in the city of Kremenchuk in late June and 21 people were killed when an apartment building and recreation area came under rocket fire in the southern Odesa region this month.



kilometers (12 miles) southeast of Kramatorsk, a city that is expected to be a major target of Russian forces as they grind westward.

The Donetsk region is one of two provinces along with Luhansk that make up the Donbas region, where separatist rebels have fought Ukrainian forces since 2014. Last week, Russia captured the city of Lysychansk, the last major stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in Luhansk.

Russian forces are raising "true hell" in the Donbas, despite assessments they were taking an operational pause, Chasiv Yar is about 20

Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai said Saturday.

After the seizure of Lysychansk, some analysts predicted Moscow's troops likely would take some time to rearm and regroup.

But "so far there has been no operational pause announced by the enemy. He is still attacking and shelling our lands with the same intensity as before," Haidai said. He later said the Russian bombardment of Luhansk was suspended because Ukrainian forces had destroyed ammunition depots and barracks used by the Russians. **AP**

Anxiety grows for Ukraine's grain farmers as harvest begins

Kyiv: Oleksandr Chubuk's warehouse should be empty, awaiting the new harvest, with his supply of winter wheat already shipped abroad.

Instead, his storage bins in central Ukraine are piled high with grain he cannot ship out because of the war with Russia.

The green spikes of wheat are already ripening. Soon, the horizon will look like the Ukrainian flag, a sea of gold beneath a blue sky.

Chubuk expects to reap 500 tonnes, but for the first time in his 30 years as a farmer, he's uncertain about what to do with it.

"Hope is the only thing I have now," he said.

The war has trapped about 22 million tons of grain inside Ukraine, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a growing crisis for the country known as the "breadbasket of Europe" for its exports of wheat, corn and sunflower oil.

Before Russia's invasion, Ukraine could export 6 million to 7 million tons of grain per month, but in June it shipped only 2.2 million tons, according to the Ukrainian Grain Association.

Normally, it sends about 30% of its grain to Europe, 30% to North Africa and 40% to Asia, said Mykola Horbachov,

head of the association.

With Russia's blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports, the fate of the upcoming harvest in Ukraine is in doubt.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization says the war is endangering food supplies for many developing nations and could worsen hunger for up to 181 million people.

Meanwhile, many farmers in Ukraine could go bankrupt. They are facing the most difficult situation since gaining independence in 1991, Horbachov said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said his country is working with the U.N., Ukraine, and Russia to find a solution, offering safe corridors in the Black Sea for wheat shipments.

For now, Ukraine is trying less-effective alternatives to export its grain, at least to Europe. Currently, 30% of exports go via three Danube River ports in southwestern Ukraine.

The country also is trying to ship grain via 12 border crossings with European countries, but trucks must wait in line for days, and Europe's infrastructure cannot yet absorb such a volume of grain, Horbachov said.



"It's impossible to build such infrastructure in one year," he told The Associated Press.

Russia's invasion also caused transportation costs to soar.

The price to deliver this year's harvested barley to the closest Romanian port, Constanta, is now \$160 to \$180 per tonne, up from \$40 to \$45. And yet a farmer selling barley to a trader gets less than \$100 per ton.

The losses are piling up, along with the harvest.

"Most of the farmers are running the risk of becoming bankrupt very soon. But they don't have any other option but to sell their grain cheaper than

its cost," Horbachov said.

On top of such challenges, not all farmers can sell their grain. Before the invasion, Chubuk could sell a ton of wheat from his Kyiv region farm for \$270. Now he can't find a buyer even at \$135 per ton. "The whole system backs up," including storage options, said James Heneghan, senior vice president at Gro Intelligence, a global climate and agriculture data analytics company. The system was meant to keep Ukraine's exports flowing, not store them.

Without money coming in for grain, future harvests are challenging. **AP**

Canada to release equipment for Russia-Germany gas pipeline

Berlin: The Canadian Government says it will allow the delivery to Germany of equipment from a key Russia-Europe natural gas pipeline that has undergone maintenance - equipment the absence of which Russia's Gazprom cited last month as a reason for more than halving the flow of gas.

The return of turbines from the Nord Stream 1 pipeline sent to Montreal for a scheduled overhaul has been complicated by sanctions imposed on Russia over the war in Ukraine. Canada's minister of natural resources, Jonathan Wilkinson, said in a statement late Saturday that "Canada will grant a time-limited and revocable permit for Siemens Canada to allow the return of repaired Nord Stream 1 turbines to Germany."

That, Wilkinson said in the statement posted on Twitter, will support "Europe's ability to access reliable and affordable energy as they continue to transition away from Russian oil and gas."

He said that "absent a necessary supply of natural gas, the German economy will suffer very significant hardship."

Siemens Energy said after Gazprom started reducing gas flows in mid-June that it had been unable to return a gas turbine that powers a compressor station on the pipeline, which had been overhauled after more than 10 years in service, to the customer, Gazprom.

German politicians have dismissed the Russian explanation for the 60% reduction in gas flows through Nord Stream 1, saying that equipment shouldn't have been a significant issue until the fall and the Russian decision was a political gambit to sow uncertainty and push up prices.

The Canadian move comes before Nord Stream 1 is due to shut down for annual maintenance on Monday.

In previous summers, the work led to a roughly 10-day shutdown, but German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck has said he suspects that Russia may cite "some little technical detail" as a reason not to resume gas deliveries.

The reduction in gas flows comes as Germany and the rest of Europe try to reduce their dependence on Russian energy imports. **AP**

Ukraine Muslims pray for victory, end of occupation

Kostiantynivka: By the time the Russians invaded, 43-year-old Mufti Said Ismahilov - one of the Muslim spiritual leaders of Ukraine - had already resolved that he would step aside from his religious duties to fight for his country.

At the end of last year, as warnings of an imminent attack grew louder, Ismahilov began training with a local territorial defense battalion. By then he had served as a mufti for thirteen years.

Born and raised in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, Ismahilov had already fled Russia once before, in 2014, when Moscow-backed separatists captured his city.

He eventually moved to a quiet suburb outside Kyiv called Bucha - only to find himself, eight years later, at the heart of Moscow's assault on Kyiv, and the site of atrocities

that shocked the world. It felt as if the threat of Russian occupation would never end.

"This time I made the decision that I would not run away, I would not flee but I would fight" he said in an interview with The Associated Press in Kostiantynivka, a town close to the front lines in eastern Ukraine where a battle for control of the region is intensifying. Ismahilov began working as a military driver for paramedics evacuating the wounded from front lines or besieged towns.

Tasked with driving in highly dangerous conditions, but also emotionally supporting the critically injured, Ismahilov says he sees his new job as "a continuation of my spiritual duty before God."

"If you are not scared and you can do this, then it is very important. The Prophet was



himself a warrior," Ismahilov says. "So I follow his example and I also will not run, or hide. I will not turn my back on others." Ismahilov was one of dozens of Ukrainian Muslims who gathered at the mosque in Kostiantynivka Saturday to mark Eid al-Adha - an important religious holiday in Islam.

The mosque is now the last remaining operational mosque in Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donbas. Ismahilov told the AP that there are around 30 mosques in the region in total but that most are now in the hands of the Russians.

Last week, Russia captured the city of Lysychansk, the last major stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in the eastern province of Luhansk. The governor of the Luhansk region said on Saturday that Russian forces are now pressing toward the border with the neigh-

bouring Donetsk region.

Muslims make up almost 1 per cent of the population in Ukraine, which is predominantly Orthodox Christian. There is a large Muslim population in Crimea - home to the Crimean Tatars and illegally annexed by Russian in 2014.

Numbers there jump to 12 per cent. There is also a sizeable Muslim community in eastern Ukraine, the result of waves of economic migration as the region industrialised and many Muslims immigrated to the Donbas region to work in the mines and factories.

The conflict in 2014 forced many Muslims from Crimea and Donbas to relocate to other parts of the country where they joined long-established Tatar communities or built new Islamic centers alongside Turks, Arabs and Ukrainian converts. **AP**

South African police say 15 killed in Soweto bar shooting

Johannesburg: A mass shooting at a tavern in Johannesburg's Soweto township has killed 15 people and left others in critical condition, according to police.

Police say they are investigating reports that a group of men arrived in a minibus taxi and opened fire on some of the patrons at the bar shortly after midnight Sunday.

Those injured have been taken to Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.

The number of cartridges found on the scene indicates that a group of people opened fire in the bar, said Gauteng province police commissioner Lt. Gen. Elias Mawela.

"The primary investigation suggests that these people were enjoying themselves here, in a licensed tavern operating within the right hours," Mawela told The Associated Press.

"All of a sudden they heard some gunshots, that is when people tried to run out of the tavern. We don't have the full details at the moment of what is the motive, and why they were targeting these people," he said.

"You can see that a high caliber firearm was used and it was shooting randomly. You can see that every one of those people were struggling to get out of the tavern," Mawela told The Associated Press.

The area where the shooting took place was very dark, making it harder to find people who could identify the suspects, he said.

Rifles and a 9 mm pistol were used in the attack, said national police spokeswoman Col. Dimakatso Sello. In a separate incident, four people were shot dead by unknown gunmen at a tavern in Sweetwaters township in the coastal city of Pietermaritzburg on Saturday night. According to the police, two men entered the tavern and randomly opened fire on the patrons, killing two people on the scene while two others were confirmed dead at the hospital. **AP**

Retired general suspended after tweet critical of Jill Biden

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A retired three-star Army general has been suspended from his duties as an adviser to active-duty officers, an Army spokeswoman said Saturday. The suspension followed reports that his social media account carried a comment critical of first lady Jill Biden.

Retired Lt. Gen. Gary Volesky was serving as an HQE-SM, a highly qualified expert-senior mentor, when he was suspended by Lt. Gen. Theodore Martin, commanding general of the Combined Arms Center, according to a statement from Army spokeswoman Cynthia O. Smith. She did not give a reason for the

suspension, which was pending the outcome of an inquiry, and no other details were provided.

USA Today reported that a Twitter account under Volesky's name carried a reply to a statement by the first lady following the Supreme Court's action last month overturning the abortion rights decision Roe v. Wade. "For nearly 50 years, women have had the right to make our own decisions about our bodies. Today, that right was stolen from us," Biden said.

The newspaper reported that the tweet under Volesky's name stated: "Glad to see you finally know what a woman is." The tweet was later deleted. **AP**

Italy relocates migrants after Lampedusa center overwhelmed

Rome: The Italian navy on Saturday began relocating the first 600 migrants from the Sicilian island of Lampedusa after its refugee identification center became overwhelmed with new arrivals and photos circulated of filthy conditions.

July has seen a sustained uptick in daily migrant arrivals in Italy compared to recent years, according to Interior Ministry statistics. Overall, migrant arrivals are up sharply this year, with 30,000 would-be refugees making landfall so far compared to 22,700 in the same period in 2021 and 7,500 in 2020. **AP**

Iran enriches uranium to 20% with new centrifuges

Tehran: Iran announced on Sunday that it has begun enriching uranium up to 20 per cent using sophisticated centrifuges at its underground Fordo nuclear plant, state TV reported, an escalation that comes amid a standoff with the West over its tattered atomic deal.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, a spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, said uranium enriched to 20 per cent was collected for the first time from advanced IR-6 centrifuges on Saturday. He said Iran had informed the UN nuclear watchdog about the develop-

ment two weeks ago.

Centrifuges are used to spin enriched uranium into higher levels of purity. Tehran's 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers had called for Fordo to become a research-and-development facility and restricted centrifuges there to non-nuclear uses.

Iran had previously told the IAEA that it was preparing to enrich uranium through a new cascade of 166 advanced IR-6 centrifuges at its underground Fordo facility.

But it hadn't revealed the level at which the cascade would be enriching. **AP**

UN: Russia and Ukraine are to blame for nursing home attack

Washington: Two weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine in February, Russian forces assaulted a nursing home in the eastern region of Luhansk. Dozens of elderly and disabled patients, many of them bedridden, were trapped inside without water or electricity.

The March 11 assault set off a fire that spread throughout the facility, suffocating people who couldn't move. A small number of patients and staff escaped and fled into a nearby forest, finally getting assistance after walking for 5 kilometers (3 miles).

In a war awash in atrocities, the attack on the nursing home near the village of Stara Krasnyanka stood out for its cruelty. And Ukrainian authorities placed the fault squarely on Russian forces, accusing them of killing more than 50 vulnerable civilians in a brutal and unprovoked attack.

But a new UN report has

found that Ukraine's armed forces bear a large, and perhaps equal, share of the blame for what happened in Stara Krasnyanka, which is about 580 kilometers (360 miles) southeast of Kyiv. A few days before the attack, Ukrainian soldiers took up positions inside the nursing home, effectively making the building a target.

At least 22 of the 71 patients survived the assault, but the exact number of people killed remains unknown, according to the United Nations.

The report by the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights doesn't conclude the Ukrainian soldiers or the Russian troops committed a war crime. But it said the battle at the Stara Krasnyanka nursing home is emblematic of the human rights office's concerns over the potential use of "human shields" to prevent

military operations in certain areas.

The aftermath of the attack on the Stara Krasnyanka home also provides a window into how both Russia and Ukraine move quickly to set the narrative for how events are unfolding on the ground - even when those events may still be shrouded by the fog of war. For Ukraine, maintaining the upper hand in the fight for hearts and minds helps to ensure the continued flow of billions of dollars in Western military and humanitarian aid.

Russia's frequently indiscriminate shelling of apartment buildings, hospitals, schools and theaters has been the primary cause of the war's thousands of civilian casualties. Ukraine and its allies, including the United States, have rebuked Moscow for the deaths and injuries and called for those responsible to be brought to justice.

"The bottom-line rule is



But Ukraine also must abide by the international rules of the battlefield. David Crane, a former Defence Department official and a veteran of numerous international war crime investigations, said the Ukrainian forces may have violated the laws of armed conflict by not evacuating the nursing home's residents and staff.

"The bottom-line rule is

that civilians cannot intentionally be targeted. Period. For whatever reason," Crane said. "The Ukrainians placed those people in a situation which was a killing zone. And you can't do that."

The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline," drawing from a variety of sources, have independently documented hundreds of attacks across Ukraine that

likely constitute war crimes. The vast majority appear to have been committed by Russia. But a handful, including the destruction of the Stara Krasnyanka care home, indicate Ukrainian fighters are also to blame.

The first reports in the media about the Stara Krasnyanka nursing home largely reflected statements issued by Ukrainian officials more than a week after the fighting ended.

Serhiy Haidai, the governor of Luhansk, declared in a March 20 post to his Telegram account that 56 people had been killed "cynically and deliberately" by "Russian occupiers" who "shot at close range from a tank." The office of Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said in a statement issued the same day that 56 elderly people died due to the "treacherous actions" of the Russian forces and their

allies. Neither statement mentioned whether Ukrainian soldiers had entered the home before the fighting began.

The Luhansk regional administration, which Haidai leads, did not respond to requests for comment. The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office told the AP on Friday that its Luhansk division continues to investigate Russia's "indiscriminate shelling and forced transfer of persons" from the nursing home. About 50 patients were killed in the attack, the office said, fewer than it stated in March. The prosecutor general's office did not directly respond to the U.N. Report, but said it also is looking into whether Ukrainian troops had been in the home.

Moscow-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years in the mostly Russian-speaking eastern industrial heartland, the Donbas, which includes the

Luhansk and Donetsk regions. They have declared two independent "people's" republics, which were recognized by Russia just before the war began. After the invasion, these separatist fighters came under Russian command.

Viktoria Serdyukova, the human rights commissioner for the Luhansk separatist government, said in a March 23 statement that the Ukrainian troops were responsible for casualties at the nursing home. The residents had been taken hostage by Ukrainian "militants" and many of them were "burned alive" in a fire started by the Ukrainians as they were retreating, she said.

The U.N. Report examined violations of international human rights law that have occurred in Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24. The Stara Krasnyanka attack totals just two paragraphs in the 38-page report. **AP**

Japan votes for key poll in shadow of Abe killing

Tokyo: Japanese went to the polls Sunday in the shadow of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was gunned down while making a campaign speech. Abe's governing party appeared to be cruising to a major victory.

As people voted, police in western Japan sent the alleged assassin to a local prosecutors' office for further investigation. A day earlier a top regional police official acknowledged possible security lapses that allowed the attacker to get so close and fire a bullet at the still-influential former Japanese leader.

In a country still recovering from the shock, sadness and fear of Abe's shooting - the first former or serving leader to be assassinated in postwar Japan - polling started for half of the upper house, the less powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament.

Abe was shot in Nara on Friday and airlifted to a hospital but died of blood loss. Police arrested a former member of Japan's navy at the scene. Police confiscated a home-made gun and several others were later found at his apartment.

The alleged attacker, Tetsuya Yamagami, told investigators he acted because of Abe's rumored connection to an organization that he resented, police said, but had no problem with the former leader's political view. The man had developed hatred toward a religious group that his mother was obsessed about and that bankrupted a family business, according to media reports,



Tetsuya Yamagami, the attacker who shot former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was making a campaign speech for the governing party, gets out of a police station in Nara, western Japan on Sunday

including some that identified the group as the Unification Church.

Abe's body, in a black hearse accompanied by his wife, Akie, returned to his home in Tokyo's upscale Shibuya, where many mourners, including Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and top party officials, paid tribute. His wake and funeral are expected in coming days.

Nara prefectural police chief Tomoaki Onizuka on Saturday said that Abe's assassination was the "greatest regret" in his 27-year career. He said problems with security were undeniable, that he took the shooting seriously and will review the guarding procedures.

Abe's assassination ahead of Sunday's parliamentary election shocked the nation and

raised questions over whether adequate security was provided for the former prime minister.

Some observers who watched videos of the attack noted a lack of attention in the open space behind Abe as he spoke.

Experts also said Abe was more vulnerable standing on the ground level instead of atop a campaign vehicle, a standard for premier-class politicians, but that option was reportedly unavailable due to his hastily arranged visit to Nara.

Mitsuru Fukuda, a crisis management professor at Nihon University, said police were seen focusing forward and paying little attention to what was behind Abe, noting that the suspect was approaching the former leader unno-

ticed until he fired the first shot.

"Clearly there were problems," Fukuda said.

The first shot narrowly missed Abe and hit an election vehicle. The second entered from his upper left arm damaged his neck artery, causing massive bleeding and death.

Fukuda said that election campaigns provide a chance for voters and politicians to interact because "political terrorism" was extremely rare in postwar Japan. It's a key democratic process, but Abe's assassination could prompt stricter security at crowded events like campaigns, sports games and others.

On Saturday, when party leaders went out for their final appeals under heightened security, there were no more fist-touches - a COVID-19 era alternative to handshakes - or other close-proximity friendly gestures they used to enjoy.

After Abe's assassination, Sunday's election had a new meaning, with all political leaders emphasizing the importance of free speech and their pledge not to back down to violence against democracy.

"We absolutely refuse to let violence shut out free speech," Kishida said in his final rally in northern city of Niigata on Saturday amid tightened security. "We must demonstrate that our democracy and election will not back down to violence."

According to the Asahi newspaper, Yamagami was a contract worker at a warehouse in Kyoto, operating a forklift. He was described as a quiet person in the beginning

but started ignoring rules that led to quarrels with his colleagues, then he started missing work and quit in April citing health problems. A next-door neighbor at his apartment told Asahi he never met Yamagami, though he recalled hearing noises like a saw being used several times late at night over the past month.

Japan is known for its strict gun laws. With a population of 125 million, it had only 21 gun-related criminal cases in 2020, according to the latest government crime paper. Experts say, however, some recent attacks involved use of consumer items such as gasoline, suggesting increased risks for ordinary people to be embroiled in mass attacks.

While media surveys had predicted a major victory for the governing Liberal Democratic Party amid fractured and weak opposition, a wave of sympathy votes from Abe's assassination could bring a bigger victory than Kishida's modest goal of winning the house majority.

Even after stepping down as prime minister in 2020, Abe was highly influential in the LDP and headed its largest faction. His absence could change the power balance in the governing party that has almost uninterrupted ruled postwar Japan since its 1955 foundation, experts say.

"This could be a turning point" for the LDP over its divisive policies on gender equality, same-sex marriages and other issues that Abe-backed ultra-conservatives with paternalistic family values had resisted, said Fukuda. **AP**

Top US diplomat to pay Japan condolence visit

Bangkok: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will pay a brief condolence visit to Japan next week following the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the State Department said Sunday.

Blinken will travel to Tokyo on Monday to pay his respects to the former leader and meet with senior Japanese officials before returning to Washington from an Asian tour that he is now wrapping up.

"Secretary Blinken will travel to Tokyo, Japan, to offer condolences to the Japanese people on the death of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and to meet with senior Japanese officials," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"The U.S.-Japan Alliance is the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and has never been stronger."

Blinken is in Thailand on a pre-scheduled visit and had been in Indonesia on Friday attending a Group of 20 nations' foreign ministers meeting in Bali when Abe was shot and killed.

He will be the most senior U.S. Official to visit Japan in the aftermath of Abe's death. **AP**

Blinken hits out at ASEAN for lack of pressure on Myanmar

Bangkok: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is criticising Southeast Asian nations for not doing enough to press Myanmar's military government to return the country to the path of democracy following last year's power seizure.

But as Blinken lamented the lack of progress in Myanmar, also known as Burma, he also moved to strengthen US ties with key regional ally Thailand - part of efforts to counter Chinese influence across the Indo-Pacific.

Speaking at a news conference in Bangkok, Blinken said it was "unfortunate" that repression in Myanmar was continuing nearly 18 months after the military takeover. And, he said he was disappointed that Myanmar's neighbours weren't applying pressure for it to end.

"I think it's unfortunately safe to say that we've seen no positive movement," Blinken told reporters.

"On the contrary, we continue to see the repression of the Burmese people who continue to see violence perpetrated by the regime."

He blasted Myanmar's military leaders for jailing or forcing almost the entire opposition to flee and for worsening the grim humanitarian situation by not delivering the kind of assistance and supplies that are needed to improve conditions.

Blinken then took aim at Myanmar's neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has been attempting to convince the military into implementing a

five-point plan to return the country to a democratic path.

"All countries have to continue to speak clearly about what the regime is doing in its ongoing repression and brutality," he said.

"We have an obligation to the people of Burma to hold the regime accountable. Regional support for the regime's adherence to the five-point plan developed by ASEAN is also critical. That has not happened."

He added that all members of ASEAN "need to hold the regime accountable for that, continue to demand an immediate cessation of violence, the release of political prisoners and the restoration of Burma's democratic path."

Just last week, Myanmar hosted a regional gathering of officials in what the opposition said was a direct contravention of the ASEAN peace plan following the ouster of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi's ouster in February 2021 triggered widespread peaceful protests that were violently suppressed and evolved into armed resistance, and the country has slipped into what some U.N. Experts characterize as a civil war.

Blinken traveled to Thailand after attending a meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of 20 rich and large developing countries in Indonesia, where he accused China of siding with Russia over the war in Ukraine and said that support was complicating already fraught relations between Washington and Beijing. After meeting China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in

Bali on Saturday, Blinken warned that Chinese support for Russia on Ukraine poses a threat to the rules-based international order. Blinken's visit to Thailand was intended to bolster at least one small part of that order.

In Bangkok, Blinken signed two cooperation agreements with his Thai counterpart, pledging to expand strategic cooperation with Thailand and improve the resilience of supply chains.

Although modest, the deals fit into the administration's broader strategy for the Indo-Pacific, which is aimed at bluntly China's increasing assertiveness and offering alternatives to Beijing-sponsored development that many US officials regard as a trap for smaller, poorer nations.

Blinken did not mention China by name in his comments with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha or Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai. But after signing the deals, he said the US and Thailand "share the same goal of a free, open, interconnected prosperous, resilient and secure Indo-Pacific."

American officials use that phrase often to refer to the prevention of Chinese dominance in the region and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had similar comments when he visited Bangkok last month and met Prayuth.

Thailand is already a member of President Joe Biden's Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, a bloc that was created earlier this year with the aim of curbing the momentum of China's Belt. **AP**

Biden defends impending visit to Saudi in opinion piece

Washington: President Joe Biden, preparing for a trip to Saudi Arabia amid criticism of its poor human rights record, defended his decision in a newspaper opinion piece, insisting that he had long supported reforms and sought to "reorient but not rupture" relations with a longstanding strategic partner.

In the article posted online Saturday night by The Washington Post, Biden pointed to developments in the Middle East that he contended had made the region more stable and secure than when the Trump administration ended, among them intense diplomacy as well as military action against state-sponsored attacks. But his framing of the Saudi relationship in particular appeared defensive, especially with some in the U.S. demand-



ing that he not lend legitimacy to the government with a visit.

Biden linked U.S. strength and security to countering Russian aggression and competition from China, then argued that engaging directly with countries like Saudi Arabia could help promote those efforts.

The president said he aimed to strengthen a U.S.-Saudi partnership "going forward that's based on mutual interests and responsibilities,"

while also holding true to fundamental American values."

"I know that there are many who disagree with my decision to travel to Saudi Arabia," Biden wrote. "My views on human rights are clear and long-standing, and fundamental freedoms are always on the agenda when I travel abroad, as they will be during this trip, just as they will be in Israel and the West Bank."

It was notable that Biden's op-ed appeared in the Sunday opinion section of the Post, whose writer Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by Saudi agents in 2018.

On that issue, Biden contended he had responded with sanctions against the Saudi forces involved in the killing and issued scores of visa bans for anyone found harassing dissidents abroad. **AP**



In this photo taken using a drone, Muslims perform Eid al-Adha prayers on the street in Jakarta, Indonesia on Sunday

China-Pak naval, air drills to jointly deal with maritime threats in Indian Ocean



Beijing: All-weather friends China and Pakistan on Sunday kicked off their 'Sea Guardians-2' drills off the Shanghai coast by deploying their new high-tech naval ships and fighter jets to "jointly deal with maritime security threats," as their navies stepped up cooperation in India's backyard, the Indian

Ocean.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and the Pakistan Navy, will hold the joint naval exercise in maritime and aerial spaces off Shanghai in mid-July, Captain Liu Wensheng, a spokesperson for the PLA Navy, said in a statement.

The two navies held an opening ceremony for the second edition of the Sea Guardian drills on Sunday, official media here reported.

The exercise is a "normal arrangement according to an annual schedule, and it is not aimed at a third party," Liu said.

The PLA Eastern Theatre Command Navy sent the frigate Xiangtan, the corvette Shuozhou, the comprehensive supply ship Qiandaohu, a submarine, an early warning aircraft, two fighter jets and a helicopter for the drill while the Pakistan Navy's frigate Taimur joined the exercise, state-run Global Times reported.

Taimur is the second of four powerful Type 054A/P frigates built by China. It was delivered to the Pakistan Navy in Shanghai on June 23. The

first ship in the Type 054A/P-class, the Tughril, joined the Pakistan Navy Fleet in January, according to the daily's report.

Themed "jointly dealing with maritime security threats," the exercise will feature training courses including the joint strike against maritime targets, joint tactical manoeuvring, joint anti-submarine warfare and joint support for damaged vessels, Liu said.

The drill's goal is to enhance defence cooperation, conduct professional and technical exchanges, deepen traditional friendship between the two countries and the two navies, and promote the development of the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between China and Pakistan, Liu said.

China and Pakistan face

non-traditional security threats including piracy and maritime terrorists in regions like the Indian Ocean, so it has become necessary that the two countries enhance cooperation in these aspects, Wei Dongxu, a Chinese military expert, told the Global Times.

The two countries also need to jointly demonstrate their capabilities in safeguarding strategic sea lanes that transport energy and goods, Wei said. The first edition of the 'Sea Guardians' exercise was held in January 2020 in the North Arabian Sea off Karachi.

The Arabian Sea region is strategically important as major Indian ports including Kandla, Okha, Mumbai, Mormugao, New Mangalore and Kochi are located there.

The Arabian sea provides

entry to the Indian Ocean where China currently has built a logistics base at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Observers say Sino-Pakistan military cooperation in recent years focussed more on the Navy as China gradually stepped up its naval presence in India's backyard, the Indian Ocean.

Besides building its first military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa in the Indian Ocean, China has acquired Pakistan's Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea which connects with China's Xinjiang province by land in the USD 60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China is also developing Sri Lanka's Hambantota port after it acquired it on 99 years lease. **AP**

Race for UK PM widens with 9 candidates in fray, Sunak maintains lead



London: British Indian former Cabinet minister Rishi Sunak maintained his lead as the race to replace Boris Johnson as Conservative Party leader and next UK Prime Minister widened on Sunday with a total of nine candidates in the fray, with Trade Minister Penny Mordaunt emerging as an early second favourite.

Mordaunt shared a #pm4pm video to announce her candidacy, following Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Pakistani-origin former Health Secretary Sajid Javid.

The complete line-up so far for the leadership race includes Goan-origin Attorney General Suella Braverman, Iraqi-origin Nadhim Zahawi, Nigerian-origin Kemi Bedanoch and Tory backbencher Tom Tugendhat.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is expected to declare her candidacy soon too, taking the total to 10 potential candidates in one of the widest battlefields for a Tory leadership race.

"Our leadership has to change. It needs to become a little less about the leader and a lot more about the ship," said Mordaunt, who is now second ranked in the bookmaker's

odds with Sunak still ahead.

"If I become Prime Minister, I will protect women's rights and ensure women and girls enjoy the same freedom most males take for granted in feeling safe from assault and abuse," the UK-born former Chancellor said on Sunday.

The 42-year-old son-in-law of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy had launched his bid with a pledge to restore trust, rebuild the economy and reunite the country. He is yet to lay out his plans in full but has so far not indicated any immediate tax cuts if elected leader.

For a traditionally low-tax favouring Conservative Party, the focus of the race is expected to be on the candidates' plans to cut taxes.

Javid - the UK-born son of British Pakistani bus driver who has also served as a former Chancellor in the Cabinet - promised wide-ranging tax cuts, including cancelling next year's scheduled hike in corporation tax from 19 per cent to 25 per cent and instead gradually reduce it by 1p a year to 15 per cent.

"I don't believe in unfunded tax cuts. This is a funded proposal," he told the BBC soon after launching his bid. **AP**

Nigeria's troubled northwest battles child malnutrition

Abuja: Four years ago gunmen attacked Halima Musa's village in northwestern Nigeria, killing her husband and the oldest of their seven children.

The family fled to the safety of a camp for displaced people, but now they are hungry, she said.

"It's been more than one year since the government brought us food items," she said from Sokoto camp.

It's 2 p.m. And she's preparing the family's first - and only - meal for the day. She's not sure where she'll find food the next day. "I and my children are usually begging," she said.

Northwest Nigeria's escalating violence has claimed thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Many, like Musa, are sheltering in camps that often have inadequate food.

The violence has exacerbated the chronic poverty in this part of the West African nation which has a 40% poverty rate, according to the latest government statistics, including some of the poorest citizens in the troubled north.

Many families have had to abandon their farmlands as they are forced to choose their lives over livelihoods.

The attacks have "pushed many communities to their limits, including about 500,000 people forced to flee from home," according to Michel-Olivier Lacharite of Doctors Without Borders, the France-based medical charity.

The group is preparing to provide food to up to 100,000 malnourished children this year in Nigeria's Katsina state alone, said Lacharite, head of the group's emergency operations.

Despite alerting the government to the problem, he said, "We have not seen the mobilization needed to avert a devastating nutrition crisis."

The violence in northwest Nigeria is blamed on armed groups that authorities say are mostly young semi-nomadic herdsman from the Fulani tribe who are in conflict with settled farming communities over limited access to water and land. Some of the rebellious herdsman are now working with Islamist extremist rebels in the country's northeast in targeting remote communities.

As Nigeria's jihadi insurgency in the northeast has abated somewhat, the violence in the northwest has worsened, according to authorities.

"The government gives them (displaced people) more attention in the northwest even now than the northeast," said Murdakai Titus with Nigeria's National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons.

"Northwest is given high priority ... for intervention activities from the commission - relief materials, livelihood activities, training them to be self-reliant," he said.

The UN World Food Program Nigeria office is working to prevent acute malnutrition in children by providing nutritional assistance to children aged from 6 months to 23 months. Aid is also provided to pregnant and breastfeeding women in vulnerable households, said Chi Lael, a spokeswoman for the U.N. World Food Program in Nigeria.

Malnutrition remains a source of concern though, Lael said, pointing out that in certain areas, "children under five were twice as likely to be malnourished compared to those from the general population." Manzo Ezekiel, a spokesperson for Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency, said the agency knows nutrition must be improved to the internally displaced population.

Hannatu Ahmadu and her four children were on the run for a month after gunmen attacked her Takwo village in the Munya area of Niger state. They managed to find safety but they don't have enough food. "As I speak with you, we have not been able to harvest our crops and we are currently here starving," she told AP from the Munya displacement camp in Niger state which neighbors Abuja, Nigeria's capital. Ahmadu said erratic deliveries of food aid makes it difficult to feed her children. "We only eat once a day," she said. **PTT**

Stock market minnows lag behind, take bigger hit

New Delhi: Falling up to 13 per cent this year so far, BSE small-cap and midcap stocks have lagged behind the benchmark Sensex as experts said these indices had climbed more than the frontline index during the “good times” and a deeper correction is natural in the current turbulent times.

Equity markets have faced many headwinds this year with the emergence of geopolitical tensions, inflation concerns and unabated selling by foreign funds.

Experts said that there has been nervousness across the capital markets both domestic and globally mainly driven by these challenges.

The BSE smallcap index has tumbled 3,816.95 points or 12.95 per cent this year so far while the midcap gauge fell by 2,314.51 points or 9.26 per cent. In comparison, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 3,771.98 points or 6.47 per cent this year.

“The mid and smallcap indices had also gone up a lot more than the Sensex during good times so it is only natural that they will fall more than the Sensex during bad times. Rise and fall in mid and small-



caps tend to be more pronounced than their largecap

counterparts,” said Rahul Shah, Co Head of Research, Equitymaster.

He further said as far as the current trend is concerned, while the markets are no longer expensive, they aren't cheap either. “This is a market where quality and growth will be rewarded and valuations and bad quality will be rejected,” Shah added. **PTI**

‘IT stocks likely to remain under pressure amid global headwinds’

New Delhi: Information technology stocks are likely to remain under pressure in the near-term amid headwinds emanating from the worsening economic situation in key global markets and financial market volatility, according to analysts.

While the country's largest software exporter TCS reported a 5.2 per cent rise in June quarter net profit on Friday, kicking off the latest earnings cycle, IT shares have been sliding, with the BSE Information Technology index tumbling nearly 24 per cent so far this

year.

Cross-currency headwinds and large scale talent churn resulting in higher wage hikes could also add to the challenges, especially in terms of the impact on operating margins, analysts opined.

Though it is early to draw conclusions, the ongoing political developments in the United Kingdom where Indian-origin Rishi Sunak has thrown his hat in the ring to be the prime minister, are also being closely watched. Sunak is the son-in-law of Infosys co-founder N R Narayana Murthy. **PTI**

‘Housing sales jump 2.5 times in Delhi-NCR during Jan-June; prices up 7%’

New Delhi: Housing sales in Delhi-NCR jumped 2.5 fold annually during January-June on revival in demand and lower base effect, while prices rose 7 per cent, according to property consultant Knight Frank India.

In its latest half-yearly report ‘India Real Estate: Residential and Office Market H1 2022’, the consultant said sales of residential properties rose to 29,101 units in January-June this year from 11,474 units in the corresponding period of 2021.

The sales in first half of 2021 calendar year were hit by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

New launches of homes jumped multi-fold to 28,726 units from 2,943 units during the period under review.

Housing prices appreciated 7 per cent annually to Rs 4,437 per square feet during January-June 2022.

Unsold inventories of res-

idential properties came down by 6 per cent to 95,811 units on improved sales performance.

“In H1 2022, NCR's residential market maintained demand momentum with half-yearly sales of 29,101 units. This is the highest sales clocked in any half yearly period since H2 2013,” the report said.

With the prevalence of low home loan interest rates for the most part of H1 2022, Knight Frank India noted that sustained homebuyer interest was maintained in the residential market.

Talking about property rates, the consultant said many developers have increased residential prices in the past few quarters to absorb the rising input costs.

In the past six months, the impact of rising input costs for cement and steel have bumped up the residential product pricing in NCR in a very pronounced manner. **PTI**

FPIs take out over ₹4K cr from equities in July so far; pace of selling slows

New Delhi: Foreign investors continue to desert Indian equity markets and have pulled out over ₹4,000 crore this month so far amid steady appreciation of the dollar and rising interest rates in the US.

However, the pace of selling by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) has been declining over the last few weeks.

“With oil prices breaching the USD 100 a barrel mark, and refining margins cracking across markets, hopes for lower inflation helped improve market sentiments. RBI's measure to help stem the sliding rupee added to the building bullish momentum,” said Vijay Singhania, Chairman at TradeSmart.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, however, believes that the decline in the pace of net withdrawal by FPIs does not signify a change in trend as there has not been any significant improvement in the underlying



drivers.

FPIs have been on selling mode for the last nine months.

FPI inflows will resume once there are clear indications of inflation peaking out, likely to be manifested in global CPI readings around August-September, said Hitesh Jain, Lead Analyst - Institutional Equities, YES Securities.

“If the high inflation narrative takes a back seat, there will also be a possibility of cen-

academic courses,” the ministry said in the statement.

Candidates must have a certificate of 5th-12th grade pass along with a skill training certificate, an ITI Diploma, or a graduate degree to participate. After training, candidates will earn National Council for Vocational Education and Training-recognised certifications, which will improve their employability.

“The major purpose of this programme is to encourage companies to hire more apprentices while also assisting employers in discovering and developing their potential via training and practical skillsets,” the statement said.

Rajesh Aggarwal, secretary, ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship, said: “We hope that the Apprenticeship Mela will provide additional job opportunities for talented individuals across the country. While the primary purpose of these programmes is to recruit more apprentices, it is important to note that apprenticeships such as these are necessary for practical training, which is what we are striving for here. **PTI**

Sebi mulls making ‘market risk factor disclosures’ to help investors

New Delhi: In a global first, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is planning to issue regular ‘risk factor disclosures’ on market trends, including surges and collapses, to help investors make right decisions by learning from the regulator’s insights, sources said.

The move, which is still in a preliminary stage of discussion, can help investors avoid a herd mentality that has been particularly witnessed during the last couple of years -- starting with large-scale selloffs when the pandemic hit the world in early 2020, followed soon by a sharp surge in buying of stocks without understanding the fundamentals and largely on account of get-rich-quick stories and then subsequent losses.

Particularly of significance has been the losses suffered by investors in a large number of IPOs in the recent past and in the highly complicated futures and options segment of the capital market.

“Though the investors have seen a fixed pattern play out in every single cycle -- that is, everyone rushes to buy shares when the going is good and then they indulge in panic-selling when a crisis strikes.



The basics of capital market investments are always thrown out of the window and one key reason for that is the lack of truly independent insights,” a top official said.

The official further said most of the research material available in the market has been prepared by the market participants who have their own business interests in mind and therefore it could be a great idea if the regulator itself makes public its insights from upswings or downtrends in the market.

Explaining the idea that Sebi is working on, a high-level source said, “It's time for Sebi to lead by example by making

disclosures on matters that can have implications for investors at large and disclosures of important market-wide datapoints.”

“A simple sentence mandated under the present regulations that certain ‘investments are subject to market risks’ has become too cliched and it is like a motherhood statement that does not work anymore. What is required at this moment is that investors get some detailed datasets, that too from the regulator and not only from their wealth managers, whose main aim remains maximising their businesses,” said the source involved in the proposed move. **PTI**

FMCG makers expect recovery in volume growth, margin in Q2FY23

New Delhi: With commodity prices peaking out, major FMCG players, including Parle Products, Godrej Consumer Products and Dabur expect a recovery in demand in both rural and urban markets going forward aided by price stability. Moreover, FMCG makers can look forward to better gross margins by the last month of Q2FY23 on a year-on-year basis, as there is a lag of around two months in their inventory coupled with forward contracts, experts say.

Prices of commodities have now peaked out and there has been a 15-20 per cent decline from peak prices in most commodities, according to Parle Products Senior Category Head Mayank Shah.

This has brought some respite to FMCG companies, whose margins were affected by high inflation. Since most companies stagger price hikes and take them in a phased manner, we will not see any further price hike or package weight reduction which was in the offing.

Despite price hikes taken by FMCG companies, the total increase in input cost was not factored in,” Shah told PTI.

While prices of commodities have seen a decline in the last few days, they are still very high compared to a similar period last year, he said.

“Hence at best we will see no further price hikes. The price stability will help in the recovery of the market, both urban and rural since inflation and price hikes were a major concern,” Shah added.

Expressing similar views, Edelweiss Financial Services Executive Director Abneesh Roy said crude oil price is at a one-month low and packaging cost, which is a significant raw material input for all FMCG companies, is linked to crude oil prices.

When asked about margin expansions, he said in “Q2FY23 there will be some benefit, not major as there is a lag of 2-3 months given there will be inventory, forward contracts. **PTI**

Accolite to raise headcount in India by over three-fold to 8,500 in 3 years

New Delhi: Texas-based IT firm Accolite Digital plans to raise headcount by over three-fold in India to around 8,500 in the next three years, a top company official said.

Accolite Digital founder and CEO Leela Kaza told PTI that the company is aiming to grow revenue by five-fold to USD 500 million and increase global headcount by around 4-fold to 10,000 people by 2025.

“The vision is to scale our business to half a billion by 2025 and double down in our three core verticals BFSI (Banking and Financial Services, Insurance): TMT (Technology, Media and Telecom) and healthcare. We are deeply entrenched in digital product engineering, cloud and DevOps, data and AI, customer experience, cyber security, and design services,” Kaza said. He said that the company is consistently growing the business at industry leading growth rates anywhere between 35 to 50 per cent. **PTI**

Muthoottu Mini looks at 45% loan growth this fiscal

Mumbai: Kochi-based mid-sized gold loan player Muthoottu Mini Financiers is looking to grow its loan sales by over 45 per cent in this fiscal as it embarks on a faster expansion and also increasing per branch productivity as the economy returns to near normalcy from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Job losses due to the first three waves of the pandemic and the subsequent pick-up in economic activities have been driving demand for gold loans from individuals for personal requirements and small businesses for working capital, coupled with a massive spike in the bullion prices since the pandemic hit the world in March



2020. Muthoottu Mini, hailing from the Muthoot group, closed FY22 with over 25 per cent growth and an AUM of Rs 2,500 crore, which grew from Rs 1,994 crore in the previous fiscal.

The larger group entity Muthoot Finance is a listed company with over Rs 65,000

crore of AUM, up 11 per cent from FY21, while the other one Muthoot Fincorp is the third-largest player with around Rs 10,000 crore of live loans and the No 2 Manappuram Finance grew 11 per cent in FY22 to Rs 30,300 crore.

Muthoottu Mini had an average loan growth rate of 22 per cent in the three years to FY21, and 25 per cent in FY22 and hopes to add 45 per cent more new customers this fiscal. This industry normally counts only fresh loans as loan sales and not pledge renewal.

Muthoottu Mini Managing Director Mathew Muthoottu told PTI that he expects new loans sales to clip at 45 per cent this fiscal. **PTI**

PNB to rope in actuarial firm to find embedded value of CHOICE ahead of divestment in insurance JV

New Delhi: Punjab National Bank will select an actuarial firm on Monday for calculating the embedded value of insurance joint venture CHOICE, in which the state-owned bank has to divest its stake as per regulatory requirement.

The New Delhi-based lender will open financial bids on July 11, 2022 to select the actuarial firm.

At present, PNB has stakes in two insurance firms -- PNB MetLife India Insurance Company Limited (PNB MetLife) and Canara HSBC OBC Life Insurance Company Ltd (CHOICE).

PNB MetLife, a joint venture between MetLife International Holdings LLC (MIHL), Punjab National Bank



(PNB), M Pallonji and Company Pvt Ltd, Jammu & Kashmir Bank (JKB), and other investors, has been operational since 2001, with MIHL and PNB being the promoters of the company.

PNB also became a stakeholder in CHOICE after the erstwhile Oriental Bank of Commerce merged into it.

In March 2020, OBC and United Bank of India were amalgamated into PNB. As all

assets and liabilities of OBC were subsumed into PNB by virtue of such amalgamation, PNB became a shareholder of CHOICE to the extent of OBC's stake of 23 per cent.

Established in 2008, Canara HSBC Life Insurance Company is a joint venture between Canara Bank (51 per cent), HSBC Insurance (Asia Pacific) Holdings Limited (26 per cent) and Punjab National Bank (23 per cent).

HSBC's stake in CHOICE is held through INAH, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, which in turn, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of HSBC Holdings plc -- the holding company of the HSBC Group.

IBA seeks bids from advisory firms for designing leadership dev programme for PSBs

New Delhi: Industry body IBA has invited bids from advisory firms and institutes to design and deliver a leadership development programme for public sector banks (PSBs).

The training programme can be delivered through three modes -- online as e-learning modules, online through live webinars/meetings and

through in-person mode, a public notice said.

The objective is to develop future generation of leaders who are digitally savvy, strategic thinkers with capability to build highly collaborative teams and create customer-centric organisations that thrive in a very dynamic competitive environment, it said.

“The Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) has been requested by the Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) to appoint an Agency/Firm/Institution to design and deliver a leadership development programme for Public Sector Banks in India,” it said. **PTI**

Maruti Suzuki deploys twin-pronged strategy to enhance market share

New Delhi: Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) plans to protect and enhance its market share in the non-SUV space while expanding presence in the SUV segment, where it has been lagging behind the competition, as part of a twin-pronged strategy to safeguard its position in the auto sector, as per a senior company official.

The company currently has a market share of 67 per cent in the non-SUV space, its highest in two decades, but lacks muscle in the fast-growing SUV segment with overall market share hovering around 13 per cent.

“The objective seems to be clear, we need to protect and



enhance market share in the non-SUV segment while capturing more of SUV (share).It is very simple, clear and quite obvious goal,” MSI Senior Executive Director (Marketing and Sales) Shashank Srivastava told PTI in an interaction.

In the SUV segment, the company plans to launch new models, while in the non-SUV space comprising hatchbacks, sedans and vans, it aims to bring in new features, technology and aggressive design language, he added.

Asked if the company would also look at bringing a brand new entry-level car, he said: “It is a possibility but we have to finalise our plan. We will do anything to protect our market share.”

In the SUV space, MSI is already in the process of taking a slew of measures, including back-to-back product launches to cater to a range of customers across various emerging sub-segments. **PTI**

Supply chain constraints to continue affecting auto sector this year: Mercedes-Benz India

New Delhi: The semiconductor shortage issue and supply chain constraints that have plagued the auto industry are unlikely to be resolved this year and the situation may improve only in 2023, according to Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Martin Schwenk.

While demand for the company's products continues to be buoyant with order book size increasing, he said there is a concern over the global economic uncertainties and geopolitical crisis having an impact on India, thus putting a question mark over how things would be in the next six to 12 months. “The supply situation, unfortunately, has not improved. We still have short-



ages of semiconductors. We have congestion in the shipments and harbours. We have missing components in our production. So I would say unfortunately, the future remains very hard to predict as well,” Schwenk told PTI in an

interview. Elaborating on the impact of the issue, he said, “We have significant supply constraints still in our entire chain, which limits us in delivering as many cars as we would have wanted at the moment. **PTI**

DJOKER WINS 21st GRAND SLAM

Novak comes from a set down to beat Nick Kyrgios 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) to equal Sampras' mark of seven titles at All England Club

AP ■ LONDON

Novak Djokovic waited. He waited for Nick Kyrgios to lose focus and lose his way. Waited to find the proper read on his foe's big serves. Waited until his own level rose to the occasion.

Djokovic is not bothered by a deficit - in a game, a set, a match. He does not mind problem-solving. And at Wimbledon, for quite some time now, he does not get defeated.

Djokovic used his steady brilliance to beat the ace-delivering, trick-shot-hitting, constantly chattering Kyrgios 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (3) on Sunday for a fourth consecutive Wimbledon championship and seventh overall.

The top-seeded Djokovic ran his unbeaten run at the grass-court Grand Slam tournament to 28 matches and raised his career haul to 21 major trophies, breaking a tie with Roger Federer and moving just one behind Rafael Nadal's 22 for the most in the history of men's tennis.

Among men, only Federer, with eight, has won more titles at Wimbledon than Djokovic. In the professional era, only Federer was older (by less than a year) than the 35-year-old Djokovic when winning at the All England Club.

This comeback on a sun-filled afternoon followed those in the quarterfinals, when Djokovic erased a two-set deficit against No. 10 seed Jannik Sinner, and in the semifinals, when No. 9 Cam Norrie grabbed the opening set. In last year's title match at Wimbledon, Djokovic dropped the opening set. In the 2019 final, he erased two championship points against Federer.

There were two particularly key moments Sunday, ones that Kyrgios would not let go as he began engaging in running monologues, shouting at himself or his entourage (which does not include a full-time coach), earning a warning for cursing, finding reason to disagree with the chair umpire he fist-bumped before the match, and chucking a water bottle.

In the second set, with Djokovic serving at 5-3, Kyrgios got to love-40 - a trio of break points. But Kyrgios played a couple of casual returns, and Djokovic eventually held.

When that set ended, Kyrgios waved dismissively toward his box, sat



down and dropped his racket to the turf, then groused, to no one in particular: "It was love-40! Can it get any bigger or what?! Is that big enough for you?"

And then, in the third set, with Kyrgios serving at 4-all, 40-love, he again let a seemingly sealed game get away, with Djokovic breaking there.

The 40th-ranked Kyrgios was trying to become the first unseeded men's champion at Wimbledon since Goran Ivanisevic in 2001. Ivanisevic is now Djokovic's coach and was in the Centre Court guest box for the match.

Kyrgios, the 27-year-old Australian, had never had been past the quarterfinals in 29 previous Grand Slam appearances - and the last time he made it even that far was 7 1/2 years ago.

In some ways, he stole the show Sunday. He tried shots between his legs, hit some with his back to the net, pounded serves at up to 136 mph and produced 30 aces. He used an under-

EBDEN, PURCELL WIN MEN'S DOUBLES TITLE

AP ■ LONDON

Matthew Ebdon and Max Purcell defeated defending champions Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic — playing with a broken wrist — to win the Wimbledon men's doubles title on Saturday.

The 14th-seeded Australians came out on top 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/2) after more than four hours of action on Centre Court.

Ebdon and Purcell made the final after saving three match points in the first round and five more in their semi-finals.

They spent more than 20 hours



on court in winning the title.

Pavic had broken his right wrist in the semi-finals and played Saturday with the injury heavily strapped.

arm serve, then faked one later.

For all of the significant records and other factoids logged in the 560-page Wimbledon Compendium - including categories such as "ambidextrous players" or "runners-up who wore glasses in a final" - no mention is made of "underarm serves in a gentleman's final," but it seems safe to say that was a first.

Perhaps, in some ways, it would have been fitting for such a unique player to emerge as the champion at such a unique Wimbledon.

All players representing Russia or Belarus were banned by the All England Club because of the war in Ukraine; among the men that kept out of the field were No. 1-ranked Daniil Medvedev, the reigning U.S. Open champion, and No. 8 Andrey Rublev. In response, the WTA and ATP professional tennis tours took the unprecedented step of revoking all ranking points from Wimbledon.

There's more: Federer missed the tournament for the first time since the late 1990s because he is still recovering from a series of operations on his right knee. The No. 2 man in the rankings, Alexander Zverev, sat out after tearing ankle ligaments. Three of the top 20 seeded men, including 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini, pulled out of Wimbledon after it began because they tested positive for COVID-19.

And Nadal withdrew before he was supposed to face Kyrgios in the semi-finals, the first time since 1931 that a man gave walkover at Wimbledon in a semifinal or final.

As for Kyrgios, his talent is unmistakable. But over the years, he has drawn more notice for his preference for style over substance on court, his tempestuousness that has earned him ejections and suspensions, and his taste for the nightlife.

During the past two weeks alone, Kyrgios racked up \$14,000 in fines - one for spitting at a heckling spectator after a first-round victory, another for cursing during a wildly contentious win against No. 4 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in the third round - and caught flack for wearing a red hat and sneakers before or after matches at a place where all-white clothing is mandated. He and the world also learned that he is due in court in Australia to face an assault allegation.

Rybakina shrugs off Russia questions after Wimbledon triumph

AP ■ LONDON

Newly crowned Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina broke down in tears on Saturday after she was again confronted by questions over her Russian roots.

Rybakina, born in Moscow but representing Kazakhstan after switching allegiances in 2018, defeated Ons Jabeur in the women's final.

Her triumph came at a tournament where her Russian compatriots were banned following the invasion of Ukraine.

"I don't know what's going to happen. It's always some news, but I cannot do anything about this," said the 23-year-old when asked if the Russian government would be tempted to politicise her Grand Slam triumph.

"I'm playing for Kazakhstan a very long time. I represent them on the biggest tournaments, Olympics, which was a dream come true."

Russian tennis chief Shamil Tarpishev, however, hailed Rybakina's victory as a triumph for Russia, describing the player as "our product".

"It's very nice! Well done Rybakina! We win the Wimbledon tournament," Tarpishev was quoted as saying by Russian news agency, Ria Novosti.

Rybakina's parents live in Moscow. She has been reluctant throughout the tournament to elaborate on how much time she spends in the country.

When she was pressed further on Saturday and invited to condemn Russian President Vladimir Putin and the invasion, Rybakina pleaded for understanding.

"I didn't choose where I was born. People believed in me. Kazakhstan supported me so much."

"Even today I heard so much support. I saw the flags. So I don't know how to answer these questions."



Chelsea agree fee with Man City for Sterling

AP ■ LONDON

Raheem Sterling looks set to be the first major signing of the Todd Boehly era at Chelsea as according to media reports on Sunday they have agreed a fee with Manchester City.

Sky says the England international forward will cost £47.5 million (\$57.1 million) whilst the BBC believe it is worth up to £50m including add-ons.

New Chelsea chairman Boehly has thrust himself to the fore of transfer negotiations with the American also acting as interim sporting director in the post Roman Abramovich era.

Sterling's signing will endorse Boehly's high profile involvement as both Barcelona and Real Madrid were believed to be keen to buy him.

Sterling, 27, has already reportedly agreed personal terms and subject to a medical will sign a five year contract with the option of a further year.

Chelsea hope the formalities will be completed in time for Sterling -- who has been capped 77 times -- to join them on their pre-season tour to the United States.

Sterling is into the final year of his contract at City and will fill the void left by the departure of record signing Romelu



Lukaku's return on loan to Inter Milan -- just a year after splashing out £97 million on the Belgian striker.

Sterling joined City for £49m in 2015 from Liverpool and has won four Premier League titles among nine major trophies in his time there.

A key player in the early years of Pep Guardiola's reign at City, Sterling has scored 131 goals in 337 appearances for the English champions.

However, his regular place in the starting line-up at City has come increasingly under threat from the signing of Jack Grealish for a Premier League record £100 million last year, plus the emergence of Phil Foden from the club's academy.



Indian boxing contingent for the Commonwealth Games (CWG) poses for a photograph before leaving for Jordanstown, Northern Ireland, for a two week long preparatory camp ahead of the CWG 2022. The Indian team will leave for Birmingham on July 24.

PTI

Leclerc spoils Max's Spielberg party

AP ■ SPIELBERG

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc held off world champion Max Verstappen to win the Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday and reboot his world championship challenge.

Lewis Hamilton took third ahead of his Mercedes teammate George Russell in cars that had both needed hefty repairs after crashes in Friday qualifying.

This was Leclerc's third win of the year and Ferrari's first at the Red Bull Ring since Michael Schumacher in 2003.

After a series of disappointing results Leclerc was thrilled to finally get another win under his belt. He had to retain his composure, though, in the closing laps as he reported an issue with a sticking throttle pedal.



"I definitely needed that, to finally show we've got the pace in the car is incredible," said a relieved Leclerc.

Verstappen was far from disheartened despite failing to take the chequered flag in front of his 'orange army' of expectant 50,000 travelling Dutch fans. "I couldn't give them a win today but second isn't too bad," said the Red Bull driver who didn't leave the circuit empty handed after winning Saturday's sprint. Verstappen still has a comfortable lead in the overall standings -- leading Leclerc by 38 points at the halfway point of the championship.

Groenen & Cernoia fail Covid tests at Euro

AP ■ SEHFIELD

Veteran midfielders Jackie Groenen of the Netherlands and Italy's Valentina Cernoia were among players at Euro 2022 testing positive for Covid-19 on Sunday.

England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy, a substitute in the opening win against Austria, also tested positive and has left the squad. Groenen who was part of the Dutch team that won the last Euro's in 2017, collected her 88th cap playing the full match Saturday as the Dutch drew 1-1 with Sweden.

The Manchester United player "has tested positive for Covid and has isolated. She will be back once she tests negative," the Dutch team tweeted.

World Games: Verma, Jyothi win Bronze



PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

Miguel Becerra, who levelled the second end.

But Verma and Jyothi held their nerves to return strongly in the third end before slotting in a perfect final round to clinch it 157-156 in their Bronze medal playoff on Saturday.

According to an Archery Association of India statement, this was India's first ever medal at the World Games and for former World Cup Gold medallist Verma, this was his 50th podium finish at the international level.

Verma is now the only Indian archer to win medals at all stages of compound archery -- World Games, World Championship, World Cup Final, World Cup, Asian Games, Asian Championship.

Verma's individual campaign however ended in disappointment following his dream run that saw him eliminate world No. 1 and world champion Mike Schloesser of USA in the quarters.

Verma failed to overcome the semifinal hurdle, suffering a 141-143 loss to Jean Philippe Boulch, the French world No. 4 who is one place ahead of the Indian.

Then, in the bronze playoff he lost to lower-ranked Canadian Christopher Perkins 145-148.

Chico Aura captures Malaysia Masters

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo captured the Malaysia Masters badminton title on Sunday with a sensational upset after defeating Hong Kong star Angus Ng Ka-long in straight sets.

Chico Aura, ranked 45th in the world, outclassed favourite Ng, who was eyeing his second Malaysia title after his 2017 win.

The 24-year-old Indonesian triumphed over 28-year-old Ng 22-20, 21-15 in 45 minutes.

The victory in Malaysia is Chico Aura's biggest career title.

During the first game, Chico Aura faced a tense session with Ng who is world number



13. Both players traded point for point until Chico Aura found the cutting edge when it mattered for the lead.

But Ng did well to match Chico Aura in the second game,

until his Indonesian opponent moved up a gear with excellent shot placements in succession for a strong 15-10 lead.

After that it was home bound for Chico Aura who

sealed the second set with an amazing cross court flick that left Ng stumped.

The Indonesian, who only made it to the main draw following the withdrawal of several top names including Viktor Axelsen and Anders Antonsen, said it was a "dream come true" to win the tournament.

"I remained focused from start to finish and I think that played a big part. I'm proud of myself, and this victory will be an inspiration for me to aim for more success in the future," he told reporters. The women's singles saw South Korea's rising star An Se-young crowned champion after she breezed past China's Chen Yufei 21-17, 21-5 in one-sided final.

Shooting WC: Arjun, Paarth qualify for 10m Air Rifle final

PTI ■ CHANGWON

India's Arjun Babuta, Paarth Makhija qualified for the men's 10m Air Rifle final at the ISSF Shooting World Cup here on Sunday.

Arjun scored an impressive 630.5 in the 60-shot qualification stage to finish second in the 53-strong field. Paarth, on the other hand, finished fifth with a score of 628.4.

The third Indian shooter in the Men's 10m Air Rifle event, Shahu Tushar shot 624.4 to finish 30th.

Veteran Israeli shooter Sergey Richter topped the chart with a score of 631.6.

Shooters from Australia, Austria, Korea, Thailand and the USA claimed the other five qualifying spots, prominent among them being Tokyo Olympics Silver medallist American Lucas Kozieniesky.



The finals of the men's 10m Air Rifle event are scheduled on Monday.

In the women's 10m Air Rifle event, it was a disappointment for the Indian shooters as none of them could make the cut for the finals.

It was the 21-year-old Mehuli Ghosh who came closest with a score of 628.7 to finish 11th in the field, but she lost out on a qualifying spot by just 0.1 point.

Senior debutant Ramita shot 627.4 to finish 17th while former world number one and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan finished 24th with a score 626.3.

Meanwhile, Indian shooters participating in the Trap and Air Pistol events will kick-off their campaigns on Monday.

India has fielded a 32-member strong contingent in the Changwon World Cup.

More than 432 athletes from 44 countries are taking part in this edition of the World Cup.

SKY'S 117 GOES IN VAIN AS ENGLAND WIN

PTI ■ NOTTINGHAM

Suryakumar Yadav gave a 360 degree masterclass enroute to a special hundred but England pulled off a consolatory 17-run win over India in the third T20 International here on Sunday.

David Malan made a sublime 77 off 39 balls as England put India's second string attack to sword to finish with a mammoth 215 for seven.

Surykumar (117 off 55 balls) kept India in the hunt with his classy effort but lacked support from other batters while chasing the huge target. India's innings ended at 198 for nine in 20 overs.

India sealed the three-match series 2-1, having won in Southampton and Birmingham.

India were on the backfoot at the start of the run chase, struggling to 31 for three in five overs.

Openers Rohit Sharma (11) and Rishabh Pant (1) perished cheaply and it was another failure for Virat Kohli (11), who was caught at cover while trying to manufacture a third consecutive hit after collecting a four and a straight six off David Willey.

Suryakumar brought India back into the game with a 119-run stand with Shreyas Iyer (28 off 23) who was a spectator to his partner's brilliance for the major part of the partnership.

As he often does, Suryakumar toyed with the opposition bowlers and picked his shots all around the ground.

The highlights of his glorious innings was the two lofted

square drives off pacers Richard Gleeson and Chris Jordan that went all the way for six.

He became the fifth Indian to score a hundred in T20 Internationals by opening the face of the bat and guiding a low full toss off Willey between backward point and short third man.

His innings comprised 14 fours and half a dozen sixes.

Suryakumar single-handedly brought the equation down to gettable 66 off 30 balls before running out of partners at the other end.

Earlier, skipper Jos Buttler (18 off 9 balls) and Jason Roy (27 off 26) helped England reach 52 for 1 in six overs. Malan and Liam Livingstone (42 not out off 29) then shared an entertaining 84-run partnership to set the platform for a massive total.

Having already sealed the series, India rested their front-line bowlers in Jasprit Bumrah, in-form Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Yuzvendra Chahal, besides star all-rounder Hardik Pandya.

The Indian next gen were taken to the cleaners by a power-packed England batting lineup which had disappointed in the first two games. Ravi Bishnoi's effort of two for 30 in four overs was the only silver lining in an otherwise ordinary bowling performance.

Buttler punished the inexperienced Uman Malik during his brief stay, collecting two fours and a six off the Indian's opening over that yielded 17 runs.

Avesh Khan foxed Buttler with a slower ball that he played



on to the stumps.

After Roy was caught behind off Malik, Malan changed gears and played proper cricketing shots that he is known for.

He comfortably swept the spinners for maximums and was quick on the pull and cut against the pacers.

Out of the five sixes, Malan's slog sweep off Ravindra Jadeja over square leg and pick up shot over cow corner off a low full toss from Avesh stood out.

As he often does, Livingstone dealt in sixes as he hit four of them and alongside Harry Brook (19 off) and Chris Jordan (11 off 3) fired England past 200.

Livingstone got a life when

he was dropped by Virat Kohli in the deep.

England amassed as many as 129 runs in the last 10 overs.

Malik leaked the most runs for India, ending with figures of one for 56 in four overs.

IF I KEEP PERFORMING...

Delighted to have put up a brilliant display against India on debut, England quick Richard Gleeson feels if he keeps performing he might get a shot at playing the T20 World Cup later this year.

Gleeson dismissed the much-revered trio of India skipper Rohit Sharma, star batter Virat Kohli and wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant with his fifth, seventh and eighth deliveries in the second T20I, which the tourists won by 49 runs.

The 34-year-old finished with impressive figures of 3/15.

"Great to make my debut, but it's all about winning games of cricket really, at the end of the day. So it's disappointing to lose, but on a personal note, great start," Gleeson said at the post-match press conference.

With the T20 World Cup around the corner, Gleeson, who started playing professional cricket at 27, hopes he can make the cut for the marquee event.

"You want to play in the big occasions, don't you? So, yeah, why not? I'll just look towards the next game and go from there.

"(England selection) wasn't anywhere near my radar. It was just to play the highest standard that I could. I just want to keep playing cricket and enjoying it, for as long as I can. Who knows? If I keep performing, anything could happen."

After putting up a 171-run target, the Indian bowlers, led by Bhuvneshwar Kumar, bowled beautifully to bundle out the hosts for 121 and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

"I think maybe they (India) were a little bit over-par.

"And then they started well with the ball. So that's always going to put us on the back foot, and they bowled well. But that can be the way T20 cricket goes at times.

"You play the game hard, so sometimes you come off, sometimes you don't. It's just you've got to take the rough with the smooth if you're going to play that way, and I don't think we'll be taking a backwards step in the next game."

The right-arm had suffered a career-threatening stress fracture of the lower back in 2020. Reflecting on the injury, Gleeson said "It wasn't me contemplating retirement. It's something that would have been forced upon me.

"(The recovery) was a long, slow process. Unfortunately, because of my age, it takes a little bit longer to heal from things like that. But (playing again) makes it all worthwhile."

India have a 'real powerhouse of a T20 team' available: Giles

PTI ■ LONDON

India have "a real powerhouse of a T20 team" available at their disposal that looks strong from top to bottom with an equally capable bench, feels former England spinner Ashley Giles.

India cantered to a 49-run win in the second T20I against hosts England, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

"It's a real powerhouse T20 team India have available," Giles told 'ESPNcricinfo'.

The visitors had won the previous T20I in similar fashion. Without the likes of star players Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant in the team, India had



notched a 50-run win in the series opener.

"India look a really strong unit

from the top to the bottom. If you look at the changes from the first T20I to this one (second T20I). You could have easily played that team and the result would have been similar," Giles said.

"You look at that bowling attack, it was incredibly strong."

In both T20s, India showed a start-to-finish aggressive intent despite losing wickets, which ultimately formed the cornerstone of the wins.

"You got to keep pressuring bowlers. Some time bowlers can have their days but no matter how many wickets you lose you have to keep going and get as many runs as you can and this India side is more the capable of doing that."

Dhoni interacts with India players at Edgbaston

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

World Cup-winning captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was seen interacting with the India players after the team's series-clinching win in the second T20 International against England here.

Rohit Sharma's inspirational leadership and an aggressive brand new approach saw India outclass England by 49 runs in the second match to seal the rubber on Saturday.

After the game Dhoni, who was in attendance at Edgbaston, interacted

with the likes of Ishan Kishan and Yuzvendra Chahal.

The pictures of the interaction were uploaded on Twitter by the BCCI and wicket-keeper-batter Rishabh Pant too posted a photo of him with the legendary former captain.

"Always all ears when the great @msdhoni talks!" the BCCI tweeted alongside a photo of the discussion that took place in the dressing room.

Dhoni is in the United Kingdom and was recently seen enjoying a match at the Wimbledon.



Govt bats for cricket tie on Aug 22 as part of I-Day celebrations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has sent a proposal to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to organise a cricket match on August 22 between India and the rest of the world as part of celebrations to mark 75 years of India's independence, sources said.

The sources indicated that the Ministry of Culture, which sent the proposal, is in talks with BCCI officials to try and rope in top Indian players as well as popular cricketers from abroad to play the match as part of the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav campaign.

BCCI sources said at this point of time, the proposal is still being discussed as there are a lot of "operational and logistical elements" associated with procuring the services of international players.

"We have received a proposal from the government to organise a cricket match between India XI and World XI on August 22. For a rest of the world squad, we would need at least 13-14 international players and their availability is something that we need to check on," a source said.

He added during that time, English domestic cricket would be underway and the Caribbean Premier League would also begin. The BCCI is checking if international players would have to be compensated financially for their participation.

As far as services of international cricketers are concerned, top BCCI officials will be in Birmingham for the ICC annual conference (July 22-26), where they might speak to officials of other boards to release a few of their players for the match in India.

Getting top stars of the Indian team won't be a problem, the sources said.

BCCI sources stated that all Indian players will be requested and they are likely to join the squad for the match. The cause of concern at this time is to ensure that the quality of the World XI team is top-notch, they said.

As of now, it is unclear whether the match will have the status of an international T20 or a friendly.

While it is yet to be confirmed, the match, if conducted, is likely to be held at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground.



Somerset set new records in 191-run T20 rout of Derbyshire

AP ■ LONDON

South Africa's Rilee Rossouw led the way as Somerset enjoyed a record-breaking 191-run win over Derbyshire in an English T20 Blast quarter-final on Saturday.

Rossouw top-scored with 93 off just 36 balls as southwest county Somerset posted a colossal 265-5 -- the highest total in English domestic T20 history -- in front of their own fans at Taunton.

That surpassed the 261-2 the Birmingham Bears, as Warwickshire are known in T20 cricket, made against Nottinghamshire last month.

Derbyshire, faced with a huge chase, collapsed to 74 all out inside 12 overs with former Australia fast bowler Peter Siddle taking 3-10 for Somerset.

The 191-run margin of victory was the highest by runs in a T20 match in England.

Former Proteas international Rossouw, 32, smashed seven sixes and eight fours to become Somerset's most prolific scorer in a T20 season with 600 runs at an average of 50,

with a strike rate of 197.36.

Tom Banton weighed in with 73 from 41 balls, while Tom Lammonby struck 31 from nine.

Amid all the blazing hitting, George Scrimshaw, recently called up to the second-string England Lions, took a hugely creditable 2-16 and it might have been a different story had the towering Derbyshire quick bowled his four overs straight through from the start of the innings.

By contrast, Derbyshire leg-spinner Mattie McKiernan went for 82 in his four overs, the most expensive figures in men's T20 cricket history, including 36 off one over which saw Rossouw strike five sixes and a four -- with the barrage of boundaries only interrupted by a no-ball off the fourth delivery.

Defeat was tough on a Derbyshire side who have made huge strides this season under Mickey Arthur, their much-travelled South African coach.

Victory meant Somerset joined Yorkshire, Hampshire and Lancashire in next week's finals day at Edgbaston.

Bracewell's heroics help NZ win 1st ODI

AP ■ DUBLIN

New Zealand were done and dusted at 120 for 5, before out came Michael Bracewell and slammed 127 off 82 balls to get his side over the line. The Kiwi hammered 4, 4, 6, 4, 6 in the final over of the run chase to help his side beat Ireland by 1 wicket in the first ODI of three-match series.

Earlier, Harry Tector struck a maiden one-day international century as Ireland posted 300-9 in their series opener against New Zealand on Sunday.

The 22-year-old converted his fourth successive half-century at this level -- and eighth in his last 11 ODI innings -- to a score of 113 off just 117 balls, including 14 fours and three sixes.

His latest impressive innings at this level delighted home fans at the Malahide ground near Dublin.

Tector came in with Ireland in trouble at 26-2 in the seventh over against New Zealand, runners-up in the last two men's ODI World Cup finals.



Ton-up Chandimal puts Sri Lanka ahead in 2nd Test

AP ■ GALLE

Former captain Dinesh Chandimal hit a gritty century to steer Sri Lanka to a lead of 67 on Sunday and push Australia on to the backfoot on day three of the second Test.

The hosts reached 431 for six at stumps after the Australian spinners hit back with late wickets at the Galle International Stadium.

Chandimal, on 118, and Ramesh Mendis, on seven, were batting at the close of play on a pitch which held firm and witnessed a brief spell of morning and afternoon rain.

Chandimal's 133-run fifth-wicket stand with debutant Kamindu Mendis, who made 61, remained the highlight of the day's play as Sri Lanka surpassed Australia's first innings total of 364.

"I thought Australia bowled real-

ly well," the Galle-born Kamindu told reporters.

"Loose balls were rare. Good support from Chandi. The main idea of us was to rotate the strike and pick up singles. Then we started picking up boundaries."

The 23-year-old all-rounder said, "The wicket has lot of assistance for spinners today compared to the first two days. Our plan is to get a decent lead and put pressure on Australia."

Chandimal was lucky to survive a reprieve on 30 when Mitchell Starc had him caught behind only for the umpire to deny the call but ultra-edge showed a spike when the ball passed the bat.

Australia were left frustrated as they had exhausted their three umpire reviews and Chandimal went on to tire out the bowlers.

Spinners Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Swepson and left-arm quick Starc



worked hard to claim two wickets each.

Chandimal reached his 13th Test century and second against Australia as he screamed in delight and raised his bat to an applauding dressing room.

Leg-spinner Swepson soon struck to send back the left-handed Kamindu, who survived a missed stumping on 43, bowled and Lyon took down wicket-keeper-batsman Niroshan Dickwella for five.

But Chandimal and Ramesh, who was given out caught behind and successfully reviewed the call in his favour, saw the day through.

Earlier another veteran batsman Angelo Mathews contributed with 52 before falling to Starc's left-arm pace in the second session.

Australia led the two-match series 1-0 after a crushing opening win inside three days at the same venue on a vicious turner.