

OPINION 6
NOSTALGIA: THE DAYS
OF YORE AT RIMC**WORLD 8**
IRAN SUSPENDS TALKS WITH
SAUDI AFTER MASS EXECUTION**MONEY 9**
INDIA GDP GROWTH
FORECAST CUT TO 7.9%Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADALate City Vol. 32 Issue 72
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, MONDAY MARCH 14, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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PANT LIGHT
UP B'LURU
12 SPORT

Cong chooses to stay with Gandhis

Sonia offers to quit, CWC members plead with troika to continue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on Sunday evening saw the repeat of the same old drama, which the highest decision-making body of the party has witnessed after every poll debacle in the recent past.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi made the emotional offer that Gandhis will move out "if the party feels so", and CWC members pleaded with them to continue. At the end of the nearly five-hour-long meeting, it was decided that Sonia will continue to lead the party, which will be guided by former chief Rahul Gandhi and General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi.

Even as the meeting progressed, hundreds of party workers raised slogans outside the party headquarters in favour of the Gandhis.

The leadership decided to convene another round of the CWC and a Chintan Shivir after the end of the second part



Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi chairs the Congress Working Committee meeting after the party's debacle in the recent Assembly elections held in five States, at the AICC HQ, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

of the Parliament Budget Session in April third week. The CWC authorised Sonia to take all necessary steps to revamp the organisation, but there was no outcome on advancing the organisational elections scheduled for September this year.

After the decimation of the Congress in the Assembly polls, the need for an immediate full-time party president and an early organisational overhaul had gained importance.

The CWC meeting held to discuss party's poll debacle in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Goa and Punjab had all members attending barring former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and former Defence Minister AK Antony. Sonia chaired the meeting.

Rahul and Priyanka were

also present along with the Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma. Azad and Sharma belong to the G-23 dissident camp and on Friday called the party defeats "shocking" and demanded an urgent roadmap for revival.

During the meeting, Sonia listened to all leaders and said she was willing to make required changes to strengthen the party.

Amid calls for large-scale reforms to revive the party's dwindling electoral fortunes, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal said that the party president will immediately take corrective measures to revamp and re-strengthen the organisation. Sources said Azad questioned the move to crack down on the old guard.

Continued on Page 2

US scribe shot dead, another hurt in Ukraine

Kyiv: One US journalist was shot dead and another wounded on Sunday in Irpin, a front-line suburb of Kyiv that has witnessed some of the fiercest fighting since Russia invaded Ukraine. Papers found on the American reporter's body identified him as 50-year-old video documentary shooter Brent Renaud, of New York.

A New York Times identity card was among the papers, leading to reports that he worked for the paper, but the US daily said he was not working for it at the time of his death.

The International Federation of Journalists identified the wounded reporter as American photographer Juan Arredondo.

A third victim, a Ukrainian who had been in the same car as the Americans, was also wounded, according to a medic at the scene.

Continued on Page 2

Ukraine crisis worsens, India moves embassy to Poland

Modi, CCS review security situation; briefed about all aspects of conflict and its implications for country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the worsening situation in war-torn Ukraine, the Indian Embassy there has been shifted temporarily to Poland.

"In view of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Ukraine, including attacks in the western parts of the country, it has been decided that the Indian Embassy in Ukraine will be temporarily relocated to Poland. The situation will be reassessed in the light of further development," the Government announced on Sunday.

The decision to shift the embassy to Poland came in the backdrop of reports indicating rapid advance by the Russian military in western Ukraine and towards the capital Kyiv. Family members of the Indian

Embassy staff were moved out of the country some days ago after the invasion began on February 24. A significant number of officials in the Indian Embassy in Kyiv were already working from its camp office in Lviv for the last few days. Lviv is a city in western Ukraine, around 70 kilometers from the border with Poland.

These officials played an important role in ensuring the safe evacuation of more than 18,000 Indian citizens including students from Ukraine since February 22 through special flights arranged by India as part of "Operation Ganga."

The citizens were brought out from neighbouring countries including Romania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova after they crossed over to these countries from

Ukraine through land border transit points. Ukraine had closed its airspace for civilian aircraft after Russia began the military operation.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed the security scenario along with his ministerial colleagues of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and was briefed about all the aspects of the conflict and its likely implications for the country. The key meeting was held two days prior to the second part of Budget Session of Parliament beginning Monday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will apprise both Houses about the situation in Ukraine, its consequences for India and details of Operation Ganga to evacuate stranded Indians from there.

Continued on Page 2

AAP hints at a new revolution in Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

A century after Bhagat Singh popularised the slogan of "inquilab zindabad", the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has indicated the beginning of a new revolution in Punjab. Chief Minister-designate Bhagwant Mann on Sunday asked people of the State to attend his oath ceremony on March 16 by donning basanti turbans, the headgear associated with the martyr.

The party has already chosen his maternal ancestral village, Khatkar Kalan, for the ceremony. Mann, who led the AAP in bagging a historic mandate with record 92 seats, a tally secured for the first time by a party since Punjab's reorganisation in 1966, is set to take oath as Punjab's 17th Chief Minister on Wednesday.

In a massive event at Khatkar Kalan village in Nawanshahr, only...

Continued on Page 2

Shatrughan to contest LS polls from Asansol, Supriyo from Ballygunge

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday sprung a huge surprise naming cine star Shatrughan Sinha as Trinamool Congress' candidate from Asansol Lok Sabha constituency which fell vacant after

sitting MP and Bollywood personality Babul Supriyo resigned from the BJP. Mamata also named Supriyo, a singer-turned politician, as her party's candidate for the Ballygunge Assembly segment in South Kolkata. Supriyo had joined the TMC after quitting the BJP.

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Post UP win Yogi meets Modi, Naidu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In his first visit to the national Capital after his return to power in Uttar Pradesh (UP), Chief Minister-designate Yogi Adityanath on Sunday discussed with the BJP leadership the list of the State Cabinet Ministers and names of the Deputy Chief Ministers.

Adityanath had back to

back meetings with top leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, party president JP Nadda and BJP national general secretary BL Santosh.

He also met Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu.

Adityanath discussed names of probables first with BL Santosh and later with the party president. It is expected that a number of new faces

would be included in his second run in the Government.

The leadership is considering the inclusion of two former police officers (Rajeshwar Singh and Asim Arun) in the new Cabinet. The newly-elected MLA from the Sarojini Nagar seat of Lucknow, Rajeshwar Singh, was an officer of UP Police, BJP MLA

Continued on Page 2

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LIC/FRA/2021-22/49/Eng

AAP holds post-victory road show in Punjab

Kejriwal says Punjab will have honest CM after decades

PNS ■ AMRITSAR/CHANDIGARH

Sweeping away Punjab's traditional political players by securing a thumping three-fourth majority, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday conducted a massive victory march to thank the people of the state for the party's historic victory.

Stressing that three crore Punjabis have ushered in an "inquilab" (revolution), AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that for the first time, after so many years, Punjab has got an honest Chief Minister.

"Tussi kamaal kar dita" (you did wonders). I love you Punjab!" said Kejriwal, addressing the people waiting on both sides of the road during the party's victory march in Amritsar.

"We are bowing before three crore Punjabis...the whole world knew that Punjabis bring revolution, but still could not believe that such an incredible inquilab could sweep...saare haar gaye.....Sukhbir ji, Parkash Singh Badal ji, Manpreet Badal got defeated...Channi defeated on both the seats, Majithia ji...Navjot Singh Sidhu ji tasted defeat...only Punjabis could bring this bahot bada inquilab...no one else...aap logon ne jharu chala di" said Kejriwal, who was accompa-

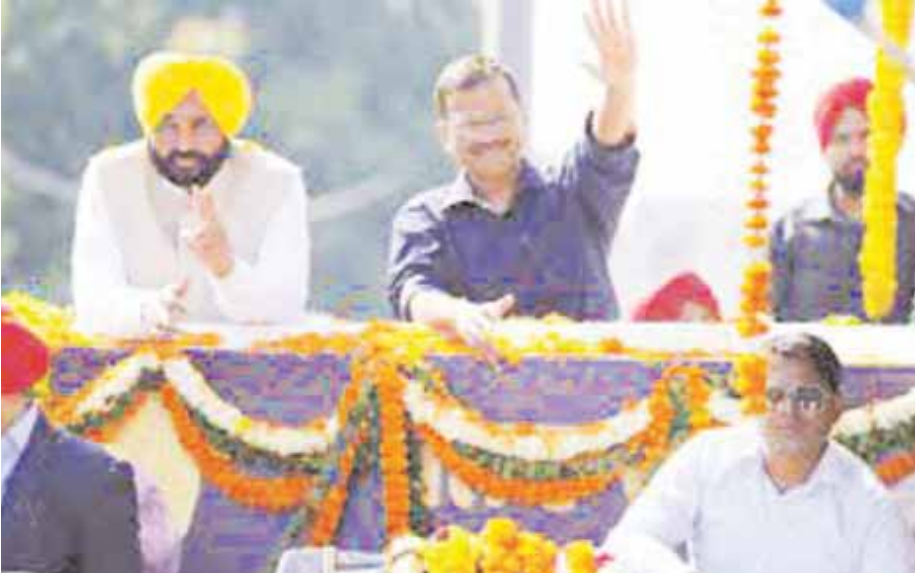
nied by the Chief Minister-designate Bhagwant Mann, and the party's newly-elected MLAs and senior leaders.

Continuing, Kejriwal said that after so many decades, "Punjab will be getting an honest CM...My younger brother Bhagwant Mann is kattar imandaar...An honest government will be formed."

Promising the formation of a corruption-free and honest government in the State, Kejriwal declared, "It will be honest government. Even if our Minister or MLA indulges in any kind of corruption, we will not spare them and send that person to jail. We will stop this loot of coffer. Every penny will be spent on the people."

Kejriwal also asserted that all the "guarantees" he and the party had given to the people of Punjab in the run-up to elections, "would be fulfilled...we are committed".

"Mann would take oath of CM...Not only he, each and every Punjabi would be the CM...I request you all to come to Khatkhar Kalan, the land of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, to grace the swearing-in ceremony and start building a new Punjab by participating in that historic ceremony...We are committed to make hasda vasda Punjab rangla Punjab," he said, amidst loud cheering by the crowd.



Punjabis would get rid of dishonest and tainted politicians, who had been looting the state with both hands, he added.

Kejriwal said that the AAP government will take Punjab on the path of progress. "We will make Punjab 'Rangla' (vibrant). Every penny of public money will be spent on the people. We will fulfill all the guarantees we have promised to the people of Punjab. It may take some time, but no guarantee will be abandoned," he added.

Mann, addressing the people, said that the people of Punjab have created history.

"All the traditional parties got together to defeat the AAP, but the revolutionary people of Punjab united against them and made AAP win with an overwhelming majority," he said.

"After 20 days of hunger strike and a long struggle, Arvind Kejriwal formed AAP, and contested elections in Delhi on donations given by the people, and formed the government. The aim of the Aam Aadmi Party is to do politics for the betterment and upliftment of the common people by eliminating corruption and nepotism from the politics of the

country," he said.

Stating that the AAP government will solve the problems of the common people and ensure their safety, Mann said that for the same we have already withdrawn the security of 122 leaders because now hundreds of those police personnel will be deployed in the service of the public instead of politicians. "17 police vehicles were taken back from the leaders. We will get the police to do police work and create a safe environment for the common people," he added.

AAP wiped out the Congress and the SAD-BSP combine by defeating stalwarts like sitting and former Chief Ministers like Charanjit Singh Channi, Parkash Singh Badal, and Amarinder Singh.

Chief Minister-designate Mann will take oath alone on Wednesday, party sources said. The oath ceremony of his cabinet, which may comprise 17 members, will be held later.

AAP has won 92 seats in Punjab -- up from 20 in 2017 with its vote share rising to 42.4 per cent.A day earlier, Mann met Governor Banwarilal Purohit at the Raj Bhawan here and staked claim to form the government.

He is set to take oath as the 17th Chief Minister of Punjab at Khatkhar Kalan, the ancestral village of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh in Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar district, on March 16 at 12.30 p.m.

Addressing the media outside the Raj Bhavan on Saturday, Mann said: "We also informed the Governor about the place and time of the swearing-in ceremony. I have invited all the people of Punjab to come to Khatkhar Kalan for this historic occasion. On March 16, not only us and our ministers, all the people of Punjab will take an oath to make Punjab prosperous again. We all together make Punjab prosperous."

Adhikari defeated Didi by unfair means, says TMC's new entrant from the BJP

Kolkata: Days after switching over to the TMC from the BJP, veteran leader Joy Prakash Majumder stirred a controversy as he claimed that Leader of Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari's win against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the 2021 assembly polls from Nandigram was not by fair means.

Majumder, who was suspended by the BJP in the last week of January for "anti-party activities", claimed that it was "baffling" how Adhikari went on to clinch the seat, just hours after Banerjee was declared winner from the constituency in Purbia Medinipur district.

"I remember Suwendu had stated on the night of May 2 that he had to use tricks to win Nandigram," the newly appointed vice-president of the TMC, who was once a fierce critic of Mamata Banerjee, told reporters on Saturday.

"The counting process was not transparent in Nandigram. By sleight of hand, Suwendu suddenly piped Mamata Banerjee, who was initially declared the winner," Majumder said.

Former state minister Rajib Bandyopadhyay, who had unsuccessfully contested from Domjur on a BJP ticket and returned to the TMC shortly after, also claimed that Majumder's assertions were 100 per cent true.

"I know Suwendu Adhikari was not declared the winner in a fair manner. I can vouch for that," Bandyopadhyay said.

In a tongue-in-cheek Twitter post in Bengali, Adhikari described the press meet of the Trinamool Congress leaders as a "farce" conducted by an "extortionist" party. **PTI**

Cong chooses...

From Page 1

...Captain Amarinder Singh and attempt to destabilise Harish Rawat in Uttarakhand.

"Congress interim president Sonia will lead us and will take future steps. We all have faith in her leadership," Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge said after the meeting.

"Every single member of the CWC wants Sonia Gandhi to guide party till organizational elections are held," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said after the CWC to brief the media.

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar said that Congress needs to be strengthened and should be revived to lead the opinion. Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot and Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel who attended the meeting defended the Gandhisand said Rahul was the sole campaigner against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Venugopal, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Kharge, party's leader in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and P Chidambaram were among those who attended.

Azad, Sharma and Mukul Wasnik were the only three from the G 23 leaders who participated in the meeting, which has a large number of Gandhi family loyalists.

Congress lost Punjab to the Aam Aadmi Party, could not wrest Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur from the BJP, and the party's tally in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh fell to its lowest.

While Sonia has not been actively campaigning for some time, Rahul, along with Priyanka, had been the star campaigner for the Congress in the polls, with the brother-sister duo also playing a major role in key decisions of the party.

Despite a high-pitched campaign led by Priyanka, the Congress could manage to win only two of the 403 Assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh with the vote share plummeting to a meager 2.33 per cent and most of its candidates losing security deposits.

Ahead of the meeting, the chorus for making Rahul Congress president again grew louder as several leaders and workers voiced support for him to take on the mantle of party chief.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Gehlot said no one was taking on Prime Minister Modi as Rahul does and was fighting resolutely.

"The Prime Minister has to start his speech after targeting Rahul, you can understand what this means. All of us want that Rahul ji should take on the mantle of party leadership," Gehlot told reporters.

Karnataka Congress president D K Shivakumar also backed the idea to make Gandhi the party chief."As I have said it earlier as well, Rahul Gandhi should take up the Congress presidency in a full-time role immediately. This is the wish of millions of Congress workers like me," he tweeted.

Earlier in the day, top Congress leaders discussed the party's strategy for the upcoming Budget Session of Parliament and decided to work in coordination with other like-minded parties to raise issues of public importance.

The meeting of the Congress Parliamentary strategy group was held at the residence of party president Sonia.

US scribe shot dead, another hurt in...

From Page 1

AFP reporters in Irpin saw Ukrainian volunteer soldiers rush the body on a stretcher to a more secure location before laying it out on the ground for further identification.

Danylo Shapovalov, a surgeon volunteering for the Ukrainian territorial defence, said Renaud died instantly from a gunshot wound to his neck.

Ukrainian officials were quick to blame Russian forces for the shooting but the exact circumstances were unclear.

AFP reporters heard small arms and artillery fire in the area, which runs along the front splitting Ukrainian positions from advancing Russian forces

"The car was shot at. There were two journalists and one of ours," Shapovalov told AFP.

"Our guy and the journalist are wounded, I provided them first aid, the other one received a wound in the neck, he died immediately."They kept shooting'

The New York Times called Renaud "a talented photographer and filmmaker" who last contributed to the paper in 2015.

"He was not on assignment for any desk at The Times in Ukraine," said a statement tweeted by deputy managing editor Cliff Levy.

Arredondo said in a news video shot of him in his hospital bed that the reporters' vehicle came under attack

after crossing a Ukrainian-controlled checkpoint.

"We were going to film other refugees leaving. We got into a car, someone offered to take us to the other bridge," he said.

"We crossed a checkpoint and they started shooting at us, so the driver turned around and they kept shoot-

ing."

Ukrainian officials immediately blamed Russian forces for the attack, which occurred near a bridge leading from Irpin to the flashpoint town of Bucha, now under Russian control.

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said US officials would consult with Kyiv to determine the circumstances of the attack.

"We'll be consulting with the Ukrainians to determine how this happened and then to measure and execute appropriate consequences as a result of it," Sullivan told CBS television.

Renaud won Harvard University's Nieman Fellowship in 2019, which he used to report on a wide range of global issues, including Black Lives Matter protests in his native Little Rock, Arkansas.

His other work included an HBO documentary on heroin addiction and reports on Africa and the Middle East, according to his official Nieman biography.Renaud becomes the first foreign reporter killed in Ukraine since the Russian assault began on February 24.

HC restores plea over Mathura mosque row

Allahabad: The Allahabad High Court has restored a petition seeking the removal of Mathura's Shahi Idgah Mosque, which is claimed to be built on Krishna Janambhoomi, the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

The main petition was dismissed in default on January 19, 2021 as the petitioner appeared in person and not through a lawyer. The application for restoration was filed immediately thereafter.

In an order on February 17, a division bench comprising Chief Justice Rajesh Binal and Justice Prakash Padia restored the plea on grounds that the application to restore it was filed without any delay.

"For the reason stated in the application, the same is allowed. Order dated January 19, 2021 dismissing the main petition in default is recalled.

Let the main petition be now listed as per roster on July 25, 2022," the court said. Earlier in 2020, a Mathura court had dismissed a plea seeking the removal of the mosque.

A group of people had moved the Mathura court over the 17th century mosque they claim was built at the birthplace of Lord Krishna, within the 13.37-acre premises of the Katra Keshav Dev temple. **PTI**

AAP hints new revolution in Punjab...

From Page 1

...Mann is expected to take the oath, while other party MLAs would swear in as Cabinet Ministers later on in another similar ceremony.

"We have to fulfill the dreams of Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh. The ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh has to be carried forward. To pay homage to our great freedom fighters, who laid down their lives for our country, instead of Raj Bhawan, we are organising the swearing-in ceremony in the land of martyrs Khatkhar Kalan," said Mann while addressing the massive crowd during the party's victory march at Amritsar on Sunday.

Inviting people for his oath-taking ceremony, Mann said, "You all have to come with basanti (yellow coloured) turbans to take the oath and carry ideology of Bhagat Singh to every home. All Punjabis will take oath as Chief Minister and all will be the Chief Minister."

Exhorting the people to reach Khatkhar Kalan to take the pledge on this historic day for the holistic development of the State and betterment of its people, Mann said, "It is the AAP, which has broken the convention by organising swearing-in ceremony at Khatkhar Kalan as earlier such functions were held at Raj Bhawan. This move is primarily aimed at paying glowing tributes to our great martyrs."

"I have already announced that there would be no photo of Chief Minister in the State Government Offices as per the past practice. Now only Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh and Dr BR Ambedkar's pictures would be installed in all offices," he reiterated.

Mann, accompanied by AAP supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during the roadshow, said the newly-elected Government would start functioning "from the very first day" to cherish the aspirations of people, who have reposed full faith and trust in AAP's policies and programmes.

Expressing gratitude to the people, Mann said all the political parties were hand in glove to make the new Government by underestimating the AAP, but the unity of the people vanished their nefarious designs with a huge mandate of 92 seats in AAP's favour.

Referring to the withdrawal of security from 122 political persons, Mann said that as many as 403 security persons had been redeployed in police stations. "These police personnel would work professionally in the police stations to discharge duties related to law and order only," said Mann also ridiculing the previous Governments for befooling the people by asking them to hold thikri pehras (night vigil) in villages or mohallas at their own while they were keeping their security intact, who had been staying at the tents pitched outside their residence.

Kejriwal said after a long time Punjab had got a thorough "honest" Chief Minister, who would ensure a clean and transparent Government.

"If AAP's any Minister and MLA indulge in malpractices, s/he would not be spared and sent to jail," declared Kejriwal adding that it was an established fact that Punjabis are known for ushering in revolution and they had really done so by bringing a great revolution.

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Sd/-SAJAL DHAMIA Advocate

Post UP win Yogi...

From Page 1

Aseem Arun, who won from Kannauj, was an IPS officer of the ADG rank. Many BJP Legislators who have won by a huge margin are also in the reckoning. Defense Minister Rajnath Singh's son Pankaj Singh won by a margin of 1,81,513 votes from Noida.

Shalabh Mani Tripathi, a young Brahmin face considered to be close to Yogi, may also be inducted in the new Yogi cabinet. Allies Apna Dal and Nishad Party are also likely to get a place in the cabinet while MLC Ashish Patel and Sanjay Nishad may get important cabinet berths.

Besides the new faces, old leaders like Suresh Khanna, who won with a landslide victory from Shahjahanpur for the ninth consecutive time, may also be made a minister. According to sources, the swearing-in of Adityanath may take place post-Holi which is on March 18. The date is still

being finalised, they said. Eleven State Ministers and a Deputy-CM Keshav Prasad Maurya have lost the Assembly polls, but that may not be held against them and most of them could find a place in the Council of Ministers, sources said.

Names discussed for Deputy-CMs include State president Swatantra Dev Singh, former Deputy CM Dinesh Sharma and ex-governor of Uttarakhand and now an MLA from Agra, Baby Rani Maurya.

Keshav Prasad Maurya, considered a rival to Adityanath, who Post UP win Yogi meets Modi, Naidu narrowly lost his Assembly election, too may again be considered for the Deputy CM's post, sources said.

In the past, late Arun Jaitley was inducted into the Modi Cabinet despite his Lok Sabha defeat in 2014 from Amritsar, Punjab."Altogether 50 names were discussed in various meetings and parleys", they said.

As Ukraine situation worsens India moves...

From Page 1

As regards the CCS meeting, an official statement said the Prime Minister chaired it to review India's security preparedness and the prevailing global scenario in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The Prime Minister was briefed on the latest developments and different aspects of India's security preparedness in the border areas as well as in the maritime and air domain.

The Prime Minister was also briefed on the latest developments in Ukraine, including the details of Operation Ganga to evacuate Indian nationals, along with some citizens of India's neighbouring countries, from Ukraine.

Modi directed that all possible efforts should be made to bring back the mortal remains of Naveen Shekharappa, who died in Kharkiv.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval attended the key meeting.

Modi also took a detailed overview of global technology usage in the Defence sector and India's advances in the same. He emphasised the need for integrating the latest technology into India's security apparatus, sources said.

Shatrughan to contest...

From Page 1

Announcing her decision Mamata tweeted, "Happy to announce on behalf of the All India Trinamool Congress that Shatrughan Sinha, former Union Minister and famed actor, will be our candidate in Lok Sabha by-election from Asansol."

Sinha who had joined the BJP in the 1980s and later became a Union Minister subsequently fell out with the present saffron leadership and joined the Congress Party. The two-time Patna-Sahib MP contested the polls in 2019 on Congress ticket but was defeated by then Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.The BJP promptly reacted to the Chief Minister's referring to her "insider-outsider" narrative. The Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar said, "Let Mamata decide whether Shatruiji is a outsider or an insider."

Before last year's Assembly elections. Mamata

had attacked the BJP for "roping in "outside leaders" who had no understanding of local culture to campaign in Bengal.

Announcing the Supriyo's name for the Ballygunge Assembly seat the Chief Minister tweeted, "Babul Supriyo, former Union Minister and noted singer, will be our candidate in Vidhansabha by-election from Ballygunge. Jai Hind, Jai Bangla, Jai Ma- Mati-Manush!"

The Ballygunge Assembly seat fell vacant following the demise of senior politician and Cabinet Minister Subrata Mukherjee. Supriyo, the then saffron MP who had contested the last year's Assembly elections on a BJP ticket from Tollygunge seat in Kolkata, lost out to local Minister Arup Biswas. Subsequently, he joined the TMC a party after being dropped from the Union Ministry.Soon after his name was announced by the Chief Minister, Supriyo expressed his gratitude saying he would always remain grateful to Banerjee for providing him the opportunity to serve the people of Bengal.

AAP to gherao BJP HQ against civic polls deferment

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will gherao the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters in the national Capital to protest against the decision of the State Election Commission to defer municipal election. Accusing the BJP, AAP MCD in-charge and senior party leader Durgesh Pathak said the SEC was blackmailed to defer the MCD elections. “The BJP thinks they can do anything in Delhi and no can stop them.

“For the last 15 years, the BJP has emptied the pocket of the civic body. The situation has become as worse as the staffs are not being given salaries for months.

“The BJP-ruled civic bodies have failed even to maintain sanitation in the city,” he said.

Pathak said the AAP leaders and volunteers went through a series of struggles to form party. “People of the city remember

that when AAP formed government in 2013 for the first time but after 49 days it collapsed. Even at that time, the BJP did not let the elections take place. It happened only after the AAP workers and leaders hit the street.

“We demand the BJP to let the SEC to decide dates for MCD elections. I urge every party worker and leader to reach the AAP headquarters at 10 AM on Sunday after which they will do gherao of BJP headquarters,” he said.

Earlier on Wednesday, SEC deferred the announcement for conducting elections for the three municipal corporations after it received a communication from the Centre in this regard.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday also appealed the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to let MCD elections take place in the city, saying that postponing polls weakens democratic system.

Paytm CEO Sharma arrested for ‘ramming’ DCP’s car, granted bail

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Vijay Shekhar Sharma, the CEO and founder of Paytm was arrested last month for allegedly ramming his car into the official vehicle of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) South district. Police said he was also released on bail by the investigating officer of the case on the same day.

According to police, the incident took place on February 22. According to the First Information Report (FIR), the complainant, constable Deepak Kumar, who was driving DCP Benita Mary Jaiker’s car, stated that the incident took place when he and constable Pradeep were on the way to a petrol pump in Malviya Nagar from Hauz Khas. “When they reached near gate number 3 of Mother International School at Aurobindo Road, constable Kumar slowed down the car as people had gathered there to drop their children. Meanwhile, a blue luxury car bearing a Haryana registration number hit the complainant’s



vehicle from the rear. The driver of the offending car escaped from the spot along with the vehicle,” as per FIR. Based on Kumar’s complaint, a case under section 279 (rash driving) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered on the same day, police said.

During investigation, the offending vehicle was identified and its driver Sharma was arrested and released on bail. Both the vehicles were impounded and mechanically inspected, said a senior police

official. In a statement, a Paytm spokesperson said that a complaint was filed in connection with an alleged minor motor vehicle incident.

“There was no harm caused to any person or property in the said incident. Media reports claiming the nature of the arrest are exaggerated, as even complaint against vehicle was for a minor offense under a bailable provision of law and requisite legal formalities were completed on the same day,” the spokesperson added.

‘NDMC constructing more toilets specially for transgenders, women’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the aim to provide public convenience as basic amenities along with safety and dignity of women and transgender community in New Delhi area, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is constructing more public toilets specially for “Transgenders’ and Pink Toilet for women, Vice Chairperson of NDMC, Satish Upadhyay said.

While giving details of project Upadhyay informed that so far 5 Pink Toilets have already been constructed by Council in New Delhi area for women which are located at LIC-Parliament Street, near Super Bazaar-Outer Circle, Factory Road-Safdarjung Hospital, ‘B’ Avenue-Sarojini Nagar near ICICI Bank and Ramgharia Dharanashala near Safdarjung Hospital. The work of another Pink toilet will start soon at B Block-Inner Circle-Connaught Place. He further said that after constructing capital’s first public toilet for transgenders on Humayun Road and

Rajendra Prasad Road, it has now decided to increase its number in which the Council is going to construction of 10 more toilets at Lodhi Garden, Laxmibai Nagar, near Safdarjung Hospital, Akbar Lane, Panchkuian Road, Copernicus Marg and there is also a provision for construction of four toilets in blocks ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘D’ and ‘F’ of Connaught Place.

Upadhyay also informed that NDMC is first civic body to provide “Smart Toilet Virtual Tour” of smart toilets located in NDMC area at the web link https://www.ndmc.gov.in/virtual_tour/index.htm.

The council has also made available the GPRS information of all its toilets on the NDMC 311 mobile app, so that any needy person can find it conveniently. The Council has provided a toilet facility every 500 meters in its area. NDMC provides details of daily cleanliness of toilets located in their area through NDMC311 app and one can give their feedback if there is no cleanliness.

21-year-old DU graduate found hanging at rented accommodation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 21-year-old Delhi University graduate was found hanging from the ceiling fan at his rented accommodation in Northwest Delhi’s Vijay Nagar area. The deceased has been identified as Prakhar Yadav, a native of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh.

According to a senior police official, Yadav’s neighbours informed a police head constable, who was on evening rounds, about him on Friday evening. “Yadav used a bed sheet to allegedly hang himself from the ceiling fan,” the senior police official said adding that no suicide note was found at his house.

According to his roommate Monu Bharti, Yadav was an alumnus of Hansraj College and had been working in Noida since last week, the senior police official added. After the postmortem, Yadav’s body was handed over to his family members, the police said.

PICTALK



Punjab CM-designate Bhagwant Mann receives AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal at Amritsar airport

PTI Photo

4 people, including 3 women, held for kidnapping infant from Punjabi Bagh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested four persons, including three women, for allegedly kidnapping an infant from west Delhi’s Punjabi Bagh area. The accused have been identified as Bhawna (28) and Pawan (29), residents of Kishanganj, Rekha Jain (50), a resident of Shakarpur, Babita Jain (38), a resident of Mojpur.

According to Ghanshyam Bansal, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), West district, on Friday, a woman lodged a complaint about kidnapping of her 45 days old daughter from her shanty by one Bhawna and her accomplices.

“Bhawna and her associates went to woman’s house and when she did not find her child, the woman caught Bhawan. During investigation, efforts were made to trace the kidnapped girl.

With the help of technical assistance, police identified all the accused persons who were involved in the crime and later nabbed them,” said the DCP. The kidnapped girl was recovered from Babita with-in three hours of registration of case. The girl handed over to her family. Investigation of the case is still in progress, said DCP. Bhawna told police that she had a few miscarriages, so she adopted this crime to become a mother and involved other persons in it, police said.

2 arrested for assaulting cop with beer bottle in Gulabi Bagh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two men were arrested for allegedly abusing and attacking a police constable with beer bottle in north Delhi’s Gulabi Bagh area, police said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Ashok (22) and Yash Pratap Singh (22), both residents of Sarai Rohilla, they said.

On Thursday, constables Pradeep, Rikhil, and Vijay were on foot patrolling the Old Rohtak Road near Kishan Ganj Railway Station where they saw three men inside a car playing very loud music, police said.

They signalled the car driver to turn the volume down, who in turn confronted them with abuses but moved from the spot, a senior

police officer said. When they got to know that their car number was noted down, they took a U-turn and tried to run over the police staff but missed them and continued driving, the officer said.

All three passengers were holding beer bottles in their hand, he said. Shocked with the assault, the three cops flagged a couple of bikers down and started chasing the car.

After a chase of almost 8-10 minutes, the car stopped, but before police could apprehend the accused, one of them hit Pradeep, one of the cops, on his forehead with a beer bottle, which was cut open and began to bleed, said the officer.

After the assault, the accused fled the spot in direction of Sarai Rohilla area,

Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) Sagar Singh Kalsi said. An eyewitness identified the car driver as Ashok and another passenger as Yashu Chauhan.

Pradeep was taken to the hospital and a case was registered under relevant sections on his statement, police said. Following the tip-off, police arrested two of the accused and also seized the car, which was found to have a beer bottle inside it, Kalsi said.

Upon interrogation, it was found that Ashok is a taxi driver who picks up passengers from Sarai Rohilla Railway Station, while Yash, a gym trainer in the same area, has previously been found involved in gambling case. Efforts are on progress to nab the remaining third, Kalsi added.

Capital records 132 Covid cases, positivity rate 0.38 per cent

PTI NEW ■ DELHI

Delhi on Sunday reported 132 fresh COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 0.38 per cent, according to data shared by the city health department. With this, the national capital’s case count increased to 18,62,934, the latest health bulletin stated.

The death toll remained unchanged at 26,141. The number of COVID-19 tests conducted the previous day stood at 34,994, the bulletin said.

Delhi had on Saturday logged 161 COVID-19 cases with a positivity rate of 0.44 per cent, and one death. On Friday, the city had recorded 174 cases with a positivity rate of 0.45 per cent, and no death.

On March 5, 6 and 7 too, no fatalities were recorded in the city. The number of daily COVID-19 cases in Delhi has been on the decline after touching the record high of 28,867 on January 13. The city had



recorded a positivity rate of 30.6 per cent on January 14, the highest during the third wave of the pandemic. The surge in Covid cases in Delhi during the third wave of the pandemic was largely due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the virus. Amid the decline in daily cases, the number of patients under home isolation in Delhi has also fallen significantly over the last few weeks.

As on February 1, the total number of home isolation cases stood at 12,312. The number stood at 548 on Sunday. There are 3,507 containment zones in Delhi, the bulletin stated. There are 10,560 beds for COVID-19 patients in Delhi hospitals and 92 (0.87 per cent) of them are occupied, it said.

Hindu College launches first startup with UVC disinfectant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University’s Hindu College has launched its first start up with the development of a machine that can disinfect a range of items.

The machine, designed like a microwave, has UVC (Ultraviolet-C) tubes that disinfect items, said Lalit Kumar, an assistant professor at the college, who has developed the machine.

“You can place inside it any item that you want to disinfect. This machine can prove to be very useful for home, offices, hospitals, grocery stores etc.

“Through this machine, currency notes, office files, grocery items, fruits, vegetables, glasses, masks, healthcare products, ATM cards, parcels, children’s toys and other accessories can be disinfected within a minute,” he said.

Kumar said that clothes cannot be put inside the machine since for the machine to disinfect an item, the surface

has to be fully exposed. “You will need a bigger machine to disinfect clothes. Of course, you can keep a small piece of cloth for disinfecting,” he said. The idea to develop the machine was born due to the coronavirus pandemic, Kumar said.

He said the machine is the result of a team work of Professor Anju Srivastava (college principal), Professor Reena Jain, both from Chemistry Department of the college, and IIT Delhi alumnus Updesh Verma.

“This machine is capable of inactivating 99.9 per cent of bacteria, viruses, yeast and mould within a minute of exposure,” Kumar claimed.

The machine works by destroying the RNA and DNA strands of virus and bacteria, he said. It has been certified by Shriram Institute for Industrial Research and safety features are recorded by LASTEC, ie Laser Science and Technology division of DRDO, he said. The machine is available in the

market at Rs 13,000 and has a capacity of 50 litres. It has been given an aesthetic look by two Delhi government school students who have painted it. The two girls painted the machine under the ‘Business Blasters’ initiative of the city government.

“A few months back, I came across an article about two Delhi government school students who do hand painting. I had a word with them and they painted the front door of the machine. The machine looks beautiful.

“I have got all the machines in my inventory painted by them,” he said. The work on the machine was started eight months ago and based on the machine the college launched its first start-up, which it has named Ionuva Innovations.

“Next in line is an air disinfectant that we are working on. It will disinfect the air as well as purify the air,” Kumar said.

Delhi HC asks Twitter to respond to plea against suspension of user account

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has sought response of microblogging platform Twitter on a plea challenging the suspension of a user account for alleged violation of rules.

Justice V Kameswar Rao issued notice to Twitter and the Centre on the petition by Jasdeep Munjal who said that on February 24, when he tried to login to his Twitter handle @MeghBulletin, he saw that his account was suspended by the US-based social media platform without giving any notice to him.

The court listed the petition for further hearing on March 30, when several other similar matters will be heard. The Centre was represented through standing counsel Manish Mohan. Senior advocate Sajjan Poovayya, representing Twitter, said the writ petition was not maintainable against the platform as it was a private entity. The petition



said after suspension of the account, the petitioner received an email from Twitter stating that the account has been suspended for violating Twitter rules.

“A lot of Twitter users, including various social media influencers and friends, expressed their sympathy for the arbitrary suspension of the petitioner’s account. The same thing happened with the petitioner’s previous twitter handle @MeghUpdates which had more than 1,68,000

followers and millions of impressions per month at the time of its suspension,” Munjal, represented through advocate Raghav Awasthi, said. He claimed that there were multiple accounts which were impersonating petitioner’s

account for getting indirect benefits and removing his handle from the platform without any notice has also given an unquestioned opportunity to fake handles in spreading false news in his name.

“The action of Twitter is violative of various provisions of Constitution including Articles 14, 19 and 21 inasmuch as it is an impairment of the right to free speech and is arbitrary.

“Furthermore, there is no provision under which content can be edited or modified before transmission suo-motu by an intermediary like Twitter.

In other words, there is no sanction for this action under Information Technology Act, 2000 and Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021,” the plea, filed through advocate Mukesh Sharma, said.

It sought quashing of Twitter’s February 24 decision by which petitioner’s account was suspended.

YAMUNA-POLLUTION

‘No dirty water will flow into Yamuna by Dec-end’



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

No dirty water will be flowing into the Yamuna by

December-end as all drains carrying sewage into the river will be tapped, a senior official said. The over 1,300-km-long Yamuna is among the most

polluted rivers in the country and also provides water to more than half of the national Capital. National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) Director General G Asok Kumar said there are 18 drains that deliver dirty water into the Yamuna, and plans are afoot to tap these drains and divert the dirty water to sewage treatment plants (STPs).“

Now that the sewage treatment plants are in place, we can divert the dirty water flowing into the river to these plants. The treated water which we get from the STPs can then be added to the river so that the flow of the river is also improved. So by December, no dirty water will be coming into the Yamuna

river and its flow will also see improvement,” he told PTI. “We will try to ensure that there is bathing quality water in the Yamuna by then,” he added.

Kumar said once dirty water stops flowing into the river, the next step will be to set a minimum flow of water in the Yamuna to have uninterrupted flow, which will ensure its cleanliness.

Just 2 per cent or 22 km of Yamuna falls in Delhi, but 98 per cent of pollution in the Yamuna comes from the national capital due to untreated or semi-treated industrial effluents or sewage that is being discharged into the river in the 22 km stretch. According to estimates made

by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi generates 3,800 million litres of sewage per day. The official said NMCG is also looking into nonpoint sources of pollution in the Yamuna.

“We are also trying to find out about the nonpoint sources like the ones which also cause froth in the river. We are also trying to look at the dhoobi ghats through which a lot of soap is coming into the water.

We are trying to address those nonpoint sources too and see they do not add pollution to the river,” he said. Kumar added that the NMCG is starting NGYodha (Namami Gange Yamuna of Delhi area) that will focus upon cleaning the Yamuna river.

Max temperature settles at 32 deg C in city

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The maximum temperature in the national capital on Sunday settled at 32.6 degrees Celsius, three notches above season’s average, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The minimum temperature settled at 16.2 degrees Celsius, one notch above season’s average, it said. The humidity oscillated between 75 per cent and 40 per cent. Delhi’s air quality was recorded in ‘moderate’ category. The 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) read 193 at 4 pm, according to Central Pollution Control Board. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered ‘good,’ 51 and 100 ‘satisfactory,’ 101 and 200 ‘moderate,’ 201 and 300 ‘poor,’ 301.

Ambedkar musical to go on till March 24: Delhi Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday said that musical on life of social reformer B R Ambedkar has received a “tremendous response” from public and shows will now go on till March 24.

Earlier, the musical starring actor Rohit Roy was scheduled to end with two shows on March 12. The musical on life and legacy of Ambedkar, the architect of Constitution, had kicked off on February 25 and shows were being held at JLN Stadium here. “The Kejriwal government has decided to extend its musical drama on

Babasaheb Ambedkar till March 24 after seeing public’s tremendous response for show,” Deputy CM’s office said in a statement. The play is being showcased in a 100-ft arena having a 40-ft revolving stage, which has been mounted with thematic design.

Stagecraft also include digital props and spectacular play of light and shadow. The duration of the play is about two hours, and it showcases a mix of theatrics, acrobatics and choral performance to background music. The script is embedded with social commentary on plight of the Dalit community and its struggle.

'51% elected MLAs in UP have criminal record'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the 403 newly-elected legislators in Uttar Pradesh, 205 (nearly 51 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves. Of these 143 (36 per cent) MLAs have made the declarations in their affidavits. According to an analysis report released by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 158 (39 per cent) winning candidates have declared serious criminal cases, including cases related to murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping and crimes against women.

There are five winning candidates who have declared cases related to murder (IPC Section-302) against themselves. Winning candidates with cases related to attempts to murder are 29 while six winning candidates have declared cases related to crimes against women - one of whom has a case related to rape.

According to ADR analysis, there are 111 (44 percent) out of 255 winning candidates from the BJP who have criminal antecedents, 71 out of 111



winning candidates are from SP, 7 out of 8 winning candidates from RLD, 4 out of 6 winning candidates from Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party, 4 out of 6 winning candidates from Nishad Part, 3 out of 12 winning candidates from Apna Dal, 2 from Jansatta Dal Loktantrik, 2 from Congress and 1 from the BSP.

Nearly 233 out of 255 newly elected legislators from the BJP, 100 out of 111 from SP, 9 out of 12 from Apna Dal, 7 out of 8 from RLD, 6 from Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party, 6 from Nishad party, 2 from Jansatta Dal Loktantrik, 2 from INC and 1 BSP winning can-

didates have declared assets worth more than Rs 1 crore.

"The average assets per winning candidates for 255 BJP winning candidates is Rs 8.14 Crores, 111 SP winning candidates is Rs 7.39 Crores, 12 Apna Dal (Soneylal) candidates is Rs 7.13 Crores, eight RLD candidates is Rs 7.56 Crores, six Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party candidates is Rs 7.94 Crores, 6 Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal candidates is Rs 6.64 Crores, two Congress candidates is Rs 19.71 Crores and two Jansatta Dal Loktantrik candidates have average assets worth Rs 13.75 Crores," the report said.

Farmer leaders to meet today to chalk out future course of action

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Farmers' union leaders will meet on Monday in the national Capital to decide the further course of action as the Central Government has not formed a committee for the minimum support price and other pending issues of agitating farmers.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar last month had informed Parliament the Centre would set up a committee on minimum support price (MSP) once the upcoming Assembly polls in five States come to an end.

"Now the election results are out and the model code of conduct is over. It is the government to set up a committee on MSP and other issues. Farmers leaders are planning to meet on Monday in the national capital to chalk out future plans," people who are aware of the development said.

The agenda of the meeting is to review of assurance letter given by the government on 9th December 9, progress made so far in Lakhimpur Kheri case, national action plan on the MSP, scheme of martyrs

memorial, decision on organisation those participated in the assembly polls in Punjab, rules and regulations of Samyukt Kisan Morcha and current fund situation.

In the recently concluded assembly polls, all candidates who have contested or fielded by farmers unions or 'Samyukt Samaj Morcha', (SSM) lost their deposit in the recently concluded Assembly polls in Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh.

The farmer leaders have been vocal against the Bharatiya Janata Party in the assembly polls 2022, which they had supported in the 2017 Assembly elections and the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and campaigned against the saffron party in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

This time they failed to make any impact despite year long successful protests at Delhi's borders.

Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh's founder member Binod Anand said that farmers' leaders have lost their credibility when they decided to contest the assembly polls. "Besides, those who are funding them to continue the

protest at Delhi's borders refused to bear the expenses of elections. That's the reason farmers union leaders proved damp squib in the assembly polls," he added.

As per the poll body data, Samyukt Samaj Morcha chief Balbir Singh Rajewal (79), who was SKM coordinator playing key role in the farmers' agitation, was also among the contestants who could not save his security deposit as he lost the poll battle from Samrala.

Rajewal got only 4,676 votes — 3.5% of the total votes polled. Lakhbir Singh Lakha Sidhana, an accused in the Red Fort violence case, was the only won who saved his security deposit as he finished number 2 in Maur after getting 28,091 votes (20.64% of the total votes polled).

SKM's legal cell convenor and president of the All India Kisan Sabha Federation, Prem Singh Bhangu, was in fray from Patiala's Ghanaur seat and managed to get only 1,681 votes. Gurpreet Singh Kotli, a teacher and a marginal farmer who covered kisan agitation through his Facebook live feeds, managed to get 880 votes from Gidderbaha constituency.

Follow rule to find successor of Delhi Metro MD: Ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a fresh stand-off, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has asked Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Dev to follow selection procedure adopted in 2011 for successor of Mangu Singh, Managing Director of Delhi Metro.

This comes after Delhi Government formed its own selection committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia as chairman. The committee is expected to meet on Monday to find out Mangu Singh's successor. Singh's tenure has already ended but he has been given an extension till selection of new MD.

In a letter written to Dev, MoHUA secretary Manoj Joshi reminded that a selection committee comprising Urban Development Secretary Dr. Sudhir Krishna, Delhi Chief Secretary PK Tripathi, and Delhi Metro chief E Sreedharan had selected Delhi Metro chief in 2011.

"In view of above, it is recommended to relook into formation of selection committee in manner as was done in 2011 so that a fair and professional

section of MD, Delhi Metro is done," reads letter. Further, as per terms and conditions of Memorandum of Understanding, MD, Delhi Metro will also require approval of Central government.

Joshi further said in his letter that Delhi Metro is having largest metro network in country and is a lifeline not only for people of Delhi but also for entire NCR.

"MD of such a prestigious organisation should be professional with proven competency and selected by experienced professionals associated in field of metro construction and operation.

It is felt that experience from a relevant field is missing in proposed committee. Further, you will agree that selected candidate should neither be a political appointee nor unduly influenced by political consideration," he said.

Joshi further categorically said that according to the rules, it is mandatory to get approval of central government for selected MD. Earlier, in a related development, the Delhi government has formed its own selection committee headed by deputy chief minister.

Ukraine crisis likely to hit Indian naval preparedness

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Russia-Ukraine crisis has defence preparedness underpinnings for India in ways more than one. Till now, Ukraine has been a major supplier of engines for underdevelopment nuclear submarines and frigates and the crisis is likely to hit Indian naval preparedness.

Ukrainian companies supply the Russian-origin engines and components for the naval assets under development by India. Russia, on the other hand, is the major supplier of armoured and air assets to the Indian defence forces.

While Moscow has been on record appreciating New Delhi's stance on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Kremlin is said to be disappointed with India for not expressing "explicit" solidarity with the erstwhile superpower, observers said.

Moscow has stood solidly behind India for the last seven decades and has used its veto power 22 times at the UN to thwart the Security Council bid to put New Delhi on the dock on various occasions. Russia had also backed India while UNSC listing against Pakistani terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad and its chief Maulana Masood Azhar in recent years. As late as late 2020, the Russians supplied two squadrons of Sukhois off-the-shelf post the heightened Chinese military posture following the Galwan incident in the eastern Ladakh despite objections from Beijing,

sources said.

Despite the projected bonhomie between India and the US, Washington neither used the veto once in New Delhi's favour nor act against Pakistani terrorist groups targeted against India like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Tayabba (LeT) despite having boots on the ground in Afghanistan for two decades. On the contrary, American companies backed by the state are providing server services to the Pakistani terrorist groups.

Also, Washington is seeking to undermine the Indian influence in Nepal by aggressively getting its Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) ratified by the Nepalese Parliament. The MCC is designed to compromise Nepalese sovereignty and wean away the Gorkhas for the American security requirements, they said.

Historically, the US has always backed Pakistan knowing fully that Islamabad actively promotes terrorism in the region and beyond, especially against India.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis also precipitated major geopolitical shifts and undermined the NATO assessments that the pressure tactics by the US/NATO would culminate in Russia backing down on the aggressive threshold on its borders with Kyiv.

Interestingly, the US has not put its boots on the ground and has only been making statements in favour of Ukraine. The US sanctions against Russia are also aimed at

hitting defence supplies from Moscow and getting a further significant pie in the Indian defence market, they said.

Sensing an opportunity in the crisis, China has assured Russia to buy all the gas, the quantum of which will be hit by the US sanctions against such supplies to Europe.

To offset the disruption in engine supplies from Ukraine, New Delhi is exploring the possibility of sourcing such equipment from France, more particularly from the French firm DCNS, sources said.

"In the scenario of Russia backing down on defence supplies to India, the US and EU will raise their bar for such supplies to New Delhi as the white skin supremacy is at its peak and they would not want the Indians to maintain the hegemony in the Indian Ocean.

The point is clearly self-explanatory as India has been kept out of the military alliance of the Quad grouping," a defence expert said.

While the trusted allies are on the threshold of drifting away from New Delhi, the Western world led by the US is also not on the same page with India when they are needed to address the Indian security concerns, the expert said.

"In this backdrop, the clamour for the alliance with the US only serves the limited objectives of the greedy babus in seeking employment for their wards with American think tanks or companies besides getting scholarships for them," another expert added.

Hindi should be given importance: M Venkaiah Naidu



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

All languages are supreme but Hindi should be given importance as it is spoken by a large number of people, Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said here on Sunday. He also said the administration should be in regional language and education should be imparted in the mother tongue.

Naidu made these observations at the ninth meeting of Hindi Salahkar Samiti of Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Besides Naidu, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, 11 Members of Rajya Sabha and two Members of Parliamentary Committee on Official Language, a representative of Akhil Bhartiya Hindi Sanstha Sangh, the Secretary and Joint Secretary of the Department of Official Language of Ministry of Home Affairs, Secretary-General of Rajya Sabha, Additional Secretary, OSD and Joint Secretary in-charge of Official Language Section of Rajya Sabha Secretariat are members of this Committee.

Naidu said at present the technology has advanced so much that it is possible to translate from English to many regional languages simultaneously. He also expressed view that language of administration should be regional and education should be imparted in mother tongue. He also stressed that there is no opposition to English language but it should not be binding for anyone.



View of Khidkiya Ghat during renovation work, on the banks of Ganga river in Varanasi, on Sunday

PTI Photo

100-day countdown to Int'national Day of Yoga launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the run-up to 8th International Day of Yoga to be held on June 21, the Government on Sunday inaugurated Yoga Mahotsav 2022, an event to commemorate 100 days countdown to the D-Day. This year International Day of Yoga 2022 campaign will focus on theme '100 days, 100 cities and 100 organisations', said Union Minister of Ayush, Sarbanand Sonowal on Sunday

while inaugurating the event. For the first time to celebrate 'Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav', it will demonstrate Yoga at 75 Heritage and cultural sites on the D-Day in India.

The Union Environment Ministry too has offered to hold the yoga session at its 75 identified lakes and 52 tiger reserves across the country. Other programs include Yoga programs, Yoga demonstrations, workshops, seminars to be held not only in India but across the globe. The Ministry will prop-

agate benefits of using WHO mYoga App, Namaste App, Y-break App. Various people-centric activities and programmes will be launched on MyGov platform including Photo contest, quiz, discussion, pledge, poll survey, jingle, etc, he said.

Sonowal added that IDY 2022 is an opportunity for a mass movement to promote health, wellbeing, and peace across globe. The Minister said that as WHO's Global Centre for Traditional Medicine is being established in India, it is incumbent upon country to lead world on path of peace, well-being, better and affordable health.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, said that Haryana is first state in India to establish a Yoga Commission. "We are in process of establishing an Ayush University in Kurukshetra, Haryana in a 100-acre area. We have also taken initiative to make it

mandatory to make available an Ayush Doctor in almost 2000 Public Health Centers of Haryana," he said. Prem Singh Tamang, Chief Minister of Sikkim proposed to establish the National Yoga and Meditation Institute at Kiritunga Lake in Sikkim.

"It will be a global institution which will impart knowledge about yoga. He added that Yoga is part of school curriculum of Sikkim and around 500 teachers are imparting these services," said Chief Minister.

In his Address, Bhupender Yadav, Union Environment Ministry said that on the path of environment-friendly lifestyle, Yoga and Ayush as a whole, have a lot to contribute. We are amending Bio-diversity Act which will have a lasting impact on the advancement of Ayush systems. He requested Ayush Minister to also organise Yoga programmes during this countdown series at prized sites like 49 select lakes and 52 tiger reserves.

Registered facility needs to verify vehicle records digitally for scrapping: Draft policy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility (RVSF) shall digitally verify the records of vehicles produced for scrapping, including no-pending dues and no record of blacklisting by regional transport authorities, according to the draft notification by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) for vehicle scrapping.

The statement said MoRTH has issued the draft notification pertaining to the registration and functions of vehicle scrapping facility, under which necessary checks to be done from the ministry's 'Vahan' database before submission of application by a vehicle owner.

"These checks include surrender of hire-purchase, lease or hypothecation agreement of the vehicle, no criminal record against the vehicle in records of the National Crime Records Bureau, no pending dues on the vehicle, and no record of blacklisting of the vehicle by regional transport authorities," it said "Application for vehicles fail-

tronic trading have a digital proof of the transaction. The Certificate of Deposit shall be a necessary and sufficient document for the owner to avail incentives and benefits for purchase of a new vehicle as may be declared from time to time. The validity of this certificate shall be 2 years from the date of issuance.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the National Vehicle Scrapping Policy in August last year and had said it will help phase out unfit and polluting vehicles and also promote a circular economy.

Under the new policy, the Centre had said the states and Union Territories (UTs) will provide up to 25 per cent tax rebate on road tax for vehicles that are purchased after scrapping old vehicles.

The vehicle scrapping policy will come into effect from April 1, 2022. Announced in the Union Budget 2021-22, the policy provides for fitness tests after 20 years for personal vehicles, while commercial vehicles will require it after the completion of 15 years

Decision to create reserve fund comes as big relief for Khadi institutions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A far-sighted policy decision taken by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 2018, to create a special reserve fund to deal with market fluctuations and other eventualities, has come as a savior for all Khadi institutions across the country, just when the textile industry is grappling with a steep price hike of the raw cotton.

In 2018, KVIC had decided to create a Products Price Adjustment Account (PPA), a Reserve Fund for its 5 Central Sliver Plants (CSPs), to meet market-driven eventualities.

These CSPs are purchasing cotton and converting it into sliver and roving for the supply of Khadi Institutions, which converts it into yarn and fabric. The PPA fund was created by transferring just 50 paise to it from each kilogram of the total sliver/roving sold by these CSPs. Three years down the line, when the entire textile sec-

tor is facing the brunt of short-supply and a steep hike in the price of raw cotton, KVIC has decided not to increase the cost of sliver/roving being supplied to the Khadi institutions by its sliver plants across the country despite the cotton prices surging by over 110 percent. Instead, KVIC will bear the excess cost of Rs 4.06 crore on procurement of raw cotton bales at the increased rates from the PPA Fund.

It is pertinent to mention here that the price of raw cotton has increased from Rs 36,000 per candy to Rs 78,000 per candy (each candy weighs 365 KG) in the last 16 months. This has put a direct impact on production of cotton apparels by major textile companies across the country, that have also reduced the production by 30 to 35 percent in the recent months. This decision of KVIC, which has been taken for the first time to create such reserve fund, comes as a big relief for over 2700 registered Khadi

institutions and over 8000 Khadi India Outlets that are already grappling with production & marketing challenges due to restrictions imposed during Covid-19 pandemic. KVIC largely purchases cotton bales from Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) for its 5 CSPs located at Kuttur, Chitradurga, Sehore, Raebareilly and Hajipur, that convert various varieties of cotton into sliver and roving.

The Cotton varieties purchased by KVIC are BB mod, Y-1/S-4, H-4/J-34, LRA/MECH, MCU_5 and DCH_32. The Price difference reported in these days is from Rs 13000 per candy to Rs 40000 per candy of these varieties.

KVIC will require 6370 cotton bales of different varieties by 31st of March 2022 which, as per the current rate, will cost Rs 13.25 crores as against Rs 9.20 crores as per the old rates. The price difference of Rs 4.05 crores will be met

from the PPA reserve created by KVIC in these days. The reserve fund has ensured that the Khadi institutions in the country remain unaffected by the price rise and the prices of Khadi cotton apparels also do not go up. KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena said that this decision would save both Khadi institutions as well as the Khadi buyers from any adverse impact of price rise.

"Short supply of raw cotton from CCI and the consequent rise in price of cotton has hit the entire textile industry including Khadi. But KVIC has decided to continue the supply of roving/sliver to Khadi institutions at the old rates so as to mitigate any financial burden on the institutions.

At the same time, it will also benefit crores of Khadi buyers as there will be no increase in the price of Khadi fabric and garments. It is KVIC's commitment to every Khadi buyer to provide Khadi at affordable prices in tune with

Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of "Khadi for Nation", Saxena said. Khadi has nearly 9 percent share in the Indian textile industry and produces nearly 150 million Sq Mtr fabric per year. With this decision, Khadi has emerged as the only entity that is unaffected by the steep price rise of cotton. Khadi buyers and Khadi institutions, thus, have a reason to rejoice.

Khadi Institutions have unanimously welcomed the move and thanked KVIC for the big support saying this would safeguard the institutions against any market adversities. "Cotton prices have gone up by over Rs 70 per KG.

This step of KVIC will help Khadi Institutions survive during these difficult times. Any hike in the price of sliver and roving would have put a huge financial burden on Khadi institutions that are yet to recover from the impact of Covid19," said Shri Sarthank Singla, Secretary of Khadi Udyog Jathlana, Ambala.

PHONE TAPPING CASE

Fadnavis questioned for 2 hrs

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Amid protests by the Opposition BJP workers across the State, the Mumbai Cyber police on Sunday recorded the statement of former Chief Minister and current Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, Devendra Fadnavis, in connection with the leak of classified information relating to the much-discussed phone tapping case.

At around noon, a team of cyber police officials investigating the phone-tapping case reached Fadnavis' official residence "Sagar" and recorded his statement for two hours on issues relating to the phone tapping scam, The former Chief Minister, who was in the normal course was to go the BKC police station in north-central to record his statement, had stayed put at his residence after the Mumbai's Joint Police Commissioner called him late on Saturday night and told him that there was no need for him to come to police station to record his statement.

Fadnavis had himself tweeted on Saturday night that he would not be going to the BKC police station in response to the summons issued to him by the police. "Just received a call from Joint CP,Crime. He told me I'm not required to go toBKC police

station. Instead,they will only come to take the required information. I have cancelled all my Pune programs for tomorrow. I'll be at my residence. They can come anytime. JaiHind, JaiMaharashtra!"

Talking to media persons after the police recorded his statement at his residence, Fadnavis said, "The MVA Government may try hard to implicate me in the phone tapping case, I am not going to stop. I will continue to expose the MVA. I work for the people. I will continue to expose corruption of this government. This Government will not succeed in its intent to expose me".

Fadnavis also tweeted separately, "I had submitted the entire transcript & evidences to Union Home Secretary about the police transfer scam by MVA,in Maharashtra. First the High Court & then SC ordered a CBI probe on this scam. This Maha police transfer scam would've never come out in public, if I hadn't spoken up."

In a development that came less than as fortnight after the Pune police registered an FIR against senior IPS officer and former police commissioner Rashmi Shukla under the Indian Telegraph Act in the phone tapping case, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Cyber cell of the Mumbai crime police Nitin



Jadhav had asked Fadnavis to appear before the police at 11 am on March 13 (Sunday) to provide information relating to the phone tapping case.

On his part, Fadnavis had himself said on Saturday that he had been summoned by the cyber branch of the Mumbai police had issued him a notice under section 162 CrPC calling him to appear before the BKC Cyber Police Station at 11 am Sunday. "I will go there tomorrow and record my statement," he had said.

Fadnavis — who faces the allegation of "leaking" details relating to a "top secret" report submitted to it in August last year by the then State Intelligence Commissioner Rashmi Shukla through the

then the Director-General of Police Subodh Jaiswal – had on Saturday come down heavily on the Shiv Sena-led MVA Government for "protecting" those involved in the alleged racket involving the transfers and promotions of police officers ranging from inspectors to high-ranging IPS officers.

Ahead of the police recording the former Chief Minister's statement, the BJP workers across the State on Sunday staged protests against the notice issued to Fadnavis to appear before it record his statement in the phone tapping case. At several places, the BJP workers also made a bonfire of the notice issued to Fadnavis on Saturday.

Talking to media persons, Fadnavis had said on Saturday, "As a Leader of Opposition, I have the privilege not to reveal where I got the information from. All the same, I was State Home Minister once and I understand my responsibility. If an offence was falsely registered and if the police want some help, I will respond. So, I will go to the Police Station tomorrow," Fadnavis said

It may be recalled that the State Intelligence Department (SID) had lodged a complaint with the police after Fadnavis had on March 23, 2021 gone to town demanding a CBI inquiry into the alleged racket involving the transfers and promotions of police officers

ranging from inspectors to high-ranging IPS officers.

Fadnavis had made his demand based on a confidential report submitted by the then State Intelligence Commissioner Rashmi Shukla through the then the Director-General of Police Subodh Jaiswal on August 25, 2020 allegedly involving corruption in matters relating to the transfers and promotions of police officers ranging from inspectors to high-ranging IPS officers.

On his part, Fadnavis had cited a letter written by Shukla in her capacity as the then State Intelligence Commissioner. "I have 6.3 GB of data that includes the call records and the transcripts which I will hand over to the Union Home secretary as he is the custodian of IPS officers and demand a CBI inquiry into the transfer-posting-promotion racket," Fadnavis had said.

At his Saturday's news conference, Fadnavis had denied that he had leaked the report to the media. He said that he had had submitted the report on the transfer scam that he received to the then Union Home Secretary. The summoning of Fadnavis comes on the heels of the Pune police registering an FIR against senior IPS officer and former police commissioner Rashmi Shukla under the Indian Telegraph Act.

‘Why do some people think they’re above law?’

Says Raut on BJP's protest against police summoning Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

In the wake of the BJP's Iprotest against Mumbai police recording Devendra Fadnavis's statement in a case of alleged illegal tapping of phones, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday asked why some people and political parties think of themselves as above the law and why "drama" was being created.

Raut in a post on Twitter claimed that earlier central agencies had summoned several Maharashtra ministers and public representatives for probe into some cases out of "political vendetta".

There are no special rights for anyone in democracy and all are equal before the law, said the RajyaSabha member and Shiv Sena's chief spokesperson, whose party shares power with the NCP and Congress in Maharashtra.

The Sena MP's remarks triggered a war of words between the two leaders as Fadnavis later said that he was not afraid of the police notice, and asked Raut why he gets scared when such a situation arises before him.

A team of the BKC cyber

police here on Sunday recorded former Maharashtra chief minister Fadnavis's statement in connection with the phone tapping case. The police had issued a notice to Fadnavis in this connection and BJP workers in parts of Maharashtra on Sunday staged protest and burnt copies of the notice.

A number of BJP leaders, including MLA NiteshRane, MLCs Prasad Lad and PravinDarekar, also gathered outside Fadnavis's residence in south Mumbai.

"Why some people and political parties think of themselves as being above the law? The central agencies summoned several ministers and public representatives in Maharashtra for probe out of political

vendetta and they appeared before the agencies...No one has special rights in democracy. All are equal before the law. Why this drama then?" Raut asked in a tweet in Marathi.

When asked about Raut's comment, Fadnavis told reporters here that he was not afraid of the notice issued to him by the cyber police.

"But why does Sanjay Raut get scared when such a situation arises before him? Why does he make allegations against agencies? Why does he address press conference everyday to ask why he is being summoned?" Fadnavis said while replying to a ques-



tion after his statement was recorded by the police.

Countering the BJP leader, Raut said in another tweet that there was 'some problem' in what Fadnavis heard and saw.

"Sanjay Raut is a manly Shiv Sainik. There is no question of getting scared," Raut tweeted. The RajyaSabha member recalled he has addressed two press conferences to "expose with evidence" how the central agencies carry out their actions.

"So, don't lie to this extent," Raut asked Fadnavis.

Meanwhile, talking to reporters here earlier in the day, Maharashtra minister and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray targeted the BJP and said the MahaVikasAghadi (MVA) government (comprising the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress) does not use its agencies against the opponents as "campaign machineries" like the Centre does.

Maha BJP MLA moves SC against HC order dismissing plea on new rule on Speaker's election

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maharashtra BJP MLA Girish Mahajan has moved the Supreme Court against the Bombay High Court order dismissing his plea challenging the validity of new rules of "open voting method" to elect the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the State Assembly respectively.

Mahajan, in the PIL, has alleged that the notification dated December 23, 2021 was "illegally and arbitrarily" issued by the Maharashtra government amending Rules 6 and 7 of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rule, 1960, under which the secret ballot method was replaced with an open vote system through voice vote and show of hands.

The appeal filed through advocates AbhikalpPratap Singh and Siddharth Dharmadhikari said that the Bombay High Court has dismissed on March 9 the PIL filed by petitioner Mahajan that raised several substantial questions of laws having an impact on the general public at large.

The appeal questioned whether Maharashtra Assembly Rules, 1960 are procedures established by law as held by this court in a plethora of cases. "Whether the Governor of State has discretionary powers insofar as fixing the date for the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly is concerned?" the appeal said.

It said that another substantial question of law raised is whether the chief minister of a state can exercise any power under the Constitution of India without aid and advice of the Council of Ministers?

The appeal further said, "Whether the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly can be selected by the Chief Minister of state?"

"The petitioner furthermore respectfully states that the Speaker and Deputy Speaker have a very significant role in the healthy functioning of the democratic process in the state and they are constitutionally expected to be free, fair and non-partisan persons operating above any political party", it said.

Supporters of SP, BJP clash in Budaun; 10 booked

PTI ■ BUDAUN

A political argument between supporters of the Samajwadi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party escalated into a clash and led to stone pelting here, police said on Sunday.

An FIR has been registered against 10 people and three of them have been detained in connection with the incident in Kakarala area underAlapur police station limits here, they said.

"One Mohammad Rustam and Asrar alias Maili, along with their supporters, were involved in a political argument that escalated into violence.

Their supporters pelted stones on each other. Four police teams were rushed to the spot to contain the situation. Those involved in the clash managed to flee from the spot as the police teams reached there.

No one was injured in the incident," Superintendent of Police (City) Praveen Singh Chauhan said.

More IPC Sections added to FIR against Abbas Ansari



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Abbas Ansari, son of mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, is likely to be arrested any time. After booking him for violation of the model code of conduct, police have launched a probe in this connection and added more IPC sections against him.

Ansari won the recently-concluded UP Assembly election from Mau. The police started the probe into a case of alleged violation of the model code of conduct by Abbas Ansari during the assembly elections. A case was filed against Ansari after he allegedly threatened government officials at a public rally in Mau earlier this month.

On Saturday, the police added four Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections to the case registered against Ansari.

The new sections included Section 186 (obstructing official work), Section 189 (threatening public servant), Section 153A (statement or attempt to cause disturbance against any particular class) and Section 120B (criminal conspiracy).

Ansari contested as a candidate of the Samajwadi Party-Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party alliance. At a rally on March 3, Ansari had said, "I have told SP chief Akhilesh Yadav that no transfers or postings will happen for six months. First, 'hisab-kitab' will happen with them and only then their transfer certificates will be stamped."

The videos of Ansari's controversial remarks were widely shared, prompting the police to take cognisance and file a case. Sources said that the cops are waiting for the green signal from the top brass and once they get the go-ahead, they will arrest Ansari.

A local police officer claimed that they could also impose the National Security Act (NSA) against Ansari as he threatened the law-enforcing agencies cracking down on criminals.



Devotees participate in the Shyam Fagun Mahotsav procession, in Patna, on Sunday

PTI Photo

Missing SP leader, wife found murdered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The bodies of Samajwadi Party Vyapar Prakasht's (business cell) State secretary Rajesh Agrawal and his wife Babli, who were missing for the past two weeks in Bijnor, were recovered by police.

The cops said the victims were killed and the bodies were buried in a house belonging to Ruma, a woman working in the beauty parlour of the SP leader's wife. According to the police, Ruma, along with her son and paramour, murdered the duo.

On February 28, Rajesh and his wife Babli went missing all of a sudden. The couple did not have any issue.Rajesh's relatives grew suspicious as his mobile phone remained switched off for several days.

They started searching for him. On Friday, Babli's brother, along with some SP leaders, met the superintendent of police and expressed apprehension of some untoward incident. The police swung into action and came to know that Ruma had an affair with the SP leader after her husband died. On the basis of suspicion, the police called Ruma for interrogation on Saturday evening.

Shah: Cooperative sector to contribute hugely in \$5 trillion economy goal

PTI ■ TAPI

Union Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the cooperative sector is going to make the largest contribution to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of making India a USD five trillion economy, in the process benefiting several crore people associated with it.

Addressing a gathering of milk producers of the Surat District Co-Operative Milk Producers' Union Ltd. (Sumul) here, the Union Home and Cooperation Minister said a strong cooperative sector will help realise the dream of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

"I can say with confidence that, in the coming days, the area of cooperation is going to make the largest contribution towards realising PM NarendraModi's dream of a 5 trillion dollar economy," Shah said during the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony ofSumul dairy.

"If Sumul gets strong, its two-and-a-half lakh (member milk producers) benefit. If a private dairy gets strong, only five people benefit. If the cooperative sector becomes strong, the country's farmers, cattle farmers, owners will get strengthened, and the idea



ofAtmanirbhar Bharat will grow," he said.

Shah urged the audience to take a pledge to make the cooperative sector the strongest in the world in the coming 25 years when India celebrates 100 years of Independence.

Shah informed that Sumul had grown from producing 200 litres of milk per day in 1971 to selling milk worth Rs 7 crore per day now, with the money getting deposited in the bank accounts of its 2.5 lakh members, which he termed the "magic of cooperative theory".

The Union minister also hailed the contribution of Tribhuvan Patel, widely known as the father of the cooperative movement in India and founder-chairman of the world-renowned Amul,

He said Sumul aims to raise milk production to 25 lakh litres per day from the current 20 lakh litres.

Siddaramaiah: Won't contest from Chamundeshwari seat in next Assembly polls

PTI ■ MANDYA

Former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is reluctant to contest the 2023 Assembly election in the state from the Chamundeshwari Assembly segment in Mysuru district where he had lost in 2018.

As the sitting Chief Minister back in 2018, he chose to contest from Chamundeshwari and vacated his 'safe seat' ofVaruna in Mysuru district to son DrYathindraSiddaramaiah.

While his son emerged victorious, the senior Siddaramaiah lost to JD(S) leader G T DeveGowda with a margin of about 34,000 votes in Chamundeshwari seat.

"People are calling me to contest from four to five places.

I have not decided yet," Siddaramaiah told reporters here.

When asked whether he would try his luck from Chamundeshwari seat in 2023, the Congress leader said, "I will not contest from there."

Replying to a query on the possibility of elections being held ahead of schedule follow-



ing the BJP's victory in four out of five assembly polls recently, Siddaramaiah said he did not think it will happen.

He added that Chief Minister BasavarajBommai, senior BJP leader B S Yediyurappa and other leaders have also ruled it out.

Calling such questions speculative, he said there was no reason for holding early elections when the polls are due in April 2023.

However, Siddaramaiah, who is Congress Legislative Party leader said: "In case there are early elections, we are ready to face. People are in our favour."

To a query on the rumours that many Congress leaders

were ready to switch sides, the CLP leader asked people to wait and watch to see many BJP leaders joining the Congress.

Siddaramaiah also claimed that the Janata Dal (Secular) MLA G T DeveGowda has spoken to him seeking ticket for himself and his son. "I have told him that I have not yet spoken to the party high command," the CLP leader said.

On the possibility of BJP and the JD(S) forming an alliance, the former chief minister said: "We are not bothered if they form an alliance, come to an understanding or even go for match fixing."

Regarding former Union minister C M Ibrahim's allegations, who resigned from Congress and is expected to join the JD(S), Siddaramaiah said there was no need to give value to the allegations made by a person who has quit the party.

Ibrahim was given ticket to contest the assembly election fromBhadravathi assembly constituency by denying ticket to a sitting MLA Sangamesh in 2013 but he lost. I made him, a defeated candidate, planning board chairman.

Safe evacuation of Indians from Ukraine shows PM's diplomacy: AIADMK

PTI ■ CHENNAI

AIADMK coordinator O Panneerselvam on Sunday thanked Prime Minister NarendraModi for the safe evacuation of Indian students, as well as Pakistan and Bangladesh citizens, from the war-hit Ukraine and said this showed the height of diplomacy and rapport of the Prime Minister with foreign countries.

He was happy to learn that the government under the Prime Minister's "vibrant leadership" not only evacuated all Indian students from the war-hit Ukraine but also the citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh and made the "Operation Ganga" a grand success, Panneerselvam said in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister.

"The safe evacuation of Indian students who were caught in the conflict zone Summy through humanitarian corridor with the cooperation of both Russia and Ukraine was truly remarkable.

This shows the height of diplomacy and rapport of the Prime Minister with the foreign countries," Panneerselvam said.

Smugglers, cop held in Jaipur with 35 ivory tusks

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Three people including a UP Police Sub Inspector were arrested here on Sunday with 35 ivory tusks weighing around 30 kg, police said.

They were arrested by the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Rajasthan Police and Wild Life Crime Control Bureau in a joint operation.

They recovered 35 ivory tusks along with 165 gram ivory tusk powder, one loaded revolver with six cartridges from miscreants

The arrests were made when a team intercepted an SUV in Jalupura area of the city acting on a tip-off about movement of ivory tusks and tiger skin.

They recovered 35 ivory tusks along with 165 gram ivory tusk powder, one loaded revolver with six cartridges, and Rs 1.50 lakh cash from the vehicle, an official statement said.

The accused were identified as Nazuddin Khan, a Sub Inspector posted atHardoi Police Lines in Uttar Pradesh, Nadir alias Shahrulkh Khan, and Gulam Khan, it said.

The accused had come to sell the tusks in Jaipur and are being interrogated, police said.

Free weddings of differently-abled solemnised in TN temple

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The weddings of differently abled persons were solemnised in the presence of Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Minister P K SekarBabu at the renowned Andavar temple, Vadapalani, here on Sunday.

The Minister who gave away marriage certificates to the couples who were married at the temple, said the DMK government introduced the free marriage scheme for the differently abled after completely waiving the charges towards the conduct of the marriages on temple premises.

Speaking to reporters later, the Minister said a marriage ceremony was held at the VadapalaniMurugan Temple for the disabled on the eve of Chief Minister M K Stalin's birthday.

On the incident of about 20 priests allegedly preventing a Scheduled Caste woman from having darshan at the ChitrabalaMedai in the ancient Natarajar temple, in Tamil Nadu's Chidambaram (inCuddalore district) last month, the Minister said the government would consult legal experts to resolve the issue.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hungry to win

The BJP, unlike the Congress, is already off the block in the Gujarat poll arena

In 1951, the Congress won 388 seats out of 430 in the first elections to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. In 2022, it lost the deposit in 387 seats, winning just two. The vote share of 47.93 per cent then stands reduced to a few decimals over two per cent. Does that define irrelevance? Losing seats is part of electoral politics. Losing votes is an existential question. No leader would want to be in the shoes of Sonia Gandhi and her children today. The media and the social media speak of it in derision. For a party that swept to power in two general elections because of sympathy — not developmental work — it faces public ridicule today. For a party that was the spine of the freedom movement, it surely deserves a better fate. But politics is a game of fatalities, facts and successes. Whatever initiative the “high command” now takes to stem the rot seeping in may prove inadequate. The BJP is already on the Gujarat election bandwagon even as Congress is yet to reach the starting block. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Ahmedabad the day after the results, the meeting with his mother going viral on social media. In the next 48 hours, a newspaper report informs us, he held three road shows, talked to State party leaders about the coming Assembly elections in Gujarat later this year, addressed thousands of Panchayat Raj representatives, attended the convocation of a university and inaugurated a State-level sports tournament. And that is when BJP is ruling the State.



On the other hand, Gujarat Congress legislators are eager to meet Rahul Gandhi to discuss poll strategy. They wrote to the “high command” that the party cadre is demoralised and exiting in the absence of a strategy to counter BJP. Rahul is officially yet to even respond. That is how the two national political rivals differ in their approaches to elections. Gujarat must be farthest from the mind of the Congress Working Committee which has first to tackle, and as usual quell, any challenge to the “high command”. The reasons for the UP fiasco will be probed, which is also the usual routine. The fate of that report will be no different from a lot of such reports in the past. A panel probed the reasons for the party’s dismal performance in the last round of Assembly elections. It was never made public, and there is no evidence that the “high command” ever acted on the recommendations. The party is in a permanent state of a slide. Everything it does boomerangs. Transparency and course correction are absent. Despite the latest political tumult, the “high command” will unhurriedly follow a set pattern. Its organisational elections will be the priority. For, an elected “high command” needs to replace the interim one. The only thing left to be seen is whether a change in the composition of the “high command” improves the party’s fortunes.



Tourists stand in the water canal at the Taj Mahal complex during a sunny day, in Agra

Gone, is it?

Experts plan to rely on conditions rather than number of cases to signal an end to the pandemic

All indications suggest that the Corona virus is making a quiet exit. There were 400-odd cases in the Capital in recent past but zero deaths. Around this time last year, the second wave was raging and a lot of people lost their lives, but thereafter there has not been a wave though Omicron came and waned without much damage. It must be mentioned that now a sizable population is vaccinated and herd immunity might have already checked its growth in the tracks. Now that schools have opened and elections taken place without much hassle and international flights set to resume by this month end, it is about time to leave the Coronavirus behind and move on. The World Health Organisation’s health experts have already begun debating how and when to call an end to the global COVID-19 crisis. A number of challenges remain in declaring it as history as it has shown in the past its resilience and its tendency to return with a bang, so it would not be wise to reach a hasty decision and repent later. For this, the experts will have to identify and quantify milestones that could establish beyond doubt the exit of a pandemic.



Besides, the geographical expanse of Coronavirus is such that it would be a nightmare for experts to reach a conclusion. While cases have decreased in many countries, fatalities have increased in Hong Kong, and China reported more than 1,000 new daily cases this week for the first time in two years. So experts are now contemplating new techniques to reach a conclusion. They are trying to identify conditions rather than number of cases that would eventually signal the end of the public health emergency declared on January 30, 2020. Meanwhile many countries, including India, have started taking baby steps to return to normal, such as relaxing masking and quarantine regulations and opening borders. Another pertinent fact is that such viruses are seldom completely eliminated. They remain forever; of course their impact is reduced due to immunity, drugs and vaccines. In this also, researchers feel that even if COVID-19 cases decline, it would still kill thousands worldwide such as say TB or malaria. Besides, the danger of a new variant cannot be ruled out. The only way in this situation is to learn to live with Corona as we have been living with thousands, if not millions, of viruses.

Nostalgia: The days of yore at RIMC

The 100-year history of the Rashtriya Indian Military College is replete with great men, stories of their achievements and playful mischiefs

At my age, memory is fading more gracefully than are my Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) and Gorkha silk ties. The RIMC, when I joined in 1950, was called Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College and had English masters including Hugh Catchpole, the principal. He would ferry some of us to Mussoorie on Sundays to share toll tax and, more importantly, push his aging Austin up steep gradients. He employed the same strategy inside the squash court, luring you with a squash ball if you took three points in three games playing him. Similar inducements were offered when he tested you with a new ball on the cricket pitch. Remarkable were those inscrutable souls, giving so much of themselves to cadets so that they proved the best in whatever they did. While PC Syam’s curly hair swung starboard, the cricket ball moved both ways. Or Raj Manchanda, rising to become the national squash champion, and your author winning the western India junior championship in 1956 — that was the Catchpole magic which simultaneously ensured your English grammar achieved the same excellence. The diminutive EJ Watson, who got married at the ripe young age of 94 in England, was his barking buddy.

Today, RIMC that the likes of Catchpole, Watson, Shingal and Sharma helped make a world-class institution, is celebrating its centenary. It is truly the cradle for valour and excellence. The first Indian officer to win the Victoria Cross was Prem Bhagat who rose to become an Army Commander, combining style with substance. Bhagat would have made a great Army chief had Indira Gandhi kept her promise. The first PVC was also bagged by a Rimcollian, Somnath Sharma, the savior of Kashmir. The college bequeathed on the nation four Army chiefs, Generals KS Thimayya, GG Bewoor, VN (Titch) Sharma and S Padmanabhan, and two Air chiefs, Nimmi Suri and Birendra Dhanoa who bombed the hell out of Pak jihadists at Balakot. The list of Army, Air Force and



Navy Cs-in-C and flag officers will fill a book.

Titch Sharma helped jog my memory about our Pakistani Old Boys and visit to what has now become an enemy country. But in better times, things were very different. Recalling exploits of Gul Hassan who became Army chief, two Air chiefs, Asghar Khan and Nur Khan, and Navy chief Mohammad Sharif was enthralling. There is also Col Inayatullah Hassan who fought in the Anglo-Indonesia war as a pilot while Maj Taj Mohammad Khanzada DSO, MC who joined the INA and numerous others who imbibed grit from the boxing ring at RIMC.

As a greening cadet, we got to sneak peak at RIMC reunions. Take the one in 1952. Old Boys having fun on gravel and tarmac outside what is today the Bhagat Hall. Army Ambassador cars parked disorderly outside while Air Commodore Subiah performed somersaults, Rajwade cartwheels and Bhalu Kochhar’s hand springs, while Prem Bhagat perched on the bonnet of the Ambassador balancing his glass on his head and dancing to *Gore gore banke chhore*...the RIMC signature song. Sweating and sizzled, they would roll into the



A WINK AND A HANDSHAKE WERE THE PASSWORD FOR DRINKS ON THE SAVOY WITH THE CHOICEST OF SCOTCHES AND DELECTABLE SNACKS. THIS WAS THE TRUE DOUBLE-ENGINE FRIENDSHIP. LATER IN LIFE, WE RECIPROCATED WITH BOTTLES OF TRIPLE X RUM

Mess for dinner as their better three-fourths continued jiving in the junior anteroom.

In 1956, along with Rimcollian Gentleman Cadets invited from the IMA, we were feasting on Scotch eggs when in strode sans fanfare, Army chief Thimayya. Instead of sitting at the Cadet Captain’s table, he joined us on the benches opposite it. He ate his breakfast with us, speaking to all. His tall figure and deep voice were spell-binding.

All the waiters at RIMC were from Goa — D’Souza, Rodrigues, Noronha... and head butler Thople. These great men took care of our culinary preferences and calories, never hesitating to serve extras. When college closed for holidays, they would migrate to join five star hotels in Mussoorie. As a young Captain, along with other Rimcollians, I landed up at the Savoy for the unmissable Miss Mussoorie contest. Hip flasks depleted, we eyed the bars manned by our Goan friends. A wink and a handshake were the password for drinks on the Savoy with choicest of Scotches and delectable snacks. This was the true double-engine friendship. Later in life, we reciprocated with bottles of Triple X Rum, the Goan elixir. At another reunion, the ageing



ASHOK K MEHTA

Catchpole was the chief guest visiting from Pakistan. I brought Aditi whom I had not married. He confided in her the reason why he never married: “I feared she would poison me.” Just how many Rimcollians have been poisoned by their spouses, RIMC keeps no record. But wine merchant Bikram Singh treated us with the best of blended Scotches in his time. Gen Virendra Singh, who would not touch the stuff being a tee-totaler and strict vegetarian, was an extravagant entertainer of booze. Even in London where he would rent a flat in the summer, he would introduce Rimcollians doing courses there to the high and mighty, including Field Marshal Edwin Brammal. Viru was once G3 to DQ Brammal.

Today, 100 years on, the youngest cadet, Nihar Reddy, all of 12 years seven months, will meet Gen Sharma, incredibly sprightly at 92. Rimcollians will be riotously happy, enjoying the centenary reunion guzzling RIMC spirits.

(The writer, a retired Lt Gen and a Rimcollian, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CM STALIN’S CLARION CALL

Sir — It is very timely and laudable that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has advised his law enforcement officers to act tough against bigots who are bent on creating religious conflicts in the State with political motives, particularly when we have witnessed polarisation of people in the name of religion to win elections in the just-concluded Assembly elections in five States. As mentioned by him, such bigots, particularly the communal-minded religious fanatics, misuse the social media platform for destructive purposes like fanning caste and religious conflicts.

A State like Tamil Nadu, which is known for its peace-loving people and its great values, particularly religious tolerance and unity among its people irrespective of their caste, community, creed or religion, should not be allowed to become a platform to promote hate in the name of religion by such brain-washing elements and any such move by anyone should be nipped in the bud. People should be very alert against being carried away by the vicious campaigns made by such fanatics and treat them like untouchables if they want the harmony of love that prevails among the people to be maintained in future also.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

ADDING TO PLIGHT OF REFUGEES

Sir — This is only to exacerbate the Ukrainian plight that the apprehension of vulnerable human trafficking looms large these days there in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine’s capital Kyiv on February 24 in view of the millions of women and children fleeing across the Ukrainian borders, braving the unabated Russian aggression. On the face of it, it is women and child refugees who are on the receiving end of this trafficking menace, as per the report from United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). This is not only trafficking but also sexual exploitation and abuse of the victim refugees.

Over 2.5 million people, including more than 1 million children on the run from the strife-hit Ukraine, bear testimo-

Needed: A strong Oppn



The Congress debacle in the recent Assembly elections confirms the decline of the ‘grand old party’ and the significance of the BJP in national politics. The BJP’s resounding victory in four out of the five States has put paid to the criticism against the party and its Governments. The collapse of the Congress has created a vacuum in the already weak Opposition. An insignificant Opposition is not a good sign for democracy. An Opposition is as important as the ruling party. A non-existent Opposition will

adversely affect proper functioning of Government. In the absence of a strong Opposition, the Government could take rash decisions without being challenged.

As for the Congress, lack of good organisational structure, ideological uncertainties and failure to take a decision about leadership change have created a serious crisis. The substantial vote share that it used to get in the past has now shifted to regional parties and the BJP. The party is unable to express its views on important issues. It is likely that its position as the main Opposition party will be taken up by some other opposition parties like the AAP or TMC. The AAP has decided to strengthen the party in different States, and expects to perform well in the upcoming polls in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. But in order to become an alternative to the BJP, AAP needs to put in a lot of efforts.

Venu GS | Kollam

ny to the worst-ever state of affairs vis-a-vis the unprecedented humanitarian crisis Europe is faced with since World War II seeing the huge exodus. However, one suspect was detained in Poland on the suspicion of sexually exploiting a 19-year-old girl refugee who was lured on the pretext of providing shelter and food. In another case, the local officials eavesdropped on a person making false promises of work and a room to a 16-year-old. These happenings were thankfully averted by the timely intervention of the authorities concerned.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

SAY NO TO DRUGS, FIRMLY

Sir — The drugs supply in schools and colleges is an important problem in our country. This is the beginning from where the youth get attracted to it. Some students try it for fun and also force their friends to try it at once but very soon it becomes the habit for them. For drug suppliers, it is only the consignment and deal which has to be completed by hook or by

SOUND BITE

Shatrughan Sinha will be our candidate in the Lok Sabha byelection from Asansol.



TMC supreme — Mamata Banerjee

In Ukraine, rivers of blood and tears are flowing.

Catholic Church head — Pope Francis

It’s a trek for me but Kala Ghoda reminds me so much of Khan Market in Delhi.



Actor Shahid Kapoor’s wife — Mira Rajput

I do think that there’s similarity in MS style and my style.

S African cricketer — Faf du Plessis

The life of a person is more important to us than forming a Government.




SP leader — Akhilesh Yadav

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN


RESCUE RIVERS TO SUSTAIN HUMAN LIFE

Most of the rivers in India are severely polluted



HARISH BARTH WAL

Water is a primaevael element that sustains life, the elixir of life as Sir C.V. Raman called it. It must be treated with utmost caution and regard. Globally, it is getting scarce. At places it is dearer than gold, pricier than petrol. About 70 percent of Earth's surface is water. Yet 97 percent is salty and just one percent fit for ready human consumption. Eighty per cent of water supplies for human and agricultural use are sourced from groundwater. Increasing exploitation of groundwater is lowering of groundwater levels in most regions besides creating soil salinity. Daily discharge of some two million tonnes of toxic industrial effluents, garbage and farm wastes further degenerates groundwater quality. Technology to make the filthiest water fit and safe exists but is too costly. Rain water is an excellent source of potable water but its erratic and unreliable availability renders it unmanageable. So, all eyes are set



on rivers to meet varied human needs. Recognising the seminal role of rivers in growth of civilisations, agriculture, transportation, hydro electricity generation and economic growth, the International Day of Action for Rivers on March 14 was established to raise awareness about protection of rivers and prevent water contamination. The Jal Shakti Ministry focuses on the revival and conservation of wetlands in the river basins and tackling the alarming levels of river pollution. Had there been no tampering with the flowing waters, our urban and rural settlements may not have suffered river pollution and potable water crunch. Most rivers in India are severely polluted, some looking like dirty canals. The Thames in London, the cleanest as of now, is an example worth emulating. Till fifty years ago it was much polluted and declared 'biologically dead'. But it was cleaned and revived.

Indian farming conditions are characteristically marred by droughts and floods. In this context, the project on interlinking of rivers and canals, is critical. Once implemented, the excessive water of monsoon months shall be diverted to water-deficit regions and also help bring in larger areas under farming and irrigation, provide build-up of waterways for transport and accelerate installation of multipurpose river projects and generate additional employment. Sadly, the nation's river water distribution scene is plagued by inter-state disputes: Krishna, Cauvery, Satluj, Beas, Ravi, Tungabhadra, Godavari, Narmada, Mahi, Yamuna, Karmansa, and so on. Tribunals established to settle the riparian State disputes on sharing of waters could not resolve the conflicts. The conflict is about a riparian state's reluctance to part with water that could be spared to quench the thirst of millions in a neighbouring State. Abroad, the interlinking of Rhine-Danube canal, Illinois waterway, Tennessee-Tombigbee waterway, Gulf Intracoastal waterway and Dian Zhong Water Diversion Project have demonstrated that the networks created ushered in multifold benefits. At home, on the proposed river linking projects related to Krishna, Pennar and Cauvery, the Karnataka chief minister bluntly declared recently to take all steps to get the State's share of water, and not compromise. Similar sentiment has been conveyed by Telangana over Godavari waters. Then, we have another view strongly espoused by 'Waterman of India' Rajendra Singh against linking of rivers pleading not to divert the free flow of rivers, the veins and arteries of earth. True, changing the courses of rivers can disturb the ecology of water creatures yet considering the overall long-term advantages justifies the waterways linking project. Rajendra Singh also opposes erection of hydro-electricity plants as the power thus produced costs Rs. 19 per unit as against solar power at ₹3.60, making it clear which of the two should be promoted.

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

The risk of complex interdependencies

With Europe and Asia being dependent upon Russian gas, Putin can easily have his way on Ukraine, which might soon be evident in the de-escalation process



NISHTHA KAUSHIKI

In the wake of the recent Russian Ukrainian crisis, one of the crucial debates relates to the dangers of creating complex interdependencies through energy supplies and food grain trade. In 2012 Russia became a member of the WTO, and today, it ranks number four among the top trading partners of the EU. It enjoys a prominent position to supply natural gas, crude oil and refined oil products to the region. It is estimated that Russia supplies one-third of Europe's energy needs. From a Russian statistical perspective, about half of Russia's exported oil is shipped to European countries, including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. As the liberals would call it, the scenario could have been a perfect recipe for enhancing ties and ensuring security for Europe and other regions. Often the experts of international relations have generously put across the view that the more the interdependencies, the less would be the tendencies of the state to use force as an essential instrument of foreign and security policy. However, the manner in which the recent crisis unfolded itself, the theory seems to be falsified. Instead, one has witnessed interdependencies to ensure political and strategic divisions within the established institutions such as the European Union, leading to hesitations to bring the previously agreed mutual principles of security and defence into effect.

Although Russia started exporting crude oil to China in the late 1990s, the post-Crimea sanctions phase witnessed Russia finding alternate pathways to sell its energy resources. As per IAEA statistics, Moscow consumes almost 52 per cent of the energy produced to fulfil its domestic energy, thereby making itself reliant in its energy requirements. The energy sector in 2018 constituted around 48 per cent of Moscow's federal reserves. Hence, it became vital for President Vladimir Putin to reorient its sources before Russia could assert itself geopolitically.

Russia adopted a three-fold approach to keep Europe on its energy tenterhooks. First, it increased its export values which kept Europe engaged to a more considerable extent. Second, it initiated direct energy supplies to the European countries through diversification of the transport routes to bypass the transit passage of Ukraine and other Eastern European countries. Examples include the 'blue stream pipeline' via Turkey and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. These two measures filled Europe with the confidence that Russia might not take the path of using force in its conduct of international relations. Thus, import dependencies were maintained. Although the US and the UK from the very beginning disapproved of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to supply direct gas to countries, such decisions with an economic win-win for both European countries and Russia led to the gradual build-

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PAKISTAN'S AGREEMENT TO IMPORT TWO MILLION TONNES OF WHEAT AND NATURAL GAS FROM RUSSIA FOLLOWED BY ITS STATEMENT ON THE WEST ACCELERATES THE STRATEGIC CONVERGENCES THAT WILL AFFECT INDIA'S STRATEGIC CONCERNS. PAKISTAN IS ALL SET TO PLAY A DETERMINING ROLE IN THE TRIANGULAR DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA, INDIA, AND THE US

The writer is an Assistant Professor at Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The views expressed are personal.)



ing up of political divergences within the EU. For instance, Germany imports 35 per cent of the gas it needs from Russia, and hence in the present crisis, it has refused to stop its energy imports from Russia, citing its essentiality for the "daily lives of citizens". Hungary and Netherlands have adopted a similar approach.

The third important measure taken by Moscow is the diversification of its energy recipients to Asia. Natural gas export takes place through pipeline systems and LNG. The recipients of Russian pipeline gas include European and CIS countries. For LNG, Asia-Pacific countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have emerged as the major importers. In 2019, China began receiving the Russian gas via its Power of Siberia pipeline, and in early 2022, the two countries agreed to a 30-year contract to supply more gas to China. The revenue balance previously favoured Europe drastically changed after 2019, and one could witness Moscow's strategic redirection towards Asia. Statistically, post-2019, around 45.4 per cent of the Russian LNG exports went to Asia, and 52 per cent went to Europe. Thus, with Europe and Asia being dependent upon Russian gas, Putin can easily have his way on Ukraine, which might soon be evident in the de-escalation process. Today, the supply of Russian natural gas has proved to be a bone of contention between the EU members, due to which NATO is almost helpless, and questions are raised on its institutional viability.

Concerning Coal, in 2020, 54 per cent and 31 per cent of Russia's coal exports went to Asia and OECD Europe, respectively.

Interestingly, a week before the hostilities broke out, Moscow announced a critical decision to sell 100 million tons of coal to China for a year, thereby hinting towards its financial preparations to counter the European sanctions if the EU adopted a joint approach. The deal worth \$20 billion would further enhance the Russian energy grip over China with possible indications that Moscow, as the experts suggest, would no longer play the role of a junior partner anymore.

Further, geopolitics has important interlinkages with food security as well. Historically, when the Soviet Union disintegrated, USSR was importing vast amounts of food grain, and during the 1980s oil crisis, the prices of its energy exports decreased, leading the country to huge financial losses. Post-2014 sanctions, Putin has reversed the food security scenario. Today, Russia is the largest exporter of wheat, occupying a market of more than 18%. Russia has expanded vertically and horizontally in creating markets for its food exports. In 2020, Russia's food exports were \$30.5 billion, and in 2021 its food exports were worth \$37.7 billion. EU increased its food purchases from Russia by 41 per cent from 2020 and thus became more dependent on Russia. Simultaneously, Russia engaged Turkey and China as they soon occupied second and third place in the Russian food exports. A Russian countermeasure, if taken, can threaten the food security scenario of Europe, Latin America, West Asia and North Africa, where many countries import a good amount of wheat from Russia, apart from Ukraine. The present crisis thus is having a fragmentation effect where-

in the regional institutions such as the EU, Organisation for American States (OAS) stand divided. The same was reflected in the UNGA voting pattern. For instance, Uruguay, Jamaica, Argentina and Brazil refrained from taking an anti-Russian stand.

From an agricultural defence point of view, in 2020, a new food security doctrine was adopted by Putin that replaced the 2010 doctrine. The doctrine prohibits genetically modified imported seeds for planting to ensure that domestic varieties of grain and fruit are encouraged not only for consumption but also for re-plantation. It simultaneously provides a boost to the agro-industrial complexes. Such measures need to be appreciated from a strategic perspective.

Concerning South Asia, a factor that emerges is the evolving Russo-Pak strategic relations. Pakistan's agreement to import two million tonnes of wheat and natural gas from Russia followed by its emboldened statement on the West has accelerated the strategic convergences between the two countries that will affect India's strategic concerns. The recent developments do hint at the evolving security architecture of South Asia. Pakistan is all set to play a determining role in the triangular dynamics of Russia, India, and the US. India has diversified its source of arms, and the focus of the Government is on the development of indigenous technologies for defence, yet, a lot more needs to be done. The current Ukrainian conundrum offers insights into the future of warfare—both economic and militarily, and hence India too should learn important lessons—both said and unsaid.

War, and the grief it brings to women

One of the bitter truths of war is that its repercussions are gender-specific



AMBRESH RANJAN

War always brings with it a long-lasting devastation. It might be severe for one side and comparatively less grievous for other side. But all the parties involved in it are bound to share uneven grief and anger commonly. One of the bitter truths of war is that its repercussions are gender-specific. The broader picture reveals that not only war but other issues like climate change, environment or other humane-originated disasters have harsher effects on women leading to different circumstances for both the gender.

Women are said to be generally associated with professions considered physically less tough as they have to play a more resilient work in maintaining home and associated activities. But the sufferings they experience during conflicts are not less painful than men. In the patriarchal society, all important decisions are taken by males but their repercussions are equally shared by women. This dilemma of our society has always been witnessed in every age. The book by Farida Khalaf, Andrea C. Hoffmann - The Girl Who Escaped ISIS-- has outlined the sufferings and state of women in Iraq during the ISIS-led conflict. They were forcefully separated from their families and loved ones, traded like slaves and made to live at the mercy of their owners. During the war, many women became victims even though they did not have any direct role in the battles.

Last year in August 2021, research report, the Human Rights Watch and the Human Rights Institute at San Jose State University (SJSU) recently said, "Taliban rule has had a devastating impact on Afghan women and girls." Since the taking control of Afghanistan, Taliban have imposed various restrictions on women and have created huge barriers to women's and girls' health and education, curtailed freedom of movement, expression, and association, and deprived many of income. Afghanistan is ruled by males only. Despite the fact that women are a substantial section of the population,, they cannot voice their concerns strongly. Rather they have to live in the conditions that have been allowed for them by their male counterparts.

In post-Gaddafi Libya, conditions of women have still remained subordinate to men. The law does not specifically criminalize domestic violence. It discriminates against women with respect to marriage, divorce and inheritance. There is a reduced sentence for a man who kills or injures his wife or another female relative because he suspects her of extramarital relations. Besides, online violence against women has reportedly grown steadily in recent times. Regime changes in such countries have nothing to do with gender equality.

The patriarchal system has dominated societies always. Nonetheless, there have been distinct social conditions of women in different societies worldwide. Compared to women in most ancient societies, Egyptian women enjoyed a better place in society as they could own and inherit property and do business. Egyptians allowed women to succeed to the throne. In contrast, in early Chinese societies, women were definitely subordinate to men in patriarchal families. Their primary functions were to perform household tasks and produce offspring (preferably sons) and had little to no economic independence outside of family structures.

In modern times issues related to gender equalities are discussed on many platforms and occasions. Certain things have changed in their favour also and they have been provided platforms to share their roles. Women today constitute a large workforce in corporate, education, service, defence and other major sectors, thereby making them financially independent. And this change has definitely contributed in improving their situation in modern society. But they are still far from attaining social independence. And during situations like war their concerns and views are hardly heard before finalizing family decisions. And they suffer the most during conflict times and in the aftermath.

Russian air strikes hit military base in Ukraine, kill 35

AP ■ LVIV

Waves of Russian missiles pounded a military training base close to Ukraine's western border with NATO member Poland, killing 35 people. The strike followed Russian threats to target foreign weapon shipments that are helping Ukrainian fighters defend their country against Russia's grinding invasion.

More than 30 Russian cruise missiles targeted the sprawling training facility that is less than 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the closest border point with Poland, according to the Governor of Ukraine's western Lviv region. Poland is a key location for routing Western military aid to Ukraine.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, Lviv had largely been spared the scale of destruction unfolding further east and become a destination for residents escaping bombarded cities and for many of the nearly 2.6 million refugees who have fled the country.

The training center in Yavoriv appears to be the most westward target struck so far in the 18-day invasion. The facility, also known as the International Peacekeeping and Security Center, has long been used to train Ukrainian military personnel, often with instructors from the United States and other NATO countries.

It has also hosted international NATO drills. As such, the site symbolizes what has long been a Russian complaint: That the NATO alliance of 30 member countries is moving ever closer to Russia's borders.

Russian has demanded that Ukraine drop its ambitions to join NATO.

Lviv governor Maksym Kozytskyi said most of the missiles fired Sunday "were shot down because the air defense system worked." The ones that got through through killed at least 35 people and wounded 134, he said.

Russian fighters also fired at the airport in the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Ukraine's border with Slovakia and Hungary, an attack the city's mayor said was intended "to sow panic and fear." The airport, which includes a military airfield as well as a runway for civilian flights, also was targeted Friday.

Fighting also raged in multiple areas of the country overnight. Ukrainian authorities said Russian airstrikes on a monastery and a children's resort in the eastern Donetsk region hit spots where monks and refugees were sheltering, wounding 32 people.

Another airstrike hit a westward-bound train evacuating people from the east, killing one person and injuring another, Donetsk's chief regional administrator said.

To the north, in the city of Chernihiv, one person was killed and another injured in a Russian airstrike that destroyed a residential block, emergency services said.

Around the capital, Kyiv, a major political and strategic target for the invasion, fighting also intensified, with overnight shelling in the northwestern suburbs and a missile strike Sunday that destroyed a warehouse to the east. Chief region-



al administrator Oleksiy Kuleba said Russian forces appeared to trying to blockade and paralyze the capital with day and night shelling of the suburbs.

Kuleba said Russian agents were operating in the capital and its suburbs, marking out possible future targets. He vowed that any all-out assault would meet stiff resistance, saying: "We're getting ready to defend Kyiv, and we're prepared to fight for ourselves."

Talks aimed at reaching a cease-fire again failed Saturday, and the U.S. Announced plans to provide another \$200 million to Ukraine for weapons. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov warned other nations that sending equipment to bolster Ukraine's military was "an action that makes those convoys legitimate targets."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia of trying to break his

country apart, as well as starting "a new stage of terror" with the alleged detention of a mayor from a city west of Mariupol. "Ukraine will stand this test. We need time and strength to break the war machine that has come to our land," Zelenskyy said during his nightly address to the nation Saturday.

Russian soldiers pillaged a humanitarian convoy that was trying to reach the battered and encircled port city of Mariupol, where more than 1,500 people have died, a Ukrainian official said. Ukraine's military said Russian forces captured Mariupol's eastern outskirts, tightening their siege of the strategic port. Taking Mariupol and other ports on the Azov Sea could allow Russia to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

An Associated Press journalist in Mariupol witnessed

tanks firing on a nine-story apartment building and was with a group of hospital workers who came under sniper fire on Friday. A worker shot in the hip survived, but conditions in the hospital were deteriorating: Electricity was reserved for operating tables, and people with nowhere else to go lined the hallways.

Among them was Anastasiya Erashova, who wept and trembled as she held a sleeping child. Shelling had just killed her other child as well as her brother's child, Erashova said, her scalp crusted with blood. "No one was able to save them," she said.

In Irpin, a suburb about 12 miles (20 kilometers) northwest of central Kyiv, bodies lay out in the open Saturday on streets and in a park. "When I woke up in the morning, everything was covered in smoke, everything was dark. We don't know who is shooting and

where," resident Serhy Protsenko said as he walked through his neighborhood. Explosions sounded in the distance. "We don't have any radio or information."

Zelenskyy encouraged his people to keep up their resistance. "We do not have the right to let up our defense, no matter how difficult it may be," he said. Later Saturday, Zelenskyy reported that 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers had died since the Russian invasion began Feb. 24.

The first major city to fall, earlier this month, was Kherson, a vital Black Sea port of 290,000 residents. Zelenskyy said Saturday that Russians were using blackmail and bribery in an attempt to force local officials to form a "pseudo-republic" in the southern Kherson region, much like those in Donetsk and Luhansk, two eastern regions where pro-Russian separatists began fighting Ukrainian forces in 2014.

UN says 579 civilians killed since war began

AP ■ GENEVA

The UN human rights office says at least 579 civilians have been killed in Ukraine since the start of the war, and more than 1,000 have been injured. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said Saturday that 42 of those killed were children, while 54 were injured. The Geneva-

based office had documented 564 civilian deaths and 982 injured a day earlier. It said most recorded civilian casualties were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a "wide impact area," such as shelling from heavy artillery and missile strikes. U.N. Officials said they believe the actual number of casualties is considerably higher than so far recorded.

Anti-war protests in Europe, rallies in Russia

BERLIN: Tens of thousands of people gathered on Sunday in cities across Europe to protest against the ongoing war in Ukraine, with small rallies taking place in Russia as well despite a crackdown by authorities against such demonstrations. The organizers planned to march from the city's Alexanderplatz — a large square named after Russian Tsar Alexander I — to a site near the Brandenburg Gate. Protests were also planned in Warsaw, London, Madrid, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Stuttgart. In Russia, where protests against the war in Ukraine have typically met with a heavy police response, rights group OVD-Info said 135 people had been detained.

US: Missiles fired from Iran hit near US consulate in Iraq

AP ■ BAGHDAD

As many as 12 missiles struck near a sprawling US Consulate complex in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil on Sunday, in what a U.S. Defense official and an Iraqi official said was a strike launched from neighboring Iran.

No injuries were reported in the attack, which marked a significant escalation between the U.S. and Iran. Hostility between the longtime foes has often played out in Iraq, whose government is allied with both countries.

The Iraqi official in Baghdad initially said several missiles had hit the U.S. Consulate in Irbil and that it was the target of the attack. Later, Lawk Ghafari, the head of Kurdistan's foreign media office, said none of the missiles had struck the U.S. Facility but that areas around the compound had been hit.

The U.S. Defense official said it was still uncertain exactly how many missiles were fired and exactly where they landed. A second U.S. Official said there was no damage at any U.S. Government facility and that there was no indication the target was the consulate building, which is new and currently unoccupied.

Neither the Iraqi official nor the U.S. Officials were authorized to discuss the event with the media and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Satellite broadcast channel

Kurdistan24, which is located near the U.S. Consulate, went on air from their studio shortly after the attack, showing shattered glass and debris on their studio floor.

The attack came several days after Iran said it would retaliate for an Israeli strike near Damascus, Syria, that killed two members of its Revolutionary Guard. On Sunday, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted Iraqi media acknowledging the attacks in Irbil, without saying where they originated.

An Iranian spokesperson rejected the accusation that Iran was behind the Irbil attack. Mahmoud Abbaszadeh, spokesman for Iran's parliamentary committee on national security and foreign policy, said the allegation could not be confirmed so far.

"If Iran decides to take revenge ... it will be very, very serious, strong, obvious," he said in an interview with a local news website.

The missile barrage coincided with regional tensions. Negotiations in Vienna over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal hit a "pause" over Russian demands about sanctions targeting Moscow for its war on Ukraine. Meanwhile, Iran suspended its secret Baghdad-brokered talks aimed at defusing yearslong tensions with regional rival Saudi Arabia, after Saudi Arabia carried out its largest known mass execution in its modern history with over three dozens Shiites killed.

The Iraqi security officials said there were no casualties from the Irbil attack, which they said occurred after midnight and caused material damage in the area. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

One of the Iraqi officials said the ballistic missiles were fired from Iran, without elaborating. He said the projectiles were the Iranian-made Fateh-110, likely fired in retaliation for the two Revolutionary Guards killed in Syria.

Another U.S. Official said in a statement that the U.S. Condemned what it called an "outrageous attack against Iraqi sovereignty and display of violence."

U.S. Forces stationed at Irbil's airport compound have come under fire from rocket and drone attacks in the past, with U.S. Officials blaming Iran-backed groups.

The top U.S. Commander for the Middle East has repeatedly warned about the increasing threats of attacks from Iran and Iranian-backed militias on troops and allies in Iraq and Syria.

In an interview with The Associated Press in December, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie said that while U.S. Forces in Iraq have shifted to a non-combat role, Iran and its proxies still want all American troops to leave the country. As a result, he said, that may trigger more attacks.

The Biden administration decided last July to end the

U.S. Combat mission in Iraq by Dec. 31, and U.S. Forces gradually moved to an advisory role last year. The troops will still provide air support and other military aid for Iraq's fight against the Islamic State.

The U.S. Presence in Iraq has long been a flash point for Tehran, but tensions spiked after a January 2020 U.S. Drone strike near the Baghdad airport killed a top Iranian general. In retaliation, Iran launched a barrage of missiles at al-Asad airbase, where U.S. Troops were stationed. More than 100 service members suffered traumatic brain injuries in the blasts.

More recently, Iranian proxies are believed responsible for an assassination attempt late last year on Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

And officials have said they believe Iran was behind the October drone attack at the military outpost in southern Syria where American troops are based. No U.S. Personnel were killed or injured in the attack.

Al-Kadhimi tweeted: "The aggression which targeted the dear city of Irbil and spread fear amongst its inhabitants is an attack on the security of our people."

Masrour Barzani, prime minister of the semi-autonomous Kurdish-controlled region, condemned the attack. In a Facebook post, he said Irbil "will not bow to the cowards who carried out the terrorist attack."

Report: Iran suspends talks with Saudi after mass execution

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran has decided to temporarily suspend its secret Baghdad-brokered talks aimed at defusing yearslong tensions with regional rival Saudi Arabia, Iranian state-linked media reported Sunday, a day after Saudi Arabia carried out its largest known mass execution in its modern history.

The Iranian news website Nournews, considered close to the country's Supreme National Security Council, reported the government had unilaterally paused the talks with Saudi Arabia that have been ongoing in Baghdad over the past year aimed at restoring diplomatic ties. Iraq's foreign minister earlier had said the fifth round of talks between Saudi and Iranian representatives was due to resume on Wednesday.

The report did not give a reason for Iran's suspension, but it comes after Saudi Arabia put to death 81 people convicted of crimes ranging from killings to ties to militant groups, a group that activists believe included over three dozen Shiites. Shiites, who live primarily in the kingdom's oil-rich east, have long complained of being treated as second-class citizens. Saudi Arabia's executions of Shiites have stirred regional unrest in the past.

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. Late Saturday, sporadic protests erupted among Shiites in the nearby island kingdom of Bahrain over the mass executions. The Baghdad-mediated talks between the regional foes began quietly in Iraq's capital last year as Saudi Arabia sought a way to end its disastrous war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, a conflict that has spawned the world's worst humanitarian disaster and brought rebel drones and missiles raining down on Saudi airports and oil facilities.

Iran-backed militias also have attacked Saudi targets and launched drones against the kingdom from Iraq.

The pause in diplomatic talks between the countries that have long competed for influence across the Middle East comes at a tense time for the region.

Could have responded to India after its missile landed in Pak, but restrained: PM Imran

PTI ■ LAHORE

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday said Pakistan could have responded to India after its missile landed in his country's Punjab province but it observed restraint.

On March 9, an unarmed Indian supersonic missile entered Pakistani territory, endangering several airliners during the course of its flight before hitting a private property (cold storage) near Mian Channu, some 275-km from Lahore. No loss of life was reported.

Speaking for the first time on the incident, Prime Minister Khan said, "We could have responded after an Indian missile fell in Mian Channu but we observed restraint."

He was addressing a public rally in Punjab's Hafizabad district on Sunday afternoon in the face of a no-confidence motion moved against him by the joint opposition.

Khan also talked about the country's defence preparedness, saying "we have to make our defence and country strong."

"Pakistan has proposed to New Delhi a joint probe into the incident to establish facts since the missile had landed into Pakistani territory."

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) said and asked why India failed to inform Pakistan immediately about the 'accidental launch' of the missile and raised questions regarding the Indian safeguards against such happenings. "Pakistan dem-and a joint probe to accurately establish the facts surrounding the incident," the FO said.



Skiers prepare at the start prior to the race from Maloja to S-Charf as they participate in the 52. annual Engadin skiing marathon in Sils, Switzerland on Sunday.

AP/PTI

Pope decries killing of children, civilians in Ukraine

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis has decried the "barbarianism" of the killing of children and other defenseless civilians in Ukraine and pleaded for a stop to the attacks "before cities are reduced to cemeteries."

In some of his strongest denunciations yet of the war in Ukraine, and in apparent reference to Russia, which invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the pontiff said that "there are no strategic reasons that hold up" in the face of such armed aggression.

Francis told about 25,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square for his customary Sunday noon appearance that Mariupol, the southern Ukrainian city which "bears the name" of the Virgin Mary, has "become a city martyred by the heartbreaking war that is devastating Ukraine."

US ends asylum restrictions for children travelling alone

AP ■ ATLANTA

Unaccompanied child migrants trying to enter the United States will no longer be denied a chance to seek asylum under new guidance announced by US Health authorities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in announcing the change late Friday night, said "that expulsion of unaccompanied noncitizen children is not warranted to protect the public health."

The change was announced shortly before a court order was to take effect that would have allowed the Biden administration to expel unaccompanied children seeking asylum under Title 42 authority, which was introduced in March 2020 to prevent spread of COVID-19. The order remains in place for

adults and families traveling with children.

Testing and other preventive measures allow children traveling alone to be released to sponsors in the United States, the CDC said. Sponsors are typically family or other close relatives.

A federal judge ruled in a lawsuit by the state of Texas that the CDC failed to explain why children traveling alone were exempted from Title 42, and gave the administration a week to appeal. Instead, the CDC lifted the order - but only for unaccompanied children. Migrants have been expelled more than 1.6 million times under Title 42, named for a 1944 public health law. Biden has kept the order in place but exempted unaccompanied children during his first days in office.

China's daily Covid cases hit two-year high; reports nearly 2,000 new infections: NHC

PTI ■ BEIJING

Coronavirus cases in China has hit two-year high as health officials have reported about 2,000 new infections in different parts of the country, including 20 in Beijing.

The Chinese mainland on Saturday reported 1,807 locally transmitted COVID-19 cases and 131 imported cases, China's National Health Commission said on Sunday.

Of the new local infections, 1,412 were reported in Jilin province, where China last Friday ordered a lockdown of the nine million residents of the provincial capital Changchun amid a new spike in COVID-19 cases in the area attributed to the highly contagious omicron variant.

Besides Changchun the latest lockdowns, also include Yucheng with 500,000 people in Shandong province.

The Commission reported that besides Jilin, 175 cases were reported in Shandong, 62 in Guangdong, 39 in Shaanxi, 33 in Hebei, 23 in Jiangsu, and 17 in Tianjin. Beijing also reported 20 cases.

Meanwhile, the situation continue to deteriorate in Hong Kong where officials confirmed 27,647 new Covid-19 cases, including 11,858 positive, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Sunday.

The former British colony also reported COVID-related 87 deaths taking the overall toll to 3,729, the report said.

Greek PM in Istanbul to hold talks with President Erdogan

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Greece's Prime Minister Kicked off his visit to Istanbul Sunday by attending a service for Orthodox Christians at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is in Turkey to hold talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a rare meeting between the neighbours who have been at odds over maritime and energy issues, the status of Aegean islands and migration.

The two leaders are expected to discuss bilateral and international relations as well as the effects of the Russia-Ukraine War, the Turkish presidency's communications

directorates said.

Greece and Turkey are nominal NATO allies but have strained relations over competing maritime boundary claims that affect energy exploration rights in the eastern Mediterranean. Tensions flared in the summer of 2020 over exploratory drilling rights in areas in the Mediterranean where Greece and Cyprus claim their own exclusive economic zone, leading to a naval standoff. Turkey also claims Greece is violating international agreements by militarizing Aegean islands.

Since then, Greece has embarked on a major military modernization program. Officials from both countries resumed exploratory talks in

2021 after a five-year pause to lay the groundwork for formal negotiations to begin but have not made much progress.

Greece has also accused Turkey of allowing migrants to cross its land and sea borders despite a deal with the European Union to prevent illegal crossings, while Turkey and rights groups have documented Greek authorities' practice of migrant "push backs" to Turkey. But the two countries also cooperate on energy projects, including a newly built pipeline that spans their countries transporting natural gas from Azerbaijan to western Europe ? a project that is part of Europe's effort to reduce dependence on Russian energy exports.

India GDP growth forecast cut to 7.9%: Morgan Stanley

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As higher oil prices torpedo economic recovery worldwide, Morgan Stanley has cut India's GDP forecast for the fiscal year beginning April 1 by 50 basis points to 7.9 per cent, raised retail inflation projection to 6 per cent and expects current account deficit to widen to 3 per cent of GDP.

"Even as we expect the cyclical recovery trend to continue, we expect it to be softer than we previously projected," it said in a report. "We believe that the ongoing geopolitical tensions exacerbate external risks and impart a stagflationary impulse to the economy."

India is affected through three key channels -- higher prices for oil and other commodities; trade, and tighter financial conditions, influencing business/investment

sentiment.

"Building in higher oil prices, we trim our F23 GDP growth forecast 50bps, to 7.9 per cent, lift our CPI inflation forecast to 6 per cent, and expect the current account deficit to widen to 10-year high of 3 per cent of GDP," it said.

India is 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs and the recent spurt in international oil prices, which pushed rates to a 14-year high of USD 140 per barrel before retracting, will result in the country paying more for the commodity. Also, higher prices will result in inflationary pressure.

The key channel of impact for the economy will be higher cost-push inflation, feeding into broader price pressures, which will weigh on all economic agents -- households, business, and government.

Regarding India's exposure

to macro stability risks, Morgan Stanley said even as macro stability indicators are expected to worsen, lack of domestic imbalances and focus on improving the productivity dynamic will help to mitigate risks.

"As such, we do not expect that fiscal or monetary policy will need to tighten disruptively to manage macro stability risks. The risk would stem from a further sustained rise in oil prices, leading to quick deterioration in macro stability and currency volatility," it said.

The brokerage expected a repo rate hike in the June meeting of RBI's Monetary Policy Committee. "But we now expect the April policy to mark the process of policy normalization with a reverse repo rate hike."

"However, if the RBI were to delay its normalization process, the risk of disruptive

policy rate hikes would rise. We see less room for fiscal policy stimulus to support growth given high deficit and debt levels - we see a possibility of a modest fuel tax cut and reliance on the national rural employment program as an automatic stabilizer," it said.

The report saw upside risks of 0.5 per cent of GDP to the fiscal deficit target of 6.4 per cent of GDP for FY23 (April 2022 to March 2023).

"We see risks skewed to the downside for growth and to the upside for inflation and the CAD," it said. "Again, the key risk would be a sharp and sustained rise in oil prices, exacerbating macro stability concerns and leading to disruptive monetary tightening. Further, risks could arise if global growth conditions weaken further, which would impair India's export and capex cycle."

India's post-pandemic eco recovery progressing well; high oil prices pose risks: Ashima Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic recovery from COVID-19 is progressing well, with better than expected growth rates, and the trajectory will continue but persistently high oil prices can play spoilsport, eminent economist Ashima Goyal said on Sunday.

Goyal, who is also a member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI, further said inflation, which has largely remained within the central bank's tolerance band, was also showing signs of moderating as supply conditions eased because there was no over-stimulus unlike in many western countries.

"India's economic recovery from COVID-19 is progressing well, with better than generally expected growth rates. Higher growth is not just due to a base effect, because Indian growth in 2021 exceeds that of many countries, which had a worse fall in growth in 2020," she told PTI in



an interview.

According to Goyal, it points to India's continuation of reforms as well as good macro-economic policies.

She pointed out that India's steep fall in growth during the first lockdown received a lot of adverse publicity but IMF's January growth figures for 2020 and 2021 show many countries to be worse off.

Asked what will be the impact of the Ukraine crisis on the Indian economy, the eminent economist said: "The recovery will continue but persistently high oil prices could cause some moderation in

growth." Asia's third-largest economy is projected to grow 8.9 per cent in the fiscal year ending March 31, slower than the previously anticipated 9.2 per cent, according to recent government data.

Noting that the Budget was based on conservative assumptions this time, tax revenues are buoyant and the divestment process is set rolling, she said, "So the impact may not be major."

According to Goyal, the investment and growth slowdown from which the economy suffered over the last decade was because policy was unable to smooth external shocks. At present monetary and fiscal policy has some space to smooth the oil shock in a coordinated manner," she said, adding that it should be used to sustain the domestic investment cycle and the resulting job growth.

Goyal suggested that avoiding over-reaction and excess volatility in rates and responses

is important.

Replying to a question on high oil prices, she said crisis-related spikes in oil prices have often been sharp and short in the past.

"The fisc has space... Taxes were raised when oil prices fell and can be reduced now. If higher oil prices sustain, some burden sharing can be devised," Goyal suggested.

She emphasised that the priority should be given to measures to greening the economy in the long-run to reduce dependence on imported oil.

Asked whether the surge in edible and crude oil prices due to the Ukraine crisis could force the RBI to raise its inflation forecast, she said the central bank's inflation projection is based on the assumption that average oil price for the year will be USD 80.

"Therefore if oil prices persist above this for some months and there is domestic pass through, the inflation forecast would rise," Goyal said.



Fertiliser subsidy may exceed RE by ₹10K cr, fiscal deficit to remain close to 6.9% in FY22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government's fertiliser subsidy bill in the current fiscal year may go up by about Rs 10,000 crore due to the Russia-Ukraine war, but higher tax revenues will help keep fiscal deficit close to the estimated 6.9 per cent level, an official said.

The official further said the oil prices are expected to cool in the next 2-3 months on higher production from the US and OPEC member countries.

The Revised Estimates (RE) had pegged the fertiliser subsidy at over ₹1.40 lakh crore in current fiscal year, while the Budget Estimate (BE) for next fiscal year is estimated at over ₹1.05 lakh crore.

"We expect oil prices to cool in next 2-3 months. The rising oil prices would not alter the budget math of the government much in the current fiscal except for fertiliser subsidy which is likely to go up by about Rs 10,000 crore," the official said.

The official further said that since farmers need to stock up fertilisers before the beginning of the sowing season, import of potash -- a key component in fertiliser manufacturing-- cannot wait for international prices to cool.

Also, rise in prices of natural gas, a key raw material for the manufacturing of urea and

comprising nearly 70 per cent of the total cost of producing urea, in the global market would lead to rise in domestic prices of urea.

International crude oil prices shot up to 14-year high of USD 140 per barrel early last week before retracting to near USD 112 on Friday. But even this rate is 45 per cent higher than the USD 80-87 range of January when most of the Budget 2022-23 would have been prepared.

The official said that even at this elevated level of spending, the fiscal deficit would remain close to the 6.9 per cent level in the current fiscal year as pegged in the revised estimates.

"India's fiscal deficit would be close to 6.9 per cent as given in the revised estimate as higher tax revenues will offset the gap in the non-tax revenues and higher fertiliser subsidy outgo. As of now, we will remain close to the numbers given in the RE for this year and in the Budget Estimates for next fiscal," the official added.

In the RE for the current fiscal year ending March 31, the fiscal deficit has been revised a tad higher at 6.9 per cent of GDP, from 6.8 per cent estimated earlier. The deficit is projected to come down to 6.4 per cent of GDP in the next fiscal year.

FPI selling continues for 6th consecutive month; net outflows at ₹45,608 cr in March so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing their selling spree for the sixth straight month, overseas investors have pulled out a net Rs 45,608 crore from the Indian markets in March so far.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) fear that India would be impacted more by commodity price hikes, particularly in crude oil, since India is a major importer, said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

As per depositories data, FPIs pulled out Rs 41,168 crore from equities, Rs 4,431 crore from the debt segment and Rs 9 crore from hybrid instruments, taking the total net outflow between March 2-11 to Rs 45,608 crore.

This is the sixth consecutive month of FPI outflows from the Indian markets.

The selling is mainly confined to financials and IT since these segments constitute the bulk of assets under the custody of FPIs, Vijayakumar noted.

"An important takeaway from FPI selling is that it is not impacting all segments. For instance, FPIs sold IT stocks worth Rs 10,984 crore in

February, but in March IT is one of the best performing sectors," he added.

Nimish Shah, Chief Investment Officer, Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors, said the dollar has been gaining strength since August-September 2021 and the interest rates in the US have moved up now.

The geopolitical crisis has also moved market flows and shifted sentiment from risk-on to risk-off, resulting in withdrawals from most emerging market economies, he pointed out.

Shrikant Chouhan, Head -

Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities, said other than Thailand, all other emerging markets have witnessed outflows till date in March.

"Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia and Philippines witnessed FPI outflows to the tune of USD 7,089 million, USD 2,665 million, USD 426 million and USD 26 million, respectively.

On the other hand Thailand witnessed inflows of USD 102 million," he said.

As per Shah, sectors like IT, pharma, banks and auto ancillary would do well going forward.

GAIL declares record dividend for FY22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd has declared a second interim dividend of 50 per cent (Rs 5 per share) for the current fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

The total dividend payout will be Rs 2,220.19 crore with a record date of March 22, the company said in a statement.

"The decision (to issue dividend) was taken by the board of directors of GAIL, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, at their meeting here on March 11," it said.

For the current fiscal 2021-22, GAIL has already declared an interim dividend of Rs 4 per share to its shareholders in December 2021.

The two interim dividends total to Rs 9 per equity share (90 per cent on the paid-up equity share capital). Total dividend payout is Rs 3,996.35 crore. Manoj Jain, chairman and managing director, GAIL, stated that the company shareholders have been provided with steady long-term returns on their investments. "This is the highest ever dividend payment in terms of total dividend amount by GAIL," he said.

Gold imports surge to \$45 bn in April-Feb this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), surged by about 73 per cent to USD 45.1 billion during April-February this fiscal on account of higher demand, according to official data.

The imports stood at USD 26.11 billion in April-February 2021.

In February 2022, however, imports of the precious metal dipped by 11.45 per cent to USD 4.7 billion, as per the data by the commerce ministry.

The surge in gold imports during the 11-month period contributed to the widening of the trade deficit to USD 176 billion, against USD 89 billion in April-February 2021.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry.

The gems and jewellery exports

during the first nine months of the current fiscal grew by 57.5 per cent to USD 35.25 billion.

India's current account slipped into a deficit of USD 9.6 billion or 1.3 per cent of GDP in the September quarter, according to the Reserve Bank. The current account, which records the value of exports and imports of goods and services, along with international transfers of capital, was in surplus both in the quarter-ago and year-ago periods.

Commenting on rising gold imports, Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEP) Chairman Colin Shah said monthly average imports of gold during April-February 2022 are still at 76.57 tonnes, relatively lower than the usual level. Gold imports in volume terms in April-February 2022 stood at 842.28 tonnes, which is below the usual imports in the same period, ranging from 690 to 890 tonnes, he said.

Ranjit Rath picked to head Oil India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Government headhunter GPESB has picked a non-upstream executive, Ranjit Rath to head India's second largest state oil and gas producer, Oil India Ltd.

Rath, 50, who is currently chairman and managing director of Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd (MECL), was selected after interviews of five applicants on March 9, a notification from the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB) said.

He was selected for the post of chairman and managing director ahead of two directors on the Oil India board and another executive director of the company.

Oil India's current chairman and managing director Sushil Chandra Mishra will superannuate on June 30 this year.

Rath has been heading MECL, a mini-ratna central public sector enterprise under Ministry of Mines, since November 2018. His name, after getting clearance from anti-corruption bodies like CVC and CBI, will be sent to the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for vetting.

PESB had on June 28, 2021 selected Rath for the post of chairman and managing director of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), according to a separate notification of the government headhunter.

It isn't clear why he wasn't appointed to that post. In December 2021, Samiran Dutta (Director Finance) of BCCL, was appointed as the new chairman and managing



director of BCCL.

A Geoscientist, Rath is an alumnus of IIT Bombay, IIT Kharagpur and Utkal University. Prior to his appointment to MECL, he was the General Manager with Engineers India Ltd, New Delhi and was posted with Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd.

Rath is a recipient of the prestigious National Geosciences Award 2016 from the President of India. He has co-authored a book titled 'Underground Storage Technologies' and has published several technical papers and participated in conferences in India and overseas.

According to his LinkedIn profile, he joined engineering consultancy firm Engineers India in 1996. The PESB notification said those interviewed included Oil India's director (finance) Harish Madhav and its director (operations) Pankaj Kumar Goswami.

Oil India executive director Agadh Medhi and Madras Fertilizer Ltd chairman and managing director Saravanan U were the other candidates interviewed.

Bidding for DSF-III oil round to start on Apr 1: DGH

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bidding for 75 small and marginal oil and gas discoveries, mostly of ONGC, that are being offered in the DSF-III bid round, will begin on April 1 and close on May 16, according to the DGH.

The third bidding round under the Discovered Small Fields policy (DSF-III) was launched on June 10, 2021.

The original deadline for submission of bids was August 31, 2021. However, this was postponed to October 29, 2021. The start was again put off to February 1, 2022 and closing slated for March 15, 2022. As the bid deadline approached, it was again postponed without any reasons being given. "Bid submission for DSF Bid Round-III will start on April 1, 2022, and end on May 16, 2022," the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) said.

DSF-III offers 32 contract areas, comprising 75 fields/discoveries, with a combined total area of more than 13,000 square kilometres, in nine sedimentary basins. The fields on offer include a few of the nomination fields of national oil company, ONGC, and some of the relinquished/unmonetised discoveries.

'Govt has time till May 12 to launch LIC IPO without seeking fresh Sebi approval'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has time till May 12 to launch the initial public offering (IPO) of LIC without filing fresh papers with market regulator Sebi, an official said.

The government's sale of about 31.6 crore shares or 5 per cent stake in Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), which was estimated to fetch around ₹60,000 crore to the exchequer, was originally planned to be launched in March, but the Russia-Ukraine crisis has derailed the plans as stock markets are highly volatile.

On February 13, the government filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) for the IPO with Sebi, which granted its approval for the same last week. "We have a window till May 12 to launch the IPO based on the papers filed with Sebi. We are watching the volatility and will file the RHP giving the price band soon," an official said.

The DRHP filed with Sebi had details of the financial results of LIC and also the embedded value till September 2021.

If the government misses the May 12 window available with it, LIC would have to file fresh papers with Sebi giving the results of December quarter and also update the embedded value. LIC's embedded value, which is a measure of the consolidated share-

holders value in an insurance company, was pegged at about Rs 5.4 lakh crore as of September 30, 2021, by international actuarial firm Milliman Advisors. Although the DRHP does not disclose the market valuation of LIC, as per industry standards it would about 3 times the embedded value.

The official further said that although the market volatility has reduced in the last fortnight, it would wait for the market to stabilise further so that retail investors get confidence to invest in the stock. LIC has reserved up to 35 per cent of its total IPO size for retail investors.

"The portion reserved for retail investors require about Rs 20,000 crore to come in from retail buyers. Based on our market assessment, currently the retail demand is not as much to bid for the entire quota of shares," the official said.

The government was expecting to garner over ₹60,000 crore by selling about 31.6 crore or 5 per cent stake in the life insurance firm to meet the curtailed disinvestment target of Rs 78,000 crore in the current fiscal year. In case the share sale does not happen by March, the government will miss the revised disinvestment target by a wide margin. At 5 per cent stake dilution, the LIC IPO would be biggest ever in the history of Indian stock market.

Need to overhaul regulatory structure to promote technology development: Telecom Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is looking to overhaul the regulatory structure to facilitate development of technology and interaction with industry as a partner and not as adversaries, telecom minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Sunday.

Addressing the inaugural session of a TDSAT seminar, Vaishnaw said that the system entangled everybody and some people who did not have sufficiently strong val-

ues created a mess which defamed the telecom market in the past.

"Can we have one regulator for the entire digital world? Those kinds of things are happening. We need to really overhaul our entire regulatory set-up in terms of the legal structure, regulatory execution structure, the way our government bodies think, people are trained, the way we interact with the industry-- not as adversaries but as partners. That's the next big thing that we have to do," Vaishnaw said.

Adani, KKR, Piramal among 14 prominent bidders for Rel Cap

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Finserve, KKR, Piramal Finance and Poonawala Finance are among the 14 prominent firms that have expressed interest to acquire debt-ridden Reliance Capital Ltd, promoted by the Anil Ambani Group, sources said.

The last date for submission of bids for the debt-ridden firm was extended to March 25 from the previous fixed date of March 11 by the Reserve Bank-appointed administrator. The RBI had on November 29 last year superseded the board of Reliance Capital Ltd (RCL) in view of payment defaults and serious

governance issues. This is the third large non-banking financial company against which the central bank has initiated bankruptcy proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) recently. The other two were Srei Group NBFC and Dewan Housing Finance Corporation (DHFL). The deadline has been extended on the request of some prospective bidders who have sought more time to submit the EOLs, sources said. ArpWood, Varde Partners, Multiples Fund, Nippon Life, JC Flowers, Brookfield, Oaktree, Apollo Global, Blackstone, and Hero Fincorp are the other major companies that have submitted Expressions of Interest.

Massive demand, supply and price upcycle await nation's most profitable property market: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai property market that accounts for 10 per cent of national volumes, 23 per cent of sales and a third of the margins, is on the cusp of a historic upcycle on all fronts, having already hit a decadal high of new or primary sales in 2021 selling 38,000 units despite the pandemic-induced disruptions, says a report.

This also has the city civic body BMC netting around a whopping Rs 14,200 crore in 2021 as building permission charges, up 5x from the previous year, as developers have

been making a beeline to make it big in the country's most profitable market, UBS Securities India said in a weekend report.

The upsurge in the demand and supply and also in seeking permission also were driven by recent regulatory initiatives; like 50 per cent cut in approval charges, led to a 150 million square feet (msf) of new development rights approved in 2021 over 2020, and new residential supply of 33 msf, implying a supply surge in Mumbai over the medium term which will have pricing and margin implications for developers as well, says the report.

SILENCE OF THE LOOMS

Covid-19 adversely impacted the weavers in Bihar, says JUHI SMITA

Priyanka Devi and her family — from Rampur village in Gaya district of Bihar — have been weaving blankets from sheep wool for several generations. The Covid-19 outbreak and its subsequent lockdown, however, has made it difficult to sustain this age-old occupation. “Due to lockdown, we had a hard time selling our blankets. Left with no option, we were bound to sell them at a throwaway price. It has affected our financial condition irreversibly. I am unable to find a way out of this situation,” expressed Priyanka who is unaware of any government schemes meant for the artisans and thinks that the pandemic has disrupted markets specifically for lower-income groups.

Currently, she earns some money from the orders that she receives from the local traders but those are inadequate to make ends meet. While Priyanka is still struggling to sustain herself through weaving, Arti Kumari, another resident from the same village, has been forced to quit the occupation. The financial crisis was so grave during the lockdown that she could not afford to continue.

The absence of a market has also affected weavers from Singodi village in Paliganj block of Patna district. This village is home to families of 1,5000 weavers of which 500 are still working here. Earlier, 500 looms were operational in this region; today there are just 100. A local committee known as the Primary Weaver’s Cooperative has been working in the region to promote the interests of the weavers. Its president, Fayaz Ahmed, while pointing out the

trouble weavers had to go through, said, “Five years ago their condition was quite good, but in the last two years of Covid-19 their financial conditions have been severely impacted. Goods worth ₹30 lakh are lying unsold. The weavers who worked day and night are now working only for a few hours.”

Ahmed mentioned receiving a verbal order from the government for curtains, which they have prepared, but the products have not been delivered yet. Hence, he urged the concerned departments to provide more market avenues than just capital.

Shailendra Kumar, who works in the handloom silk sector in the Nawada district of Bihar, highlighted how the cooperative society he belongs to had similarly incurred a major loss. Around 800 weavers from Nawada, Kadirganj, and Gopalganj are members of the cooperative societies that have been majorly hit by the Covid-19. “Before the last two years, we received huge orders from exhibitions, such as the Saras Mela and national exhibitions held in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. But, in the last two years, there has been a 40-50 per cent reduction in the business. As you know, silk is quite expensive, a lack of better market avenues for the weavers results in the poor quality of work,” said Shailendra.

Likewise, is the fate of Kapil Dev Prasad, a resident of Bihar Sharif in Nalanda district of Bihar, who has been making Bawan Buti Sarees and bedcovers for the past 50 years. A member of Baswan Bigha Primary Weaver’s Cooperative



Weaver Fayyaz Ahmed

SINGODI VILLAGE IS HOME TO FAMILIES OF 1,5000 WEAVERS OF WHICH 500 ARE STILL WORKING HERE. EARLIER, 500 LOOMS WERE OPERATIONAL IN THIS REGION; TODAY THERE ARE JUST 100



Women weavers

Committee, Kapil stressed that the new generation is hesitant to continue this work because of low profits.

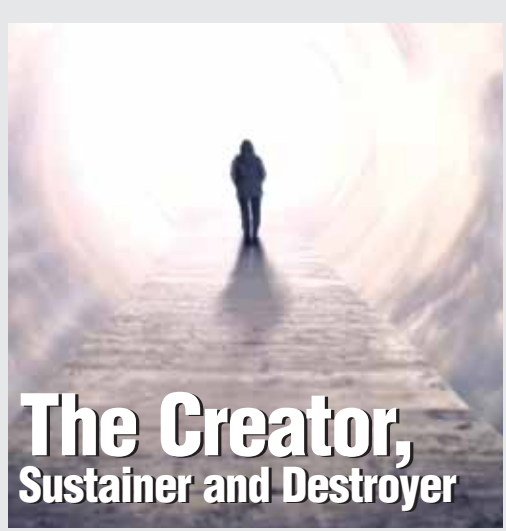
Ashok Singh, a jute weaver and a resident of Bhopatia village in Sikty block of Araria district, believes that the concerned departments should form a group of weavers and provide regular updates about the current marketplace. They should also be helped in the production so that their work can be continued by future generations.

In the current scenario where everything has shifted to online mode, Raj Nandan, from Mehfil-E-Kallen Obra Primary Weaver’s Cooperative Committee Limited, emphasised the growing importance of the e-market. “Weaving requires hard work, but the weavers are not able to reap appropriate profits. This calls for the government to work towards updating the skills of the weavers on e-market and e-commerce, especially during times such as Covid-19,” expressed Raj.

Udyan Singh, the director of Banka Silk Private Limited based in Delhi, informed about the various steps they have taken to provide better facilities to artisans of silk handloom in Bhagalpur and Banka. According to him, they are continuously informing the artisans about the new technology and the kind of competition in the market. In addition, fashion designers educate artisans about the fabric and how to work with it. “We are continuously working on export policies with the Government of Bihar and trying to receive support from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Recently, the products of weavers from Bhagalpur and Banka were exported to stores in Vancouver and Toronto in Canada. Their products will also be exported to Netherlands, Dubai, and other countries in the coming months,” Udyan explained.

The administration, on the other hand, is undoubtedly trying to provide an identity to the weavers. Working capital is being provided to all the weavers in the state, wherein, the state government deposits ₹10,000 into their bank accounts. Besides, the state government contributes annually to provide the benefits of ‘Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana’ to the weavers. Despite the availability of several schemes, the current Covid-19 situation demands a formulation of special ‘short-term’ policies with long term goals to help sustain the livelihood of these artisans.

(The author is an independent writer from Bihar.) —Charkha Features



God’s role is to purify human souls by empowering them to destroy vice and to regain their original pristine state, says

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Across the globe, every devout soul remembers God as the Creator and the one who protects and nurtures. Of the three divine acts of God — creation, sustenance and destruction — the last one needs to be understood in the right perspective. This is because, when devastating natural calamities like earthquakes, cyclones and tsunamis occur, many people term them as ‘acts of God’.

Similarly, some consider ‘death’ to be an ‘act of God’. In India people say God sends His death agent (Yama) to those whose time has come to depart the earthly life. If that is the case, then is God responsible for the death of other creatures like snakes, scorpions and insects as well? Then, some consider all events and phenomena on earth and in the universe as acts of God and hence they believe that not even a leaf can stir without His command. This belief that God inflicts such suffering on humans has led to many rituals in many cultures. For example- followers of some faith, perform animal sacrifices, feasts, sacrificial fires and make elaborate offerings to appease their gods and ward off calamities. This fear and image of God as an angry punishing authority has made humans more distanced from God. In this connection, there are many legends and stories such as Lord Shankar who is also called Mahadev opening his third eye through which flames of destruction come out and destroy the impure world. Similarly, in mythological stories, many gods and goddesses are shown in destructive roles. As they are believed to have incarnated to destroy evil forces and establish order and righteousness.

It is a well-known fact that God, Almighty, Bhagwan or by whatever name we know him, is universally acknowledged as a benefactor (*kalyankari*). So, HIS Divine role as the destroyer must be a benevolent and beneficent one isn’t it? It would be like that of a doctor removing malignant tumours or destroying harmful germs or bacteria to restore the health of his patients. Also, we know about a common practise of pulling down an old and dilapidated building that is beyond repair and rebuilding a new one. Aren’t the above examples as common as we see and experience them? Then, what is the reason to fear destruction? We must understand that in this eternal drama of life everything is cyclical — like day and night. Everything passes through three stages — beginning, middle and end. Every beginning has an end and every end leads to a new beginning. We call it creation, sustenance and destruction. In that sense, nothing is destroyed, it just changes form. It is renewed from old to new, just like a building is re-developed. This is how the eternal drama of life goes on and on.

When souls lose their purity after repeated birth and death and after getting afflicted by the five vices of lust, greed, anger, attachment and ego, nature also gets influenced by their vicious actions hence from its super excellent state, she gradually becomes utterly degraded. It is at this time when the Supreme Almighty himself comes to give wisdom and power to human souls and guide them back to their original super excellent stage. When human souls become pure, automatically nature will also be purified. Remember, evil destroys itself. It is said that at the time of destruction human intellect becomes perverted. Today human beings have created nuclear weapons. We are constantly being warned by environmentalists about global warming and its alarming effects. All this is happening due to the unrighteous thoughts and actions performed by humans. We blame God for everything, but in an actual sense, phenomena like natural calamities are not acts of God, but upheavals caused by imbalanced elements of nature. God’s role is to purify human souls by empowering them to destroy vices and to regain their original pristine state of being which is full of virtues. He liberates us and protects us from evil. He is the merciful and benevolent One who is guiding the entire humanity towards a new world of purity, peace and happiness. So instead of blaming Him, let us start listening to Him and following Him.

All of us have heard several times that environmental advocates and sustainability enthusiasts say that we should be ‘voting with our wallets’. We, as consumers, have the power to change the marketplace and the world by selecting sustainable brands that care about people and the world. On the surface, that sounds like a fantastic idea. Such consumer action can put a lot of pressure on businesses to change their operating models and practises. It can be a signal for institutional investors about the businesses that fascinate consumers and are, therefore, worth investing in. It can boost sustainably minded entrepreneurs to flip their ideas into reality.

Many companies face risks due to climate change’s impact on crops, water availability, and extreme weather conditions; there are also opportunities. One area of opportunity is reducing the Green House Gas (GHG) emissions arising from business operations to reduce the company’s impact on the planet and improve bottom-line profitability by becoming more energy efficient. Many companies are committed to reducing their contribution to future GHG emissions, decreasing the likelihood of the risks.

Another opportunity to mitigate the impact of climate change on a company’s business operations is improve water sustainability and water usage practises. Water is essential to any companies’ core business as it’s a required input of the production process. The efforts in improving water sustainability extend to both its owned operations (plants) and supply chain partners. There are reasons why voting with our wallets does not translate into sustainable consumptions.

- Voting with our wallets still motivates us to buy things. It does not ask us to take a step back and rethink our chronic and often frivolous consumerism that is bound to many issues, including pollution, which is happening due to plastic, overflow of the landfills, and products cradle-to-

Leave a green footprint

Vote with your wallet implies that the consumers should be worried about reducing their carbon footprint but the onus should be on policy makers to mandate sustainable business practises, says SACHIN SENGAR

grave carbon emissions.

- There’s an imminent equity and accessibility issue since sustainable products are significantly costlier than conventional ones. It is the poorer communities that are disproportionately impacted by unsustainable businesses. While the poorest don’t have much money to vote with their wallets, research shows that even for the better off will default to what they are used to (which are not usually sustainable products) if choices aren’t obvious and easy.
- It incentivises businesses not to become more sustainable but to signal more sustainability. So there is a real risk that voting with our wallets can backfire and lead to more green washing and another ideal signalling (like many companies claim that Black Lives Matter when they aren’t making meaningful change).
- It places the load on consumers, not businesses. Consistent with economic theory, the belief is that: a) consumers have lots of time to weigh different options and can b) obtain exact information to make the right choice — both of which are not real. In the real world, it’s never easy to find out which brands are sustainable because identifying and buying sustainable products are not easy tasks.
- It is almost impossible to buy a truly sustainable product in some categories like laptops and smartphones. This is because the actual extraction and mining of the minerals required to build products is mainly out-



sourced and is far from the company by multiple degrees.

- People who care the most about being sustainable end up removing themselves from economic activity and abstaining from voting altogether. These individuals are the ones who are likely to live off the grid, grow their food and not drive or fly or use the internet. Regardless of their admirable demonstration of sustainable living, they are not able to drive much change because they do not have the technologies and tools that enable them to raise awareness and make an impact. Meanwhile, people who don’t care about sustainability will continue to buy whatever products satisfy them.

To be clear, the point is not that voting with our wallets is a bad idea that we should get rid of. People who have the luxury to vote with their wallets should do their best to choose sustainable products. It’s also important to recognise that individual-level action is not enough to fight climate change and transform shareholder capitalism into stakeholder capitalism. This bottom-up effort cannot instigate a good shift at the required pace to avoid a catastrophic future.

Additionally, we should be aware that voting with our wallets is absolutely the kind of idea that business interests want to sell to the public — that consumers should be worried about reducing their carbon footprint and let the market solve the problem on their own, rather than calling on policy makers to mandate sustainable practises on businesses.

Being mindful of our actions and their impact on people and the planet

should be the baseline. But we need to make sure that we’re not disturbing ourselves and taking essential resources away from efforts to create systemic change. We should make changes in the policy so that the primary responsibility for sustainability falls on businesses rather than on consumers.

Here are some measures that we can do to not only be better consumers but also better citizens:

- Organise or join a group and push for systemic change. Take individual actions that can make a difference if we leverage them to influence others and build momentum.
- Think about ways to vote with our wallets creatively. When something breaks, we can use our wallets to repair it instead of buying a new product. You can rent instead of purchasing a product, especially if it’s something we won’t use frequently.
- While we should do our best to educate ourselves and buy sustainable products, we shouldn’t feel guilty if we can’t do it all the time. Use your time and mental bandwidth wisely - there are likely other, potentially more impactful ways for us to contribute to promoting sustainability.
- It is time to remind ourselves that we are not just consumers. We are citizens first and foremost. And be thoughtful about your actions; we have the power to make meaningful change-with or without our wallets.

(The author is the founder & CEO of Lowsot, an environmental startup company.)

Wars don’t bring lasting peace, only lasting death. —Janet Morris

CLIMATE AFFECTS BIRDS’ CHARACTERISTICS

A new study at The Australian National University (ANU) rolls back the curtain on half a century of evidence detailing the impact of climate change on more than 60 different bird species.

It found that half of all changes to key physical and behavioural bird characteristics since the 1960s can be linked to climate change. The other 50 per cent is due to other unknown environmental factors that have changed at the same time as our climate.

The research, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and carried out in conjunction with James Cook University (JCU), focused on birds in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Lead author Dr Nina McLean, from the ANU Research School of Biology, said, “This study shows that the impact of climate change doesn’t act in isolation and its effects are occurring where the resilience of wildlife is already pushed to the limits due to the many other challenges in a human-dominated landscape.

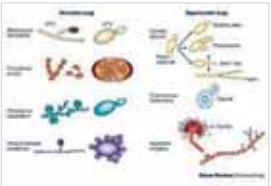


MOLDS AND YEASTS COULD CAUSE ASTHMA

Factors such as certain building features and the number of children in a daycare influenced the species of fungi found within, suggesting that many of the molds and yeasts probably have indoor sources.

The research is published in *Applied and Environmental Microbiology*, a journal of the American Society for Microbiology. Said Dr. Estensmo, “Fungal growth can lead to poor indoor air quality, and some fungi are associated with allergic reactions and respiratory symptoms that may lead to chronic respiratory diseases.”

The researchers investigated the indoor and immediate outdoor mycobiomes of 125 daycare centres in Norway, sampling dust swabbed from the insides and outsides of door frames and correlating the findings with different variables such as the number and ages of children in each daycare, the building type (single building, apartment, etc.), building materials (bricks, wood, etc.), ventilation type, presence of pests, history of mold damage and year of construction.



CUTTING HFCs TO COOL THE EARTH

An air conditioner may freshen the atmosphere in your home, but it is also degrading the atmosphere of Earth. Today’s aircons commonly rely on chemicals called HFCs (hydrofluorocarbons), which are very powerful greenhouse gases. HFC emissions have increased rapidly in the past two decades. To meet the Paris climate goals, the world now needs to wean itself off HFCs quickly, according to a new study led by IIASA researchers published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. As a bonus, this process could reduce global power consumption substantially, bringing many benefits such as lower pollution.

HFCs can be replaced with various gases that have a lower climate impact per kilogram, including ammonia, CO2, and hydrocarbons such as propane. Indeed, a phase-down of HFCs is already required by international law. In 2016, these chemicals were brought into the Montreal Protocol, a treaty originally set up to curb ozone-depleting substances.



NEXT GEN ROBOTS WILL BE SHAPE-SHIFTERS

Physicists have discovered a new way to coat soft robots in materials that allow them to move and function in a more purposeful way. The research, led by the UK’s University of Bath, is described in *Science Advances*.

With further development of the concept, it may be possible to determine the shape, movement and behaviour of a soft solid not by its natural elasticity but by human-controlled activity on its surface.

It is hoped that active matter will lead to a new generation of machines whose function will come from the bottom up. So, instead of being governed by a central controller, these new machines would be made from many individual active units that cooperate to determine the machine’s movement and function. This is akin to the workings of our own biological tissues, such as the fibres in heart muscle.



NORDIC DIET LOWERS CHOLESTEROL

Researchers from Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, Dragsted examined blood and urine samples from 200 people over the age of 50, all with elevated BMI and increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The participants were divided into two groups — one provided foods according to Nordic dietary recommendations and a control group on their habitual diet. After six months of monitoring, the result was clear.

The group that had been on the Nordic diet for six months became significantly healthier, with lower cholesterol levels, lower overall levels of both saturated and unsaturated fat in the blood, and better regulation of glucose, compared to the control group,” explains Lars Ove Dragsted, a researcher and head of section at the University of Copenhagen’s Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports.





AP ■ MANCHESTER

Cristiano Ronaldo set another goalscoring record in a return to form with a hat-trick to keep Manchester United's chances of playing in the Champions League next season alive with a 3-2 win over Tottenham on Saturday.

Ronaldo had scored just once in his previous 10 games, but three fantastic finishes took him clear as the highest scorer in professional men's football history according to FIFA's records with 807 goals for club and country.

Victory lifts United back into fourth, although they are just two points ahead of Arsenal who have four games

Ronaldo had scored just once in his previous 10 games, but three fantastic finishes took him clear as the highest scorer in professional men's football history according to FIFA's records with 807 goals

Record breaker Ronaldo

Cristiano hat-trick sets all-time scoring record as Man Utd beat Spurs

in hand. A fifth defeat in eight league games is another blow to Tottenham's hopes of a top-four finish as they remain sev-

enth, now five points behind United.

Ronaldo's second spell at Old Trafford has so far proven

to be an anti-climax with his poor form sparking debate over whether the 37-year-old's powers are waning.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner missed United's thrashing in the Manchester derby last weekend and was criticised for a perceived lack of commitment as he jetted off to Portugal to rehab a hip injury rather than watch his teammates lost 4-1 at the Etihad.

He was restored to Ralf Rangnick's starting line-up as one of five changes from that damaging defeat with Bruno Fernandes the notable absentee due to illness.

It took just 12 minutes for Ronaldo to make his mark with a stunning strike into the top

corner from outside the box.

However, United failed to build on the early goal and were instead forced back in a familiar pattern to previous home games this season against stronger opposition.

Spurs quickly had the ball in the net in response only for Ben Davies to be flagged off-side before Eric Dier's header from a corner was cleared off the line.

A Tottenham equaliser seemed only a matter of time and was gifted to them when Alex Telles handled Dejan Kulusevski's cross for a clear penalty.

Harry Kane smashed home the resulting spot-kick to continue his fine form for his sixth goal in as many games.

Within three minutes, though, United were back in front thanks to a landmark goal for Ronaldo.

He turned home Jadon Sancho's inviting cross to surpass Austria-Czech striker Josef Bican as football's all-time record goalscorer according to FIFA's records.

United's defensive deficiencies meant Ronaldo's work was not done to win the game as Spurs enjoyed the better of the second half.

Son Heung-min hooked a glorious chance wide from Kulusevski's cut-back.

When a second equaliser did arrive for Antonio Conte's men it was thanks to more misery for United captain Harry Maguire.

Consistent errors from the England international have played a huge part in his side's struggles this season and he turned into his own net from Sergio Reguilon's cross. Conte screamed for focus from his side on the sideline, but they succumbed again to Ronaldo's predatory instincts. The United number seven rose highest to meet Telles' corner nine minutes from time to power a header into the top corner for just his second United hat-trick and first since returning to Old Trafford in August.



Rossoneri consolidates top spot

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan will stay top of Serie A this weekend after Saturday's tight 1-0 win over Empoli moved them five points clear of the chasing pack.

Pierre Kalulu struck the classy winner 18 minutes in at the San Siro when a free-kick fell to him just outside the area, the French defender's first goal of the season keeping Milan's local rivals Inter at bay.

Inter, who have a game in hand, are at Torino while Napoli are a further point back in third ahead of a tricky trip to Verona.

"The table has a nice look to it, but it's virtual, because there are games in hand involved," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli.

"We did well this evening, controlled the game and didn't run many risks."

Milan have had trouble with Serie A's lesser lights in recent weeks and Saturday's win was far from straightforward, with promoted Empoli

causing problems for the hosts in the second half.

Aurelio Andreazzoli's team, who sit 13th, are without a win since mid-December but went close twice in a matter of seconds shortly after the break.

However Milan held on for a precious win to make sure that they will hold top spot, at least for another week.

Earlier, Alvaro Morata ensured Juventus extended their unbeaten run to 15 matches with a brace in a 3-1 win at Sampdoria to further strengthen their position in the top four as they moved just one point behind Napoli.

Morata put Juve two goals ahead from the penalty spot before rounding off the scoring two minutes from the end to send Juve into their Champions League decider with Villarreal in confident mood.

Massimiliano Allegri's side host La Liga outfit Villarreal in Turin on Wednesday in the second leg of a last 16 tie level at 1-1.

Won't play unless I'm 100% fit: Praneeth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Low on confidence after below-par performances in the last six months, India's B Sai Praneeth says his mantra this year is to compete only when he gets adequate training and is at the peak of his fitness.

The 29-year-old Indian was hopeful of a good show at his maiden Olympics but everything went downhill for him starting from the Tokyo Games, where he failed to win a match.

The rest of the season also didn't yield desired results as he turned up for India at the team events such as Sudirman Cup and Thomas and Uber Cup Finals, besides the world tour events, without adequate breaks or training.

"My bad luck started since the Olympics. On hindsight, going to Sudirman cup without training was a mistake but it was a team event and it was about playing for India. So playing successive events, my fitness went down. I was struggling with my stamina," Praneeth said.

Praneeth will be starting the season with the All England Championships beginning at Birmingham on March 16.

"I can't do the same mistakes like last time, can't play continuously without training and getting unfit or injured. I need to give myself time to get fitness, train and then go for



event. I will prefer playing two events this year."

It is a big year for Indian badminton with big-ticket events like Commonwealth Games and Asian Games lined up but Praneeth said he is not thinking about it at all.

"I am not thinking about CWG or Asiad, there are not much time between events and so I just want to focus on training, fitness, performance and winning tournaments. If I get selected to play for India that would be great but don't want to think about it now."

PSG fans boo Messi, Neymar in win over Bordeaux

AP ■ PARIS

Record-breakers Neymar and Lionel Messi felt the heat from Paris Saint-Germain's angry fans following another Champions League humiliation, getting whistled every time they touched the ball during a 3-0 home win against Bordeaux on Sunday. Even when Neymar scored the second goal against rock-bottom Bordeaux, the fans jeered him. Even when Messi embarked on a trademark run from deep and hit the post, he got booed.

While the runaway leader moved 15 points clear in a league it usually dominates, the fans want success elsewhere.

Yet PSG blew it again in the Champions League this week against Real Madrid. A few weeks ago they also got knocked out the French Cup, and coach

Mauricio Pochettino is widely expected to be replaced next season.

At which point Kylian Mbappe, who scored PSG's first goal against Bordeaux midway through the first half, might be playing for Real Madrid. His contract runs out in June and he can leave on a free transfer.

PSG's top scorer was the only player spared the whistles when the team names were read out.

Record seven-time Golden Ball winner Messi and Neymar were booed throughout. The two former Barcelona stars were also on the receiving end of some hostile chants encouraging them to leave.

A banner read "Direction Demission" seemingly aimed at sporting director Leonardo and president Nasser Al-Khelaifi.

Some fans in the Auteuil



section at Parc des Princes even turned up 15 minutes late in protest at PSG's midweek meltdown. The team's supporters are seething at the manner of the latest humiliating Champions League exit.

Bordeaux has leaked 68 goals, the most in the league, but almost scored in the first minute on Sunday.

With Donnarumma dropped, it was Keylor Navas in goal. He saved Remi Oudin's 20-meter strike before Jean Onana's header from the corner went just wide. Neymar lost the ball against Madrid and against Nice in PSG's 1-0 loss last weekend — both times leading to counter-attack goals.

His goal against Bordeaux came in the 52nd minute with a tap-in. A powerful strike from midfielder Leandro Paredes made it 3-0 in the 61st.

Indian women beat Germany 3-0 in shoot-out

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian women's hockey team beat Germany 3-0 in a dramatic shoot-out to avenge their first leg defeat to share the honours in the two-legged tie of the FIH Pro League here on Sunday.

The home side had lost 1-2 in the shoot-out in the first match at the same Kalinga Stadium here on Saturday.

Just like on Saturday, both the teams were locked at 1-1 at the end of the regulation time, leading to the shoot-out.

India were successful from all their first three attempts in the shoot-out while



none of the Germans could score from their three tries with home side skipper and goal-keeper Savita doing a brilliant job to deny the visitors.

Earlier, Felicia Wiedermann gave world number 5 Germany the lead in the 29th minute through a penalty corner conversion but Nisha equalised in the 40th minute through a field goal.

World number 9 India secured two points from the match, including a bonus point while Germany collected one point.

India's next matches are against England on April 2 and 3 at the same venue.

Aditi ends up tied 44th

PTI ■ CHONBURI

Aditi Ashok shot a bogey-free five-under 67 to finish tied 44th at the Honda LPGA Thailand which concluded on Sunday. This was the second successive start when Aditi had finished the week strongly with an error-free card - she had a 9-under 63 in LPGA Drive On Championships.

Aditi, who shot 70-72-68 on the first three days ended the week at 11-under 227, as Nanna

Koerstz Madsen became the first Dane to win on the LPGA tour. She beat China's Xiyu Lin with an eagle on the second play-off hole.

Starting from the 10th hole, Aditi had a great run in the middle of the round with birdies on 17th, 18th, first and third. She added one more on eighth. Koerstz Madsen and Lin finished at -26 overall to set a new tournament scoring record, breaking the mark of -25 set by Jessica Korda in 2018.

Nadal ekes out Indian Wells win

AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Rafael Nadal pulled off another great escape on Saturday, rallying from two breaks down in the third set to beat young American Sebastian Korda in the second round at Indian Wells. As newly minuted number one Daniil Medvedev -- the man Nadal beat with an epic comeback in the Australian Open final -- cruised to victory in his first match as the world's top-ranked player, Nadal was made to work by 21-year-old Korda, ranked 38th in the world.

"I feel very, very lucky today to be through," Nadal said after a 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (7/3) victory in the prestigious WTA and ATP Masters hard court tournament.

"Sebastian was playing some fantastic tennis. I didn't play my best match without a doubt (but) a lot of credit to him that he played so aggressive and he put me in a lot of trouble." Medvedev opened the action on Stadium court in the California

"SEBASTIAN WAS PLAYING SOME FANTASTIC TENNIS. I DIDN'T PLAY MY BEST MATCH WITHOUT A DOUBT (BUT) A LOT OF CREDIT TO HIM THAT HE PLAYED SO AGGRESSIVE AND HE PUT ME IN A LOT OF TROUBLE."



desert and after saving a break point in the opening game had little trouble with 21-year-old Czech qualifier Tomas Machac, ranked 158th in the world.

The reigning US Open champion wrapped up a 6-3, 6-2 victory in 70 minutes, although Medvedev said it "was not as easy as it seems" after he sealed the win on a third match point. The difference, he said, was consistency.

"If you look, the first set was pretty even. He made just a few unforced errors and maybe some bad decisions in crucial moments. That's how tennis is sometimes," Medvedev said.

Medvedev said it was a "great feeling" to take the court as world number one, "something I've always dreamed of."

But he'll have to reach the quarter-finals to prevent Novak Djokovic, absent this week due to US Covid-19 travel restrictions on the unvaccinated, from reclaiming the top spot.

Medvedev, who has never made

it past the fourth round in four prior appearances, next faces France's Gael Monfils, who beat Serbian Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-4. Meanwhile Nadal next plays Britain's Daniel Evans, who secure a 6-2, 6-0 winner over Argentina's Federico Coria.

The Spanish legend was joined in the third round by rising young compatriot Carlos Alcaraz, who beat American Mackenzie McDonald 6-3, 6-3.

The 18-year-old Alcaraz, coming off a title at the Rio Open, converted five of his nine break chances and rallied from a break down in the second set to seal the win.



Paolini shocks Sabalenka

AFP ■ INDIAN WELLS

World number three Aryna Sabalenka, the highest-ranked woman in the Indian Wells WTA tournament, crashed out of her opening match on Saturday as Italian Jasmine Paolini rallied for a 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 triumph.

Sabalenka was seeded second in a tournament missing both world number one Ashleigh Barty and second-ranked Barbora Krejickova.

Both were late with draws, Barty saying she hadn't had time to prepare after her Australian Open triumph and Krejickova with an elbow injury.

Sabalenka got off to a strong start against the 46th-ranked Italian, but Paolini was able to capitalize on her struggles on serve that includ-



ed 10 double faults.

"I mean, I'm so happy," said Paolini, who notched her first career win over a top-10 player. "I played an amazing match."

Paolini booked a third-round clash with Switzerland's 31st seed Viktorija Golubic,

who beat Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva 6-3, 2-6, 6-4.

Sabalenka's exit opens things up for former world number one Victoria Azarenka, seeded 13th, and sixth seed Maria Sakkari of Greece -- both in the same quarter of the draw.

Bumrah, Pant light up B'luru

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Rishabh Pant put Sri Lankan attack to the sword with a record-breaking half-century while Shreyas Iyer yet again conjured up a measured fifty to let India grab complete control of the second Test here on Sunday.

Pant's 31-ball 50 and Iyer's 67-run knock after useful contribution from top-order batters meant that India set Sri Lanka a mammoth 447-run target after declaring their second innings at 303 for nine.

The struggling visitors would need no less than a miraculous show to save the match after ending the second day at 28 for one. Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne (10) and Kusal Mendis (16) will resume Sri Lankan chase on Monday morning. With plenty of time at their disposal after bundling out Sri Lanka for 109 in the first session of the day for a 143-run first-innings lead, India batters gained more experience of playing with pink ball on a wicket that assisted spinners.

Like in the first innings, it was Pant's blitzkrieg that forced Sri Lanka into complete submission. He did not let them gain momentum after getting breakthroughs.

Pant's game-changing innings let Iyer play freely and that certainly helped India to extend their lead beyond the 400-run mark.

Iyer carried from where he left in the first innings, scoring 67 off 87 balls with help of nine shots the fence.

There is never a dull moment when Pant is at the crease and it did not change today. He cut, pulled, swept, reverse swept, drove, charged down the wicket at will and raised his fifty off just 28 balls with 40 of those runs coming in boundaries.

It was the fastest Test fifty by an Indian, obliterating the 30-ball effort by Kapil Dev against Pakistan in 1982. He



fell for an even 50, becoming the third scalp of left-arm spinner Praveen Jayawickrama (4/78).

The Indians scored at a good pace throughout the day with Lankan bowlers failing to exploit the spin-friendly conditions.

Rohit was calculative in shot selection before lofting off-spinner Dhananjaya de Silva straight to Angelo Mathews for 46. His footwork looked good, he largely swept left-arm spinners and charged down the wicket to smother the off-spin of De Silva.

However, he could not resist the temptation of going after De Silva when he closed in on a half-century.

Before walking back, Rohit added 42 runs with fellow opener Mayank Agarwal (22) and 56 for the second wicket with Hanuma Vihari (35), who also frittered away a solid start.

Agarwal edged one from left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya (3/87), who got

the ball to turn away from good length and had the Indian

caught by De Silva. Vihari, who would

Pant breaks Kapil Dev's fastest 50 record

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Flamboyant wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant on Sunday broke the legendary Kapil Dev's 40-year-old record of fastest Test fifty by an Indian on the second day of the Day/Night match against Sri Lanka here.

The dashing left-hander cruised to his fifty in 28 balls (7x4, 2x6) in the 42nd over of Indian second innings when he hit a Praveen Jayawickrama delivery through the extra cover boundary.

India's first World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev had cracked a 30-ball half-century against Pakistan in the Karachi Test in 1982.

"Rishabh Pant surpasses Kapil Dev to score the fastest 50 by an Indian in Test cricket... Take a bow, Rishabh," posted BCCI in its Twitter handle.

Pant also set a world record for notching up the fastest fifty by a wicketkeeper-batter in Tests, bettering the efforts of Australia's Ian Smith and former India captain MS Dhoni



(both scored 34-ball fifty).

Shardul Thakur is the third in the list of fastest Test fifty by an Indian with his 31-ball half-century in the Oval Test against England last year. Former India opener Virender Sehwag has scored a 32-ball 50 against England in Chennai in 2008.

ideally like to make the number three spot his own, missed a straighter one from Jayawickrama and lost his off stump.

Jayawickrama also sent back Virat Kohli (13), who again fell leg before and his search for that elusive 71st international hundred just got longer. He is without an international hundred in 73 innings now. It was another delivery that kept low and he was trapped on the back-foot.

The string of low scores means that Kohli is now averaging below 50 after years of consistency.

In the morning session, fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah (5/24) completed his eighth five-wicket haul and first at home as India polished off the Sri Lankan lower-order in a jiffy.

Sri Lanka resumed at 86 for six and India required less than 30 minutes to wrap their innings. Bumrah and off-spinner R Ashwin (2/30) scalped two batters each as Sri Lanka's shoddy display continued.



Khawaja, Carey Oz to 505-8

AP ■ KARACHI

In his haste to reach the 100 mark before close of play, Carey went for a slog sweep but lost his stump to a delivery from part-time spinner Babar that kept low.

Usman Khawaja's marathon 160 and Alex Carey's career-best 93 helped Australia rack up 505 for eight against Pakistan on day two of the second Test on Sunday. It was a day of painstaking accumulation at the National Stadium where the Pakistan bowlers kept the run rate under check but only five wickets fell in three sessions for all their hard work under a harsh sun.

Mitchell Starc saw off 95 deliveries for his dour unbeaten 28 and Australia captain Pat Cummins was unbeaten on nought at the close.

"Tomorrow we'll see what the skipper does but it's great to have 500 runs on the board," Carey said.

"Hopefully, the pitch starts to deteriorate tomorrow and on day four and we can create those 20 chances. So the more runs we get now, the better position we'll be in if we have to bat again." Earlier, after Australia resumed on 251-3, Shaheen Afridi subjected Nathan Lyon to a bouncer barrage but the night-watchman did not flinch and went on the attack with the pull shot. Lyon hit five fours in an

entertaining 38 before he had his stumps rearranged by an express delivery from Faheem Ashraf, ending a 54-run stand with Khawaja.

Khawaja had shelved the reverse sweep on Saturday but Pakistan were convinced they had him caught in the slips when the opener attempted the shot against Nauman Ali.

However, replays ruled out any ball-bat contact and Pakistan lost a review.

Khawaja duly brought up his 150 but could not better his highest score of 174 as Sajid Khan dealt a double blow.

The off-spinner trapped Travis Head lbw for 23 and spun one past Khawaja's bat to hit the off-stump.

Islamabad-born Khawaja's third century in four Tests included 15 fours and a six.

Cameron Green, who was not even born when Australia last toured Pakistan in 1998, made 28 before Nauman confounded him with a sharp-turning ball that pitched outside leg stump and hit the off.

Carey swept well and Starc batted resolutely to frustrate Pakistan and take Australia past the 500-mark. Pakistan captain Babar Azam brought himself on to bowl, partly to give respite to his overworked spinners, and struck in his first over.

In his haste to reach the 100 mark before close of play, Carey went for a slog sweep but lost his stump to a delivery from part-time spinner Babar that kept low. His stellar knock included seven fours and two sixes.

Carey left the field to a standing ovation from his team mates after adding 98 runs with Starc for the eighth wicket.

"Our plan was to bowl stump-to-stump and not leak too many runs," Pakistan all-rounder Faheem told reporters.

"The pitch was slow. So even when we were getting reverse swing, their batsmen had enough time to negotiate it."

Kumar Kushagra double ton propels Jharkhand to 769/9

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Jharkhand made a giant stride towards advancing to the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals as they posted a mammoth 769 for 9 against a struggling Nagaland on day two of their knockout match at Eden Gardens here on Sunday.

The 17-year-old wicket-keeper batter Kumar Kushagra made the most of the listless Nagaland attack to steer his side to a huge total after Jharkhand resumed the day at 402 for 5.

Kushagra, who was 112 not out overnight, kept on his onslaught on the Nagaland bowlers to slam 266 from 269 balls (37x4, 2x6) in his third First-Class appearance. It was his maiden First Class hundred.

The youngster, who was a part of the India U-19 team for 2020 South Africa tour, got to 200 with a boundary off Lemtur just before lunch to complete the milestone in 213 deliveries.

Senior left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem also made hay, cruising to a career-best 123 not out (223 balls; 14x4, 1x6) as the duo put together 166 runs for the seventh wicket after overnight batter Anukul Roy got out for 59.

Looking unstoppable, Kushagra kept on his onslaught against the tired



Nagaland bowlers and got to his next 50 in just 39 deliveries.

Kense finally gave the breakthrough and dismissed Kushagra and Sushant Mishra (0) in four balls in a temporary respite.

After Kushagra's departure, Nadeem held the centrestage with number 11 Rahul Shukla (29 not out) en route to his second first class century.

Nagaland employed seven bowlers with the spin duo of Imliwati Lemtur and Khrievitso Kense returning with three wickets each, while Shrikant Mundhe, Chopise Hopongkyu and Rongsen Jonathn claimed one each.

Indian players begin work on enhancing fitness at NCA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to enhance and maintain peak fitness levels for the two World Cups in the next 20 months, the Indian team management - in coordination with the selectors and the NCA - has asked a batch of shortlisted players to undergo a fitness camp in Bengaluru.

At least 25 players are right now at the NCA, currently midway through the camp which started on March 5 and will end on March 14 after which they will head to join their respective IPL teams. All the players will undergo a fitness test before they break out of the camp, but unlike last year when it was mandatory to clear the benchmarks, this time it is to record a baseline mark for every player.

There's similarity in MS & my captaincy style: Faf

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Set to lead an IPL franchise for the first time, newly-appointed Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis said his leadership style is pretty much similar to that of 'Captain Cool', Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The 37-year-old Du Plessis has been an integral part of Chennai Super Kings side under Dhoni since 2012 and also played for the the new-defunct Rising Pune Supergiant.

"I'm very lucky that I've been around some fantastic leaders in my journey in cricket. I grew in with Graeme Smith, who is South Africa's best leader ever," the former South African skipper was quoted as saying in RCB website.

"And then the 10 years with MS and Stephen Fleming, two fantastic leaders. I do think that there's similarity in MS style and my style in terms that we both are very relaxed



Mills can't wait to bowl alongside Bumrah

PTI ■ MUMBAI

England left-arm pacer Tynmal Mills is relishing the prospect of bowling alongside star Indian Jasprit Bumrah at Mumbai Indians in the upcoming Indian Premier League.

The 29-year-old Mills, a T20 specialist and who has represented England in 12 matches and has taken 11 wickets at a strike rate of 22.7, was bought for ₹1.5 crore by the five-time champions as a replacement for Trent Boult.



"Had the chance to spend a little bit of time with Bumrah during the World Cup. So looking forward to playing with him," Mills said in a video posted by Mumbai Indians.

"I have been wanting to come back for a long time and I am happy to get an opportunity," he added.

Mills, who earlier played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in 2017, will also reunite with Mahela Jayawardene, his Southern Brave coach at the Hundred.

Aus trounce NZ to fire WC warning

AFF ■ WELLINGTON

Australia recovered from a shaky start to demolish New Zealand by 141 runs in Wellington on Sunday and underscore their status as Women's Cricket World Cup favourites.

New Zealand did well to contain Australia to 269-8 after winning the toss and opting to bowl, only for the six-time champions to bounce back and skittle the host nation for 128 with 19.4 overs to spare.

New Zealand are regarded as a realistic chance to make the final of the one-day showcase, but the lopsided result is a warning to all teams in the



tournament that Australia remain the gold standard.

While their top order had a rare off day, Australia's batting depth shone through,

highlighted by half-centuries from Ellyse Perry and Tahlia McGrath.

"That's the beauty of our batting line-up, we've got some

players who can rescue an innings and build the platform that allows us to play like we did at the back end," captain Meg Lanning said.

New Zealand made an excellent start with the ball. Alyssa Healy departed for 15 with a mistimed pull shot as she tried to lift the run rate, followed by Lanning on five.

Australia were reduced to 56-3 when Rachael Haynes was bowled by Lea Tahuhu for 30 in the 16th over and limped to 113-4 before Beth Mooney dragged the ball on to her stumps, also for 30.

Perry and McGrath then combined for a crucial 101-run stand. Ashleigh Gardner con-

tributed a quickfire cameo of 48 runs from 18 balls but Australia's total looked within reach.

Tahuhu was the pick of New Zealand's bowlers with 3-53.

The home side never looked close to achieving the 270-run target as Australia's bowlers set about dismantling their batting line-up.

Teen speedster Darcie Brown had the best figures with 3-22 but the entire attack contributed to a dominant performance.

Amy Satterthwaite offered the only real resistance for New Zealand with 44, but the rest of their batters failed to fire.



Windies defy England in 1st Test stalemate

AP ■ NORTH SOUND

stand of 80 off 35 overs to see the home side to safety at 147 for four.

Bonner's unbeaten 38, following on from his nine-hour-plus 123 in the first innings, earned him the man of the match award.

Holder finished on 37 not out in another important contribution from the all-rounder against the English.

Following Joe Root's second innings declaration at 349 for six in the morning session, left-arm spinner Jack Leach claimed three wickets in quick succession after Ben Stokes made the breakthrough by removing West

Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite.

Without the services of their fastest bowler, Mark Wood, due to an elbow injury, the tourists were further frustrated for 25 overs by Brathwaite and John Campbell, who put on 59.

However, Stokes was brought into the attack as the fifth bowler and responded by trapping Brathwaite leg-before for 33. Leach, who shared the new ball with Chris Woakes, then drew Campbell into another false shot and Craig Overton took the catch over his head at mid-on for the left-hander to depart on 22.