

OPINION 6
GULF NATIONS MUST
AVOW INDIA'S STEP**WORLD 8**
DRONE STRIKE HITS RUSSIAN
REFINERY NEAR UKRAINE**MONEY 10**
MARKETS FALL AFTER 2-DAY
BREATHING AMID WEAK GLOBAL CUES

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY JUNE 23, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹4



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Uddhav offers to quit as Maha CM & Sena chief

In signed letter to Guv, 34 MLAs reaffirm trust in Shinde leadership

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After 34 rebel MLAs submitted a signed letter to the Governor "re-affirming" that their leader Eknath Shinde "is and continues" to be leader of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said here on Wednesday that he was prepared to quit both his posts as the CM and the party chief if the rebels were to meet him and express their lack of confidence in his leadership.

Within hours after the rebel Sena MLAs, led by their leader Minister Eknath Shinde, flew from Surat to Guwahati by a special chartered aircraft, a letter was submitted on their behalf to the office of Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari, Deputy Speaker and Secretary of the State Assembly, declaring that Shinde continues to be the leader of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party (SSLP). The resolution that the rebel MLAs submitted to the Governor in the form of a letter carried the signatures of 34 rebel MLAs.

On part, Sena president and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray played an emotional card as he went live on Facebook and spoke to the people of Maharashtra, wherein he made it clear: "I have no greed for power. Nor would I remain stuck to the chair. Let the rebel MLAs come and tell me that I am not good enough to hold this position. I will quit as both



Maharashtra CM and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray virtually addresses the people of the State, in Mumbai on Wednesday PTI

the Chief Minister and the party chief. You all know that despite my lack of administrative experience, my government performed extremely well during the Covid-19 period."

In his first reaction on the rebellion that his rocked the Shiv Sena after his number-two minister and senior party Eknath Shinde took away a group of 30-odd party MLAs, including three ministers, to a hotel at Surat in Gujarat, Uddhav said: "But why go to Surat or some other places to say this... He (Shinde) could have just come to me and talked to me as what he had in his mind. I would have quit my post immediately."

Uddhav said that both the NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Congress president Sonia Gandhi had supported right through and continued to support him. "But, what can I do if my own people do not want me to continue as the CM. I am ready to resign as the CM. Let the rebel MLAs come and tell me that they do not want this position. I will quit as both

Uddhav leaves CM house with bag & baggage

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday night moved from his official residence in south Mumbai to family home in suburban Bandra, hours after offering to quit the top post amid rebellion by Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde.

The CM moved out of "Varsha", his official residence, for Matoshree, the private bungalow of the Thackeray family, amid high drama as the political crisis that has rocked his Government after Shinde's revolt two days ago, showed no signs of ebbing.

Earlier, bags containing his personal belongings were seen being loaded in cars.

2 MLAs run away from Shinde's Surat camp, 1 recounts heroic escape

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a drama that unfolded after senior leader Eknath Shinde staged a massive rebellion and virtually spirited away 30-odd party MLAs to Surat in BJP-ruled Gujarat, two Shiv Sena MLAs — who had been allegedly "kidnapped" by the rebel camp — returned to Maharashtra on Wednesday, less than 36 hours after they were taken away by the rebel camp members.

On their return, the two Sena MLAs — Nitin Deshmukh from Akola and Kailas Patil from Osmanabad — said they were "misled and taken to Surat against their wishes" by the rebels group late on Monday, but they succeeded in escaping from the watchful eyes of those managing the rebel Shinde camp.

Both Patil and Deshmukh said that they were much with Chief Minister and Sena president Uddhav Thackeray and that there was no question of their indulging in rebellion or joining the rebel faction led by Eknath Shinde.

Recounting the ordeal he faced and sensational escape that he made from the rebel Shinde camp, Deshmukh claimed he was "kidnapped" from Mumbai and then taken

to Surat along with other rebel Sena MLAs who landed at Le Meridien Hotel at Surat on the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday.

Talking to the media in Nagpur where he landed after his dramatic escape from the Shinde-led Sena rebel camp, Deshmukh recalled: "Around 3 am on Tuesday, I managed to escape from the hotel. I went out of the hotel to hitch a ride from some passing vehicles. I was pursued by 100-odd Gujarat policemen who prevented me from sitting in any vehicle and they forcibly took me to some hospital."

"At the hospital, the doctors performed some medical procedure on my body, tried to prove that I had 'suffered a heart attack' and gave him some injection, though I was perfectly healthy," he said.

"They treated me like some terrorist... Somehow I managed to flee from the hospital and here I am — absolutely fit and fine. I have no heart issues as the police contended," Deshmukh said.

Earlier, Deshmukh's wife had lodged a missing complaint with the police that she suspected threats to his life as he was not available on phone after 7 pm on Monday.

Over 1,000 killed in deadliest Af quake



In this photo released by a set-run news agency Bakhtar, Afghans look at destruction caused by an earthquake in the province of Paktika, eastern Afghanistan, on Wednesday AP/PTI

AP ■ KABUL

A powerful earthquake struck a rugged, mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan early Wednesday, killing at least 1,000 people and injuring 1,500 more in the country's deadliest quake in two decades, the state-run news agency reported. Officials warned that the already grim toll may still rise.

In the remote area near the Pakistani border, residents searched for survivors and the dead by digging with their bare hands through the rubble

of collapsed stone and mud-brick houses, according to footage shown by news agency Bakhtar. It was not immediately clear if major rescue equipment was being sent — or even if it could reach the area.

The extent of the destruction among the villages tucked among the mountains was still not known. Ruttled roads — difficult to pass in the best of times — may have sustained significant damage, and a UNICEF official said landslides from recent rains have made access even more difficult.

At least 2,000 homes were destroyed in the region, where on average every home has seven or eight people living in it, the UN Deputy Special Representative to Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told reporters.

The disaster posed a major test for Afghanistan's Taliban government, which seized power nearly 10 months ago as the US and its NATO allies were carrying out their withdrawal from the country and has been largely shunned by the world community since.

Related reports on P9

Ahead of Rath Yatra

Covid vaccination on war footing in Puri

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As a precautionary measure, the authorities have ordered for Covid-19 vaccination on war footing in Puri ahead of the Rath Yatra scheduled on July 1.

"In view of possible congregation of devotees in large numbers for the Rath Yatra, the Health Department has decided to scale up the vaccination drive against Covid-19 in Puri," informed Public

Health Director Niranjana Mishra on Wednesday.

The authorities directed the Puri district administration to administer vaccines in a special camp to those who have not been vaccinated with the second dose or precaution dose. "As stated by the WHO, Covid-19 infection is there and it will remain present. The sporadic outbreak will also occur time and again. However, the number of hospitalisations due to the infection is very less

than the active cases in Odisha. As we have successfully conducted a massive vaccination drive, the intensity of the infection has declined significantly," Mishra said. "Since the diseases like malaria, diarrhoea and dengue usually rise during monsoon as Covid cases are on rise in the country, we will hold door-to-door surveillance to identify patients afflicted with Covid, malaria, dengue and TB during the season," he added.

Heavy rains in 12 dists predicted

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) Regional here on Wednesday issued a yellow warning for heavy rainfall in 12 districts of the State in next 24 hours.

As per the IMD, the alert has been issued for Kandhamal, Ganjam, Nayagarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Angul, Cuttack, Dhenkanal and Khordha districts.

At present, a cyclonic circulation lies over East Jharkhand and adjoining north Odisha between 1.5 km and 5.8 km above mean sea level tilting, the IMD said.

On Friday, heavy rainfall is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Bargarh and Deogarh.

Thunderstorms with lightning are very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Sundargarh, Deogarh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Kandhamal, Kalahandi and Balangir.

Puri corridor project HC squashes all petitions

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Laying all speculations relating to the Shreemandir Heritage Corridor project around the Jagannath Temple in Puri to rest, the Orissa High Court on Wednesday quashed all the petitions filed in connection with the construction works undertaken by the State Government. The court also dismissed the Public Interest Litigations (PILs) along with other intervening petitions regarding the corridor project. The court observed that there was no relevance of hearing the petitions after the directive of the Supreme Court. Earlier, the Supreme Court had dismissed two petitions filed alleging illegal excavation and construction activities around the Jagannath Temple. Terming the petitions as 'frivolous', the apex court dismissed the petitions and imposed a fine Rs 1 lakh each on the petitioners.

JD(U), BJD back Murmu for Prez race



Jharkhand ex-Governor and NDA's Presidential candidate Draupadi Murmu sweeps at Purnandeswar Shiv temple in Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj, on Wednesday PTI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the BJP named a tribal leader and former Jharkhand Governor Draupadi Murmu as its Presidential candidate, the Janata Dal(U) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) extended her their support, giving her more than a clear edge against Opposition candidate Yashwant Sinha.

Murmu is expected to file her nomination on June 24, accompanied by the BJP's top leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced his party JD(U)'s backing to Murmu, who could be the first tribal and the second woman to occupy the top Constitutional post. Nitish's support to Murmu

is crucial since both the JD(U) and the BJP are engaged in a bitter tussle in Bihar.

Nitish, who took diverse positions in the Presidential election in the past, has expressed "delight" over the announcement of Murmu as the NDA's presidential poll candidate.

In a statement, Nitish said he received the news over the telephone from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday night, whom he thanked for choosing a "tribal woman" for the country's highest Constitutional office.

"Many thanks to the Prime Minister for choosing a tribal woman who has proven her mettle as a Minister in Odisha and during her gubernatorial stint in Jharkhand," said Nitish.

'Vote for 'daughter of Odisha'



Naveen urges MLAs

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday appealed to the MLAs of the State cutting across party lines to elect "the daughter of Odisha Shrimati Draupadi Murmu to the country's high-

est office (President).

He made the appeal through a tweet. Murmu profusely thanked Patnaik for supporting her candidature.

Before leaving for New Delhi on Thursday, Murmu arrived in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday amidst tight security. BJP State leaders accorded her a warm reception at the MCL guesthouse.

Naveen meets Pope Francis in Vatican

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik met His Holiness Pope Francis in Vatican City on Wednesday. He was accompanied by his 5T Secretary VK Pandian.

Patnaik expressed his pleasure meeting His Holiness and thanked him for his warm audience. He wished the Pope good health and a long life.

On behalf of Odisha and its people, Patnaik presented His Holiness a Pattachitra painting which depicts the "Tree of Life".

Many priests and sisters from India, who were at the Vatican, were happy to see Patnaik and wished him well.

Notably, the World Food



Programme (WFP) has extended an invitation to Patnaik to visit its headquarters in Rome and share the transformative initiatives of Odisha in the fields of food security and disaster management.

Patnaik will meet WFP Executive Director David Beasley and have detailed discussions on Odisha's partnership with the

WFP and future projects which will further help the State in ensuring food security in a sustainable manner.

Further, Patnaik will also meet the Odia diaspora from various parts of Europe. He will discuss the possible ways to engage with the diaspora in promoting the art and culture of Odisha and also enabling them

to partner in the State's transformational journey.

On his way back, Naveen will meet investors from the Middle East and adjoining regions in Dubai. He will extend an invitation to the potential investors to come and invest in Odisha and assure them all support and facilitation by the State Government. A high-level industrial delegation from Odisha will be present during the investors' meet. Patnaik will meet the Odia diaspora from the Middle East in Dubai and discuss with them Odisha's transformational journey over the last two decades and invite them to partner with the State Government. The CM is scheduled to return to Odisha on June 30.

Draupadi's political rise significant

From small town Councillor to Prez candidate Naveen happy over BJP's choice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has expressed his happiness over the BJP's selection of Draupadi Murmu as the NDA candidate for the post of President.

Patnaik said she was glad when Prime Minister Modi had mentioned about Murmu's choice for the top post during their recent meeting in New Delhi.

Notably, former Jharkhand Governor Murmu is the first woman tribal leader to con-



test for the country's highest Constitutional post. As a Governor, she was the first tribal woman.

After she completed her tenure as Governor, she left

the top post is considered to be a BJP strategy to make an impact on the tribal community.

Murmu was a two-time MLA and a Minister in Odisha before being appointed as the Jharkhand Governor. Her five-year term as Governor was to end on May 18, 2020 but was automatically extended due to non-appointment of a new Governor due to the Covid pandemic. Murmu, who was born on June 20, 1958 in a Santhal family, worked as an Assistant Teacher at the Sri Aurobindo Integral Education and Research, Rairangpur, and as a Junior Assistant in the State Irrigation Department. She began her political career in 1997. She was elected as a Councillor of Rairangpur in 1997.

Draupadi as Prez nominee 'Modi's best reward to Odisha'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The choice of Draupadi Murmu as the NDA candidate for the post of President of the country is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "the best reward" for Odisha, said BJP State president Samir Mohanty here on Wednesday.

He told a news conference that Modi during his eight years of rule has done a lot for Odisha. Modi has been including adequate numbers of Ministers from Odisha in his Ministry. Besides, many Odias are now occupying various other top posts in the country. The Union Government has also accorded due recognition to the Odisha's Paika Bidroh, Mohanty said.

Yoga panacea for stressful life: CRPF IG



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The 8th International Yoga day was celebrated at GC CRPF Campus, Bhubaneswar on Tuesday morning.

IG Odisha Sector CRPF SK Mohanty graced the occasion as the chief guest and also attended Yoga session with other force personnel of the CRPF campus.

Addressing the participants, Mohanty spoke at length re-

garding the importance yoga in nourishing physical and mental well-being and how it helped in difficult Covid times for maintaining a healthy body and mind of most of force personnel.

He also spoke about the importance of yoga as a panacea to eliminate stress in the life of force personnel due to their nature of duties and stressful life they live.

He concluded by emphasiz-

ing that all force personnel should embrace Yoga in their life and inspire their family members to do so.

On the occasion, CRPF troopers participated in an awareness drive in the length and breadth of Odisha with the message 'Yoga for Humanity' including in Bhubaneswar, Konark, Puri and remote places of Nuapada, Kalahandi and Kandhamal districts.

Singh takes over as I& PR Secy

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Senior IAS officer Sanjay Kumar Singh has assumed charge of Principal Secretary to the Information and Public Relation Department. Officials of the department including Director Indramani Tripathy, Director (Technical) Surendra Nath Paridan and Joint Secretary Bishnupriya Sahu welcomed Singh.

Later in the day, Singh reviewed works of different sections and discussed with officials. He asked the officials to



ensure that the Rath Yatra telecast is given high priority and underlined the need for telecast of the event through various spiritual channels.

Rs 200-cr EV fraud: Victims lodge plaint with EOW

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A fraudster of Koraput district in Odisha has allegedly duped more than 20 businessmen of several States of the country of Rs 200 crore on the pretext of providing them franchises for electric vehicles (EVs). He is identified as Prabhat Kumar Nahak.

The fraud came to light when the victims lodged a

complaint with the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday.

"I have been duped to the tune of Rs 30 lakh by Prabhat Nahak. I had transferred the payment to him in September 2021. However, I have not got the electric vehicles yet," said an Uttar Pradesh businessman Lokesh Bhandari.

"We have lodged the com-

plaint with the EOW and are hopeful that the fraudster will be arrested and we will get back our money," Bhandari said.

Reports said the Nahak posing as an official of different electric vehicle brands, convinced different businessmen from Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to provide them franchises for selling the products.

Prabhat then asked them to deposit some amount into an account towards dealer registration charges.

However, no dealerships were awarded after three years following the transfer of the money. The businessmen could neither get electric vehicles to sell, nor could they get back their money. Then they realised that they had been duped by the fraudster.

AIIMS celebrates Yoga Day



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Yoga is one of the most precious gifts of India to the world. It has an immense impact on human society. And pandemic Covid has

proved the importance of yoga for human existence. Yoga should be an integral part of life, said AIIMS Bhubaneswar Director Prof Mukesh Tripathi on the International Yoga Day.

The AIIMS Bhubaneswar celebrated the day with much vigour. Senior doctors, nursing officers, students and employees also participated in the programme and practised yoga.

Notably, the AIIMS Bhubaneswar has been taking all steps to promote Aayush among people with a dedicated department being functional for the purpose.

On city outskirts Rs 50L ganja seized by STF; 1 held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Special Task Force (STF) of the Crime Branch seized eight quintals of ganja from a truck on the outskirts of the city and arrested two persons in this connection on Wednesday. The estimated market value of the seized contraband is more than Rs 50 lakh. Following intelligence inputs, a STF team conducted the raid and intercepted the truck on National Highway-16 near Pitapali.

During a search of the truck which was carrying snack items, the contraband was found concealed in a secret chamber of the vehicle. The driver and the helper of the

truck were arrested from the spot as they couldn't produce any valid authority in support of possession of the contraband.

The STF has registered a case and further investigation was ongoing. This is the second incident of this kind recently in which such a huge quantity of ganja was seized by the STF while being trafficked.

On June 4, the agency had detected an inter-State narcotics trafficking racket and seized more than one tonne (1000+ kg) near Tomando while being transported from Koraput to Jharkhand and Bihar. One accused was arrested in connection with the incident.

CM nod for 663 IR Battalion posts

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday approved creation of 663 posts for three India Reserve Battalions (IRBs) in the State. As per a release from the Chief Minister's Office, each IRB will have 221 new posts at different levels.

The list of the new posts includes Deputy Commandant (1), Havildar Major (18), Havildar (23), Constable

(154), Inspector (WT) (1), Sub Inspector (WT) (2), Havildar (WT) (4), Constable (WT) (13), Head Clerk (1), Medical Officer (1), Pharmacist (2) and Staff Nurse (2).

This apart, each IRB will have 44 new posts as support staffs.

The CMO statement further mentioned that the new support staffs' positions would be filled up through outsourcing. A total of 132 new posts would be filled up in the three IRBs.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Wrong presentation cause of trouble over Agnipath

Agnipath is perhaps the best youth-friendly scheme by the Indian Government that takes care of myriad issues and anxieties plaguing the nation, particularly related to unemployment and poverty. But unfortunately, the super brains in charge of disseminating critical public information are plain pinheads, for sure. They have shown a piece of diamond in such poor light as never to be even perceived, let alone seen to be appreciated as intended. More foolishly, some of the state authorities keep saying meaningless that the whole idea has been finalised after a thorough study of such schemes elsewhere in the world. The truth is such a scheme exists nowhere else. Agnipath is just most uniquely magnificent. Some other countries have de jure conscription schemes wherein young men and women are expected to serve in the military for a particular period, failing which they have to land in jail or pay a huge fine or suffer both depending on the extent of defiance.

There are at least fifteen great



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

countries, including Norway, Switzerland, Brazil, South Korea and the tiny city state Singapore, where military training or exposure is mandatory. Interestingly, though military service is de jure in the US, it is hardly enforced these days. The law was very strong during the Vietnam War between 1955 and 1975. Incidentally, on April 28, 1967, the 25-year-old famed boxer Muhammad Ali denied his call for military service citing religious reasons. As punishment, Ali was convicted of draft evasion, stripped of his heavyweight title, suspended

from boxing, sentenced to five years in prison and fined \$10,000. The US has six branches of military service: Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Space Force. The requirements to join are similar for all six. The main differences are in age limits, test scores and fitness levels. Men and women meet different fitness standards. The US requires all able-bodied males aged 18-25 to register with the Selective Service, meaning they could be drafted into military service if needed.

Males in Brazil are required to serve 12 months of military service upon their 18th birthday. Exemptions are for health reasons. And if you are studying at university, service can be delayed. Switzerland has mandatory military service in the Swiss Army for all able-bodied males, who are conscripted when they reach the age of majority though women may volunteer for any position. Most countries with de jure military service only conscript men; only a very few conscript women. Norway, Sweden, North Korea, Israel, and Eritrea conscript both men and

women. Norway and Sweden have a gender-neutral conscription system where men and women are conscripted to serve equal terms.

The foolish India Government wilted under the ferocity of the countrywide agitations and hurriedly announced a clutch of amendments and quotas to defuse the situation without once realising that it is only poor communication that is making a great thing look suspect. So, one hundred questions are arising in the minds of the young people found to be easy target for the opposition camps that easily trigger violent agitations. The political masters of the enormously populated India have failed to figure out what exact schemes should work best to create employment for many who haven't had the scope or willingness to train for becoming engineers, doctors, teachers or administrators. In the developed Western nations, livelihood is never the issue; in lesser countries like Brazil or Indonesia, the military is considered the best domain to accommodate the helpless youth which placates the angry youth and emboldens the uniformed body

that protects citizens.

The Indian scenario is way different. There is hardly any choice left for the job-seeking youths. The military, which essentially means the defence forces, is a preferred domain of livelihood. It is respectable as well as financially tempting. So, Agnipath having been badly presented has enraged the 'military aspirants'. Some of the guys preparing for a permanent placement now feel threatened believing that ordinary guys not with much worth would eat into their share, thereby leaving them hungry and helpless as before.

It must be noted well that out of the hundred contenders, hardly ten make it to the military. This minuscule percentage shall never suffer. Even if they go the Agnipath route, they will not be discharged anyway for the military will select them for permanent posting based on special skills and attitudes. The ordinary guys who would never have any opportunity to grab a decent job anywhere due to lack of skills and attitudes would benefit in multiple ways: the least educated vagabonds who are casual, careless

and least bothered would be tempted to get in. This otherwise non-productive group would be discharged with rare skills and attitude of a decent, productive citizen who would be top class human capital, of which the country is horrifically short. This cadre-like group would find getting jobs so easy because of skills and attitudes. Four years of training also sends them back home with big moneybags, a formal education testimonial and countless doors of employment held open with red carpets rolled out. These guys too have a fat gratuity at disposal apart from lifelong pension and medical benefits and special price Defence canteen facilities. So, guys whiling away precious time in villages by only playing cards, seeking cheap pleasures or fighting at home should find the Agnipath pathway to paradise.

The Army intends to recruit 46,000 Agniveers by way of experimentation. Later, based on the lessons learnt, it would scale up the intake to 1.25 lakh annually. Obviously, the biggest

problem diagnosed by now is the lack of proper communication with the stakeholders and the public and taking them all on board in a truly transparent manner. The Government super brains must make amply clear the message that for the youths a mechanism is being created for preferential job opportunities which, upon discharge, would go a long way in assuaging their anxiety.

Some self-proclaimed experts scream that the Government's move will damage the military's ethos and produce de-motivated jawans, among other things. Such baseless apprehensions have been triggered by both wicked political opposition as much as headless, retired Defence officials.

The BJP has fantastic spokespersons who are not only too audible but also highly capable of persuading masses to believe that the ordinary crowd is white. Some of these men and women must be pressed to the emergency service of convincing the young people that Agnipath is actually a boon, not a 'bane'.

Bihar youth held for morphing S'garh girl's pix

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ ROURKELA

The Rourkela cyber police have arrested a youth of Bihar for morphing photograph of a girl in Facebook.

The case is two years old. Rourkela Cyber police station Inspector Incharge Serofina Xess informed medipersons on Tuesday about the case and about arrest of the culprit in the case.

On July 2, 2020, a 19 years old girl of Purunanapani village under Hatibadi police station of Sundargarh district, presently residing at Jagda, under Jhirpani police station here, had come to the Cyber police station here and presented a

written report.

She alleged that on July 1, 2020 at about 11 am while she was accessing her Facebook account she found that a friend request had come from one Facebook account under name "Suman Lakra." She thought that the Facebook ID belongs to a female person and therefore she accepted the friend request but after that the unknown person edited her photograph with nude photographs and sent her through Facebook messenger continuously.

When she requested to stop the nuisance, he demanded to share her Whatsapp number and threatened if she did not oblige, he would upload the edited nude photographs in Facebook public platform and

would viral the same.

Based on the complaint of the girl, the Cyber police station, Rourkela, after registering a case, had started investigating the case. The police arrested Md Ahshan(25) of Kamtaulia village of Vaishali district, Bihar on June 19. The police also seized two mobile phones, SIM cards, Aadhaar card and driving licence from the possession of accused Md Ahshan.

Rourkela Cyber police station Inspector Incharge Serofina Xess informed on Tuesday,

"We arrested accused Md Ahshan from his village in Bihar and we brought him on transit remand. He was forwarded to the SDJM Court here."

Gandhian Das passes away at 94

PNS ■ ROURKELA

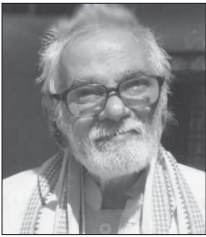
Freedom fighter, veteran Narayan Das passed away at 94 while undergoing treatment in a private hospital at Bhubaneswar on June 20.

Since his school days, Das was an ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. He visited many countries like Indonesia,

Sri Lanka, Singapore and the USA to give talks on the Gandhian philosophy nonviolence. He was the head of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Rourkela unit. He firmly stood up and faced the Emergency, during which he spread the message of 'Total Revolution' of Jaya Prakash

Narayan.

He was also associated with Khadi Mandal, Sarva Seva Sangh, Sarvodaya and many more organisations.



Raghunathpali MLA Subrat Tarai, Rourkela MLA Sarada Nayak, former Union Minister Dilip Ray, social worker Sudarsan Das, former MLA George Tirkey, Pravat Mohapatra and many more noted personalities paid their homage to late Das.

He was cremated at the Puri Swargadwar in the presence of family members, friends and well-wishers. Other rituals will be held at Rourkela. He is survived by three sons and two daughters.

3 critical in bomb attack in D'nal

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

At least three persons were critically injured when unidentified miscreants hurled bombs at a resident's house at Surapratapur village under the Bhuban police station in Dhenkanal district on Wednesday.

Sources said that a gang of miscreants hurled bombs on the house of one Jayaprakash Rout in the afternoon and fled from the spot.

In Baleswar Woman killed over dowry; probe begins

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Soro police began an investigation into the death of a woman, Sujata Panda, who succumbed to severe burn injuries at the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack on Wednesday.

Sujata suffered burn injuries on Tuesday and was referred to the SCB Hospital in a critical condition.

The family of the deceased in their complaint alleged that their daughter was set on fire by her in-law over dowry demands and it was

As a result, Jayaprakash along with Jitendra Rout and Subhankar Priyadarshi Rout sustained critical injuries. They were rushed to the Bhuban hospital by the neighbours.

Getting information, a police team rushed to the spot and initiated an investigation. The cops have launched a hunt to trace and nab the attackers. Preliminary investigation by police revealed that previous enmity might have been the motive behind the bomb attack.

CUO community joins yoga session

PNS ■ KORAPUT

The Central University of Odisha (CUO), Koraput, observed the International Day of Yoga in a befitting manner. Live streaming of mass yoga demonstration and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address from Mysuru, Karnataka, was made available at 5:30 am.

The university community attended the live programme enthusiastically. Students and faculty attended the live streaming of the programme on DD national channel from their respective homes.

Later, the CUO had a special



event on yoga held in front of the Academic Block-3. Vice-Chancellor I/c Prof Sharat Kumar Palita conveyed greeting and delivered the inaugural address. He urged everyone to include yoga as an integral part of their daily routine for a healthy and prosperous life.

Registrar Prof Asit Kumar Das highlighted the importance of yoga in life. He said that the yoga is the

way of connection between body and soul and our soul and supreme soul.

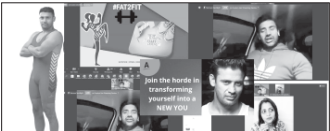
A yoga session was conducted by expert Jay Kumar Pradhan from Art of Living. Registrar Prof Das felicitated Dr Amulya Ranjan Mahapatra, eminent educationist, yoga preacher and founder of Ramkrishna Mission, Koraput, by offering a shawl and memento for his lifetime contribution towards empowerment of education and popularising yoga in the region. Dr Mahapatra delivered a lecture on 'Importance of Yoga on Post Covid Situation.'

Fitness awareness drive Wrestler Sangram Amway brand ambassador

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Amway India has launched health and fitness community-building programmes across India. Its brand ambassador and wrestler Sangram Singh will be spearheading the awareness around fitness and health community building amongst the youth and women across the country.

This is in line with Amway India's focus on supporting health amongst fitness enthusiasts to help



maintain their fitness goals coupled with the right nutrition guidance.

Commenting on the initiative, CMO, Amway India, Ajay Khanna said, "Preventive healthcare is on top of mind for the youth and women of India today. Changing lifestyles, prolonged periods of staying indoors, and other limitations

have adversely impacted consumers' mental and physical well-being. Through our wellness initiatives, we are striving to raise awareness around the importance of proper nutrition, complemented by supplements to meet one's daily nutritional needs, while also helping them build immunity through these fitness programmes."

Singh said, "I'm honoured to be associated with a brand like Amway, which emphasises the importance of holistic wellbeing."

R'gada Dibyang forum holds foundation day fest

BADAL TAH ■ RAYAGADA

The Samadrishti Kshamata Vikash evam Anusandhal Mandal (SAKSHAM), working for the empowerment of Dibyangs, held its foundation day at its Rayagada unit where more than 70 dibyangs, their care givers and empathisers (Dibyang Mitras) participated and vowed to take the empowerment process forward in the district in collaboration with Government, corporate, other private entities and philanthropists

This was jointly organised by Odisha Bikalang Manch(OBM)-Rayagada unit and Rayagada Bhinnakhyama Mahasangha (RBMS).

Secretary of SAKSHAM-Rayagada district wing Shyam

Das welcomed all the participants. State secretary of SAKSHAM Rama Chandra Sahu elaborated on the evolution of SAKSHAM and its activities. The future plan of action for the district was shared by SAKSHAM's Sangakhyak Dr Badal kumar Tah.

A membership form was distributed to enrol all the PwDs and their care givers from each village and see if anyone is left out of any service delivery and report to local authorities.

District president of OBM and RBMS Rakesh Himirika described various problems faced by them locally and called upon to work with cohesive manner to reach the goal.

Dibakar Sabar, a care giver, emphasized on increasing the disabil-



ity pension to Rs 3,000 to take care of various needs including the medical exigencies. Ex-secretary of RBMS and an orthopedically disabled himself Gobinda Chandra Mishra requested the participants to take the issues to the State capital Bhubaneswar and fight unitedly for their entitlements.

Ranjan Rath, a senior scribe of the district, assured the gathering to project the genuine issues of differently abled persons and advocate for their rightful solutions.

Anita Nanda, a college lecturer and orthopedically disabled person described the plights she herself had gone through and called on the

participants to come together under the platform of SAKSHAM to build self confidence and a fellow feeling of togetherness.

President of OBM and RBMS, Himirika nominated Jalandhar Bachel as its new secretary by replacing Amarendra Nath. Gobindra Chandra Mishra was unanimously appointed as district advisor of RBMS.

The office bearers of SAKSHAM-Rayagada district unit were declared. While Sushree Anita Nanda was nominated as president, Dibakar Sabar was nominated as vice president, Shyam Das as secretary, Sibaram Nayak as joint secretary, Prashanta Palo as treasurer and Rakesh Himirika and Jalandhar Bachel as advisors. Sibaram Nayak extended the vote of thanks.

Deceptive practices of dowry in recent times

Marriage has remained as a rich part of India's civilisation which has given primacy to nobility and sanctity. The evil of dowry, however, has destroyed the purity of marriage and social cohesiveness.

Several types of marriage tradition were prevalent in ancient India where there was neither question of cast or demand of dowry. One such process was Swayambar marriage mainly conducted in royal households where the daughter of a royal family would choose her life partner in an assembly of royal youths.

Most of the religions had distinct marriage rituals which were considered as ordained by the divine. In Roman and Greek periods, marriage was celebrated as an agreement between two families where voluntary gifts were exchanged between two sides to celebrate the occasion. In India also the parents of the bride used to hand over gifts like household materials to honour groom's family and his near and dear ones. In marriage, bride's father hands over the care and custody of his daughter to the groom and his family which is a tradition described as 'Kanyadan'.



RAMA CHANDRA PANDA

Thus marriage is not a simple bond between a male and female but regarded as a pious and sacred event in one's life. In modern times' sanctity, charm and ethical values of marriage has gradually declined as some greedy families have commercialized marriage. The evil practice also encourages corruption in the society to some extent as some employees try to gather wealth by corrupt practice to have a good saving for organizing well and decorative marriages for their daughters and consequently face problem in course of life.

In recent times, the menace has emboldened deceptive practices by some greedy parents of the groom. To avoid shame and legal liability under anti-dowry law, new strate-

gies are adopted by these parents. No more visible property of any kind is given or agreed to be given in marriage to erase any evidence. New techniques are adopted to extort money in an invisible form like seeking cash, gold ornaments, endorsement of entire marriage expenditure of groom's family by the bride's family, which thus has commercialised institution of marriage, which was considered a solemn responsibility of the families.

The price of dowry of a groom sometimes is rated on the basis of his family position and service status like IIT, Civil Service and medical profession for which some families of the groom's exploit bride's families to compensate them for expenses met by them to educate the groom. In several cases, once a marriage is fixed, the blackmail and bargaining often continues from groom's side till completion of marriage.

To avoid collapse of marriage proposal or false notion of shame to the family, the bride's side makes efforts to meet the demand. At times the bride's family sells properties or get indebted which financially destroys the family. Poor and middle class people are real suffer-

ers. In some cases situation leads to souring of post marriage relations between the two families.

The Dowry Prevention Act enacted in 1961 and amended later has prevented the menace to some extent. However, there is a need to eradicate it completely for good of society. There is also clamor about misuse of dowry law and section 498 (A) of IPC which punishes cruelty to a married women. The judiciary time to time has laid down certain safeguards against indiscriminate arrest of in-laws on complaints of brides to prevent abuse of the law. Such abuse of law also needs to be punished.

The author has some vivid memories of some of ugly practices adopted by groom's side. A few years back, a cousin of the author came and told that a friend of her who was a co-follower of religious programme at Purushottampur visited her house and after seeing her 3rd daughter, proposed to take her as her daughter -in -law. She said that the groom's side had no demand except seeking a grand wedding reception in a good hotel at Brahmapur since they are families of high status towards which they proposed her to provide 2 AC buses

to ferry 'Barat' from Sambalpur to Brahmapur where the marriage was proposed to be held in a good hotel for 2 days i.e. one day before marriage to the next day. Besides this they sought to provide Brahmapur Silk Saree (PATO) to honour every lady member of the groom's party numbering about 20. The author explained her that, all these in addition to traditional household gifts would need at least Rs 8-10 lakh to meet the cost which she cannot afford to. She expressed surprise on author's explanation and left. Later the author was told that the marriage proposal was cancelled.

A friend recently disclosed about another similar case where a girl working as a doctor in Uttarakhand, whose family had decided a groom by Sadi.com a few weeks ago, rejected the marriage proposal because groom's father told bride's mother about no demand but to make provision of 2 AC buses to ferry groom's marriage party from Bhubaneswar to bride's native district and back and to provide 15 gold rings for each lady member of the groom's household. This is the way some greedy families use marriage occasion as an opportunity to exploit the bride's family. The au-

INBRIEF

3 BALESWAR COPS AXED FOR LETTING DRUG MAFIA ESCAPE

Baleswar: On the charge of dereliction of duty, three police personnel of the Jaleswar police station have been suspended following a probe. The action has been taken after a brown sugar peddler escaped from the police station. The suspended are Sub-Inspector Priyadarshani Khatua and Constables Sk Mairuddin and Rabindra Hansda. On June 18, one Muktar Khan, a brown sugar peddler, had been arrested and 150 grams of the contraband was seized from him. However, Muktar escaped from police custody next day. This drew severe criticism from several quarters suspecting police's intention. Different teams have been formed to nab the culprit.

DAVCMC DIR ADDRESSES PRINCIPALS' CONF

Bhubaneswar: Director of Public Schools & Academics, DAVCMC, New Delhi Dr Nisha Peshin addressed at the Principals' Conference of DAV institutions, Odisha Zone held at the DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur premises on Wednesday. He emphasised on the role and responsibilities of the Principals both in academic and administrative development of the institutions. DAV Regional Director Dr KC Satapathy, Regional Officer LN Pradhan and Asst Regional Officers Dr Sujata and SK Bhoi were present along with 55 heads of DAV institutions. Dr Peshin was felicitated during the occasion.



VSS NAGAR SR CITIZENS' FORUM HOLDS YOGA DAY

Bhubaneswar: The VSS Nagar Senior Citizens' Forum on Tuesday organised a meeting to mark the International Day of Yoga. Guests MLA Susant Kumar Rout, Mayor Sulochana Das, Indian Yoga Institute State chief Suresh Kumar Mohapatra and Corporator Pravasini Mohanty spoke about importance of yoga in everyday life. While forum president Krupasindhu Sahu chaired the meeting, general secretary Er Suresh Chandra Kar moderated it. Among others, secretary Gouri Shankar Praharaj, treasurer Bhamrabar Pradhan and members Prakash Kumar Das, Debendra Kumar Biswal and Maheswar Biswal joined the meeting.



GPCDA OFFICE-BEARERS ELECTED

Brahmapur: The 54th General Body meeting of the Ganjam-Phulbani Chemists' and Drug-gists' Association (GPCDA) was held here on Sunday. BeMC Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai graced the event as chief guest, while Drug Controller of Southern Division Sunil Kumar Nayak; ADCs Debasih Lal and Prasanna Kumar Mallick and UCDA secretary Prasant Kumar Mohapatra attended the meeting as guests of honor. The meeting unanimously elected the new office bearers for the year 2022-23. Those who got elected include Bishnu Prasad Panda as president and P Satyanarayana was elected secretary. Ballahab Panigrahi, Nageswar Prusty, Kedarnath Jena, Girish Pradhan, Manoj Pati and several others coordinated the event. BeMC Mayor congratulated the newly elected office-bearers.



SAKALP SECONDARY SCHOOL HOLDS YOGA DAY

Brahmapur: The International Day of Yoga was celebrated at the Sankalp Senior Secondary School, Ralab with spirituality and integrity. Yoga guru Ashok Kumar Sahu from Patanjali Yogapeeth conducted the programme, in which around 200 students and teachers of the school participated. Students performed pranayama and various asanas like Vajrasana, Vrikshasana and Tadasana. NCC Commanding Officer Col Suresh and Admin Officer, Group HQ Brahmapur, Col Shree Krishna joined the celebration and encouraged the students to be fit by practising yoga on a regular basis. School Chairman ET Rao enlightened them about the benefits of yoga.



K'MAL DLSA HOLDS INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY

Phulbani: The Kandhamal DLSA celebrated the International Day of Yoga in its premises. The programme was joined by District and Sessions Judge Sithikantha Samal, Specail Judge (Vigilance) Santosh Kumar Jena, Family Judge Smrutilekha Barik and POC SO ADJ Sanjit Kumar Behera. Among others, Ramadevi Soren, Bhaskar Chandra Sahu, Biraja Prasad Panda and court staffs practised yoga.



couple of minutes till the procession passed over in the next road crossing. Such incidents show marriage programmes in some cases have marred sanctity, discipline and dignity. It should not be forgotten that marriage of many deserving, beautiful and educated girls are delayed because of the poverty of their parents and when one such unfortunate girl comes across such luxurious marriage processions, tears would normally roll down from her eyes for thinking about poverty of her parents, which may turn as a curse on the society. Those who have means and capacity, well they can organise grand marriage processions and parties but if some of such people can try to use the occasion to facilitate marriage of another poor girl simultaneously, it would be very pious and exemplary for others.

Similarly in spite of spending huge amount on crackers and other things in a marriage programmes, parties with financial capacity can facilitate staging of any Lok Kala on the occasion to promote age old art and inspire youths.

(The writer is a former Deputy Speaker, Odisha Legislative Assembly)

Our economy may grow by 7.5% this year: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the Indian economy is likely to grow by 7.5 per cent this year "making us the fastest-growing major economy."

He also said the value of the Indian digital economy would touch the \$1 trillion mark by 2025. Making this assertion in a virtual address at the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Business Forum, he also said the kind of digital transformation taking place in India was never seen anywhere in the world earlier. Highlighting the growth trajectory, Modi said there is an opportunity to invest \$1.5 trillion under the national infrastructure pipeline.

The BRICS grouping brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, representing 41 per cent of the global population, 24 per cent of the global GDP and 16 per cent of the global trade.

"We are expecting a 7.5 per cent growth rate this year that will make us the fastest-growing major economy," Modi said. In a 'New India' transformative changes are taking place in every sector, he said, adding that a key pillar of the country's economic recovery is technology-led growth. He also said, "We are supporting innovation in every sector."



The BRICS Business Forum took place a day ahead of a virtual summit of the five-nation bloc. Modi will take part in the 14th BRICS Summit on June 23 and 24 at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. The summit hosted by China will be held in the virtual mode. The conclave includes a High Level Dialogue on Global Development.

The upcoming summit takes place in the backdrop of the ongoing Ukraine conflict and stand-off between the armies of India and China in Eastern Ladakh for the last two years. The 13th BRICS summit was held in India in September 2021.

The BRICS has become a platform for discussion and delibera-

tion on issues of common concern for all developing countries. BRICS countries have regularly called for reform of the multilateral system in order to make it more representative and inclusive.

Discussions during the 14th BRICS Summit are expected to cover intra-BRICS cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, trade, health, traditional medicine, environment, science and technology and innovation, agriculture, technical and vocational education and training, and MSMEs.

Discussions are also likely on issues like reform of the multilateral system, combating the Covid-19 pandemic and global economic recovery, among others.

Demolitions in Prayagraj, Kanpur as per law: UP to SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Government has told the Supreme Court that demolitions of illegal structures were carried out by its Kanpur and Prayagraj municipal bodies as per law and were not related to punishing the accused involved in violent protests following remarks by two BJP leaders on Prophet Mohammed. In an affidavit filed on Wednesday pursuant to pleas filed by a Muslim body Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, the UP Government said, "The said demolitions referred to in the interlocutory applications have been carried out by the local development authority, which are statutory autonomous bodies, independent of the State administration, as per law as part of their routine effort against unauthorised/illegal constructions and encroachments, in accordance with the UP Urban Planning and Development Act, 1972".

It said that none of the actual affected parties, if any, have approached this court concerning the lawful demolition action. "It is humbly submitted that in so far as taking action against the persons accused in rioting, the State Government is taking stringent steps against them in accordance with a completely different set of statutes namely — CrPC, UP gangster, and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986 and Rules, 2021, Prevention of Public Property Damages Act and Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Act, 2020 and Rules, 2021", said UP Government in the affidavit.

The affidavit pointed out that the factum of construction being illegal has also been admitted by the two builders in Kanpur. It pointed out that the top court in a recent writ petition filed by a political party concerning the alleged demolitions in Shaheen Bagh here, noted that only the affected party and not political parties should come forward and allowed withdrawal of the petition with liberty to approach the High Court.

"Furthermore, it is submitted that even if any such alleged demolition action is to be challenged,



the same is to be done by the affected party before the High Court, and not this court", the State Government said, adding that it is taking strong exception to the attempt by the petitioners to name the highest constitutional functionaries of the State and falsely colour the local development authority's lawful actions as "extra-legal punitive measures" against accused persons, targeting any particular religious community.

It said that all such allegations are absolutely false and are vehemently denied and urged the court to hold the petitioner to terms for the said false allegations without basis before this court. The UP Government further said that the petitioner has cherry-picked two demolition actions of illegal constructions in the properties of one Ishtiaq Ahmad and one Riyaz Ahmed that took place in Kanpur on June 11, 2022, in an attempt to falsely link the same to the rioting; however, it has failed to note that in both cases, certain portions of the two illegal/non-compliant structures in question took place; that both buildings were under construction and not in conformity with the permission granted.

It said that most importantly, proceedings under the Urban Planning Act against the two buildings had been initiated by the Kanpur development authority long before the incidents of rioting that took place in June 2022 - in one case way back in August 2020 itself, while in the other, in February 2022.

Convalescing Sonia asks ED for more time

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday wrote to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) seeking postponement of her appearance in the National Herald case by a few weeks till she recovers completely. Sonia, who was discharged from hospital on June 20 after treatment of Covid complications, had been summoned by the agency for questioning on June 23 in the money laundering case. Sonia had earlier been scheduled to appear before the ED on June 8 but had sought more time from the probe agency in view of her Covid-19 infection. The agency had then issued a fresh summons.

"Since she has been strictly advised to rest at home following her hospitalisation on account of Covid and lung infection, Congress president Smt. Sonia Gandhi has written to ED seeking the postponement of her appearance there by a few weeks till she has recovered completely," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on Twitter.

'Nationalist' Govt weakening military via Agnipath: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After five days of continuous grilling by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday took on the Narendra Modi Government and said he will have to withdraw the controversial military recruitment initiative just like he had to roll back the farm laws after tendering an apology. Rahul alleged that the BJP Government "which calls itself nationalist" was "weakening" the armed forces through the 'Agnipath' scheme.

Taking a dig at the Centre over the 'Agnipath' scheme, Rahul also said those who talked about 'one rank, one pension' were bringing in 'no rank, no pension'.

Addressing Congress parliamentarians and legislators from across the country who gathered at the party AICC headquarters to express solidarity with him after he was questioned by the ED, Rahul said his questioning was an "unimportant" matter and the most important issue in the country was of jobs.

Rahul and his sister, party

general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were welcomed with slogans when they reached the AICC headquarters. Among those present were Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and his Rajasthan counterpart Ashok Gehlot. "MLAs and MPs have come to express their solidarity with Rahul Gandhi," Gehlot told reporters.

"Our MPs and MLAs are raising their voice against this conspiracy. All institutions of the Government are busy in this endeavour," his colleague Jairam Ramesh added. He said some MLAs and MPs had been stopped from coming here and the party would go ahead with the planning of its "Bharat Jodo yatra" from Kanyakumari to Kashmir starting October 2.

"The spine of the country — MSMEs — has been broken by the Modi Government. I say to all those who train in the morning to get into the Army, Navy and Air Force that the Prime Minister has broken the spine of the country and this country will not be able to give jobs to its youth," Rahul said.

"No matter what the Government does, it will not be

able to give jobs as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has handed the country to two or three industrialists who cannot ensure jobs to the youth," he said. Now, they have "closed" even the last resort for the youth -- to get into the armed forces, he said.

"Now, train in the morning, get into the forces and then go home. I guarantee that after your stint in the military, you will not get any job," Rahul Gandhi said. "The Chinese Army is sitting on our land. It has snatched away over 1,000 square kilometre of our land. This truth has been accepted by the Government," he asserted.

He asserted that the Army should be strengthened but this Government is "weakening it". "When there is a war, results of this will be evident... They are weakening the Army, it will harm the country, and they call themselves nationalists," Rahul said, attacking the Government. "I had said about farm laws that Modi will have to take them back and he did. Now, the Congress is saying Modi will have to withdraw Agnipath scheme and the youth are standing with us on this," he said.

'Rubber stamp Prez won't work in India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition candidate for the presidential polls, Yashwant Sinha, initiated his campaign strategy meeting on Wednesday at the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) office in the national Capital and said a "rubber-stamp President" will not work in the country. Sinha said the presidential election is not an individual battle but a fight for the issues facing the country.

"I am thankful to all the political parties that have given me the opportunity in the presidential polls. I am glad that these parties have given me that credibility. I wish to say that this election is not an individual fight for me. There are issues that the country is facing on which the Electoral College has to make a decision," Sinha said talking to the media after the meeting.

The former Union Minister said the BJP-led Centre is moving on a road that is not good for the country, as youngsters are suffering and now, the "joke" that the Government has played on unemployment with the "Agniveer" scheme for military recruitment, the entire country is up in arms, he said.

"The President's post is



extremely sensitive and I will not be under pressure from the Government," he said. Sinha will file his nomination for the presidential polls on June 27 and is most likely to begin campaigning from Jharkhand and Bihar.

"We will be going to various places in the country to campaign.... We are formulating a strategy on that. I congratulate Droupadi Murmu, but this is not me against her -- this is an ideological contest. We should not have a rubber-stamp President in the country," he said.

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has named Murmu, a tribal leader from Odisha, as its candidate in the presidential polls.

Out of station MPs can inform and vote from State Assemblies: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Members of Parliament (MPs) who would not be present in the Capital on July 18 to cast their vote in Parliament House for the presidential election can do so from State Assemblies, provided they inform the Election Commission (EC) in advance. In a letter addressed to all members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the poll panel has reminded them that they can cast ballots at Room No. 63 in Parliament House.

"However, on account of unavoidable reasons and exigencies of circumstances, if you cannot be present in New Delhi on the date of poll, you can opt to exercise your right to vote at the presidential election at any of the polling places situated in the State or UT of Puducherry and NCT of Delhi," the June 16 letter said.

The MPs who intend to vote from one of the State Legislative Assemblies have to send a "formal request" to the EC by filling up a form. The request should reach the poll panel "not later than ten days before the date of poll" so that necessary arrangements can be made. "It may kindly be noted that the request once made and accepted by the Commission to vote at any State Legislative Assembly will be final and no further changes will be entertained in this regard," the poll panel has cautioned.

While normally MPs vote in New Delhi and MLAs at the premises of the Legislative Assembly of each State, facilities are provided by the EC for any MP to vote in the Assembly of a State.

Similarly, an MLA can vote at the polling booth set up in Parliament House, if s/he is in Delhi on the date of poll.

Leaders like KK Sharma (Congress), Jairam Ramesh (Congress), Yogendra Shastri (Congress) and Sudheendra Kulkarni were present at the meeting on Wednesday.

India, Australia Def Mins mull ties in manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With China adopting an aggressive stance in the Indo-Pacific, India and Australia on Wednesday reaffirmed their shared objective of an open, free, inclusive, prosperous and rules based region.

The two sides also reviewed their Defence and strategic ties and security challenges during talks here between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and visiting Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The two Ministers also explored industrial cooperation in the Defence manufacturing sector as well as ways to enhance capabilities

of their militaries. Marles is on a four-day visit to India from Monday amid geopolitical upheavals triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Ukraine crisis is understood to have figured in the talks. Australia is a key partner of India and the strategic cooperation between the two sides has been on an upswing, both bilaterally as well as under the framework of the Quad or Quadrilateral coalition.

A joint statement issued after the parleys said the two Ministers reviewed the existing defence cooperation activities which have been increasing despite challenges of COVID-19 pandemic and discussed ways to enhance further coopera-

tion. The Ministers reviewed the defence and security pillars of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. They reaffirmed their commitment towards implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership based on mutual trust and understanding, common interests and shared values, of democracy and rule of law.

They welcomed the growing diversity and frequency of defence exercises and exchanges between the two countries and undertook to build upon operational engagements through the India-Australia Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement.

Both Ministers com-

mitted to give fillip to the India-Australia Joint Working Group (JWG) on Defence Research and Materiel Cooperation, which will meet in Australia later this year.

This JWG is a crucial mechanism for boosting ties between defence industries. The Ministers discussed further opportunities for industrial cooperation between India and Australia to increase the resilience of supply chains and deliver capabilities to their respective defence forces. Rajnath and Marles also welcomed the plan to commence the landmark General Bipin Rawat Young Officer Exchange Programme in the latter half of 2022.

Wrist health trackers help detect Covid before signs appear

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Health trackers strapped to the wrist for monitoring changes in skin temperature, heart and breathing rates can help detect Covid-19 days before the first tell-tale signs of the viral disease appear, according to a study published in the journal BMJ open.

The study shows that this data could be combined with Artificial Intelligence (AI) to diagnose Covid-19 even before any symptoms appear.

"While a PCR swab test remains the gold standard for confirming Covid-19, our findings suggest that a wearable-informed machine learning

algorithm may serve as a promising tool for presymptomatic or asymptomatic detection of Covid-19," the researchers said.

The researchers, including those from Risch Medical Laboratory, Liechtenstein base their findings on wearers of the AVA bracelet. The regulated and commercially available fertility tracker monitors breathing rate, heart rate, heart rate variability, wrist skin temperature and blood flow, as well as sleep quantity and quality.

Typical Covid-19 symptoms may take several days after infection before they appear during which time an infected person can unwitting-

ly spread the virus.

The researchers wanted to see if physiological changes, monitored by an activity tracker, could be used to develop a machine learning algorithm to detect Covid-19 infection before the start of symptoms.

As many as 1,163 participants under the age of 51 were drawn from the GAPP study between March 2020 and April 2021. Participants wore the AVA bracelet at night. The device saves data every 10 seconds and requires at least four hours of relatively uninterrupted sleep. The bracelets were synchronised with a complementary smartphone app on waking.

Health Min to hold high-level Covid review meeting

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has decided to hold a high-level review meeting on Friday with the core team of experts over increasing Covid-19 infections in the country.

As on date, 10 States — Maharashtra, Kerala, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal and Gujarat — have over 1,000 active cases.

The core team of experts will include AIIMS director Dr Randip Guleria, ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava and NCDC director Sajeet Singh.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, Secretary of Department of Biotechnology Rajesh S Gokhale, Secretary in the Department of Pharmaceuticals S Aparna, among others, will also attend the meeting.

In a review meeting of INSACOG held last week, states/UTs were asked to submit a "larger number" of samples for whole genome sequencing from districts and areas which had seen a surge in COVID-19 cases over a period of seven days.

In the meantime, Dr Rajesh Karyekarte of B J Medical College in his study conducted on 116 patients who were infected with BA.2.38, an offspring of Omicron's sub-variant BA.2, said that, "We have done the genome sequencing of some samples from April to June and sent the report to the Government. During the analysis, we found that BA.2 is common, but its offspring BA.2.38 is also prevalent and is neck to neck with BA.2."

Nationwide 'BRO cafes' to provide comfort and jobs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tourists thronging scenic locales in remote areas of the country can now savour hot tea or coffee and local cuisine at roadside cafes. They can also park their cars or two-wheelers there and avail of first aid if need be.

Realising the huge potential of boosting tourism and providing employment to the local populace as tourists are now venturing out to the inaccessible areas due to better road connectivity, the Defence Ministry has approved setting up of

"BRO Cafes" across the country, especially in border areas stretching from Ladakh in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east.

In a novel initiative to provide basic welfare amenities like first aid and comfort to tourists travelling in remote areas, the Ministry has given the go-ahead for cafes at 75 locations in 12 States and Union Territories. They will be known as 'BRO cafes' as most of them will come up on roads constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

These cafes, besides providing



food and other amenities to tourists will also boost economic activities in border areas and generate employment for the local populace, the Defence Ministry said here on Wednesday. Giving details of the

scheme, officials said these amenities will be located on different sections of roads with the BRO. It has its reach in the remotest border areas and besides addressing strategic needs, it has been instrumental in socio-economic uplift of the Northern and Eastern borders.

This has resulted in increased tourist influx in these scenic locations, hitherto inaccessible. In order to provide conducive and comfortable transit of tourists on these roads, located at harsh climatic and geographical conditions, the need to establish multi-utility wayside

amenities along the major tourist circuits in these regions was recognised. Since the inaccessibility and remoteness of these roads preclude widespread commercial deployments, the BRO, by virtue of its presence, took it upon itself to open such facilities at remote places.

The scheme provides for development and operation of wayside amenities in public private partnership mode with agencies, on license basis, which will design, build and operate the facility as per guidelines of the BRO.

Amenities like parking for two

and four wheelers, food plaza or restaurant, separate restrooms for men, women and differently abled and first aid facilities are proposed to be provided. Selection of licensees will be done through a competitive process. The terms of the agreement will be for 15 years which may be further extended for a period up to five years. The 75 'BRO Cafes' will be located in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Manipur, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

Rain fury: Panic-stricken Kashmiries evacuated

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Incessant rainfall across different parts of Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday created a flood like situation prompting the authorities to evacuate people from some of the low lying areas after the water levels touched the danger mark. Higher reaches across Kashmir valley including Amarnath cave shrine area also witnessed fresh spell of snowfall. The mercury levels in several parts of Kashmir valley reportedly dropped up to 15 degrees, lowest in the last 50 years in Srinagar.

The situation turned grim in Kashmir valley as several water bodies including river Jhelum crossed the flood alarm mark. Control rooms have been activated across affected districts to remain in touch with the local population while special teams have been constituted at the district level to closely monitor the situation.

The weathermen, however, advised people not to press panic buttons as the weather started showing signs of improvement in the second half of the day.

Due to continuous rainfall for the last four days, several areas across South Kashmir districts remained inundated disrupting the smooth move-

ment of traffic in the interior areas. Livestock was affected badly in several parts of Kashmir. After assessing the situation on ground zero the Union Territory administration decided to shut down schools and other educational institutions.

On the other hand the National Highway linking the twin capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar also remained blocked since late Tuesday evening as massive landslides/mudslides and shoot stones disrupted the smooth flow of traffic.

On Wednesday the highway was blocked near Samroli, 13 kms ahead of Udhampur following fresh landslides. Shuttering of an under construction bridge near Peerah in Ramban was washed away. Road stretches between Nashri and Banihal remained blocked at around 30 locations. The frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch also witnessed flash floods while the erstwhile Doda district remained on high alert following heavy downpour in the region. Unconfirmed reports claimed several nomads, venturing in higher reaches, have gone missing. Moving swiftly, local teams consisting of Indian army/police/ district officers were rushed to trace them and



extend all possible help. "No loss of lives has been reported in the higher reaches of Rajouri. The army/Police & the adm are in constant touch, the rescue operation will start as soon as the weather becomes conducive; contact with nomads at Shopian & Kulgam also established" tweeted office of Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Vikas Kundal.

An advisory was issued by the Chief Engineer Baglihar power project, to avoid going near Chenab riverbanks in view of rise in water level in the Baglihar reservoir due to incessant rains. In Ramban, Deputy Commissioner Ramban Mussarat Zia late evening visited the affected stretch on the National Highway near Mehar to take stock of the road clear-

ing operations. By late evening over 25 blocked locations were restored and work was going on to clear the other points. The movement of stranded vehicles going towards Kashmir valley was facilitated while a massive landslide at Samroli was being cleared till the time of filing the report. The district administration in Ramban had earlier made elaborate arrangements for stranded passengers and accommodated them at allocated shelter points and fed them fresh food and snacks to keep them warm. Two columns of the Indian army also remained deployed along the National Highway to extend immediate help to the stranded passengers in distress.

Assam flood situation grim as 12 die, over 55 lakh people affected

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam continued to remain grim with rising water levels of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers inundating fresh areas in the Sate and impacting over 55 lakh people across 32 districts, officials said on Wednesday.

Eighty-nine people have lost their lives since mid-May due to deluge, including 12 who died on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma travelled to Nagaon by train to review the situation in flood-hit areas in the district, the officials said, adding that he was also scheduled to visit a few relief camps there.

Nagaon was severely affected by the current wave of floods with over 4,57,381 people coming under the impact of the deluge and 15,188 inmates have taken shelter in 147 relief camps.

"Undertook a train journey from Guwahati to flood-affected areas in Chaparmukh and Kampur. The journey enabled me to take a closer look at the areas ravaged by flood along the railway tracks, which will help us in taking informed decisions and intervene accordingly," Sarma said on Twitter.

As the floodwaters of Kopili have inundated large areas in Nagaon district, necessary steps will be taken to

prevent the recurrence of such calamity in the future, he said.

Sarma visited Chaparmukh railway station to interact with flood-affected people taking shelter there and took stock of relief materials provided to them.

"Assuring them all possible help, I asked district administration to ensure adequate relief to the affected people & be on stand-by," he said.

The flood situation in three districts of the Barak Valley - Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi - remained critical with rising water levels of the Barak and Kushiara rivers inundating vast tracts of land in the valley, the officials said.

National Disaster Response Force personnel have been engaged in Cachar districts to evacuate people to safe places, while representatives of State Disaster Response Force and other agencies were deployed in the two remaining districts.

Altogether 2,16,851 people have been hit by the flood in 506 villages in Cachar district, 1,47,649 in Karimganj and nearly one lakh in Hailakandi.

The chief minister is scheduled to visit Silchar to review the prevailing flood situation. Transport Minister Parimal Suklabaidya has been camping at Silchar in Cachar and monitoring the flood situation in the Barak valley with the local MLAs, deputy com-



missioners and senior officials of the three districts.

Meanwhile, Ambassador of Japan to India Satoshi Suzuki expressed sympathy to the families who lost their "beloved ones and are affected by the recent floods and landslides occurring in Assam and Meghalaya".

"Japan always stands with the people in such difficult times," Satoshi said on Twitter.

The CM thanked him for expressing his concern for the state and people affected by the current wave of floods.

"We sincerely acknowledge the support and cooperation of Japan and its beautiful people towards the development of our state," Sarma said on the microblogging site.

Oil India Ltd has contributed Rs 5 crore to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Sarma thanked Union

Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Teli and the company's chairman and managing director Sushil Kumar Mishra for the contribution and said this will "significantly aid our ongoing flood-relief work".

Altogether 55, 42,053 people have been affected by the ongoing floods in 32 of the 36 districts of the state.

Seven more people died due to the floods during the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 89 and one was reported missing from Kamrup, according to a bulletin of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority.

Among the worst-affected districts are Barpeta with 12,51,359 people reeling under the floodwaters, Dhubri with 5,94,708 and Darrang with 5,47,421, according to the bulletin.

Himanta's wife files ₹100 crore defamation suit against Sisodia

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, the wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has filed a ₹100 crore defamation suit against Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who had alleged mal-practice in giving contracts for PPE at above market rates.

Bhuyan Sarma filed the suit at the court of Civil Judge No 1 of Kamrup Metropolitan district on Tuesday and it is likely to come up for hearing on Wednesday, her counsel Padmadhar Nayak said.

Another advocate Kishor Kumar Dutta told PTI that Sisodia while addressing a press meet on June 4 in New Delhi had made "some allegations that damaged the reputation and position" of Riniki Bhuyan Sarma.

"Sisodia unnecessarily dragged the name of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also into the controversy. That is why we have claimed that damage," he added.

Sisodia, referring to media reports had told newsmen that



while the Assam government procured personal protective equipment kits for Rs 600 each from other companies, Sarma gave urgent supply orders to the firms of his wife and son's business partners for Rs 990 apiece.

The opposition Congress, CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML)-Liberation, RCPI, TMC, Rajior Dal, Assam Jatiya Parishad and Anchalik Gana Morcha have demanded a CBI probe into the alleged corruption.

On June 1 digital media organisations - New Delhi-based 'The Wire' and Guwahati-based 'The Crosscurrent' had in a joint

investigative report claimed that the Assam government had placed four COVID-19 related emergency medical supply orders, most likely without following proper process.

Citing a series of Right to Information replies, the medial portals claimed that all the four orders, placed between March 18 and March 23 of 2020, were bagged by three firms owned by Riniki Bhuyan Sarma and the family's business associate Ghanshyam Dhanuka.

In a tweet she had refuted any wrongdoing in the supply of PPE kits to National Health Mission and said she did not take a "single penny" for them.

The present Assam government and Sarma have separately denied all charges that the chief minister's family was involved in the alleged mal-practices and termed the allegations by the two digital media as "false, imaginary, malicious and of vested interests".

Sarma was the health and family welfare minister in 2020 during the first BJP-led state government.

Polling for Rampur, Azamgarh bypolls today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Polling for the by-elections to Rampur and Azamgarh parliamentary seats will take place on Thursday.

Over 35 lakh voters are eligible to cast their votes in these two bypolls in which 19 candidates are in the fray from the two constituencies considered to be the strongholds of Samajwadi Party.

The polling will take place between 7 am and 6 pm on Thursday, according to Uttar Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Ajay Kumar Shukla.

The bypoll to the Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat was necessitated due to resignation from Lok Sabha by SP chief Akhilesh Yadav following his election to UP assembly in March this year while the

Rampur parliamentary seat was vacated by Mohammad Azam Khan for the same reason.

According to the chief electoral officer, 13 candidates are in the fray from Azamgarh, where 18.38 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise, while Rampur has six candidates and 17.06 lakh eligible voters. Campaigning for the bypolls ended on Tuesday evening.

From Rampur, the Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded former SP legislator Ghanshyam Singh Lodhi who recently joined the ruling party, while the SP has nominated Asim Raja, handicapped by Azam Khan. The Bahujan Samaj Party is not contesting from Rampur.

The Azamgarh con-

stituency is witnessing a triangular contest between BJP's Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua', a famous Bhojpuri actor-singer, SP's Dharmendra Yadav and Shah Alam alias Guddu Jamali of the BSP.

The BJP is eyeing to bolster its strength in the Lok Sabha further through these bypolls, while the SP faces the challenge of retaining both the seats. In Azamgarh, there are 18.38 lakh voters -- 9,70,249 males, 8,67,942 females and 36 third gender electors.

According to officials, 2,176 booths have been set up at 1,149 polling stations of the constituency where an estimated 15 per cent of the residents are Muslims. All the five assembly segments of the parliamentary constituency — Azamgarh, Mubarakpur, Sagdi,

Gopalpur and Mehnagar — were won by the SP in the recent assembly election.

During the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was an alliance between SP and BSP, and Akhilesh Yadav had won easily from Azamgarh, securing 6.21 lakh votes against BJP's Dinesh Lal Yadav who polled 3.61 lakh votes.

For the BJP, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath spearheaded the election campaign and sought votes for the BJP candidates on the two seats. However, Akhilesh Yadav and his wife Dimple did not campaign in the bypolls. "We are winning both the Azamgarh and Rampur seats," SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said.

The Rampur parliamentary constituency, which has

almost an equal population of Hindus and Muslims, is considered a bastion of SP's prominent Muslim face, Azam Khan. Yadavs, Sikhs and Dalit voters are also in a position to influence the outcome of the bypoll to the Lok Sabha seat.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, Azam Khan had polled 5, 59,177 votes to defeat BJP candidate Jaya Prada who secured 4, 49,180 votes. Congress candidate Sanjay Kapoor had lost his deposit.

The Rampur Lok Sabha constituency comprises five assembly segments -- Rampur, Suar, Chamraua, Bilaspur, and Milak. In the 2022 assembly elections, the SP won from Rampur, Suar and Chamraua assembly constituencies while the BJP bagged the Bilaspur and Milak seats.

Voters being terrorised, intimidated in Azamgarh, Akhilesh complains to EC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party has petitioned the Election Commission of India that voters are terrorised and intimidated in Azamgarh and Rampur Lok Sabha seats which go to polls on Thursday.

In a complaint filed to the ECI, the SP has demanded a direction to the district officials for conducting polling in a free, fair and transparent manner.

Former chief minister of UP and SP president Akhilesh Yadav said here on Wednesday that the Bharatiya Janata Party knew that it could never win the Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat and was therefore misusing the official machinery and Samajwadi Party leaders and workers were being framed in false cases. He alleged that in Rampur, many SP workers had been detained in police stations without any charges against them.

The SP alleged in its complaint that party cadre and village pradhans were being intimidated in Sagdi, Gopalpur and Mehnagar assembly seats falling in Azamgarh Lok Sabha

constituency.

The SP also alleged that the BJP leaders had given a list of the SP supporters and voters to the local police station officers to prevent them from casting their votes on Thursday. The SP alleged that in both the Lok Sabha constituencies, ministers of the BJP government had directed the lekhpals and panchayat secretaries to ensure that the votes from their villages were cast in favour of the BJP candidate.

Meanwhile, Akhilesh Yadav appealed to the voters to ensure the victory of SP candidate Dharmendra Yadav from Azamgarh. He asked the voters to be vigilant against the disinformation campaign by the BJP through various means, including social media.

"I and my father Mulayam Singh Yadav are no strangers to voters of Azamgarh and both of us are members of the larger Azamgarh family," Akhilesh Yadav said.

The SP chief issued a similar appeal to the voters of Rampur, urging them to ensure the success of the party candidate Asim Raza from Rampur.

Mayawati predicts victory of BSP candidate in Azamgarh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Predicting the victory of her party candidate, Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati, on the eve of bypolls, appealed to the voters to vote in favor of the BSP candidate for the Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat.

Mayawati expressed her hope in a tweet in which she said that she was convinced by the public support that the victory of party candidate Shah Alam alias Guddu Jamali was certain in Azamgarh.

Mayawati tweeted on Wednesday that the way the BSP was getting support from people of all sections in the elections to be held on Thursday for Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat, was very encouraging. "By staying away from the gimmicks of the opponents, this public support will definitely convert into votes, such is the full belief of BSP candidate Shah Alam alias Guddu Jamali," she said.

Due to Jamali always being helpful to the people rising



Mayawati made a strong appeal to the people to participate enthusiastically in the voting.

above the local and party politics, his credibility and popularity is more than that of the opponents, which is likely to have a good effect on the election result, she added.

Even a day earlier, Mayawati, while creating an atmosphere in favour of BSP candidate Guddu Jamali in the Azamgarh Lok Sabha by-election from Lucknow, had given him the title of a very civilised person along with describing

him as a local resident.

Regarding Shah Alam alias Guddu Jamali, who was MLA from Mubarakpur assembly constituency of Azamgarh, Mayawati had said that by ensuring the victory of Guddu Jamali in Azamgarh, people could kill two birds with one arrow. The BSP supremo had said that this was the first time that the BSP was contesting a by-election in Azamgarh and this bypoll was important for the people in the sense that they could defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party to teach it a lesson for its anti-people policies like Agnipath. She said along with this, SP could also be punished for its "internal complicity" with the BJP as both were two faces of the same coin.

She also made a strong appeal to the voters to participate enthusiastically in the voting.

Bahujan Samaj Party has fielded Guddu Jamali from Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat, while the party has not fielded its candidate for Rampur Lok Sabha seat.



A pair of ostrich attend to their eggs at the Jaipur Zoo, in Jaipur on Wednesday.

PTI Photo

Mau admin to confiscate property worth ₹ 3 cr of Mukhtar's wife

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Continuing the crackdown on mafias and their family members, the Mau administration has now ordered to confiscate property worth over Rs 3 crore acquired illegally by Afshan Ansari, wife of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari.

The action is being taken to confiscate these illegally

acquired properties on behalf of Mukhtar's family members, who are facing charges under the Gangsters Act.

According to the district magistrate of Mau, a campaign is underway to attach illegal properties in the district. Taking action under the Gangsters Act, District Magistrate Arun Kumar has issued an order to attach property worth Rs 3.76 crore ille-

gally acquired by Afshan Ansari wife of Mukhtar Ansari, resident of Yusufpur under Muhammadabad police station of Ghazipur district.

The huge property is situated in Sheikhpur Pargana of Sadar tehsil in Ghazipur district.

The market value of this land is around Rs3.76 crore, the officials claim. A case has been registered against Afshan

Ansari in various police stations of Ghazipur district, besides in Mau police station, Sarayalkhansi police station and South Tola police station.

The land to be attached was purchased by Afshan Ansari with illegally earned money. The district magistrate said that as per the direction of the government, action was being taken against the mov-

able and immovable properties acquired using the ill-gotten money in the district.

The district administration is identifying all people involved in illegal activities. There are sufficient grounds to take action against those who have created a large number of movable and immovable properties from illegally acquired money, under the Gangsters Act, he claimed.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

First among equals

The NDA holds a distinct advantage as the presidential election nears

The ruling National Democratic Alliance has selected former Jharkhand Governor Droupadi Murmu as its presidential candidate. "I am surprised as well as delighted. As a tribal woman from remote Mayurbhanj district, I had not thought about becoming the candidate for the top post," she said at her Rairangpur residence. It did not come as a big surprise to political commentators though, for it was widely speculated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi may opt for a person from either the tribal community or other backward classes (OBCs). All other major groups — Muslims, Dalits, Sikhs, women — have been represented. By choosing her as its presidential candidate, the BJP-led NDA expected to get support not just from the



MPs and MLAs from tribals but also from Odisha, her native State. The BJD, which is in power in Odisha, holds over 2.8 per cent of representation in the electoral college that will elect the President. "I am optimistic of support from all members of the Odisha Assembly and MPs," she said, "I am daughter of the soil. I have the right to request all members to support me as an Odia." Her optimism is well-grounded. Odisha Chief Minister and BJD boss Naveen Patnaik is favourably inclined towards her candidature. He tweeted: "Congratulations Smt #DraupadiMurmu on being announced as candidate of NDA for the country's highest office. I was

delighted when Hon'ble PM @narendramodi ji discussed this with me. It is indeed a proud moment for people of #Odisha." This will help her — and the NDA.

Equally important is the support she has got from Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. "We express happiness at the candidature of Droupadi Murmu for President. She is a tribal woman and it is a matter of great happiness that a tribal woman is the candidate for the highest position in the country," Nitish Kumar said. At any rate, the top BJP leadership is active and adroit enough to have its way, as evident from the political storm raging in Maharashtra. This is bad news for the Opposition which had propped up former BJP leader Yashwant Sinha as its presidential candidate. Opposition politicians had hoped that if somehow they managed to get their candidate occupy Rashtrapati Bhawan, it would not only add momentum to the campaign to eventually oust the BJP from office. That seems to be very difficult today; developments in Maharashtra have shown that not just the anti-BJP coalition is precarious but also that Opposition leaders are flatfooted. On the other hand, the BJP top brass calibrated all its moves. Supporting a tribal woman can be criticised as tokenism, but then it is not the first time tokenism has affected presidential poll; in 2007, for instance, the Congress selected Pratibha Patil, who was not a political heavyweight or household name, as its candidate. The BJP has been playing that game, and bagging rich dividends. And it is likely to get the President of its own choice.

PICTALK



A view of the swollen Jhelum river following incessant rain, in Srinagar

PTI

Trouble next door

India will do well to learn lessons from the goings-on in its immediate neighbourhood

There are several political developments taking place in our neighbourhood, and all of these portend to our own polity, what may be wrong with it, or what should be corrected. Sri Lanka is burning. Pakistan is in the black. Afghanistan remains simmering under its newfound cloak of civility. Nepal, under the new Prime Minister, has just about found its step after the former communist-leaning Premier was ousted. The suffocating situation in Myanmar is also nothing new. Now Kuwait's crown prince has dissolved Parliament and called for an early election following a stand-off between the Government and elected Assembly that has hindered fiscal reform. Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah has said that the decree would be issued for the dissolution of Parliament, the Gulf region's oldest. Even the ruling Emir of Kuwait has blessed the dissolution move. The Opposition lawmakers are staging an open-ended sit-in since last week at the Parliament complex to press Sheikh Meshal to name a new Prime Minister to replace the caretaker Premier who has faced a combative Parliament. The political crisis, which has blocked the country's economic and social progress, seems to be worsening.



Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe admitted in Parliament that its economy has "completely collapsed" and an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the only path to revival. While it is a fact that the island nation faces a far more serious situation beyond mere shortages of fuel, gas, electricity and food, any financial rescue plan with the IMF is not expected until Colombo agrees with its creditors on restructuring its \$51 billion foreign debt, which could take months. The country first defaulted on its debt in April and went cap-in-hand to the IMF, which asked Colombo to raise taxes and restructure loss-making state enterprises, but it made people angrier. To soothe the seething population, Sri Lanka's Cabinet has approved an amendment to the Constitution that could curtail presidential powers. Besides, Sri Lanka's Parliament sessions will be restricted to two days this week instead of four days amid the current fuel supply crisis. The situation in India is no better. Unemployment is rampant, inflation is rising, growth is slowing and the nation is seemingly in the throes of lumpen elements that threaten to derail our foreign relations anytime. We must seriously be on our guard!

Gulf nations must avow India's step

The Government has asserted its respect for all religions while the Gulf countries have often been suspect in establishing their secular credentials



VIVEK GUMASTE

The *démarche* issued by a host of Islamic nations with regard to the unfortunate Nupur Sharma incident had stirred up a hornet's nest in India and unleashed a welter of emotions. An ugly cocktail of shame, embarrassment, anger and frustration swirled and vitiated the air. There have been concerns about India's international image; some have rued over its impact on trade with the Arab world.

A former BJP leader sanctoriously claimed that India's "image has now come crashing down". He further averred that "... (It) caused grievous damage to our image as a liberal, secular democracy..." But is this really so? Do we need to feel ashamed? And did this controversy erode our credibility as a liberal secular democracy?

We, one person's aberration, even if the individual belongs to the ruling party, cannot indict an entire nation, its people and its Government. Second, the Government did act to rectify the indecorum by asserting its respect for all religions and by suspending the errant office bearer. Nupur Sharma has since apologised for her remarks.

Next, let us take a closer look at those Muslim countries that are hectoring India on morality. These include Kuwait, Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Jordan, Bahrain, Maldives, Malaysia, Oman, Iraq and Libya. The majority of them are autocracies which designate Islam as the official religion; a caveat that automatically relegates all other religions to second-class status.

Countries like Saudi Arabia



prohibit the construction of non-Muslim places of worship; in other Gulf countries, non-Muslims have to seek Government permission. These countries do not even afford non-Muslims the basic courtesy of dignity in death. Kuwait and Qatar do not allow cremations forcing non-Muslims to fly dead bodies out of the country to their native places. And let us not forget that Qatar is the country that indirectly endorsed MF Hussain's blasphemy against Hindu gods by honouring him with a citizenship.

In contrast, despite all the criticism that the Modi Government has been subject to, both at home and abroad, and despite all the talk of Hindu hyper-nationalism, we still remain a liberal democratic country par excellence that treats all its citizens equally. Muslims have the same rights as any Hindu. They have access to the same educational institutions, same job opportunities, the same health facilities and are beneficiaries of the same ration cards. They can build their own mosques and pray unhindered in these. We cannot be shamed by countries whose record on religious freedom is ques-

tionable. We need to be confident in our own skin and answerable to ourselves alone as the bearers of an ancient moral civilisation.

Coming to the question of trade, the Gulf Cooperation Council (consisting of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) is a major trading partner with exports of \$44 billion and imports worth \$110 billion (2021-22). About a third of India's crude oil needs (Saudi Arabia 18 per cent; UAE nine per cent and Kuwait five per cent) are supplied by the Gulf countries. However, since the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the equation is fast changing. Crude oil supplies from Russia have dramatically shot up reaching 3.36 million metric tonnes in May 2022 — a nine-fold monthly increase compared to 2021. India's dependence on oil from Gulf countries is significant but can be balanced by increasing supplies from Russia.

On the flip side, the Gulf countries are overwhelmingly dependent on India for their food needs. Specifically, India accounts for 84 per cent, 91 per cent and 80 per cent of Qatar's, Kuwait's and Iran's rice

requirements. So, vulnerability due to trade disruption extends to both sides.

What is most concerning is that this outrage has emboldened terrorists to threaten India with attacks and encouraged anti-social elements amongst India's Muslims? It has led to calls for beheading on national television, rioting through the streets and obscene calls for Hindu genocide from mosque tops. The Government of India has done the right thing to defuse the crisis by reiterating its respect for all religions and by suspending the errant office bearers.

The Gulf countries too must step up to the plate. After having vented their disapproval publicly, they must now show maturity if they do not want the narrative to be hijacked by radical fundamentalists. To put an end to the matter, they need to release another statement that welcomes the Indian Government's actions and acknowledges India as a genuinely secular nation.

(The author, a US-based academic and political commentator, frequently writes on current affairs in India. The views expressed are personal.)



THE MAJORITY OF THESE MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE AUTOCRACIES WHICH DESIGNATE ISLAM AS THE OFFICIAL RELIGION; A CAVEAT THAT AUTOMATICALLY RELEGATES ALL OTHER RELIGIONS TO SECOND-CLASS STATUS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

START AGNIPATH ON TRIAL BASIS

Sir — While working out the financial benefits of the Agnipath scheme, national security concerns and administrative feasibility cannot be brushed aside. The moot question is whether after completing four years in uniform, they will be able to withstand the pressures of unemployment. These well-trained youths can easily be lured, recruited and exploited by anti-social elements, creating newer challenges after completing their tenure. There is no gain saying that the new recruitment scheme for jawans is being pushed in a hurry to counter the rising discontentment among the unemployed youth and ever-growing resentment against the Government.

Another rational way of revisiting the Agnipath scheme is to downsize the Army, as China did in 2015 by giving 2.3 lakh soldiers VRS as part of its modernisation drive. The poor execution of SPARSH is a case in point. The new pension system for the armed forces veterans, which was launched with much fanfare in 2021 for post-2015 retirees, also ended in a fiasco as on May 1, almost 60,000 ex-servicemen were kept deprived of their pension. Taking lessons from its poor execution, it is essential to run Agnipath on a trial basis first.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

RADICAL REFORMS AFTER CONSULTATIONS

Sir — This refers to 'Some reforms may look unfair at first, but help nation in long run: Modi' (June 21). The PM's statement is relevant because it comes against the backdrop of widespread protests against the Agnipath scheme. Irrespective of the merits and demerits of the scheme, it has turned into a burning issue. Also, it is difficult to ignore the fact that this is the third big reform by the Modi-led Government to face such serious opposition. The land reform Bill in its first term and the farm reforms Bill in its second term were withdrawn to avert likely electoral losses despite there being enough reasons to persist with these.

Comments malign Cong's image



The way in which the leaders of the Opposition Congress and its former Ministers were seen losing their cool in public meetings in the recent past, is sad. Their frustration was evident in their statements. The kind of abusive language used by Shaikh Hussain about the Prime Minister of the country in the Congress' protest public meeting in Nagpur and after that at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, by former

Union Minister of Congress, Subodh Kant Sahai. It's a sad state of affairs. The Congress has been an old national party. It has had a golden history. But today, the language the senior Congress leaders are using in public meetings is not in any way in the interest of the party.

What derogatory remarks are being made by the leaders about certain constitutional posts, they don't even care about it. The Congress has ruled the country for more than 60 years and all that has been possible only because of the nation's people. It has also been the tradition of Congress to respect the sentiments of the same people. The Prime Minister is not only a leader of a political party, his is a constitutional post, leading the country in the world. Insulting your constitutional post does not suit the leaders of a national party like the Congress. Such statements will only hurt the image of the Congress.

Rajender Kumar Sharma | Haryana

The issues that these two aborted reforms set out to address remain, and are likely to have a detrimental impact on the Indian economy. While it is possible the opposition to such reforms was inevitable, it is also possible that their intensity might have been diminished through a consultative process involving all stakeholders, an elaborate detailing of the contours of the reforms. However, when it comes to the adoption of radical reforms, good intentions and a majority in Parliament may not necessarily translate into instant and universal acceptance.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

NEED TO HARMONISE WITH TECH

Sir — With great admiration and belief in the columns of your newspaper, I seek to bring to your attention the fast-growing menace of tech addiction and the resultant health scares among the youth of our country. Today, we are able to enjoy some of the most convenient gadgets to have ever existed, which offer far more information and

sources of entertainment than any other. As a result, the upcoming generation has been becoming increasingly information-heavy. The number of hours an average person spends in gaining information, whether wanted or unwanted, is fast increasing, with a screen in front of our eyes showing us new wonders every minute.

And on top of that, the wonders are as per choice and preferences. All this temptation often leads young children to spend much more time on these gadgets than what's healthy. And even though we may not realise it instantly, it levies a huge load of tiredness on our brains and eyes, often leading to inexplicable stress and irritability. Hence, through the pages of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to appeal to the youth worldwide to maintain a balance of all spheres of life to fully enjoy it.

Divyansha Sharma | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

Many reforms in the present may seem unpleasant... but over time, there are benefits.



Prime Minister —Narendra Modi



Afghan ambassador —Farid Mamundzay

Music is also a form of yoga, which I have been practising since childhood.



Singer —Sukhwinder Singh



India chief coach —Rahul Dravid

I am happy to inform you that the Indian farmers are completely protected.



Commerce Minister —Piyush Goyal

FIRST COLUMN

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE TO STRENGTHEN UNITY

India already has a fairly uniform set of laws



RAJENDRA PRASAD GUPTA

In a country as diverse as India, a lot has changed during the 75 years of Independence. India is continuously climbing the ladder of success. The country is asserting itself as a major economic and military power. In such a milieu, there is an urgent need that India, like other nations, strengthens the initiative of national integration by passing a uniform civil code.

The criminal code, civil procedure code, the Special Marriage Act, etc., apply uniformly to all citizens. Barring a few exceptions, India has a fairly uniform set of laws.

The British government had entrusted the responsibility of initiating a uniform civil code to Warren Hasting in 1772 when he was conferred the civil, judicial and administrative responsibility. Later, the British government emphasised the need to compile the codification of Indian laws on various subjects in 1835, with a few exceptions.

Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives us freedom of conscience and freedom to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, including the protection of our cultural diversity. At the same time, there is Article 44, which upholds a "uniform civil code" for citizens. It is part of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution.

In order to bring uniformity in law, various courts have often said in their judgments that the government should strive towards ensuring a uniform civil code.



With the passage of time, many laws have been changed in India. The demand for a uniform civil code has also been going on since the time of Independence. In fact, even the framers of the Constitution had deliberated on it, but it was put on hold due to opposition by the Muslim representatives.

India will not be the first nation to implement a uniform civil code. The US, Canada, and European nations as well as many Islamic countries like Turkey, Indonesia, and Sudan have uniform civil codes.

By promoting the politics of appeasement in India, a select few fundamentalist organisations, which are protected by political parties, are engaged in dividing the country. If one looks at the developments in history, one will find that since Independence these organisations have been involved in anti-national activities. Many conspiracies have been hatched for the purpose of precluding a uniform civil code. Owing to vote bank politics, top leaders of many major political parties started fear-mongering, telling the Muslim community that a uniform civil code would violate their rights as enshrined in the Constitution.

These politicians forget that the same Constitution has also talked about implementing a uniform civil code. They should also be aware that a uniform civil code has been in force in Goa for years, which has proved to be effective in maintaining harmony and a peaceful environment, and accelerating development there.

Therefore, it would be better if today we make meaningful efforts to solve the problem and not leave it to the future. This step will also be commendable and in tune with the motto of 'One Nation and One Legislation.'

For this it is necessary that the Centre, Parliament and state governments agree on this issue to develop a national consensus. While preserving cultural diversity, it is necessary that no person should be discriminated against. As far as possible, there should be the same law in India and a uniform civil code.

Several pending issues like triple talaq, Article 370, and Ram Mandir have been addressed in the last few years. This has raised hope that uniform civil code will also become a reality.

(The author, a professor, is the vice-president of BJP in Bihar and a member of Bihar Legislative Council)

BJP's foreign outreach serves national interest

The outreach is an exercise to realise democratic ideals and reach out to those uninitiated and curious about our country



SUMEET BHASIN



BIASES, PREJUDICES, AND PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES THAT THE BJP HAS SOUGHT TO ADDRESS IN ITS OUTREACH TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES. 'KNOW BJP' IS AN INITIATIVE OF THE RULING PARTY

(The author is Director, the Public Policy Research Centre, the BJP's principal think tank; twitter at @sumeetbhasin)



motion by former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogue, which went on for several years, had laid the foundation for the Indian pivot in Asia for the US, which also augmented the global outreach of India.

Notably, former BJP chief and deputy PM LK Advani had set in motion the party's foreign outreach by creating a foreign cell and the overseas friends of the BJP, which are playing important roles in the outreach, who in turn have become vocal advocates of Indian national interest. Deployment of technology for outreach by the BJP in the last one decade by tapping the full potential of social media platforms has given a boost unseen in the past.

Vajpayee, being a true democrat, had the idea to connect with the Indian diaspora to tap their growing influence to work for the Indian national interest. Needless to say, increase in the Indian outreach with foreign capitals corresponds with the rise in the politico-economic clout of the Indian diaspora.

In PM Modi, the Indian diaspora got the perfect voice for Indian national interest. Predictably, the interactions with the diaspora are a regular feature during his foreign visits. So, while Vajpayee laid the foundation for the connect with the world, Modi has upgraded it by building a grand edifice of an India that's connected with every corner of the world—from developed countries to island nations, from the African continent to the developing nations and the immediate neighbourhood. He has deployed full resources to build relationships of

a reliable and dependable friend.

For many, the BJP is a relatively new political party, for they have been used to seeing Congress in power for decades. The BJP gained full majority in the Lok Sabha only in 2014 under the leadership of Modi. This happened again in the 2019 general election. While Vajpayee led the government within the coalition limitations, PM Modi has the unprecedented popular mandate to unlock India's fullest potential. The Modi-led government at the Centre has carried out a legislative agenda which was earlier seen as impossible.

Revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Then the archaic practice of triple talaq among the Muslims was discarded; this caught the attention of many in the world. Such political will to carry out hard reforms is tough to find even among many world leaders. This fuels curiosity of foreign commentators in the BJP and its leadership; this has necessitated a creative outreach strategy, so that we could keep pace with the fast-changing global narrative.

The outbreak of Covid-19 tested the characters of national leaders of several countries. India with over one billion population was seen by many as too vulnerable to the deadly pandemic. But the incumbent Indian leadership proved equal to the task; in fact, it excelled in its response with two made in India vaccines that shielded not just Indians but millions in several countries. The neighbouring countries remained solely dependent on India.

PM led the outreach at the policy front, holding consultations with the scientific community to find answers to the looming challenges in the form of Covid-19. India showcased why the country is the pharma capital of the world, with the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro expressing gratitude for the medicines and vaccines by equating the efforts with Hanuman carrying the 'Sanjeevani Booti' for injured Lakshman.

The BJP's outreach with the poor during such trying times shaped the party's deep social reach in the form of distribution of dry ration kits to millions of people during lockdowns and thereafter. BJP workers ran community kitchens across the country. Blending of the social and political work further helped the endeavour.

Dialogue and dissemination are in the DNA of the BJP and its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Foreign commentators have their misgivings about the RSS and the BJP because of the long-term narratives fed to them by the political rivals and the well-entrenched 'Left-liberal ecosystem.'

RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat held extensive interactions with the representatives of the foreign media at Vigyan Bhavan a few years ago where he responded to all the questions. He explained to them the worldview and functioning of the organisation.

The BJP leaders have their ears to the ground; outreach helps them know the pulse of the people. They are not the prisoners of history; they are willing to walk the tough road.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

WE HAVE OPENED UP THE SPACE AND THE DEFENCE SECTORS WHICH, FOR DECADES, WERE UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL.
—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 75 YEARS, SERVICE CHIEFS ARE BEING FRONTED TO DEFEND A GOVERNMENT'S POLICY DECISION.
—LEADER OF OPPN IN THE RAJYA SABHA MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

South Africa: Anti-graft Prez faces scam charges

A politically-linked former spy hurled some not-very-convincing charges at President Ramaphosa, ruining latter's name



GWYNNE DYER

Once upon a time (about four years ago) Cyril Ramaphosa was seen as South Africa's last, best hope. Since the end of Apartheid in 1994, the leadership of the country's ruling African National Congress (ANC) had passed from the wise and heroic Nelson Mandela to the intellectual but ineffectual Thabo Mbeki and then to the corrupt and ignorant Jacob Zuma.

But in 2018 the fractured and demoralised ANC pulled itself together, remembered its purpose, and replaced Zuma as president with Cyril Ramaphosa. Hope soared: Ramaphosa had a long record of activism in the struggle against Apartheid; he was a former trade union leader; and he was so rich that he didn't need to be corrupt. He was the ideal candidate.

(The author's new book is The Shortest History of War)

For a while it went well. The economy didn't grow much and unemployment stayed very high, but Zuma's chief cronies fled abroad, others were charged with various crimes, and even Zuma wound up in jail. Ramaphosa was at least trying to clean up the mess—but then, two years ago, there was a burglary at his wildlife game farm in Limpopo province.

Nobody heard about it at the time, because Ramaphosa didn't mention it publicly. That's understandable, because the burglars allegedly found \$4 million in cash hidden in cushions on his sofa. That's not a good look for a president whose USP is fighting corruption, so no report was made to the police. Ramaphosa just swallowed the loss.

That's not as crazy as it sounds: Ramaphosa is one of the richest men in South Africa, and \$4 million is less than one per cent of his wealth. He could just be trying not to draw attention to it. But then, early this month, Arthur Fraser, former head of South Africa's intelligence agency, lodged a criminal complaint with the police about the affair.

Fraser said that Ramaphosa's 'presidential protection unit' (bodyguards) had tracked down the burglars, kidnapped, and interrogated them, and then bribed them to keep quiet about the cash. Maybe Ramaphosa was just trying to protect his reputation as a man of the people, but even so he would have been breaking the law. And then Fraser outed him.



The news is now out all over town, and by this week Ramaphosa was under attack from all sides. "Criminals do not report crimes when the proceeds of their crimes are stolen," as Julius Malema, leader of the opposition Economic Freedom Fighters party, put it, and a great many other people in Parliament and in the street

took the same view.

This comes at just the wrong time for Ramaphosa, who faces a leadership challenge in the ANC in December. His anti-corruption campaign within the party has not prospered, and Zuma's supporters staged riots that killed hundreds when he was jailed. Now Zuma's out of jail, and Ramaphosa is tarred with the same corruption brush himself.

There's a lot that's wrong with this story. Arthur Fraser, the former spy chief who brought the complaint against Ramaphosa, is a close ally of Zuma's. The South African President does hold regular cash auctions of his prize Ankole cattle and various game animals at his farm, but why would he hide the cash in pillows? Tax avoidance?

This is a man who has sat on literally dozens of boards and is allegedly worth \$450 million. If he wants to avoid taxes, he has lawyers aplenty; he doesn't need sofa cushions. The whole 'burglary' operation, and especially the source and the timing of the 'complaint', smells like a political sting. Nevertheless, Ramaphosa is in deep trouble.

The real object of the sting would have been to highlight Ramaphosa's great and unexplained wealth. He probably didn't break the law to get it, like Zuma did, but he didn't inherit it and he didn't earn it by hard work. He just got paid huge sums to sit on boards, and invested the proceeds wisely.

Ramaphosa got on those boards as part of the ANC-sponsored 'Black Economic

Empowerment' programme, one of whose purposes was to provide a reliable, low-profile income stream for its political work. Most of its supporters were very poor, but the chosen 'BEE' appointees were expected to donate much of their large incomes to the ANC.

It's less lurid than Zuma's route to great wealth via partnership with Indian 'entrepreneurs' in a project of 'state capture', but both men's riches came from their ties to the ANC. To the average voter in Alexandra township, the two men will look exactly the same.

That is why the ANC will probably lose its majority in Parliament in the 2024 election, after 30 years in power. High time, really, even though nobody knows what's coming out of the box next.

Ukraine journalist, soldier ‘coldly executed’: Press group

AP ■ KYIV

A Ukrainian photojournalist and a soldier who was accompanying him when they were killed in the first weeks of Russia's invasion appear to have been "coldly executed" as they were searching Russian-occupied woodlands for the photographer's missing image-taking drone, Reporters Without Borders said Wednesday, citing its findings from an investigation into their deaths.

The press freedom group said it went back to the spot where the bodies of Maks Levin and serviceman Oleksiy Chernyshov were found April 1 in woods north of the capital, Kyiv.

The group said it counted 14 bullet holes in the burned hulk of their car still at the scene.

The group said disused Russian positions, one of them still booby-trapped, were found close by. Also found were the remains of food rations, cigarette packets and other litter seemingly left by Russian soldiers.

Some of Levin and Chernyshov's belongings, including the soldier's ID papers and



parts of his bulletproof vest and the photographer's helmet, were also recovered, it said.

A Ukrainian team with metal detectors also uncovered a bullet buried in the soil where Levin's body had lain, it said.

The group said that finding suggests "he was probably killed with one, perhaps two bullets fired at close range when he was already on the ground."

A jerrycan for gasoline was also found close to where Chernyshov's burned body had been recovered, it added.

Reporters Without Borders said its findings "show that the two men were doubtless coldly executed."

Levin and Chernyshov were last heard from on March 13. A GPS tracker in their vehicle gave their last position, in woods north of Kyiv, the group said.

It said Levin had lost his drone in the area on March 10 and hadn't been able to recover it because he'd come under Russian fire. Drones have become a common tool for photojournalists to get aerial photos and video.

Ukraine-based publishing house CEO, journalist killed in action

IAN S ■ KIEV

Chief Executive Officer of Ukraine-based Blitz-Inform Publishing House Volodymyr Chepovy has been "killed in action" when defending Ukraine against Russian forces.

The statement was made on Telegram by the National Union ring to spokesperson of the Deputy Head of Kiev City State Administration Liudmyla Shykota, a Ukrinform news agency reported.

"Today it has been confirmed that Blitz-Inform Publishing House CEO, Business publication Editor-in-

Chief, Business 100 project initiator Volodymyr Chepovy was killed in action. Enthusiastic, cheerful, active," Shykota wrote.

Chepovy's death was also confirmed by political expert Vitalii Kulyk.

"Volodymyr Chepovy went to war as a volunteer fighter of the Territorial Defense Forces and was killed in the early weeks of June. His body was identified just yesterday," Kulyk noted.

Volodymyr Chepovy became the 34th media professional to have been killed since the Russia-Ukraine war started.

Reporters Without Borders said Levin had on occasion shared information gleaned from his drone, including about Russian positions, with Ukrainian forces.

"But the use of his drone was

first and foremost a journalistic endeavour, confirmed by his entourage and shown by the images sold to the media since the start of the Russian invasion," it said.

Drone strike hits Russian refinery near Ukraine



AP ■ MOSCOW

A drone strike caused a fire at a refinery in southwestern Russia near the border with Ukraine on Wednesday, but no one was hurt and the blaze was contained quickly, officials said.

The fire engulfed industrial equipment at the Novoshakhtinsk oil processing plant in the Rostov-on-Don region. The authorities said that dozens of fire-fighters extinguished the flames in a half-hour and no one was hurt.

The refinery said in a statement that the fire was caused by a strike carried out by two drones, describing it as a "terrorist" act.

It didn't give further details, but the state news agency Tass said that two Ukrainian drones flew over the plant and one of them slammed into a heat exchanger, triggering the fire.

Ukrainian officials haven't claimed responsibility for the drone strike.

A video posted on a messaging app channel showed a drone flying by and hitting what was purported to be the refinery, a giant plume of smoke rising into the sky.

The authenticity of the video couldn't be independently verified.

The Rostov regional governor, Vasily Golubev, said that fragments of two drones were found on the territory of the plant. The refinery said it temporarily suspended the operations to assess the damage.

Wednesday's attack on the refinery follows a series of explosions and fires in western Russia amid Moscow's fighting in Ukraine in an operation that began nearly four months ago.

In April, two Ukrainian helicopter gunships struck an oil depot in Belgorod, according to Russian officials, causing a massive fire. Several other explosions and fires hit refineries, oil depots, and an ammunition storage facility.

Europe told to prepare immediately for Russia to turn off all gas exports

IAN S ■ LONDON

Europe needs to prepare "immediately" for Russia to turn off all gas exports to the region this winter, according to the head of the International Energy Agency, who has called on governments to work on reducing demand and keeping nuclear power plants open.

Fatih Birol said that the reductions in supplies in recent weeks the Kremlin has attributed to maintenance work could, in fact, be the beginning of wider cuts designed to prevent the filling of storage facilities in preparation for winter, as Russia seeks to gain leverage over the region, The Guardian reported.

"Europe should be ready in case Russian gas is completely cut off," he said in an interview with the Financial Times. "The nearer we are coming to win-



ter, the more we understand Russia's intentions." "I believe the cuts are geared towards avoiding Europe filling storage, and increasing Russia's leverage in the winter months."

EU countries are racing to refill storage sites, with Germany hoping to reach 90 per cent of capacity by November. Its stores are only half full, The Guardian reported.

Member states have also

been working to reduce their reliance on Russian fossil fuels, by sourcing gas from other countries, including the US, and by speeding up the switch to renewable energy, although officials have conceded that the race to phase out Russian oil and gas would mean burning more coal and keeping nuclear plants going.

Birol said emergency measures taken by European gov-

ernments to reduce energy demand had probably not gone far enough, and urged countries to work on preserving energy supplies.

"I believe there will be more and deeper demand measures as winter approaches," Birol said. He added that gas supplies may need to be rationed, if Russia were to further reduce gas exports.

Moscow has reduced or even cut off gas deliveries to several EU countries in recent weeks, in response to their decision to impose sanctions on the Kremlin over its invasion of Ukraine.

Russian gas supplies to Europe received through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline - which runs under the Baltic Sea to Germany - have been falling, The Guardian reported.

Diary of 12-year-old Ukrainian refugee to be released

AP ■ NEW YORK

The reflections of a 12-year-old refugee from the Russian invasion of Ukraine will be published this fall. Yeva Skalietska's book is called "You Don't Know What War Is: The Diary of a Young Girl from Ukraine."

Union Square & Co. Will release her account Oct. 25.

"Everyone knows what the word 'war' means, but practically no one knows what this word really represents," Skalietska said in a statement released Wednesday. "I want the world to know what we have experienced."

Skalietska's book begins with her 12th birthday, shortly before the Russians attacked on Feb. 24. She had been living in Kharkiv with her grandmother when the bombing began. (Yeva's parents separated when she was a baby, and her grandmother has raised her).

"She describes the bombings they endured while sheltering underground, and their desperate journey to West Ukraine. She shares her confusion about why the Russians would



attack them, since she speaks Russian and follows many of their customs," according to Union Square's announcement.

"After many endless train rides and a prolonged stay in an overcrowded refugee center in Hungary - because several countries in Europe refused them entry - Yeva and her beloved grandmother eventually find refuge in Dublin, where she bravely begins to forge a new life, hoping she'll be able to return home one day," the publisher said.

Union Square will donate a portion of the proceeds to Ukraine refugee organizations.

Germany's Scholz: G7 to discuss 'Marshall plan' for Ukraine

AP ■ BERLIN

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday that he wants to discuss the outlines of a "Marshall plan for Ukraine" with the leaders of the Group of Seven countries at their upcoming summit in Germany. Scholz hopes for a united front on long-term support for Ukraine when he hosts the annual G-7 summit in Bavaria next week.

The group of the world's

leading economic powers is made up of the US, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Canada and Japan. The chancellor told Germany's parliament that "rebuilding Ukraine will be a task for generations."

Recalling his visit last week to Irpin, a Kyiv suburb that saw intense fighting, he said that "some things there remind not just me of the pictures of German cities after World War II."

‘Politically motivated’ Western sanctions on Russia have caused global economic challenges: Putin

PTI ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday said the "politically motivated" Western sanctions on his country have caused global economic challenges like decrease in business activity, a spike in unemployment, a shortage of raw materials and difficulties in ensuring global food security.

In his address to a business conference of the BRICS hosted by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Putin also said that Russia was in the process of rerouting its trade and oil exports towards countries from the grouping which comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

"New politically motivated sanctions are imposed again and again, the mechanisms of putting

pressure on competition are being reinforced," he was quoted as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

"A deliberate breakdown of cooperation ties is taking place, transport and logistics chains are collapsing," he said.

"All this is contrary to common sense and elementary economic logic, is to the detriment of the interests of business on a global scale, and negatively affects the well-being of the population, essentially, of all countries."

"As a result, problems in the global economy are becoming chronic," he said.

"There is a decrease in business activity, an increase in unemployment, a shortage of raw materials and components, difficulties in ensuring global

food security are being exacerbated, prices for grain crops and other basic agricultural products are driven up," Putin said without referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Putin ordered a "special military operation" against Ukraine on February 24. The US-led Western nations have imposed crippling sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine is one of the world's top grain producers along with Russia, but has been unable to export to global markets because of a blockade of its Black Sea ports. The BRICS countries, Putin said, are developing business in difficult conditions.

"Entrepreneurs in our countries are having to build their business in difficult conditions when Western partners neglect

the basic principles of a market economy, free trade, the inviolability of private property, pursue an essentially irresponsible macroeconomic course, including the launch of a printing press, uncontrolled emission and the accumulation of unsecured debts," he said.

Noting that despite all problems and difficulties, BRICS businesses have been "consistently enhancing mutually beneficial ties in the areas of trade, finance, and investment", Putin said that in the first three months of 2022, trade between Russia and the BRICS countries increased by 38 per cent - and reached USD 45 billion.

"Contacts between Russian business circles and the business community of the BRICS countries have intensified.

Chinese President Xi hits out at US, EU for imposing sanctions against Russia

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday hit out at the US and EU for imposing sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, saying the act of wilfully imposing curbs will harm people around the world.

History has shown that hegemony, group politics and bloc confrontations bring neither peace nor stability, but rather war and conflict, President Xi said in a keynote speech delivered in a virtual format at the opening ceremony of the BRICS Business Forum.

The Ukraine crisis has again sounded the alarm for humanity: Countries will surely end up in security hardships if they place blind faith in their positions of strength, expand military alliances, and seek their own safety at the expense of others, Xi was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

In his speech at the Business Forum, Xi hit out at the US and EU for imposing sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, saying the act of wilfully imposing sanctions will bring disasters to people around the world.

Describing sanctions as boomerangs and double-edged swords, Xi said those who politicise, leverage and weaponise global economy and wilfully impose sanctions by taking advantage of dominance in international financial and monetary systems will eventually harm others and themselves and bring disasters to people around the world.

The BRICS Business Forum meeting was held ahead of Thursday's 14th summit of BRICS nations - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which will be held in Beijing via video link followed by high-level dialogue on global development the next day.

China is this year's chair of the BRICS.


Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa are expected to take part in the summit hosted by President Xi.

The Summit will be held in virtual format under the theme of Foster High-quality BRICS Partnership, Usher in a New Era for Global Development, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a statement.

Noting that safeguarding peace is the common cause of all humanity, Xi said that only if everyone cherishes and upholds peace, and remembers and learns from the bitter lessons of war, can there be the hope of peace.

"Facing the turmoil and instability in the world, we should keep firmly in mind the original aspiration of the UN Charter, as well as our mission to promote peace," Xi said.

Urging the international community to abandon zero-sum game and jointly oppose hegemony and power politics, Xi called for the building of a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, equity and justice, and mutually beneficial cooperation.



GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, ENVIRONMENT & REMOTE SENSING
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
for
Preparation of Revision Document of J&K Action Plan for Climate Change

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, the Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing (DoEERS) of the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), is inviting the services of a reputed technical organization for the revision of the UT Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The interested organizations may submit the Expression of Interest (Eoi) by providing required information as given in the Eoi document.

The complete Eoi, supported by the relevant documents must reach the office of the Director, Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Parysaran Bhawan Transport Nagar, Gladini, Narwal, Jammu / SDA Colony, Bemina, Srinagar /email id dirjkers@gmail.com on or before **13.07.2022, 12:00 noon**. The email/envelope must be clearly superscripted as "EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR REVISION OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE".

The offers shall be opened by the Departmental Evaluation Committee to be constituted for the purpose, on **14th July 2022**, in the Office chamber of the Director, Department of Ecology, Environment & Remote Sensing, J&K Govt., Jammu/Srinagar. The detailed EOI document is available on our website www.jkdeers.com

The Eoi may be submitted through Email/Registered Post/Speed Post. The DoEERS shall not be held responsible for any postal delay for non-receipt of Eoi within the scheduled date and time. The DoEERS reserves the right to reject any or all the Eois without assigning any reasons thereof.

The important details pertaining to the submission of the EOI are as under:

Date of issue of EOI	: 20.06.2022
Date of Pre-Bid Conference	: 29.06.2022, 11:30 am
Due date for submission of EOI	: 13.07.2022, 12 Noon
Date of opening of EOI	: 14.07.2022, 12 Noon

Place: Srinagar
Dated: 20.06.2022
No. DIPK-4516/22 Dated: 22.06.2022

Sd/- Staff Officer to Director,
Ecology, Environment & Remote Sensing
J&K, Govt. Jammu/Srinagar

French paratroopers conduct military drill in Estonia

AP ■ TALLINN

French armed forces conducted a surprise military exercise in Estonia, deploying more than 100 paratroopers in the Baltic country that neighbours Russia, the French defense ministry said Wednesday.

The airborne operation conducted on Tuesday night and dubbed Thunder Lynx "enabled, at very short notice, the dropping of about 100 paratroopers" from France's 11th Airborne Brigade "over an area secured by Estonian soldiers," the statement said.

The hastily organised exercise in Estonia, a NATO ally, was executed as an act of "strategic solidarity" amid Russia's war in Ukraine.

"The airborne operation



illustrates the ability of the French armed forces to intervene, in emergency, and support an allied country," a French defense ministry statement said.

France has around 500 sol-

diers deployed to Romania as part of NATO's Rapid Reaction Force and has been a key player in NATO's bolstering of forces on the alliance's eastern flank since the war started.

In May, France deployed an air defense system to Romania that NATO said "can ensure protection to the forces operating within the area."

Indonesian Prez to visit Russia, Ukraine

IAN S ■ JAKARTA

Indonesian President Joko Widodo will visit Moscow and Kiev by the end of June and meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky respectively, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told a press briefing on Wednesday.

Retno said that during the visits, Widodo will discuss the food crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Xinhua news agency reported.

The "special visits" would show that Indonesia, as the host country of Group of 20 (G20) Summit in November, was "actively responding" to the ongoing geopolitical issue.

Indonesia has fully expected that Russia, one of G20 members, will attend the summit, while Ukraine was also invited for the

meeting as a guest country.

"We fully understand that the situation now is very complicated, and all of the countries in the world know that. Thus, through the visits, the president wants to contribute to overcoming the food crisis that has been caused by the war and has impacted the poor countries. The President wants to push for the spirit of peace," Retno said.

She pointed out that President Widodo would be the first president from the Southeast Asia region to visit both countries since the conflict broke out in February.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been going on since then, which has been widely reported to trigger a rise in global food and energy prices.

Before travelling to Moscow and Kiev, Widodo will first attend the G7 Summit in Germany.

Afghanistan quake kills 1,000 people, deadliest in decades

AP ■ KABUL

A powerful earthquake struck a rural, mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan early Wednesday, killing 1,000 people and injuring 1,500 more in one of the deadliest quakes in decades, the state-run news agency reported. Officials warned that the already grim toll may still rise.

Information remained scarce on the magnitude 6.1 temblor near the Pakistani border, but quakes of that strength can cause serious damage in an area where homes and other buildings are poorly constructed and landslides are common.

Experts put the depth at just 10 kilometers - another factor that could lead to severe destruction.

The disaster posed a major test for the Taliban-led government, which seized power last year as the U.S. Planned to pull out from the country and end its longest war, two decades after toppling the same insurgents in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Rescuers rushed to the area by helicopter Wednesday, but the response is likely to be complicated since many international aid agencies



left Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

Reaching rural areas even in the best circumstances remains difficult in Afghanistan, a landlocked nation just smaller than Texas with rutted mountain roadways that may now have sustained significant damage.

In light of those difficulties, a Taliban official asked for international help. "When such a big incident happens in any country, there is a need

for help from other countries," said Sharafuddin Muslim.

"It is very difficult for us to be able to respond to this huge incident."

Neighbouring Pakistan's Meteorological Department said the quake's epicentre was in Afghanistan's Paktika province, some 50 kilometers southwest of the city of Khost.

Buildings were also damaged in Khost province, and tremors were felt some 375 kilometers away in the

Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

Footage from Paktika showed men carrying people in blankets to waiting helicopters. Others were treated on the ground. One resident could be seen receiving IV fluids while sitting in a plastic chair outside the rubble of his home and still more were sprawled on gurneys.

Some images showed residents picking through clay bricks and other rubble from destroyed stone houses, some of whose roofs or walls had caved in. The death toll given by the Bakhtar News Agency was equal to that of a quake in 2002 in northern Afghanistan. Those are the deadliest since 1998, when a 6.1 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tremors in Afghanistan's remote northeast killed at least 4,500 people.

In most places in the world, an earthquake of that magnitude wouldn't inflict such extensive devastation, said Robert Sanders, a seismologist with the U.S. Geological Survey.

But a quake's death toll more often comes down to geography, building quality and population density.

"Because of the mountainous area, there are rockslides and land-slides that we won't know about until

later reporting. Older buildings are likely to crumble and fail," he said.

"Due to how condensed the area is in that part of the world, we've seen in the past similar earthquakes deal significant damage."

The Taliban are still trying to reconstitute government ministries abandoned by staff loyal to its previous Western-backed government, and it was not clear how officials arrived at the casualty tolls reported by Bakhtar.

In Kabul, Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund convened an emergency meeting at the presidential palace to coordinate the relief effort, and Bilal Karimi, a deputy spokesman for the Taliban government, wrote on Twitter to urge aid agencies to send teams to the area.

The "response is on its way," the U.N. Resident coordinator in Afghanistan, Ramiz Alakbarov, wrote on Twitter. That may prove difficult given the situation Afghanistan finds itself in today.

After the Taliban swept across the country in 2021, the U.S. Military and its allies fell back to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport and later withdrew completely.



US senators reach bipartisan compromise on gun violence bill

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Senate bargainers reached agreement Tuesday on a bipartisan gun violence bill, potentially teeing up final passage by week's end on an incremental but landmark package that would stand as Congress' response to mass shootings in Texas and New York that shook the nation.

Lawmakers released the 80-page bill nine days after agreeing to a framework for the plan and 29 years after Congress last enacted major firearms curbs. It cleared an initial procedural hurdle by 64-34, with 14 Republicans joining all 48 Democrats and two allied independents in voting yes. That strongly supported a prediction by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., of approval later this week. Passage by the Democratic-led House could follow quickly.

Though Republicans blocked tougher restrictions sought by Democrats, the accord marks an election-year breakthrough on an issue that pits the GOP's staunch gun-owning and rural voters against Democrats' urban-centered backers of firearms curbs. That makes it one of the most incendiary culture war battlefields in politics and a sensitive vote for some lawmakers, particularly Republicans who might alienate Second Amendment stalwarts.

The legislation would toughen background checks for the youngest firearms buyers, require more sellers to conduct background checks and beef up penalties on gun traffickers. It also would disburse money to states and communities to improve school safety and mental health initiatives.

Aides estimated the measure would cost around \$15 billion, which Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, the lead

Democratic bargainer, said would be fully paid for.

Resolving one final hurdle that delayed the accord, the bill would prohibit romantic partners convicted of domestic violence and not married to their victims from getting firearms. Convicted abusers who are married to, live with or had children with their victims are already barred from having guns.

The compromise prohibits guns for a person who has "a current or recent former dating relationship with the victim." That is defined in part as one between people "who have or have recently had a continuing serious relationship of a romantic or intimate nature." An offender's ability to own a gun could be restored after five years if they've not committed another serious crime.

On another late dispute, the bill would provide \$750 million to the 19 states and the District of Columbia that have "red flag" laws making it easier to temporarily take firearms from people adjudged dangerous, and to other states with violence prevention programs. States with "red flag" laws that receive the funds would have to have legal processes for the gun owner to fight the firearm's removal.

Momentum in Congress for gun legislation has a history of waning quickly after mass shootings. Lawmakers are scheduled to begin a two-week July 4th recess by this weekend.

The legislation lacks far more potent proposals that President Joe Biden supports and Democrats have pushed unsuccessfully for years, derailed by GOP opposition. These include banning assault-type weapons or raising the minimum age for buying them, prohibiting high-capacity magazines and requiring background checks for virtually all gun sales.

UK plans to rewrite human rights law; critics cry foul

AP ■ LONDON

The British government on Wednesday unveiled plans for a Bill of Rights it says will strengthen free speech and the power of Parliament - but that critics argue will rip up human rights protections for ordinary people.

The government published the bill days after courts in the UK and Europe, on human rights grounds, stopped Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative administration deporting people seeking asylum in Britain to Rwanda. If approved by Parliament - where it faces a battle - the legislation will raise the bar for bringing human rights legal claims. It will reduce the ability of foreign nationals convicted of a crime in Britain to challenge deportation on the basis of their human rights.

The government says the goal is to reduce "trivial" and "frivolous" claims.

The law will also give British courts the power to ignore rulings by the European Court of Human

Rights, currently the ultimate arbiter of rights law for dozens of countries, including the U.K. It was an ECHR judge who ruled last week that an Iraqi man should not be sent to Rwanda under the government's controversial deportation plan, a judgment that led to the flight being grounded.

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said the bill, which would replace the U.K.'s Human Rights Act, would "curb abuses of the system and inject a bit more common sense" into human rights law.

Raab said Britain would retain its "fundamental commitment" to the European Convention on Human Rights, but its move could set it on a collision course with the Council of Europe, which oversees the Strasbourg-based rights court.

The Govt depicted the Bill of Rights as an assertion of British sovereignty in the wake of the country's departure from the EU. However, the European Court of Human Rights is unconnected to the EU; it is an international tribunal supported by 46 countries.

AP ■ CANBERRA

Authorities declared the final seats on Wednesday in a greener, more fragmented Australian Parliament following May 21 elections.

The election brought Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party to power for the first time in nine years.

The Australian Electoral Commission on Wednesday declared the Victoria state seat of Cooper was the 77th won by Labor in the 151-seat House of Representatives where parties need to control a majority to form government.

The opposition conservative Liberal Party was later declared the winner of the Western Australia state seat of O'Connor.

Labor's narrow majority means that the government will not have to negotiate with the opposition or unaligned lawmakers to get legislation through the lower chamber.

But that is not the case in

Australian authorities declare final results after election



the Senate, where Labor holds only 26 of the 76 seats.

If Labor got all 12 senators from the minor Greens party to support legislation, the government would only need to persuade one of the six remaining independent or unaligned legislators to reach a majority. The environmentally focused Greens held only nine seats in the

previous Senate.

An early test will be when the government attempts to enshrine in legislation a new greenhouse gas reduction target on July 26 when the Parliament sits for the first time since the election.

Labor was elected on a pledge to reduce Australia's emissions by 43% below

2005 levels by 2030. The government last week formally adopted the target, but enshrining it in law would make the task of changing the target more difficult for a future administration to achieve.

The conservative coalition went to the election last month with a less ambitious target of a reduction of 26% to 28% by the end of the decade. Opposition leader Peter Dutton has ruled out the 32 opposition senators supporting Labor's 43% target.

Greens leader Adam Bandt has said he will push the government to ban new coal mines and gas projects when that target legislation is negotiated. The Greens want Australian emissions reduced by 75% by 2030.

Key CPC Cong expected to confer a rare 3rd term for Prez Xi, to be held in 2nd half of 2022

PTI ■ BEIJING

President Xi Jinping on Wednesday announced that the 20th Congress of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) will be held in the 2nd half of this year --- a high-profile party event during which he is widely expected to be conferred an unprecedented third term.

The 20th National Congress of the CPC will be held in the second half of this year to draw China's development blueprint in the next stage, Xi said, while addressing the BRICS Business Forum via video link, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Xi who turned 69 on June 15, is



widely expected to continue in power for the rare third term, perhaps for life, defying the 68-year retirement age rule followed by his predecessors.

The official retirement age for Chinese leaders is 68 or two five-year tenures at the helm.

His number two leader, Premier Li Keqiang, who will turn 67 on July 1, has already announced retirement after completing his 10-year tenure this year.

Described as the "core" leader of the party like the party founded by Mao Zedong, Xi, heading the CPC, the powerful military and the Presidency is widely expected to get endorsed by the key once-in-a-five-year-Congress.

The CPC Party Congress was due to be held in October, but based on Xi's announcement on Wednesday, it is expected to take place any time soon.

Xi's third term was regarded as a foregone conclusion after China's national legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC) removed the two-term limit for President through a key constitutional amendment in 2018.

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli lawmakers voted in favour of dissolving parliament in a preliminary vote on Wednesday, setting the wheels in motion to send the country to its fifth national election in just over three years.

The motion was the first step in a series of votes before the formal disbanding of the government.

It came two days after Prime Minister Naftali Bennett announced he was disbanding his unravelling governing coalition of eight ideologically diverse parties just over a year after he took office.

The historic coalition, which uneaten longtime leader Benjamin Netanyahu, was wracked by infighting and

Israel lawmakers vote for dissolving Parliament

defections in recent months.

It included dovish parties committed to a two-state solution with the Palestinians, hawkish ultranationalists who oppose a Palestinian state, and a small Islamist faction, the first Arab party to join a government.

A series of proposals for dissolving parliament were passed by a vast majority of the 120 members of Knesset, the Israeli parliament.

But a final vote on at least one of the motions is still required in order to dissolve

parliament, and that is expected to be held next week.

Once it passes, Bennett will step down as prime minister and hand over the reins to his ally, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. New elections are expected to be held in October.

Bennett and Lapid formed their coalition of parties united solely in their

opposition to Netanyahu last year after four inconclusive elections in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Parliament was deadlocked between those who supported a Netanyahu-led government and those who refused to join forces with him while he was under indictment for corruption.

Netanyahu is on trial and faces charges of fraud, breach of trust, and accepting bribes in three high profile cases.

He has denied any wrongdoing and has repeatedly dismissed the accusations as part of a witch-hunt to oust him from office.

Nawaz Sharif can be arrested if he doesn't secure transit bail: Pak Min

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Deposed Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif can be arrested if the PML-N supremo does not secure transit bail while returning to the country from the UK, the country's law minister has said.

Sharif - against whom several corruption cases were launched by the government of former prime minister Imran Khan - had left for London in November 2019 after the Lahore High Court granted him four-week permission allowing him to go abroad for his treatment.

Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar said Tuesday that if former prime minister Nawaz Sharif does not secure transit bail while coming back to Pakistan, he can be arrested, Geo News reported.

The 72-year-old supremo of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is the elder brother of the current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

In 2020, Islamabad High Court's Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani issued non-bailable arrest warrants for the PML-N supremo after he failed to return to Pakistan following the expiry of his bail.



Time and again, there have been rumours of the former prime minister's return to Pakistan, but the speculation gained momentum after the formation of the coalition government in April - as the PML-N is the major player in the coalition.

The three-time prime minister had given an undertaking to the Lahore High Court to return to Pakistan, citing his record to face the process of law and justice within four weeks or as soon as he is declared healthy and fit to travel by doctors.

He was also given bail in the Al-Azizia Mills corruption case in which he was serving seven-year imprisonment in Lahore's high-security Kot Lakhpat jail.

In his press conference on Tuesday, Tarar - a senior PML-N member said that if Nawaz Sharif receives transit bail, then he cannot be arrested upon arrival in Pakistan, the report added.

Saudi crown prince visits Turkey

AP ■ ANKARA

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is scheduled to arrive in Ankara on Wednesday, making his first visit to Turkey following the slaying of Saudi columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul.

As Saudi Arabia and Turkey press ahead with efforts to repair ties that were strained by Khashoggi's killing, the crown prince will meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the last leg of a Middle East tour that also took him to Egypt and Jordan. Erdogan said talks with Prince Mohammed, who is commonly referred to by his initials MBS, would focus on advancing Turkish-Saudi relations to a "much higher degree."

Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia in April, paying his first visit to the kingdom since 2017, a year before the gruesome Khashoggi killing.

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R.O. No. 359 Corrigendum & Time Extension-01 Dt. 22.06.2022
The following dates of Tender No. - 01/EE(E&M)/ICHARI/TN/2022-23 and Tender No. 02/EE(E&M)/ICHARI/TN/2022-23 are being extended as follows alongwith corrigendum.
1. Earnest money should be read as 37,140.00 and 36,318.00 respectively.
Last date of downloading the tender:- upto 10:00 hrs. of 11.07.2022
Last date for submission of tender:- upto 15:00 hrs. of 11.07.2022
Tender opening Date & Time: Upto 11:30 hrs. of 12.07.2022
All other terms & conditions shall remain same. For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal "https://uktenders.gov.in"
Executive Engineer (E&M) Ichari Dam, Ichari
"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement System)

N.I.T. No.	E-File No. 126732
Name of work and its location	Tender for "Provision for shot Blasting of LHB coaches as well as Bogies & Springs of LHB coaches at RCNK/SNP" for a period 12 months.
Approx. cost of work	Rs. Tender Cost: Rs. 91,00,899.30/- (Rs. Ninety One Lacs Eight Hundred Ninety Nine and Three Zero paise only) including GST @18%.
Earnest Money	Rs. 1,82,000/-
Completion period of work	12 Months of date of execution of work
Cost of Tender document on cash/by post	NIL
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 11:00 hrs. on 04.07.2022 Opening of Tender at 11:30 hrs.
Website particulars notice board location	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in
complete details of tender can be seen	
No. : E-File No. 126732	1524/22
Dated : 18.06.2022	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
Office of the Chairman State Level Purchase Committe,
Sheep Husbandry Department, J&K, Srinagar
(Directorate of Sheep Husbandry, Lalmandi, Srinagar)
Tel.No: 09194-2310604, Fax No: 0194-2311063, Email: kashmirmerino.sheep@gmail.com
e-Nit No:- DSHK/ACCTTS/2022-23/4012-22 Dated:- 20-06-2022
Subject: E-Procurement Notice for the supply of PPR Vaccine.
For and on behalf of LT. Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Union Territory of India, e-Tenders in two bid system (Technical-1 and Financial bid-2) through Chairman State Level Purchase committee, Sheep Husbandry Department, J&K, Kashmir (Directorate of Sheep Husbandry Department, Kashmir) are invited from Original manufacturers/companies of repute and firms in line possessing valid authorization of principals, for fixing the rate contract for supply of PPR Vaccine (live attenuated freeze dried).
The bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility, criteria, specifications, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), set of terms and conditions of supply/contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the e-procurement website www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below.
1. Date of Issue of Tender Notice :- **20-06-2022**
2. Period of downloading of bidding documents :- **20-06-2022 to 14.07.2022**
3. Bid submission start date :- **21-06-2022**
4. Bid submission end date :- **14-07-2022 (04:00 pm)**
5. Date and time of opening of bids (online) :- **15-07-2022 (2:00 P.M)**
1. Instructions for bidders regarding e-tendering process: -
i. Bidders are advised to download bids submission manual from the "Downloads option as well as from Bidders Manual kit" on the website www.jktenders.gov.in to acquaint themselves with bid submission process.
ii. To participate in bidding process bidder has to get a Digital Signature Certificate (DSC), as per Information Technology ACT-2000. Bidders can get Digital Certificate from an approved vendor.
iii. The bidder has to submit their bids online in electronic format with the Digital Signature. No bidding will be accepted in physical form.
iv. Bids will be opened online as per the schedule mentioned at Para-1.
v. Bidders must ensure to upload scanned copy of all necessary documents with the technical bid.
2. The department will not be responsible for delay in online submission due to any reason.
(Note: Scan all the documents on 100dpi with Black and White option.)

Sd/- Chairman State Level Purchase Committee
Sheep Husbandry Department Jammu & Kashmir
DIPK-4561/22 Dated: 22.06.2022

Nifty to slide to 14,500 by year-end: BofA Securities

Mumbai: Indian equities will bottom-out only in August or September and the 50-share benchmark Nifty will fall by another 6 per cent to 14,500 points by the end of this year, an American brokerage said on Wednesday.

A cut in companies' earnings as the advantage from cheaper inventory buffer wears off, continuing headwinds on crude oil prices and "vulnerable" valuations of Nifty stocks even after the recent correction were cited by BofA Securities as the factors which will drag down the markets. The brokerage had initially estimated the Nifty will rise to 19,100 by the end of the year and revised the target down to 17,000 after the sell-off.

The benchmark, which closed 1.44 per cent down at 15,413.30 points on Wednesday, has been losing ground over the past few weeks, driven by factors like monetary policy tightening globally and higher commodity prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"We are cautious on markets despite the recent market correction. In addition to glob-



ally tightening monetary conditions and a slowing economic outlook, including fears of a recession in the US, we see other risks," analysts at the brokerage said.

Other factors driving the brokerage to be cautious include earning cuts of up to 4 per cent with the risk of more downgrades and crude prices, which it said can spike to USD 150 per barrel. Meanwhile, the brokerage said the rupee will depreciate beyond its own expectations to Rs 81 against the US

dollar by the end of 2022.

The rupee slumped 21 paise to a record low of 78.35 against the greenback on Wednesday. "We believe the risks are still skewed towards more depreciation for the rupee as the fundamental outlook has deteriorated further primarily due to higher oil and other commodities," it said.

However, the analysts were quick to add that the RBI's reserves of nearly USD 600 billion will be a mitigating factor against the risks. **PTI**

Markets fall after 2-day breather amid weak global cues

Mumbai: Equity indices slipped in the negative territory on Wednesday after a two-day breather, with the BSE Sensex tumbling 709.54 points following weak trends in global markets.

Unabated foreign fund outflows also played spoilsport for the bourses.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 709.54 points or 1.35 per cent to settle at 51,822.53. During the day, it declined 792.09 points or 1.50 per cent to 51,739.98.

The NSE Nifty fell 225.50 points or 1.44 per cent to end at 15,413.30.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Wipro, Reliance Industries, IndusInd Bank, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finserv, Titan and Bajaj Finance were the major laggards.

On the other hand, TCS, HUL, PowerGrid and Maruti Suzuki India were the gainers.

Elsewhere in Asia, markets in Hong Kong, Seoul, Shanghai and Tokyo ended lower.

European markets were also trading in the red in mid-

session deals.

The US markets recorded smart gains on Tuesday.

"Pull back rallies can be sharp and it was sharp yesterday. The important question is -- will this continue? There is no economic news, except the softness in crude, to sustain the rally.

"There is no reason for FIIs to change their selling strategy since the dollar continues to be strong and US bond yields are attractive and expected to rise further," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

The BSE Sensex had zoomed 934.23 points or 1.81 per cent, while the NSE Nifty climbed 288.65 points or 1.88 per cent on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 4.19 per cent to USD 109.8 per barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital market, as they sold shares worth Rs 2,701.21 crore on Tuesday, as per exchange data. **PTI**

No purchase of coal from Russia after April 20: Tata Steel



New Delhi: Tata Steel has not made any purchase of PCI coal from Russia post its April announcement of severing business ties with Russia amid the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, a company spokesperson said on Wednesday.

On April 20, Tata Steel had said it would stop doing business with Russia. To ensure business continuity, all its steel manufacturing sites in India, the UK and the Netherlands have sourced alternative supplies of raw materials to end its dependence on Russia.

"Tata Steel would like to issue a clarification in view of the incorrect information floating around in some sections of the media with respect to the buying/ importing of coal from Russia," the spokesperson said. A deal for supply of 75,000 tonne of PCI coal was finalised in March 2022 and the contract became effective weeks before Tata Steel's April announcement.

The shipment was received in May 2022 to honour the business commitment made before the announcement.

"Post the announcement, Tata Steel has not made any fresh purchase of PCI coal from Russia. As a responsible corporate, we have and will continue to remain committed to our stated stance and resulting obligations," the spokesperson said.

The pulverised coal is used by steelmakers in the blast furnace (BF) as an auxiliary fuel. Pulverised Coal Injection (PCI) is a process that involves injecting large volumes of fine coal particles into the raceway of the BF. **PTI**

Shah to address national conclave on urban cooperative banks today

New Delhi: Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah is scheduled to address a national conclave that will deliberate on the future role of the urban cooperative credit sector in the country.

The conclave will discuss various issues related to Scheduled and Multi-State Urban Co-operative Banks and Credit Societies and will also felicitate Urban Cooperative Banks that have completed 100 years of service to society, an official statement said.

The Minister of State for Cooperation B L Verma, Chairman Emeritus of the National Federation of Urban Cooperative Banks and Credit Societies (NAFCUB) H K Patil and senior ministry officials will be present at the event.

Among other issues, the Conclave will discuss recommendations of the Reserve

Bank of India's expert committee, the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020, and its impact and developments, the role of credit societies in the financial sector scenario with special reference to multi-state societies and the issue of regulation and taxation of cooperative credit societies.

The Conclave will also felicitate Urban Cooperative Banks that have completed 100 years of service to society. There are 197 such banks in the country.

Urban Cooperative Banks are among the oldest banking institutions in the country. They are banks organised and managed by a cross section of people from society that could include teachers, lawyers, traders, doctors, engineers, social workers and others for providing banking services to their members. **PTI**

Sebi sends ₹5 lakh notice to Future Enterprises in disclosure lapses case

New Delhi: Capital markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday sent a notice to Future Enterprises asking it to pay over Rs 5 lakh in a matter pertaining to disclosure lapses about initiation of arbitration proceedings against Future Group by Amazon.

The regulator also warned the company of attachment of assets and bank accounts if it fails to make the payment within 15 days.

The notice came after the company failed to pay the fine imposed on it by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). In an order passed in March, the capital markets regulator had slapped a fine of Rs 5 lakh on Future Enterprises for disclosure lapses in the case related to arbitration proceedings against Future Group by Amazon.Com NV Investments Holdings LLC. Future Enterprises failed to



disclose to the exchanges the information regarding the initiation of arbitration proceedings and also the passing of an order dated October 25, 2020 in favour of Amazon.

In its notice, Sebi directed Future Enterprises to pay Rs 5.21 lakh, which includes penalty, interest and recovery

cost, within 15 days.

In the event of non-payment of dues, the markets regulator will recover the amount by attaching and selling the company's moveable and immoveable properties. Besides, the firm faces attachment of its bank accounts. **PTI**

Rupee plunges by 27 paise to record low of 78.40 against US dollar

Mumbai: The rupee declined by 27 paise to a record low of 78.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday due to unabated foreign fund outflows and losses in the domestic equities.

A stronger greenback overseas also weighed on the rupee sentiment, forex traders said. However, receding crude prices in the international market restricted the rupee's loss, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local currency opened flat at 78.13 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 78.13 and a low of 78.40.

The domestic unit finally ended at a record low of 78.40, down 27 paise over its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee had settled at 78.13 against the US dollar.



The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, strengthened by 0.05 per cent to 104.48.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, dropped 4.46 per cent to USD 109.54 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 709.54 points or 1.35 per cent lower at 51,822.53, while the broader NSE Nifty fell 225.50 points or 1.44 per cent to 15,413.30. **PTI**

Gold declines ₹205; silver down by ₹ 926

New Delhi: Gold price in the national capital on Wednesday fell by ₹205 to ₹50,487 per 10 gram in line with a decline in international rates of the precious metal, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal settled at ₹50,692 per 10 gram.

Silver also tumbled by ₹926 to ₹59,959 per kg from ₹60,885 per kg in the previous trade. In the international market, gold was quoting lower at USD 1,825 per ounce while silver was trading flat at USD 21.28 per ounce.

"Gold prices traded weak with spot gold prices at COMEX trading 0.41 per cent down at USD 1,825 per ounce on Wednesday. Gold prices are struggling on a stronger dollar and weaker bond yields," said Tapan Patel, Senior Analyst (Commodities) at HDFC Securities. **PTI**

73% of sellers in India rely on sales technology at least once a week: Report

Mumbai: With the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting the sales process, around 73 per cent of sellers surveyed are using technology at least once a week to get access to real-time data to drive sales, says a report.

Companies are increasing their appetite for data-based insights to better gauge buyer intent and drive greater sales, the LinkedIn sixth edition of the 'APAC State of Sales 2022' report stated.

In fact, more than eight in 10 (84 per cent) sales professionals in India have lost at least one deal to an important decision maker changing roles in the past year alone.

Therefore, access to the right intel has become mission-

critical for sales functions across the board, the report opined.

To avoid these repercussions, three in four (73 per cent) sellers in India are now using sales tech at least once a week to get access to accurate real-time data, indicating the growing preference for CRM systems and sales intelligence tools in the industry, it said.

Findings also suggest that younger (under 35 years) professionals are leading this tech-savvy shift, given that they are 1.2 times more likely to use CRM tools for over 3 hours in a week as compared to their older (over 35 years) counterparts.

But as more businesses turn to tech, sales managers must seek ways to deal with the impending challenge of 'dirty data', with 2 in 5 sellers (46 per cent) and CRM users (38 per cent) identifying incomplete inaccurate data as their largest challenge, it suggested.

"Over the past two years, the rise of remote work has accelerated the use of technology across industries.

Our data shows that three-quarters (73 per cent) of sellers in India today are relying on sales technology at least once a week, which clearly means that data is driving the

future of sales," LinkedIn Sales Solutions for India Head Abhai Singh said. **PTI**

Jain Irrigation shares jump over 10% on Rivulis deal

New Delhi: Shares of Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd on Wednesday jumped over 10 per cent after the company said its global irrigation business will be merged with Temasek-owned Rivulis in a cash-and-stock deal, a move that will help the firm to reduce its consolidated debt.

The stock jumped 17 per cent to ₹43.90 during the day on the BSE. It ended at ₹41.35, a gain of 10.27 per cent.

At the NSE, it rallied 9.86 per cent to settle at ₹41.20 apiece. In volume terms, 48.32 lakh shares were traded at the BSE and over 4.25 crore shares at the NSE during the day.

Jain Irrigation Systems on Tuesday said its global irrigation business will be merged with Rivulis in a cash-and-stock deal, a move that will help

the company to reduce its consolidated debt by ₹2,700 crore or around 45 per cent.

Jain Irrigation's global irrigation business has been valued at ₹4,200 crore, of which ₹2,700 crore will be used to repay its all overseas debt and ₹200 crore will come to the parent company, its Managing Director Anil Jain told reporters.

In the merged entity, it will have a 22 per cent equity stake, while Rivulis will hold 78 per cent. The deal is likely to be concluded in the next six months, he said, adding that the combined entity will have a revenue of USD 750 million. At present, Rivulis has an annual revenue of USD 400 million, while that of Jain Irrigation's global irrigation business is USD 350 million. **PTI**

Jain Irrigation shares rise 17% on Rivulis deal

New Delhi: Shares of Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd on Wednesday rose 17 per cent after the company said its global irrigation business will be merged with Temasek-owned Rivulis in a cash-and-stock deal, a move that will help the firm to reduce its consolidated debt.

The stock jumped 17 per cent to ₹43.90 on the BSE. At the NSE, it rallied 16.8 per cent to ₹43.80.

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Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd's wholly-owned subsidiary Jain International Trading and Rivulis have entered into definitive transaction agreements. **PTI**

Emami Realty aims at 50% sales growth in FY23

Kolkata: Emami Realty has projected that real estate demand will remain robust despite economic headwinds, and is aiming at a 50 per cent jump in sales to ₹750 crore in the current fiscal, a top company official said on Wednesday.

The real estate arm of the diversified Emami Group has targeted retiring its long-term debt by 2023-24, which is now pegged at ₹118 crore, he said.

The developer, which has a land bank of around 2,500 acres in 7-8 cities in the country, will leverage the resource for new projects and explore monetisation of a part of it in the next few years.

"Economic headwinds, high commodity prices and other associated costs affected us by around 20 per cent.

Despite all these, robust demand will continue and help overcome the challenges.

"We are expecting a topline of ₹750 crore in the current fiscal from the standalone operations as against nearly ₹500 crore sales achieved in FY22," Emami Realty MD and CEO Nitesh Kumar told PTI in a telephonic interview.

The total revenue from projects, including joint venture ones, is pegged at ₹1,180 crore during the fiscal.

The combined revenue in FY22 was ₹950 crore, registering an 85 per cent year-on-year growth.

After the introduction of real estate regulations, home buyers have been switching to organised real estate companies, he said, adding that such a trend helps these firms maintain strong sales. **PTI**

IGIA India's first airport to switch over to renewable energy sources: DIAL

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Airport on Wednesday stated that it has becomes the India's first airport to switch to renewable sources for its energy needs and is running entirely on hydro and solar power from June 1.

As per the statement released by the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), this is a major step by the airport toward achieving the ambitious goal of becoming a net zero carbon emission airport by 2030.

"Approximately 6 per cent of the airport's electricity requirement is met from the onsite solar power plants. These plants are on the airside and on the roofs of the Cargo terminals

of the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport," it said.

"Starting June 1, 2022, Delhi Airport has adopted renewable energy use from the hydropower plant for its demand of the remaining 94 per cent, thus ending its dependency on non-renewable power. This move will help Delhi Airport in the reduction of indirect energy emissions whopping 200,000 tonnes of CO2 every year," it read.

"DIAL has a 7.84 MW solar power plant on the airside, whereas as part of stakeholder collaboration, operators of the Cargo terminals at Delhi Airport have added another 5.3 MW rooftop solar power plant," DIAL said.



SERENA MAKES WINNING RETURN

AP ■ EASTBOURNE

Serena Williams made a winning comeback after a year on the sidelines as the American legend teamed with Ons Jabeur to beat Sara Sorribes Tormo and Marie Bouzkova 2-6, 6-3, 13-11 in the Eastbourne International doubles on Tuesday.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, was back in action for the first time since she made a tearful exit from Wimbledon last year.

The 40-year-old suffered a leg injury during her Wimbledon first round match against Aliaksandra Sasnovich and had not been seen on court since.

Before Williams made the surprise announcement of her return last week, rumours of retirement had swirled around her for several months.

But, with Wimbledon starting on June 27, Williams finally resumed her career, playing with Jabeur at the Wimbledon warm-up event by the Sussex seaside.

Williams and Tunisia's Jabeur, who is third in the WTA singles rankings, saw off Spain's Sorribes Tormo and Bouzkova of the Czech Republic in the last-16 tie.

Although Williams was far from her vintage best, she will be encouraged by her first outing for 12 months.

She and Jabeur will face Japan's Shuko Aoyama and Taiwan's Chan Hao-ching in the quarter-finals.

"It was so fun to play with Ons. We had a lot of fun and our opponents played amazing. We were happy to stay in there," Williams said.

"I called Ons, she has been playing so well and I knew I needed to play some matches and she has always been so nice to me on tour.

"Yeah, I caught some fire behind me, it was good."

Serena has been given a wildcard to play in the singles at Wimbledon as



she restarts her history bid.

Williams is one Grand Slam crown away from equalling Australian Margaret Court's record of 24 singles titles at the majors.

The last of Williams' 23 Grand

Slam singles titles came at the Australian Open in 2017.

Since then she has lost four Grand Slam finals, including at Wimbledon in 2018 and 2019.

Williams won the seventh and

most recent of her seven Wimbledon singles titles in 2016.

Serena, who became a mother in 2017, has plummeted to 1,204th in the WTA rankings due to her period out of action.

TENACIOUS SPIRIT

Wimbledon is widely considered Williams' best chance of winning another Grand Slam and this was her first step towards that goal.

After so long away, Serena soaked up the applause during a raucous reception from the crowd when she walked onto court in the early evening sunshine.

Williams' husband Alexis Ohanian was watching from the stands as his wife made an understandably rusty start.

With Williams' groundstrokes initially lacking their usual precision, the first set quickly slipped away.

Serena was appearing in doubles competition on grass for the first time since 2016, when she won Wimbledon with her sister Venus.

The 14-time Grand Slam doubles champion was well short of peak form and Bouzkova and Sorribes Tormo twice led by a break at the start of the second set.

But Williams showed the tenacious spirit that has defined her career, striking the ball cleaner and crisper as she and Jabeur hit back to level the match at one-set all.

In the match-deciding tie-break, Serena squandered a match point on her serve with a wayward forehand at 9-8 and Jabeur wasted another at 10-9.

But the pair saved a match point from Bouzkova and Sorribes Tormo at 10-11, reeling off the last three points to clinch a dramatic victory in the dusk.

In the Eastbourne women's singles, last year's Wimbledon runner-up Karolina Pliskova lost 6-1, 4-6, 4-6 against Britain's Katie Boulter.

Spanish top seed Paula Badosa was beaten 6-4, 6-3 by British wildcard Jodie Burrage.

In the men's singles, Ryan Peniston also enjoyed an impressive victory on home turf, beating French Open quarter-finalist Holger Rune 4-6, 7-6, (7/5), 6-1.

Mane joins Bayern

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich confirmed the signing of Sadio Mane from Liverpool on Wednesday, as the Senegal forward signed a three-year deal with the Bundesliga champions.

Bayern have reportedly paid a fee which could rise to 41 million euros (\$43 million) for Mane.

The 30-year-old won the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Club World Cup titles during six years on Merseyside.

"My agent told me that there were also enquiries from other clubs, but for me, the feeling was right from the start when Bayern presented their plan with me," Mane told German daily Bild.

"It was the right club at the right time.

"It is one of the biggest clubs in the world and the team are always fighting for all the titles."

Mane added he wants to

"do everything to make sure I win titles with my teammates".

Bayern won a 10th straight Bundesliga title last season.

Mane, voted African footballer of the year in 2019, is a versatile attacker who has spent the majority of his career on the wing but can also play through the middle.

His arrival will ease the pain for Bayern if wantaway striker Robert Lewandowski leaves the club, while Serge Gnabry is also stalling over a contract extension.

"Sadio Mane is a global star, who underlines the appeal of Bayern and will increase the attractiveness of the Bundesliga as a whole," said Bayern president Herbert Hainer.

"Fans come to the stadiums to see unique players like this."

The signing of Mane takes some pressure off Bayern sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic after Lewandowski made it clear he would not extend his contract which expires next year.



Boehly named new Chelsea chairman, Granovskaia departs

AP ■ LONDON

Todd Boehly on Wednesday was named as Chelsea's new chairman to replace Bruce Buck and will act as interim sporting director after the club confirmed the departure of Marina Granovskaia.

Granovskaia is stepping down from her role as director as part of a shake-up at Stamford Bridge, leaving co-controlling owner Boehly to spearhead Chelsea's negotiations in the transfer window.

All the top Boehly-Clearlake Capital consortium figureheads have been added to Chelsea's new board following the purchase of the club from Roman Abramovich.

"As custodians of Chelsea FC, we now begin executing our long-term vision and plan for the club, creating an outstanding experience for its passionate, loyal fans, and continuing to challenge for top honours in line with Chelsea FC's dedicated history," said Boehly.

"Working together, side by side, we are firmly committed to winning, both on and off the pitch. For us, that effort has begun."

Clearlake chiefs and Chelsea co-controlling owners Behdad Eghbali and Jose Feliciano have also been added to the Blues' new board.

Los Angeles Dodgers co-owner Mark Walter, Swiss magnate Hansjoerg Wyss and British tycoon Jonathan Goldstein have all been officially named on the Chelsea board.

Chelsea will now start the search for a permanent sporting director, with Granovskaia leaving the club after almost 20 years at Stamford Bridge.

Granovskaia rose to prominence as one of the toughest negotiators in football in Abramovich's Chelsea reign.

"Boehly will operate as interim sporting director until the club names a full-time replacement, continuing the club's work towards its targets during the current transfer window,"

said Chelsea's statement.

Granovskaia will remain available during the current transfer window to help the club's transition.

Chelsea face a hectic summer transfer market of transfer dealings.

The club, who finished third in the Premier League last season, have been linked with Sevilla's Jules Kounde, Manchester City's Raheem Sterling and Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembele.



PSG president denies Zidane talks



AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al-Khelaifi insisted he "never spoke" with Zinedine Zidane about becoming coach in an interview published by French daily Le Parisien on Tuesday, saying the club had "chosen another option".

"We never spoke with him, neither directly, nor indirectly," said Al-Khelaifi, without ruling out that others in Qatar had approached the former France star.

"When I say 'we', it's PSG. Me, I am the president of PSG and I never spoke with him."

The Qatari official said the club was keen to head in a different direction.

"We chose a coach who will

be the best for what we want to put in place," said Al-Khelaifi as he confirmed talks with Nice boss Christophe Galtier.

"I hope we'll quickly find an agreement but I respect Nice and the president (Jean-Pierre) Rivere, everyone stands up for their own interests."

TEXTOR COMPLETES LYON TAKEOVER

Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas said on Tuesday a deal had been struck for US businessman John Textor to complete a takeover of the seven-time French champions.

Eagle Football Holdings, a sports investment vehicle controlled by Crystal Palace shareholder Textor, is set to acquire a majority stake in the Ligue 1 club.

PRAVIN THIPSAY

In my column 'Champion born this month', today I have the pleasure of presenting a beautiful game by a champion who can be called William Shakespeare of Chess. Let us see what some 'all time greats' have said about him. — "He was the most accurate Chess Player" and "He was probably the greatest genius in Chess" — Bobby Fischer. Or "He mostly played with zero inaccuracy" and "He is the only player who never made a blunder" — Garry Kasparov. Or "Finest Chess player ever existed" — Adolf Anderssen.

Though nothing much has been said about Morphy by the Soviets, most of the Soviet Chess Trainers give a lot of emphasis on teaching his way of play. In the famous book 'Miniatures by World Champions', Anatoly Karpov has dedicated more than one third of the book to the games of this all time great player.

Yes, I am talking of the undisputed Champion, Paul Morphy!

Paul Charles Morphy (22nd June 1837 — 10th July 1884) was born at New Orleans in a wealthy distinguished family. According to his uncle Ernest Morphy (a strong and imaginative player himself), no one formally taught Chess to Paul. However, at the age of 13, Paul became famous as the best player in

DE RIVIERE – PAUL MORPHY

United States. In 1850s Paul Morphy visited Europe and defeated the strongest players in the world with such an ease that he was acknowledged as the Best Chess Player in the World. (The official World Champion titles, however, started much later, in 1886). Morphy's victory over Count Carl Isouard and Duke of Brunswick of France is probably the most famous Chess game. His stunning Rook and Queen sacrifice against the then British Champion Henry Bird finds place in every book on Chess combinations.

Morphy didn't talk or write much about Chess but his simple quote "Help your pieces so they can help you" is the best advice a Chess Trainers could give to their pupils. Paul Morphy demonstrated that the safety of King and activity of pieces invariably decided outcome of a Chess game. Even today, the times of Paul Morphy are known as "The Golden Era of Chess".

Today we will see a comparatively unknown but extremely creative game by Morphy. I was lucky to see it as a child, that too, annotated by master of King side attack, Grandmaster Leonid Shamkovic. I was indeed greatly impressed by the



originality of Morphy's play then but I must confess that today I stand even more impressed by the game, the planning as well as the execution.

1. e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5

This double attack on Black's f-pawn is a standard procedure of attacking 'f7'. 4...d5 5.exd5 Na5!

The classical system of counter-attack for Black. Instead of recapturing the pawn at d5, Black goes after the enemy bishop.

6.d3?! 6...h6

Black drives back the White knight. 8.Nd4 ...Bc5! 9.Nb3? allows Bg4! with a powerful initiative to Black.

8.Nfd2 is bad due to 8...Bg4! 8...Nxc4 9.dxc4 Bc5! 10.h3! 10...0-0 11.Nh2 Nh7?!

Black shows a very deep understanding of the position since he realizes that piece play alone will not break through White's position. He

prepares a 'Pawn Storm' by pushing the f-pawn till it is stopped by White pieces. However, more accurate would have been 11...e3! 12.Bxe3 Bxe3 13.fxe3 Ne4 14.Nf1 Qh4+ 15.g3 Qf6! 16.c3 Bf5! 17.Nbd2 Nc5!;

11...c6! was a strong alternative as well. 12.Be3! was called for. 12...f5 13.Nb3 Bd6! 14.0-0

Trying to castle on the Queen side would have led to catastrophe. For example, 14.Bd2? e3!! 15.fxe3 Bg3+ 16.Kd1 Nf6! 17.Be1 Bxh2! 18.Rxh2 b5! 19.Nd4 bxc4 20.Qxc4 Nxd5 21.Nc6 Ba6 22.Nxd8 Bxc4 23.Nc6 Nxe3+ 24.Kc1 Rae8! 25.Bb4 Rf6 26.Na5 Bd5 27.g3 Nf1 etc.

14...Bxh2+! 15.Kxh2 f4! Black has the advantage due to his active pieces and White's vulnerable king.

The knight enters the game with a gain of tempo on the White queen. 17.Qg6!? was an interesting option. For example, 17...Bf5 18.Qh5 Bxc2 19.Nd4 Bd3 etc.

17.Qd3! would have led to a complex and unclear position.

The move played -- 17.Qd4? --, allows a stunning combination followed by an unexpected finale.

Morphy clinched the issue with 17...Nf3+!!

A beautiful sacrifice which creates decisive light square weakness on White's King side.

17...Bxh3? allows White to

defend with 18.Bxf4! Bd7 19.Kg1 etc. 18.gxf3 Qh4 19.Rh1!

White seems to have guarded his King side well. The obvious capture 19...Qxh3 check gives White a clear upper hand after 20. Kg1 whereas an attempt to bring the King Rook in play with 19...Rf6 allows White to move the King to safety after 20.Kg2!

However, Morphy had already planned his final assault after the Rook move as well.

The point! Now the White King has been caught in a cage with no possible escape.

20.Nc5 leaves the White Queen unguarded and is punished with 20...Rf6! 21.Bxf4 Bf5+! 22.Kg1 Rg6+ 23.Bg3 Qxd4 etc.

20.Bxf4 Rxf4 21.Qxf4 Qxf4+ 22.Kxh3 Qxf3+ 23.Kh2 Qxf2+ 24.Kh3 Rf8 is hopeless.

20.Rg1? allows 20...Bf1 check-mate! 20. Kg1 allows 20...Qg5 ch, 21. Kh2, Qg2 Checkmate.

20...Rf6 21.Qxf6 21.Raf1 leads to an immediate mate after 21...Bf5+ 22.Kg2 Rg6.

21.Nc5 trying to bring the Knight for defence is too slow. Black plays 21...Rg6! followed by a deadly discovered check by the Queen.

21.Qd3 (to stop ...Rg6) allows a similar finish as in the game. 21...Qx2+! 22.Kxh3 Qg3#

21...Qxf2+! 22.Kxh3 Qg3 Checkmate!

NEW ERA STARTS FOR WOMEN IN BLUE

In 1st match after Mithali Raj's retirement, Harman-led India will take on Sri Lanka in 1st T20I

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

The Indian women's cricket team will be eyeing a fresh start under new all-format skipper Harmanpreet Kaur against Sri Lanka in the first T20 International of the three-match series, starting here on Thursday.

With the T20s all set to feature in the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and also at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup eight months away, India will look to begin their campaign on a high.

This will be the first international assignment for the Indian women since the disappointment at the 2022 Women's World Cup.

Notably, the Indian team, for the first time, will be without the legendary Mithali Raj, who hung up her boots earlier this month after an illustrious 23-year-old career.

On the personal front, skipper Harmanpreet will be eyeing a milestone.

The 33-year-old batter, who has amassed 2319 runs from 121 matches, needs another 46 runs to eclipse Mithali in the shortest format.

The spotlight will also be on vice-captain Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet and coach Ramesh Powar, who recorded a seven-match winning streak in the last T20 World Cup before India were knocked out in the semifinals by South Africa.



Hosts Sri Lanka, on the other hand, will start the series on the back foot as they were recently whitewashed 0-3 by Pakistan in a T20 series.

However, the Indians will have to remain vigilant against the likes of Sri Lankan veterans Oshadi Ranasinghe and Chamari

Athapaththu.

The Indians last played a one-off game against New Zealand in the shortest format in February this year, which they lost by 18 runs.

Going into the series, the likes of Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma and pacer Pooja Vastrakar will inject enough con-

fidence owing to their current form.

Going by current form and world rankings, India will definitely start as favourites against the Island nation and the hosts will need to raise their game by leaps and bounds to upset the Indians.

India skipper Harmanpreet

said fielding is one area they are giving more emphasis on in the series against Sri Lanka.

"As a team, there are quite a few areas we are currently working on to improve keeping in mind this particular series against Sri Lanka. While our core strength lies in our batting, we are giving extra efforts to improve our fielding skills," she said.

"All our top batters and bowlers are fit for this series and we all expect to give our very best in this series," said Harmanpreet in the pre-match press conference.

The three-game T20 series will be followed by as many ODIs, scheduled to be played atallekele on July 1, 4 and 7.

SQUADS

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Simran Bahadur, Yastika Bhatia, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Richa Ghosh (WK), Sabbhineni Meghana, Meghna Singh, Poonam Yadav, Renuka Singh, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Pooja Vastrakar, Radha Yadav.

Sri Lanka: Chamari Athapaththu (C), Nilakshi de Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Vishmi Gunaratne, Ama Kanchana, Hansima Karunaratne, Achini Kulasuriya, Sugandika Kumari, Harshitha Madavi, Hasini Perera, Udeshiika Prabodhani, Oshadi Ranasinghe, Inoka Ranaweera, Sathya Sandeepani, Anushka Sanjeewani, Malsha Shehani, Tharika Sewwandi.

We've several top order batters, everyone will get chance: Harman

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

The Indian team is packed with a number of top-order batters and the new all-format captain Harmanpreet Kaur says all will get a chance to show their worth in the T20 series against Sri Lanka, starting Thursday.

Elegant left-hander Smriti Mandhana, explosive Shafali Verma, Sabbhineni Meghana and Yastika Bhatia are all top-order batters in India's 15-player squad.

In the absence of Smriti, it was Shafali and Yastika, who opened the batting against New Zealand in February.

"We do have many top order batters, including three to four of them, who can play as openers. But, when it comes to this team, everyone will have opportunity to showcase their skills," Harmanpreet said on the eve of the series-opener.

"We all are representing our country and whatever opportunity might come at some point, we must make the best use of it. We have many batters who can play at any position. We will try to give everyone the space to bat where they feel comfortable," she added.

Harmanpreet also backed talented all-rounder Jemimah



Rodrigues, who was not included in the last ODI World Cup squad, but has now made a return to the side for the series against Sri Lanka.

"Jemimah is truly an experienced player. She will definitely play a crucial role in the T20 series," Harmanpreet said.

The skipper admitted that while it is not possible to give everyone an equal opportunity all the time, but, it is her responsibility to talk to everyone to find out the perfect team combination for big tournaments.

"I will ensure that everyone has enough chances to prepare. If you look at Jemimah's case, she always grabs whatever opportunities come her way. Similarly, it's very important to keep talking to other players and find out the right combination for big-ticket events like the Commonwealth Games," she remarked.



Pak recall fit-again Yasir Shah for SL Test

AP ■ KARACHI

Pakistan selectors Wednesday recalled fit-again Yasir Shah for the two Test match series against Sri Lanka next month, after the leg-spinner's career was put on hold by nagging injuries last year.

The 36-year-old played the last of his 46 Tests 11 months ago in the West Indies but has not been selected since over lack of fitness, missing a series in Bangladesh and another at home against Australia.

Yasir started his career in 2014, becoming the quickest to 200 Test wickets after 33 matches four years later, while anchoring Pakistan's spin attack.

He now has 235 wickets in 46 Tests.

Chief selector Mohammad Wasim said Yasir's inclusion would improve the team's spin attack.

"Our spin department is boosted with the return of Yasir, who proved himself as a match-winner," said Wasim.

Yasir took 24 wickets in Pakistan's 2-1 win during their last Sri Lanka tour in 2015.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on Wednesday announced the schedule of Pakistan's tour

next month.

"Pakistan will play a three-day warm-up match between 11-13 July in Colombo while the first Test will be played at Galle from 16-20 July," SLC said.

The second Test will be staged in Colombo from 24-28 July.

Left-arm slow bowler Nauman Ali is the other front-line spinner in the 18-man squad, which will be led by Babar Azam.

Uncapped middle-order batsman Salman Ali Agha and former skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed are also part of the squad, but opener Abid Ali was not selected despite recovering from a heart problem.

Spinning allrounder Mohammad Nawaz has also been recalled. He was named in the squad for Australia Tests but was withdrawn due to injury.

Squad: Babar Azam (captain), Mohammad Rizwan, Abdullah Shafique, Azhar Ali, Faheem Ashraf, Fawad Alam, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Nauman Ali, Salman Ali Agha, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood, Yasir Shah.

Jamie Overton to make England debut vs NZ

AP ■ LEEDS

Jamie Overton will make his debut for England in the third and final cricket Test against New Zealand starting Thursday after fellow fast bowler Jimmy Anderson was ruled out because of an ankle injury.

Overton's twin brother, Craig, was also in the squad and an option to replace Anderson but England went with the more inexperienced of the siblings in the only change to the team at Headingley.

England holds an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

England captain Ben Stokes said Anderson had a "puffy ankle," and wasn't sure if he'd be healthy enough to play in next month's Test against India.

"Unfortunately Jimmy's not pulled up as well as we would have liked him to, so Jamie Overton's going to make his debut this week," Stokes said.



Sundar signs up with county side Lancashire

IAN ■ MANCHESTER

County side Lancashire on Wednesday announced that they have signed up India all-rounder Washington Sundar as their overseas player.

Washington, who has been missing in action due to hand injury sustained while playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL 2022, is set to join the team after his rehab at National Cricket Academy (NCA) gets over.

This will be his first stint in England's domestic cricket and would be the second Indian after Cheteshwar Pujara to play county cricket.

"Washington, who is currently following a period of rehabilitation with the BCCI after a recent injury, will be available for the whole Royal London One-Day Cup competition, and fitness depending, a number of LV=County Championship games in July," said an official statement by Lancashire.

"I am extremely excited to play county cricket for the first



time with Lancashire Cricket. To play in English conditions will be a great experience for me and I can't wait to play at Emirates Old Trafford. I would like to thank both Lancashire Cricket and the BCCI for allowing this opportunity happen and I'm looking forward to joining up

with the squad next month," said Washington after his Lancashire signing.

Mark Chilton, Lancashire's Director of Cricket Performance, expressed excitement over Washington joining the county side in the current English domestic season.

Ishan breaks into top 10 in T20 rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

On the back of his recent exploits, veteran Dinesh Karthik jumped a massive 108 spots to 87th on the latest ICC T20 rankings for batters, even as young opener Ishan Kishan broke into the top 10.

Kishan finished the series with two half centuries against South Africa and was the leading run scorer with 206 runs at an average of 41. That form catapulted the left-hander up one spot to sixth on the latest T20 rankings for batters.

Karthik has been in excellent form since the IPL-15 and had a few blazing knocks in the T20 series against South Africa.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam still holds the top spot on the T20 batting rankings and Kishan is the only Indian player rated inside the top 10.

Yuzvendra Chahal was the biggest mover on the T20 rank-



ings for bowlers with the India spinner jumping three places to 23rd following his six wickets during the South Africa series.

Former captain Rumeli Dhar retires



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India women's team captain Rumeli Dhar on Wednesday announced her retirement from all forms of the game.

The right-handed batter and medium pacer announced her decision through an Instagram post.

"23 years of my cricket that started from Shyamnagar in West Bengal has finally come to an end as I announce my retirement from all formats of cricket," Dhar said in her post.

The 38-year-old played four women's Tests, in which she scored 236 runs with one half-century. She has picked up eight Test wickets since making her debut against England in 2005 at Delhi. She played her last Test against the same opponent in 2006 at Taunton.

She also played 78 WODIs, scoring 961 runs and taking 63 wickets, with six half-centuries since her debut against England in 2003 at Lincoln. She played her last ODI in 2012.

Dhar, who played for Bengal among other domestic sides, also featured in 18 T20s, in which she scored 131 runs and took 13 wickets after making her debut against England Women in 2006.

At 34, she made an unexpected comeback to the India T20 team in 2018 against South Africa, and played her last game in the format against Australia Women at the Brabourne Stadium the same year.

Disciplined MP keep Mumbai at 248/5 on Day 1

PTI ■ BENGALURU

An unheralded bunch of Madhya Pradesh bowlers stuck to its plans as a star-studded Mumbai side toiled its way to 248 for five on the first day of the Ranji Trophy final here.

Despite an opening stand of 87 between Prithvi Shaw (47, 79 balls) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (78, 163 balls), Mumbai failed to drive home the advantage on a pitch that wasn't conducive for strokeplay.

A 400-plus first-innings total will now depend on the season's highest run-getter Sarfaraz Khan (40 batting, 125 balls), who is looking good for another big knock with the dependable Shams Mulani (12 batting, 43 balls) giving him company.

While left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya was the tireless

operator from one end, having sent down 31 overs for figures of 1 for 91, seamer Gaurav Yadav (23-5-68-0) was distinctly unlucky and the wickets column don't reflect the relentless pressure that he put on Mumbai batters, especially skipper Shaw.

In fact, it was the pressure applied by Yadav which helped nippy seamer Anubhav Agarwal (19-3-56-2) and tall off-spinner Saransh Jain (17-2-31-2) to share the bulk of the spoils, with some intelligent execution of plans.

Mumbai did enjoy the advantage during the first hour after Shaw opted to bat and, along with Jaiswal, took on the MP attack.

The strategy to start with Kartikeya's slow left-arm orthodox seemed to have backfired when Jaiswal took him on and lofted him over long-on for a six.



Shaw followed suit and hit Kartikeya over long-off for a six as they added 87 for the first wicket.

But while Jaiswal, with his drives and upper cuts, looked to continue from where he left in the semi-final, Shaw, despite his seven fours (at least three of them behind square) looked edgy.

The first breakthrough came minutes before lunch break when Anubhav, who was bowling closer to the stumps, decided to move slightly wide and fired in a couple of deliveries with the angle.


While Shaw managed to defend one, the second delivery saw him play across the line and the stumps rattled.

Arman Jaffer (26 off 56 balls) looked solid till he tried a forward-defensive jab off Kartikeya, without factoring in the extra bounce, and the ball

took an inside edge off his bat and Yash Dubey, at short mid-wicket, completed a diving catch.

The pitch in the second session slowed down considerably and Suved Parkar (18) paid the price when a delivery from Saransh stopped on him and the leading edge off closed bat face just lobbed up for the easiest of catches for rival captain Aditya Shrivastava. The dismissal that was most well-planned was that of Jaiswal, who was closing in on a fourth hundred of the season.

Anubhav, who had started operating wide of the crease, started cramping the left-hander for room. As he was finding it difficult to get the boundaries, Jaiswal, without much room, tried the square cut but failed to keep it down and Dubey at gully took a sharp low catch.

**OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER,
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1. Name of the work : 18 Nos.Work

2. Estimated cost : Rs.9.60 Lakhs to Rs 87.56 Lakhs (Approx.).

3. Period of completion : 6 (Six) Months.

4. Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal : From 11A.M of dt.28.06.2022 to 5.00 P.M. of dt.07.07.2022.

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6. Date & time of opening of bids : 08.07.2022 at 12.30 P.M.

7. Name and address of the officer Inviting Bid : The General Manager, WATCODivision,Cuttack- 753003,Odisha,Ph.(0671) 2547115email gmwatcoctc@gmail.com

8. The bidders have to participate in ONLTNE bidding only.

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