

CITY 2  
YOGI DISCUSSES DEV PROJECTS  
WITH UNION MINISTERSOPINION 6  
AGNIPATH SCHEME IS  
GOVT'S TRIAL BY FIREWORLD 10  
UKRAINIANS CHEER NATION'S EU  
CANDIDACY AMID WARTIME

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY JUNE 25, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

AUS BEAT  
SRI LANKA BY  
4 WICKETS  
12 SPORT

# LEGAL BATTLE AWAITS CONFIDENT REBEL CAMP

## Sena rebels to go to court if Dy Speaker disqualifies 12 MLAs

TN RAGHUNATHA ■  
MUMBAI

Having lobbed the ball into Maharashtra's Deputy Speaker Narhari Sitaram Zirwal's court in their own tactful ways, the rebel Eknath Shinde camp and the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituents on Friday prepared themselves to play an active part in the procedural tangles that will unfold in the run-up to the confidence vote that the Uddhav dispensation may seek sometime next week.

Deputy Speaker Zhirwal, who has been acting as the Assembly Speaker since February 2021 in the absence of a full-fledged speaker, will have a tough task on hand in dealing with the claims and counter-claims to be made by the Shinde camp and the MVA Government.

Given the complex nature of the emerging situation and the ramifications of the anti-defection law that will come into play in the coming days, the matters relating to the possible disqualifications of MLAs may land in courts, leading to the delay in the resolution of the current political crisis in Maharashtra.

Taking the first step, Deputy Speaker Narhari recognised the decision taken by the parent Shiv Sena Legislature Party (SSLP) on June 21 sacking the rebel Sena leader and Minister Shinde as the Sena

group leader in the State Assembly and replacing him with its senior party functionary Ajay Choudhury.

The recognition of the parent Sena leadership's decision to appoint Choudhury as the new SSLP leader in place of Shinde means that the Deputy Speaker has a strong reason to believe that the parent has enough numbers to act in a manner it has done.

The chair's ruling allowing the appointment of Choudhury as the new SSLP leader has ticked off the rebel Shinde camp, which is preparing to challenge the deputy speaker's order in the Bombay High Court on Saturday morning.

On its part, the rebel Sena camp on Thursday submitted a fresh letter to the Deputy Speaker that 37 rebel Shiv Sena MLAs camping in Guwahati (which is more than the requisite two-third strength i.e., 36 MLAs out of total 55 Sena MLAs in the State Assembly) reaffirming that Shinde would continue as the Sena group leader in the State Assembly. Till Friday evening, the Deputy Speaker had not accepted the claim that the Shinde camp enjoyed the support of 37 Sena MLAs.

If the Deputy Speaker accepts the rebel Sena camp's claim that Shinde enjoys the support of 37 out of the total 55 Sena MLAs in the Assembly and declares him as the Sena legislature party leader, the



parent party will be as good as over. Because, the Shinde faction — if it has two-thirds of the parent party's strength in the Assembly — can merge with another party or become a separate group in the House without attracting penal provisions of the anti-defection law.

On the other hand, the parent Sena party is hoping against hope that the Deputy Speaker will disqualify 12 MLAs, including Eknath Shinde, for allegedly violating the party whip, based on a written request made to that effect by the parent Sena's new SSLP leader Ajay Choudhury on Thursday.

If the Deputy Speaker disqualifies 12 Sena rebel MLAs, including Shinde, the development will result in the rebel Sena camp — the strength of which will be reduced to 25 MLAs against the earlier 37 MLAs — attracting action under the anti-defection law.

If such development takes place, the 12 disqualified Sena rebel MLAs will not be able to take part in the confidence vote to be sought by the Thackeray dispensation. It remains to be seen if the remaining 25 Sena rebel MLAs will vote against the confidence vote and if yes, whether they will face action under the anti-defection law.

Till the confidence vote is over, the Deputy Speaker will deal with all matters relating to the strength of the ruling MVA — comprising Shiv Sena (55) NCP (53), and Congress (44) — that had collective strength of 152 MLAs on paper till the Shinde-led rebellion rocked the Shiv Sena on June 21. However, after the confidence vote is decided, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari will take control of the situation.

Governor Koshyari, who was admitted to the Reliance Foundation Hospital on Wednesday after he tested pos-

itive for Covid-19, will remain in hospital for some more days.

It remains to be seen if Koshyari, despite being in hospital, will intervene in matters which come under the domain of the Deputy Speaker.

Meanwhile, all the three MVA constituents — Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress — are rooting for Uddhav Thackeray seeking a confidence vote on the floor of the Assembly.

On Thursday, NCP chief Sharad Pawar — who is the architect of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Government, said that the floor test was the only way to resolve the current political crisis. He expressed optimism that the MVA dispensation would survive the current crisis facing the Shiv Sena. "Let the MLAs come back from Guwahati. The situation will change drastically. The MVA Government will survive the floor test in the State Assembly," Pawar said.

## J&K to host G-20 leaders; diplomatic win post Art 370

### UT has set up 5-member high level panel for first ever G-20 meet in India

MOHIT KANDHARI ■  
JAMMU

Come 2023, the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir will be extending a red carpet welcome to the G-20 leaders, an influential grouping that brings together the world's major economies.

This major development is already seen as a major diplomatic victory for India especially after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A in August 2019.

India has been a member of G-20 since its inception in 1999. New Delhi will be holding the G-20 Presidency from 1 December 2022 and will convene the G-20 Leaders' Summit in 2023 for the first time.

World leaders of G-20 member nations — the United States, Russia, China, Germany, France, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom — are expected to attend the meeting.

G-20 brings together 19 of



the world's leading economies and the European Union, with its members accounting for more than 80 per cent of global GDP, 75 per cent of global trade and 60 per cent of the global population.

The UT administration is scheduled to host the world leaders in Kashmir valley. To facilitate the meeting, the UT administration has already constituted a five-member high level committee for overall coordination.

In September last year, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was appointed as India's Sherpa for the G-20. The Ministry of External Affairs had said that India will hold the G-20 presidency from December 1, 2022, and will convene the G-20 leaders' summit in 2023 for the first time.

According to an official

order issued here on Thursday, the Union Territory's housing and urban development department principal secretary will be the chairman of the committee which was formed in response to a June 4 communication from the Ministry of External Affairs.

"Sanction is hereby accorded to the constitution of a committee...for overall coordination of G-20 meetings to be held in the Union Territory of J&K," said the order issued by Principal Secretary, General Administration Department, Manoj Kumar Dwivedi. The members of the committee include Commissioner Secretary (Transport), Administrative Secretary (Tourism), Administrative Secretary (Hospitality and Protocol) and Administrative Secretary (Culture).

Continued on Page 9

## SC rejects Jafri's plea against SIT's clean chit to Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Upholding the SIT's clean chit to Narendra Modi in Gujarat riots of 2002, the Supreme Court on Friday dismissed Zakia Jafri's petition alleging conspiracy at the highest level, observing that these are attempts to "keep the pot boiling" for years and abuse of process with ulterior design.

Bringing the curtains down on the bid to reopen the probe, a bench headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar said the material collected during the investigation did not "give rise to strong or grave suspicion regarding hatching of larger criminal conspiracy at the highest level" for causing mass violence against Muslims.

The bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar termed the petition of Congress MP Ehsan Jafri's widow as "the devious stratagem to keep the pot boiling, obviously, for ulterior design" and said all those involved in "such abuse of process need to be in the dock and proceeded with in accordance with law". The court said

the present proceedings (by Zakia Jafri) have been pursued for the last 16 years with the audacity to question the integrity of every functionary involved in the process.

The apex court also said that disgruntled officers of the Gujarat Government need to be in the dock and proceeded with in accordance with law for creating a sensation by making false revelations on the 2002 riots. The top court also said it finds force in the argument of the State that the testimony of Sanjiv Bhatt (then IPS officer and now in jail for custodial torture) and RB Sreekumar (now retired IPS officer) was only to sensationalise and politicise the matters in issue, "although, replete with falsehood".

"At the end of the day, it appears to us that a coalesced effort of the disgruntled officials of the State of Gujarat along with others was to create a sensation by making revelations which were false to their own knowledge. The falsity of their claims had been fully exposed by the SIT after a thorough investigation," said the apex court.

Continued on Page 9

## SC upholds death to minor divyang's rapist

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday sent to gallows a man for kidnapping, raping, and killing a seven-and-half-year-old mentally and physically challenged girl in 2013, saying the crime was of the nature of "extreme depravity which shocks the conscience" and left "no other option but to confirm the death sentence".

The apex court upheld the death sentence given by the Rajasthan High Court to convict Manoj Pratap Singh.

"We may sum up thus: In the case of the present nature, the crime had been of extreme depravity, which shocks the conscience, particularly looking to the target (a seven-and-a-half-year old mentally and physically challenged girl) and then, looking to the manner of committing murder, where the hapless victim's head was literally smashed, resulting in multiple injuries, including a fracture of frontal bone..." said a bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar.

Condemned convict Manoj Pratap Singh, then 28 years of age, had kidnapped the physically and mentally challenged minor girl in front of her parents from their fruit and vegetable vending cart on January 17, 2013, brutally raped her at a secluded place before killing her by smashing the head in Rajsamand district, Rajasthan.

The bench rejected the contention that in the case, hinging on circumstantial evidence, the death penalty should not be awarded saying that if the conviction can be sustained on such proof then the extreme penalty can also be imposed depending on the nature of the offence.

"In the present case, where all the elements surrounding the offence as also all the elements surrounding the offender cut across the balance sheet of aggravating and mitigating circumstances, we are clearly of the view that there is absolutely no reason to commute the sentence of death to any other sentence of lesser degree," Justice Maheshwari said.

Continued on Page 9

## Daily Covid count shoots up to 4-month high to over 17K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India on Friday reported a single-day count of over 17,000 fresh Covid-19 cases after a gap of over four months (124 days), recording a 30 per cent jump in daily cases.

A total 17,336 coronavirus cases were reported in a span of 24 hours, taking the total infection tally to 4,33,62,294, while the death toll due to the disease climbed to 5,24,954 with 13 new fatalities being reported, according to the Union Health Ministry data.

The national Capital recorded 1,447 new Covid cases and one more death on

Friday, while the positivity rate dropped to 5.98 per cent. These fresh cases were recorded out of 24,203 tests conducted the previous day. The infection tally in Delhi has risen to 19,28,841 and the death toll stands at 26,243.

Delhi had recorded 1,934 Covid cases and zero death on Thursday, while the positivity rate had stood 8.10 per cent.

Fresh cases dropped slightly from 858 cases on Thursday to 816 cases on Friday in Karnataka. At the national level, the daily positivity rate was recorded at 4.32 per cent and the weekly positivity rate at 3.07 per cent, according to the Health Ministry.

The count of active cases has increased to 88,284, comprising 0.20 per cent of the total infections, while Covid-19

recovery rate at the national level was recorded at 98.59 per cent, it said.

Continued on Page 9



## States can ban abortion, rules US SC

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US Supreme Court has ended Constitutional protections for abortion that had been in place nearly 50 years in a decision by its conservative majority to overturn Roe v. Wade. Friday's outcome is expected to lead to abortion bans in roughly half the States.

The ruling is the culmination of decades of efforts by abortion opponents, made possible by an emboldened right side of the court that has been fortified by 3 picks of former President Donald Trump.

It puts the court at odds with a majority of Americans who favored preserving Roe, according to opinion polls. The ruling came more than a month after the stunning leak of a draft opinion by Justice Samuel Alito indicating the court was prepared to take this momentous step. See P10



A celebration outside the US Supreme Court in Washington on Friday. The Supreme Court has ended constitutional protections for abortion that had been in place nearly 50 years

AP



# Yogi discusses dev projects with Union ministers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath met Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Culture and Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy and Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways, General (Retd) VK Singh in Delhi and discussed the ongoing development schemes in Uttar Pradesh.

The chief minister held a meeting with the Union ministers regarding the all-round development of the Braj region and discussed the Braj development project. He also discussed the points related to the 361 km-long Braj Chaurasi Kos Parikrama project, 52 km-long Braj Teerth Path project and 72 km-long Govardhan Connect project with the Union road transport and highways minister.

The chief minister discussed with the railway minis-



ter the development of about 12 km-long Mathura-Vrindavan rail route as an alternate transport route. This railway route situated between Mathura-Vrindavan is not being used at present. The land on this route can be used to develop an alternative transport route between Mathura and Vrindavan. In view of this, a light rail transit system (LRTS) is proposed to be constructed on the Mathura-Vrindavan railway line.

The chief minister also spoke to the railway minister regarding the construction of a tourist facilitation centre at Mathura junction.

A large number of tourists and devotees visit Mathura from all over the country and

abroad. Of these, the maximum passengers come by trains. The construction of a tourist facilitation centre at the railway station will facilitate the passengers coming to Mathura.

The chief minister discussed with the Union minister for ports, shipping and waterways about the development of a waterway on the river Yamuna, connecting Vrindavan-Mathura-Gokul. The development of this waterway will facilitate the pilgrims visiting Mathura, Vrindavan and Gokul pilgrimage sites.

The chief minister discussed in detail with the Union culture and tourism minister the restoration of the mythological and historical heritage of Braj region.

# UP govt to set up two centres of excellence for promotion of startups

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to set up two centres of excellence in the state for the promotion of startups.

One of these startups is being set up in the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur for promotion of drone technology.

With the Yogi government committed to providing a better ecosystem to industries, around 6,379 startups have already registered in the state.

According to the department for promotion of industry and internal trade of the Centre, 6,379 startups are registered in Uttar Pradesh.

"The startup policy of the state government has been framed to provide all support to those willing to set up their startups in the state," said Vinayak Nath, chairman of UP Startup Council.

Noida has turned out to be the most preferred destination for startups followed by Ghaziabad, Agra, Lucknow and Gorakhpur in Purvanchal region. According to govern-

ment officials, around 1,154 startups have registered in Noida, 533 in Ghaziabad, 500 in Lucknow and 1,219 in Bundelkhand and Purvanchal regions of the state.

According to industry experts, Noida is a preferred destination for startups due to availability of logistics, better connectivity and availability of land for big projects.

The Information Technology and Electronics department of the state government has also decided to set up 100 incubators with one incubator in each district.

Around 47 incubators have already been set up. In the state capital, the country's biggest incubator will come up in around 2.5 lakh square feet area.

The Uttar Pradesh Electronics Corporation (UPEC) has already identified a land opposite CCS airport in Amausi to set up the incubation centre. The UPEC is in talks with Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), a Union government enterprise, to build and operate this incubation centre.

# Prez poll: Azam, Shivpal skip Akhilesh's meeting

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party senior leader Mohammad Azam Khan and party MLA Shivpal Singh Yadav stayed away from the meeting called by party president Akhilesh Yadav to finalise the strategy for the presidential election.

The SP and its allies have decided to support joint opposition candidate Yashwant Sinha in the presidential election.

The SP and its allies have 125 MLAs which includes 111 of SP, eight of Rashtriya Lok Dal and six of Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party.

The members of the legislature council are not in the electoral college for the election of the president of India.

Besides, the SP and its allies have five MPs in Rajya Sabha and three in the Lok Sabha. If the SP wins the by-elections to Rampur and Azamgarh parliamentary constituencies, the number of its MPs will increase to five in the Lok Sabha. The total value of votes of MLAs and MPs of SP and its allies is 26,000.

The term of President Ram Nath Kovind

ends on July 18, 2022. Members of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha and MLAs of the state assemblies constitute the electoral college of the presidential election. Each MP carries a vote value of 708, which is based on a pre-decided formula. The vote value of each MLA varies as per a state's population (1971 Census) and the number of seats in assembly. This is where UP is vital as each of its MLA carries a value of 208, the highest, as opposed to a mere seven for an MLA in Sikkim.

The SP faces a tough task of keeping its flock together in the presidential election. Its ally, Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party leader Om Prakash Rajbhar, is particularly sulking over the denial of ticket to his son for the recently concluded UP Legislative Council election. Shivpal Yadav, the estranged uncle of Akhilesh Yadav, is another party legislator giving jitters to the SP president.

Yashwant Sinha, a leader of Trinamool Congress, was proposed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the consensus presidential candidate of the opposition.

# Man sets wife, kids on fire; woman dies, kids critical

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident in Kushinagar, a man set his wife and two children on fire after a tiff over his drinking habit.

The third son somehow saved himself by hiding in another room.

The incident took place on Friday and the wife succumbed on the way to hospital while both children are battling for their lives with more than 70 per cent burn injuries. Both have been admitted to Gorakhpur Medical College hospital.

The accused is absconding. Reports said that Ramsunaj Sahani had a tiff with his wife, Subhawati, over his consuming liquor after which he set her and their two children, Mushkar (11), Arun (4), on fire. Subhawati died while both children were critically injured. The third child Ankit somehow saved himself.

Local police claimed to have launched a hunt for the accused. The incident took place in Fard Mundera village under Kaptanganj police station of Kushinagar district.

The local residents claimed that the accused used to spend all his earnings on alcohol and after his wife raised an objection, he set her and his children

on fire

In Sultanpur, a 25-year-old man was beaten to death in Katka Khanpur market area, police said on Friday.

The incident took place around 10:30 pm on Thursday. Some unidentified people beat him up leading to his death, Gosaiganj police station incharge Sandeep Kumar Rai said. Rai said the man, identified as Prabhakar Mishra, was addicted to alcohol for a long time. It is learnt that he had an altercation with the owner of a factory in the vicinity over some minor issue

Meanwhile, the blood-soaked body of a 17-year-old boy with his throat slit was found in a field along the roadside in Deoria city on Friday morning. Prima facie, it appeared that he had been brutally murdered by slitting his throat with a sharp weapon. The accused had also chopped off the fingers of the boy's hands and toes and dumped the body on the road connecting Sutavar to Chaumukha.

Police registered a murder case. Superintendent of Police Sankalp Sharma expressed suspicion that the victim was murdered by someone close to him. The deceased, identified as Rehman (17), was a resident of Lar town and used to help his father in a grocery shop

located in the area.

Rehman had left the house on a bike on Thursday night. Police recovered the motorcycle from the Mile area. Further investigations are on.

Meanwhile the bodies of two unidentified youths were found lying in a pit near Manauapur village under Haiderganj police station in Ayodhya. The police started the investigation and sent both the bodies for autopsy.

Later, the deceased were identified as Manoj Modanwal and Ravi Modanwal, both residents of Sahabganj Bazar of Lalganj police station area of Pratapgarh district. Reports said that some locals, after finding the bodies, informed the police. Superintendent of Police (Rural) Atul Kumar Sonkar, CO Bikapur Manoj Kumar Yadav reached the spot for investigation. Sonkar said that no wounds were found on the bodies of the deceased. Relatives disclosed that they left the shop on Thursday morning and both the youths were friends.

Suspecting that someone threw the bodies after killing the youths, the police are scanning the recordings of CCTV cameras installed nearby. The family members claimed no enmity of both which could have lead to their murder.

# CM for decentralisation of new agri technology

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised the need for decentralisation of the new agriculture technology to make it easily accessible for the common farmers.

"Instead of centralisation of technology, there should be decentralisation and the agricultural universities along with Krishi Vgyan Kendra (KVK) and progressive farmers should ensure easy access of technology to the common farmers so that they are not hesitant in adopting new technology. If the new technology remains confined to KVK, we will not get the desired results and scientists should also come forward to ensure that the benefit reaches the common farmers," the chief minister said here on Friday while addressing a seminar on UP road map for agriculture and allied sector.

Expressing his displeasure over the slow pace of technology transfer to the common farmers, the chief minister said, "I must admit that our

agricultural universities and institutions lack adequate communication with the farmers and rural society. Whatever facilities in the agriculture sector, like universities and KVK, have been created have been financed from the taxpayers' money and we have to adopt innovative ideas for providing services to the farmers."

"For the last two years, the entire world was reeling under the impact of the pandemic which has affected all sectors of the economy. The construction sector was worst affected and it recorded 50 per cent negative growth. It was only the agriculture sector which recorded a positive growth of 3.5 per cent," Yogi Adityanath said.

The chief minister said: "UP is a blessed state in terms of fertile land and water resources. The share of UP agricultural land at all India level is 12 per cent. Our population is 16 per cent of the country while the share of Uttar Pradesh in total agricultural production of the country is 20 per cent. This shows the potential of UP in the agricul-

ture sector which remains to be fully utilised."

"In 2017, when Bharatiya Janata Party was voted to power, there was an atmosphere of despair across the state and the common people were demoralised and felt nothing could be done in Uttar Pradesh. We wanted to do something innovative. I was confident that we could do a lot by reviving our traditional cottage industry. Out of total 75 districts of the state 57 districts had unique products and new product was created for rest of the district and ODOP (One District One Product scheme) was born that has led to UP emerging as an export hub and total export from UP in 2021-22 was Rs 1.56 lakh crore," he said.

The chief minister added, "India will grow only if UP develops. In UP, agriculture provides maximum employment. UP should have a robust action plan and do periodic monitoring."

Yogi Adityanath said, "I visited Moradabad and the state of the brassware industry has been transformed with ODOP

and total export from the district in the last fiscal was Rs 9,500 crore. The earlier governments neglected the district and the industry and with meager resources the local entrepreneurs were running the industry, constantly harassed by the UP Pollution Control Board. Now they have been freed from the web of pollution laws and regulation and the industry is doing well."

"With small efforts of scientists and progressive farmers, the potential of UP can be enhanced by three times. Even today farmers have no technology. UP issued maximum soil health card; Kisan Samman Nidhi has benefitted maximum number of farmers in UP. The government, in the last five years, has created 22 lakh hectares of additional irrigation potential," the chief minister said and added, "Farming needs to be diversified from the cycle of cereals like wheat and paddy to horticulture. Agri scientists should also focus their attention on organic zero budget farming. Many agricultural scientists are still not

very enthusiastic about organic farming. Cost is low and production is high in natural farming."

"For India to become a 5-trillion USD economy, as the goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UP's contribution to this goal will come from agriculture and allied sectors," he said.

Yogi Adityanath said, "The conclusion of this seminar should be shared with the Krishi Vgyan Kendra as UP has nine agriculture climatic zones. The KVK scientists should be encouraged and their services should be utilised for working in new sectors."

"The KVK has good scientists and their work should be linked with agri science. The government agencies should also encourage them. This work should not be confined to only KVK and agricultural universities and KVK should be developed as centres of excellence. If a tissue culture lab is to be established it should be in agri university and KVK should be linked with it," the chief minister said.

# 12 killed in mishaps

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A dozen persons were killed in separate mishaps since Thursday night.

Four people were killed in a head-on collision between a truck and a Roadways bus near village Bharehta on Pilibhit-Basti highway in Dhaurahra Kotwali area of Lakhimpur Kheri district on Friday morning.

More than 12 people were seriously injured in the accident.

According to the police, two people died on the spot while two succumbed to their injuries in the hospital. All the injured were rushed to the community health centre in Dhaurahra. Due to the critical condition of many of the injured, the doctor referred them to the district hospital.

In another mishap in Dhaurahra locality of Kheri, a private bus knocked down a couple riding a motorcycle on Kafr Dhakherwa road, killing the wife on the spot. The husband, who was seriously injured, was rushed to the community health centre at Ramya Behad and his condition was said to be critical. Naseeruddin of Salempur Kon village adjacent to the city was going towards Dhaurahra with his wife Khushnuma when a private bus on the way to Dhaurahra from Lakhimpur hit his motorcycle.

The bus driver fled after the accident. In another mishap which took place in the Narkhi police station area of Firozabad district, three motorcycle riders were killed late on Thursday evening. The three youths, one of who was celebrating his birthday on the day, were friends and were returning home from the city.

The victims were identified as Shivam of Surajpura village who was celebrating his birthday on Thursday, and his friends Akash and Gaurav. They had gone to the city

area to celebrate the birthday and were returning to Fariha when they met with the accident.

In a separate mishap, a woman crossing the road on Muzaffarnagar-Gaigheri State Highway in Nagal area of Saharanpur district was hit by a vehicle on Friday morning, and died on the spot.

Angoori Devi (55) wife Nathiram, a resident of Kapasi village of Nagal police station area, was returning to her village by a bike from Bharatpur with her son Monu. As soon as they reached Kota, his son tried to cross the road by an illegal cut on the road divider while his mother started crossing the road on foot. Meanwhile, a vehicle coming from Gagalhedhi's side hit her and she died on the spot.

In Jaunpur, three persons, including a minor boy, died while two others were injured when a leaking LPG cylinder kept inside a hut caught fire in Kewatli village of Maharajganj, police said on Friday.

The mishap took place when Neelam, (28), wife of one Akhilesh Vishwakarma (30) of Kewatli, was going to boil milk. Her husband Akhilesh, two children Shivansh (5) and Yuvraj (3) were sleeping in the hut at the time of the incident on Thursday evening. As she lit a match stick, the gas leaking from the LPG cylinder caught fire and within no time engulfed the entire hut.

Hearing their screams, locals ran to the spot and Akhilesh's elder brother Suresh, 32, tried to rescue all the four by jumping into the inferno, police said. With the help of locals, Suresh was able to bring out all the four. The police then took them to a nearby government hospital where after giving first aid doctors referred them to district hospital. However, Suresh, Neelam and Shivansh died of burn injuries during treatment while the condition of Akhilesh and his other son were said to be critical, said police.

# Govt's mega plantation drive to increase green cover in

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh is set to increase its green cover with the state government's mega plantation drive from July 1.

Under the drive, 35 crore saplings will be planted across the state till August 15.

On August 15, 75 saplings will be planted in each village of the state to mark Azadi Ka Amrit Varsh.

Chairing a high-level review meeting, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that with the spirit of Indian culture of conservation of nature, there was a need to take forward the tree plantation campaign as a mass movement. He said as the massive tree plantation drive was going to start, a detailed programme should be prepared in this regard to make this campaign a big success.

Additional Chief Secretary

(Environment, Forest and Climate Change) Manoj Singh said that in the last few years, the state government had worked tirelessly to increase the green cover in Uttar Pradesh. He said there were over 58,000 villages in Uttar Pradesh and the government planned to plant over 43.5 lakh saplings in a day on August 15.

"Efforts are being made by the Forest department to increase the green cover in the state which will help in pollution control," he said.

According to the State of Forest Report-2021, 9.23 per cent of the total geographical area of Uttar Pradesh has forest cover. In 2013, it was 8.82 per cent. There has been an increase of 91 square kilometres in the total forest cover and tree cover during 2019. "The government has now set a target to further enhance this area to 15 per cent by 2030. For this, the government will plant 175 crore

saplings in the next five years. And for this, the Yogi Adityanath government has been doing intensive plantation during the rainy season since its first tenure. As a result, 101.49 crore saplings have been planted with the efforts of the government between 2017-18 and 2021-2022," Singh said. Indigenous plants like banyan, peepal, pakad, neem, bael, amla, mango, jackfruit, and drumstick will get preference during the plantation drive. The intention of the government is that the plantation during the rainy season should be according to the agro-climatic zone of the area concerned. Twenty-seven departments, including the Forest department, together will make the 'Mission 35 Crore' successful.

The nodal agency for plantation is the Forest department. But apart from it, 26 other departments will participate in the grand tree planta-

tion campaign. The target of each department has already been fixed. The highest target of 12.60 crore and 12.32 crore saplings is for Forest and Rural Development departments respectively. Apart from this, the target of the Agriculture and Horticulture departments is 2.35 crore and 1.55 crore saplings respectively. Environment fighters will also play an important role in making this campaign a success. Farmers and beneficiaries of prime minister's award in the environment, empowered force, women, disabled, low-income group, visually impaired, MGNREGA job card holders, self-help groups, village level and city development workers, forest workers, tribal-forest, Chief Minister Abhyudaya Yojana beneficiaries, teacher-students, and women will also be involved in the tree plantation campaign.

# SIT holds four cops responsible for suicide by teacher in custody

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the suicide by a teacher in Kannauj held four policemen, including the then inspector, responsible for pushing the man to end his life in police custody.

A 35-year-old government school teacher, who was detained by police following a complaint by his in-laws, hanged himself inside a police station in Kannauj on March 20, 2022. The deceased teacher's family alleged that he was tortured by his in-laws and later in police custody after which he committed suicide.

Parvat Singh of Gidausa village in Jalaun district, an assistant teacher at a government school in Sempur village in Auraiya, visited his in-law's place in

Sukhapurwa village of Kannauj. There he allegedly created a ruckus following a conflict with his wife Neeraj.

On the basis of the complaint of Neeraj's family, the teacher was detained by the police at night. Around 3 o'clock in the morning, Parvat Singh was found hanging in the toilet of the Kotwali. The father of the deceased had lodged a report against three people, including daughter-in-law Neeraj.

After the death of the teacher in police custody, the investigation was given to the Crime Branch, Crime Investigation Department (CBCID).

The CBCID lodged an FIR against the then Tirwa Kotwali in-charge Tribhuvan Kumar, head moharri Radheshyam, the guard constable Arun Kumar and the then Sadar Kotwali in-charge Inspector Vikas Rai,

who was investigating the matter and filed a final report without waiting for the medical report.

On the petition of the accused, a division bench of the Allahabad High Court had directed the state government to constitute an SIT and conduct a fair investigation into the case. The SIT found that Inspector Tribhuvan Singh had illegally detained the teacher, Parvat Singh, in the police station, and his medical report was not made after his death.

Constable Arun Kumar, the SIT said, showed negligence by taking the deceased to the toilet due to which Parvat Singh got the chance to end his life. The SIT has charged the police personnel and the then inspector under Section 306 (abetment to suicide) of the Indian Penal Code.

**SBFC**  
**SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd.**  
Address: Unit No. 103, First Floor C&B Square, Sangam Complex, 127, Andheri-Kurla Road, Village Chakala, Andheri (East), Mumbai 400059 | Telephone: +91 22 67875300 |  
Fax: +91 22 67875301 | Email: info@sbfc.com  
Corporate Identity Number: U67190MH2008PTC178270

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd. On **28th June'22** at Lucknow district Gomti Nagar, Alambagh and HARJINDER Nagar Kanpur Branch, Gomti Nagar address: 1st Floor, I/B, Bhatia Complex, Viram Khand, Patrakapuram Chowraha, Gontinagar, district Lucknow. ~ 226010, Alambagh address ~ Kundan Clinic 55/176 jha first floor Alambagh, Lucknow-226005, and Harjinder Nagar Kanpur district address, 1 16B, N-2,Road Lal Bangla Harjinde Nagar, Kanpur-208007, Uttar Pradesh- 204301. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to all linked accounts of Customer id for various customers mentioned below with branch details.  
Kanpur ~ AP003292545,AP00446660 Lucknow: AP0032431,33Ayodhya,AP00317951,AP00335304, AP00361585,AP00374481,AP00414153  
For more details, please contact:  
**SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd.**  
Contact Number(s): 1800-102-8012 , Alambagh: 0522-4113074/ 4113041, Gomti Nagar: 0522-4114337/ 4114338, Swaroop Nagar: 0512-2530892/2530897  
(SBFC Finance Pvt. Ltd.reserves the right to alter the number of accounts to be auctioned &/postpone / cancel the auction without any prior notice.)







# CSJMU organises special session on yoga

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) organised a special session on yoga on Friday as part of the International Yoga Day in association with the Department of Physical Education and School of Health Sciences. The session was held as per the theme for this day 'Yoga for Humanity'. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between CSJMU and Mokshayatan International to promote yoga.

The chief guest, Padamshri Swami Bharat Bhushan, addressing the session expressed his happiness and appreciation for CSJMU and said that excellent teachers were never satisfied with what they already knew and were constantly seeking knowledge. He informed that the world's first university was founded in India and the term 'guru' originally referred to a yogi. He asserted that the ability to develop exceptional personalities lay with the instructor. He responded to inquiries from students on Yoga after his address. Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak, Vice-Chancellor of CSJMU and chairman of this programme, expressed his joy and said that yoga was an age-old practice that had its roots in Indian philosophy. He said although it started as a spiritual practice it had gained popularity in spreading physical and mental well-being. He said that the varsity would develop new yoga courses to encourage individuals to practice yoga. Ayurvedacharya, Dr Vandana Pathak, who was the special guest said that yoga kept the body and mind healthy and made the routine good. Yoga should be practised regularly by everyone



Padamshri Swami Bharat Bhushan lighting the ceremonial lamp to inaugurate Yoga Day at CSJMU on Friday.

as regular practice enhanced cognitive, spiritual and physical abilities. She said though one may hope for a guru to guide through yoga's deeper practices, many students require nothing more

than a skilled asana teacher. She said it is essential to learn yoga under a yoga guru who can perform and teach its ideologies as well. University Registrar Dr Anil Kumar Yadav

expressed gratitude to everyone and said assembly of huge number of participants was highly encouraging. He said the 108 surya namaskars competition, 74 participants from the yoga asana sports competition and 95 participants from the monthly yoga session received certificates and winners received medals and memento. Students from 13 colleges and institutes participated in the yoga asana sports competition.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof Sudhir Kumar Awasthi who was special guest and introduced Swami Bharat Bhushan and said that Swamiji was the founder and chairman of Mokshayatan International Yogashram, Saharanpur. He said Swamiji had developed a triangle-based approach to physical growth based on the Sattvik diet, yoga and isometric exercises.

Mahila Mahavidyalaya, SN Sen Mahavidyalaya, Brahmanand PG College, DAV College, VSSD College, and Dayanand Girls' Degree College participated in the yoga asana sports competition. In the female category the winners Bhumi, Aaradhya, Shraddha, Shubhi, Mansi, Jyoti, Kajal, Kanchan, Kamal, Priyanka and in the male category, the winners Tejavi, Ashutosh, Prakhari, Yogesh, Amarnath Verma, Ritesh and Ravi were awarded with medals and mementoes by Swamiji. Prof Sudhanshu Pandey, Dr Ashish Kumar Dubey, Dr Ram Kishore (programme coordinator) and Dr Digvijay Sharma were also present in this programme. The students of the Music department greeted the guests warmly and presented Saraswati Vandana.

## Counselling session of students held

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Director of School of Business Management, CSJM University, Prof Sudhanshu Pandya, while addressing a counselling session of MBA and BBA students of the varsity said as the country's economy was growing with a rapid pace and many new companies were coming up thus there was enough job prospects and all those who have BBA degree can be just as good as an MBA qualified manager.

He said students wishing to pursue a Bachelor of Business Administration or BBA must know that in the past few years, BBA had turned out to be one of the most recognised programmes and numerous students after completing their school were moving towards taking this programme. He said pursuing this programme from just any college was not sufficient, it was important to have the right choice of college, which can impart the education in the right manner along with requisite practical exposure to become a renowned professional in the field of their choice.

Prof Pandya said one of the most obvious choices to pick for BBA graduates was to take up a master's degree programme in the same field and it was also one of the most suitable ones. He said umpteen more options open up after completing an MBA degree after graduating with a BBA degree in the fields such as finance, banking, operations, marketing, human resources, among others. After completing the MBA degree one can get leadership roles in different types of industries. He said an MBA degree from a good college will equip one to become engaging in the task

that was being assigned to one, judge the performance of people, acquire leadership roles and many other relevant roles.

He said the job profile of a data scientist was to gain insights from unstructured and structured data, this insight was being used to develop plans and better-informed decisions, and ultimately, attain the objective of obtaining better results. He added that it was one of the most promising courses to take up after BBA.

He said digital marketing was another promising career option that can be picked up by BBA graduates. He said it was more about the management part of growing a business online than the technical part that was related to digital marketing. He said with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree one will develop the competency on how to run a business online. He said with the increase in the online presence of companies across various industries, the demand for digital marketers had increased considerably. Prof Pandya said another option was to pursue a career in this field as a product manager and this option was particularly suitable for those who were from a science background.

He said if the students had not heard about Bitcoin then some time should be spent to make themselves familiar with that thing. He said the reason was that with a BBA degree one can also make a successful career as a blockchain expert. He said the fast-growing cryptocurrency had changed the way people think about money and how it can be earned. Others who addressed it were Prof Ashu Yadav, Dr Sudhanshu Rai, Dr Aparna Katiyar and Dr Vivek Sachan.

## Team takes feedback of work done in field of malaria, filaria

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An international team of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was on a trip to Kanpur to take a first hand feedback of the work done in the field of malaria and filaria and other infectious disease. The team was led by Deputy Director, Dr Jordan Tappero and Kayla, Infectious Diseases of BMGF. The team was in Kanpur to carry out a survey of the efforts made under this project financed by BMGF and how far it had been able to contain the disease under Filariasis Eradication Project.

Official Spokesperson for the BMGF, Rashi Gupta, said that the team had visited Sachendi and Binnaur and the houses where filariasis patients were there. She said the team took a feedback from the patients and then held a meeting with district malaria officer and gave suggestions in giving momentum to the whole project. She claimed the team was satisfied with the

drug distribution to the patients. She said team also interacted with the special teams and trained them for the job and also carried out a special training session for ASHAs and how they should administer drug to them.

Gupta said the team was apprised about the problems faced by the ASHAs and the major challenges faced by them in the field. She said the team then held a meeting with the DMO Arun Kumar Singh, and took a feedback as to what facilities were the filariasis patients being provided. The team also took a feedback for the patients of hydrocele and informed about the facility of surgery to be provided to the patients.

She said the team checked the multiple drug administration register especially of the families of the affected people. She said the team then held a meeting with various officials related to the Health department. She said the team carried out a similar visit in Binnaur

of Kalyanpur block and took a feedback from patients and the people along with health workers. The team emphasised on the need to spread awareness among the masses.

### MUKHYAMANTRI ABHYUDAYA YOJANA

District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) Dr Pragya Pandey while addressing the presspersons on Friday said for special training and teaching the UP government had introduced Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana and was being implemented in the right earnest in Kanpur and the surrounding districts. She said students who were keen to pursue civil services, JEE, NEET, NDA, CDS and other competitive examination can avail themselves of the facility. She said the Uttar Pradesh government launched the Abhyudaya Free Coaching to help students who cannot afford different exam training costs. She said according to the

Yogi government plan, students will receive free training courses for all competitive examinations which they were pursuing. She said all applicants who were willing to apply online should download the official notification and read all eligibility criteria and application process carefully. She said it will provide information about 'Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana 2022' like scheme benefit, eligibility criteria, key features of scheme, application status, application process and more. She said in the first phase, UP Mukhyamantri Abhyudaya Yojana will be implemented in 18 divisional headquarters of the state. She said at these divisional headquarters, coaching will be imparted physically and virtually under UP Abhyudaya Free Coaching Scheme. Officials will also devote their time and experts will also be posted there. She advised students keen to avail themselves of the facility to apply at the earliest.

## Loco pilot dies of cardiac arrest

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In the Intercity Express train going from Pratapgarh Junction to Kanpur, the loco pilot died due to cardiac arrest. This incident happened on Friday morning. Train driver Girish Chandra's health suddenly deteriorated near Kasimpur Halt in Amethi district. The train pilot died shortly after. Due to it the train stood for about half an hour. After this, by arranging another pilot, the railways sent the train forward.

Intercity Express was going to Kanpur from Pratapgarh Junction on Friday morning. The pilot of the train was 55-year-old Girish Chand Sharma. Girish had reached Kasimpur halt at 6 in the morning while taking the train from Pratapgarh to Kanpur. There he got down to fix the engine pipe. At that moment someone's phone rang. He started talking and in the meantime he fell unconscious. Seeing this, a chaos broke out there. The control room was informed immediately. Within a short while, the ambulance arrived. He was taken to Fursatganj Hospital. There he was declared brought dead. Railway officials and employees arrived on the information of the sudden death of the loco pilot. After arranging for the second loco pilot, the train was sent forward. During this, the train stood there for about half an hour. Loco pilot Girish Chandra was a resident of Parasrampur Sadar in Pratapgarh.

**CUG NUMBER:** Now every railway employee in the country will have his own CUG (Closed User Group) number. A new telecom circular has been issued by the Railway Board for this purpose. In this, there is an order to give CUG numbers to all categories of railway employees. This will now make contact with the employees very easily. Railway Board has issued a letter for this on June 22 on behalf of the Executive Director of Telecom

Department Rakesh Ranjan. With this, now all the employees of the whole country including the employees of North Central Railway (NCR) will get the CUG number.

Till now, only railway officers, supervisors, loco pilots, train managers and safety category employees used to get CUG numbers, but now all categories of railway personnel have been brought under the purview of CUG mobile scheme of Indian Railways i.e. all will be given CUG numbers.

At present, about 66,000 railway personnel are employed in North Central Railway. Of these, about 20 thousand already have CUG numbers. Now the remaining 44 thousand railway workers will get CUG number. It has been said in the circular that the list of employees will be certified by the Personnel department. After this, the Railway CUG Coordinator will provide SIM to all the departments. This SIM will be deposited on retirement or transfer. At the time of depositing the SIM, a certificate of no dues will also have to be given on it. North Central Railway's CPRO Dr Shivam Sharma said that the telecom circular has been issued with the consent of the Finance Directorate of the Ministry of Railways. Under this additional CUG connections are to be provided. All the railway workers of NCR will get CUG number.

**ARRESTED:** Police arrested a notorious criminal Vivek Yadav alias Vivek Bagi, a resident of Gangapur, Bairia in Ballia, and his four gang members from the Civil Lines area on Thursday evening and seized a car, one country-made pistol of 0.315 bore along with live cartridges and five crude bombs from his possession. SSP Ajay Kumar said while investigating bomb hurling incident at Harish Dhaba in the city on June 20 they came to know about the involvement of an inter-district gang involved in many criminal activities and arrested its five active members of the gang, including the kingpin Vivek Yadav.

## ‘Cause of most childhood scoliosis unknown’

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Noted spine surgeon, Dr NAK Gupta, addressing the presspersons on Friday said the Spine Clinic will observe two day scoliosis awareness so as to spread awareness about the disease and other spinal related conditions. He said in India majority of the parents were ignorant of the disease and fail to get it medically rectified. He said the earlier the diagnosis the better the treatment. He said scoliosis was a sideways curvature of the spine that most often was diagnosed in adolescents and added that it can occur in people with conditions such as cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy but added that the cause of most

childhood scoliosis was unknown. He said there were currently two approved options for non-fusion correction, the Tether and ApiFix and these procedures offered a more rapid post-surgery recovery, less blood loss and a faster return to sports and general activities than for fusion. He said traditional surgical correction of spinal deformity had involved relatively long instrumentation and fusion techniques, producing a straighter but stiffer spine. He said in the infant this approach led to a shorter trunk. He said current surgical techniques may also have an adverse effect on pulmonary function. He said in order to minimise the effects strategies had been devised to

limit exposure related morbidity and these had largely focused on minimally invasive and thoracoscopic techniques and endoscopic techniques of spinal instrumentation and scoliosis correction were now well established. He said in non-fusion techniques in the growing spine, to maximise or modulate future growth potentials, were being explored. He said their potential advantages were obviation of the need for early fusion and countering of the resultant relative axial shortening from spinal arthrodesis. Dr Gupta said in severe scoliosis, the rib cage may press against the lungs, making it more difficult to breathe. He said it could also lead to back problems. He added that peo

ple who had scoliosis as children may be more likely to have chronic back pain as adults, especially if their abnormal curves were large and untreated. He said a mild curve was less than 20 degrees, a moderate curve was between 25 degrees and 40 degrees, a severe curve was more than 50 degrees. He said the severe curves can affect the lungs. He said there was no quick fix for scoliosis and wearing a brace or recovering from surgery takes a while. He said there were several different types of braces and it acted as a holding device that kept a curve from getting worse. He said a brace won't make the spine straight. He said wearing a brace correctly can prevent the need for surgery.

## Foreigners join Namami Gange campaign

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The ongoing Namami Gange's campaign received a boost when a section of foreign tourists visiting the holy city participated in the drive on Friday, appealing to the people not to use polythene bags and keep the river Ganga clean and pollution-free. When the Namami Gange activists were offering 'shramdaan' to remove waste from the river, some foreign joined hands and they also distributed cotton bags among the devotees at Dashaswamedh, Rajendra Prasad and Man Mandir ghats. Convener of Namami Gange (Kashi area) Rajesh Shukla appealed to the people to keep cotton bags whenever they visit the markets. He said that polythene has affected the beauty as well as health of the city as it choked the drains frequently causing their overflowing in different localities. Apart from a group of foreign



Foreign tourists supporting Namami Gange campaign in Varanasi on Friday.

tourists from the UK, those who were also present were Bina Gupta, Pushpalata Verma, Sonu, Sagar Agrawal, Rajat Gupta, Nagina Pandey, Kirtan Barnwal and Sushma Jaiswal. Earlier, under the leadership of city co-convenor of Namami Gange and Ganga Vichar Manch Shivam Agrahari, a cleanliness campaign was conducted at the three ghats including Sheelta, Dashaswamedh and Munshi. Later, they went up to Darbhanga Ghat to appeal to the people not to throw wastes at the ghats and in the river. The activists offered 'shramdaan' to bring out waste and flowers from the river and their campaign was also joined by a section of South Indian tourists, especially from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. City co-convenor Ramprakash Jaiswal, Rashmi Sahu, Shivang Pandey, Renu Acharya, Ramesh Chauhan and many others were also present.

## Winners declared

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Essay competitions were organised on the occasions of World Environment Day and International Yoga Day as parts of Azad Ka Amrit Mahotsav under the joint auspices of Personnel department of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) and BHU Sansthan. The results of both these essay competitions were announced. The judges of contests held on the occasion of Environment Day and Yoga Day were Vikas Pandey of BLW Inter College and Akhlaq Hussain Khan. Secretary of BLW Sansthan Alok Kumar Singh was convener of the contests while treasurer BM Verma and library secretary PK Dixit and others were also present at the time of announcement of results. Anupama Gupta stood first

in the junior section in an essay contest organised on Environment Day while Aaradhya Gupta and Maryada Pandey secured second and third places, Aanchal Kumari and Para Singh received consolation prizes. Among seniors, Praveen Krishna won first place followed by Sony Nigam and Manjari Tiwari. Anshika Srivastava and Anuradha Singh got consolation prizes.

In the essay contests organised on occasion of Yoga Day, Anuradha Singh stood first among the juniors while Yash Singh and Anshika Srivastava finished second and third respectively. Harsh Pandey and Pragati Mishra got consolation prizes.

Among the seniors, Rajesh Kumar won first position while Shalini Choudhary and Karan Virendra Singh were placed second and third respectively.



# Friday prayers pass off peacefully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Amidst tight security arrangements, yet another Friday namaz at Gyanvapi mosque passed off peacefully in this holy city. It was the third Friday prayers since Kanpur violence over the controversial statement of suspended Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson Nupur Sharma when the district administration and Varanasi police commissionerate had made elaborate security arrangements not only at gate No 4, the entry point of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir and Gyanvapi Masjid but also in all the adjoining sensitive areas. Actually, in the city the local administration is facing a tough challenge for about seven weeks since the survey was done in Gyanvapi mosque on the instructions of the court. The matter became more sensitive when a section of pro-Hindutva forces intensified their movement demanding regular prayers of Adi Vishweshwar which was claimed to be found during the survey led by advocate commissioner in Gyanvapi mosque. In wake of such prevailing circumstances, the maintenance of law and order situations in this parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a big challenge for the administration. It was the reason why right from the morning, heavy police forces were deployed both outside and inside the newly-constructed Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham (Corridor)



Tight security for Friday prayers at Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi.

as the entry gate for both the temple and mosque is common. Every Muslim willing to go to the mosque was thoroughly checked with the help of metal detectors. However, the number of Muslims reached there, responding to the appeals of Anjuman Intejamiya Committee looking after the management of Gyanvapi mosque, was low in comparison to June 10, when after Kanpur violence and statement of Nupur Sharma, a large number of Muslims reached there posing a challenging time for the administration. The administration

took a relief around 2 pm when the 'namaz' concluded and the Muslims left the premises.

In order to keep a watch on the troublemakers, right from the morning the police also kept watch on rooftops of buildings of nearby localities through drones to ensure that there were no collection of stones and bricks. Besides, the police forces led by senior officers also took out a route march in Godowlia and adjoining areas to instil confidence among the residents and devotees who came here to offer prayers at one of the

Dwadasa Jyotirlingas Kashi Vishwanath temple.

Meanwhile, in response to the call given by Swami Avimukteshwaranand, popularly known as Swamishri and local representative of Shankaracharya Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, 'jal-abhishek' and prayers at various Shiva temples in different places across the country continued. The district administration was also alert, keeping a watch on those troublemakers who can fan the flames of unrest on the issues of Nupur Sharma's statement and Agnipath recruitment scheme.

# DM takes action in borewell tragedy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma taking the matter of borewell tragedy seriously in which a 13-year-old boy died, issued notices to concerned department and company as the primary investigation found negligence of three concerned officers including junior engineer (JE) of Jal Nigam (Electrical Mechanical Division Office, Construction Division, Rural),

project manager of L&T and site engineer.

Aniket Yadav (13), son of Radheshyam Yadav, fell into the borewell while playing in Binda village under Pindra tehsil area around 5 pm on Thursday. The borewell was dug there by the officers of Jal Nigam and L&T, a private company. After the incident, the local residents brought out the boy from a pit dug for a borewell and rushed him to a nearby private hospital where the doctors declared

him dead. Later, the incident was investigated by the SDM Pindra. In this initial investigation, it was found that the pit dug for borewell by Jal Nigam and L&T officials was neither covered nor any kind of signage board was installed there which was a clear matter of negligence shown by junior engineer of Jal Nigam Priyanka Yadav, project manager of L&T BP Raghubanshi and site engineer Ravi Kumar.

After receiving the report

from the SDM, the DM issued notices to the concerned department/company for an early departmental action as well as clarification from them. He said that legal action would also be taken on receipt of replies to the notices from the Jal Nigam and L&T. The DM has also sought certificates from the Jal Nigam (Gramin) and L&T related to proper protection of all borewells they had dug in the district till Friday.

# IIA members hold meeting with DC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Indian Industries Association (IIA), Varanasi Chapter on Friday held a meeting with the Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agrawal at his office and placed their demands before him. Agrawal assured to pay serious consider their demands. The IIA members said they had held a meeting with Agrawal on June 16, 2021, on several issues and the meeting had yielded positive results in industrial development. But, there are some issues which should be sorted out in the development of the industries of this eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, they added They raised the issue of collateral security before the divisional commissioner and demanded that it should be released in the interest of industry. The industrialists furnished their stock statements and papers of renewal on time but despite this, the panel interest was imposed, they lamented and demanded that this issue should be sorted out and the officers concerned should be directed to no impose the interest when the required documents are furnished within stipulated time. In the present competitive circumstances, the industrialists transfer their accounts from one bank to other but the bank charged pre-payment panel interest which is not practical; the members said and demanded that this interest should not be charged on the transfer of the accounts. The industrialists face many



DC Deepak Agrawal holding a meeting with entrepreneurs in Varanasi on Friday.

difficulties in getting the panel interest and other inadequate surcharges back, they said and demanded that this issue should also be addressed.

A power sub-station has been established in Ramnagar industrial estate but it is now in a poor condition and the equipment installed here has not been replaced for a long time and as a result this industrial estate does not get uninterrupted power supply, they said. They demanded an improvement in the power supply because uninterrupted power supply plays a key role in the development of industries indirectly. The industrialists had paid TCS charge in

electricity bills but it is not showing in 26 AS and due to which they have failed in availing its benefit, the members said and demanded for making correction in the bill. They also demanded the option of TDS on the portal of UPPCL like the option of TCS so that they could make payment by deducting the TDS following the government rules. At present, they are not getting the benefit of cash discount on making payment by deducting the TDS, they added. The members of IIA also handed over a memorandum of demands to the divisional commissioner. An industrialist and national president of IIA RK

Chaudhary and others were present in the meeting.

**MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED:** The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), Varanasi, on Friday staged a protest against the Agnipath recruitment scheme. The Morcha submitted a memorandum to the district administration to be forwarded to the President of India demanding the roll back of the scheme. They urged the President of India to interfere in the matter and issue an order to the government to roll back the scheme. Among those who joined the protest were Aflatoon, Ramjanam, Kripa Verma, Kamlesh Kumar and Anup Shramik.

# IOB organises loan distribution camp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) organised a loan distribution camp under Azad Ka Amrit Mahotsav at its Lahurabir branch here.

Regional manager of the bank PC Satpati distributed loan of ₹497 lakh in agriculture, ₹103.75 lakh in MSME, ₹3 lakh in PM SVANidhi and ₹7 lakh under Mudra Loan. The bank



approved loan of ₹497 lakh to the director of 'Pure Dairy Solution' Venkat S Dharan in agriculture.

Prominent among those present in the camp were chief managers of the bank Shailendra Pandey and Ramji Singh, senior manager Prashant Kumar and branch manager Piyush Kumar Singh.

IOB distributing loans in Varanasi on Friday.

# 18-year-old youth murdered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In a shocking incident, an 18-year-old youth was murdered by some unidentified miscreants on Thursday night. After killing the youth, the killers fled by dumping his body on the roadside track. In the morning the villagers saw the body with a mark of injury on the neck. The youth has been identified. The police is trying to find out who com-

mitted the murder and why.

Anil Kumar lived in Ghatampur village under Uttaraon police station. Anil's body was lying on the road track on Katra Dum Gadha Road, about 500 metres from his house on Friday morning. The villagers going from there in the morning spotted the body. A large number of people gathered there. On getting information, the police also reached and tried to identify

the victim. He was identified as Anil Kumar. According to eyewitnesses, Anil had injury marks on his neck. It is suspected that he was strangulated to death. Police personnel inspected the spot and sent the body for the post-mortem examination. A force has been deployed in the village.

Anil Kumar used to work at the brick kiln. At night, he was seen having food with four youths at a dhaba located

in Katra. His body was found in the morning. The police have picked up the four youths, including others, for questioning. As of now, the reason for the murder is not clear. Police is investigating the matter. So far no one has given a complaint. Anil Kumar has a sister, who is married. Father Basudev Yadav works in a company in Mumbai. He is there at present and mother Rimpa is the only one at home.

# Zonal Rly Users & Consultative Committee meeting held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The second meeting of the ninth Zonal Railway Users and Consultative Committee of North Central Railway (NCR) was organised here on Friday. As many as 44 members of Zonal Rail Users and Consultative Committee were present. The committee unanimously condemned the recent violence and damage to the railway property in recent Agnipath agitation. While speaking about the recent agitation MP Kaushambi V Sonkar condemned it and said everyone has right to express his views but it should be done peacefully and in a constitutional manner. He also suggested the approved list of products for stalls at stations should be provided to members so they can check it while inspecting the stations. Addressing the meeting General Manager Pramod Kumar, said Railways is the life-line of the nation and it contributes significantly to the development. There has always been a huge gap between demand and supply of railway, one of the main reasons for this being capacity constraints. He said that the year 2021-22 was a challenging year. It started with the second wave of Covid, which not only affected all sectors of the economy, but had engulfed the entire humanity. In this difficult situation, NCR, an important part of Indian Railways, living up to the call of the nation, made a commendable contribution in ensuring supply of essential commodities through all available means and providing transportation facility to the



workers to reach their homes. Kumar also apprised the members of the committee that, One Station One Product' Scheme in NCR was implemented on pilot basis on March 25 this year. Under it stalls are being allotted at one station to sell the famous product in that place/city and till now stalls have been allotted at 13 railway stations and the product is being sold. In the near future this scheme will be implemented at other selected railway stations also. Pramod Kumar said that action was taken against 4,988 illegal vendors. In the last financial year, action was taken against 3,406 people to curb unprovoked alarm chain pulling. In the drive against illegal sale of tickets and illegal vending, 140 unauthorised ticket agents were arrested and action was taken against them. Members ZRUCC Viay Arora and Pradum Jaiswal demanded Prayagraj to Lucknow Shatabdi train & increase in the frequency of Mumbai Duronto. Krishna Gautam thanked the

railway administration for the work of second entry at Tundla station and also raised the issue of stoppage of various trains at Tundla station and demanded plantation of saplings in the park. Gyaneshwar Shukla of Chitrakoot expressed the demand for beautification of the local park. Demand to expedite the work of gauge conversion in Gwalior was also raised. During the meeting, issues like stoppage of trains at various stations and waterlogging in rail underpass were raised by various members. Gyanendra Srivastava of Prayagraj appreciated the efforts of railway administration and asked for timely completion of projects. In the meeting the election of the member of National Railway Users and Consultative Committee was also held. In this election out of three members Pradeep Kumar Tiwari, Sunil Singh Parihar and Krishna Gautam, members elected Krishna Gautam. The election was conducted by Deputy Chief

Personnel Officer (DyCPO) MK Kulshrestha.

**POLES DAMAGED:** An open door of a goods train, which was heading for Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction from New Delhi, damaged several OHE poles and water pipeline at Prayagraj Junction. By the time the train was put to a halt, it had damaged around a dozen poles which are being repaired by authorities by taking shut-down of main power on the track concerned. According to Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) of North Central Railway (NCR), the goods train was loaded from Jam Nagar (Gujarat) and was heading for Shivpur. One of the side door of a wagon of this train was open and while crossing Prayagraj Junction, it hit the water hydrants and the OHE poles besides the track. The train damaged around 40 water hydrants and some poles. The power was cut for a short time and barring one train, the traffic movement was normal on the route.

# Five-day yoga festival concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The five-day yoga festival organised at the Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIT), Allahabad, to mark the eighth International Yoga Day concluded on the Jhalwa campus on Friday. During this five-day festival, about 100 people of the institute participated in one and a half hour yoga asana session every day. Mainly Tadasana, Vrikshasana, Trikonasana,

Shishu Asana, Hastapad Asana, Nadi Shodhana, Surya Namaskar, Pranayama and meditation were conducted during the fest. Dr Komal Jaiswal, teacher of Art of Living, introduced everyone to different dimensions of yoga at the Yoga Mahotsav. She described yoga as not just doing asanas, but the development of the whole personality, which gives energy, joy and enthusiasm to the person. In the last session at IIIT-A auditorium on Friday

morning, Surya Namaskar competition was conducted in which people from all sections of the institute participated with full enthusiasm. As many as 22 people participated in the Surya Namaskar competition, in which Ayushi secured tge first position. Himanshu and Birender Sharma won the second prize jointly while Dr Akhilesh Tiwari and Akhilesh Mishra won the third prize jointly. Dr Sanjay Singh, programme coordinator on the

occasion said that similar programmes would continue at the institute in this series. Dean Prof. Shekhar Verma shared his experience about the positive aspects of Yoga. Prof Pawan Kumar Chakraborty, Dr Akhilesh Tiwari, Dr PK Saini, Pankaj Mishra, Dr Mithilesh, Rajendra Bisht, Pankaj Srivastava were present. Nearly hundreds of students, teachers, officers and employees of the institute participated in the five-day fest.

# TB champions creating awareness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The government is constantly striving towards making the country tuberculosis (TB) free by 2025. The 13 TB patients of the district, who were fully cured, are now working as champions in making the community aware of TB eradication. They are also helping patients suffering from TB in their treatment under a new initiative taken by the Health department. All these TB champions are now pasting posters at TB units, government hospitals and community and primary health centres (CHCs/PHCs). Giving this information, District Tuberculosis Officer (DTO)

Dr Rahul Singh said that the main message in the poster is 'Jung to Jeetee TB Se, Kuch Kho Ke Paya Hai' and with this, these TB champions are now creating awareness among the people towards TB eradication. Singh said that in these posters, the phone numbers of TB champions are mentioned so that in case of any trouble, the TB patients can contact them and sort out their problems. "In the past, training has been given to all TB champions of the district, so that along with treatment and cooperation of TB patients, they can change the behaviour of the community as well," said Dr Singh, adding that if a TB patient gets treated timely and takes med-

icines properly, he/she can be easily cured.

"There are still many misconceptions about TB in the society. To dispel them and boost the morale of TB patients, TB champions in the district are sharing their experiences and mobilising the patients that their treatment is possible," he said. He also added that the TB patients and their family members are being explained in detail about the risks, treatment etc.

District PPM (public-private mix) coordinator Naman Gupta said that the phone numbers and names of TB champions are mentioned in all TB units, District Hospital and CHCs/PHCs by putting

posters of TB champions of the respective areas. One of TB champions said that a long time ago he had TB but with regular and complete medicine intake and nutritious food, he succeeded in defeating the disease. "I feel my experience helps the TB patients a lot in their screening and counselling," he said. Another patient said he did not know how he suffered from TB while working in a TB unit but after screening, investigation etc when TB was confirmed, he took a full course of medicine apart from focussing on diet and finally, he won the battle against TB. "Now I'm feeling happy by counselling TB patients," he added.

# 'Ensure character verification of all school bus drivers'

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar while presiding over the meeting of road safety committee at Collectorate on Thursday asked road construction agencies to do improvement work on black spots to reduce road accidents. During discussion on various road safety points the DM directed to ensure character verification of all school bus drivers and no laxity will be tolerated in this matter. The DM was apprised by the ARTO that 24 accidents took place at black spots and total 254 deaths were reported

in year 2021. The meeting was attended by Additional District Magistrate (Finance & Revenue) Shiv Patap Shukla, RTO Enforcement Rajesh Verma and other officials concerned.

**SEMINAR:** To mark the death anniversary of Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee a seminar was organised at BJP office on Thursday. The speakers remembered the spirit of the leader who fought for the nation throughout his life. Besides, hundreds of BJP workers gathered at the statue of Dr Mukherjee located at Mukeri Bajar and garlanded it. Paying homage on the occasion,

Chairman Nagar Palika Parishad (NPP) Mirzapur Manoj Jaiswal appealed to workers that it will be real tribute to the leader if we follow his path.

**THREE HELD:** Range police station of cyber crime arrested three accused of fraud. Sub-inspector of the police station Dr Chandrashekar Yadav said Ayush Gupta, a resident of Vidyut Vihar Colony NTPC Shaktinagar, Sonbhadra, had on May 27, 2022, lodged a case. After registering the case the police started the investigation and through use of technical devices, the police identified three accused. SI said a team

led by SHO cyber crime police station Shyam Bahadur Yadav raided the houses of the accused whose fraud of ₹2,76,555 was detected and arrested them with the help of the local police. As per the police, four mobile phones, nine ATM cards and two bank pass books had been recovered from their possession. The arrested accused were identified as Monu Yadav and Arun Kumar, residents of Junedpur village, and Bhavish Kaushik, a resident of Saray Jhanjhan, residents of Bulandshahr district. After completing the legal formalities the police sent the accused to jail.



# Time to exit BRICS?

India’s continuation in the grouping lends legitimacy to the regimes of Xi and Putin

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s concern over “expanding” military ties is not the worry of a statesman who is committed to global peace and rules-based international order; it is the fear of a tyrant who is the lord and master of the world’s most powerful and dangerous rogue State. Addressing the virtual annual BRICS Business Forum from Beijing, he denounced the US’ alliance-building in Asia (read Quad) and the West’s sweeping sanctions against Russia. “In the past century, humanity has gone through the scourge of two World Wars and the dark shadow of the Cold War. The tragedies of the past tell us that hegemony, group politics and bloc confrontation bring no peace or security; they only lead to wars and conflicts,” Xi said at the event in which there were representatives and business groups from Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. If there is one country that must learn from the tragedies of the past, it is China; it is also the country that needs to realise that hegemony, group politics and bloc confrontation bring no peace or security. Not just realise but also act on this realisation and stop propping up other rogue States like Pakistan and North Korea. But this will not happen because what Xi wants is hegemony not peace, confrontation not dialogue. Similarly, he uses the Ukraine crisis, which he calls a “wake-up call for all in the world”, to rant against the expansion of “military alliances”.

The BRICS meet not only allows the Chinese President to spread his lies but also gives an opportunity to Russian President Vladimir Putin to partially regain some respectability that he lost after he launched an unprovoked attack on Ukraine. In his video address, Putin said that his country was “redirecting” its trade flows to BRICS nations and other “reliable international partners”. Unsurprisingly, he slammed the debilitating sanctions that the western nations had imposed on Russia, calling them “politically motivated” and “contrary to common sense and basic economic logic”. The entire exercise of BRICS meet was galling from the Indian perspective, for Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended it. The head of the Government of the world’s largest democracy sharing platform (though virtual) with the two most dangerous dictators was not something many Indians would cherish. In fact, the mere presence of the Indian Prime Minister lends a great deal of legitimacy and even respectability to the two tyrants; just like guilt by association, there is also legitimacy by association. Consider the contrast between India on the one hand and China and Russia on the other. In recent times, India has extended everything it could — PPE kits and vaccines to dozens of countries, aid to crisis-hit Sri Lanka. On the other hand, China exported the deadly virus that killed millions of people and Russia attacked a neighbour for no reason. Frankly, India should get out of BRICS which anyway lacks the *raison d’etre*. Just like the Non-Aligned Movement.

## PICTALK



Crowds walk along on the 12th hole at the Travellers Championship tournament, at TPC River Highlands

# Agnipath scheme Govt’s trial by fire

The Govt faces an uphill task in meeting expectations of the nation’s youth when economy is experiencing severe recession and job market is unstable

Much water has flown down the Ganges since unveiling of the new human resource policy by the Defence Ministry for recruiting soldiers, sailors and airmen. The country witnessed widespread protests, rioting and violence by youth in many States causing irreparable damage to public property. This abrupt change has not gone well with the youth aspiring to join the armed forces lured by the earlier system of joining service for 17 years and enjoying pension benefits. Taking note of the resentment among the youth and the Opposition encashing upon the unrest, the Government went into damage control and the age limit was enhanced from 21 years to 23 years. Home and Defence Ministries announced 10 per cent reservation to reinstate the retired troops in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) forces, defence Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and other jobs. Some States also assured job security to Agniveers after their retirement. Indian business magnates justified the Agnipath scheme, claiming that it has large potential for employment.

Senior armed forces officers also sought to clear the doubts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself said that some reforms “may look unfair” at first, but will help in nation-building later. He met the three service chiefs to discuss the Agnipath scheme. The Army and the Air Force have since issued recruitment notifications. All these developments indicate that the Government failed to do proper homework before introducing the scheme and is now acting in haste to control the situation.

The scheme has received mixed response from the veterans and public — those in service have supported the decision whereas most retired officers have criticised the move. They have raised apprehensions on various counts like the training duration for Agniveers, whether their motivation level will be as high as that of regular soldiers and the rehabilitation of retired troops. They have also criticised the hasty manner in which



the scheme was implemented without putting the scheme to test through a pilot project. To meet the cumulative threat from China and Pakistan, the Indian forces require young, highly trained and motivated soldiers. The pertinent questions are whether the new breed of Agniveers will be able to meet this challenge?

What benefits would the retired Agniveers get? How would the defence forces gain out of this scheme? Critics feel that the first casualty would be the quality of human resources. Any eligible person will first compete for jobs in civilian Government, police and Central forces where she enjoys assured service till the age of 60 years and pension benefits, before opting for the four-year unsecured stint in the armed forces. The second casualty would be training — an Agniveer’s six-month stint will be able to gain him neither any worthwhile expertise in handling expensive military equipment nor understand the nuances of a modern battlefield of artificial intelligence, cyber warfare etc. Poor-quality human resources, inadequately trained and poorly paid Agniveers, lacking any motivation with a broken reg-

“POOR-QUALITY HUMAN RESOURCES, INADEQUATELY TRAINED AND POORLY PAID AGNIVEERS, LACKING ANY MOTIVATION WITH A BROKEN REGIMENTAL SYSTEM, WILL BE A DISASTER IN THE MAKING FOR OUR VALOROUS ARMED FORCES

mental system, will be a disaster in the making for our armed forces.

The scheme’s supporters hailed it as a path-breaking initiative that would replace an aging Army, in which more than 60 per cent men are above 30 years of age and would pave the way for regular intake and availability of young, fit and motivated youth who wish to don the uniform and serve the nation for short periods. The scheme is expected to open up new opportunities for our youth, boost civil-military fusion and pave the way for becoming worthy representatives of the best regimental traditions of the armed forces. One of the biggest challenges facing the armed forces is the budgetary constraints. Ballooning salary and pension bills have placed enormous stress on the availability of funds for military modernisation. The emphasis of the new scheme is on ensuring a youthful and tech-savvy profile of the armed forces while reducing the overall burden on pension and gratuities. Another logic given in favour of this scheme is that several foreign models were studied before its implementation. The service period ranges from two to eight

years with options for active and reservist service in many modern armed forces of the world, such as the US, UK and France. The Israeli army, which is considered to be one of the best in the world, has service of 30 and 20 months, respectively, for men and women.

The Government faces an uphill task of tackling this peculiar situation of meeting expectations of the frustrated youth at a time when the economy is experiencing severe recession and job market is unstable. Unfortunately, the 1.4 million-strong Army has faced neglect by all Governments, defence expenditure being relegated to the “non-plan” category and Finance Ministry, instead of finding ways and means of raising essential, additional funds for national defence, has passed the buck to the armed forces and demanded that they evolve measures for reducing the pension bill. All these lacunae need to be taken care of before it is too late.

(The writer is a senior journalist and Chairman, the Panwar Group of Institutions, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

## SOUND BITE

Why are you (BJP) disturbing the Assam Govt when they are facing floods?



West Bengal CM —Mamata Banerjee

The Cold War mentality must end. BRICS must oppose the abuse of sanctions.

Chinese President —Xi Jinping

Three films from down south did really well. Films in Hindi have also done well.



Actor —R Madhavan

In 2020, we were coming up; it was the transition period for the juniors.

Indian cyclist —L Ronaldo Singh

This (₹60,000 crore) is one of the largest transfers to a foundation in Indian corporate history.



Asia’s richest person —Gautam Adani

# For progress?

A BJP MLA’s proclamation on 50 States after the LS poll must be for the right reasons

Stoking a political controversy, BJP’s Karnataka leader Umesh Vishwanath Katti has stated that once PM Narendra Modi returns to power after the 2024 elections, the nation will have 50 States. He even elaborated the Union Government’s purported plans to, at the local level, have North Karnataka as a separate State, and, at the national level, to split Maharashtra into three states and Uttar Pradesh into four. The six-term member of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, who currently holds the portfolio in the Ministry of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, is a vocal proponent of separate statehood for north Karnataka. A video of him making the statement, which took place at a Belagavi Bar Association event, has since gone viral. Ostensibly, the blueprint primarily takes into account the population numbers of bigger States; such States would be suitably bifurcated for the ease of governance and altogether 50 States would come into existence after the 2024 Lok Sabha election, as per the so-claimed initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It actually is high time that IT companies, who have Bengaluru their home, looked out outside the metropolis, especially since north Karnataka has huge potential.



Though Katti admitted that it’s not his party’s official stand, he exhorted the people of north Karnataka to “make it happen”. He may have a point, though. Bengaluru is bursting at seams with its burgeoning population; it lacks water supply for citizens, who have to spend hours in traffic jams. The statements by Katti, who represents the Hukkeri Assembly constituency, have reignited the regional divide debate in Karnataka in which most of the population and leaders from the northern parts of the State have been demanding statehood to get better amenities and development for the region. But this scheme by the ruling dispensation is quite understandable provided it’s aimed squarely at providing better governance to the grassroots, bring development to the remotest regions and benefit the last man standing at the end of the spectrum. However, if the end aim is to reap narrow dividends for a particular party, the planned move can’t be condoned. However, as we all know, there’s a lot more to be read between the lines in politics than in their actual content, so there’s only hoping that there’s no mala fide intention behind the purported move.

## OUR SOLDIERS LEARNING MANDARIN

Sir — At a time when modern communication techniques are transforming the landscape of military warfare, the prospects of countries are likely to depend on how soldiers conduct themselves when they face their enemy soldiers at an unarmed border. In this respect, basic conversation in enemy language is of utmost importance. The Government’s initiative to train them in the Chinese language is aimed at easing tensions emanating from a lack of proper language communication between the border patrols. Several transgressions like border standoffs, first in Doklam and now in Ladakh, take place every year and such incidents highlight the increasing gravity of the situation.

To combat such unforeseen circumstances, over 60,000 Himveers and Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel have already completed their training in Mandarin in order to communicate fluently with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers during patrols. Acquiring the Chinese language skills could help reduce misunderstandings along the border at a time when relations between the two countries are still incendiary. Proficiency in enemy language can help on-the-spot negotiation and contact procedure. This concept needs to be replicated in other northeastern States bordering other countries, which can help in better communication and can even enhance cultural ties.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

## WHO IS BEHIND THE MAHARASHTRA CRISIS?

Sir — We have heard it straight from the horse’s mouth. Eknath Shinde has revealed that the entire operation of splitting the Shiv Sena was supported by a ‘national party’. There are no prizes for guessing which party it is. He gave the clue, of course to whom it was needed, that it was the party, a ‘superpower’ that taught Pakistan a lesson. The strength and confidence of Shinde appears to be emanating more from BJP’s support than the number of MLAs owing allegiance to him. It falls on the BJP

## PM package employees’ woes



Since after the barbaric and gruesome killing of Rahul Bhat (a PM Package employee) by terrorists in the Kashmir Valley, which was followed by a series of such dastardly acts by militants in the region, all Kashmiri Pandit package employees went on the streets and are protesting for their one-point demand of being relocated outside the State of Jammu & Kashmir. These package employees are peacefully agitating since the last 45 days in Jammu as well as in Kashmir. Due to the recent spike in the targeted killings in Kashmir, the PM package employees are

feeling insecure, threatened and totally unsafe. Many Hindu minority employees were massacred at their workplaces and this is indeed a very grave concern.

Thus, rightly, these hapless and unfortunate employees are only demanding their relocation outside Kashmir, at least as a temporary measure, as there is fear psychosis among them. These Kashmiri Pandit employees have become soft targets in Kashmir. Therefore, relocation outside Kashmir is the only viable solution at this juncture to stop further bloodshed. India is currently under the strong leadership of PM Narendra Modi and thus all PM package Kashmiri Pandit employees have full trust in his Government. It is now hoped that the Centre will pay immediate heed to the protesting Kashmiri Pandit employees and order their temporary adjustments outside Kashmir in order to save their lives.

ON Koul | New Delhi

to convincingly rebut the charge that the threat of using Central agencies has facilitated the revolt against the MVA Government.

Shinde says that his sole demand is that the Sena snap ties with Congress and NCP and join hands with the BJP, its ‘natural ally’. The dilution of Hindutva under Uddhav Thackeray’s leadership because of the ties with the Congress and the NCP cited for the revolt is only a fig leaf. The BJP’s role in triggering the political crisis might not have been as explicit as in Karnataka or Madhya Pradesh but the party has lost its moral compass and become accustomed to toppling non-BJP State Governments.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

## MODI NOT TO BLAME FOR GODHRA

Sir — The Supreme Court has upheld the clean chit given to former Chief Minister Narendra Modi and 63 others in the Gujarat riots, triggered by the burning of a railway coach in which *kar sevaks* were burnt alive. The Godhra carnage was a

spontaneous public reaction to the killing of innocent *kar sevaks*, like the Sikh massacre. It is easy, and right too, to say two wrongs cannot make one right. But mob frenzy on an unprecedented scale would cause immense damage before the situation is brought under control. This is what happened both in the Indira Gandhi assassination case and the *kar sevaks* burning case.

The SIT closure report giving clean chit to Modi and others was challenged by Zakia Jafri, the widow of slain Congress leader Ehsan Jafri. Zakia has fought a relentless legal battle to get “justice” for the death of her husband. But she must concede that Modi had not engineered the Godhra incident. Zakia should come to terms with the reality surfacing now. Just as she is bereaved, the families of *kar sevaks* are also bereaved by their death. Godhra was an offshoot of *kar sevak* killings that spread across the State.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



FIRST COLUMN

CUSTOMS DUTY IS MUST ON E-TRANSMISSIONS

It will provide a level playing field to the domestic industry



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

Moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions has got another lease of life at the World Trade Organisation's 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12). Some say this has happened due to pressure exerted by the United States, others think that India has bargained this for other gains.

It's noteworthy that India had pronounced that it would oppose this moratorium, as it causes a huge loss of revenue, apart from hurting our digital development, as domestic players face intense competition from global tech companies.

Significantly, at the time of the start of the WTO, trade in electronic products was very limited. In such a situation, the tariff on the trade of electronic products was temporarily suspended and it was decided in the Second Ministerial Conference of the WTO in 1998 to study the issues related to the global electronic trade with reference to the development needs of the developing countries. It was proposed that tariffs on electronic products be postponed till the next ministerial conference.

It is unfortunate that the developed countries kept suspending the decision on imposing tariffs on the import of electronic products, on several pretexts. Today the situation is that more than \$30 billion of electronic products are being imported into India alone. That is, even if 10 per cent tariff is imposed, the government will get revenue of more than \$3 billion.



According to a recent study, developing countries could have generated \$56 billion from imports of just 49 digitalised products in the period 2017-19. Least developed countries could have generated \$8 billion in this period, which is double the amount they need for giving double dose of Covid vaccine to their populations.

The issue here is not only about loss of revenue, it's a much larger issue for a country like India, where our start-ups and software companies are able to make a variety of electronic products, where we can make movies and other entertainment products in our own country, but when all such products are imported undeterred, without tariff, there is little incentive to produce them indigenously.

Tariff moratorium on e-products is actually killing our efforts of Atmanirbhar Bharat, benefitting the US, European countries, and China.

At the beginning of MC12, India started with a bold stance and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said: "I think this moratorium, which has been continuing for 24 years, must be reviewed and re-looked at."

However, the decision on moratorium in MC12, is read as follows: "We agree to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC 13, which should ordinarily be held by 31 December 2023. Should MC 13 be delayed beyond 31 March 2024, the moratorium will expire on the date unless Ministers or the General Council take a decision to extend."

In the earlier Ministerial Conferences of WTO, in the last 24 years, the developed world had been easily getting the moratorium. MC12, was the first such conference where they faced some resistance from the developing countries. With this, a hope had arisen that the moratorium would end ultimately. But this battle was also lost.

Since 1998, the digital revolution has changed a lot in the world. There are digital products which are fast replacing physical products. Many of the digital products in health, fintech, public services, etc., incorporate artificial intelligence and 3D printing. Failure to tax them in innovative ways is likely to impact the government finances adversely.

We have started developing our own digital products; the production linked incentives (PLIs) scheme has been designed to nurture our infant digital products industries. Imposition of custom duties can help them by providing a level-playing field.

Though MC12 is over, India should leave no stone unturned to end this moratorium.

(The author is Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi)

Despite its low share price, LIC is valuable

NIRJHAR MAJUMDAR

The IPO was a failure but LIC policyholders and investors will get their money's worth in course of time

The insurance industry is now at a crossroads. The regulator is busy changing the rules of the game. Insurers are changing business models, disrupting the traditional value chain. Foreign insurers and reinsurers are taking more interest in the business, as the insurance market is growing, following the rising prosperity of people despite a recessionary situation. Yet, insurers are still at their wits' end as to how to take insurance penetration to the next level.

Amidst this scenario, LIC launched its IPO by offering 3.5 per cent of its shares to retail and institutional investors. This has enabled the government to mop up about Rs 21,000 crore from the market. As much as 10 per cent of the offloaded LIC shares have been allotted to policyholders and 5 per cent to employees. In fact, this was the biggest IPO in India's corporate history.

About a month has elapsed since the listing of LIC's shares in stock exchanges. At the moment, LIC shares are traded about 30 per cent below the issue price. Some doomsayer analysts have already started fear-mongering in the market, proclaiming this as a bad omen for the market leader. In this article, I would try to dispel this notion.

Certain facts merit special attention of those who have invested money in LIC's IPO. This article is all about instilling confidence in LIC policyholders and shareholders by reassuring that they will get their money's worth in the days to come.

Let us see how LIC is placed in the market vis-à-vis its competitors. It has customers all over the country and across all sections of society. It has 30 crore in-force policies in its books as on date. On the other hand, none of the private insurers has a strong presence in rural India, as most of them are engaged in picking up low-hanging fruits of the metro and Tier-I cities. None of the private life insurers has even 1 crore of in-force policies. Most Indians living outside metros and Tier-I cities have not even heard the names of leading private insurers. For them, life insurance means LIC.

Besides, LIC is insuring the lives of crores of poorer citizens through low-cost group insurance schemes. Some financial analysts go to the extent of saying that LIC's products are not innovative enough. The fact is all insurers have innovative products. It is more important to check whether the insurers are able to sell those products in the market. Even on this count, LIC is much ahead of the competition. LIC sells all types of insurance products in large numbers—endowment, term, whole life, or even annuities. On the other hand, private insurers as a whole earn 40 per cent of the premium income by selling Ulips only.

While Ulips are not necessarily unde-



THE LIC HAS CUSTOMERS AND 30 CRORE IN-FORCE POLICIES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY AND ACROSS ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY. ON THE OTHER HAND, NONE OF THE PRIVATE LIFE INSURERS HAS EVEN 1 CRORE OF IN-FORCE POLICIES

(The author is an insurance industry analyst)



sirable products, they are more investment-oriented than insurance. Indians need more protection, savings, and annuity products than investment products with some element of insurance. And LIC has been selling more protection/savings products, to take the benefits of insurance to the remotest corners of the country.

Let's talk a little bit about the technicality of this business. Embedded value (EV) is defined as the present value of future profits plus adjusted net asset value. EV of LIC was calculated to be Rs 5.4 lakh crore before the launch of IPO. This was arrived at, on the basis of realistic assumptions on future mortality, expenses and interest rates. Insurers and their consultants made pretty conservative assumptions on these parameters. All these bases of valuation are, however, more or less the same for all the insurers (except to some extent the expenses).

What then can make the difference? I would say persistency ratios of insurers (especially 61-month persistency) can determine EV of the insurers a lot. For LIC, this ratio is 48 per cent in terms of policies (the industry average being 33 per cent and 59 per cent in terms of premiums). This is very close to the global standard. A satisfactory persistency ratio of LIC means there will be a satisfactory flow of premium income in future, resulting in better surpluses. If there are better surpluses, there will be higher dividends and also higher share price.

Nobody can belittle the contribution of private insurers. But people need to know certain facts

which prove LIC's dominance in the industry across the country. LIC is respected not just for its holding 66 per cent market share but also for its omnipresence in the country, making it convenient for ordinary people to visit the insurer's offices. The hallmark of its operations is the honesty and integrity with which the employees have been discharging their duties and clean image that the organisation has been able to maintain in the midst of corporations getting entangled in recurring financial scams. LIC is one organisation which has worked from their brick-and-mortar offices even during the worst of pandemic times, keeping the interests of crores of its customers and one million plus intermediaries in sight.

Now, let's talk about the movement of share price of LIC. As have already been mentioned, only 10 per cent shares have been sold to policyholders and 5 per cent to employees. A bulk was sold to anchor investors. Hence, the people reposing faith in LIC as policyholders and the people investing in IPO are completely different.

A section of investors is being made to believe that the IPO was overpriced and that the price would slide even further as the fundamentals of the organisation were below par. They were also fed on the rumour that anchor investors would offload their shares immediately after lock-in period. All such negative publicity contributed to the fall in share price so rapidly. But there is a limit to such fall as regards the share price of an organisation as financially sound as LIC.

Let's remember some basics of the investment game. Once Warren Buffet said, "In the short run, stocks behave like a slot machine, but in the long run, they behave like a weighing machine." Now the share price of LIC is moving randomly and is getting determined purely by forces of demand and supply. These random movements cannot be used to predict the long-term value of the stock.

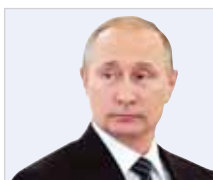
In the long run, the intrinsic value of a company remains constant, irrespective of what the traders of stocks do every day in the market. In the long run, the share price will be equal to the intrinsic value of a company. This is true for all the markets and for all the stocks. The annual report of LIC is in the public domain and investors can access that. All successful investors of the world muster the skill of making sense out of financial and industry data, and wait patiently for the fair value of a company to emerge.

Every Indian knows what LIC stands for. The organisation has weathered many storms in its 66-year journey since 1956. Yes, there is a need for the business model of the organisation to undergo change; it is already working towards that.

Finally, we must remember that not all analysts are in the business of misguiding investors. JP Morgan said in its recently released report on LIC that the market failed to understand the strength of LIC. The price to embedded value ratio (P/EV) is unrealistically low. This means that both the LIC policyholders and investors will get their money's worth in course of time.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

BRICS CAN BOLSTER GLOBAL POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY... MUTUAL COOPERATION HAS BENEFITED THE LIVES OF ALL CITIZENS.—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



THE WEST IS FOMENTING CRISIS. THE STATE OF GLOBAL ECONOMY IS DUE TO THE SELFISH ACTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL STATES.—RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN

US-Pakistan partnership: Always at India's cost

Pakistan, which played an important role in containing the spread of communism, continues to be of help to the US

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price recently commented in favour of advancing the "US-Pakistan partnership" in a manner that serves their "mutual interests." Elsewhere, at the CNN News18 Town Hall, S. Jaishankar stated that a "lot of India's problems with Pakistan are directly attributable to the support that the United States gave to Pakistan." The link between the US support to Pakistan and India's problems needs to be revisited.

Theoretically, the power of the weak states to attract the great powers has been well established. Weak states cannot defend themselves. Consequently, they seek financial and military aid in exchange for their strategic autonomy and the geostrategic location. Pakistan is



NISHTHA KAUSHIKI

(The author is Assistant Professor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda)

one such state.

Soviet Union leader Stalin first extended an invitation to Pakistan PM Liaquat Ali Khan in 1949 to visit Moscow. The fundamental differences between an Islamist state and a communist Soviet prevented that entente; hence, Pakistan sided with the US and played an important role in containing the spread of communism.

By 1955, Pakistan had joined two regional defence pacts, the South East Asia Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization (Baghdad Pact). A little before 1955, in 1953, when Ayub Khan visited Turkey, he reiterated Dulles's 'northern tier defence pact' in which the two countries would occupy a prominent position. Later in 1954, the Turko-Iraqi agreement (Baghdad Pact)

superseded the Turko-Pak plan.

Consequently, from 1953 to 1961, Islamabad received nearly \$2 billion in US assistance, one-quarter of this in military aid. Apart from this data, information retrieved from the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) indicates that from 1955 to 1959, US arms exports amounted to \$1.02 billion. When correlated with Pakistan's then financial situation, strong indications of a vicious cycle of US aid and US arms exports emerge. In the budding relationship between the two, the core security concerns of India, a democratic nonaligned country, were sidelined.

Upon India's vehement protests, oral assurances were given by Eisenhower to Nehru that the US would take care of

the situation in a case of Pakistan's aggression against India. Thus, while India was idealistically following a nonaligned policy, Pakistan was hard bargaining its geostrategic location in lieu of military aid. According to the strategic experts, nearly four-fifths of all the foreign aid Pakistan received during 1951-60 came from the US. From the 1960s to the late 1970s, there was a brief period when US aid to Pakistan decreased.

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan again allowed Pakistan to extract more aid from the US. In exchange for Pakistan's role in the Afghan war, a \$400-million US aid was offered to Pakistan. It was rejected by the Zia-ul-Haq regime in 1980 and was labeled as 'peanuts.' Haq eyed the F-16,

which Islamabad later got.

Thus, from 1983 to 1990, Pakistan received military aid of \$3.73 billion along with 1,000 Stinger missiles, and the component of US arms sales was \$2.2 billion. This was the same period when Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir started, including the massacre of Kashmiri Hindus.

Also, at a regional level, many security experts attribute the birth of the Taliban to ISI and US agencies. Had the US assistance not been there, Pakistan would not have been so aggressive against India and its other neighbours, such as Afghanistan and Iran. Thus, the relationship between Pakistan and the US has always been based on a patron-client state wherein foreign or military aid is given to serve the US geopolitical interests.

In the post-Cold War phase,

Pakistan was reeling under sanctions due to its nuclear tests and was denied any military aid. However, the 9/11 attacks in the US again brought Pakistan to the forefront of Washington's South Asia policy. As per the SIPRI data, during 2002-14 Pakistan, as a major non-NATO ally, got military aid worth \$5.81 billion and the arms sales component was \$3.2 billion.

This was the same period when the Nandimarg massacre and Mumbai attacks took place. All these attacks were attributed to Pakistan. India collected the 'proof' and gave it to the US, hoping that the US might acknowledge it and help India. Little did India realise that the geopolitics of national interests, military aid, and arms trade are closely interrelated factors. Hence Pakistan was never

labeled as a 'terrorist state' by the US.

It was only after Pakistan's backstabbing of the US in Afghanistan that former US president Donald Trump realised America's mistake and commented in 2018 that it had "foolishly" given aid and, in return, merely got "lies and deceit."

Today, despite Washington's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism and the backstabbing by Pakistan in Afghanistan, the US is all set to re-engage Pakistan, which will harm India's interests.

Given the evolving situation, India too is changing. The coupling of strategic autonomy and Atmanirbhar Bharat in the defence sector is the answer to the geopolitics of the patron-client relationship.



# Droupadi Murmu files nomination papers

PM along with top leadership of NDA hand over her papers to officer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Momentum for the July 18 Presidential election picked up on Friday as BJP-led NDA's nominee Droupadi Murmu filed her nomination papers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the set of papers to Returning Officer P C Mody.

Murmu, 64, was also accompanied by Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari and Piyush Goyal. BJP president J P Nadda and several chief ministers including Yogi Adityanath, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Manohar Lal Khattar, B S Bommai, Bhupendra Patel, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Pushkar Singh Dhami, Pramod Sawant and N Biren Singh were also present.

Every set of presidential nominations has to have 50 proposers and 50 seconders among elected representatives. Besides the NDA leaders, YSR Congress V Vijaysai Reddy and BJD leader Sasmit Patra, who are not part of the alliance, were also in Parliament to support her nomination. AIADMK leader O Panerselvam and M Thambidurai, JD-U's Rajiv Ranjan Singh were also present on the occasion.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), a tribal party, which until now is supporting the Joint-opposition-consensus candidate and former Minister in the Vajpayee gov-



ernment Yashwant Sinha, is also likely to "review" its stand and back the NDA's 'Santhani' leader from Odisha, sources said. NDA's nomination of a tribal leader has put JMM in a spot.

Murmu, the former governor of Jharkhand, if elected, will be the first tribal president and the second woman in the post. She will also be the youngest president ever, second only to N Sanjeeva Reddy, who was a few days older to her when he became the President.

Pratibha Patil became the first woman president of India in 2007 under the Congress-led-UPA government. Meanwhile, Murmu on Friday called up key opposition leaders, including Congress chief Sonia Gandhi,

NCP's Sharad Pawar and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and sought their support for her candidature. All the three leaders expressed their best wishes to her, sources said. The counting of votes will take place on July 21.

Murmu, the NDA candidate is expected to clinch the post in her contest against Sinha with ease thanks to additional support from regional parties like BJD, JDU and YSR Congress.

The president is elected by members of electoral college consisting of elected members of both houses of Parliament and elected members of the legislative assemblies of all states including national capital territory of Delhi and Union territory of Puducherry.

# Energy security understood by all nations: Kwatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is procuring crude oil from Russia to ensure its national energy security and this position is well understood by many countries, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said here on Friday.

His assertion came days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelling to Germany to take part in the G-7 summit on June 26-27. The ongoing military action by Russia in Ukraine is likely to come up during the deliberations.

Many western nations have imposed sanctions against Russia. Kwatra justified India's position while replying to a question on what will be India's approach if New Delhi faces criticism during the upcoming



G-7 summit for its procurement of Russian crude oil. The Foreign Secretary said India's consideration for crude oil purchases has been very well understood by the global community. "India's consideration for crude oil purchases is very well understood. It is appreciated across the countries. I do not see that as any point of assuming any pressure," the Foreign Secretary

said. Kwatra also said "whatever are the trading arrangements that India puts in place with regard to the purchase of crude oil all over the world is determined purely by the consideration of energy security in India." Modi will visit the Alpine castle of Schloss Elmau in southern Germany on June 26 and 27 to attend the annual summit of G7 countries.

From Germany, Modi will travel to the United Arab Emirates(UAE) on June 28 to pay his condolences on the passing away of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the former president of the Gulf nation.

Giving details of the Prime Minister's schedule at a media briefing, Kwatra said India's regular participation at G-7 summits clearly points to increasing acceptance of the

country's role to find a solution to solve key global challenges. The Foreign Secretary said Russia-Ukraine situation has generated food security crisis over the world.

India has taken a proactive stance that food security of vulnerable countries is addressed and India's food security is also not impacted. There has been an appreciation of India's position.

On the Prime Minister's visit to the UAE on way back to India, Kwatra said India and UAE relations are dynamic, robust and widespread. "Energy security is an important pillar of our relations. People-to-people connect is another aspect.

Security, environment, education and investment are other areas of discussion between the two countries," he

said. The Foreign Secretary said Modi's visit to the UAE will focus on two main issues. Firstly to pay condolences on the passing away of former UAE President and Abu Dhabi Ruler Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Secondly, to congratulate Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for becoming President of the UAE.

On the issue of controversial remarks against Prophet Mohammad leading to protests in many Gulf countries, Kwatra said almost all Middle East countries have an understanding of India's position.

"We have communicated our stand on various platforms. I do not think that will be taken forward anymore," he added. Modi is visiting the country for the first time after the controversy.

# IAF starts recruitment process under Agnipath scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The IAF on Friday started the recruitment process under the recently announced Agnipath scheme. The Army had started the process earlier this week while the Navy will commence the recruitment this weekend.

"Registration window to apply for #Agniveervayu is operational from 10 am today," the IAF said on Twitter.

The candidates will have to register online and then clear an online examination. Those successful will then undergo physical fitness and medical tests for final selection. The Navy also follows same system. So far more than 4,000 aspirants had registered for the IAF

examination, sources said.

The Agnipath scheme to recruit jawans to be known as Agniveers on contractual basis was rolled out on June 14. It led to mass protests in many parts of the country.

The government, however, ruled out rolling it back and termed the scheme as "transformative" to ensure youthful profile and technology savvy armed forces to fight modern day war. Unveiling the Agnipath scheme, the government had said aspirants between the ages of 17-and-a-half and 21 years will be inducted for a four-year tenure. After completion of this stint, 25 per cent of them will be selected for regular service of 15 years or more with full pension benefits. Several parts of

the country witnessed violent protests against the scheme. A number of opposition parties and military experts had slammed the scheme, contending it will adversely impact the operational capabilities of the armed forces.

The government had on June 16 increased the upper age limit for recruitment under the scheme to 23 years from 21 for the year 2022 as a one time waiver. It said the decision was taken as recruitment was put on hold for the last two years due to the corona pandemic.

The Army has said the new scheme will ensure a youthful profile of the defence forces and result in reduction of the average age of soldiers from 32 to 26 years over a period of time.

# Won't take coercive action against Karti, ED tells HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday orally assured the Delhi High Court that no coercive action will be taken against Congress MP Karti P Chidambaram till July 12, when his anticipatory bail plea in the alleged Chinese Visas scam will be taken up for hearing.

Justice Jasmeet Singh also asked the ED to file a status report on the matter before the next date of hearing.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the ED, orally assured the court that nothing will happen till July 12, next hearing.

"I will not make a statement but it is understood that nothing will happen till then.

My understanding is only till the 12th (of July)," he said, adding that there is no apprehension of the arrest. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Karti, urged the court to grant interim protection from arrest to Karti till the next date of hearing.

Karti had approached the High Court after his anticipatory bail plea and that of two others was dismissed by the trial court on June 3 on the ground that the offence was of a very serious nature.

Following CBI's FIR, the ED registered the money laundering case against Karti and others in the alleged scam pertaining to the issuance of a visa to 263 Chinese nationals in 2011 when his father P Chidambaram was the Home Minister.

# 5 newly-elected MPs take oath in Rajya Sabha

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu on Friday administered oath to five newly-elected MPs from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha. The oath was administered in Rajya Sabha chamber in Parliament House.

Those who took oath are Niranjan Reddy Sirgapor and Ryaga Krishnaiah (both of YSRCP) from Andhra Pradesh, Damodar Rao Divakonda and B Parthasaradhi Reddy (both of TRS) from Telangana and Niranjan Bishi (of BJD) from Odisha.

While Krishnaiah, Divakonda and Reddy took oath in Telugu, Sirgapor did so in English. Bishi has been elected to Rajya Sabha in bypoll to fill casual vacancy caused in Rajya Sabha due to resignation of Subhash Chandra Singh. He took oath in Oriya. Rajya Sabha deputy chairman Harivansh and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and External Affairs V Muraleedharan, Secretary-General of Rajya Sabha P C Mody and other senior officers of Rajya Sabha Secretariat were present.

# SC upholds SIT clean chit on Guj riots: Thakur, other BJP leaders say 'Satyamev Jayate'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP in unison chanted "Satyamev Jayate" after the Supreme Court on Friday upheld the Special investigation (SIT)'s clean chit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and 63 others in the Gujarat riots of 2002, when he was the State's Chief Minister, and dismissed a plea by slain Congress leader Ehsan Jafri's wife Zakia alleging a larger conspiracy.

Welcoming the judgment, BJP leader and Union minister Anurag Thakur said, "Satyamev Jayate! Similar was the response of other party leaders who tweeted soon after the Supreme Court delivered the judgment.

"Satyamev Jayate," (Truth alone triumphs) was how another Union minister Smriti Irani also put it while party spokesperson Sambit Patra also tweeted the same expression. Describing the apex court's judgment as a "befitting reply to Modi haters", BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala also said "The



truth always prevails. The magistrate had accepted the SIT closure report, it was upheld by the Gujarat High Court and upheld by the Supreme Court as well.

There is a cottage industry of Modi haters. They went to the extent of defaming Gujarat, defaming India, and today these people have got a resounding and befitting reply from the Supreme Court."

Another BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said, "The honourable Supreme court has given a verdict of great importance to everyone. And it shows that though justice has been delayed, it has not been denied. We welcome the judgement."

# Tapan Kumar Deka appointed IB Director

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday appointed Sri Lanka and Indo-China border expert Tapan Kumar Deka as the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and granted yet another one-year extension to Secretary of Research and Analysis Wing Samant Kumar Goel.

Deka, who has extensively handled operations wing of the agency was put in charge of the counter-terror assaults during the 26/11 Mumbai attack.

Deka will have a tenure of two years, according to an official order issued by the Personnel Ministry. He is a



1988-batch officer from the Himachal Pradesh cadre. He takes over from Arvinda Kumar, who will demit his office on June 30 after exhausting his one-year extension last year. The fate of A S Rajan, a 1987 batch IPS officer, Special



Director in IB, whom Deka has superseded was not known yet. He is retiring in February next year. The other Special Director Swagat Das was shifted on Thursday and posted as Special Secretary (Internal Security) in the Union Home

Ministry. The tenure of Samant Goel, who has been heading the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), has been extended by one more year, the ministry said in another order.

With this, Goel is the third R&AW chief who has got a tenure of more than three years. Earlier R N Kao, the founder chief of RAW served the agency for nine years followed by N F Suptnook who was at the helm of affairs for six years. Deka, considered to be an expert on the affairs of operations, especially in Kashmir as well as the Northeast, currently heads the operations wing of the IB, which he has

been serving for over two decades. He has a vast experience about terrorists and Islamic radicalisation in the country and had led the operations against the terror group Indian Mujahideen, which created mayhem through a series of bombings and other subversive activities across India in the 2000s.

Deka, who hails from Assam, was personally sent by Union Home Minister Amit Shah to his home State to handle the volatile situation that arose following the large-scale violence that rocked Assam after the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019.

# Parameswaran Iyer picked as CEO of Niti Aayog

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday appointed former Drinking Water and Sanitation Secretary Parameswaran Iyer, who spearheaded the Swachh Bharat Mission, as the CEO of Niti Aayog.

He will replace Amitabh Kant, who will demit office on June 30. Iyer has been appointed for two years or until further orders, whichever is earlier, said an order of the Personnel ministry.

According to the order, Iyer's appointment has been

made on the same terms and conditions as were applicable for Kant.

A 1981-batch IAS officer of Uttar Pradesh cadre, Iyer is a well-known sanitation specialist, and best known for spearheading Prime Minister Narendra Modi Government's flagship scheme Swachh Bharat Mission between 2016 and 2020.

Iyer had taken voluntary retirement from the Indian Administrative Service in 2009. He had also worked as a senior rural water sanitation specialist at the United

Nations. Outgoing Niti Aayog CEO Kant played a key role in Niti Aayog's policy making, with a focus on digital India, asset monetisation, disinvestment, aspirational districts programme and electric vehicles, among others.

He was appointed as the CEO of Niti Aayog on February 17, 2016, for a fixed two-year term. Kant was later given an extension till June 30, 2019. His term was further extended for two years till June 2021, and then another one-year extension was given till June 30 this year

# Address livelihood woes of people near ESZs: Rahul to PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to help address the concerns of those affected by the Supreme Court order on maintenance of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

Sharing his letter to the prime minister in a Facebook post, Rahul said he has drawn his attention to the plight of the local communities of Kerala's Wayanad whose livelihoods will be adversely affected by the recent Supreme Court order.

"The state and the union governments can help by requesting dilution of a minimum width of an ESZ to the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The Supreme Court judgment considers rec-

ommendations made by the CEC and the MoEF&CC," the Lok Sabha MP from Wayanad in Kerala said in his Facebook post.

In his letter to the prime minister, Rahul Gandhi said he has also sent a missive to the Kerala chief minister on the issue. "I request the Union government to address these concerns in the larger public interest and reiterate our shared commitment to balancing conservation goals with our people's legitimate developmental needs," he said in the letter to Modi.

Recalling the recent judgement of the Supreme Court in the T N Godavarma Thirumulpad versus Union of India and others case, Gandhi said it mandates maintenance of an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) of one km around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries which has led to widespread protests around Wayanad parliamentary con-

stituency. "Local communities, still reeling under the impact of the Covid pandemic, have expressed grave concerns regarding the implications of this judgment on their lives and livelihoods.

The Guidelines for Declaration of Eco-Sensitive Zones around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries dated February 9, 2011, as well as the above mentioned judgement prohibit certain activities in the ESZ. The ESZ Guidelines also regulate several activities, including, the change of agriculture systems, protection of hill slopes, and erection of electrical cables," he said.

The judgement, he noted, states that no permanent structure shall be permitted to come up for whatsoever purpose within the ESZ. "As one of the most densely populated regions in Western Ghats, such restrictions hamper the ability of local communities to improve their standard of living.

# Military strategists must not lose sight of primary objective of war-fighting, says IAF chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has to constantly update its national security strategy as the global order is being increasingly challenged with little or no regard to rules, IAF chief V R Chaudhari said here on Friday.

Making this point, he also said India must reassess its strategic priorities and realign its actions to ensure that it is not left behind adding that the military strategists must not lose sight of the primary objective of "war-fighting." His observations in a seminar came in the backdrop of India's lingering border row with China in eastern Ladakh, the situation in Afghanistan and the geopolitical upheavals triggered by the crisis in Ukraine.

Refraining from naming any country, the IAF chief said "coercion" is the new strategy with cyber, information and space domains becoming the "new battlefield".

"Today, we are witnessing a rapidly evolving international order that is increasingly being challenged by a complex multipolar world with little or no regard to rules or to the traditional processes of geopolitical interplays," he said. Chaudhari said diplomacy, economy and information are becoming the 'primary tools' of engagement with the military instrument being used as a deterrent." Coercion is the new strategy with cyber, infor-



mation and space domains becoming the new battlefield. Therefore, we must reassess our strategic priorities and realign our actions to ensure we do not get left behind," he said.

The seminar marked the culmination of the first 'Warfare and Aerospace Strategy Programme' (WASP) was conducted by the Indian Air Force.

The WASP was rolled out with an aim to generate strategic thought and understanding amongst mid-career air power practitioners. Chaudhari hoped that the programme will enable the officers to understand the whole-of-government approach and generate independent opinions in dealing with national security issues.

"We believe that such cross-pollination of ideas from multiple disciplines can lead to critical thinking which allows a person to formulate solutions as well as take more rational and effective decisions," he said. "At the same time, a military strategist must not lose sight of the primary objective and that is war fighting.



# SFI vandalises Rahul’s Wayanad office; 1 hurt

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The office of Rahul Gandhi, an MP, at Wayanad came under attack from SFI activists on Friday, which resulted in Augustine Pulppalli, an office staff getting seriously injured. More than forty activists of the SFI, the student wing of the CPI-M gate-crashed into the office of the former chief of All India Congress Committee and vandalised the office properties. There were hardly five to six personnel who were present in the office at the time and they were chased out by the SFI activists.

The attack was in protest against the alleged indifference of the MP to interfere in the Supreme Court verdict dated June 3 ordering every protected forest, national park and wildlife sanctuaries across the country should have a mandatory eco-sensitive zone of a minimum one km starting from their demarcated boundaries.

But the office of Rahul Gandhi had said that he had written letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan asking the duo to file appeal against the verdict. There is a widespread apprehension

among the Christian and Muslim communities in the State that the apex court verdict would leave 1.5 lakh families living in these buffer zones stranded and without homes.

The Kerala Catholic Bishop Council and various Islamist organisations had issued statements condemning the court order immediately after the supreme Court verdict. Most of the districts in the State observed hartals and bundhs against the Supreme Court verdict.

The attack on Rahul Gandhi’s office resulted in Congress workers coming out condemning the incident. K C Venugopal, AICC General Secretary, lambasted the CPI-M led Kerala Government for the attack on Gandhi’s office.

“The Narendra Modi Government is after the blood of our young leader Rahul Gandhi and has been tormenting him by unleashing the Enforcement Directorate against him.

The Pinarayi Vijayan Government is aiding and abetting the Modi Government by vandalising Rahul Gandhi’s office. There is a secret deal between the Congress and the CPI-M to target Rahul Gandhi

40 SFI men trash office over SC’s ruling on ESZs; Cong says MP has written to PM

## CPM condemns act

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The CPI-M on Friday condemned the act of vandalism by SFI activists at the Wayanad office of Rahul Gandhi MP. E P Jayarajan, convenor of Left Democratic Front and Kerala’s CPI-M strongman told reporters that there was no justification for the attack on the Wayanad office of Gandhi, who represents the constituency in Lok Sabha.

“The CPI-M or the LDF do not know the reasons behind this attack. A thorough probe would be held about the factors that led to the attack and action would be taken against those

who took law into their hands” said Jayarajan.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan too expressed his displeasure over the incident and said law would take its own course. The move by the CPI-M in condemning the attack of Gandhi’s office is seen as an attempt by the Marxists to minimize the anger among the Congress cadre across the country in the backdrop of the emerging alliance between the two parties in the national level. The Congress and the CPI-M are on the same side of the opposition in their support for Yashwant Sinha , the opposition candidate for the Presidential election.

who is the most popular leader in the country,” said Venugopal.

N D Appachan, president, Wayanad District Congress Committee, alleged that the SFI attack was a pre-planned action and the police extended all support to the SFI activists. P

Gagarin, secretary, Wayanad CPI(M) said that he was in the dark about the march to the MP’s office.

# ‘BRICS summit vital for post-Covid eco recovery’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The role of the BRICS forum is more important than ever for post-Covid global political economic recovery as also risk management in the global political economy, experts from Moscow and New Delhi said in an online discussion in the run up to the virtual BRICS summit.

“BRICS not only supports multi-polarity but can potentially strengthen commerce and trade relations especially when the world is facing economic challenges post-Covid. BRICS can contribute to global economic recovery not only to the economies of the BRICS countries but even non-BRICS countries,” said former Indian ambassador to Russia Bala Venkatesh Varma.

“The projected global economic growth is expected to be 2.5-2.9 per cent as against the usual 5.5 per cent growth rate before the Covid pandemic. However, India is expected to grow between 7 to 7.5 per cent. India can play a larger role in the revival and regeneration of global economic recovery,” Verma said.

“The post sanctions regime,

the BRICS is considering the implementation of an international reserve currency to facilitate global trade and partnerships in disruptions in the payment system. Settlements in national currencies can help in mitigating the challenges help in settlement will cater to participants of many countries. Enabling payments in national currencies between the BRICS partner countries can help tourism and health,” said Head of the group of South Asia and the Indian Ocean region of the Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, Alexey Kupriyanov.

Former Dean of School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University Anuradha Chenoy stressed on the need to address the challenges posed by the “selective de-globalisation” and the intended shift in global supply chains will lead to disruptions especially to the vulnerable countries.

Director of the Institute of Asian and African countries , Moscow State University Alexei Maslov said Russia’s good relations with China does not in any way affect the privileged strategic partnership with India.

The online video bridge was organized by Sputnik News. 2.

## Shiv Sena workers vandalise board at rebel MLA’s office in Mumbai

**Mumbai:** Shiv Sena workers on Friday vandalised a board outside the office of party MLA Mangesh Kudalkar who is part of the group of rebel legislators led by senior Maharashtra minister Eknath Shinde, police said.

Kudalkar represents the Kurla assembly constituency in the city.

He is camping in Guwahati along with Shinde and other Sena MLAs who have rebelled against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. A group of Shiv Sena supporters gathered outside Kudalkar’s office in Nehrunagar area of Kurla and tried to smash up a board bearing his name and photograph, said a police official. Before they could attack the MLAs’ office, police personnel on the spot intervened, following which they dispersed, he added.

Mumbai police have stepped up security at several locations including Shiv Sena ‘shakhas’ (local offices) in the city to prevent any untoward incident following Shinde’s rebellion. **PTI**

# IAF: Appreciate air-to-air refuelling of our Su-30 Mkl aircraft by UAE’s air force

**New Delhi:** The UAE Air Force’s aircraft on Friday conducted air-to-air refuelling of IAF’s Su-30 Mkl fighter jets so that they could operate their non-stop flight to Egypt, an official statement said.

“IAF (Indian Air Force) deeply appreciates the in-flight refuelling provided by UAE Air Force MRTT (multi role tanker transport) aircraft



which assisted the IAF Su-30 Mkl formation to seamlessly undertake nearly 6 hours non-stop ferry while proceeding to Egypt for the Tactical Leadership Program,” the IAF

tweeted. In the last few years, India’s ties with the UAE have witnessed a major upswing.

The UAE Air Force had provided mid-air refuelling to a number of Rafale fighter jets on their journey from France to India. India is procuring 36 Rafale jets from France out of which 33 have already been delivered.

# Flood situation in Assam critical; toll rises to 108



A man uses a makeshift boat to travel on a flooded road in Kamrup district in Assam on Friday

PTI

**Guwahati:** The flood situation in Assam was critical on Friday with 45.34 lakh people reeling under the deluge, officials said.

The Brahmaputra and Barak rivers along with their tributaries are in spate, even as floodwaters started receding from a few areas, they said.

The toll rose to 108 with seven deaths reported in the last 24 hours, they added.

The situation in Silchar, considered ‘Gateway to Barak Valley’, is alarming with most areas still under water, a district

official said.

The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said that it has further expedited rescue and relief operations with additional resources deployed in the severely affected districts, especially Cachar where Silchar is located.

Eight NDRF teams with 207 personnel were brought in from Itanagar and Bhubaneswar, while an Army team with 120 members was sent in from Dimapur along with nine boats for the opera-

tions in Silchar, officials said.

Additionally, two CRPF and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams were airlifted to Cachar, they added.

The state government has started a helpline -- 0361-2237219, 9401044617 and 1079 -- for the situation in the district.

Nearly 3 lakh people have been affected by an acute shortage of food, clean drinking water and medicines as almost the entire Silchar town is submerged in flood waters, officials said.

# Saudi Arabian committee to popularising Yoga

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

While religious zealots disrupted an International Yoga Day session at Male, the capital city of Maldives on Tuesday and chased away the participants terming Yoga as un-Islamic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, dominated by puritanical Islamic theology has wholeheartedly welcomed the ancient Indian system of knowledge and wisdom. Schools in Saudi Arabia have included Yoga in their curriculum as a sports and wellness mission. A media release by Saudi Yoga Committee, a constituent of the Ministry of Sports in Saudi Arabia said that a massive programme is underway to popularise Yoga all over the Kingdom.

Hereafter Yoga sessions would be a daily event in all Saudi Arabian physical fitness centres. The Saudi Arabian



Government’s Ministry of Sports has launched Saudi Yoga Committee to popularise Yoga among the Kingdom’s population and has issued orders to open Yoga schools in all physical wellness centres across the country.

Nouf Al-Marwaai, who was honoured with Padma

Shree by the Government of India for her efforts to propagate Yoga across the Kingdom has been appointed as president of Saudi Yoga Committee by the Kingdom’s rulers. An important development of the IYD 2022 was the hashtag #Invest In Yoga launched by Marwaai and the unprece-

dent response it received from Saudi citizens. The Yoga Day organised by the Indian Consulate in Riyadh turned out to be a huge success as hundreds of Saudi citizens and physical fitness freaks thronged the Consulate for getting initiated into Yoga.

The Ministry of Sports,

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will ensure that all cities in the Kingdom have Yoga centres to make it accessible to all citizens. In a major development, the Saudi Government opened an exclusive page for Yoga in its Sports Ministry’s website, giving the arts of Yoga equal status to other sports activities.

According to a release by the Indian Consulate, the Yoga has a global market share of \$ 215 billion and the Saudi Government is looking for a major chunk of this investment opportunity. The year 2022 opened a new chapter in Saudi Arabia’s enthusiasm for Yoga as the conservative rulers in the Kingdom announced cash prizes for winners in the Yoga Sports as well as Yoga Championship. Senior officials of Saudi Sports Ministry took part in the IYD event held by office of the Indian Consul General in Jeddah.

# Tejashwi Yadav blames BJP for Maha pol crisis

**Patna:** RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Friday squarely blamed BJP’s ‘dictatorial’ ambition of ‘hijacking’ the entire country for the ongoing political crisis in Maharashtra.

Yadav said this when asked to comment on the happenings in the western state, where revolt in Shiv Sena threatens to pull down the government it heads with the help of Congress and NCP.

“It is well known that the BJP does not let any government opposed to it function in peace. It tries to topple such regimes by hook or by crook”, the former Bihar deputy chief minister alleged.

“BJP wants to hijack every state where it is not in power. It is an attitude of tanashahi (dictatorship)”, alleged Yadav who was stripped of power in 2017 when Chief Minister Nitish Kumar abruptly snapped ties with his RJD and returned to the NDA fold.

Yadav, who is now the leader of the opposition, however, declined to comment on whether he foresaw any political instability in Bihar where the saffron party and Kumar’s JD(U) appear at daggers drawn, specially in the aftermath of ‘Agnipath’ scheme which triggered violent protests across Bihar. **PTI**



A vehicle plies on a road amid rain in Kolkata on Friday

PTI

## FROM PAGE 1

### J&K TO HOST G-20 LEADERS; DIPLOMATIC WIN POST ART 370

“Further, principal secretary to the Government, housing and urban development department is also nominated as UT level nodal officer to coordinate the arrangements for the G-20 meetings in the Union Territory of J&K,” the order said. Prime Minister Modi has been leading India’s representation at the G-20 summits since 2014. India has been a member of G-20 since its inception in 1999. According to the MEA, India will be part of the G-20 Troika (preceding, current, and incoming G-20 Presidencies) from December 1, 2021 till November 30, 2024.

### SC REJECTS JAFRI’S PLEA AGAINST SIT’S CLEAN CHIT TO MODI

The SC appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by former CBI Director RK Raghavan after four years of investigation has given clean chit to then Gujarat Chief Minister Modi and 63 others in February 2012. Jafri had challenged the SIT’s clean chit to 64 people, including Modi alleging a larger conspiracy.

The apex court appreciated the Special Investigation Team (SIT) for its “indefatigable work” in challenging circumstances and said it has come out with “flying colours unscathed”. The top court said no fault can be found with the SIT’s approach and its February 8, 2012 final report is backed by firm logic, “expositing analytical mind and dealing with all aspects objectively for discarding the allegations regarding larger criminal conspiracy...”

The bench upheld the decision of a magistrate in accepting the final report submitted by the SIT and rejecting the protest

petition filed by Jafri. She had challenged the Gujarat High Court’s October 5, 2017 order rejecting her plea against the SIT decision. “We do not countenance the submission of the appellant regarding infraction of rule of law in the matter of investigation and the approach of the magistrate and the high court in dealing with the final report,” the bench said in its 452-page judgement.

Congress leader Ehsan Jafri was among the 68 people killed at Ahmedabad’s Gulberg Society during violence on February 28, 2002, a day after the Godhra train burning that claimed 59 lives. The riots that it triggered killed 1,044 people, mostly Muslims. Giving details, the Central Government informed the Rajya Sabha in May 2005 that 254 Hindus and 790 Muslims were killed in the post Godhra riots.

In its verdict, the apex court noted that the SIT had formed its opinion after considering all the material collated during the investigation. The question of further probe would have arisen only on the availability of new material/information in connection with the allegation of larger conspiracy at the highest level, which is not forthcoming in this case. “As aforementioned, the SIT has gone by the logic of falsity of the information or material and including the same remaining uncorroborated.

“In that, the materials collected during the investigation do not give rise to strong or grave suspicion regarding hatching of larger criminal conspiracy at the highest level for causing mass violence across the State against the minority community and more so, indicating involvement of the named offenders and their meeting of minds at some level in that regard,” said the judgment.

“Intriguingly, the present proceedings have been pursued for last 16 years (from submission of complaint dated June 8, 2006 running into 67 pages and then by filing protest petition dated April 15, 2013 running into 514 pages) including with the audac-

ity to question the integrity of every functionary involved in the process of exposing the devious stratagem adopted (to borrow the submission of counsel for the SIT), to keep the pot boiling, obviously, for ulterior design,” it said. “As a matter of fact, all those involved in such abuse of process, need to be in the dock and proceeded to in accordance with law,” the bench said, criticising the “disgruntled officers” of Gujarat and petitioner Jafri.

### SC UPHOLDS DEATH TO MINOR DIVYANG’S RAPIST

Even the alternative of awarding the sentence of imprisonment for the whole of the natural life with no remission does not appear justified in view of the nature of crimes committed by the appellant and looking to his incorrigible conduct, added Justice Maheshwari in the verdict. The top court, in its 129-page judgment, concurred with the findings of the courts below that the offence fell under the rarest of rare categories warranting the imposition of the death penalty on the convict, a native of Maharajganj district in Uttar Pradesh. The verdict was delivered on appeals against the Rajasthan High Court’s May 29, 2015 verdict affirming the conviction and death penalty awarded by the Court of Special Judge, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Cases, Rajsamand. “The heinous nature of the crime, like that of the present one, in brutal rape and killing of a mentally and physically challenged girl, who was only about seven-and-a-half-year-old, definitely carries excessively aggravating circumstances, particularly when the manner of commission of both the major offences of rape and murder shows the depravity of highest order and would ex facie shock anyone’s conscience,” said

the apex court.

### DAILY COVID COUNT SHOOTS UP TO 4-MONTH HIGH TO OVER 17K

An increase of 4,294 cases has been recorded in the active Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours, the data showed.

The number of patients who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 4,27,49,056. The case fatality rate was recorded at 1.21 per cent. According to the Ministry, 196.77 crore vaccine doses have been administered in the country so far under the nationwide Covid-19 vaccination drive.

India’s Covid-19 infection tally crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5, 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and the one-crore mark on December 19, 2020. The country crossed the grim milestones of two crore cases on May 4, 2021, three crore on June 23, 2021 and four crore on January 25 this year.

Thirteen new fatalities due to the disease were reported in the country - seven from Kerala, two from Punjab, and one each from Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) on Covid-19, an expert panel of India’s Central drug authority, on June 24 recommended granting emergency use authorisation to Serum Institute’s (SII) Covovax for children aged 7 to 11 years. The recommendation has been sent to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for final approval. The application for emergency use authorisation was submitted by Prakash Kumar Singh, director (Government and regulatory affairs) at SII on March 16.



# UKRAINIAN ARMY TO LEAVE BATTERED CITY TO AVOID ENCIRCLEMENT

AP ■ KYIV

After weeks of ferocious fighting, Ukrainian forces will retreat from a besieged city in the country's east to avoid encirclement, a regional governor said Friday.

The city of Sievierodonetsk, the administrative center of the Luhansk region, has faced relentless Russian bombardment. Ukrainian troops fought the Russians in house-to-house battles before retreating to a huge chemical factory on the city's edge, where they holed up in its sprawling underground structures.

In recent days, Russian forces have made gains around Sievierodonetsk and the neighboring city of Lysychansk, on a steep bank across the river, in a bid to encircle Ukrainian forces.

Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said that the Ukrainian troops have been given the order to leave Sievierodonetsk to prevent that.

"Regrettably, we will have to pull our troops out of Sievierodonetsk," Haidai told The Associated Press. "It makes no sense to stay at the destroyed positions, and the number of killed in action has been growing."

He said that the Ukrainian soldiers have "received the order to retreat from Sievierodonetsk to new positions in fortified areas and continue resistance from there."

Haidai noted that Ukrainian troops still remain in Sievierodonetsk, facing massive Russian bombardment that has destroyed 80% of buildings.

Haidai said the Russians were also advancing toward Lysychansk from



The sculpture of prominent Italian poet Dante Alighieri, is protected by sandbags, on Vladimir's Hill in Kyiv, Ukraine

Zolote and Toshkivka, adding that Russian reconnaissance units conducted forays on the city edges but were driven out by its defenders.

The governor added that a bridge

on a highway leading to Lysychansk was badly damaged in a Russian airstrike and became unusable for trucks.

The Russian Defense Ministry declared Friday that four Ukrainian bat-

talions and a unit of "foreign mercenaries" totaling about 2,000 soldiers have been "fully blocked" near Hirske and Zolote, south of Lysychansk. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

Following a botched attempt to capture Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, in the early stage of the invasion that started Feb. 24, Russian forces have shifted focus in the war to the Donbas region, where the Ukrainian forces have fought Moscow-backed separatists since 2014.

The Russian military controls about 95% of Luhansk province and about half of neighboring Donetsk province, the two areas that make up the Donbas.

After repeated requests to its Western allies for heavier weaponry to counter Russia's edge in firepower, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said a response had arrived in the form of medium-range American rocket launchers.

A U.S. defense official confirmed Wednesday that all four of the promised High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, were in the hands of Ukrainian forces but said it wasn't clear if they have been used yet.

The U.S. approved providing the precision-guided systems at the end of May, and once they were in the region, Ukraine's forces needed about three weeks of training to operate them. The rockets can travel about 45 miles (70 kilometers).

The U.S. will send an addition \$450 million in military aid to Ukraine, including four more of the medium-range rocket systems, ammunition and other supplies, U.S. officials announced Thursday.



## Ukrainians cheer nation's EU candidacy amid wartime woes

AP ■ KYIV

The European Union's decision to make Ukraine a candidate for EU membership offered war-weary Ukrainians a morale boost and hope of a more secure future Friday as the country's military ordered its fighters to retreat from a key city in the eastern Donbas region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hailed the decision of EU leaders as vindication for his nation's fight against Russia's aggression and said he was determined to ensure Ukraine retained the ability to decide if belonged in Europe or under Moscow's influence. "This war began just when Ukraine declared its right to freedom. To its choice of its future. We saw it in the European Union," Zelenskyy told the nation in a televised address late Thursday.

"That is why this decision of the EU is so important, motivates us and shows all this is needed not only by us."

Others recalled the 2014 revolution that ousted

Ukraine's pro-Moscow president, sparked in part by his decision not to complete an association agreement with the EU. Russian President Vladimir Putin opposed that agreement, just as he demanded before he sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 that NATO never accept Ukraine as an alliance member.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk, an opposition leader who became prime minister after the revolution, expressed joy at the country's candidate status but also "bitterness" over the "terrible price that Ukraine pays for the desire to be a free, independent European state."

"Thank you to our soldiers - they won this decision," Yatsenyuk tweeted. "Ukraine is a great country that will inevitably become a member of the EU and, just as inevitably, a member of NATO."

Ukraine applied for membership less than a week after Russia invaded the country and must undergo a complicated process of many months to be eligible to join the 27-nation bloc.

## Poland gets a loan to help it look after Ukraine refugees



AP ■ WARSAW

Poland is getting a loan of 450 million euros (\$474 million) from a bank linked to a European human rights group to help it cope with the influx of refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Poland and the Council of Europe Development Bank signed the loan agreement Friday.

Some 4.3 million refugees crossed into Poland after Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Poland is providing them with free shelter, social and medical care, education and job opportunities.

Many have moved on to other countries and some have decided to go back home, but an estimated half of the number remain in Poland.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki singled out the European Union earlier this month, saying it's decision-making procedures for providing financial support are "sometimes too slow."

The Council of Europe has 46 member countries, including EU nations, and aims to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

# SC overturns Roe v. Wade; States can ban abortion

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court has ended Constitutional protections for abortion that had been in place nearly 50 years in a decision by its conservative majority to overturn Roe v. Wade. Friday's outcome is expected to lead to abortion bans in roughly half the states.

The decision, unthinkable just a few years ago, was the culmination of decades of efforts by abortion opponents, made possible by an emboldened right side of the court that has been fortified by three appointees of former President Donald Trump.

The ruling came more than a month after the stunning leak of a draft opinion by Justice Samuel Alito indicating the court was prepared to take this momentous step.

It puts the court at odds with a majority of Americans who favored preserving Roe, according to opinion polls.

Alito, in the final opinion issued Friday, wrote that Roe and Planned Parenthood v. Casey, the 1992 decision that reaffirmed the right to abortion, were wrong the day they were decided and must be overturned.

"We hold that Roe and Casey must be overruled. The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision," Alito wrote. Authority to regulate abortion rests with the political branches, not the courts, Alito wrote.

Joining Alito were Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. The latter three justices are Trump



appointees. Thomas first voted to overrule Roe 30 years ago. Chief Justice John Roberts would have stopped short of ending the abortion right, noting that he would have upheld the Mississippi law at the heart of the case, a ban on abortion after 15 weeks, and said no more. Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan - the diminished liberal wing of the court - were in dissent.

"With sorrow-for this Court, but more, for the many millions of American women who have today lost a fundamental constitutional protection-we dissent," they wrote.

The ruling is expected to disproportionately affect minority women who already face limited access to health care, according to statistics analyzed by The Associated Press.

Thirteen states, mainly in the South and Midwest, already have laws on the books that ban abortion in the event Roe is overturned.

Another half-dozen states have near-total bans or prohibitions after 6 weeks of pregnancy, before many women know they are pregnant.

In roughly a half-dozen other states, the fight will be over dormant abortion bans that were enacted before Roe was decided in 1973 or new

proposals to sharply limit when abortions can be performed, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

More than 90% of abortions take place in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy, and more than half are now done with pills, not surgery, according to data compiled by Guttmacher. The decision came against a backdrop of public opinion surveys that find a majority of Americans oppose overturning Roe and handing the question of whether to permit abortion entirely to the states. Polls conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and others also have consistently shown about 1 in 10 Americans want abortion to be illegal in all cases. A majority are in favor of abortion being legal in all or most circumstances, but polls indicate many also support restrictions especially later in pregnancy.

The Biden administration and other defenders of abortion rights have warned that a decision overturning Roe also would threaten other high court decisions in favor of gay rights and even potentially, contraception.

But Alito wrote in his draft opinion that his analysis addresses abortion only, not other rights that also stem

from a right to privacy that the high court has found implicit, though not directly stated, in the Constitution. Abortion is different, Alito wrote, because of the unique moral question it poses.

Whatever the intentions of the person who leaked Alito's draft opinion, the conservatives held firm in overturning Roe and Casey.

In his draft, Alito dismissed the arguments in favor of retaining the two decisions, including that multiple generations of American women have partly relied on the right to abortion to gain economic and political power.

Changing the composition of the court has been central to the anti-abortion side's strategy. Mississippi and its allies made increasingly aggressive arguments as the case developed, and two high-court defenders of abortion rights retired or died. The state initially argued that its law could be upheld without overruling the court's abortion precedents. Then-Gov. Phil Bryant signed the 15-week measure into law in March 2018, when Justices Anthony Kennedy and Ruth Bader Ginsburg were still members of a five-justice majority that was mainly protective of abortion rights.

By early summer, Kennedy had retired and was replaced by Justice Brett Kavanaugh a few months later. The Mississippi law was blocked in lower federal courts.

But the state always was headed to the nation's highest court. It did not even ask for a hearing before a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which ultimately held the law invalid in

December 2019.

By early September 2020, the Supreme Court was ready to consider the state's appeal.

The court scheduled the case for consideration at the justices' private conference on Sept. 29. But in the intervening weeks, Ginsburg died and Barrett was quickly nominated and confirmed without a single Democratic vote.

The stage now was set, although it took the court another half year to agree to hear the case.

By the time Mississippi filed its main written argument with the court in the summer, the thrust of its argument had changed and it was now calling for the wholesale overruling of Roe and Casey. The first sign that the court might be receptive to wiping away the constitutional right to abortion came in late summer, when the justices divided 5-4 in allowing Texas to enforce a ban on the procedure at roughly six weeks, before some women even know they are pregnant. That dispute turned on the unique structure of the law, including its enforcement by private citizens rather than by state officials, and how it can be challenged in court.

But Justice Sonia Sotomayor noted in a searing dissent for the three liberal justices that their conservative colleagues refused to block "a flagrantly unconstitutional law" that "flouts nearly 50 years of federal precedents." Roberts was also among the dissenters.

Then in December, after hearing additional arguments over whether to block the Texas law known as S.B. 8, the court again declined to do so, also by a 5-4 vote.

## Russian military cargo plane crashes, killing 4

AP ■ MOSCOW

A Russian military cargo plane crashed Friday, killing at least four crewmembers and leaving several others injured, officials said.

The heavy-lift Il-76 cargo plane went down in the southwestern Ryazan region. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the plane suffered an engine problem that forced the crew to crash-land it on the ground.

The regional administration said that four of its crew were killed and a further five were injured when the plane slammed into a field just outside the city of Ryazan. Officials said that those injured were hospitalized in grave condition.

The four-engine Il-76 was designed in the 1970s and has served as the main heavy-lift cargo plane for the Soviet and Russian air force. It has also been widely used by many countries around the world.

# UN chief warns of 'catastrophe' from global food shortage

AP ■ BERLIN

The head of the United Nations warned Friday that the world faces "catastrophe" because of the growing shortage of food around the globe.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the war in Ukraine has added to the disruptions caused by climate change, the coronavirus pandemic and inequality to produce an "unprecedented global hunger crisis" already affecting hundreds of millions of people.

"There is a real risk that multiple famines will be declared in 2022," he said in a video message to officials from dozens of rich and developing countries gathered in Berlin. "And 2023 could be even worse."

Guterres noted that harvests across Asia, Africa and the Americas will take a hit as farmers around the world struggle to cope with rising fertilizer and energy prices.

"This year's food access issues could become next year's global food shortage," he said.



bilise global food markets.

The Berlin meeting's host, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, said Moscow's claim that Western sanctions imposed over Russia's invasion of Ukraine were to blame for food shortages was "completely untenable."

Russia exported as much wheat in May and June this year as in the same months of 2021, Baerbock said.

She echoed Guterres' comments that several factors underlie the growing hunger crisis around the world.

"But it was Russia's war of attack against Ukraine that turned a wave into a tsunami," Baerbock said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted that Russia has no excuse for holding back vital goods from world markets.

"The sanctions that we've imposed on Russia collectively and with many other countries exempt food, exempt food products, exempt fertilizers, exempt insurers, exempt shippers," he said.

# Hearing: Trump told Justice Dept to call election 'corrupt'

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump hounded the Justice Department to pursue his false election fraud claims, striving in vain to enlist top law enforcement officials in his desperate bid to stay in power and relenting only when warned in the Oval Office of mass resignations, according to testimony Thursday to the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.

Three Trump-era Justice Department officials recounted persistent badgering from the president, including day after day of directives to chase baseless allegations that the election won by Democrat Joe Biden had been stolen.

They said they swept aside each demand from Trump because there was no evidence of widespread fraud, then banded together when the



president weighed whether to replace the department's top lawyer with a lower-level official eager to help undo the results.

All the while, Republican loyalists in Congress trumpet-

ed the president's claims - and several later sought pardons from the White House after the effort failed and the Capitol was breached in a day of violence, the committee revealed Thursday.

## Aftershock in Afghanistan as quake toll rises to 1,150 dead

AP ■ AFGHANISTAN

An aftershock took more lives Friday and threatened to pile even more misery on an area of eastern Afghanistan reeling from a powerful earthquake that state media said killed 1,150 people this week.

Among the dead from Wednesday's magnitude 6 quake are 121 children, but that figure is expected to climb, said Mohamed Ayoya, UNICEF's representative in Afghanistan. He said close to 70 children were injured.

That earthquake struck a remote, mountainous region already grappling with staggering poverty at a time when the country as a whole is spiraling deeper into economic crisis after many countries pulled back critical financing and development aid in the wake of the Taliban's takeover. On Friday, Pakistan's



Meteorological Department reported a new, 4.2 magnitude quake that state-run Bakhtar News Agency reported took five more lives in hard-hit Gajay District and injured 11 people.

International aid had been keeping the country afloat, and its withdrawal left millions unable to afford food and further strained already struggling medical facilities.

# Setting gridlock aside, Congress set to OK gun violence bill

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A bipartisan gun violence bill that seemed unimaginable a month ago is on the verge of winning final congressional approval, a vote that will produce lawmakers' most sweeping answer in decades to brutal mass shootings that have come to shock yet not surprise Americans.

The House was set to vote on the \$13 billion package Friday, a month after a gunman massacred 19 students and two teachers at a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school. In Buffalo, New York, a white man authorities said was motivated by racism is accused of killing 10 Black grocery shoppers just days before Uvalde.

The two slaughters - days apart and victimizing helpless people for whom the public felt immediate empathy - prompted both parties to conclude that

Congress had to act, especially in an election year.

After weeks of closed-door talks, Senate bargainers from both parties produced a compromise taking mild but impactful steps toward making such mayhem less likely.

Families in Uvalde and Buffalo, and too many tragic shootings before, have demanded action. And tonight, we acted," President Joe Biden said after passage. He said the House should send it to him quickly, adding, "Kids in schools and communities will be safer because of it."

The legislation would toughen background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged dangerous. It would also fund local programs

for school safety, mental health and violence prevention.

The Senate approved the measure Thursday by 65-33. Fifteen Republicans - a remarkably high number for a party that has derailed gun curbs for years - joined all 50 Democrats, including their two independent allies, in approving the bill. Still, that meant that fewer than one-third of GOP senators backed the measure.

And with Republicans in the House expected to solidly oppose it, the fate of future congressional action on guns seems dubious, even as the GOP is expected to win House and possibly Senate control in the November elections.

Top House Republicans urged a "no" vote in an email from the No. 2 GOP leader, Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana. He called the bill "an effort to slowly chip away at law-abiding citizens' 2nd Amendment rights."



# India can finish on podium in hockey WC: Savita

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India captain Savita feels there is no dearth of motivation and confidence in the national women's hockey team as it eyes a historic podium finish at the upcoming World Cup.

The top International Hockey Federation (FIH) tournament will be jointly hosted by the Netherlands and Spain from July 1 to 17.

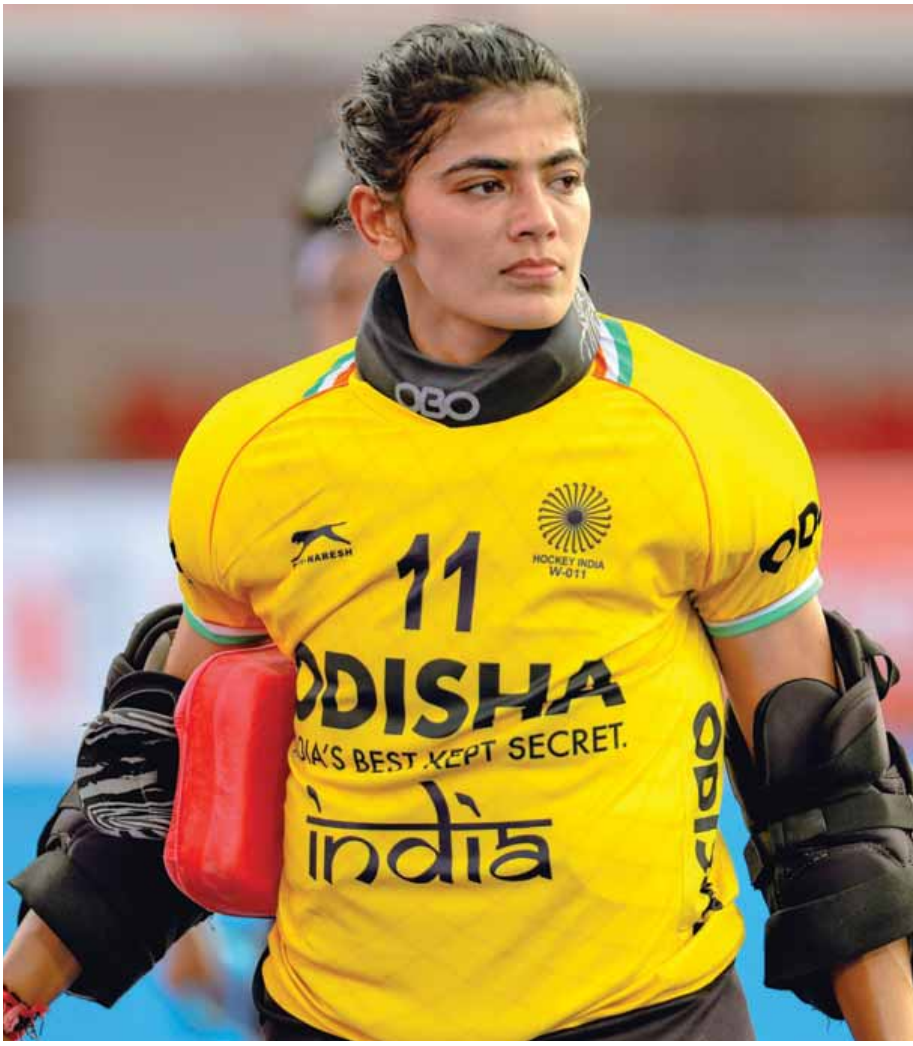
India finished a historic fourth at the Olympics last year and Savita said the Tokyo Games had instilled a belief that they can match the best in the business on the biggest stage.

"Our performance in Tokyo gave us the belief that we can finish on the podium in global events," Savita said.

"Post Olympics, we realigned our focus on taking our performance to the next level. We channelled our energy into doing well in the FIH Pro League and finishing third in this prestigious league has given us a boost ahead of the World Cup."

Indian women's best-ever result at the World Cup is a fourth place finish in the inaugural edition in 1974. In the 2018 tournament, India secured the eighth spot.

India's splendid show in Tokyo has changed the face of women's hockey in the coun-



try. Featuring in its debut FIH Pro League, the Indian women gave big shots like the Netherlands and Argentina tough fights to finish a creditable third.

"The Indian women's hockey team has never won a medal at the World Cup and it is our mission to make this dream come alive this time," Savita said.

The ace goalkeeper said playing and fighting together as a unit will be key to success in the World Cup.

"We are very excited to play in the World Cup. We just want to play as a team. For us, the Olympics was a great experience. We learnt a lot from there and we believe we have to play together and fight hard," she said.

"After the Olympics, everyone in our team is so motivated, so focused. We really want to play against good teams," she added.

In the upcoming quadrennial event, India are placed in Pool B alongside England, China and New Zealand, and will open their campaign against England on July 3 at Amstelveen.

"Of course, England, China and New Zealand are good teams. We've already played against them. But we have to focus on ourselves first. We will go match by match," Savita said.

## Consistency is paramount for progress: Schopman ahead of WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian women's hockey team coach Janneke Schopman is stressing on consistency, without which, she said on Friday, the side will struggle to go far in the upcoming World Cup.

The quadrennial event will be jointly hosted by the Netherlands and Spain from July 1 to 17.

India's best-ever result at the World Cup is a fourth-place finish in the inaugural edition in 1974. In 2018, India finished eighth.

"If we truly play to our potential, we play the way we know we can consistently, anything is possible. Women hockey at this moment is very tight, anyone can beat anyone," Schopman said.

"(But) consistency is a big point of attention. If we can play consistently well, top-4, and who knows a podium in the World Cup is a possibility."

"At the same time if we don't perform we can miss the quarterfinals."

The coach said the players need to understand their



is players taking up ownership on the field and believe that they can perform.

"Realistically, I think we are up there. We are in the top 6. Our performance against Argentina (recently in Pro League) showed that we can compete against any country."

India finished a creditable third in their debut FIH Pro League season and Schopman said the recent back-to-back high-intensity matches against Belgium and Argentina augur well ahead of the World Cup.

"Pretty happy with our preparation. We have another week. Last week we had the Pro League matches and quite happy with the way we responded after the Belgium matches. So preparation is going in the right direction."

"It's a great achievement to finish on the podium in your first Pro League. We had good runs against pretty much every team we played. Apart from points we got we learned a lot from these games. It was a satisfying run," she said.

## Serena to begin Wimbledon against 113th-ranked foe

AP ■ WIMBLEDON

Serena Williams will begin her Wimbledon comeback by facing Harmony Tan, a 24-year-old from France who is ranked 113th and owns a 2-6 career record in Grand Slam matches.

The placement of Williams in the women's bracket was the most anticipated aspect of Friday's draw at the All England Club. She is making her first appearance in singles at any tournament since she hurt her right leg and stopped playing during the first set of her first-round match at Centre Court a year ago.

Because of her lack of activity over the past 12 months, Williams - who has been No 1 in the rankings - is outside the WTA's top 1,200 this week and so could have ended up anywhere in the field and against any opponent in the first round. She only returned to the tour this week by playing two doubles matches at a tuneup event in England.

While the 40-year-old

American's track record would merit a seeding, the All England Club now adheres strictly to the rankings in determining how it seeds players.

Williams has won seven Wimbledon championships, part of her total of 23 Grand Slam titles, a record for the professional era. Tan, meanwhile, will be making her debut at the grass-court tournament.

If Williams gets past Tan, next up could be a match against Sara Sorribes Tormo, who is seeded 32nd but has never been past the second round at the All England Club or the third round at any major in 19 past appearances.

The third round potentially would put Williams against a tougher test: No 6-seeded



Karolina Pliskova, who was the runner-up to Ash Barty last year at Wimbledon and also reached the final of the 2016 U.S. Open - beating Williams in the semifinals there.

Barty retired at age 25 in March and so is not defending her title when play begins on Monday. That also leaves open the question of which woman will have the honor of playing the first match at Centre Court on Tuesday, a slot traditionally reserved for the prior year's champion.

The two most likely choices would seem to be No 1 Iga Swiatek, who enters on a 35-match winning streak and is coming off a title at the French Open, or Simona Halep, who won the 2019 trophy.

## Kvitova vs Ostapenko in Eastbourne final

AP ■ EASTBOURNE

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova advanced to her first grass-court final in four years by beating Beatriz Haddad Maia 7-6 (5), 6-4 at Eastbourne on Friday.

Kvitova will face defending champion Jelena Ostapenko in the final. The eighth-seeded Latvian defeated 12th-seeded Camila Giorgi 6-2, 6-2 in the other semifinal match.

Haddad Maia had won 12 straight matches on grass including back-to-back singles titles in Nottingham and Birmingham over the last two weeks.

The 14th-seeded Kvitova reached her first final of 2022 and first grass-court final since Birmingham in 2018. Kvitova earned the only



service break of the match to begin the second set against the 15th-seeded Brazilian.

The 32-year-old Czech player's only career loss in five grass-court finals was to Marion Bartoli at Eastbourne in 2011, when Kvitova went on to win Wimbledon for the first time.



## India clubbed with Brazil, USA, Morocco in women's U-17 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will play Brazil in a FIFA World Cup. Not in the world football governing body's flagship event but in its U-17 tournament for women.

Hosts India have been clubbed alongside the football powerhouse, Morocco and the USA in a tough group for the upcoming U-17 FIFA Women's World Cup, the draw for which took place in Zurich on Friday.

The country is slated to host the tournament from October 11 to 30 across three venues — Bhubaneswar's Kalinga Stadium, Goa's Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium and Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium.

India, being the host nation, are an automatic selection and is placed in Group A.

A total of 16 teams across four groups will be participating in the tournament.

India will begin their campaign against the USA on October 11 (Tuesday) at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar. Their second match will be against Morocco on October 14 (Friday) at the same venue. The home team's

last group stage match against Brazil will be on October 17 (Monday).

India were scheduled to host the 2020 edition of the World Cup but the tournament was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Defending champions Spain, who beat Mexico in the final of the 2018 edition, are placed in Group C along with Colombia, China, and Mexico.

Group B consists of Germany, Nigeria, Chile and New Zealand. Japan, Tanzania, Canada and France constitute Group D.

North Korea are the most successful team in the history of the tournament, having won the trophy in 2008 and 2016, while Japan, South Korea, and France have each won the title once.

Host Mollie Kmita presented the official draw and was joined by former US women's national team player and FIFA women's World Cup winner, Heather O'Reilly, former coach of the New Zealand national team, Ricki Herbert, as well as Jaime Yarza, FIFA's director of tournaments, and Sarai Bareman, FIFA chief women's football officer.

## Medvedev loses to Bautista Agut in Mallorca quarters

AP ■ PALMA

Top-ranked Daniil Medvedev will remain without a title on grass this season after a straight-set loss to Roberto Bautista Agut in the quarterfinals of the Mallorca Championships.

Medvedev lost 6-3, 6-2 after entering the match with an 8-2 record on the surface for the year, with his losses coming in consecutive finals in Germany and the Netherlands.

Medvedev, who will not play at Wimbledon because of the ban on Russians over the war in Ukraine, needed to come from behind to get past Aslan Karatsev in the round of 16 on



Wednesday.

Medvedev, the defending champion in Mallorca, had only one break opportunity against the 20th-ranked Bautista Agut, who had advanced without having to play in the last 16 because Nick Kyrgios withdrew with an abdominal injury.

## Archery WC Stage 3: Compound mixed pair in final

PTI ■ PARIS

Indian archers assured themselves of a second medal in the World Cup Stage 3 with ace duo of Abhishek Verma and Jyothi Surekha Vennam sailing into the compound mixed team final here on Friday.

A day after Deepika Kumari and Co. cruised into the final of recurve women's team event to confirm their first medal of the meet, the compound mixed pair of Verma and Jyothi followed suit, defeating Estonia's Robin Jaatma and Lisell Jaatma 156-151 in a lopsided semifinal.

The Indian duo will face fifth seed France in the com-



pound mixed team final on Saturday.

Making a comeback after more than seven months, world

number 3 Jyothi, who was sidelined in the Asian Games trial, is also in the hunt for an individual medal, having advanced

into the semi-final.

A day after Lisell gave Jyothi a tough fight in the individual quarterfinal, the Estonian along with her teammate Robin failed to create much pressure and slipped behind after the Indian pair had a perfect first round.

Maintaining their consistency, Verma and Jyothi extended their lead to five points in the third round that proved decisive, even as their rivals levelled it 38-38 in the final set of arrows.

Having got a bye into the pre-quarters, third seeded India began their mixed team campaign eliminating Puerto Rico by a handsome eight-point margin (158-150).

## Milan begin Scudetto defence against Udinese in mid-August

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan will begin their Serie A title defence with the visit of Udinese after the 2022/23 season's fixture list was announced on Friday.

Stefano Pioli's side then face Atalanta, Bologna and Sassuolo before hosting the first Milan derby of the season in early September.

Milan took the Scudetto from Inter on the final day of last season's enthralling title race and will likely be doing battle with their local rivals -- who are set to bring back Romelu Lukaku -- for the title in a campaign which starts earlier than usual.

The opening round of fixtures are on August 13, due to the World Cup which kicks off in Qatar in November, and finishes on June 4 next year.



The first week of the season will be held around when Italian families traditionally set off to the seaside, lakes or mountains on holiday to escape the intense summer heat.

The league will break from November 13 to make space for the World Cup but unlike the Premier League will not return in December, with the action starting up again on January 4.

Inter start with a trip to Serie B champions Lecce, one of only three teams from Italy's southern regions, before facing Spezia, Lazio and promoted Cremonese before their first

local derby of the season.

Should the season go down to the wire as it did in May, there are some big matches in the final few weeks which could have an impact on the destination of the title.

### BERLUSCONI BACK

Juventus, hotly-tipped to sign free agent Paul Pogba, host Milan in the penultimate round of fixtures, when Inter await rivals Atalanta at the San Siro.

The week before Inter travel south to Napoli, who were well in the title race last season until they fell away in the final weeks of the campaign.

Milan fans will welcome back former owner Silvio Berlusconi in late October when promoted Monza visit the San Siro during the 11th round of fixtures.

## Daruvala completes successful F1 test with McLaren

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young Indian racer Jehan Daruvala made a successful Formula 1 test debut this week with eight-time constructors' winner McLaren and is now eligible for a Super Licence.

The 23-year-old, who is aiming to become the third racer from India to race in

Formula 1, drove the Woking-based team's 2021 race-winning challenger — the MCL35M — on Tuesday and Wednesday at Silverstone.

The test was Jehan's first taste of F1 machinery and he chalked up over 130 laps combined over the two days, over twice the distance F1 drivers will cover during British GP. The

track time helped him earn enough points to apply for a Super Licence, which is needed to compete in F1.

Jehan, who ran trouble-free on both the days, currently races with Italian team Prema in the Formula 2 championship, the feeder series that sits one step below Formula 1, and is third in the overall standings.



The Uttar Pradesh team bagged the bronze medal in the 4x50m freestyle relay boy's group (III) on the first day of 48th Sub Junior National Aquatic Championships at Rajkot on Friday. The team of Himanshu Singh, Shiv Kant Nishad, Ajeet Yadav and Akash Chauhan clocked 02:08:22 seconds to clinch the medal. UP Swimming Association president Raja Jai Pratap Singh congratulate the team.



## Surya, Sanju set to be in playing XI against Ireland



PTI ■ MALAHIDE

Dashing stroke-players Suryakumar Yadav and Sanju Samson will be returning to the India playing XI in place of Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant in the two-match T20I series against Ireland starting Sunday.

While chief coach Rahul Dravid is in Leicester with the Test squad, National Cricket Academy (NCA) head VVS Laxman, who is in charge of the T20I side for this particular series, is expected to follow the template set by 'The Wall'.

With Iyer and Pant in the Test team, Surya, who is making a comeback from a wrist injury, and Samson, who is looking to make use of what

could be his last chance to prove his worth, will be sure-shot starters.

Surya has been a regular in the Indian T20I side for the past one year and will only get his place back.

But as far as Samson is concerned, his alternative could be Deepak Hooda, who can also bowl a couple of overs of handy off-spin, besides possessing an ability to hit the ball hard.

However, if one looks at coach Dravid's philosophy, he doesn't believe in casting his net too wide and exploring too many options. He also needs to close in on spots by the time India play the Asia Cup.

While Ruturaj Gaikwad has not been very successful, the Chennai Super Kings opener might just get two more chances against a weak Ireland side, against whom he can score some runs and get his confidence back.

Ishan Kishan, who has all but sealed the reserve opener's slot for the next few months, will continue in his role for the time being and will open with regular skipper Rohit Sharma in the England leg of the T20Is also.

Stand-in captain Hardik Pandya, who batted at No 5 in the last series, is expected to continue in that position with Dinesh Karthik coming a slot below him.

However, with Karthik being assigned a specific role, he could also come ahead of Pandya, depending on the situation.

But it is still not clear if Dravid or Laxman will try out 'Jammu Express' Umran Malik or blockhole specialist Arshdeep Singh in this series, or continue with Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Avesh Khan, with Axar Patel and Yuzvendra Chahal as the spinners.



## INDIAN EVES LOOK TO SEAL SERIES

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

Eying a series-clinching victory, the Indian women's cricket team would expect a better showing from its top-order when it takes on Sri Lanka in the second T20 International, here on Saturday.

The Indians made a positive start to the limited-overs tour of the Island nation with a 34-run win in the series-opener on Thursday.

The team would not only aim to secure the three-match series but also address the grey areas and continue the winning momentum ahead of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, where women's cricket will make its debut in the T20 format.

The Birmingham Games will be held from July 28 to August 8.

In the series opener, the Indians managed a modest 138 for six after opting to bat before the bowlers, led by left-arm spinner Radha Yadav,

choked the Lankan batters. But India's batting show left a lot to be desired in the first game.

The likes of Shafali Verma, who made a run-a-ball 31, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (22) and Richa Ghosh (11) all got starts but could not convert them into substantial knocks.

Having failed in the previous game, Harmanpreet will be hoping to eclipse the legendary Mithali Raj in the shortest format. She needs just 24 runs to become the highest run-getter from India in this format. Mithali, who recently retired from all forms of cricket, had scored 2364 run from 89 games.

Vice-captain Smriti Mandhana and Sabbhineni Meghana endured an off day in office and the visitors would need the duo to click if India are to put on a big total.

It was left to Jemimah Rodrigues, who made her comeback to the side after a while, and Deepti Sharma to

provide the late burst and take India to the winning total. Even though Rodrigues and Deepti did the rescue act, the Indian think tank would want the top-order to do better job.

The Indian bowlers, on the other hand, were right on the money with the spin trio of Radha (2/22), Deepti (1/9) and part-timer Shafali (1/10) shinning bright on the low and slow wicket.

With the same venue hosting all the three T20s, spinners of both teams will play vital roles.

Sri Lanka too would be hoping for a better effort from their batters.

Middle-order batter Kavisha Dilhari (47 not out) remained stranded as she failed to get support from the other hand. The likes of skipper Chamari Athapaththu, Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Madavi and Nilakshi de Silva will have to take more responsibility in the batting unit.

On the bowling front, spin duo of Inoka Ranaweera (3/30) and Oshadi Ranasinghe (2/22) would look for support from their opening bowlers to keep Indian batters quiet.

### 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, Udeshika Prabodhani, Oshadi Ranasinghe, Inoka Ranaweera, Sathya Sandeepani, Anushka Sanjeevani, Malsha Shehani, Tharika Sewwandi.

## Adil Rashid to miss white-ball series against India

PTI ■ LONDON

England will be without the services of Adil Rashid in next month's white-ball series against India as the leg-spinner has received clearance from the country's cricket board (ECB) to make Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

Rashid, a practising Muslim, will fly to Saudi Arabia on Saturday, which means he will also miss the latter stages of Yorkshire's T20 Blast campaign.

"I've been wanting to do it for a little while but I've found it pretty difficult with the timings. This year, I felt as though it was something that I had to do, and something I wanted to do as well," Rashid told 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"I spoke to the ECB and to Yorkshire about it and they were very understanding and encouraging, like: 'yep, you do what you've got to do and then come back when you can'."

"Me and the missus are going and I'll be there for a couple of weeks," he added.

Rashid was part of England's recently-concluded tour of the Netherlands, where the visitors comfortably bagged the three-match ODI series 3-0.

"It's a massive moment: each faith has got their own different thing but for Islam and being a Muslim, this is one of the biggest ones," Rashid said.

"It's a big thing for my faith and for myself. I knew that I needed to do it while I'm young and strong and healthy. This is something that I really committed to myself that I would do."

India take on hosts England in a white-ball series, including three T20Is and as many ODIs from July 1 to 17.

Rashid is expected to miss all six games as he is likely to return in mid-July, ahead of England's white-ball series against South Africa.

## Pakistans introduce separate Test & white-ball contracts

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday introduced separate red ball and white ball central contracts for its players with increased retainers but would discourage its elite players from competing in foreign leagues, for which it is ready to pay them compensatory money.

The PCB said that the Board of Governors meeting has approved an annual budget of 15 billion rupees for the fiscal year 2022-23 with 78 per cent allocated for cricket activities.

"As part of its strategy to incentivise, reward and encourage its high-performing elite cricketers, as well as to narrow the gap in salaries compared to players of other countries, the BoG has approved changes in the men's central contracts structure,"



the PCB said in a statement.

From July 1, separate red and white-ball contracts will be given with increased retainers. The number of centrally contracted players has been increased from 20 to 33.

The Board announced a 10 per cent increase in match fees across formats and also an increase in match fee for non-playing members from 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the overall match fee.

A captaincy allowance has also been introduced to compensate the team leader for the additional responsibilities that come with that role.

PCB Chairman, Ramiz Raja also announced at a media conference in Lahore that the Board has also set up a special fund for current players who get offers for playing in foreign leagues.

## Ramiz brushes aside rumours of being sacked

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Ramiz Raja has obliquely said that he wants to continue in the top post, following prolonged speculations that he was likely to be sacked by the ruling government. There have been speculations for months that Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif will soon bring in his own nominee to replace Ramiz as PCB Chairman.

Shahbaz recently also held meetings with three former Chairmen of the board, Khalid Mahmood, Zaka Ashraf and Najam Sethi on cricket matters leading to more speculations that Ramiz would be told to go home.

"It's been two months now and we can't live on speculations. If something had to happen it would have happened by now. Look unless you give continuity a chance nothing will improve in

Pakistan cricket," Ramiz said. "Cricket gives me excitement. I have a lot of other options. The PM is our line in charge and I have put in a request to meet him and brief him on what we are doing and our plans for the future."

Ramiz said that his goal is to improve cricket in Pakistan and the good work should not be disregarded.

"There is no ego issue here, we just want to improve Pakistan cricket. If the constitution allows a change fine but just because of tradition you should not undo the good work," he said.



## Oz beat SL by 4 wickets

AP ■ COLOMBO

Wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey's unbeaten 45 and inspired bowling helped Australia to a four-wicket consolation win over Sri Lanka in the fifth ODI on Friday.

Australia bowled out the hosts for 160, a tricky total on a bowling-friendly Colombo pitch the tourists overhauled with 10.3 overs to spare.

Fast bowlers Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and spinner Matthew Kuhnemann took two wickets each.

Chamika Karunaratne hit a valiant 75 for Sri Lanka, who won the five-match series 3-2 after they had taken an unbeatable lead in the fourth match.

Australia were in trouble at 4-50 when the left-handed Carey and Marnus Labuschagne, who made 31, put on a key stand of 51 to set up the chase.

Teenage left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage took three wickets including David Warner, for 10, and Glenn Maxwell, for 16, but the left-handed Carey

kept his calm.

Earlier Sri Lanka slipped to 85-8 before Karunaratne, who improved on his previous ODI best of 44 not out, and debutant Pramod Madushan put on a stubborn stand of 58 for the ninth wicket.

The tourists had quickly rattled the Sri Lankans after Hazlewood removed the openers inside five overs and finished with figures of 2-22.

Charith Asalanka was run out for 14 after a misunderstanding with his partner Kusal Mendis, who made 26 but was out hit wicket off Glenn Maxwell on the next ball.

Kuhnemann, a left-arm spinner, then struck twice in one over including skipper Dasun Shanaka for one as Sri Lanka slipped further to 85-8.

But Karunaratne fought back as he reached his maiden ODI fifty with a boundary off Cummins to celebrate with a fist pump.

Cummins finally got out Karunaratne, who hit eight fours and two sixes in his stay, to wrap up the innings.

## England collapses to 91-6 against Kiwis in 3rd Test

AP ■ NOTTINGHAM

England collapsed to 91-6 at tea against New Zealand on day two of the third test as Ben Stokes' promise to play entertaining cricket backfired badly with Trent Boult destroying the top order at Headingley on Friday.

England, which holds an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series, trails New Zealand by 238 runs.

The afternoon session started promisingly for England, which claimed two quick wickets to end New Zealand's first innings on 329 after the visitors went to lunch at 325-8. England spinner Jack Leach took 5-100.

Boult (3-43) quickly reduced England to 17-3 by clean bowling openers Alex Lees (4) and Zak Crawley (6), followed by Ollie Pope (5).

Tim Southee claimed the valuable wicket of Joe Root (5), who was caught behind to make it 21-4.

Neil Wagner took 2-17, including the wicket of the England captain after Stokes hit two fours and a six in a 13-ball cameo of 18 runs. That made it 55-5, and then 55-6 after Wagner trapped Ben Foakes lbw for a duck.

Jonny Bairstow, England's hero in the second test, helped to stabilize the innings. He was 33 not out off 34 balls. Jamie Overton was also at the crease



on 16.

Earlier, Tom Blundell couldn't review his leg-before-wicket dismissal because the DLS system wasn't working. England pacer Matthew Potts (1-34) took advantage of the technical fault to claim Blundell for 55.

Potts' delivery, which looked worth reviewing in normal circumstances, ended another dangerous counterattack by Blundell and Daryl Mitchell (109). The Kiwi duo has shared partnerships of 195,

236 and 120 in the series.

Mitchell reached his third century in three tests by hitting Leach for a six. He was dismissed for 109 in the last ball of the session with Zak Crawley taking the catch.

Mitchell followed knocks of 108 at Lord's and 190 at Trent Bridge. On his way to three figures, Mitchell broke Martin Donnelly's New Zealand record of 492 runs in a series in England, in 1949.

Southee was out for 33. Stuart Broad took 3-62.

# Madhya Pradesh close in on maiden Ranji title

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Unheralded Yash Dubey and Shubham Sharma made the biggest stage of Indian domestic cricket their own with well-crafted centuries, that pulled the rug from under heavyweights Mumbai's feet as Madhya Pradesh took a giant leap towards their maiden Ranji Trophy title, here on Friday.

Mumbai's first innings score of 374 looked reasonably good on the second day but Dubey (133, 336 balls) and Sharma (116, 215 balls) added 222 runs for the second wicket to take MP to a solid 368 for 3 at the end of day three.

Madhya Pradesh now need only seven more runs to take a decisive first innings lead and unless they suffer a collapse in the fourth innings, the title is theirs for taking.

MP had lost to Karnataka when the

last time they competed in a Ranji Trophy final in the 1998-99 season.

The duo took the sting out of Mumbai attack with some 'khadoos' (stubborn) batting straight out of Chandrakant Pandit's coaching play book as 245 runs were scored through the whole day but more effectively, they ran Mumbai attack ragged with their solid game plan.

Rajat Patidar, one of the heroes of RCB's campaign in the IPL, then used his new-found confidence to score an unbeaten 67 with 13 boundaries.

MP would certainly want to stretch their innings as much as possible so that Mumbai have no chance to make a comeback in the game.

The Chinnaswamy Stadium track didn't show signs of wear and tear and the bright sunshine only helped the MP batters to settle down easily against a Mumbai attack which was at one level ordinary.



The biggest disappointment was their left-arm spinner Shams Mulani (1/117 in 40 overs), who bowled too many loose deliveries.

Veteran Dhawal Kulkarni (21-3-51-0) and the seasoned Tushar Deshpande (24-8-73-1) were also below-par as they consistently gave drivable length the batters in the morning session.

Instead of conjuring up maiden overs and building the pressure slowly, within first half an hour, they allowed Dubey and Sharma to easily hit multiple cover drives to get their eye in.

Kulkarni, the only man in this set-up with experience of winning a Ranji Trophy, bowled too many deliveries outside the off-stump which were left alone.

The only time he looked menacing was when Dubey had taken his eyes off a short ball and was knocked down.

While Dubey hit 14 boundaries and

Sharma had 15 hits and a maximum to his credit, what stood out during their partnership was their running between the wickets.

That Dubey (613 runs) and Sharma (578 runs) have been standout performers for MP this season was evident in their on-field communication, where they would tap the ball towards mid-on or mid-off to steal those quick singles.

Dubey in fact after scoring his hundred did repeat the 'Sidhu Moosewala' celebration (thigh thump and index finger pointed towards sky) but it was more about driving home a point for Sarfaraz Khan, who was sledging the duo.

By the time, Sharma was caught behind off Avasthi and Dubey gave Mulani something to cheer after another 72-run third wicket stand, some of the Mumbai players were on their hunches.