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TONNES WHEAT SINCE BAN'

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Sena rebels challenge suspension notice in SC

Rejection of no-trust motion against Deputy Speaker, too, questioned

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the heightened political turmoil in Maharashtra, the rebel Shiv Sena MLAs, led by senior leader Eknath Shinde approached the Supreme Court on Sunday against the disqualification notice issued against them.

The rebel Legislators, who have been camping at a luxury hotel in Assam's Guwahati, also challenged the rejection of the no-confidence motion against Deputy Speaker Narahari Zirwal.

Shiv Sena had filed a petition before the Deputy Speaker for disqualifying 16 rebel MLAs after they revolted against the party and pushed the Government on the brink of collapse. The Deputy Speaker's office has issued 'summons' to these MLAs, seeking written replies by the evening of June 27. In their petition filed in the top court, the rebel leaders have also challenged the appointment of Ajay Choudhary as the Shiv Sena Legislature Party



Shiv Sena supporters stage a protest in support of Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Sunday

leader. Sena named Choudhary to the post after removing Shinde a day after the latter left Mumbai with a sizable number of loyal MLAs, leaving the Maha Vikas Aghadi Government teetering.

Amid the intense power tussle between Shinde and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, one more Minister left the Sena camp on Sunday and joined the rebel leaders. Uday Samant is the ninth

Minister to desert the Uddhav Thackeray's team.

Meanwhile, the Sena leadership has hardened its stance against the rebels and is planning to take away the portfolios of some of the Ministers in the rebel camp. According to reports, Shinde, who heads the Urban Development Ministry, Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Gulabrao Patil and Agriculture Minister Dada Bhuse as well as Ministers

of States Sambhuraaj Desai and Abdul Sattar are likely to lose their portfolios.

The State witnessed large-scale protests by Shiv Sena workers against the rebel leaders. In Mumbai, a large number of party workers, including women, assembled outside the office of 'Saamana', at Prabhadevi and took out a two-wheeler rally raising slogans against Shinde and rebel MLAs.

My dad offered CM's chair to Shinde: Aaditya

Was tempted with ₹50 cr to join rebel faction, says Sena MLA

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In two sensational claims, Sena Minister Aaditya Thackeray said here on Sunday that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had offered the Chief Minister's post to rebel faction leader Eknath Shinde on May 20, while Sena MLA Udaysingh Rajput claimed that the rebel Sena group had offered him Rs 50 crore to join the faction led by Shinde.

On a day when the Shinde camp prepared itself to battle it out both within and outside the State Assembly and the parent Sena camp went about the



Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray during his interaction with party workers from Kalina and Kurla Assembly constituencies, at Santacruz, in Mumbai on Sunday

task of keeping its flock together, Aaditya, addressing the party workers at a series of rallies including the ones at Dahisar and Thane, said: "On May 20, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had called Eknath Shinde to 'Varsha' (CM's official residence), asked him if he had any grievance against him (CM). He also had asked if he wanted to become the Chief Minister."

Centre gives Y+ CRPF security to rebel MLAs

Guv too asks Maha cops to protect Legislators

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Government on Sunday provided Y+ category Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) security cover to 15 rebel Shiv Sena MLAs. Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari has also asked the State Director-General of Police to provide security to the rebel MLAs. The development comes a day after the State Government withdrew the security cover to the rebel Sena MLAs and the homes of many of them were attacked by the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

As per the Union Home Ministry's order, the rebel MLAs, who have been accorded the CRPF security cover, include: Ramesh Bornare, Mangesh Kudalkar, Sanjay Shirsat, Latabai Sonawane, Prakash Surve, Sadanand Saranavkar, Yogesh Dada Kadam, Pratap Sarnaik, Yamini Jadhav, Pradeep Jaiswal, Sanjay Rathod, Dadaji Bhuse, Dilip Lande, Balaji Kalyanar and Sandipan Bhumare.

On Saturday, Sena workers loyal to Uddhav Thackeray staged protests against the rebels and vandalised office of an MLA in Pune. Rebel leader Eknath Shinde wrote to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, State Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil and the DGP Rajnesh Seth alleging that security cover provided to the rebel MLAs at their residence and to their family members has been withdrawn "as an act of revenge".

BJP wins big in Tripura

PNS ■ AGARTALA

BJP registered an impressive performance in Tripura, winning three out of the four Assembly seats which went to poll on June 23. The Congress bagged one seat.

While Chief Minister and BJP candidate Manik Saha won in Town Bordowali, his party's candidates Swapna Das won

Cong pips BJP to bag Mandar seat

PNS ■ RANCHI

The Congress candidate Shilpi Neha Tirkey won the Mandar Assembly by a margin of 23,517 votes. Shilpi got 95,062 votes, while the BJP candidate, Gangotri Kujur came second with 71,545. Over 61.25 per cent of about 3.5 lakh

Jolt for AAP in Punjab, party retains Delhi's seat

MONIKA MALIK/PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday faced a resounding defeat in the Sangrur Lok Sabha by-election just 100 days after the massive mandate it got in State Assembly polls. A former IPS and Khalistan-ideologue Simranjit Singh Mann, won the Sangrur seat --- represented by AAP since 2014 --- by a slim margin of 5,822 votes. On the other hand, AAP candidate Durgesh Pathak defeated the BJP's Rajesh Bhatia by a margin of 11,468 votes in the Rajinder Nagar Assembly by-poll. Pathak got 40,319 votes (55.76 per cent) while Bhatia got 28,851 (39.91 per cent) votes. The Congress candidate Prem Lata secured only 2019 votes (2.79 per cent). Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called it the defeat of BJP's "dirty politics" and thanked the people for



AAP candidate Durgesh Pathak flashes the victory sign alongwith party's senior leaders Sanjay Singh, Gopal Rai and Atishi Marlena at party headquarters after winning Rajinder Nagar bypoll, in New Delhi on Sunday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

appreciating the work done by his Government in the national Capital. Senior AAP leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister

Manish Sisodia also congratulated Pathak and said the poll results show that Kejriwal lives in the hearts of the people.

CAPSULE

CRIME BRANCH ARRESTS TEESTA IN FORGERY CASE

Ahmedabad: The Ahmedabad crime branch on Sunday arrested activist Teesta Setalvad, a day after she was detained in Mumbai and shifted to Gujarat, in connection with a fresh case of forgery, criminal conspiracy and insulting criminal proceedings to cause injury registered against her, officials said.

'PROGRESS MADE FOR THEATRISATION PLAN'

New Delhi: Definite progress has been made in ongoing deliberations for the theatratisation plan and the Indian Air Force (IAF) remains fully committed to the tri-services integration for enhancing comprehensive national combat power, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary said on Sunday.

ASSAM FLOOD: OVER 25 LAKH STILL AFFECTED

Guwahati: The flood situation in Assam continued to remain critical on Sunday with more than 25 lakh people still reeling under the deluge, although water level has started receding from some areas.

Indians proud of democracy, PM tells desi diaspora

Looking forward to fruitful discussions with G-7 leaders, Modi says on reaching Munich

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/MUNICH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said Indians are "proud" of democracy, which has been made vibrant by the diversity of culture, food, clothes, music and tradition.

Making this assertion while addressing the Indian diaspora in Munich, he also said the country has shown democracy can deliver and has delivered.

However, he cautioned that June 26 marks the Emergency as well. "Today is June 26, which is also known for the day when India's



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being received by officials, upon his arrival in Munich, Germany on Sunday

democracy that is in the DNA of every Indian, was trampled and suppressed 47 years ago. Emergency was a black spot on the vibrant history of India's democracy," the Prime Minister said. The PM arrived in Munich earlier to attend the G-7 summit hosted by Germany. Besides, he will

also hold bilateral meetings with world leaders on the sidelines of the summit in the next two days. In his address to the Indian community, the Prime Minister also said now every village in the country is open defecation free, has electricity and 99 per cent of the villages also have clean cooking fuel.

CBI probe against 3 IT staffers for aiding fake TDS returns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has started a probe against three Income Tax department officials and nine private persons for allegedly facilitating fictitious refunds of TDS deducted for several assessee by misusing system access of senior officers.

The CBI filed an FIR based on a complaint from Joint Commissioner of Income Tax, Muzaffarnagar, against three group C Officials of the Income Tax who allegedly managed to dupe the department by misusing RSA tokens of assessing officers to work out and generate fictitious refunds of Tax Deducted at Source (TDS).

RSA tokens are unique and time-synchronous solutions that automatically change a user's password every 60 seconds. Following the registration of the FIR, the agency has carried out searches at multiple locations, officials

said.

The CBI has named three Income Tax Department officials --- Abhay Kant, Saurabh Singh and Rohit Kumar --- in connection with the case along with nine beneficiaries of the refunds.

The case has been registered by the anti-corruption branch of the CBI under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections relating to criminal conspiracy, forgery, cheating and criminal breach of trust besides criminal misconduct under the Prevention of Corruption Act besides provisions of the Information Technology Act.

The tax department has alleged that the officials misused the RSA tokens of assessing officers to work out and authenticate generation of fictitious refunds payable to 11 assessee, on the system, and got the refunds worth over Rs 1.39 crore between August 1, 2020 and August 25, 2021 till the fraud was detected.

Varun likely to move private Bill to end MPs', MLAs' pensions

DEEPAK KUMAR UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

BJP Member of Parliament Varun Gandhi may move a bill in Lok Sabha in the coming monsoon session seeking an end to post-retirement benefits to the MPs and MLAs.

The party MP, who has become a vocal critic of the Centre's Agnipath scheme for recruitment in the Army and declared that he himself would not take pension, will be writing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take steps to end pension benefits to the public representatives, sources close to him said.

The MP would be moving a private member bill to withdraw pension benefits to MPs and MLAs. He would also move a bill to make recruitment in the Government jobs "time-bound", sources said. According to an estimate, the Center is spending over Rs 70.50 crore on monthly pension being paid to the for-



mer MPs, which also include rich film stars, businessmen and industrialists having declared their wealth in their election affidavits running into crores.

Varun has argued that if those recruited in the armed forces under the Agnipath initiative are not eligible for a pension, then why public representatives "after five years term" should get post-retirement benefits.

On Sunday Varun tweeted that two youth Sachin in Rohtak and Vikas in Fatehpur, who were preparing for years to join army, have committed suicide after the Government announced the Agnipath scheme.

Strategy framed to control road accidents

54 deaths reported three months in road mishaps at Seraikela

PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Under the chairmanship of Deputy Development Deputy Commissioner Praveen Kumar Gagrai and District Transport Officer Dinesh Kumar Ranjan, Additional Municipal Commissioner Adityapur Girja Shankar Prasad, Sub-Divisional Officer Seraikela Seraikela Ram Krishna Kumar, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Headquarters) Chandan Kumar Vats a meeting of the District Road Safety Committee was called in the presence of other members of the committee.

During this, the District Transport Officer shared the information related to the road accidents, the reasons for the accidents and the actions taken in the accident so far this month and last month. During this, he informed the committee members that from April 2022, the compensation amount



fixed for the dependents of the dead under Hit and Run has been increased from Rs 25,000 to Rs 2,00,000 and for those injured in the accident from Rs 12,500 to Rs 50,000. He said that 11 black spots have been created in the district. In the last three months, 20 accidents took place in

March, 18 in April and 20 in May at different places. In which 54 people died and 40 people were injured. During the meeting, the Deputy Development Commissioner gave necessary instructions while discussing in detail various points including controlling road accidents, providing compen-

sation to the victims of the accident, and making people aware about the accident.

Instructions given by the Deputy Development Commissioner: Need to put up necessary boards, stand-off signage around the black spots marked, Make sure to get the street lights installed on the

road side in the city areas repaired, Executive Officer, while assessing the faulty street lights in the Nagar Panchayat urban area, should provide the list to the department, ensure strict action against the drivers who are illegally parking on the road in industrial establishments and urban areas.

Students body demands teaching at Women's College at Barhi

PNS ■ LOHARDAGA

The students of Women's College, led by Mamta Kumari, the head of Masmano Panchayat has demanded to start degree studies at Barhi Segrotoli of Senha block area located on Lohardaga Bodo main road.

The students in this connection submitted a memorandum to Ranchi University Vice Chancellor Dr. Ajit Kumar Sinha. <

The students delegation also submitted memorandum to Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon, Rajya Sabha MP Dheeraj Prasad Sahu.

The students body in its



Students delegation submits memorandum to Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon.

memorandum stated that women's college constructed on the Barhi Lohardaga-Bodo main road was inaugurated on 27 January 2021. The Mahila Mahavidyalaya

was inaugurated by the then Governor Draupadi Murmu. The students body said that there is only one degree college in Lohardaga district—the Baldev Sahu Ma-

havidyalaya, in which students of Gumla and Latehar study apart from Lohardaga. Being the only college, many students are not even able to get admission. As a

result, the education of the students remains incomplete.

The impact of poverty is so severe that it is not a matter of all the students to study outside the district. Since people of marginal farmers reside in Lohardaga district, everything is dependent on agriculture.

Students also join hands with their household chores and farming and go to college.

The delegation included Arvind Oraon, Suraj Kumar, Bablu Oraon, Vinay Oraon, Roopa Kumari, Ritu Kumari and other students were among those who submitted the memorandum.

Students learn basic life support skills

PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

A total of 175 students and 15 teachers of Jusco School South Park participated in the Basic Life Support Skills Program organised at Kudy Mahanty Auditorium today.

It was organised under the aegis of Tata Steel Foundation and SAFE.

The session was conducted by Dr Pushpa Tiwari and Dr Prabal Ghosh from the Tata Steel Foundation.

The students were trained

on handling three emergency situations - Cardiac Arrest, Serious Road Accidents and Choking. A team of 17 students from the Manipal Medical College led by Dr Sachin Patil helped the students to practice the hands on technique of administering CPR in the correct way.

Mili Sinha thanked the Chairperson SAFE for her inspiration to organise an enlightening on this very important skill. She also thanked the entire team of



Medical practitioners for their valuable inputs and

praised their commitment to train the youth of Jamshed-



pur on this significant skill of saving lives.

Stir for water supply in Bhuli Township



PANKAJ KUMAR ■ DHANBAD :

Former ward councillor of ward 15 of DMC has started a different kind of stir for ensuring water sup-

ply through high rise water reservoirs in Bhuli township by sitting on dharna on top of one of reservoirs.

Ranjeet Kumar Babloo, who had represented ward 15, had been demanding starting water supply in township via the two high-rise water reservoirs.

But despite his written demands neither the water

supply department nor the DMC took any initiative. Sore by the indifferent attitude of the officials Ranjeet had announced stir yesterday and today he started his five day stir by climbing on top of the reservoir.

Talking to media ahead of climbing on top Ranjeet said, it's a decade now since the reservoirs were con-

structed and fixtures of intake and outgoing were installed but despite that supply to Bhuli township failed to commence.

"I cannot why but it appears the connivance of WSD and DMC authorities who happen to be hand in gloves with the water supply mafia ghat supplies water via tankers in this local-

ty", said Ranjeet.

District authorities had sent a magistrate to prevent him from climbing on top of the reservoir.

He, however, refused to talk to him till DMC and WSD authorities gave a written assurance of commencement of date for starting supply through the two reservoir.

Writer Ansuman bats for simple words to improve writing

PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

For Jamshedpur writer Ansuman Bhagat, writing is not just limited to pen and paper, Ansuman explains that writing gives direction to my life and at the same time helps me to keep my thoughts flowing continuously. The time it takes for a



writer to judge his own thoughts is longer than the

time it takes for a writer to reach his readers. So that the right and accurate ideas can reach the people and it leads to a better option in life.

Ansuman Bhagat is a famous writer of the 21st century whose name comes first among the famous personalities of Jamshedpur in the field of writing.

Along with this, Ansuman is also known for his simple writing and beautiful ideology. Ansuman Bhagat is the first writer in the country who raised his voice for the rights of writers and their livelihood from the state government. He has written four books so far and all these books also come in the

category of bestselling books on the World Wide Web. Ansuman's fourth book was recently published, titled 'Ek Safar Mein', in this book he wrote on the reality of Bollywood TV industry and the life of a common artist, due to which Ansuman Bhagat became a subject of much discussion.

Woman killed in front of husband for performing black magic

NITYANAND DUBEY ■ GARHWA

In a shocking incident, a 26 year old married woman Gudiya Devi was killed by her own sister and brother-in-law on pretext of black magic at ward number 6 of Banshidhar Nagar Panchayat of the district.

Sister Lalita Devi and brother-in-law Dinesh Oraon killed Gudiya Devi in front of her husband Munna Oraon, on Tuesday.

They cut off victim's tongue for performing black magic. The poor woman uterus and intestine were also taken out through the private part, due to which she died in agony. The incident happened last Tuesday. The deceased's sister Lalita Devi and brother-in-law Dinesh Oraon both are residents of Daleli village under Meral police station.

Regarding the incident, deceased's husband Munna Oraon told that both brother-in-law Dinesh Oraon and his wife Lalita Devi had come to the house of his neighbor Ramsharan Oraon alias Gota a week ago. In the meantime, Lalita called her sister Gudiya Devi and brother-in-law Munna Oraon to the house of Ramsharan Oraon for black magic.

After doing black magic for three to four days continuously, on Tuesday morning, in front of the eyes of mother-in-law, husband, brother-in-law and brother-in-law etc. together cut off the tongue of victim.

When even this did not fill the mind, the uterus and intestine were also taken out through his private part. After which he died a painful death. After the death, the



Police officials at the place of occurrence



Deceased's devrani Usha Devi

sister-in-law and others took her dead body to the maternal uncle house Ranka and burnt the dead body there.

Devrani also attacked for opposing Jethani's murder

As there was opposition from family members Lalita Devi, attacked her sister's sister-in-law Usha Devi for opposing the incident. Everything has happened in front of the deity of the deceased.

After a lot of scraping, Usha Devi told that everything happened in front of her eyes. She told that she was not going to Ramsharan Oraon's house. But his daughter-in-law, Gudiya Devi, forcibly took him and her husband Shambhu Oraon as well. On going there, his sister-in-law started playing and pressure was made on him to play too.

Meanwhile, on receiving information about the woman being sacrificed due to black magic, station in-charge Yogendra Kumar reached Oraon Tola on Sunday and investigated the matter.

After taking stock of the spot, station in-charge Yogendra Kumar has taken into custody five people, including two sons and two daughters-in-law of the deceased's husband Munna Oraon and Ramsharan Oraon alias Gota.

SDPO Pramod Kesari said that the information about the murder of Gudiya Devi, wife of Munna Oraon, has been received only today. Some people have been brought for questioning.

Further investigation is underway.

NEWS IN PIX



Chief Minister Hemant Soren launched the Dhad Dishom app during a Dhad Dishom conference at Ghatsila on Sunday. Health Minister Banna Gupta, Transport Minister Champai Soren and others are also seen in the picture. PNS



Villagers at stall for their medical check-up during a mega health camp organised by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs at Khunti district on Sunday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Cong demonstration against Agniveer scheme

DHANBAD : Congress to hold demonstration against Agniveer scheme on Sunday and has appointed assembly segment wise leaders who would lead the site here in different areas.

District congress chief BP Singh said that former mjunsterMannan Mallik to read demonstration at Dhanbad while state working president Jalsbwar Mahato at Baghmara and so on.

Demonstrations would be held at all six assembly segments from 10 am to 1 pm to oppose the move of union government to dilute the recruitment policy in army.

PNS

Shilpi Neha Tirkey wins Mandar, becomes youngest MLA

PNS ■ RANCHI

United Progressive Alliance (UPA) candidate, Shilpi Neha Tirkey won the Mandar State Assembly by-election and became the youngest MLA from the State. She defeated BJP candidate Gangotri Kujur by more than 23 thousand votes. Till the filing the report announcement has not been made yet.

Congress candidate Shilpi Tirkey got a total of 95062 votes. While BJP candidate Gangotri Kujur got 71 thousand 545 votes. On the other hand, AIMIM candidate Dev Kumar Dhan has been at number three with 22395 votes.

Shilpi Tirkey was consistently ahead from the beginning. She maintained an edge over BJP candidates from the first round till the last. There is an atmosphere of celebration in the party with the victory of the Congress candidate. The echo of fireworks and drums is being heard at the Congress



Congress candidate Shilpi Neha Tirkey with her father Bandhu Tirkey flashes victory sign after winning the Mandar Assembly constituency by-election, in Ranchi on Sunday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

State office. Congress leaders are expressing happiness by feeding each other sweets.

Congress party created history with the victory of Shilpa Tirkey. At present, the Congress party has become such a party in Jharkhand, which has the maxi-

mum number of women's representatives. At present, five women MLAs have reached the Jharkhand Assembly on Congress ticket. At present, Deepika Pandey Singh, Mamta Devi, Poornima Neeraj Singh and Amba Prasad are women MLAs from Congress. The number

has gone up to five with Shilpi Tirkey. With this, the Congress has a total of 18 MLAs. At the same time, Geeta Koda has become an MP by winning on a Congress ticket.

After the victory, Shilpi Tirkey has become the youngest MLA of Jharkhand. Earlier, Congress MLA from Barkagaon, Amba Prasad was the youngest MLA. Prasad's age was 31 years at the time of 2019 elections. At the same time, Shilpi Tirkey is 29 years old.

After the victory, Shilpi Tirkey said, "I will take the fight that Baba has started from the road to the house. The people of Mandar proved by supporting that truth should not be supported by lies. He said that the opposition parties conspired to implicate Baba, to which the people of Mandar have given the answer. I will complete Baba's unfinished work on priority."

Expressing happiness over UPA candidate victory,

Chief Minister, Hemant Soren said that the people of Mandar have given the answer to BJP by giving blessings to Shilpi Neha Tirkey. "It is not possible to make statements just by being narcissistic. Work has to be done on the ground too. He said that BJP has suffered a fourth defeat by taking Mandar by-election, and the party should think about Babulal Marandi. Congress was confident that Shilpi Neha would win by about 20 thousand votes. Which the people of Mander have done, he added.

Congress Legislature Party Leader and Rural Works Department Minister, Alamgir Alam said that all the conspiracy of BJP has been destroyed by the people of Mandar. <

"Mandar's former MLA and working president Bandhu Tirkey was harassed under the conspiracy, which the public has shown the door to outside in Mandar. Opponents got a befitting reply," he added.

Straight loss for BJP in fourth assembly by-poll

PNS ■ RANCHI

The result of Mandar assembly by-poll has yet again confirmed that the Hemant Soren led JMM-Congress-RJD alliance is still unbeatable in Jharkhand after Shilpi Neha Tirkey of the Congress defeated BJP's Gangotri Kujur by a margin of 23000 votes.

She is the daughter of senior politician Bandhu Tirkey. The by-election was necessitated following disqualification of Bandhu Tirkey as the MLA after he was convicted by a special CBI court in disproportionate asset case.

The Congress is naturally excited over the victory as it has increased the tally of the party in the assembly. "This is the victory of people of



Deepak Prakash

Mandar. The BJP hatched conspiracy against me and got me disqualified from the assembly. People have given a befitting reply to the BJP. People have responded their faith in the government the Hemant Soren led alliance," Bandhu Tirkey said.

The result has left the BJP disappointed as the party believed that the presence of



Gangotri Kujur

Deokumar Dhan as the candidate of Asaduddin Owaisi's party will divide Muslim vote which will pave way for the victory of the BJP. However, Muslim votes remained intact.

This is the fourth assembly by-poll which the BJP has failed to grab from the UPA alliance. In 2019 assembly poll the JMM led al-

liance pushed the BJP out of the power in Jharkhand to an extent that chief minister Raghubar Das lost the election.

Hemant Soren contested two assembly seats namely Dumka and Barhet. Later on he resigned from Dumka seat. In the ensuing by-election the JMM fielded Basant Soren, younger brother of chief minister. The BJP repeated former minister Louise Marandi. But she failed to grab Dumka.

The second by-poll took soon after when sitting Congress MLA from Bermo Rajendra Singh died. Since it was a seat of the Congress, the party fielded Jai Mangal Singh, elder son of the deceased leader. He defeated BJP's Yogeshwar Mahto Batul with a margin over

14000 votes.

Similarly, in Madhupur assembly by-election the BJP could not snatch this seat from the JMM. This seat fell vacant following the death of JMM minister Haji Hussain Ansari. The JMM offered this seat to his son Hafizul Hassan Ansari. He defeated BJP's Ganga Narayan Singh.

However, the BJP leaders refused that these by-elections were a referendum upon the performance of the state government. "In the by-election, local factors play role. This government has become extremely unpopular and it has to go sooner or later. We concede defeat in Mandar assembly. But our candidate had given a tough fight to the ruling alliance," said a BJP leader.

Bais, Munda for health services at rural doorstep

More than 60,000 people participated at health camp

PNS ■ RANCHI

A mega tribal health camp was organized in Khunti on Sunday attended by more than 60000 people. State Governor Ramesh Bais, Union Tribal Affairs minister Arjun Munda in presence of local MLAs Neelkanth Singh Munda and Koche Singh Munda, senior BJP leader and former MP Karia Munda among others inaugurated the mega health camp at local Birsra College.

Governor Bais, speaking on the occasion said that such health camp should not be confined at district headquarters, but effort should be made so that such health camps are organized at village level too so that larger population are benefitted.

The health camp named as Abua Bugin Swasthya Nawa Pahal Swasthya Mela in Mundari language means 'Ours Better Health' was a joint initiative Tribal Affairs

Ministry and the district administration.

Governor Bais said that modern facility should be provided to tribals. The Governor on the occasion also said that how sickle cell anemia has become a health hazard for tribals. He said, "Such health camps should be organized at village level at regular interval so that large population is benefitted."

The Governor on the occasion also talked about NDA government much ambitious scheme Ayushman Yojana being launched from Khunti. He said that Jharkhand is land of brave hearts and at the time when Country is celebrating 75th years of Independence the role and contribution of State freedom fighters especially Birsra Munda should be spread and taught to younger generation.

Union Tribal Affairs Minister ARjun Munda speaking on the occasion said that improvement in health services and education is way for proper development of tribal society. He said,



Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda, Khunti MLA Nilkanth Singh Munda presents a memento to Governor Ramesh Bais during a mega health camp organised by Ministry of Tribal Affairs at Khunti district on Sunday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

"There is huge gap in human development index among tribals. We can bridge the gap by improving health services and education among tribal population."

Munda said that his ministry is organizing the even to prove better health facilities to tribals. He said, "We are happy that more than 60,000 people have registered themselves for participation at the event. During

the camp people will get treatment and medical advices in several disease such as heart, sickle cell anemia, among others." Munda said that the event also features distribution of wheelchairs, and other medical equipments among the beneficiaries.

Around 200 doctors participated at the programme to provide free medical consultation to visitors.

The health camp named

Abua Bugin Swasthya Nawa Pahal Swasthya Mela is a joint initiative of the Tribal Affairs Ministry and the district administration. Some of the medical facilities which were available at health camp includes pediatrician, gynecologists, dentist, oncology, orthopedic, cardiologist, gastroenterologist, neurologist, ophthalmologist, urologist, endocrinologist, blood test, plastic surgery, stem cell therapy, TB and chest, vaccination and others.

Five selected Covid 19 warriors will be felicitated on this occasion. A short documentary will be produced on Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India Limited (ALM-CIL).

On this occasion, ALM-CIL will also distribute artificial limbs to five beneficiaries.

Two schools in the Khunti district also received computers. A panel discussion on health issues besides a presentation on Education, Skilling and Livelihood will be done by Sanjana Patro.

BAU performing better with minimum resources: Governor

PNS ■ RANCHI

Life is a struggle and those who perform better with minimum resources excell in every walk of life, said Governor Ramesh Bais on Sunday while addressing the 42nd Foundation Day Ceremony of Birsra Agricultural University (BAU). He said BAU is performing very well on research and HRD front despite acute shortage of teachers which is an example for others.

Bais said when he took over as Jharkhand Governor and convened a meeting of Vice Chancellors (VCs), he was surprised to know universities of Jharkhand were running with hardly 30 per cent of the sanctioned strength of teachers and other staff. JPSC has been instructed to expedite recruitment of university teachers, he added.

When I was a student, Bais said, products made in Germany dominated the global market, then time came for products made in Japan and China. However, time will soon come when products made in India will dominate across the globe.

The Governor urged the scientists to devise effective

strategies to ensure remunerative marketing of farmers' produce. He adviced the farmers that if they have compulsion of selling their lands for Government development projects, they must invest the compensa-tion money in land elsewhere because investment in land is fastest-growing. Money deposited in bank will not last long.

Guest of Honour of the event and former VC, BAU and IGKV, Raipur, Dr MP Pandey said universities and other institutions of higher learning should be better known for out of the box thinking and the land of en-ergy and motivation. He adviced BAU to devise ways and means for making some farm produce of Jharkhand globally competitive and this way, the dream of one district one product may be realised.

Speaking on the occasion BAU VC, Dr Onkar Nath Singh outlined the activities and achievements of the University and urged the Chancellor to use his good offices for speedy sabction of Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) and MACP to BAU. He said BAU was marching ahead with con-

tinued support of the state government and chancellor's office.

Five retired persons of BAU, aged between 85 to 95 were felicitated with memento and shawl by the Governor for their exemplary contribution to the institution and farming sector. They were Prof NC Das (93), Dr SC Prasad (87), SN Das (88), Damri Ram (92), and Pachu Mahto (95).

Amit Kumar Jha bagged first prize in the essay competition organised for non teaching staff on the topic 'World Environment Day 2022'. Amrendra Kumar Verma and Alok Kumar Jha stood second and third respectively. Consolation prize went to Bharti Kumari. Similarly, Priyanshi Pragma received first prize in the essay competition organised on the topic 'Feasibility of virtual mode of teaching during COVID 19' for students. Five farmers were also felicitated for their innovative efforts in farming.

Ten assistant professors recently recruited by JPSC for agriculture and veterinary faculties of BAU were given appointment letters by the Governor.

CIL chairman holds review meeting to increase coal supply

PNS ■ RANCHI

Chairman, Coal India Limited (CIL), Pramod Agrawal chaired a review meeting of Central Coal-fields Limited(CCL) at its headquarters in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Sunday. One of the agendas of the meeting was to increase supply of coal to the power plants, situated in various states of the country. He also reviewed the implementation of the Enterprise Resource Planning(ERP) in the company so that the stakeholders get benefitted from this new system.

Chairman cum Managing

Director (CMD), CCL, PM Prasad, CMD, CMPDIL, Manoj Kumar, Director Technical and Operations, Ram Baboo Prasad, Director Technical(P&P), SK Gomasta, Director(Finance), PK Mishra, General Managers and HoDs of various departments attended the meeting. Area General Managers were connected via video conferencing.

Agrawal reviewed the performance of the company with all Area GMs of mining areas and issued necessary instructions to increase the production in remaining period of ongoing FY Year 2022-23.He

Agrawal expressed confidence that CCL will attain the desired target of the current fiscal and asked each Area GMs to meet their targets of respective areas. He also asked the management of CCL to ensure uninterrupted supply of coal to the power plants.

Prasad briefed him on performance and related issues.

Jharkhand based subsidiary of CIL- CCL is carrying out mining activities in eight districts of Jharkhand and meeting the energy of the Nation. Mining sector contributes around 2 per cent to India's GDP.

ED charge sheet against Pooja Singhal likely soon

PNS ■ RANCHI

The Enforcement Directorate is likely to file a charge sheet against suspended IAS Pooja Singhal in the money laundering case by the first week of July. Agency sources said that scrutiny of evidence and statements is in the final stage and the charge sheet will be filed before July 7.

As per the provisions of the money laundering act, the charge sheet will have to be filed within 60 days of the arrest of the accused. In this case, the ED arrested chartered accountant Suman Singh on May 7, a day after the raid when the ED seized Rs 19.31 Crore from his residence and office. Suman Singh is alleged to be associated with Pooja Singhal and her husband Abhishek Jha. Pooja Singhal was arrested on May 11. Suman Singh is said to have confessed that most of the cash



belonged to Pooja Singhal.

The ED conducted raids in Ranchi, Kolkata, Muzaffarpur (Bihar), and Jaipur in Rajasthan against Pooja Singhal, husband Abhishek Jha, CA Suman Singh, former Khunti district employee RK Jain and a few entry operators.

The ED insiders said that other than Pooja Singhal and Suman Singh, the charge sheet is likely to be filed against Abhishek Jha who is the owner of Pulse

Hospital. There is a possibility that mining officers of some of the districts may be charge-sheeted who were suspected to be involved in money laundering through illegal mining. Pooja Singh was originally booked by the ED for committing a scam in the MNREGA scheme in the Khunti district. The probe established that she as the mining secretary also remained involved in the corruption.

It is alleged that a part of the unaccounted money she invested in the construction and development of Pulse Hospital. The ED is said to have found that her bank account as well as her husband had an unusual deposit of Rs 1.43 Crore between 2007 and 2010. She purchased as many as 13 life Insurance premiums worth over Rs 80 Lakh. See prematurely terminated Life Insurance and got around Rs 84 Lakh out of this.

INBRIEF

SAIL, MTI kickstarts Diamond Jubilee Celebrations

Management Training Institute (MTI) of SAIL kick-started its yearlong diamond jubilee celebrations showcasing extraordinary cultural talent of its employees, family members, contract workers and othersin a glittering function held at MTI Auditorium in the late evening of June 25. Director In-charge, Rourkela Steel Plant, Atanu Bhowmick was the Chief Guest on this occasion. Emphasizing on the stellar role played by MTI in honing the managerial skills of top executives of SAIL, he congratulated the MTI collective for achieving the sixty-year milestone with resounding success. He also distributed the excellence awards to the performers of MTI.

Royaloak Furniture Retail Store Inaugurated in Ranchi

India's leading Furniture Brand Royaloak today launched its first store inRanchi.Royaloak with its International range of Sofas, Recliners, Dining, Mattress, Beds, Décor and widest range of Office and Outdoor Furniture. On the occasion of the opening of their first store in, Ranchi,Chief Guest, Minister Parliamentary Affairs and Rural Development, Jharkhand AlamgirAlam andGuest of Honour, Rajesh Thakur were present.

MURgency Group acquire majority stake in Zikitza Healthcare

MURgency Group has entered into Share Purchase Agreements with Acumen Fund to acquire majority stake in Ziqitza Health Care Limited, India's leading emergency medical response and transportation (Life Support Ambulance Service) company. MURgency Group a holding company for multiple businesses based out of India, UAE and USA.

Banna boycotts mega health camp as CM not invited

PNS ■ RANCHI

State Health Minister Banna Gupta on Sunday boycotted the mega health camp organized in Khunti on alleged charges that proper protocol was not followed at the function. Gupta boycotted the function when he came to know that neither the Chief Minister was invited at the function nor his photos were put up at the official function. Gupta was in Circuit House, Khunti when he came to know that the large hoarding put behind the main dais has pictures of Governor Ramesh Bais, Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda, Health Minister (Gupta),

Khunti MLA Neelkanth Singh Munda, Torpa MLA Koche Singh Munda and Tamar MLA Vikash Singh Munda.

Gupta alleged that mega health despite being a government function was saffronize. The day-long event was organized by ministry of tribal affairs and district administration. He said, "It appears that entire event is organsies by BJP. Health department will not be part of such politics." He further said that central government is doing politics on health, which is against the federal structure. The resources of both the Center and the state are engaged in the health camp, so not call-



ing the Chief Minister is an insult to them. The Health Minister also held the Deputy Commissioner of Khunti responsible for not calling the Chief Minister. He said that the Deputy Commissioner should have taken the initiative for this. The minister also called up Arun Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary,

Health Department and asked whether the Chief Minister was called in this or not.

Asked how he came to know that the Chief Minister's photograph was not displayed on the stage, the Health Minister said he was informed about it at the Circuit House and some people even showed him the photograph of the stage. He then decided to boycott the program.

Not only Health Minister, but even Tamar MLA Vikash Singh Munda failed to turn up at the event. Vikash Munda in JMM MLA from Tamar, while two other MLAs Neelkanth Singh Munda and Koche Munda who had pic-

tures at hoarding are BJP MLAs.

A mega tribal health camp was organized in Khunti which was attended by around 50000 people. Around 200 doctors participated in the programme to provide free medical consultation to visitors.

The health camp named Abua Bugin Swasthya Nawa Pahal Swasthya Mela is a joint initiative of the Tribal Affairs ministry and the district administration.

This is not for the first time that Centre and state have loggerheads over such issue as both have differences over taking credit over different government schemes too.

Emergency took away all rights of citizens: Modi



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the imposition of the Emergency "took away right to life and personal liberty" and recalled what he described as the massive popular movement against it to defeat the "dictatorial mindset" and "re-establish democracy".

Addressing his monthly radio talk 'Man ki Baat, Modi also touched on rapid growth in space start-ups and increasing achievements in the field of sports."It was the month of June when an emergency was imposed. In that, all the rights were taken away from the citizens of the country," he said "One amongst those rights was

the 'Right to Life and Personal Liberty' provided to all Indians under Article 21 of the Constitution.

At that time an attempt was made to crush the democracy of India", said the Prime Minister. He said as people fought back, the country's courts, every Constitutional institution and the press were put under control.

"The condition of censorship was such that nothing could be printed without approval. I remember when famous singer Kishore Kumar refused to applaud the Government, he was banned. His entry on the radio was done away with.

"But even after many attempts, thousands of arrests, and atrocities on lakhs of people, the faith of the people of India in democracy did not shake... not at all! For us, the people of India, the sanskars of democracy which we have been

carrying on for centuries; the democratic spirit which is in our veins, finally won", he said.

The people of India got rid of the emergency and "re-established democracy in a democratic way", Modi said. "It is difficult to find such an example of defeating a dictatorial mindset, a dictatorial tendency in a democratic way, in the whole world", said the Prime Minister.

Turning to progress in the space sector, Modi said many big feats related to the space sector have been accomplished in our country.

One of these achievements of the country, he said, has been the "creation of an agency named In-Space... an agency that is promoting new opportunities in the space sector for the private sector of India."

This beginning has especially attracted the youth of our country, he said."Till a few years ago, in our country, in the

space sector, no one even thought about start-ups. Today their number is more than a hundred", he said giving an example of Chennai and Hyderabad which have two start-ups - Agnikul and Skyroot.

"These start-ups are developing launch vehicles that will take small payloads into space. Through this, the cost of Space Launching is estimated to come down significantly.

Similarly, Dhruva Space, another Start-Up of Hyderabad, is working on High Technology Solar Panels for Satellite Deployer and Satellites", said Prime Minister.

He also mentioned Tanveer Ahmed of Digantara, another space start-up that is trying to map waste in space.

"I have also given him a challenge that they should evolve work technology, which can solve the problem of waste in space. Both Digantara and

Dhruva Space are going to make their first launch from ISRO's launch vehicle on the 30th of June", he said.

Similarly, Neha, the founder of Astrome, a space start-up based in Bangalore, is also working such flat antennas which will not only be small, but their cost will also be very low. Demand for this technology can be, Modi said would be all over the world.

Modi said he also met Tanvi Patel, a school student of Mehsana, "working on a very small satellite, which is going to be launched in space in the next few months."

The Prime Minister said like Tanvi, about 750 school students in the country are working on 75 such satellites in the Amrit Mahotsav, and "it is also a matter of joy that, most of these students are from small towns of the country."

Modi turned on to progress in sports in the country and

mentioned that Country was holding Chess Olympiad in Chennai from July 28 with the participation of 180 countries.

He praised Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra for "setting new records of success", winning the silver at Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland and the country the gold in Kuortane Games.

"In the recently held Khelo India Youth Games too, our players set many records. You would love to know that a total of 12 records have been broken in these games - not only that, 11 records have been registered in the names of female players. M. Martina Devi of Manipur has made eight records in weightlifting", he said.

Similarly, Sanjana, Sonakshi and Bhavna have also made different records."With their hard work, these players have proven how much India's prestige is going to rise in the international sports arena in

the coming times, he said.

Prime Minister specifically praised sportspersons who made big though coming from low economic backgrounds and small towns.

Modi praised woman cricketer Mithali Raj who retired from the game recently. The successful efforts related to 'waste to wealth' was what Modi spoke about next in his radio talk.

"One such example is that of Aizwal, the capital of Mizoram. There is a beautiful river 'Chitte Lui' in Aizwal, its banks were full of plastic and polythene waste.

"The organization working to save the river, decided to build a road using this polythene, that is, the waste that came out of the river. "From that, in a village in Mizoram, the state's first plastic road was built... that is cleanliness and development as well", he said.

Govt playing with future of youth, should withdraw Agnipath: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up its attack on Government over the 'Agnipath' scheme, the Congress on Sunday said Modi Government is playing with the future of the youth by bringing in the new military recruitment plan. The party asked Government to withdraw this "Tughlaqi" decision.

Twenty senior Congress leaders, including former Union Ministers and spokespersons, addressed press conferences titled 'Agnipath ki Baat: Yuwaon se Vishwasghaat' in as many cities and demanded the withdrawal of the scheme, citing risk to national security and discontent among the youth.

The party said it will also hold a nationwide protest in every assembly constituency against this "anti-youth and anti-national" scheme "bull-dozed through without discussion". Addressing a press conference in the national

Capital, Congress spokesperson Shakti sinh Gohil said the Congress is standing with the youth and this "Tughlaqi decision" should be withdrawn immediately. "At a time when China has entered our borders... this ('Agnipath' scheme) is like playing with national security," Gohil said.

"I demand from the prime minister that 'Agnipath' be withdrawn and all those ministers or BJP spokespersons who say that the 'Agnipath' scheme is good, they should get their sons and daughters recruited under the 'Agnipath' scheme," he said.

Gohil also demanded an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi over BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya's remarks apparently suggesting that he will give priority to 'Agniveers' for security jobs at his party office. "The leader who said that Agniveers will be employed in BJP offices as guards should be sacked by the prime minister and the PM

must apologise," Gohil said.

Addressing a press conference at the PCC headquarters in Jaipur, Congress Rajya Sabha MP from Haryana Deepender Singh Hooda also attacked the Centre over the 'Agnipath' scheme and called the government a "copycat" for importing ideas from foreign nations to draft policies.

"The Government has adopted the attitude of a 'Nakalchi Bandar (copycat)' but this is Hindustan. Sometimes it gives the example of America in the context of agriculture laws and at other times talks about Israel in reference to military service," he said.

Several parts of the country witnessed protests after the announcement of the 'Agnipath' scheme on June 14. Others who address the Press conferences were at Shimla by Alok Sharma; Dehradun - Manvendra Singh; Chandigarh - Ranjeet Ranjan, MP; Jaipur - Deepender Singh Hooda, MP;



Ahmedabad: Alka Lamba; Mumbai - Supriya Shrinete; Bengaluru, former HRD Minister MM. Pallam Raju; Chennai - Gaurav Gogoi, MP; Hyderabad - Naseer Hussain, MP.

The Congress has demanded a rollback of the scheme. Earlier a seven-member Congress delegation led by Leader of Opposition (LoP) and including two Chief Ministers met President Ram Nath Kovind and submitted a memorandum with two demands in connection with the army recruitment scheme 'Agnipath' and police action during Congress' protest.

Progress made in deliberations on tri-services' theaterisation plan: IAF

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Definite progress has been made in ongoing deliberations for the theaterisation plan and the Indian Air Force (IAF) remains fully committed to the tri-services integration for enhancing comprehensive national combat power, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari said on Sunday.

In an interview to PTI, the Chief of Air Staff said the IAF is hopeful that the final structures, as and when they come out, would be potent, robust and capable of tackling the existent and future threats.

"The process of theaterisation of the Indian Armed forces is at a deliberation stage. There are a few issues which are being discussed and definite progress has been made in this aspect," he said.

As per the plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity

looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory under an operational commander.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands. Initially, a plan was firm up for the creation of an Air Defence Command and Maritime Theatre Command.

"While the deliberations are ongoing, we are hopeful that the final structures, as and when formed, would be potent, robust and capable of tackling the existent and future threats," the Chief of Air Staff said. "Therefore, the joint structures that we may form shall be specific

to our environment, adequately deliberated and war-gamed to clearly annunciate tasks and roles of each service," he said. Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said the three services are on the "same page" when it comes to these broad aspects of formulation of joint structures. "The IAF remains fully committed to integration

that brings about transformation and enhancement of the comprehensive national combat power," he said.

"We are sanguine that the armed forces will meet the aspirations of the nation and arrive at a model that is most effective and is future ready," the IAF Chief added.

He said the IAF is committed to joint operational planning based on principles of achieving enhanced combat power and efficiency in operations of armed forces.

The Chief of Air Staff was asked about the perception that the IAF is not very keen on the theatreisation initiative. The theatre commands are being planned to integrate the capabilities of the three services and to ensure optimal utilisation of their resources.

The Department of Military Affairs headed by India's first Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat last year had asked all the three services to carry out independent stud-



ies on the theatreisation plan for its rollout. The deliberations on the theatreisation plan slowed down a bit following the death of Gen Rawat in a helicopter crash in December last.

"My vision for the IAF is to build on the strong foundations of our service and make it further effective and ever ready to protect the the sovereignty of our nation," the IAF chief said, in replying to a separate question.

"We aim to achieve this through enhancement of entire spectrum of our operational capabilities, induction of modern technology and by ensuring better serviceability and availability of our assets," he said. Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said the coming years would demand more

Senior Opp leaders likely to accompany Yashwant when he files nomination

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Opposition leaders, including Sharad Pawar, Sharad Yadav and others, are likely to accompany their Presidential candidate Yashwant Sinha when he files his nomination on Monday. The NDA's nominee Draupadi Murmu filed her nominations last week.

Besides Pawar, representatives from other political parties such as also TMC, SP, RJD, Congress and others are likely to join Sinha.

On Sunday, Sinha said the July 18 Presidential election is much more than a personal contest and is a step towards resisting the authoritarian

streak of the Government. Sinha said he was not in any 'dharma sankat' over not getting the support of his son, Jayant Sinha, a BJP MP. " He follows his 'Raj Dharma', I will follow my 'Rashtra Dharma', he said.

Sinha has promised to raise his voice for farmers, workers, unemployed youth, women and all marginalised sections of society if he wins the election.

In a letter to Opposition parties Sinha thanked them for choosing him unanimously as their common presidential candidate and assured them that he will conscientiously uphold, without fear or favour, the basic values and guiding ideals of the Constitution.

Cong refutes BJP's charges that Sonia was behind Teesta's campaigns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday termed "baseless" the BJP's allegations that AICC president Sonia Gandhi was behind activist Teesta Setalvad's campaign against then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi over the 2002 riots in the state, and said the charges were "in direct contempt of" the Supreme Court's ruling.

The opposition party's reaction came a day after BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra alleged at a press conference that Congress-led UPA government, especially its education ministry, had given Rs 1.4 crore to an NGO run by Setalvad, and this money was used to run a campaign against

Modi and also to "defame" India. "She (Setalvad) was not alone. Who was the driving force? Sonia Gandhi and the Congress party," he had said. Reacting to remarks, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said on Twitter, "The charge by BJP spokespersons that Teesta Setalvad acted at the behest of Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi is wholly bogus and baseless."

"The Congress party condemns these allegations most forcefully. These allegations are in direct contempt of Supreme Court's judgment," Singhvi said. In its order on Friday, the Supreme Court dismissed a petition challenging clean chit given by Special Investigation Team (SIT) to Modi and others in 2002 post-Godhra riots.

EC makes fresh push for power to de-register parties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid an ongoing clean-up exercise to identify unrecognized parties involved in corrupt practices, the Election Commission has made a renewed push to get powers to de-register political parties.

The election law provides the poll panel power to register an association of people as a political party but does not give it the authority to de-register.

At a recent interaction with the Union Legislative Secretary, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar is learned to have pushed for this power to withdraw the registration of political parties.

The poll panel had been writing to the government to grant it power under the Representation of the People Act to de-register a political party on certain grounds. The

poll panel believes that many political parties get registered but never contest elections. Such parties exist only on paper. The possibility of forming political parties with an eye on availing the benefit of income tax exemption also cannot be ruled out, the Election Commission (EC) feels.

A senior official said the Commission which has the power to register political parties is also empowered to de-register in appropriate cases. He said adequate safeguards can be put in place while giving EC this authority.

Under the constitution, the Election Commission is required to function independently and ensure free and fair elections. An inquiry into non-compliance with the conditions for the grant of registration might involve the Commission in matters of a political nature and could mean



monitoring by the Commission of the political activities, programmes and ideologies of political parties. This, EC feels, is perhaps the reason why it has not been given the power to cancel the registration of a political party.

The poll body had recently deleted from its register a total of 198 registered unrecognized political parties from its register as they were found to be "non-existent" during a verification exercise aimed at

cleaning up the system. In a recent statement, the poll panel had said that a reference has also been sent to the Department of Revenue for necessary legal and criminal actions against three such parties involved in serious financial impropriety.

There are nearly 2,800 registered unrecognized political parties in India. Besides, eight parties are recognised as national parties and over 50 as recognised state parties.

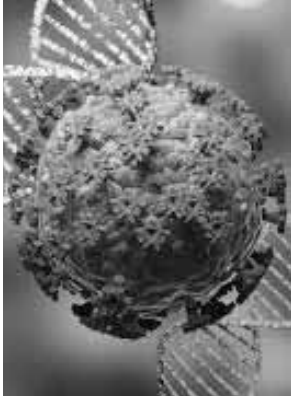
'Comorbid women had higher death risks in Covid'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Young women with co-morbidities like chronic kidney disease (CKD), diabetes, and hypertension had a higher risk of death due to Covid-19 than males during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, according to a study by a team of researchers from Delhi-based Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

The study highlights how co-morbidities like diabetes and hypertension weaken the immune system, making it incapable to fight the virus. It was conducted on 2,586 Covid-19 patients who were admitted to the hospital from April 8 to October 4, 2020.

The patients were divided into two categories: those aged between 18-59 years; and those above 60 years of age. The team observed the association of diabetes, hypertension or high blood pressure, and CKD on the prognosis and mortality of Covid infected hospitalised



patients. The conditions have been, from the beginning of the pandemic, associated with the progression of Covid disease to the severity and higher mortality risk. These have also been linked with prolonging the recovery period.

The findings, published in the journal Molecular and Cellular Biochemistry, showed that patients with CKD were the most prone to severity as well as mortality, followed by high blood pressure and dia-

betes. Compared to the elderly patients with these comorbidities, the severity of Covid infection, as well as mortality, was found to be much higher in younger patients. Many studies have reported males to be at higher risk of infection than females.

In this study, although the number of Covid admitted male patients (69.6 percent) was more than twice the number of females (30.4 percent), the risk of severity of infection and mortality was found to be higher amongst the females.

This is even after having the same comorbid conditions, except for the hypertensive patients, the researchers said.

According to Dr Rashmi Rana, author and consultant, Department of Research at the hospital, "our study also found that females were relatively at higher risk of mortality as compared to males having same comorbid conditions except for hypertension patients."

Our study showed the risk

of the severity of Covid-19 infection in younger patients with underlying comorbidities were found to be relatively at higher risk of severity of disease as well as mortality compared to elderly patients with similar underlying conditions, added Dr Vivek Ranjan, co-author, and Chairperson at the hospital's Department of Blood Transfusion.

Out of the 2,586 patients, 779 (30.1 percent) needed ICU admission, whereas 1,807 (69.9 percent) did not require it. About 2,269 (87.7 percent) recovered, while 317 (12.3 percent) patients died.

"On comparing the impact of multiple comorbidities with the severity of Covid-19 infection, it was found that the presence of comorbidity poses a greater risk of ICU admission.

As the number of comorbidities increases, the risk of severity of Covid19 infection also increases significantly," said Dr D.S. Rana, co-author and Chairperson, Department of Renal Sciences.

After 3 decades, BHU identifies Amphiregulin that helps in identifying asymptomatic Kala Azar patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After three decades of intensive research aiming to help better management of Kala Azar, scientists at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) have identified Amphiregulin — a biomarker — that helps in identifying asymptomatic patients suffering from the disease, also called Visceral leishmaniasis (VL).

VL is fatal and can cause death. It can also cause severe bleeding, infection, and facial disfigurement. People living in India, Ethiopia, Brazil, Sudan, and Bangladesh are vulnerable to it. India has missed deadlines thrice to eliminate this neglected Tropical Disease.

According to BHU scientist, Dr. Rajeev Kumar, the research team carried out a transcriptomic study on blood

samples collected from three groups of persons (asymptomatic Kala Azar patients, Kala Azar patients, and healthy individuals) living in the area of influence of Kala Azar, and identified Amphiregulin — a biomarker — that helps in identifying asymptomatic individuals.

Amphiregulin not only inhibits inflammation and tissue damage but can also help in differentiating individuals with active disease. According to Dr Siddhartha Shankar, Senior Research Fellow, who led the study under the guidance of Prof. Shyam Sundar, Distinguished Professor, Department of Medicine, Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS)-BHU, and Dr. Rajeev Kumar, CEMS, IMS-BHU, symptoms includes irregular fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anemia. The disease spreads easily as it remains asymptomatic

in the early stage, and detecting it has so far been costly and very complex.

However, the new research will make it much easier. This internationally acclaimed research by Indian scientists has been published in the latest issue of 'Clinical and Translational Immunology' research journal.

In India, Kala Azar is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected 'Phlebotomus argentipes' sandfly. The size of these sandflies are a quarter of that of an average mosquito. Their body length is from 1.5 mm to 3.5 mm. Most cases occur in Brazil, East Africa and India. An estimated 50,000 to 90,000 new cases are reported annually worldwide, of which only 25 to 45 per cent are reported to the WHO.

"Asymptomatic individuals do not show any symptoms of the disease but carry the parasite in their body which can

help in the spread of Kala Azar. Therefore this research is a very interesting discovery in the field of Kala Azar research, especially in light of the eradication programme of the government.

BHU scientists feel that the study could be globally acceptable and is reliable and cost-effective. Prof. Shyam Sundar, the country's leading scientist who has been working in the field of Kala Azar research for the last three decades, said, "We are taking forward our research work keeping in mind the Kala Azar eradication programme of the government, and this discovery is a big step in that direction."

Adult sandflies are hairy, with straight wings that are small and large in proportion. It takes birth from an egg and the larva grows into an adult through the stage of the pupa. This entire cycle takes about a month.

Flood situation grim in Assam, over 25 L still hit; toll at 121

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam continued to remain critical on Sunday as the toll touched 121 with more than 25 lakh people still reeling under the deluge, although water level has started receding from some areas.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, during the day, visited Silchar in Cachar district, which is among the worst-affected areas, and assessed the damage caused by flood waters in the Barak valley city.

According to latest updates by Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), over 25 lakh people are still facing difficulties in 27 flood-hit districts of the state, comprising 79 revenue circles and 2,894 villages. As many as 2.33 lakh have taken shelter in 637 relief camps of the northeastern state, which had been battling floods and landslides for the past two weeks.

Relief materials were being distributed to affected popula-



tions that haven't put up at the shelter camps through 259 distribution centres or points that have been opened temporarily, the ASDMA bulletin said.

NDRF had been helping the district administration in safe evacuation of people from affected areas apart from the state forces like SDRF, Fire & Emergency Services, the police

and ASDMA volunteers. So far, 67,237 people have been moved to safety by the various agencies, the bulletin said. Four more persons died on Saturday in the floods in different parts of Assam, raising this year's toll in the state due to flood and landslides to 121. Fresh landslides were reported from Kamrup Metropolitan district, the ASDMA said. During

the last 24 hours, the state experienced an average rainfall of 7 mm. Since March 1, the state recorded 1,891.90 mm rainfall.

As per Central Water Commission bulletin, Kopili river at Dharamtul in Nagaon, the Barak at BP Ghat in Karimganj and AP Ghat in Cachar, and its tributary Kushiya at Karimganj town are above danger levels.

TMC played the Goa game in Tripura says Left Front

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Hours after the Tripura by-election results the Left Front and Congress on Sunday attacked the Trinamool Congress for working as the real "vote katua" party that was working with the purpose of helping the BJP.

Showing how the people of Tripura had rejected the TMC by relegating it to the fourth position in all the four Assembly constituencies where Assembly by election results were declared on Sunday, senior CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakrabarty said "the election results only show the real acceptability of the TMC in Tripura and the real intention of their leaders in going to that State with all the camera focus behind them ... they are the real vote cutters."

While in all the four seats both the CPI(M) and the TMC ended winning no seats, the Left managed to retain the second place in two seats

whereas the TMC was pushed to the fourth slot in all the four seats.

Another State committee leader said "it is quite clear why the BJP was continuously targeting the TMC ... this is because they wanted to shift the focus on that party as the real challenger so as to cut the opposition votes ... TMC will make no presence in Tripura in the next year's Assembly elections... they are the appointed agents of the BJP to spoil the opposition unity ... as they did in Goa so they are doing in Tripura ... till a few weeks ago their biggest leaders like Abhishek Banerjee was coming to Tripura ... he has fulfilled his goal ... now the BJP Government will not send ED, CBI to their houses for a few weeks." Saying that in by-elections people generally vote in fear in States like Tripura, CPI(M)'s Rabin Deb said "a change is inevitable in that State and the BJP Government is bound to go in 2023."

The TMC leadership promptly hit back to the Left attack saying LF was a spent force and that they existed only on sign boards. "We accept that we are on the fourth spot ... but which child grows into a strongman soon after birth ... We have started our journey and will win Tripura ... But Tripura has rejected the Left and will never bring them back," said senior party leader JP Mullick.

Meanwhile, stray violence marked the Sunday's Bengal civic by-elections and Siliguri sub-divisional board polls with about 78 percent voters exercising their franchise.

While about 78 percent voters cast their votes in Siliguri, 69% and 72% of voters voted in South and North Dum Dum. At Bhatpara the constituency of BJP-turned-TMC MP Arjun Singh 74 percent voters cast their votes amid complaints of massive rigging. At Jhalada in Purulia district and Panihati in North

24 Parganas 80 percent and 56 percent voters exercised their franchise respectively.

In Siliguri Sub-divisional board elections about 78 percent voters cast their votes amid reports of violence near Phansidawa, Motabari and Naxalbari Assembly areas.

While State Election Commissioner Sourav Das said that the polls were nearly peaceful with about reports of some disturbance coming from 5-6 places only the Left and the BJP complained there was rampant rigging in these areas.

"It is undecclared Emergency going on in Bengal ... let alone the voters, here no candidate is safe ... the Sunday's violence has clearly shown that," State BJP president Sukanto Majumdar said. TMC MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy however said that there was no violence adding "the losers will have to show some excuse for their defeat ... this is the same excuse they are putting forward for the people."

Akhilesh, Azam allege rigging, use of unfair means in elections

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and senior party leader Azam Khan alleged large-scale rigging and use of unfair means in the Azamgarh and Rampur bypolls. Khan demanded that the elections be conducted under the watchful eye of a global body such as the International Court of Justice for a free and fair democratic process.

Former CM Akhilesh Yadav alleged that the BJP won with deceit. "The Samajwadi Party contested the elections in Rampur and Azamgarh with full strength and the electorate in both the constituencies were favourably inclined towards the party. However,

nothing worked as the voters were intimidated and prevented from casting their votes. A large number of SP workers and polling agents were illegally detained at police stations," Yadav alleged.

Yadav said that at a polling booth in Rampur with 900 Muslim votes, only six votes were cast while at another booth with 500 Muslim votes, only one vote was cast.

"This is a mockery of elections and democracy. By no stretch of imagination this can be termed as an election where the democracy has been mutilated and voters shown contempt," the SP chief alleged.

Questioning the celebration of victory in Rampur and Azamgarh by Chief Minister



Yogi Adityanath, the SP chief said: "The electorate of Rampur and Azamgarh are at their wits' end over the celebration of victory by the BJP and its rank and file. People of

UP will give a befitting lesson to the arrogance of the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections."

The SP chief alleged that the BJP's double-engine government has ruined millions

of poor people who are staring at a bleak future. He also alleged that the development process in the state has come to a grinding halt since the BJP came to power in 2017.

Meanwhile, Azam Khan claimed that the SP had not lost but won by a margin of over 2.5 lakh votes. Addressing a meeting of party workers at the district office after the results were announced on Sunday, Khan alleged rigging in the election and said the state machinery was misused and voters were prevented from exercising their franchise. "Let there be free and fair elections; if we lose, I will quit electoral politics forever. We are happy in our defeat and I know that the BJP is not happy with its victory as it has not been achieved by fair means. The SP was also in power and conducted the elections but never indulged in such vendetta against our political rivals," the SP leader

said.

"Let the record of the previous Lok Sabha and assembly elections be examined. As per the voting patterns and the support base of the Samajwadi Party and votes used to be polled by it will show that we have won the elections by at least 2.5 lakh votes. We lost as the supporters of the SP were prevented from casting their votes. The voters were assaulted, intimidated and unlawfully detained in police stations on the day of polling," Khan said.

Targeting the media, he said the fourth estate failed to discharge its duty. He also trained his guns at the police and said the cops responsible for maintaining law and order have been targeting the people

of Rampur with specific religious identity for the last many years. "I am very disappointed by the conduct of the police as we are made to feel like foreigners in our own home land. After partition of India in 1947, a miniscule population went to Pakistan while a huge number of people stayed back," Khan said.

"The way polls were conducted in Rampur and Azamgarh was not an election but a mockery of democracy. Only one community was targeted and detained in police stations.

Local people in Rampur and Azamgarh were targeted by the police on the basis of their religious identity and were framed in false cases," Khan alleged.

Suspended 'flamboyant' cop to take plunge in Kashmir electoral politics

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After serving the Police Department for over 22 long years, Basant Rath, a 50 year old 'flamboyant' suspended IPS officer of 2000 batch, Sunday announced his decision to 'permanently' hang his uniform before taking a plunge in the electoral politics of Kashmir.

He is often seen in 'black dress' and seldom wore uniform after locking horns with his superior officers.

Rath, who remained very active on his twitter timeline and posted 'cryptic' messages which triggered debates and invited wrath of netizens, once again chose the platform where he shared his wish list to resign from the Indian Police Service.

He wrote, 'Politics is a noble profession' while uploading a signed copy of his resignation letter. "I wish to resign from the Indian Police Service in order to be able to participate in electoral politics. "Please consider this letter as my request for resignation/

voluntary retirement and process it accordingly ...,"

The letter, dated June 25, 2022, was addressed to the Chief Secretary, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and was also marked to The Director General of Police, J&K and he Commandant General Home Guard and SDRF.

Hours before uploading his resignation letter, Rath had dropped clear hints claiming he wanted to join electoral politics. "If I ever join a political party, it will be BJP. If I ever contest an election, it will be from Kashmir. If I ever join politics, it will be before March 6, 2024.

Rath attracted attention of the local media and netizens, especially from Kashmir valley during his stint as IG, Traffic in Jammu and Kashmir. He was also running a book club and distributed books, free of cost to the needy students and aspirants studying for the Union Public Service examination. In July 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs had placed him under suspension

in connection with repeated instances of gross misconduct and misbehaviour.

Earlier, in the last week of June 2020, Rath had filed a written complaint, in his personal capacity and not as a policeman, against Jammu and Kashmir police Chief, Dilbagh Singh, stating that Singh poses a threat to his safety and reputation.

While serving the department he adopted 'unorthodox' means and also invited public wrath while he went around kicking motorbikes parked on the roadside. In March 2020, the government had taken serious note of another act of indiscipline when he forcibly shifted kashmiri students, stranded at a quarantine centre in Jammu, to a nearby hotel in his official vehicle.

In November 2018, he was shunted out of the traffic department shortly after a spat with the then Mayor of Srinagar Municipal Corporation, Junaid Azim Mattu on a social media platform.

Yogi's chopper makes emergency landing following bird hit



PNS ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's helicopter had to make an emergency landing at the police lines in Varanasi just a few minutes after take-off on Sunday.

After his two-day visit to Varanasi, Yogi was leaving for Sultanpur to pay tributes to former MLA Surya Bhan Singh but the helicopter had to make an emergency landing follow-

ing a bird hit.

According to Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agrawal, the chopper was hit by a bird and the pilot, in a bid to avoid any problem, decided to make the emergency landing in Varanasi. District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma said the CM and other staff were safe and they left for Lucknow from a state plane.

After the incident, the CM's proposed visit to Sultanpur was postponed and

he returned to the circuit house before leaving for the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport in Babatpur. There he waited for some time for the state plane to arrive. Around 11 am, the CM left for Lucknow.

Earlier, the local ministers, public representatives and other officers made emergency arrangements at the police lines and the CM was provided a security cover first on his way to the circuit house and then to the airport.

Farmer shot dead in Muzaffarnagar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational incident, a farmer was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Muzaffarnagar late on Saturday night. On being informed, the kin of the deceased and local villagers reached the spot and blocked the Meerut-Shamli road by placing the body there. They demanded the arrest of the killers. The police also reached the place and assured the protesters that the accused would be arrested soon. The protesters lifted the blockade after which the body was sent for autopsy.

Reports said that 43-year-old farmer Satendra alias Pappu, who was a resident of village Fugana under Fugana police station area of Muzaffarnagar, had gone to the field late on Saturday night. When Satendra did not return home, his family members went out to search for him. In the meantime, they were informed that Satendra

had been shot dead.

SP (Rural) Atul Kumar Srivastava pacified the protesters by assuring them that the accused would be arrested soon. The police registered a case on the complaint of Satendra's family and took two people into custody.

Satendra's elder brother said he got information about the incident and by the time he reached the scene, Satendra had already succumbed.

According to the SP, the family members suspected that Satendra might have been killed over enmity with some local villagers.

Meanwhile, a boy was fatally knocked down by a truck near Bairauna village of Khukhundu police station area in Deoria on Saturday evening.

In the incident, the villagers set fire to the truck. The villagers then created a ruckus, placing the body on the road. There was also a scuffle between the police and villagers.



Fishermen spread fishing nets while sailing in the Hooghly river, in Nadia on Sunday

PTI

Yogi: Win in Rampur, Azamgarh a clear message by the people

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Hailing the Bharatiya Janata Party's bypoll victory in Rampur and Azamgarh Lok Sabha constituencies, considered to be the stronghold of the Samajwadi Party, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Sunday that the public has given a clear message to 'parivarvadis', casteist and communal elements.

Congratulating the BJP candidates and workers, Yogi said, "The victory in the bypolls has determined the optimistic fate of the 2024 general elections. People have shown their trust in the double-engine government under the leadership of PM Modi. Good governance and public welfare policies have overthrown corruption, hooligan-

ism and terrorism."

"The victory of BJP candidate Ghanshayam Singh Lodhi in Rampur and that of Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' in Azamgarh has affirmed BJP's positive and development-oriented approach which ensures the uplift of every section of the society without any discrimination," Yogi said.

"The win testifies the good governance of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the tireless efforts as well as hard work of dedicated party workers have produced incredible results in such challenging places. I express my deepest gratitude to the people of Rampur and Azamgarh for believing in the BJP," he added.

Highlighting the success of the BJP in winning public support, Yogi said, "After the



thumping victory in assembly elections, the BJP won massive seats in the UP Legislative Council elections, and now the party has fared exceptionally well in Azamgarh and Rampur. Double engine has fetched double win."

"The BJP will continue to

work under PM Modi's able leadership on the path of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas aur Sabka Vishwas'.

This is the reason people have rejected negative forces with destructive and dynastic approach," he added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Daggers drawn

The Maharashtra crisis deepens while the Thackeray heir and his dissenters fight for Balasaheb's legacy

The political drama in Maharashtra is getting interesting every passing hour. The fear, however, is that it can become dirty in no time. In fact, Shiv Sena president and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's loyalists have already begun protesting against rebel Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde and his followers. The banners of rebels have been defaced, stones hurled at some places and an MLA's office has been vandalised in Pune. It seems that Chief Minister Thackeray, having overcome the initial shock of such a massive revolt, has decided to dig his heels in. It is not the first time that the party has suffered dissidence to a noticeable extent. In December 1991, Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray's confidant Chhagan Bhujbal sought to split the party. Bhujbal, who belongs to other backward classes or OBC, might have thought of riding the Mandal wave, but the party remained intact. The revolt by Narayan Rane in 2005 also didn't break the party; ditto Raj Thackeray's rebellion a little while later. That was then; Bal Thackeray, who liked to be compared with the tiger, was alive and kicking. But political commentators are watching with great anticipation if his son, Uddhav, would be able to weather the raging storm? He is not believed to be aggressive as his father or even his own cousin Raj. He has often been portrayed as a gentler version of a typical Shiv Sena leader with an interest in wildlife

photography. Would he be able to take on street fighters like Eknath Shinde who have risen through the ranks?

Anticipation is accompanied with fear, for Shiv Sena leaders are not known for patience and tolerance of their adversaries' views. Thankfully, the semblance of normal party functioning is being maintained. So, on Saturday, Uddhav Thackeray chaired a meeting of the party national executive, attended by his partisans. Unsurprisingly, they authorised him to take all party decisions. The meeting also asserted that only the Shiv Sena (that is, the group under Uddhav Thackeray) can use the name of Balasaheb Thackeray. It was also decided to serve disqualification notices to 16 rebel MLAs on the ground that they did not attend a party meeting Uddhav had called earlier in the week. Meanwhile, Shinde's supporters are crying foul, arguing that Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal, an NCP leader, is not qualified to act against the 16 MLAs as there is a petition seeking his removal. The rebels are reportedly seeking legal opinion. Shinde, meanwhile, has presented himself as a Hindutva warrior. In a tweet, he urged the Shiv Sainiks to "understand MVA's plan". He claims to be "fighting a battle with a dragon to free the Shiv Sena and Shiv Sainiks from its clutches". Colourful imagery indeed, but the point is that Uddhav Thackeray is still the Chief Minister and therefore has control over the administration and police. One only hopes that the internecine battle within the Sena doesn't get nastier.

PICTALK



Castle Elmau and surroundings during the G7 summit in Kruen, near Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

AP

First among equals

There's nothing exciting about the Prez poll, at least not till the eve of the 2024 LS election

The process of electing the 16th President of India has begun. The election is scheduled for July 18 and the counting of votes will take place on July 21. Exactly a month earlier, Yashwant Sinha, the Opposition's unanimous choice, filed his papers. The choice of the ruling BJP and its allies is Droupadi Murmu. Unlike other elections, the presidential election is routine and there's nothing exciting about it. Generally, the ruling party with a majority in the Lower House and sufficient seats in the Upper gets its candidate elected. The Opposition candidate is more of positioning to tell all that the next President was not a consensus choice. Though the BJP is a little short on the numbers, its candidate is likely to sail through as BJD and others have pledged support to Murmu. The President is indirectly elected by an electoral college consisting of MPs and MLAs. The electoral college comprises 776 MPs and 4,123 MLAs who would be voting to elect the President. Total votes for UPA candidate (including the support of non-UPA parties) are 4,02,682 which is 37.31 per cent of total votes while the votes for NDA candidates with outside support are 6,13,849 or 56.82 per cent.

Thus the outcome of the election is obvious. Though often the office of President is seen as politically insignificant, it is not. The President's role gets pronounced at the time of the formation of a new Government, especially when no party has a clear mandate. For this reason, the party in power never takes it lightly and settles for the most trusted person. Murmu is a former Jharkhand Governor, a two-term MLA from Odisha and served as Minister in the BJP-BJD coalition Government. Sinha has had an illustrious political career and a clear political ideology; he served as Finance Minister in the Vajpayee Government. But it is the numbers and not merit that would decide the President and Murmu's credentials as a tribal lady are unbeatable. What is more, Murmu is getting a lot of support from non-NDA parties and so is likely to win hands down. But her moment of truth would come in 2024 when she would be instrumental in the formation of a new Government at the Centre.



India at G7 Summit & its Ukraine stand

It is quite clear that the western nations will make efforts to convince India to change its stance on Russia, which is a delicate diplomatic challenge



SIMRAN SODHI

The upcoming G7 Summit in Germany will see global leaders get together to discuss several issues. The one that will dominate the deliberations is likely the Ukraine invasion, sanctions on Russia and how the world, the western world, should deal with defiant Russian President Vladimir Putin. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be there, as India, Indonesia, South Africa and Senegal have been invited as special guests. According to a report in *Bloomberg*, Germany was in two minds as to whether to extend the invitation to India; the reservation being that India has not condemned Russia for its invasion and also abstained from the United Nations Resolutions censuring Russia. But pragmatism won the day and India was extended the invitation. But it remains quite clear that in the luxury resort of Schloss Elmau in the Bavarian Alps, where the Summit will take place, the western nations will make efforts to convince India to change its stance on Russia.

For India and Modi, it will present a delicate diplomatic challenge. Of course, India today wants to be a part of the global leadership but it has no intentions of breaking ties with old and tested allies, Russia being the best example. The problem also is that not only has India not condemned Russian actions in Ukraine, it continues to buy oil at discounted rates from it and is also working out an alternative payment system to keep this going. The United States and Europe, who have been leading the charge against Russia, have expressed their frustrations but, of late, the approach has been more nuanced in public with the western world trying to show an understanding of India's position.

Indications are clear that while India will stick to its stand, so will the western world. Earlier this year, while visiting Germany, Modi called on both Russia and Ukraine to end the fighting, saying: "We believe that no party can emerge victorious



in this war." Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra also said that India has always maintained that "there should be cessation of hostilities in Ukraine and the path to resolution goes through diplomacy and dialogue". India is likely to toe this line during the G7 Summit. But, behind closed doors, the G7 intends to raise the pressure on India.

So far, one has to admit that India has maintained its 'neutrality' on the Ukraine war with success. The Quad, a grouping of the US, Japan, India and Australia which initially seemed to be tested by the Ukraine crisis with three members vocally critiquing Russia and India being the lone neutral voice, seems to have reconciled to the in-house differences. Challenges in the Indo-Pacific are a common cause for Quad and even as the Ukraine war presents a new challenge, reality stares hard in the shape of China. All four need one another to counter the dragon's ever-expanding global footprint. Also, for India, China is another worrisome factor that explains its stand on Russia. In the regional dynamics, Russia's embrace of China is worrisome and a

“THE SUMMIT WILL TEST INDIA NOT ONLY IN HOW IT PUTS FORWARD ITS UNIQUE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE BUT ALSO CHECK WHETHER INDIA IS READY TO PUSH BACK DELICATELY AND DEMAND THAT THE WORLD SEE SITUATIONS AND CRISIS FROM A NON-WESTERN VIEWPOINT

closer relationship between Russia and Pakistan even more so. After the Ukraine war, the world has seen a change in the shape of its alliances and a closer Russia-China axis is there for all to see. It doesn't make the world comfortable but it worries India even more, with a boundary dispute, and the Chinese looking for yet another excuse to expand territorially.

The G7 consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the US (the European Union is not a member of the G7 but attends the Summit). It is an informal grouping of the world's richest nations and hence the most powerful, too. Russia had joined the G7 in 1998 making it G8 then, but following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia was shown the door. Interestingly, China, despite the size of its economy and the global influence it asserts, has been kept out of the grouping. So looking at the G7 in an unbiased fashion, it's quite apparent that it is a grouping of rich and powerful western nations that has zero representation from Africa and the Middle East.

It also helps explain and understand the contradictions not just in the global order but also the response to the Ukraine war.

India is not part of the G7 or the western world. But with an economy that is growing and a strategic place in the Indo-Pacific, it today cannot be kept out. India is also one of the few countries that have shown the occasional spine to the western nations that still seem to view the world from a very narrow post-World War II perspective. The upcoming G7 Summit will test India not only in how it puts forward its unique global perspective but also check whether India is ready to push back delicately and demand that the world see situations and crisis from a non-western viewpoint. That, at the end of the day, is the hallmark of a global leader.

(The author, a Delhi-based journalist and foreign affairs analyst, holds a *Masters in International Relations from the American University in Washington DC. In 2009, her book 'Piercing the Heart: Untold Stories of 26/11', was published. The views expressed are personal.*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ANTI-MURMU PROTEST ISN'T GOOD

Sir — This refers to the editorial, *'First among equals'* (June 23) wherein it was logically elaborated that the BJP has been playing its game beautifully, and reaping rich dividends. By nominating Droupadi Murmu for the post of the new President of India, the NDA has given a gift to all tribals, besides redeeming the tribal vote bank towards the alliance. Her nomination by the ruling NDA will tilt the political equations in its favour. Murmu has risen from the grassroots political level. She had attained a remarkable position as a teacher, Nagar Panchayat representative and ministerial position in the Odisha Cabinet.

She has completed the tenure as the Governor in Jharkhand without any controversy, which shows that she has a lot of experience of working in a high constitutional post. The NDA will get an opportunity to strengthen its penetration in tribal States like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Opposing Murmu's candidature will prove to be politically harmful for the Opposition parties. Another special thing is that in the presidential election, neither the NDA nor UPA will be in a position to issue a whip to their MLAs and MPs since the election is done by secret ballot.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

PURE AIR MAKES LIFE BEAUTIFUL

Sir — Through your columns, I wish to draw attention towards the topic of air pollution and its fatal effects. In today's world, almost everything around us is contaminated and so is the air that we breathe. Air pollution is becoming a matter of great concern each passing day. Every living being needs fresh air to remain healthy. Breathing in polluted air can lead to fatal diseases like asthma and cancer, which in turn can lead to death. With the increasing number of cars and factories, the world is becoming a tougher place to live in. Our environment thrives upon balance.

To curb the air pollution, more trees

US must review gun rights order



It is most unfortunate that the US Supreme Court has not taken seriously many firing incidents on the locals and foreigners, including schoolchildren in major cities, expanded gun rights and ruled that Americans have a right to carry handguns in public (June 24). Though the Supreme Court ruled that handguns can be carried in public for self-defence outside homes, most of the guns are used for various offences and crimes. Many Indian students, software workers and salespersons are among the worst victims of guns

without any provocation. The guns used by some anti-social elements, criminals and unemployed are playing havoc with citizens and creating terror in the society.

The worst part is that a few psychos are gunning down even schoolchildren. It is shocking that the Supreme Court judges (6-3) in a majority judgment, who gave ruling for letting guns be in the hands of Americans, have lost compassion and love, at least for schoolgoing children. These days, a handgun meant for defence has become a ready weapon for offences and crimes, which was not considered by the court. The US may be progressing in all fields with international command but cannot control guns and its misuse in killing innocents. The killing of innocent schoolgoing children is a dangerous signal for society. Hope a review petition is filed citing many incidents of casual firings.

JP Reddy | Telangana

should have been planted. Instead, we can see deforestation all around us. People seem to carelessly do things that are making the environment more polluted. They need to take steps that will reduce the effects of air pollution, like using solar panels, replacing fossil fuels and by using electricity and petroleum efficiently. I hope that my small but sincere effort will help spread awareness among people about the fatal effects of air pollution and how dangerous it can be for the lives of those inhabiting this planet.

Divyansha Sharma | Ujjain

WHAT A COMEBACK, DK!

Sir — As India's head coach Rahul Dravid has rightly said, Dinesh Karthik hasn't just knocked on the door of Indian cricket, but banged it hard and made a spectacular comeback into the national side after a gap of three years, riding on his stellar performance in the IPL this year. The Tamil Nadu wicket-keeping batter last played in Indian colours in the forgettable 2019

World Cup semifinals against New Zealand. Picked up by Royal Challengers Bangalore and donning a new persona, 'Dinesh Karthik 2.0', the seasoned middle-order batter, took up the role of a finisher to perfection, which became one of the biggest talking points in the cash-rich tournament.

Since making his Test debut way back in 2004 against Australia, Dinesh Karthik has made several comebacks to the Indian team but the latest one is undoubtedly the most inspiring of all and is nothing less than a fairytale. His 27-ball 55 against South Africa in the Rajkot match, which was his first half-century in T20s, further underscores his value as a 'finisher'. Ahead of the 2022 T-20 World Cup to be held in Australia in October-November, Dinesh Karthik will be the cynosure of all eyes.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The laws of J&K, adapted in Ladakh, provide protection to both jobs and land.



Ladakh Lt Governor
—RK Mathur



Chinese Foreign Minister
—Wang Yi

Women today are capable enough of doing their own thing in their own way.



Actor
—Ankita Lokhande



World championship swimmer
—Katie Ledecky

There is a need to tighten the (Indian cyberspace) accountability matrix.



Union Minister
—Rajeev Chandrasekhar

FIRST COLUMN

HELP KIDS COPE WITH DEATH OF DEAR ONES

Handle them sensitively yet with honesty



SONALI KHAN

With the novel coronavirus hitting the globe, many families were left staggered to their feet with medical emergencies, untimely death of their loved ones. What began with a learning loss resulted in weakened financial conditions and also, in many cases, the loss of parents, grandparents or loved ones for children. Usually, when it comes to talking about death with children, adults don't know how to start the conversation or how and what exactly to say.

Here's how you can explain what happened. While explaining about death to children, it is critical that they are handled most sensitively yet with honesty. It's important for an adult (whom the child feels safe and comfortable to interact with) to talk to him or her in a quiet place. Conversations help to create an open and comforting environment that allows them to question and freely express their thoughts and feelings.

You can begin with explaining what death is. For example, you might say, "When a person dies, his or her body stops working. The heart stops beating and the body stops moving, eating, and breathing."

Many times, younger children may not realise that death is permanent and ask questions like "when will Naani come back?" and "I want to show Papa what I made". Phrases such as "he is gone into long sleep," "your loss," and "passed away" may seem gentler but can also confuse the young children, who often think literally. They may think if the relatives look for the "lost" loved one, he or she could be found. Hence, it's important to reaffirm the facts gently, and reassert death with most honesty.



Children go through waves of emotions when something like this happens in their life. They experience anger, frustration, anxiety and build a story that it might have happened because of a certain reason. Remind them that nothing they did caused the death or there's nothing that can reverse it.

Also, sometimes it is natural for children to feel angry or disappointed with the family member for leaving them alone or when a close relative passed away. In such a situation, one must allow kids to express themselves freely and assure that feeling this way is alright by saying something like "I know you're upset that Mom died. Sometimes I feel like that, too."

However, children can develop strong fears about their own personal safety or about the death of the surviving parent. And that's when their fears need to be addressed and they need to know that you are there to take care of them. Grief is a very complex emotion; it is not easy for children to cope with. Sometimes children's responses can be harsh when coping with the death of their parent or any loved one. Children may have nightmares or scary thoughts. They may not want to talk about the deceased person in any way, inclusive of happy memories. They may experience trouble sleeping, concentrating, and others. If such feelings or behavioural patterns occur to a degree that concerns you, then it's best to seek professional help.

It may not be possible to prepare fully for the emotions that may follow however, with time they may become easier to process. Remind your children that while change is hard for everyone, you are there for them to get through this time. It's important that you give them all the information that they need to avoid assumptions leading to confusions.

Maintaining some routines can help children. It's important to keep the memories of the deceased alive for your children; after all, they still love the deceased person.

Remember grieving is a slow process that requires time. While feelings attached with the loss may never completely go away, with each passing day they can become easier to endure. Give yourself and your children permission to feel happy again. Be assured that the memory of your loved one can live on in the hearts of your family.

(The author is a journalist-turned-activist who works towards women empowerment and development of children.)

We should celebrate Independence Month



Individuals celebrate birthdays, but a nation ought to celebrate its Independence for a month, not in a single day

To understand a certain concept better, we expect that a paragraph about it will help us better than a single sentence. Likewise, we say that to achieve greater skill development, our practice sessions need to be longer. Thus, when we accord something more time, we hope to have given it that much more attention.

Generally, in our minds the expression 'a day or two' suggests a quite short duration. 'Day' is such a familiar word, and so casually used that we rarely reflect on it. It is an important unit of time. If an individual celebrates his or her birthday, shouldn't a nation celebrate Independence Month rather than only a day?

Many kinds of organisations played a role in our gaining Independence; they were quite different from each other, and unique in what they did. You have heard it said that we should also render proper respect to many movements and sacrifices across the country. An Independence Month, organised as themed weeks, or even as distinct days to recognise and highlight various aspects of self-governance would also spread greater political awareness among the people.

There are of course programmes on the day of official and ceremonial significance, but in practical terms, Independence has meant our own currency without colonial insignia, that our houses of legislature are sovereign, our own Chiefs of the Armed Forces, our own Election Commission, and various Indian Councils for research, our Central Universities, and national corporations in the Energy and other sectors. Showcasing each of them and celebrating their progress is something that can be done in greater detail than through only a few tableaux over three hours in a single day. It can be a richer, longer, more informative experience through an Independence Month.

The opportunity to organise a number of exhibitions on progress will not only inform our citizens about the energy sector, the telecom and ITES sector, the space sector and so on; it will also help the youth.

Now, for argument's sake, someone could say that a much larger country in terms of area and with about twice our number of states is, after all, observed on one day with a lot of fireworks and parades. Their struggle for Independence, while admirable for many things, was quite different. It was concentrated in a few battle arenas, and basically under one command. Their nation itself grew in territory over the mainland over several decades, and largely drew upon the progressive political ethos of Western Europe as its main source.

While we thus appreciate the US's particular history, it is plain to see that our own liberation from the colonial yoke has been a different kind of process. Given our geography and ancient heritage, our



THE OPPORTUNITY TO ORGANISE A NUMBER OF EXHIBITIONS ON PROGRESS WILL NOT ONLY INFORM OUR CITIZENS ABOUT THE ENERGY SECTOR, THE TELECOM AND ITES SECTOR, THE SPACE SECTOR AND SO ON; IT WILL ALSO HELP THE YOUTH

(The author is a creative director, advertising faculty, and an amateur epistemologist. The views expressed are personal)



Constitutional spirit includes elements from Western and indigenous frameworks as we had an equally illustrious and forward-looking team of authors as were the Founding Fathers of the US.

In fact, the project to draft the Constitution is itself an undertaking about which more information can be shared. From inception, there has been a strong inclusivist orientation in the Republic of India. Cabinets at national and state levels have sought to have members from under-represented or marginalised communities, or from places far away from economic and political hubs.

On the contrary, it is much rarer to find Native Americans among Secretaries or in the House of Representatives. Representation for them was initiated only in 1924, and it took till 1965 for them to even properly participate as voters across most States. Given our own greater diversity and many regional and district cultures, India is more representational in its political culture from the beginning.

Much more remains to be done, yet the Constitution adopted within three years of Independence got us off to a flying start. There is in it a pluralism and coexistence of doctrines—there are some curbs on exploiting fellow humans for profit even while incentivising industrial growth. The mixed economy approach of having some utilities undertaken and operated by the State, a broadly welfarist outlook, a planning model suited to the developmental needs of a Third World country (typical for most recently decolonialised)—all parts of a

unique 'middle path' policy, in itself a marvel. There was advocacy of a scientific temper and promotion of modern education for all. In an ethos where both consumerism and spirituality have been pursued parallelly!

The generation of leaders and experts who determined and agreed upon such a choice was a generation that could boast of knowledge and practical experience. While no set of principles may be such that a further adaptation cannot be considered at all, what we've had already so far is not narrow, and any fault is actually about weak implementation.

A month, therefore, would not only be a celebration, it would be a thanksgiving, a reaffirmation and a renewal of our commitment to our fair polity. With the passing years, we won't have people any more who had known how things were, prior to 1947. The domination by the European, the severely limited participation in governance in those times, the inadequate infrastructure across sectors, will all be long forgotten. Our present rights and freedoms had been dreamt of for decades before they were ushered in 75 years ago.

The very theme of Independence can lead us to reflect, as families and citizens, on how it can be practically maintained. There's an important aspect of economic freedom, which Gandhiji had underlined.

In the US, a lot of ordinary people are groaning under the yoke of steep debt—for housing, healthcare and education. A small part of it is due to heedless use of credit cards, but much of it has to do with the lack of a sense of soci-

ety, and with the adoption of a view of people as customers first, and only then as humans. Student debt, and steep cost of university education are formidable barriers to opportunity and social mobility. It helps to remember something here that is often forgotten.

Rather than being accorded our freedom, we have to realise that we are born free, and as Rousseau famously said, the chains get forged only subsequently.

For India, decolonisation halted the robbery of our natural resources by an imperial power. It brought us into the modern era of representative government, and put us on the path of inclusive development. It shook off past shackles and at the same time, launched visions of a prosperous and progressive future for all strata in our society. The Directive Principles, as enshrined in the Constitution, undertake to uplift large numbers living in various kinds of deprivation, whose circumstances in recent generations had offered little or no scope.

This is a socioeconomic gap that a positive governmental agenda can bridge. Yet, independence is really all about people being kept out of debt, than being placed in debt. We reciprocate by serving national interest in many small ways for the broad support we receive. This is what President J.F. Kennedy, in his 1961 White House inaugural, said, "Ask what you can do for your country."

An Independence Month of thirty-one days would offer enough time to ask these questions, and to discover enough answers.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

SHARAD PAWAR IS THREATENING THE (REBEL) MLAS TO COME TO THE ASSEMBLY. THEY'LL VOTE AS PER THEIR WILL.
—UNION MINISTER NARAYAN RANE



WE WILL STAND BY CM UDDHAV THACKERAY. WE ARE KEEPING AN EYE ON THE CURRENT SITUATION.
—MAHARASHTRA DEPUTY CM AJIT PAWAR

Israel: All turbulence in politics is about Netanyahu

Netanyahu or Bibi is the standard-holder for the Jews who favour a bigger country but without citizenship to Palestinian Arabs

There was a rare moment of grace in Israeli politics last Monday, as Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid announced they would dissolve their extraordinary coalition and pitched Israel into its fifth election in three and a half years.

The coalition was extraordinary because it included such a broad spectrum of political conviction in Israel, from Rightwing pro-settler parties like Bennett's Yamina to Centre-Left Yesh Atid (Lapid's Party) and even, for the first time ever, an Islamic party, the United Arab List.

The moment of grace was the loyalty and even friendship shown by Bennett and Lapid, political and ideological opponents who rose above the bitter divisions of a fragmented Israeli



GWYNNE DYER

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

political scene characterised by defections and betrayals.

They did not blame each other for the coalition's collapse. They treated each other with respect. Bennett even kept his word to share the top job in rotation with Lapid, who will become prime minister of the transitional government for the months between now and the next election, probably in late October.

"They are political rivals who were wise enough to create a rare partnership, almost utopian by Israeli political standards. They began nicely and ended even better. We were as dreamers—is this Israel, or Denmark?" wrote Haaretz journalist Yossi Verter. But these two men apart, it's Israel. Definitely Israel.

The eight-party coalition

had one unifying principle: to stop 'Bibi' (Binyamin Netanyahu, prime minister for most of the past 25 years) from coming back to power yet again. It could only work by concentrating on social issues (where there was some agreement) while preserving the status quo on 'security', settler violence and Palestinian rights.

Even so, the attempt to hold such a spectacularly diverse coalition together was ultimately sunk by the defections of members who felt morally compromised by working with people of such radically different views. It only had 62 Members of the Knesset out of 120 to start with, and just three MKs quitting, one at a time, destroyed its parliamentary majority.

So will Netanyahu be back



in power again after October? He's still on trial for breach of trust, accepting bribes, and fraud, but the coalition didn't get around to banning people on trial for felonies from becoming prime minister, so it's certainly possible.

That was why Netanyahu strove so hard to bring the coalition down, getting the

opposition to vote against every single coalition measure. The Knesset and the country are so evenly balanced that any reshuffle of the deck is another chance to win.

Netanyahu even got his allies in the Knesset to vote against another five-year extension of the regulation that places Jewish settlers in the West Bank under Israeli civil law, not the military law that controls life for Arabs in the occupied territories.

That normally goes through automatically, without debate, but Netanyahu's Likud Party and its allies voted against it despite the fact they are pro-settler parties. Bibi knew that the four Arab members of the coalition government couldn't bring themselves to vote for the settlers having special rights, so the

measure failed and the coalition fell.

Actually, everything political in Israel is ultimately about the settlers and the occupation now, and the country is split down the middle with almost surgical precision. That's why it was so hard to make an anti-Bibi coalition, but it's just as hard to form a pro-Bibi one.

Few people realised that this was the future they were creating when Israel won the 1967 war and conquered substantial Arab-populated territories in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Between the 1948 war, when most Arabs fled or were driven from what then became Israel, and the Six-Day War of 1967, about 85 per cent of Israel's population was Jewish. After Israel's victory in that

war, about half the population on the land now controlled by Israel was Arab and either Muslim or Christian.

That is still the case today, although the Gaza Strip has been turned into an open-air prison that is technically not in Israel. So unless you are planning to give the occupied territories back, you can have a democratic Israel where half the population is Arab, or a Jewish Israel where half the population has no political rights.

That's the choice that divides and paralyses the country, and there's no decision on the horizon. Bibi is the standard-holder for all those Israeli Jews who favour a bigger country but one where most Palestinian Arabs are not citizens, and he may be back in power by the end of the year.

As summit host, Spain paper urges NATO to watch southern flank

AP ■ BARCELONA

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine is certain to dominate an upcoming NATO summit in Madrid, Spain and other member nations are quietly pushing the Western alliance to consider how mercenaries aligned with Russian President Vladimir Putin are spreading Moscow's influence to Africa.

As the host of the summit taking place from Tuesday to Thursday, Spain wants to emphasise its proximity to Africa as it lobbies for a greater focus on Europe's southern flank in a new document outlining NATO's vision of its security challenges and tasks.

The Strategic Concept is NATO's most important working document after the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, which contained the key provision holding that an attack on one member is viewed as an attack upon all.

The security assessment is updated roughly every decade to reset the West's security agenda.

The current version, approved in Lisbon in 2010, stated the risk of a conventional war on NATO territory was "low."

It did not explicitly mention concerns about instability in Africa. At the time, the alliance viewed apathy as its

biggest military threat; U.S. Complaints that some European members were not paying their due featured heavily in summit talks.

Fast forward a dozen years, and the view looks very different from NATO headquarters in Brussels.

After Russia brought war close to NATO's eastern borders, the alliance has worked to provide Ukraine with an assortment of more powerful weapons and to avoid the very real risk of getting drawn into the fighting.

But there appears to be a consensus among NATO members heading into the Madrid summit that while Russia remains concern No. 1, the alliance must continue to widen its view globally. Spain's position for an increased focus on "the South" is shared by Britain, France and Italy.

In their view, the security challenges in Africa arise from a Putin apparently dead-set on restoring the imperial glories of Russia as well as from an expansive China.

Russia has gained traction thanks to the presence of its mercenaries in the Sahel region, a semiarid expanse stretching from Senegal to Sudan that suffers from political strife, terrorism and drought.

"Each time I meet with NATO ministers, the support



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez arrives to pose for photos with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the NATO summit at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

AP

of the allies is total due to the instability that we see on the alliance's southern frontier and especially the situation in the Sahel region right now," Spanish Foreign Minister José Albares said.

The Kremlin denies links to the Wagner Group, a mercenary force with an increasing presence in central and North Africa and the Middle East.

The private military company, which has also participated in the war in Ukraine, has developed footholds in Libya, Mali, Sudan and Central African Republic.

In Mali, Wagner soldiers are filling a void created by the exit of former colonial power France.

In Sudan, Russia's offer of an economic alliance earned it

the promise of a naval base on the Red Sea. In Central African Republic, Wagner fighters protect the country's gold and diamond mines. In return, Putin gets diplomatic allies and resources.

French President Emmanuel Macron has long called for a "greater involvement" from NATO in the Sahel region.

Italy is another NATO member attuned to the political climate across the Mediterranean Sea.

The country NATO's Joint Force Command base in Naples, which in 2017 opened a south hub Hub focusing specifically on terrorism, radicalization, migration and other security issues emanating from North Africa and the Middle East.

The Italian ambassador to NATO, Francesco Maria Talo, said in a May interview with Italian news agency ANSA that humanitarian crises in Africa must concern all NATO allies.

"Near us there's Africa, with a billion inhabitants at risk of poverty, aggravated by food insecurity, terrorism and climate change, all factors that combine to create insecurity," Talo said. "And Russia is present there, too."

The importance of the other side of the Mediterranean became painfully evident to Spain over the past year due to a series of diplomatic crises involving Morocco and Algeria and their rivalry over the fate of Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony.

Amid the disputes, reduced border security allowed migrants to enter Spanish territory, and there were perceived threats to energy supplies. Analysts consider both to be tactics of "hybrid warfare" when governments use them against other countries.

Speaking in Madrid last month, British Defense Minister Ben Wallace noted the problems caused last year when Belarus, a Putin ally, allegedly encouraged migrants to cross its borders into Poland and other neighboring countries.

"If the likes of Wagner get the control they have or they'd like to have in places like Libya

or indeed what we see they're already doing in Mali, do not think that Spain will be untouched by that," Wallace said. NATO is also expected to include in the new Strategic Document a reference to China's growing military reach both in and beyond the Pacific theater. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said last month in Madrid that "China has joined Russia in openly contesting the right of each and every country to choose its own path."

In May, U.S. Army Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commander of U.S. Africa Command, warned that China was trying to build a military naval base on Africa's Atlantic coast. He said that China "has most traction" toward establishing the base in Equatorial Guinea, a tiny oil-rich dictatorship that was once Spain's only sub-Saharan African colony.

China only operates one acknowledged foreign military base, located in Djibouti in East Africa. But many believe that its People's Liberation Army is busy establishing an overseas military network, even if it doesn't use the term "base."

NATO has invited the leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand to the summit to demonstrate its interest in the Asian-Pacific.

Destruction everywhere, help scarce after Afghanistan quake

Gayan: When the ground heaved from last week's earthquake in Afghanistan, Nahim Gul's stone-and-mud house collapsed on top of him.

He clawed through the rubble in the pre-dawn darkness, choking on dust as he searched for his father and two sisters. He doesn't know how many hours of digging passed before he caught a glimpse of their bodies under the ruins. They were dead.

Now, days after a 6 magnitude quake that devastated a remote region of southeast Afghanistan and killed at least 1,150 people and injured hundreds more, Gul sees destruction everywhere and help in short supply. His niece and nephew were also killed in the quake, crushed by the walls of their house.

"I don't know what will happen to us or how we should restart our lives," Gul told The Associated Press on Sunday, his hands bruised and his shoulder injured. "We don't have any money to rebuild."

It's a fear shared among thousands in the impoverished villages where the fury of the quake has fallen most heavily - in Paktika and Khost provinces, along the jagged mountains that straddle the country's border with Pakistan. Those who were barely scraping by have lost everything. Many have yet to be visited by aid groups and authorities, which are struggling to reach the afflicted area on rutted roads - some made impassable by landslides and damage.

Aware of its constraints, the cash-strapped Taliban have called for foreign assistance and on Saturday appealed to Washington to unfreeze billions of dollars in Afghanistan's



An Afghan girl carries a donated mattress after an earthquake in Gayan village, in Paktika province, Afghanistan.

AP

currency reserves. The United Nations and an array of international aid groups and countries have mobilized to send help. China pledged Saturday nearly \$7.5 million in emergency humanitarian aid, joining nations including Iran, Pakistan, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in dispatching a plane-load of tents, towels, beds and other badly needed supplies to the quake-hit area.

U.N. Deputy Special Representative Ramiz Alakbarov toured the affected Paktika province on Saturday to assess the damage and distribute food, medicine and tents. U.N. Helicopters and trucks laden with bread, flour, rice and blankets have trickled into the stricken areas.

But the relief effort remains patchy due to funding and access constraints. The Taliban, which seized power last August from a government sustained

for 20 years by a U.S.-led military coalition, appears overwhelmed by the logistical complexities of issues like debris removal in what is shaping up to be a major test of its capacity to govern.

Villagers have dug out their dead loved ones with their bare hands, buried them in mass graves and slept in the woods despite the rain. Nearly 800 families are living out in the open, according to the U.N.'s humanitarian coordination organization OCHA.

Gul received a tent and blankets from a local charity in the Gayan district, but he and his surviving relatives have had to fend for themselves. Terrified as the earth still rumbles from aftershocks like one on Friday that claimed five more lives, he said his children in Gayan refuse to go indoors.

The earthquake was the latest calamity to convulse Afghanistan, which has been

reeling from a dire economic crisis since the Taliban took control of the country as the U.S. And its NATO allies were withdrawing their forces. Foreign aid - a mainstay of Afghanistan's economy for decades - stopped practically overnight.

World governments piled on sanctions, halted bank transfers and paralyzed trade, refusing to recognize the Taliban government. The Biden administration cut off the Taliban's access to \$7 billion in foreign currency reserves held in the United States.

As he toured the disaster site, Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi urged the White House to release the funds "at a time when Afghanistan is in the grips of earthquakes and floods" and to lift banking restrictions so charities can more easily provide aid.

Western donors have withheld longer-term assistance as they demand the Taliban allow a more inclusive rule and respect human rights. The former insurgents have resisted the pressure, imposing restrictions on the freedoms of women and girls that recall their first time in power in the late 1990s.

Now, around half the country's 39 million people are facing life-threatening levels of food insecurity because of poverty. Most civil servants, including doctors, nurses and teachers, have not been paid for months. U.N. Agencies and other remaining organizations have scrambled to keep Afghanistan from the brink of starvation with a humanitarian program that has fed millions and kept the medical system afloat.

AP

Iraqi caretaker PM in Iran to rekindle talks with Saudis

Tehran: Iraq's caretaker prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi arrived in Iran on Sunday, state TV reported, on a visit aimed at reactivating Baghdad-mediated talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi officially received Al-Kadhimi, who was slated to also meet with other officials in Tehran, according to the report. He was the first foreign leader to visit Iran after Raisi took power in August.

Al-Kadhimi's office said Saturday he arrived in the Saudi city of Jiddah for an official visit to meet with Saudi officials. It was his second visit to Saudi Arabia since he took the post of prime minister in May 2020.

Iran, the largest Shiite Muslim country in the world, and Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties

in 2016 after Saudi Arabia executed prominent Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Angry Iranians protesting the execution stormed two Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, fueling years of animosity between the nations.

The Saudi-Iran talks aimed at defusing yearslong tensions between the regional foes began quietly in Iraq's capital in 2021. Saudi Arabia sought a way to end its disastrous war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. The conflict has spawned one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters and brought bombs from rebel drones and missiles raining down on Saudi airports and oil facilities.

Besides Yemen, Iran and Saudi Arabia support opposite sides in conflicts in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

AP

At least 20 dead in South African club; cause not yet known

Johannesburg: South African police are investigating the deaths of at least 20 people at a nightclub in the coastal town of East London early Sunday morning.

It is unclear what led to the deaths of the young people, who were reportedly attending a party to celebrate the end of winter school exams.

Local newspaper Daily Dispatch reported that bodies were strewn across tables and chairs without any visible signs of injuries.

"At this point we cannot confirm the cause of death," said health department spokesperson Siyanda Manana.

"We are going to conduct autopsies as soon as possible to establish the probable cause of death. The deceased have been taken to state mortuaries," Manana added.

Police Minister Bheki Cele was on Sunday morning

"I AM STILL UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED, BUT WHEN I WAS CALLED IN THE MORNING I WAS TOLD THE PLACE WAS TOO FULL AND THAT SOME PEOPLE WERE TRYING TO FORCE THEIR WAY INTO THE TAVERN"

expected to visit the scene.

The owner of the club, Siyakhlangela Ndevu, told local broadcaster eNCA that he had been called to the scene early Sunday morning.

"I am still uncertain about what really happened, but when I was called in the morning I was told the place was too full and that some people were trying to force their way into the tavern," he said.

"However, we will hear what the police say about the cause of death," Ndevu added.

AP

Israeli PM convenes Cabinet before Parliament is dissolved

Aviv: Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett convened what is likely his last Cabinet meeting as premier on Sunday, with parliament expected to dissolve itself this week, triggering new elections in the fall.

Bennett's decision to head to elections puts an end to an ambitious political project that united eight ideologically disparate parties that chose to put aside their differences to oust former leader Benjamin Netanyahu, the current oppo-

sition leader, who now has an opening to return to lead the country.

The elections, the fifth the country has held in three years, deepen an unprecedented political crisis in Israel.

At the meeting, Bennett listed a series of accomplishments under his year-old government and thanked his coalition partners, which included dovish parties that support Palestinian statehood, nationalist ones who don't, and for the

first time in Israeli history, an Arab political faction.

"It was an excellent government that relied, yes, on a complicated coalition. And here in this room there is a group of people that knew how to put aside ideological disagreements, to rise above, and to work for the state of Israel," he said.

As part of the power-sharing agreement that brought Bennett to power, he is set to hand over the premiership to Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, a centrist former broadcaster, once parliament is dissolved.

Elections are expected around the end of October and polls show Netanyahu's Likud

party is expected to garner the most seats.

But as in most rounds of voting during the current political turmoil, Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, has been unable to muster a majority to form a coalition government, with some of his traditional allies refusing to join him. That could further extend the crisis after the upcoming vote.

While Bennett's government helped steady the economy and navigated the last year of the coronavirus pandemic, it was beset by disagreements over the very issues it sought to avoid, particularly Israel's 55-year occupation of the West Bank.

AP

Syrian, Russian paratroopers conduct joint drill

Damascus: Hundreds of Syrian paratroopers took part in a joint drill with their Russian counterparts in the war-torn country in the second joint maneuver this month, state media reported.

The agency did not give further details in its Saturday night report about the drill or say where they took place.

It said the aim was to train Syrian paratroopers how to respond in varied circumstances.

Russia is a main backer of President Bashar Assad and has a broad presence in Syria where an 11-year conflict has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced half the country's pre-war population. Russia became involved

militarily in Syria in September 2015 helping to tip the balance of power in favour of Assad's forces.

Earlier this month, the Syrian and Russian air forces conducted drills over different parts of the country, including on the edge of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Four months ago, the two countries conducted a drill a week before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

In mid-February, the Russian military deployed long-range nuclear-capable bombers and fighter jets carrying state-of-the-art hypersonic missiles to Syria for massive naval drills in the Mediterranean Sea.

AP

Survivors recount Mali's deadliest attack since coup

Bamako: Moussa Tolofidie didn't think twice when nearly 100 jihadists on motorbikes gathered in his village in central Mali last week.

A peace agreement signed last year between some armed groups and the community in the Bankass area had largely held, even if the gunmen would sometimes enter the town to preach Shariah to the villagers. But on this Sunday in June, everything changed - the jihadists began killing people.

"They started with an old man about 100 years old ... Then the sounds of the weapons began to intensify around me and then at one moment I heard a bullet whistling behind my ear. I felt the earth spinning. I lost consciousness and fell to the ground," Tolofidie, a 28-year-old farmer told The Associated Press by phone Friday in Mopti town, where he was receiving medical care.

"When I woke up it was



Saga Saganla, 30, from Diawely, lies on his bed at Somine Dolo hospital in Mopti, Mali.

AP

dark, around midnight. There were bodies of other people on top of me. I smelled blood and smelled burnt things and heard the sounds of some people still moaning," he said.

At least 132 people were killed in several villages in the Bankass area of central Mali during two days of attacks last weekend, according to the gov-

ernment, which blames the Group to Support Islam and Muslims jihadi rebels linked to al-Qaida.

The attack - the deadliest since mutinous soldiers toppled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita two years ago - shows that Islamic extremist violence is spreading from Mali's north to more central areas, analysts

have said.

The conflict-riddled country has been battling extremist violence for a decade since jihadists seized control of key northern cities in 2012 and tried to take over the capital. They were pushed back by a French-led military operation the following year but have since regained ground.

The Associated Press spoke to several survivors on Friday who had sought treatment at a hospital in Mopti and were from the villages of Diallassagou, Dianweli and Dessagou. People described hearing gunfire and jihadist shouting, "Allahu akbar", Arabic for "God is great," as they ran into the forest to save their lives.

Mali's government blamed the attacks on the Group to Support Islam and Muslims, or JNIM, which is backed by al-Qaida, although the group denied responsibility in a statement on Friday.

AP

1 dead, 1 missing, 163 rescued in inter-island Philippine ferry fire

Manila: An inter-island ferry with 165 passengers and crew caught fire off a central Philippine province Sunday, leaving one dead and another missing while the rest were safely rescued, the coast guard said.

The fire hit the vessel Mama Mary Chloe shortly after noon near two island villages in Bohol province, coast guard officials said.

A search backed by fishing boats was underway for one missing person.

Footage on social media showed people in life vests bobbing in the sea, with the vessel engulfed in thick black

smoke.

The ferry, which was carrying eight crew members and 157 passengers, including 15 children, was en route to the eastern province of Leyte from Bohol.

Sea accidents are common in the Philippine archipelago because of frequent storms, badly maintained boats, overcrowding and weak enforcement of safety regulations.

In December 1987, the ferry Dona Paz sank after colliding with a fuel tanker, killing more than 4,300 people in the world's worst peacetime maritime disaster.

AP

Russia strikes Kyiv as troops consolidate gains in the east

AP ■ KYIV

Russia attacked the Ukrainian capital in the early hours of Sunday morning, striking at least two residential buildings, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said, as elsewhere Russian troops consolidated their gains in the east.

Associated Press journalists in Kyiv saw rescue services battling flames and rescuing civilians. Klitschko said four people were hospitalised with injuries and a 7-year-old girl was pulled alive from the rubble.

Ukraine Member of Parliament Oleksiy Goncharenko wrote on the Telegram messaging app that “according to prelim data 14 missiles were launched against Kyiv region and Kyiv.”

Before Sunday’s early morning attack, Kyiv had not faced any such Russian

airstrikes since June 5.

Klitschko told journalists that he believed “it is maybe a symbolic attack” ahead of this week’s NATO summit in Madrid.

Two more explosions were later heard in Kyiv, but their cause and possible casualties were not immediately clear.

Meanwhile, Russian forces have been seeking to swallow up the last remaining Ukrainian stronghold in the eastern Luhansk region, pressing their momentum after taking full control Saturday of the charred ruins of Sievierodonetsk and the chemical plant where hundreds of Ukrainian troops and civilians had been holed up.

Serhiy Haidai, governor of the Luhansk region that includes Sievierodonetsk, said Sunday that Russia was conducting intense airstrikes on the adjacent city of Lysychansk,

destroying its television tower and seriously damaging a road bridge.

“There’s very much destruction — Lysychansk is almost unrecognizable,” he wrote on Facebook.

Also Sunday, U.S. President Joe Biden said the United States and other Group of Seven leading economies intend to announce a ban on imports of gold from Russia. They hope that measure will further isolate Russia economically over its invasion of Ukraine.

Senior Biden administration officials said gold is Moscow’s second largest export after energy, and that banning imports would make it more difficult for Russia to participate in global markets.

Biden’s Twitter feed said Russia “takes in tens of billions of dollars” from the sale of its gold, its second largest export



after energy.

On Saturday, Russia also launched dozens of missiles on

several areas across the country far from the heart of the eastern battles. Some of the

missiles were fired from Russian long-range Tu-22 bombers deployed from

Belarus for the first time, Ukraine’s air command said.

The bombardment preceded a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, during which Putin announced that Russia planned to supply Belarus with the Iskander-M missile system.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said late Saturday that Russian and Moscow-backed separatist forces now control Sievierodonetsk and the villages surrounding it. He said the attempt by Ukrainian forces to turn the Azot plant into a “stubborn center of resistance” had been thwarted.

Haidai confirmed Saturday that Sievierodonetsk had fallen to Russian and separatist fighters, who he said were now trying to blockade Lysychansk from the south.

Russia’s Interfax news agency quoted a spokesman for the separatist forces, Andrei Marochko, as saying Russian troops and separatist fighters had entered Lysychansk and that fighting was taking place in the heart of the city. There was no immediate comment on the claim from the Ukrainian side.

Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk have been the focal point of a Russian offensive aimed at capturing all of the Donbas and destroying the Ukrainian military defending it — the most capable and battle-hardened segment of the country’s armed forces.

Capturing Lysychansk would give Russian forces control of every major settlement in the province, a significant step toward Russia’s aim of capturing the entire Donbas. The Russians and separatists control about half of Donetsk, the second province in the Donbas.

Biden praises allies for unity on Ukraine war

AP ■ ELMAU (GERMANY)

US President Joe Biden says Russian President Vladimir Putin hoped the West would “splinter” as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine drags on.

But Biden praised the allies who have stuck together and stood up to the Kremlin during the four months of war, applying sanctions on Russia while sending weaponry to Ukraine.

Greeting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Sunday, Biden praised his counterpart for helping to sustain the pressure on Russia and exhorted him to keep at it — a central message of Biden’s five-

day trip to meet allies at summits in Germany and Spain.

“We have to stay together, because Putin has been counting on from the beginning that somehow NATO and the G7 would splinter,” Biden said. “But we haven’t and we’re not going to.”

Biden added: “We can’t let this aggression take the form it has and get away with it.”

Scholz, who is hosting the annual Group of Seven summit in the Bavarian alps, greeted Biden on a balcony overlooking what the US leader called a “magnificent” view of lush greenery and towering peaks.

Biden credited Scholz for helping to lead the European in



standing up to Russia, saying his tough response “had a great

impact on the rest of Europe to move.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urges fellow G-7 leaders not to give in to ‘fatigue’ over the war in Ukraine

PTI ■ GERMANY

Johnson has expressed concern that divisions may emerge in the pro-Ukraine alliance as the four-month-old war grinds on. He says allies should not pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to concede territory in exchange for a ceasefire.

The British leader said at a G-7 summit in Germany on Sunday that it was a principle that “a free, independent sovereign country like Ukraine should not be violently invaded and should not have its boundaries changed by force.”

Asked whether he thought France and Germany were doing enough, Johnson praised the “huge strides” made by



Germany to arm Ukraine and

cut imports of Russian gas.

He did not mention France.

UK joins US, Canada, Japan at G7 Summit to ban Russian gold imports

PTI ■ LONDON

New exports of Russian gold will no longer be allowed to enter the UK, US, Canada and Japan after tough new measures agreed at the G7 Summit in Germany on Sunday, designed to exert pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin over the conflict with Ukraine.

Gold is a major Russian export, worth 12.6 billion pounds to the Russian economy in 2021. Its value to the Russian elite has also increased in recent months with oligarchs rushing to buy gold bullion in an attempt to avoid the financial impact of western sanctions.

“The measures we have announced today will directly hit Russian oligarchs and strike at the heart of Putin’s war machine,” said UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is attending the summit in Bavaria.

“Putin is squandering his dwindling resources on this pointless and barbaric war. He is bankrolling his ego at the

expense of both the Ukrainian and Russian people. We need to starve the Putin regime of its funding. The UK and our allies are doing just that,” he said.

London is a major global gold trading hub and UK sanctions, which will be the first of their kind to be implemented against Russia anywhere in the world, will have a huge impact on Putin’s ability to raise funds.

“With this import ban on new Russian-origin gold, over 13.5 billion pounds of our imports from Russia will be covered by restrictions. Given London’s role at the heart of the global gold trade, this shows the UK will take tough steps to stop the Russian war machine,” said UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

“I am pleased that following discussions with others in the G7 Finance Track, the US, Canada and Japan will be joining us in imposing this measure, shutting down avenues for Russian gold sales and maximising the impact that we can have on Putin and his

cronies,” he said.

At the G7, the UK’s message has been to further isolate Russia from the international financial system. The UK claims to have already sanctioned more than 1,000 individuals and more than 100 entities since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began in February.

The measures announced this week build on the action taken by the London Bullion Market in March to suspend six Russian refineries.

The gold import ban, which will come into force shortly, will apply to newly mined or refined gold. It does not impact Russian-origin gold previously exported from Russia. The UK government has said that there are no plans to extend restrictions to Russian gold purchased legitimately before the import ban was put in place.

Legislation will be tabled in the UK Parliament to implement this latest ban as the UK pledges further GBP 429 million in guarantees for World Bank lending to Ukraine.

Carpe diem: In Ukraine, war turning love into marriages

AP ■ KYIV

When the couple awoke to the rumble of war on Feb. 24, they’d been dating for just over a year. Russia was invading and Ihor Zakvatskyi knew there was no more time to lose.

He fished out the engagement ring he’d bought but, until then, not yet been ready to give to Kateryna Lytvynenko and proposed. If death do us part, he figured, then let it be as husband and wife.

“I did not want to waste a single minute without Katya knowing that I wanted to spend my life with her,” Zakvatskyi, 24, said as he and his 25-year-old bride exchanged vows and wedding rings this month in the capital, Kyiv. The newlyweds joined a growing army of Ukrainian couples who are speedily turning love into matrimony because of the war.

Some are soldiers, marrying just before they head off to fight. Others are simply united in determination that living and loving to the full are more important than ever in the face of so much death and destruction.

Ukraine’s wartime martial laws include a provision allowing Ukrainians, both soldiers and civilians, to apply and marry on the same day. In Kyiv alone, more than 4,000 couples have jumped at the expedited opportunity. Before the war, a one-month wait was the norm.

After a three-month interruption in normal service, Kyiv’s Central Civil Registry Office is fully open again and working almost at a prewar pace. Since Russia withdrew its badly bloodied invasion forces from around Kyiv in April, redirecting them to front lines east and south, many people who’d fled the fighting have returned. Weddings have increased accordingly.

The returnees include Daria Ponomarenko, 22, who fled to Poland. Her boyfriend, Yevhen Nalyvaiko, 23, had to stay, because of rules preventing men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country.

Reunited, they quickly wed — because “we don’t know what will happen tomorrow,” she said.

Jealously guarding their intimacy after their painful months apart, it was just the



two of them, without friends and family. Rather than a puffy bridal gown, she wore a Ukrainian embroidered shirt, the traditional Vyshyvanka chosen now by many brides to stress their Ukrainian identity.

In peacetime, they would have opted for a traditional wedding with many guests. But that seemed frivolous in war.

“Everything is perceived more sharply, people become

real during such events,” he said.

Anna Karpenko, 30, refused to let the invasion crimp her wedding — she arrived in a white limousine.

“Life must go on,” she said. She and her new husband dated for seven years, often talking about marriage, before the war turned the plan into action.

Pavlo and Oksana Savryha already had 18 years of civil

marriage under their belts before the invasion prompted them to renew their vows — this time in a small 12th-century church in the war-damaged northern city of Chernihiv.

“Our souls told us to do so. Before the invasion, we were constantly running somewhere, in a hurry, and the war forced us to stop and not postpone the important decisions until tomorrow,” Pavlo said.

Prince Charles got suitcase of cash from Qatar for charity: Report

PTI ■ LONDON

Prince Charles, the heir to Britain’s throne, allegedly accepted a suitcase full of cash as a charitable donation from the former Prime Minister of Qatar, according to a UK media report on Sunday.

“The Sunday Times” says the suitcase was one of three bundles of cash given as charitable donations which the 73-year-old received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani.

The three lots, which reportedly totalled Euro 3 million, were handed to the prince personally between 2011 and 2015. Each payment was reportedly deposited into the accounts of the Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund (PWCF), a low-profile grant-making entity which funds projects close to the royal’s heart and his country estate in Scotland. There is no suggestion the payments were illegal, the newspaper said.

“Charitable donations received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim were passed immediately to one of the Prince’s charities who carried out the appropriate governance and have assured us that all the correct processes were followed,” Prince Charles’ Clarence House office said in a statement.

The newspaper claims that on one occasion the money was handed over in a holdall at a meeting at Clarence House. On another, the

“Charitable donations received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim were passed immediately to one of the Prince’s charities and have assured us that all the correct processes were followed,”

paper reports the cash was contained in carrier bags from the famous London department store Fortnum and Mason.

“At a few hours’ notice from “The Sunday Times”, we have checked into this event in the past, and confirm that the previous trustees of PWCF discussed the governance and donor relationship, (confirming that the donor was a legitimate and verified counterparty) and our auditors signed off on the donation after a specific enquiry during the audit. There was no failure of governance,” PWCF chairman Sir Ian Cheshire was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

“The donation was made in cash and that was the donor’s choice,” he said.

The PWCF has the stated aim of transforming lives and building sustainable communities, by awarding grants to good causes in fields such as conservation, education, health and social inclusion.

“The Sunday Times” said Sheikh Hamad’s lawyers declined to comment.

Boris claims to be on track to win next general election amid rebellion

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Sunday angered many of his Conservative Party colleagues with bold claims of being on track to lead the governing party at the next general election, despite a growing rebellion against his leadership following scathing defeats in two important by-elections.

Johnson has been putting up a strong defence in the face of criticism after voters punished the Conservatives over the partygate scandal and rising cost of living crisis by voting for Opposition Labour and Liberal Democrats in the by-elections earlier this week.

With these by-polls seen as a de facto referendum on his leadership, the UK PM was asked by reporters at the end of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in

Rwanda if he would like to serve a full second term in office until the next election expected in 2028-2029.

“At the moment I’m thinking actively about the third term and what could happen then, but I will review that when I get to it,” he told reporters. A Downing Street source later suggested he may have been joking.

Earlier, in a BBC interview, Johnson said: “If you’re saying you want me to undergo some sort of psychological transformation, I think that our listeners would know that is not going to happen.

“What you can do, and what the government should do, and what I want to do, is to get on with changing and reforming and improving our systems and our economy.”

He claimed that voters were “fed up with hearing conversation about me” and wanted to focus instead on

the cost of living, the economy and “standing up to violence and aggression” in Ukraine. “Forget about me, think about what this country, the UK could do and where it’s gone,” he told reporters.

However, his reaction and comments in the wake of the by-election defeats have attracted strong criticism from Conservative Party quarters believed to be plotting yet again to try and oust him as leader and Prime Minister. One unnamed former supporter of Johnson and an ex-Cabinet minister branded his remarks as “completely delusional”. A senior member of Parliament from a “red wall” seat, traditionally Labour Party strongholds which had been won over by the Tories in the 2019 general election, said he was “showing increasing signs of a bunker mentality, and that never ends well”

Dolphins in Lisbon river show benefits of protecting nature

AP ■ LISBON

Delegates attending a UN conference in Lisbon next week might take inspiration for their efforts to protect the oceans by looking out of the venue’s windows at Portugal’s longest river, where frolicking dolphins nowadays delight locals and tourists.

The number of dolphins swimming from the Atlantic into the mouth of the River Tagus at Lisbon has increased significantly in recent times as pollution has dropped.

“In the past 10 years, with the water improvement, we started seeing wildlife much more frequently,” says local sailor and guide Bernardo Queiroz, who organizes trips to see bottlenose and common dolphins in the river.

“We used to see (the dolphins) 10 times a year and now we have (them) 200 days a

year,” he says.

Queiroz’s tour business aims to create awareness about the importance and the benefits of nature preservation.

Senior officials and scientists from more than 120 countries are due to attend the five-day UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon starting Monday.

The United Nations is hoping that a conference starting Monday will bring fresh momentum for protracted efforts to find an international agreement on protecting the world’s oceans.

No comprehensive legal framework covers the high seas. Oceans cover some 70% of the earth’s surface and provide food and livelihoods for billions of people. Some activists refer to them as the largest unregulated area on the planet.

The oceans face a “severe” threat from global warming, pollution and acidification.

‘India exported 1.8 mn tonnes wheat since ban’

New Delhi: India has exported 1.8 million tonnes of wheat to a dozen-odd countries, including Bangladesh and Afghanistan, since the country banned exports of the grain on May 13, according to Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey.

About 33,000 tonnes of wheat as humanitarian assistance has already been supplied to Afghanistan against the commitment of 50,000 tonne, he said. Pandey, addressing a ministerial conference on ‘uniting for global food security’ held at Berlin, Germany on June 24, said India has always taken the needs of the world into consideration, even while meeting the onerous obligations of feeding its population of 1.38 billion people, an official statement said.

The secretary said: “It is important here to explain that the recent decision by the Government of India (GoI) to bring about regulation on wheat exports was essentially taken to protect domestic availability as well as availability to vulnerable countries to whom supplies cannot be ensured by market forces.”

India has nonetheless continued with its commitment to cater for the genuine needs of neighbouring countries and food-deficit nations through



Government-to-Government mechanism and also to fulfil supply commitments already made, he said.

“After the regulation until June 22nd this fiscal year, 1.8 million tonnes of wheat have been shipped out, almost four times from the previous year to countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Israel, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, UAE, Vietnam and Yemen,” he said.

On May 13, the government suspended wheat export with immediate effect. It moved the export of all varieties of wheat, including high-protein

durum, from “free” to the “prohibited” category. The decision was aimed at controlling rising prices of wheat in the domestic market.

India had exported a record 7 million tonnes of wheat during 2021-22 fiscal, while typically, the country exports around 2 million tonnes which is around 1 per cent of global wheat trade, he said. Stating that India is deeply conscious of its responsibilities towards the most vulnerable in various parts of the world, Pandey said the country continued to provide humanitarian assistance, both through the supply of vaccines as well as food consignments, during and beyond the pandemic. **PTI**

Global trends, crude oil, FII movement key stocks’ drivers this week

New Delhi: Stock markets will be driven by global trends, crude oil movement and foreign institutional investments this week, analysts said, adding that benchmark indices may also face volatility amid the scheduled monthly derivatives expiry.

Moreover, the movement in the rupee and the progress of monsoon would also be watched by investors, they added.

“Indian markets managed to recover from lower levels after two weeks of sharp cuts thanks to a recovery in global markets and a cut in commodity prices. It seems that this recovery may see a further extension and we can expect a decent rally in the coming days in equity markets,” said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

“Apart from F&O expiry, monthly auto sales numbers and monsoon development will be important triggers,” Meena said. Crude oil, rupee movement and FIIs’ behaviour will be other important factors, he added.

Ajit Mishra, VP - Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, “We expect volatility to remain high this week as well, thanks to the scheduled expiry

of June month derivatives contracts.”

“Besides, the performance of global indices especially the US, crude movement and monsoon progress, etc will remain on the radar. This week also marks the beginning of a new month so auto numbers will also start pouring in from July 1,” Mishra added. **PTI**

Mcap of 9 of top 10 valued firms jumps ₹2.51 L cr; TCS lead gainer

New Delhi: Nine of the 10 most valued firms added ₹2.51 lakh crore to their market valuation last week, with Tata Consultancy Services emerging as the biggest gainer.

Last week, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,367 points or 2.66 per cent.

HDFC Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever Limited and ICICI Bank were among the gainers while Reliance Industries was the sole loser in the pack. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) added ₹74,534.87 crore to its market valuation which stood at ₹12,04,907.32 crore at close on Friday. **PTI**

Trustworthiness, decisive leadership has led to India’s growth: Piyush Goyal

Coimbatore: India’s economy has grown due to its trustworthiness, decisive leadership and democratic structure favouring transparency at all levels, Union Commerce, Industry and Textile Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

The country, which is now a USD 3 trillion economy, has announced a stable policy framework and respected every investment made across sectors, Goyal said during an exclusive interaction meeting with members of CII in association with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Government of India and Invest India organised here on Saturday evening.

Members from the textile, light engineering and ICT sectors participated in the meeting.

Stating that DPIIT reforms are empowering Indian industries to bring about global growth, Goyal said the importance of launching the ONDC network (Open Network for Digital Commerce) has the potential to break barriers by enabling and empowering customers to engage with sellers of their choice seamlessly.

Goyal said current e-commerce platforms were restrictive and favour products of the platform developers’ choice but through ONDC, MSMEs



and startups can harness opportunities provided by digital advancement in connecting with their customers, an official release said here on Sunday.

Suggestions on importance of diversification and expansion to advanced economies like Japan for textiles was a welcome step and the ministry will support this endeavour, the Union minister said.

He assured to resolve representations on integrating multiple accreditations necessitated for the pump industry within a few days and assured that all the suggestions provided by the sectoral representatives will be duly considered and wherever possible will be resolved in a month’s time.

Kamal Bali, Deputy Chairman, CII Southern Region and Managing Director, Volvo Group (India) Pvt Ltd and CII Tamil Nadu leadership Shankar Vanavarayar and CII Coimbatore leadership, Prashanth and Arjun Prakash highlighted some special needs for industrial development such as, design capacity augmentation, creating high-value added jobs, high-value products and enriching innovation capacity for capturing global markets, the release said.

Rajendra Ratnoo, Joint Secretary, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce, and V K Singh, Special Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, spoke on the various reforms launched by their respective ministries for the benefit of industry. **PTI**

Bids invited sans PPAs for power from 8K MW thermal capacities



New Delhi: The Government will invite bids from states to sell electricity generated from 8,000 megawatt (MW) thermal capacities without PPAs, Power Minister RK Singh has said.

A total of 8,000 MW of thermal capacities in India are without any power purchase agreements, Singh, who is also the Minister for New and Renewable Energy, told PTI.

Replying to a question related to capacities without PPAs in India, the minister said, “There are 8,000 MW of capacities which don’t have PPAs in thermal”.

Sharing the government’s plan to resolve the issue, the minister informed that states have been asked to send their electricity requirement, and accordingly bids will be invited. “We will aggregate (their demand) and call on for bids and based on the bids, whoever puts in the lowest bids, PPAs will be signed. Once PPAs are signed, they (states) will get the power,” he said.

Speaking further, the minister said there are also some thermal capacities undergoing the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) proceedings, and the government has already taken several steps, including meeting with the bankers, to resolve the issue at the earliest so such plants can start operations.

“There are some projects in the NCLT. The country has 17,500 MW plants, which run only on imported coal. Out of that, 2,500 MW were under the NCLT. I had a meeting with bankers etc. We worked out on ways and means of starting this,” he said. **PTI**

423 infra projects show cost overruns of ₹5 lakh crore

New Delhi: As many as 423 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of ₹150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than ₹4.95 lakh crore, as per a report.

According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which monitors infrastructure projects of ₹150 crore and above, out of 1,568 projects, 423 reported cost overruns and as many as 721 projects were delayed.

“Total original cost of implementation of the 1,568 projects was ₹21,59,802.67 crore and their anticipated completion cost is ₹26,54,818.05 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of ₹4,95,015.38 crore (22.92 per cent of original cost),” the ministry’s latest report for May 2022 said. According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till May 2022 is ₹13,42,535.22 crore, which is 50.57 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects. However, the number of delayed projects decreases to 563 if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion. Further, it showed that for 569 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported. Out of the 721 delayed projects, 113 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 121 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 350 projects for 25-60 months and 137 projects have been delayed for 61 months and above. **PTI**

North Eastern Coalfields seeks clearances to operationalise 2 Assam mines in FY23

Margherita: Coal India unit North Eastern Coalfields is in the process of seeking clearances for putting into operation two of its mines in Assam in the current financial year.

The development assumes significance in the wake of efforts being made to avoid the reoccurrence of power outages faced by the country at the beginning of the summer season this year due to the shortage of coal supplies.

According to a senior official, once production starts from Tirap OCP (open cast project) of North Eastern Coalfields in Assam, the mine will add 0.6 million tonnes (MT) of coal supplies.

He further said that the company is also in the process of getting clearances for Tikak OCP in the state which will produce 0.2 MT of coal. “Once both the mines



begin production, the company will produce around one million tonnes of more coal,” the official said.

A major share of the coal produced from both blocks will go for power generation.

Coal mining at North Eastern Coalfields resumed in March after Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi inaugurated the

New Delhi: Foreign investors continue to desert Indian equity markets and pulled out close to ₹46,000 crore so far this month following monetary policy tightening by the Reserve Bank and US Federal Reserve, high oil prices and volatile rupee.

The net outflow by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from equities reached ₹2.13 lakh crore unutilised now in 2022, data with depositories showed.

Given the policy normalisation narrative by the US Fed and other major central banks, coupled with high oil prices and volatile Rupee, FPIs are likely to stay away from emerging market assets, Hitesh Jain, Lead Analyst - Institutional Equities, Yes Securities, said.

FPIs’ exodus still on; pull out ₹46K cr from Indian equities in June so far

FPIs inflow will only resume once there is visibility on the peak of bond yields in the US and an end to Fed rate hikes, he added.

Moreover, FPIs are likely to sell more if the current trend of rising dollar and bond yields persists, said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

According to the data, foreign investors withdrew a net amount of ₹45,841 crore from equities in June (till 24th).

The massive selling by FPIs continued in June as they have been relentlessly withdrawing money from Indian equities since October 2021.

“The RBI’s tightening of the monetary policy and inflated global commodity prices

have primarily led the domestic markets to bleed in terms of substantial cash outflows from the equity markets during the last few months,” Manoj Purohit, Partner & Leader – Financial Services Tax, BDO India, said.

The pace of such withdrawals was last seen when the pandemic surged in the first quarter of 2020.

Globally, the ongoing military conflict between Ukraine and Russia, rising fed rates and the return of the pandemic outbreak have further added fuel to the fire, Purohit said.

Geojit Financial Services’ Vijayakumar said that the rising dollar and appreciating bond yields in the US are the major factors triggering FPI outflows. **PTI**

GST Council Meet: Rate changes in taxes on some items on cards

New Delhi: The all-powerful GST Council, headed by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, is likely to make changes in goods and services tax (GST) rates on a handful of items and may go with the officers panel’s recommendations to maintain status quo in rates of over 215 items.

The 47th meeting of the GST Council, headed by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising representatives of all states and UTs, is scheduled for June 28-29. The Council is meeting after a gap of six months.

Apart from rate rationalisation, the Council is expected to see a stormy discussion around compensation payout to states with Opposition-ruled states aggressively pushing for its continuation beyond the 5-year period which ends in



June.

Major changes proposed by the officers’ panel or the Fitment Committee in the tax rates are a uniform 5 per cent GST rate on prostheses (artificial limbs) and orthopaedic implants (trauma, spine, and arthroplasty implants). Besides, orthoses (splints, braces, belts and calipers) too have been proposed in the lowest bracket of 5 per cent.

Currently, these goods attract tax rate of either 12 and

5 per cent.

The committee has also recommended reduction in GST rate on ropeway travel to 5 per cent from 18 per cent currently with ITC, Himachal Pradesh placing this request before the GST Council in September last year.

It also suggested that GST rate on ostomy appliances (including pouch or flange, stoma adhesive paste, barrier cream, irrigator kit, sleeves, belt, micro-pore tapes) should be reduced to 5 per cent, from 12 per cent at present.

Also, tax rates on sewage treated water is likely to be cut to ‘nil’. Currently, an ambiguity in wordings in the GST rates slab has led to two orders from Authority for Advance Ruling (AAR) stating that sewage treated water attracts 18 per cent GST rate. **PTI**

Lenders extend timeline for RCL resolution by 2 months to Nov

New Delhi: Lenders of debt-ridden Reliance Capital Ltd (RCL) on Sunday decided to extend the resolution process timeline by another two months to November 2 as there has been a tepid response from bidders for its acquisition.

The timeline was already extended once by 90 days -- from June 3 to September 2, 2022. This is the second extension granted by the Committee of Creditors (CoC) for the completion of RCL’s resolution process.

As per the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) rules, the administrator had to close the resolution of RCL within 180 days -- by June 3. The CoC also decided to extend the last date for submission of the resolution plan by the prospective bidders from June 20 to July 11. **PTI**

After 5 months, ONGC finally gets a Director on HPCL Board

New Delhi: After over five months, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has finally got a Director appointed on the Board of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd -- a firm it had acquired for ₹ 36,915 crore.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on June 22, conveyed its consent for the appointment of Pankaj Kumar, Director (Offshore), ONGC as a director on the board of HPCL, according to regulatory filings by HPCL. For over five months, ONGC had no representative on the board of HPCL -- a company in which it owns a 51.11 per cent stake since January 2018.



HPCL for over one-and-a-half years -- between January 2018 and August 2019 -- did not recognise ONGC as its promoter despite the government selling its entire 51.11 per cent stake in the company to the oil explorer. It relented only after a rap from market regulator SEBI. ONGC got the right to

appoint one director who HPCL called ‘Government Nominee Director’ (Representative of ONGC).

“Pankaj Kumar has been appointed as Government Director on the Board of the company effective June 22, 2022,” HPCL said in the filing. Officials said ONGC has been nominating one of its directors as the nominee director. Prior to the latest appointment, its last nominee director was Alka Mittal, Director (HR) who was appointed to the HPCL board in April 2021.

In January this year, Mittal was given additional charge of chairman and managing director of ONGC after the retirement of the incumbent. **PTI**

IOB aims to boost advances to retail, MSME, agri, corporate sector in FY23

New Delhi: State-owned Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) is aiming to boost advances in retail, MSMEs, corporate and agricultural loans during the current fiscal year, as the lender has substantially brought down the stressed assets on its balance sheet through sustained and targeted efforts.

The outlook of the Indian banking sector is seen to be improving on the back of better credit demand and strong balance sheets, IOB said in its FY21-22 annual report.

In the fiscal year ended March 2022, IOB witnessed doubling of its net profit at Rs 1,709 crore, as against ₹831 crore in the previous fiscal year, as the bank improved on its asset quality through a



multi-pronged strategy and focussed recovery initiatives.

IOB said the asset quality of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) are on an improving trend though some loans are classified as restructured loans under pandemic permitted RBI schemes.

During 2021-22, the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) of the PSBs improved from 9.11 per cent to 7.29 per cent and

net NPA from 3.09 per cent to 2.20 per cent.

“The Indian Overseas Bank is aiming to increase advances in the current financial year with secular growth across retail, micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME), and corporate and agricultural loans,” Partha Pratim Sengupta Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, Indian Overseas Bank said in his address to shareholders.

The Chennai-based lender pointed to the revised outlook by the India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on the Indian banking sector from ‘improving’ to ‘stable’ for 2022-23, helped by better credit demand and strong balance sheet of the banks. **PTI**

EV maker OSM to set up retrofit plant in Punjab at \$25-million

Mumbai: EV maker Omega Seiki Mobility is setting up a retrofit facility to convert internal combustion engine (ICE)-powered vehicles into electric vehicles near Chandigarh at an investment of USD 25-million, which is expected to be operational by the December quarter, company’s founder and chairman Uday Narang has said.

Narang also said that as the financing remains a challenge for the EV customers, retrofit brings these vehicles within the reach of those customers who want to move to such vehicles from ICE, particularly at the time when petrol and diesel

prices are at a much-elevated level.

The Faridabad-based company, which is a part of the Anglian Omega Group, currently manufactures cargo and passenger electric three-wheelers and small commercial vehicle M1KA. Besides, it is in the process of launching an electric two-wheeler as well as trucks in higher range.

“We have tied-up with a global player for retrofit technology to get into conversion of vehicles with ICE engines into electric powertrain vehicles. We are setting up a retrofit plant in Mohali in Punjab on 5-acre land,” Narang told PTI. **PTI**

AP ■ LONDON

At least at the outset, before a tennis ball is struck, this edition of Wimbledon is as much about who - and what - is missing as who's here.

And that's even taking this into account: It is no small matter that the grass-court Grand Slam tournament marks the return of Serena Williams to singles play after a year away.

The No. 1-ranked man, Daniil Medvedev, was barred from competing by the All England Club, along with every other player from Russia and Belarus, because of the war in Ukraine.

"It's a mistake," International Tennis Hall of Fame member Martina Navratilova said about the ban. "What are they supposed to do, leave the country? I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy."

Novak Djokovic, the No. 1 seed and three-time defending champion who will play in the first match in Centre Court on Monday, looked at the situation this way: "It's really hard to say what is right, what is wrong."

"As a child of a war - several wars, actually, during the '90s, I know what it feels like being in (the Ukrainians') position," the 35-year-old from Serbia said. "But at the other hand, I can't say I fully agree (with deciding) to ban Russian tennis players, Belarusian tennis players, from competing indefinitely. I just don't see how they have contributed to anything that is really happening. I mean, I don't feel it's fair."

The two professional tours reacted by pulling their ranking points from Wimbledon, an unprecedented move in a sport built around the rankings in so many ways. In turn, some athletes opted not to show up, including 2014 runner-up Eugenie Bouchard and four-time major champion Naomi Osaka.

For others, though, it was a no-doubt-about-it decision to show up. This is, after all, Wimbledon, with its unique surface and long-standing traditions, its powerful prestige and - let's face it - tens of millions in prize

NO RUSSIANS, NO RANKINGS, BUT SERENA'S BACK

money.

"It's definitely hard to swallow that there are no points. I'm not going to sit here and tell you I'm happy about it. But the cards are dealt. At the end of the day, if I tell my mom I'm not playing Wimbledon, she'd be like, 'Are you nuts?!' So I'm going to go, no doubt," said Frances Tiafoe, an American who is seeded 24th in the men's field. "It's out of everybody's hands. It's a tough situation, a crazy time. And it's not just about you. It's not a 'Why me?' problem."

There were rumors among players that prize money would be cut, too, prompting one, Fabio Fognini, to joke that he'd be thankful for that because - without any ranking points available and with less cash on offer - he'd head to an island for some vacation time with his wife, 2015 U.S. Open champion Flavia Pennetta, and their young children.

But it turned out that's all that was - a rumor: The All England Club wound up announcing it would provide a record total of about 40 million pounds (\$50 million) in player compensation.

There are other important names staying away for different reasons.

Reigning women's champion Ash Barty retired in March at age 25. Eight-time men's champion Roger Federer still has not returned from the latest in a series of knee operations; he has not participated in any tournament since last year's Wimbledon. No. 2-ranked Alexander Zverev is sidelined after tearing ligaments in his right ankle at the



French Open.

Also gone in 2022 at Wimbledon, for the first time in its lengthy history: a scheduled day off on the middle Sunday (so what had been a 13-day tournament becomes a full two-week event).

Ah, but guess who's back? Yes, Williams, thanks to a wild-card invitation, bringing enough star power to fill the spotlight for how-ever long she remains in the bracket.

The owner of seven championships at the All England Club - and 23 from all majors, a record for the professional era - last competed in singles in June 2021, when she slipped on the slick Centre Court grass and injured her right hamstring, forcing her to stop in the first set of her first-round match.

"I didn't retire. I just needed to heal physically, mentally. And I had no plans, to be honest. I just didn't know when I would come back. I didn't know how I would come back," Williams said Saturday. "Obviously, Wimbledon is such a great place to be, and it just kind of worked out."

She made a surprise appearance in doubles with Ons Jabeur on grass at Eastbourne this week, but the 40-year-old American will not have played singles before Tuesday's matchup against 113th-ranked Harmony Tan.

If Williams can crank up her best-in-the-game serve and move well enough to stay in points until she can end them with her stinging

groundstrokes, who knows what she'll be able to do? Plus, she has made a habit of winning matches soon after returning from lengthy absences.

Also around is Rafael Nadal, who is halfway to a calendar-year Grand Slam for the first time after winning the Australian Open in January and the French Open this month. The latter title, his 14th in Paris and men's-best 22nd at a major, came despite chronic pain in his left foot, which made the 36-year-old Spaniard question whether he could be at the All England Club - or continue at all.

"First of all, I can walk normally most of the days, almost every single day. That's, for me, the main issue," Nadal said Saturday. "When I wake up, I don't have this pain that I was having for the last year and a half. So quite happy about that."

This fortnight will not lack for story lines, certainly. Full crowds are back after the coronavirus pandemic led to restrictions on spectators last year and the cancellation of the tournament in 2020.

This marks the centenary of the current Centre Court, which made its debut in 1922.

French Open champion and top-ranked Iga Swiatek enters on a 35-match winning streak.

And Djokovic bids for a 21st Grand Slam trophy, knowing that, as things currently stand, he will not be able to go to the U.S. Open in August because he is not vaccinated against COVID-19 - and he says he won't get the shots.

Kyrgios happy to make 'top 10 players look ordinary'

AP ■ LONDON

Nick Kyrgios resumes his bittersweet relationship with Wimbledon vowing to continue making 'top 10 players look ordinary.'

The volatile Australian shot to fame at the All England Club in 2014 when ranked 114 in the world, he stunned two-time champion Rafael Nadal.

Kyrgios has been defeating the stars and upsetting officialdom while delighting his army of fans ever since.

"I've played top-10 players in the world this year and made them look pretty ordinary," the 27-year-old said Sunday.

"I know where my game's at. I know if I'm feeling confident, I'm playing well, I'm able to just light it up kind of whenever I want."

The facts back him up.

Having sat out the entire claycourt season, Kyrgios has excelled on grass this summer, reaching the semi-finals back-to-back in Stuttgart and Halle.

World number six Stefanos Tsitsipas fell to the Australian in Halle. That was the Greek's third loss in four meetings with Kyrgios.

Fellow members of the top such as Andrey Rublev and Casper Ruud have also fallen victim to a sometimes inspired Kyrgios in 2022.

Kyrgios made the quarter-finals at Wimbledon in 2014 on the back of his famous win over Nadal.

However, recent visits have not been so fruitful and he has yet to get past the fourth round in his last six visits.

Along the way, he has been accused of tanking, complained about the state of the grass last year while admitting he deliberately speared a ball at Nadal in the pair's bad-tempered 2019 rematch.

Kyrgios knows he has the tools to make the second week at Wimbledon again.

"I know if I'm serving well and I'm playing well, I can beat anyone. I have pretty much beaten everyone in the draw before," he said.



"It's hard. It's like not many people have gotten over the hump of winning a slam. I'm one of the people that has to deal with that every week.

"Like, Oh, he's probably one of the biggest wastes of talent. He should be winning a Slam." Kyrgios will still play to the crowd.

In recent seasons, he has sought the advice of fans on serve placement, perfected the underarm serve and once even demanded a beer while playing at the French Open.

The darker, flip side has seen thousands of dollars in fines and a suspended 16-week ban in 2019.

"The crowd knows I'm going to try and bring a lot of energy, bring a lot of flair and entertainment," Kyrgios said.

"I think that's just something I come with now. I can't really get rid of that. It's just something I want to do as well."

Nadal feels immortal, says Tsitsipas

AP ■ LONDON

Stefanos Tsitsipas believes Rafael Nadal must feel "immortal" after winning the French Open and moving halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century.

The great Spaniard captured a 14th title at Roland Garros earlier this month to add to the Australian Open he secured in January.

His win in Paris, which also extended his Grand Slam record to 22 titles, came despite him needing his injured left foot to be anaesthetised.

"I have a lot of respect for what he did at the French Open, playing with that foot. It was a broken foot in a way. It kind of makes him feel like he's immortal with the things he's able to pull off," said Tsitsipas.

"The matches, the level of intensity he's able to reach in times where it's very uncomfortable, it would be uncomfortable for most players to compete under these conditions physically."



Nadal goes into Wimbledon, which starts on Monday, claiming he is pain-free for the first time in a year and a half after undergoing treatment to cure nerve pain in his troublesome foot.

Tsitsipas believes that Nadal, the

champion at the All England in 2008 and 2010, has a psychological edge if rivals believe the Spanish star is often just one injury away from retirement.

"We're used to seeing Rafa not being able to play and win multiple

Grand Slams or tournaments," added the 23-year-old.

"That's where I think the opponents need to be more careful. When he says he can't play and has foot problems, that's where I feel he's the most threatening in terms of his performance.

"It's actually reverse psychology in a way."

World number six Tsitsipas arrives at Wimbledon with a first grass-court title under his belt having triumphed in Mallorca on Saturday.

Now he needs to translate that form to the All England Club where he has fallen at the first round three times in four visits.

That included 2021 when he was knocked out in straight sets by Frances Tiafoe.

"Last year was difficult for me. I didn't play a single match before Wimbledon on grass.

I was trying to play on grass like I did on clay, which was a huge mistake," he admitted on Sunday.

India end with three medals in Archery WC Stage 3

PTI ■ PARIS

The Indian women's recurve team of Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat and Simranjeet Kaur settled for a silver medal after the trio's fairytale run was halted by Chinese Taipei in a one-sided final at the World Cup Stage 3 here on Sunday.

India concluded their campaign with one gold and two silver medals -- two of them coming in the compound section.

The women's recurve team, who bagged a lowly 13th seed after the trio slipped out of top-30 in their individual qualification rounds, failed to make much of an impact and lost to Chinese Taipei 5-1 (53-56 56-56 53-56) in straight sets.

With Rio Olympics team bronze medallist Lei Chien-Ying in the line up, third seed Chinese Taipei mounted early pressure with two 10s and four 9s as India shot a 7 in the first set that proved to be the turning point.

The Indian trio bounced



back to level the second set but that was not enough as it again slipped in the third set,

while Chinese maintained their consistency to seal the gold.

Nevertheless it was a memorable return for world no. 3 Deepika, who returned with a team silver after being sidelined following her Tokyo Olympics debacle.

But the tournament was all about compound archer Jyothi Surekha Vennam's dream comeback, who led India's medal tally with one gold (mixed team event with Abhishek Verma) and one silver (individual) on Saturday.

The world no. 3 Jyothi too was snubbed in the Asian Games trial earlier this year.

PTI ■ PATIALA

It won't be surprising if diminutive Mirabai Chanu stands atop the podium, flashing her radiant smile, after winning a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games on July 30.

After all, she will enter Birmingham, as title favourite.

Chanu's personal best is 207kg (88kg+119kg) which is far better than the best effort of Nigeria's Stella Kingsley, who will be her nearest rival and has managed only 168kg (72kg+96kg) till date.

Chanu's legend has only grown since the last edition of the CWG. She has added an Olympic silver, an Asian Championship bronze and a world record to her kitty.

It is not baffling when she avowed that she herself will be her real competition in Birmingham and not her rivals.

"CWG will be easy for me. I will be fighting with myself," Chanu, who already has a silver (2014) and a gold (2018) at CWG, asserts politely.

"There is not much competition in CWG, but that doesn't mean there is no competition. I have to give my best performance keeping in mind the future tournaments," she said during a candid chat at Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NIS).

Since there won't be competition, Chanu has bigger targets in mind.

She is eager to rewrite her own clean and jerk world record of 119kg.

"I am thinking of attempting 120kg in the CWG."

The former world champion also wants to breach the much-anticipated 90kg mark in the snatch section, which she confesses has become somewhat of a mental block.

"Yes (it has become a men-



tal block). We have planned to lift 91kg or 92kg at the CWG. Hopefully, it will happen."

But lifting close to twice your body weight is easier said than done specially when Chanu still struggles with a shoulder imbalance.

Earlier this month, she failed to improve her snatch lift, unable to hoist 89kg twice at a domestic event due to her back.

"My back became stiff (tight) 2-3 days before going. The journey to Nagrota was also five hours. We went form Patiala to Chandigarh a day before the tournament, then took a flight from Chandigarh, which was also late. So the back became more tight."

Aware of her weakness in snatch, Chanu has worked on tweaking her technique.

"I haven't gone above 88kg. That is the weight I have set.

But training wise right now I am better placed than I was at the Olympics.

"To lift 90kg in a competition, we set the weight between 80-90kg which we lift consistently everyday.

It's not like we lift 90kg everyday," she explains.

Her personal best of 88kg is 8kg less than Tokyo gold medallist China's Hou Zhihui's world record lift of 96kg.

"I have changed my snatch technique. In snatch, while rising, the toes, back and shoulder should be in a line.

Back and shoulders are very important they need to move fast.

Earlier my movement was not synchronised. Now I have

changed it."

Chanu conceded that she feels compelled to compensate her frailty in snatch by lifting more in clean and jerk.

"Yes, I feel if not one, then in the other I have to improve. To reach 96kg, it will take some time and it will be a little difficult for me.

"93kg-94kg I can reach. If I perform well in clean and jerk I can get the same total (as the Chinese) or even more."

Chanu, who will be vying for her third CWG medal, will once again be wearing her gold earrings shaped like Olympic rings, which had stolen the show at the Tokyo Games.

The earring were a gift from her mother, who had sold her own jewellery ahead of the Rio Games, in hope that it

would bring her daughter luck. And luck it brought.

"I will wear those earrings at the Commonwealth Games. They brought me luck in Tokyo," Chanu said with an ear to ear grin.

After she won the silver at Tokyo Games, in a heart-warming gesture Chanu felicitated the truck drivers who used to give her free rides till her training academy in Imphal, which was about 30km away from her village.

"I found all the truck drivers and because of Corona they were all sitting at home," Chanu reminisced.

"They were really happy. I saw them and I thought of those days when they used to keep blowing their truck horns and I would run to get a lift.

When I reflect, I remember all the difficulties I had to go through to reach here.

But what to do, life is a cycle, kabhi upar kabhi neeche."

The Asian Games now remains the only big ticket-event where Chanu is yet stamp her authority.

INDIA WOMEN EYE SERIES SWEEP AGAINST SRI LANKA

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

The series already in their pocket, a confident India will look to complete a whitewash when they take on hosts Sri Lanka in the third and final women's T20 International here on Monday.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led outfit had thrashed the home team by 34 runs in the opening T20 and then followed it up with a dominating five-wicket win in the second game to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

More importantly, the wins will be a morale booster for India ahead of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham starting next month, where women's T20 cricket is set to make its debut.

India seem to have found the winning momentum, but they won't be entirely pleased with their performance in the series so far.

While the bowlers have done a stellar job in the two games, India's batting has left a lot to be desired.



Additionally, the Indians have been sloppy on the field.

The bowling unit has been on the mark for India. The spinners have been sensational, making full use of the slow nature of the pitch. They had comfortably defended 138 in the opening game.

Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu (43) and opener Vishmi Gunaratne (45) presented the Indian bowling unit with a challenge as the duo put up a 87-run stand in the second game.

But the Indian bowlers made a strong comeback as they gave just 14 runs in the last 3.1 overs while claiming six wickets to restrict Sri Lanka to a below-par 125.

But the visitors were made to work hard for what should have been a comfortable chase.

Shafali Verma (17), Sabbhineni Meghana (17) and Yastika Bhatia (13) were unable to convert their starts.

The team's top scorer in the previous game Jemimah Rodrigues (3) also perished cheaply and will aim for consistency.

After stuttering in the first game, prolific opener Smriti Mandhana roared back to form, her 39 off 34 balls helped the tourists win the match and the series.

Mandhana was complemented by Harmanpreet (31 not out), who is now India's leading T20I run scorer. The all-rounder played a captain's knock guiding her side over the line while also pitching in with the ball.

Sri Lanka will be desperately hoping to avoid a second consecutive whitewash, having gone down to Pakistan 0-3 in a T20 series recently.

The hosts will seek to perform as a cohesive unit and grab a consolation win, which will lift their spirits heading into the three-match ODI series, starting Friday.

For that they need more contributions with the bat while their bowlers will also need to support the spin duo of Inoka Ranaweera and Oshadi Ranasinghe, who have done most of the task with the ball for the side till now.



ASHWIN RETURNS TO SNAP TWO WICKETS

PTI ■ LEICESTER

Opener Shubman Gill struck a sublime fifty while Ravichandran Ashwin snapped two wickets after making his first appearance in the game following his recovery from a COVID-19 infection as India's warm-up match against Leicestershire ended in a draw here on Sunday.

As many as five Indians turned up for both the teams during the four-day practice match as the visitors looked to put final touch to their preparation for the rescheduled fifth Test against England starting in Birmingham on July 1.

It was a much-needed outing for Ashwin, who had travelled to England late after testing positive for the virus. He looked in good touch as he bowled 11 overs and took two wickets, conceding 31 runs.

Pacer Jasprit Bumrah led India on the fourth and final day after the country woke up to the news of their skipper Rohit Sharma testing positive for COVID-19, which put his participation in the one-off Test in serious doubt.

If he misses out, Gill will have to take the onus of giving India a good start and the Punjab batter, who was earlier dismissed for 21 and 38, finally managed to convert the starts with a 77-ball 62 studded with eight hits to the fence and two maximums.

He emerged as the top-scorer after he turned up for Leicestershire, who were set a target of 367 to win following India's second innings declaration at 364 for 7.

Hanuma Vihari, who also batted for both

the teams, spent some quality time in the middle with his 86-ball vigil producing a 26-run innings. He had scores of 3 and 20 in the earlier innings.

Chasing 367, Leicestershire lost Hasan Azad (12) early on day 4 but Gill stitched a 67-run partnership with skipper Samuel Evans (26) to steady the innings.

However, spinner Ashwin dismissed both the batters.

The 35-year-old from Chennai had first Gill caught by Mohammed Shami in the 28th over and then removed Evans with wicket-keeper Srikanth Bharat coming up with a clean take behind the stumps to effect the stumping.

Vihari and Louis Kimber (58 not out) then came together and forged a 72-run stand to take Leicestershire close to the 200-mark.

Vihari's stay ended when Ravindra Jadeja (1/35 in 8 overs) had him caught behind in the 56th over.

Kimber and Joey Evison (15 not out) batted for another 10 overs, adding 37 before both the teams decided to shake hands.

Prasidh Krishna and Bumrah bowled for both Indians and Leicestershire but both remained wicketless on the final day.

While Krishna bowled five overs for 19 runs, Bumrah rolled his arms for 8 overs, conceding 12.

Among other Indians, Cheteshwar Pujara also had batted for both teams, while Shreyas Iyer and Jadeja had batted twice in India's second innings on Saturday.

Rohit Sharma has tested positive for Covid: BCCI



PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

India skipper Rohit Sharma has tested positive for COVID-19 in a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) and placed in isolation ahead of 'fifth' Test against England, the BCCI said on Sunday.

The Test match is scheduled to begin from July 1 in Birmingham and if Rohit remains in six-day isolation, either pacer Jasprit Bumrah or wicket-keeper batter Rishabh Pant could be asked to lead the team.

"Team India captain Mr Rohit Sharma has tested positive for COVID-19 following a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) conducted on Saturday," BCCI Secretary Jay Shah said in a media release.

"He is currently in isolation

at the team hotel and is under the care of the BCCI Medical Team. An RT-PCR test will be conducted on Sunday to ascertain his CT value," the release added. Rohit had batted on first day of the ongoing warm-up game against Leicestershire but didn't take field on the second day. He did not bat in the second Indian innings.

The 35-year-old Indian skipper is expected to open the innings alongside Shubman Gill in the Test match and his participation would now depend on result of his RT-PCR test and recovery.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin had also joined the squad in England late since he had also tested positive for COVID-19 before the team left for the UK tour.

Daryl Mitchell, Blundell frustrate England again

AP ■ LEEDS

New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell frustrated England again on Sunday as they denied the hosts a fresh breakthrough in their quest for a series whitewash.

The pair batted through the entire morning session to take the Black Caps to 254-5 in their second innings, a lead of 223 runs, at lunch on the fourth day of the third Test at Headingley.

Mitchell, who had already scored three hundreds this series, including 109 in New Zealand's first innings 329, was 44 not out.

Blundell, fresh from his first-innings 55, was unbeaten on 45.

The pair had so far put on 93 to follow their first-innings partnership of 120 and this latest stand also saw them get through the first two overs the new ball, available to England for two overs before the interval.

World Test champions New Zealand resumed on 168-5, a lead of 137 runs, having lost a flurry of wickets late on Saturday.

And with England having



chased down 299 inside a day to win at Nottingham and go 2-0 up in the three-match series, the Black Caps still had plenty to do if they were to avoid a whitewash.

Mitchell and Blundell, four and five not out respectively overnight, were rarely troubled as England captain Ben Stokes -- yet to bowl himself Sunday -- rotated his pace attack.

But England left-arm spinner Jack Leach, who took 5-100 in the tourists' first-innings, did pose problems by gaining plenty of turn, dip and bounce.

Leach thought he had Mitchell, pushing forward, lbw for 17 with the total on 206.

South African umpire Marais Erasmus raised his fin-

ger, but Mitchell's review indicated the ball would have bounced over the stumps and the decision was overturned.

England had been forced into a late change, with Sam Billings called up as an emergency wicketkeeper after Ben Foakes was ruled out of the rest of the match following a positive test for Covid-19.

Foakes did not take the field on Saturday afternoon because of a stiff back, with Jonny Bairstow deputising behind the stumps, but Billings, who made his Test debut in the final match of England's Ashes series loss in Australia earlier this year, was drafted in for the remainder of this fixture.

Mithali is an inspiration to many: PM Modi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday paid glowing tributes to Mithali Raj and conveyed his best wishes to the legendary former Indian skipper who announced her retirement earlier this month.

Having made her debut at the age of 16, Mithali brought an end to an illustrious 23-year career, finishing as the most capped player, the highest run-scorer and the most successful women's captain.

In Sunday's episode of 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi described Mithali as "one of the most talented cricketers in India".



"Her retirement from cricket has emotionally moved many sports lovers. Mithali has not only been an extraordinary player but has also been an inspiration to many players. I wish Mithali all the very best for her future," the prime minister said.

Since making her debut on June 26, 1999 against Ireland, Mithali represented the country in 12 Tests, 232 ODIs and 89 T20Is. In 333 international matches, the 39-year-old aggregated 10,868 runs across three formats. She has led India to a record 89 wins from 155 ODIs, ahead of Belinda Clarke who is second in the list with 83 victories.

MP create history with maiden Ranji triumph

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Madhya Pradesh, not considered among cricketing elites during the past decade, on Sunday humbled domestic powerhouse Mumbai by six wickets in a one-sided Ranji Trophy final under coach Chandrakant Pandit, who exorcised the ghosts of losing one at this very ground 23 summers ago.

On the final day, Mumbai could only manage 269 in their second innings, leaving MP with a paltry target of 108, and they did it in style as Pandit won a record sixth national title as a coach.

Sarfraz Khan (45), who finished the season with 18 short of 1000 runs and young Suved Parkar (51) tried their bit, but with the need to attack at every opportunity, MP's Kumar Kartikeya (4/98) and the other bowlers knew that wickets would come their way.

While chasing, there were some hiccups, but with just over 100 to get, it was a stroll in the park for the MP team.

As they completed the victory, Pandit was flooded with memories (not happy ones), which he hasn't been able to erase for over two decades and despite winning five trophies as a coach.

It was here at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in the summer of 1999 when MP, despite a first-innings lead of 75, failed to win the game as Pandit, a proud captain, finished his playing career in tears.

Before the final, he spoke to PTI about divine intervention and circle of life and during the five days, sat in one corner with a white towel on his lap.

He has again proved to be an 'Alchemist', after guiding Vidarbha to four trophies (successive Ranji and Irani Cup), with a team that didn't have superstars.

The Yash Dubeys, Himanshu Mantris, Subham Sharmas, Gourav Yadavs or Saransh Jains aren't players who would give you the feeling that they are India prospects, the classy Rajat Patidar being an exception.



But they gave enough indication that they aren't ready to concede even a micro millimetre without a good scrap.

They gave the Mumbai men a lesson in perfect execution of tactic with dollops of 'Khadoos' cricket, which many thought was a patent of the 41-time champions.

MP's win once again proved

that the Ranji Trophy is often won by sides which don't have too many superstars or India prospects with ambition or wherewithal to play top-flight cricket.

It happened with Rajasthan when they had Hrishikesh Kanitkar, Akash Chopra during their triumph while Vidarbha had Wasim Jaffer and Ganesh Sathish guiding a bunch of

youngsters.

In MP, there was no Avesh Khan or Venkatesh Iyer and had only an emerging potential star in Patidar, yet they followed Pandit's 'Gurukul' style of 'My Way or Highway' coaching philosophy to emerge triumphant.

Since 2010, the Ranji Trophy, barring Karnataka's dominance for a few seasons and Mumbai winning it

once, it has been won by teams like Rajasthan (twice), Vidarbha (twice), Saurashtra (once) and Madhya Pradesh, who would never be in contention in the past.

This shows that cricket has moved from the Shivaji Park, Azad Maidan or Cross Maidan in Mumbai, from the National Stadium in Delhi or the state-of-the-art camps in Bengaluru or Kolkata, to the hinterlands.

Bhopal's Yash Dubeys, who had problems with his eye-sight during teenage years or Sultanpur's Kumar Kartikeya, who hadn't gone back home for nine years or Hoshangabad's Gourav Yadav, who would beat Prithvi Shaw's bat many times just for fun are men, who haven't had it easy.

When the Ranji Trophy started, the Madhya Pradesh cricket team wasn't even formed and it was back then known as Holkar, a princely state from the British era, which produced the country's finest cricketers - the charismatic Mushtaq Ali -- or the first ever captain of the Indian cricket

team -- the great CK Nayudu. Holkar was a formidable team till the 1950s before it was rechristened as Madhya Bharat and subsequently Madhya Pradesh.

MP, over the years, have produced some fine cricketers - spinners Narendra Hirwani and Rajesh Chauhan -- who had brief but eventful international careers.

Amay Khurasiya, who had finished his cricket some years before the IPL, where he would have been a rocking success.

And then there was the peerless Devendra Bundela, who was one of those unlucky middle-order batters, who played in the 1990s and 2000s when Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and VVS Laxman were in their pomp.

But as a Ranji team, it never looked menacing save the occasional final they played 23 summers back under Pandit's captaincy.

However, this was a team that had enough self-belief and was ready to punch above its weight. They did it with aplomb through five days.