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DON'T NEGLECT ARMY
RECRUITMENT RALLIES

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INDIA, UAE TRADE PACT MAY COME
INTO FORCE FROM MAY 1: GOYAL

NEW DELHI, MONDAY MARCH 28, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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*Air Surchage Extra if ApplicableRow over College
of Arts' incursionL-G, Delhi Govt
at loggerheads
over DTU bids

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

A "rift" between the Delhi Government and Delhi Raj Niwas over the "authorisation" issue of the prestigious College of Arts, Delhi University, has taken a massive toll on the academic progress of the institution which enjoys a great reputation of being associated with several Padma awardees like BC Sanyal, who established the college, MF Hussain, OP Sharma and others over the years.

Now from earning a dubious distinction of not enrolling students for the academic session 2021-22, to getting into protracted tussle over the affiliation issues, the students, a section of academicians and other stakeholders have started a series of protests inside and outside the college.

Lt Governor Anil Bajjal has stepped in and put on hold the pressures by the Delhi Government's Delhi Technical University to bring the College of Arts into their ambit under Ambedkar University from the umbrella of globally recog-



nised University of Delhi.

College of Arts is a very special college located in Lutyens' Delhi and was affiliated to DU's Faculty of Music and Fine Arts in 1974. While Ambedkar University is a State Government university, the DU is a Central University and have been listed in several global rankings for the institutions.

In an attempt to halt the merger of College of Arts with Ambedkar University, students have also launched an online petition to Bajjal and DU Vice-Chancellor.

The petition by students has called the act by DTU "undemocratic and highly

unethical" and stated that the students have the right to influence the process of decision-making.

A section of teaching and non-teaching staff, students and other stakeholders have accused the acting Principal of College of Arts, DU, Prof BS Chauhan of "orchestrating" the affiliation process to Ambedkar University for vested interest as he does not meet the requisite criteria to hold the position.

The college is without a regular Principal since 2012 and in this age of technology the institution has not upgraded/updated its website since 2017.

Continued on Page 2

India's export feat
shows its stronger
supply chain: PMModi pushes for
vocal for local, says
India's items in
demand globally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday pointed out that India has achieved an export target of ₹30 lakh crore, attributing the "feat" to the strengthening of the "supply chain" of India "and called for going "vocal for local" so that it goes "global".

In his monthly radio talk "Man ki Baat", the Prime Minister touched on a range of issues, including innovative start-ups, growth in "Ayush" product manufacturing, individual efforts in the country to recharge water bodies, cleanliness, and meaningful works of kindness by several people to nourish the environment and the society.

In the beginning of his talk, Modi cited the Indian export achieving the target of ₹30 lakh crore, which, he said, more than anything showed "Indian capability".

"At first instance, it might come across as a matter related to the economy, but more

than the economy, it is related to the capability of India, the potential of India.

"At one time, the figure of exports from India used to be 100 billion, at times 150 billion, sometimes 200 billion...today, India has reached 400 billion dollars. In a way, this means that the demand for items made in India is increasing all over the world," he said.

Besides, Modi said it also means that "the supply chain of India is getting stronger by the day... and it also has a very big message."

The Prime Minister said, "The nation takes great strides when resolves are bigger than dreams. When there is a sincere effort day and night for the resolves, those resolutions also attain fruition... and you see, the same happens in a person's life as well. When one's resolve, one's efforts become bigger than one's dreams, success comes to the person on its own."

Modi pointed out that "new products from all corners of the country" are reaching foreign shores. Leather products from Hailakandi in Assam or handloom products from Osmanabad, fruits and vegetables from Bijapur or black rice from Chandauli, the exports of all of these are increasing.

Continued on Page 2

Youth lands blow on Nitish

Patna: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was on Sunday assaulted by an unidentified person near Patna, in an incident that has sent shock waves across Bihar. Officials were tight-lipped about the incident, though highly placed sources said it took place in Bakhtiyarpur where Kumar was meeting his old associates.

The Chief Minister, who has spent his early childhood in Bakhtiyarpur, was paying floral tributes to the statue of a freedom fighter from the area.

CCTV footage shows the assailant, in his late 20s or early 30s, coming from behind and landing a blow on the septuagenarian's face.

Clad in a T-shirt and trousers, the assailant is soon overpowered by the Chief



Minister's security staff who quickly hand him over to the police. Another footage shows the alleged assailant being dragged away by the policemen who mutter under

their breath "paagal hai" (he is crazy). The identity of the attacker, who is understood to have been taken to a police station, was not known immediately.

PTI

Heat wave in N-W,
central India for
next 5 days: IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There would be no relief from scorching heat in parts of northwest and central India as the India Meteorological Department has predicted extreme heat-wave conditions for the next five days.

The maximum temperature is likely to increase 2 to 3 degrees Celsius in the next four days in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, and

Madhya Pradesh. "No rain likely in these areas in near future," predicted the IMD.

As per the IMD forecast, a gradual rise in maximum temperatures by 2-3 degrees Celsius is very likely over most parts of northwest and Central India during the next four days. "There will not be any significant change in maximum temperatures over most parts of Maharashtra during next two days. The maximum temperature will gradually rise by 2-3 degrees Celsius thereafter.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

SINDHU CLINCHES 2ND
WOMEN'S SINGLE TITLE

BASEL: Ace Indian shuttler PV Sindhu clinched her second women's singles title of the season with a straight game win over Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan but HS Prannoy went down fighting in the men's singles final at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament on Sunday.

INDIAN EATERY SHUT OVER
BARRING VEILED WOMAN

An Indian restaurant in Bahrain was closed down by the kingdom's authorities after a veiled woman was allegedly prevented from entering the outlet, according to reports.

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Nobody can break Modi-Yogi pair: UP Gov

Surat: Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel on Sunday said nobody can break the Modi-Yogi pair, and added that the BJP retained power in UP with the support of a lot of people, including a large number north Indians settled in Gujarat's Surat.

She was referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath, who took oath as the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister for a second term at a ceremony held on Friday, which was attended by the PM.

In the UP Assembly polls held earlier this year, the BJP-led alliance has won 273 of 403 seats. While the BJP got 255 seats, its allies Nishad Party and the Apna Dal (S) bagged 18.

This is the first time in over three decades that a party has won the Assembly elections twice in a row in the crucial State.

"We have formed the Government in Uttar Pradesh, friends. Nobody can break the Modi-Yogi pair...Nobody can do this. A lot of people have given their support to achieve this. Several people from here (Surat) went there (UP) for campaigning," she said.

This is after 35 years that one party returned to power for a second term in a row, creating history, she added.

"For this, you must congratulate us...A large number of north Indians are settled in Surat, and they have supported us to achieve this," the former Gujarat Chief Minister said.

Patel was in Surat to lay the foundation stone for Kiran Medical College, being set up by Samast Patidar Arogya Trust at Vadod in Olpad taluka of the district. Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel were also present on the occasion.

Stating that India lags behind in the field of research, she suggested that the proposed college should have a dedicated department for this purpose.

"India rose to the occasion to carry out research and came out with a vaccine against Covid-19," the UP governor added. She also stressed the need for girls to get vaccinated against cervical cancer.

"A new vaccine (against cervical cancer) has entered the market. As of now, it is very costly. I have been told that the price of this vac-

cine will come down in the range of ₹100 to ₹ 300 by August-September. Whenever this vaccine is available, I request you to get your daughters in the age group of 9 to 14 vaccinated against cervical cancer. I have started this vaccination work in UP irrespective of the price the vaccine," she said.

In his address, Mandaviya said the country is committed to provide quality education to students.

From 55,000 seats for the MBBS course in 2014, the number has grown to 92,000 in seven years, which keeps increasing, he said.

"In the past, people were concerned about getting permission for setting up a medical college...But we have provided relaxation in all the rules to set up a medical college. There is only one rule - education should be provided to the students at a reasonable cost without fleecing them," he said.

CM Bhupendra Patel said his government is committed to provide quality healthcare to people, for which ₹12,240 crore have been allocated in the state budget for the year 2022-23.

8 killed, 44 injured as bus falls into Chittoor valley

Tirupati (AP): Eight people were killed and 44 injured when an over-speeding private bus lost control while negotiating a curve on a ghat road and fell into a valley at Bhakarapet in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh late on Saturday night, police said.

The victims, all relatives, belonged to Anantapuramu district and were on their way to Tirupati from Dharmavaram to attend a wedding engagement ceremony scheduled for Sunday morning, police added.

Over-speeding resulted in the accident, a senior police official said. A journalist working in a vernacular newspaper was among those killed in the accident. As it was pitch-dark, the rescue operation took a lot of time. Chittoor District Collector M Hari Narayanan rushed to the accident spot and supervised the rescue and relief operations.

Tirupati Urban SP Ch V Appala Naidu and a team of police personnel pulled out the injured persons using ropes and shifted them to RUIA hospital in Tirupati.

The bodies of the deceased were extricated in the early hours of Sunday and the post-mortem was conducted at RUIA hospital. State Panchayat Raj Minister P R C Reddy, hailing from Chittoor district, visited the injured persons in the hospital and consoled them. The Andhra Pradesh Government announced an ex-gratia payment of ₹2 lakh each to the kin of the



deceased and ₹ 50,000 each to the injured. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the deaths in the accident. "Pained by the loss of lives in a tragic bus accident in Chittoor, AP. Condolences to the bereaved families. I hope the injured recover soon," PM Modi tweeted.

The PM also announced ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased and ₹50,000 each to those injured in the accident.

Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, Telugu Desam Party president N Chandrababu Naidu, Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan, state BJP vice-president S Vishnuvardhan Reddy, Pradesh Congress Committee president S Sailajanath and others expressed grief over the accident. Pawan Kalyan asked the State Government to increase safety measures at such accident-prone spots and prevent fatal mishaps. **PTI**

12-year-old girl raped by 25-yr-old cousin: Police

Bhadohi (UP): A 12-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her cousin in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Bhadohi district, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place in a village under the Koirana police station area on Friday night when the girl was alone in her house and her 25-year-old cousin Pradeep Kumar visited there, police said.

Finding the girl alone, Pradeep took her out to a secluded place and raped her there, they said. The girl later reached her home and was admitted to the hospital by her parents, police said. An FIR has been lodged against the accused under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, police said.

The accused was arrested on Saturday night and was produced before a magistrate who remanded him in judicial custody on Sunday. **PTI**



BJP ally IPFT to discuss possibility of merging or allying with TIPRA Motha

Agartala: The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), an ally of the ruling BJP in the North-eastern state, on Sunday said it would discuss the possibility of merging or allying with the Tripura Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA Motha) before the assembly elections due early next year.

The TIPRA Motha, headed by royal scion Pradyot Kishore Debbarma, seeks a separate state for the indigenous people of Tripura.

"Our conference to form a new executive committee will be held on April 2 and 3. There we would discuss whether the IPFT should merge or forge an alliance with TIPRA Motha as both parties demand a separate state," IPFT spokesperson and assistant general secretary Mangal Debbarma told PTI.

TIPRA Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Debbarma has several times called upon all tribal-based parties of the state to unite to fulfil the Greater Tipraland demand.

The TIPRA Motha, formed early last year, swept the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections held in April 2021, winning 18 of the 28 seats over the 'Greater Tipraland' demand in a direct contest with the ruling BJP-IPFT alliance. The TTAADC comprises two-thirds of Tripura's territory and is home to the tribals who constitute a third of the state's estimated 40 lakh population.

The IPFT spokesperson said when the "popular" royal scion has given a call for unity of tribal parties, "we want to give him a chance for fulfilling his demand for a separate state for indigenous people of the state".

In the 60-member Tripura Assembly, the demand for a separate state may influence results in 20 seats where tribal people hold considerable sway.

'Greater Tipraland' is an extension of the IPFT's demand for 'Tipraland', a separate state for tribals by carving out the TTAADC area. The proposed 'Greater

Tipraland' state would include tribal majority areas of Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, and even Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

"It is a fact that a majority of our young generation support the separate statehood demand because of unequal development in hills and plains. Even after 74 years of Independence, the disparity continues to exist. The younger generation wants social and economic development," Tripura Tribal Welfare Minister and IPFT general secretary Mevar Kumar Jamatiya said in the Assembly on March 22.

Most of the state's tribal population live in the hills while plain areas are inhabited by non-tribals.

The party wants the Centre to discuss its demand but has not received any response so far. All major political parties in the state including the ruling BJP, opposition CPI(M) and the Congress have rejected the demand calling it "separatist and divisive". **PTI**

Woman, her lover arrested for murdering husband in Kota

Kota: A woman and a man, who were involved in an extra-marital relationship, were arrested in Kota city for allegedly murdering her husband on Sunday.

The accused were produced in a court on Sunday afternoon, a day after their arrest, and were remanded in police custody, they said. The body of Naresh Meena (38) of Jhalawar district was found in the Bhimganjmandi area of Kota city on March 18, the local police station said. Meena was living at a rented accommodation in the city along with his wife.

The married couple worked as tailors. Meena's family members initially raised no doubts over his death, but on Friday, his niece lodged a report alleging that Sunita Meena, wife of the deceased, and Pramod Khateek were having an affair and had possibly murdered her uncle, the police said.

Following this, the police tracked down Khateek, who during initial interrogation, admitted to have committed the crime with Sunita Meena's help, Circle Inspector at the Bhimganjmandi police station Laxmichand Verma said. The enquiry revealed that Khateek would visit the couple's house for work and had developed a relationship with Sunita Meena, the police said. On the night of Holi, the duo strangled Naresh Meena to death with a shoelace while he was asleep and smeared marker pen ink on his neck to cover the marks, Verma said. **PTI**

Kerala records 400 fresh Covid cases, 25 deaths

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala on Sunday recorded 400 fresh infections which raised the total to 65,31,090 till date.

The southern State reported also 25 deaths which raised the hitherto tally to 67,797, according to an official press release. Of the deaths,

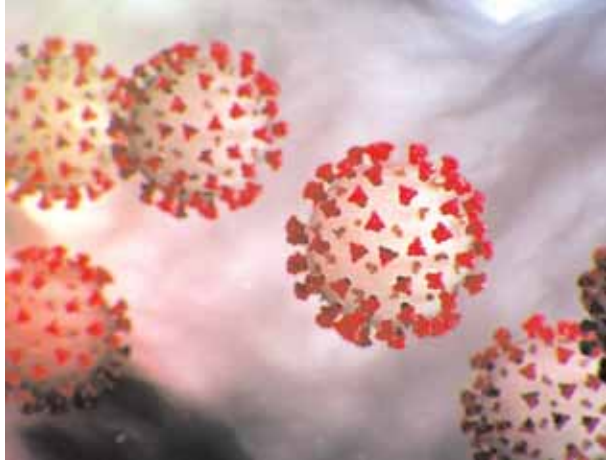
three occurred in the last few days but were not recorded due to late receipt of documents and 22 were designated as COVID-19 deaths after receiving appeals based on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court, the release said.

No deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, it said. With 593 more people recovering from the virus since Saturday, the total recoveries until now was 64,58,586 and the active cases dropped to 3,833, the release said.

As many as 14,913 samples were tested in the last 24 hours. Among the 14 districts, Ernakulam recorded the most with 88 cases, Thiruvananthapuram saw 56 and Kottayam 55, the release said.

Of the new cases, one was of a person from outside the State, three were health workers and 366 infected through contact with the source of it not being clear in 30, the release said.

There are 14,513 people now under surveillance in various districts and 14,093 are in home or institutional quarantine; 420 are in hospitals, the release added. **PTI**



Inter-State water disputes: CM Bommai to meet Union Water Resources Min in April

Hubballi (KTK): Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Sunday said he will meet the Union Water Resource Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in New Delhi to resolve several inter-state water disputes in the first week of April. Emphasising the need to make all efforts to resolve inter-state water disputes at the earliest, Bommai said the state would get the legal issues to be resolved through the courts.

"We are yet to get various approvals from the Union government with regard to inter-state water disputes. I have instructed the depart-

ments concerned to make preparations for this. I am set to meet the Union Water Resources minister in April first week to take up the issue," Bommai told reporters here. "Regarding legal issues, I have told our legal team to find a remedy, particularly the Krishna tribunal notification. I have directed the officials to get ready for certain environmental clearances for some projects," he added.

To a query on the possibility of leading an all-party delegation to New Delhi, the Chief Minister said he would speak to Shekhawat first and "if situation rises, he would take a

delegation of all the political parties in Karnataka to Delhi."

Speaking about attracting investments, Bommai said the industrial sector will get a boost as has been announced in the budget. Identification of land and other processes are in full swing to attract investments. Northern Karnataka has been given top priority, he added.

Further referring to the provisions in the budget, the Chief Minister explained that his government has given greater impetus for empowerment of women and setting up of Agricultural Secondary Directorate. **PTI**

Strike by private buses called off after Kerala CM assures hike in ticket fares soon

Thiruvananthapuram: The indefinite strike by private buses in Kerala was called off on Sunday morning after Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan assured that the state government would soon hike the ticket prices, the bus owners said. The Kerala State Private Bus Operators Federation's president, Sathyan, said the private bus owners associations were called for discussions at the Secretariat on Sunday morning by the Chief Minister, who assured them that the minimum ticket fares would be increased as sought by them.

State Road Transport Minister Antony Raju was also present at the meeting, he said.

Sathyan said the Chief Minister assured that all necessary support would be provided to the private bus owners to continue with their services and asked them to call off their strike, which had commenced three days ago on March 24. **PTI**

India's export ...

From Page 1
"Now, you will also find the world-famous apricot of Ladakh in Dubai too and in Saudi Arabia, you will find bananas shipped from Tamil Nadu. Most importantly, an array of new products are being sent to ever newer countries."

For example, the Prime Minister said the first consignment of millets grown in Himachal and Uttarakhand was exported to Denmark. Bainganapalli and Subarnarekha mangoes from the Krishna and Chittoor districts of Andhra Pradesh were exported to South Korea. Fresh jackfruits from Tripura were exported to London by air and for the first time, King Chili from Nagaland was dispatched to London.

Similarly, the first consignment of Bhalia wheat was exported from Gujarat to Kenya and Sri Lanka.

"This means, now if you go to other countries, made in India products will

be more visible than ever before", Modi said. "This list is very long and the power of 'Make In India' is equivalent in might to the extent of the list. Equally great is the potential of India... and the basis of its strength are our farmers, artisans, our weavers, engineers, our small entrepreneurs, MSME sector; people from many different professions, all of them are its true strength," he said.

"It is only due to their hard work, that the goal of exporting to the tune of \$ 400 billion has been achieved and I am happy that this power of the people of India is now reaching new markets in every nook and corner of the world", Modi said.

In his address Modi referred to many individuals including M Sri Narayanan in Kerala who made more than one lakh earthen pots and distributed to people to give water to birds around - and Chnadrakishore Patil who is preventing and cleaning the garbage being thrown in Godavari river in Maharashtra.

Modi spoke of the market of the Ayush Industry, which, he said is "increasing continuously". Six years ago, the market for medicines related to Ayurveda was around 22 thousand crore. "Today, the Ayush Manufacturing Industry is reaching around one lakh forty thousand crore rupees, that is, the possibilities are increasing continuously in this sector. In the start-up world too, AYUSH is becoming a subject of attraction", said Modi.

The Prime Minister named start-ups in Ayush like Kapiva - where Ka means - Kapha, Pi means - Pitta and Va means - Vaata. Modi said this start-up is based on healthy eating habits in accordance with our traditions.

"Niro-Street too is another start-up which is a unique concept in the Ayurveda healthcare ecosystem. Its technology-driven platform connects Ayurveda doctors from across the world directly to the people. More than 50 thousand practitioners are associated with it", he said.

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Students suffer over DU...

From Page 1

While the Delhi Government has appointed an OSD for the purpose to expedite the process of merger, Raj Niwas has said until there is a NoC (No Objection Certificate) issued for de-affiliation from DU the merger cannot happen. The Delhi University Executive Council and Delhi University Teachers' Association have reiterated their stand not to approve the "exit" of College of Arts from DU without which technically the dreams of Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP Government would not be realised.

Delhi Cabinet last year in August approved the merger of College of Arts, functioning under the Directorate of Training and Technical Education, under the

Directorate of Higher Education to be a part of Ambedkar University.

The Delhi University Executive Council has not approved the de-affiliation and opposed the move. The committee constituted in this regard said such unilateral decisions were not acceptable and, instead, they had asked the university to write a strong letter to the Government.

Director (Training and Placement), Directorate of Training and Technical Education (DTTE), Delhi Government, Dr Dipti Mal, said it is highly regrettable that the DU is delaying the matter of de-affiliation of the College of Arts.

"Already one full academic session has been at a loss and further delay in the matter

will cause a great inconvenience to all the stakeholders like students, teaching and non-teaching staff etc., associated with such a reputed institution. Delhi government has been making all efforts to give better education the fields of fine arts and related subjects," Dr Mal told The Pioneer.

He was last week appointed as an OSD to the College of Arts to bridge the gap between the institution, DU, and the GNCTD.

Members of DUEC, DUTA, and protesters from College of Arts and other stakeholders are to meet the Visitor of DU President Ram Nath Kovind, Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan after having already placed the facts before the AICTE. The college academics are governed by AICTE and not the UGC as is the case of the rest of DU colleges.

Heat-wave conditions in parts of India for next 5...

From Page 1

There would not be a significant change in maximum temperature over the rest parts of the country during the next five days," the IMD said. "Isolated heat wave conditions are very likely over Western Himalayan Region and Gujarat State during next 3 days; over West Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Rajasthan during next 4-5 days; and over south Punjab, south Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, north Madhya Maharashtra & Marathwada during March 29-31, 2022," it said.

According to Skymet, a private weather forecaster, the weather of Northwest India, including Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, West Uttar Pradesh, and North Rajasthan, will also remain dry and hot. Wind speed is also expected to slow down now. Light winds and dry weather will once again increase the temperatures over Northwest India leading to heat wave conditions at isolated pockets of South Haryana and Rajasthan.

March has been quite active in terms of various systems developing in the Bay of Bengal. Two significant systems formed in the Bay of Bengal, both almost became cyclones but did not cause any trouble to the Indian coastline.

Govt taking steps to boost night-time economy of city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government is working towards liberal policy interventions to relax functioning of the food and the hospitality sectors in order to vitalise the night-time economy of the national Capital. A senior Delhi Government official said the Government also has plans to boost the hospitality sector, including allowing bars in hotels, clubs and restaurants to remain open till late in the night, under the new excise policy.

"We have taken various steps to boost the night-time economy, including the announcement of food truck policy and developing food hubs in the city, in the budget. Several other initiatives in this regard will be taken in the coming days," he said. He said the food truck, restaurant and the film policies would also add to the nightlife in the



national capital. Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had On Saturday announced a raft of measures in the budget for the financial year 2022-23 like providing land for cloud kitchens, redeveloping major food hubs and bringing in a food truck policy in the national capital.

The National Capital Region Planning Board, in its Regional Draft Plan 2041, suggested NCR states to encourage night economy by developing facilities and infrastructure for it.

The draft plan said that while preparing plans for tourism and visitation, the states can support the growth of the night-time economy by enhancing amenities, vibrancy and safety at the centres and by

improving public facilities. Presenting budget for 2022-23, Sisodia announced that the Arvind Kejriwal government was preparing a policy to allow food trucks to operate at designated places in the city from 8 pm to 2 am.

Citing 2,000 cloud kitchens in the city, Sisodia said they are emerging as a strong part of the restaurant industry and are growing at a rate of more than 20 per cent every year. "Cloud kitchens are one of the sectors that supports the night-time economy," he said.

Officials in the government said the hospitality industry is a significant contributor to the state's overall economy and needs to have a conducive environment for smooth operation. The new excise policy of the Delhi government also suggests that the restrictions related to excise operations in hotels, clubs and restaurants need to be in sync with present-day business and social perspectives. The new

excise policy suggests changes to "archaic" rules related to not allowing music in independent restaurants, and lowering of the legal drinking age from 25 years to 21 years. The policy initiatives for ease of doing business also recommend that the bars in hotels, restaurants and clubs be allowed to operate till 3 am. On their part to boost night-time economy, the three civic bodies recently approved a scheme to provide health trade licences for setting up e-food carts or food vans in their respective jurisdictions.

The South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has passed an open-air dining policy with an aim to push the night-time economy and generate more revenue.

Under the policy, open-air dining has been allowed only at those restaurants that have privately owned open spaces such terraces, balconies and lawns so that there is no encroachment on public land or pavements.

Depts to work for boarding school for homeless

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To set up a boarding school for homeless children, three departments of the Delhi Government will be working in close coordination and the modalities of the same will be worked out in a couple of weeks, a senior official said.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia during his budget speech has allocated Rs 10 crore for setting up such a school. According to an official privy to the development "The modalities of the school will be worked out in close coordination with the Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) and the Department of Education," he told PTI.

Talking about how the idea of school originated, the official said in post-pandemic period, there was a surge in the number of homeless children. "It was observed that number of children seen near traffic signals had increased after pandemic as opposed to pre-pandemic time. We did a pilot project in Malviya Nagar with the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) and



district authorities to see that if they are provided residential facilities, how will they be benefited. We identified the children, how they ended up there and found that we may be able to prevent them from getting into begging by providing them residence," he said. The government will be coming up with a full-fledged scheme.

"The government has a commitment towards every child. Our school model is very inclusive and if there is a segment that is not attending school, we will have to assess the reasons and work on them," the official noted. Speaking in the Assembly, Sisodia had said, "Children from homeless families who live on roadsides, footpaths, under flyovers and stairs or on open places of wor-

ship, pavilions, railway platforms etc. are deprived of basic facilities like shelter, food and education." "The government has taken several measures to provide basic education to these children. However, these measures have been only partially successful. It is not possible to get quality education unless basic facilities like food and shelter are in place.

The government has decided to set up a boarding school with modern facilities. These schools will also facilitate children to live along with education and try to bring them into mainstream of the society," Sisodia said. Another official said the WCD has been working on the issue of street children and had even issued guidelines for their identifica-

tion. He said various NGOs and district authorities could also work on identifying such children. The data collected by district authorities of such children would come in handy for the education department, he said.

The policy had said there is no legal definition of street children. But Save Children Organisation, in its report, "Surviving The Street: A Study of Street Children In Delhi" had given reference of UNICEF, according to which three types of children belong to category of street children.

The three categories of street children are--those who run away from their families and live alone on street; second is street-working children who spend most of their time on streets fending for themselves, but return home on a regular basis; while last category is children from street families who live on streets with their families. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal also spoke about the initiative during the post budget press conference and said steps taken in this direction in past did not bear desired results because they lacked human touch.

Traders welcome move to set up Gandhi Nagar as 'garment hub'



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced the development of the textile market in Gandhi Nagar as a "grand garment hub", traders at the Gandhi Nagar textile market said that the decision will generate more revenue and thousands of jobs in the city.

Presenting the Budget in the Delhi Assembly for the financial year 2022-23 on Saturday, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia

announced that the Government has planned to develop the textile market in Gandhi Nagar as a "grand garment hub" and it will be re-branded and repositioned to also generate more jobs in the next five years.

"Retailers and shopkeepers have been demanding the restructuring of the market for quite a long time as several structural flaws have prevented the growth of their businesses," K K Balli, president of the Association of Wholesale Readymade Garment Dealers (Gandhi Nagar) told PTI. There

are around 15,000 shops in the market which has been dubbed as Asia's biggest wholesale market, according to Balli. This is first time when grievances and suggestions of the traders have been considered, he said.

"It is a welcoming step. We made a representation with the authorities regarding the infrastructure problems in the area several times. We are very thankful to government for announcement," he said. "The market has potential to generate more revenue and it can provide employment to thousands of people. The announcement has been welcomed by retailers and shopkeepers," he added.

Balli informed that market required a sewage system, and proper wiring as well as transformers need to be installed. Moreover, he noted, there is no single multi-storey parking which prevents customers from shopping in markets. "This is first time that our grievances

and suggestions have been considered. For several years we have been bearing the brunt of poor infrastructure in region. We hope that budget allocated for development of market will help in infrastructure improvements," he added.

Sisodia on Saturday said the Delhi government plans to develop this market in Gandhinagar as "a grand garment hub" so that if people use some garments from here, they could say it with pride that this is ready-made in Delhi.

"This requires legal recognition, infrastructure redevelopment, construction of new service centres and re-branding, marketing and re-positioning of Gandhi Nagar," he had said. This programme is expected to create more than 40,000 new employment opportunities in next five years, the deputy chief minister had said. In his speech, he had also said city government will provide an online platform, named

"Delhi Bazaar", for local merchants to join it and sell online. "Promoting 'Go Local', we will set up a 'Delhi Bazaar' that will function as a virtual store 24x7. This arrangement will be done for our local traders at 'Zero Setup Cost' i.e. 'Zero Expense'," he had said.

Elated by the announcement, a trader at the Gandhi Nagar market said the place has been lagging for years due to poor infrastructure, and added that he is hopeful that their businesses will improve if these plans are implemented.

"We have raised several issues for many years. There is a big traffic and parking problem which has prevented customers from coming here. We have potential. We not only have national customers but we do business with traders of several other countries, those in middle east and eastern Africa," Ashish Khurana, who has a retail business of readymade clothes in Gandhi Nagar, said.

15-yr-old missing girl reunited with family by cops

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 15-year-old girl, who went missing from her residence in Aurangabad in Maharashtra, was found by the Delhi Police and reunited with her parents, said police on Sunday.

According to Amrutha Guguloth, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), New Delhi district, on March 26, an information was received at Parliament Street police station that a minor girl, aged around 15 years, had come from Aurangabad, Maharashtra to Delhi's Gurudwara Bangla Sahib and did not have any ID proof and mobile number.

"Acting on the information, a police team was constituted to trace the family of the girl. The police team tried to

extract information about family members of the girl, but she did not give any satisfactory reply," said the DCP. "During enquiry, it came to notice that an First Information Report (FIR) under section 363 (kidnapping) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at CIDCO police station in Maharashtra.

Thereafter, the investigating officer of the case and the victim's family members were asked to visit Parliament Street police station for identification of the girl," said the DCP.

"After proper identification, the girl was handed over to her parents. The sincere and prompt action of Parliament Street police station resulted in the reunion of the victim girl with her family," the DCP added.

Two more arrested in connection with murder of 19-year-old man

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two more accused in connection with the murder of a 19-year-old man who died of a bullet injury following a scuffle in the Delhi's Dwarka area. The two accused have been identified as Ashish alias Ashu (24), a resident of Najafgarh and Sumit alias Dilbagh (19), a resident of Dwarka's Sector 16-A.

According to a senior police official, the victim identified as Khurshid, a resident of sector 16-A in Dwarka, succumbed to the gunshot injury after a scuffle had broken out between school students on Saturday. "Later, outsiders too had joined the fight. One of the accused, Sahil (19), who lives in Nangli Dairy area, was arrested earlier for the alleged murder of Khurshid," police said.

Contract killers held for murdering woman in Gandhi Nagar area



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two contract killers for allegedly killing a woman in east Delhi's Gandhi Nagar area. The accused have been identified as Shokeen Khan (30) and Jeeshan (22), residents of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. Police said that Khan was arrested early on Sunday following an encounter.

Khan has been arrested twice in cases of transporting cows for slaughtering in Noida and Sahibabad in Uttar Pradesh, police said.

Police said that one Madhu alias Aarti alias Punjabian, a resident of Delhi's Gandhi Nagar, gave accused Rs one lakh for task and Madhu had some apprehension that deceased would capture her property.

According to R Sathiyasundaram, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Shahdara district, on March 14 around 10 AM, Fatima was shot dead by two person at Old Seelampur. "They fired three rounds at woman and fled away from spot. Police analysed CCTV footage of area and it was revealed that accused came on a bike.

police also fired and one bullet hit his leg, following which he was nabbed.

"During interrogation, it was revealed that Khan and Jeeshan are contract killers. On March 14 around 10 am, they killed Fatima at Old Seelampur in lieu of money offered by Madhu, who paid killers ₹one lakh, the DCP said.

"The killers were introduced to Madhu by one Rani alias Reshmi, who is the girlfriend of Khan. The deceased Fatima and Madhu earlier worked together and were known to each other," said the DCP. "Fatima had some links with criminals who have been lodged in jail.

Madhu received a call earlier in which the caller said that Fatima will grab her house in Gandhi Nagar area. She got scared and shared the information with Rani," said the DCP.

"Madhu asked for help from Rani who introduced her with Khan. She offered accused persons Rs one lakh for executing killing of Fatima," said DCP adding that the efforts are being made to nab Madhu.

"The accused bought illegal weapons used in crime from Meerut. Khan also disclosed that he along with his two associates also killed one Arvind six month back who was husband of his girlfriend Rani. Two pistols, 14 live cartridges, bike used in crime and shoes worn by accused persons at time of offence," said DCP.

PICTALK



Artists perform as giant puppets during Bonjour India's 'A Twist of Fate' street show, at the Lodhi Garden, in New Delhi, Sunday, March 27, 2022

PTI Photo

Delhi records high of 36.8 degrees Celsius, 5 notches above season's average



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday recorded a maximum temperature of 36.8 degrees Celsius, five notches above the season's average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The minimum temperature settled at 20.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above the season's average, it said.

Humidity levels oscillated between 46 per cent to 21 per cent. The national capital is expected to witness clear skies on Monday. The maximum and minimum temperatures will settle around 37 degrees Celsius and 20 degrees Celsius respectively, the weather department said. Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'moderate' category.

The city's 24-hour air quality index (AQI) read 195 at 4 pm, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

Application process for CUET to start on April 2

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The application process for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for undergraduate courses in central universities will commence from April 2, the National Testing Agency has announced.

In a public notice issued on Saturday, the agency announced that the CUET will provide a single window opportunity to students to seek admission in any of the Central Universities (CUs) across the country.

The CUET (UG)-2022 will be conducted in a Computer Based Test (CBT) Mode, it said. Aspirants should refer to the information bulletin for admission to undergraduate programmes of the desired Central Universities for

admission into undergraduate programmes, it said. The details of the programmes offered by the universities will be available on their respective portals.

The online application forms for undergraduate programmes will be open from April 2 and the link will be made available on the official website <https://cuet.samarth.ac.in/>. The application process will be on till April 30.

The NTA advised the candidates to go through the required eligibility of the desired university or universities for selecting the options from UG programmes being offered. The exam will have four parts with Section IA (13 Languages), Section IB (19 Languages), Section II (27 Domain Specific Subjects) and Section III (General Test).

"Choosing options from each section is not mandatory. Choices should match the requirements of the desired university.

A candidate can choose a maximum of any three languages from Section IA and Section IB taken together," the public notice said, adding that one of the languages chosen needs to be in lieu of domain specific subjects. Section II offers 27 subjects, out of which a candidate may choose a maximum of six subjects while Section III comprises a General Test.

All questions in various testing areas will be benchmarked at the level of Class XII only, it said. "Students having studied Class XII Board syllabus would be able to do well in CUET (UG)-2022," it said. UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh

Kumar had said last week that the syllabus will be modelled on the Class 12 NCERT syllabus. "If any University permits students of previous years of Class XII to take admission in the current year, such students would also be eligible to appear in CUET (UG)-2022 also," it said. If the subject to be studied in the Undergraduate course is not available in the list of 27 domain specific subject being offered, the candidate may choose the subject closest to his choice, it added.

METRO-DRILL

CISF holds multi-agency counter-terrorist mock drill at Delhi Metro station

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A multi-agency counter-terrorist mock drill was conducted by the CISF at Delhi Metro's Dilli Haat INA station on Sunday to check the preparedness and response of various agencies.

Under the mock drill which commenced around 12.30 am at the station on Delhi Metro's yellow line, a situation of IED (improvised explosive device) blast, indiscriminate firing on passengers, metro staff and CISF personnel as well as taking of hostage by terrorists was created, a Central Industrial Security Force spokesperson said. As the situation "warranted" response from various agencies, the CISF alerted them as per the national disaster management protocol, he said. More than 640 personnel drawn from the national disaster response force (NDRF), Delhi police SWAT (special weapons and tactics), Delhi Metro rail police, national security guard (NSG), Delhi disaster management authority, fire department, civil defence, traffic police, district police and health services reached the spot and conducted a joint operation with the CISF for about three hours.

The CISF is guarding 249 stations of the rapid rail metro network in the national capital region and it has deployed about 12,500 personnel to provide a counter-terrorist cover to the facility that is used by about 26-30 lakh passengers daily.

CTU's nationwide strike from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The joint forum of central trade unions, supported by the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), has called for a nationwide strike on March 28 and 29 against the Central Government's policies affecting workers, farmers, and people in general.

The bank unions are also protesting against the Government's plan to privatise public sector banks, as well as the Banking Laws Amendment Bill 2021. Apart from unions in the banking sector, trade unions in the insurance, railway, coal, steel, oil and postal sector are also expected to participate in the two-day-long strike.

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has said that banking services may get affected due to the strike. "We advise that while the bank has made necessary arrangements to ensure normal functioning in its branches and offices on the days of strike, it is likely that work in our bank may be impacted to a limited



extent, by the strike," SBI said in a regulatory filing.

The nationwide strike will, however, have limited impact in West Bengal as the Government issued an order saying all offices were to remain open and the employees would have to mandatorily report to duty.

"In view of calls given by different trade unions for a 48-hour nationwide strike/bandh on March 28 and 29, all state government offices will remain open and employees shall report for duty on those days. Leaves to be treated as 'dies-non' and no salary will be admissible," the order read. Haryana Government has issued orders for maintaining essential services to prevent

strikes.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Power on Sunday issued an advisory to all States Governments and electricity authorities asking them to ensure the normal functioning of the electricity supply during the strike of the employees. Also, manpower may be deployed at all critical sub-stations/power stations 24x7 to handle any emergency situation, it said. Power supply to those engaged in essential services such as hospitals, defence, and railways must be ensured, it added and suggested setting up of a 24x7 control room for information dissemination and handling any kind of contingency.

"The Centre of Indian

Trade Unions (CITU) has called for a nationwide strike with effect from 06:00 hrs of March 28 to 06:00 hrs of March 30, 2022. In the interest of the consumers of electricity, it is advised that all the power utilities shall take necessary measures to ensure round-the-clock functioning of the electricity grid and availability of all plants, transmission lines and substations", the Ministry of Power said, adding that all regional/state control room executives should be vigilant and on high alert.

The advisory has been issued to all states, CPSUs (Central Public Sector Undertakings), central electricity authority, national load dispatch centre and regional load dispatch centres. The ministry also suggested measures to be taken to ensure secure and reliable grid operations. Shutdown activities planned during March 28-29 may be rescheduled to suitable future dates to the extent possible, it said and asked all concerned officials to ensure close supervision of their regional network/control area.

Congress demands CBI probe into Amtek affairs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday accused the Centre of sheltering promoters of certain companies which filed for insolvency and demanded a CBI probe into the affairs of Amtek group.

Addressing a press conference at AICC headquarters, Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam said the Government must order a probe into the findings of Ernst and Young's audit report into the insolvency of Amtek Auto.

The report states that Amtek group has carried out preferential transactions, transactions defrauding creditors, and it siphoned off more than 70 per cent of its assets and funds through 129 shell companies, Nirupam said.

"The Amtek group of companies took a loan of Rs 25,000 crore from Indian banks. The company was eventually sold for Rs 1,500 crore. Its promot-

ers wrote off assets worth Rs 7,500 crore, and Rs 12,500 crore funds were siphoned off through shell companies," he said, citing EY report.

"The findings of the EY report are there in front of us but no action has been taken, that is our issue. Why the promoters of the company are being shielded? What connection do they have with the government?" he asked.

No one but the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) can probe this matter because it seems Ministry of Corporate Affairs is hand in glove", Serious Fraud Investigation Office is short staffed, and National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) also seems to be a part of this scam", Nirupam alleged.

The swindling by the promoters of Amtek must be probed, he demanded.

Citing official figures, Nirupam said that in the last five years, six lakh crore of banks' money has been lost.

Modi government must come out with a white paper on all such insolvency cases", Nirupam said, accusing the government of shielding promoters of several firms that have filed for insolvency recently.

Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera alleged that in the name of resolving the insolvency cases of the companies, institutional corruption is going on.

"Nirmala Sitharaman ji always says these companies took loans during the time of the UPA. But the loan defaults and the loss of money is going on under the Modi government," Nirupam said.

He also compared the



Amtek case with that of ABG Shipyard.

In February, the CBI booked ABG Shipyard Limited, its former chairman and managing director Rishi Kamlesh Agarwal, and others, for allegedly cheating a consortium of lenders led by the ICICI Bank in the biggest such bank fraud. Congress had questioned why the government took five years after the liquidation proceedings of ABG Shipyard to lodge an FIR in connection with the alleged duping of 28 banks.

Stress affects learning of movement: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is one more reason to not flirt with stress. A team of researchers has found that stress seems to have a negative effect on the learning of movements — at least in mice.

In their study at the University of Bonn, the researchers found that the neurons of rodents lose some of their contact with other neurons after stress. The animals also developed motor deficits. The results may be useful for earlier diagnosis and improved therapy of stress-related diseases such as depression. They also document that stress leaves traces in the brain — possibly permanent ones. The study is published in the journal Translational Psychiatry.

Chronically stressed people often show abnormalities in their motor skills, such as poorer fine motor control. However, how these symptoms occur has hardly been studied so far. "We investigated this question in our study," explained Prof. Dr. Valentin Stein from the Institute of Physiology II at the University of Bonn.

The researchers used mice as experimental animals, some of which they exposed to a

stressful situation for a few days. Meanwhile, they used a special microscopy method to take pictures of the rodents' brains. They focused on parts of the cerebral cortex responsible for motor control and learning new movements.

"With our method, it is possible to observe one and the same neuron at different points in time," says Dr. Anne-Kathrin Gellner, a physician at the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at Bonn University Hospital. "We can therefore see whether and how it changes as a result of stress."

In fact, the researchers came across a conspicuous feature: after the stressful situation, the neurons studied lost some of their synapses — these are the contacts to other nerve cells. During learning processes, new synapses are usually formed or existing ones are strengthened. Instead, the stressed rodents lost up to 15 percent of their contacts.

At the same time, the animals developed motor learning deficits. For example, they had to try to grasp a food pellet with one paw and transport it into their mouths. In the wild, mice use both paws to do this, so they had to relearn this skill. The non-stressed control

group achieved a success rate of 30 percent after five days. The stressed rodents, however, only managed to take the food in every tenth attempt.

Mice vary in their sensitivity to stress. Some of them hardly develop any abnormalities after a few days of stress — they are considered resilient. Surprisingly, these robust animals had similar difficulties as their more sensitive peers in learning to grasp with one hand. "It is, therefore, possible that motor tests are very suitable for detecting stress-related disorders such as depression before other symptoms become apparent," said Prof. Valentin Stein.

The research group also examined the fluid that washes around the brain and spinal cord. They found certain proteins that can normally be detected there in neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. "We, therefore, believe that stress-related psychiatric diseases such as depression are also associated with the degradation of neurons," said Dr. Gellner. "Accordingly, long-term stress — to which children are increasingly exposed — can potentially cause serious damage to the brain."

J&K delimitation panel to hold public sittings

On April 4 and 5 to discuss suggestions/objections received by stakeholders before finalising redrawing of the boundaries

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

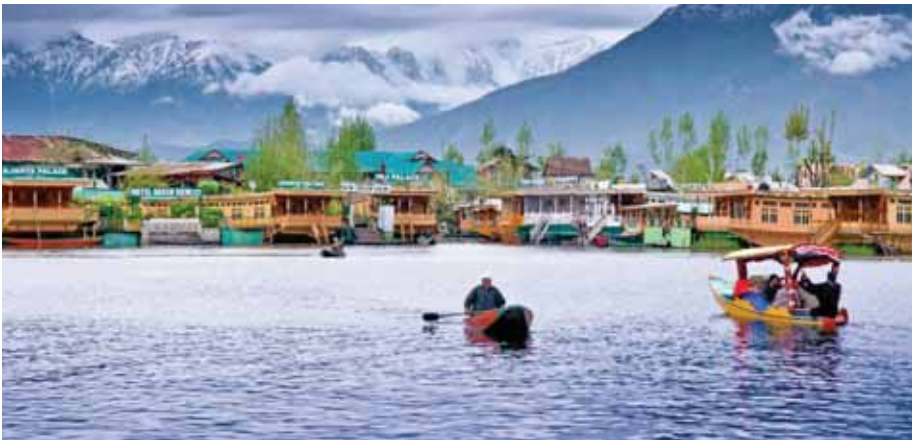
As 600-700 representations have been filed on the draft proposal of delimitation of the Jammu and Kashmir after putting the report in the public domain on March 14, the Delimitation Commission will hold public sittings at Jammu and Srinagar on April 4 and 5 to discuss the suggestions/objections received by the stakeholders before finalising the redrawing of the boundaries of Assemblies and Parliament.

Top sources said that 600-700 representations have been filed before the Commission by political parties, organizations, and individuals after putting the report in the public domain on March 14. "The Commission will settle claims and objections either by accepting or rejecting the suggestions.

The claims which are accepted by the Panel will reflect in the final report which it will be submitting on or before May 6, the extended timeline for finalizing recommendations," sources added. The Commission is likely to hold public sittings on Monday and Tuesday on the draft proposal.

Sources said that the Commission will be meeting people/ delegations in Jammu province on April 4 at the Convention Centre where delegations from Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, Ramban, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Poonch, Reasi, Samba and Jammu have been given time for an appointment. While the delegations and individuals of Kashmir districts -Srinagar, Budgam, Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama, Shopian, Ganderbal, Bandipore, Kupwara and Baramulla will meet the Commission at SKICC Srinagar on April 5. The Commission had sought suggestions and objections from people till March 21.

In their 18-page dissent note of the National Conference Jammu Kashmir given by the Associate Members stated that the party doesn't agree with recommendations of the Commission and questioned very constitution of the Panel pending



Supreme Court verdict on Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act.

On the other hand, the Congress has demanded renaming of Jammu East Assembly seat as Temple City, Bahu as Bawe Wali Mata constituency and Thanna Mandi as Shahdara Sharief. The party said the people were expecting one additional Lok Sabha seat but the Panel has committed a mistake by making a Lok Sabha constituency by dividing two divisions (Anantnag-Poonch Parliamentary seat).

Voicing concern over gap in voters in Assembly constituencies, the Congress pointed out that some seats are

based on 30,000 and 50,000 votes while others have close to 2 lakh votes. It cited the names of Gurez which was based on 30,000 votes, Paddar which has 51,000 electorates, Dooru which comprised 1.92 lakh voters and Surankote having 1.82 lakh votes.

BSP president Som Raj Majotra has submitted constituency wise suggestions to the Delimitation Commission. The suggestions pertained to Kathua South, Kathua North, Ramgarh, Samba, Nagrota, Raipur Domana, RS Pura-Jammu South and Akhnoor constituencies

Asserting that the last Delimitation Commission had

taken seven years to submit a report, sources said the existing Panel will be completing its task within two years and two months despite COVID pandemic due to which it couldn't do much work in first year. Headed by Justice (Retired) Ranjana Prakash Desai and comprising Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra and State Election Commissioner (SEC) KK Sharma, the Commission was set up on March 6, 2020 with one-year term which was extended by another year. While the term was due to expire on March 6, 2022, it was granted two months extension till May 6 this year.

PM congratulates 'Ahimsa Yatra Sampannata Samaroh Karyakram'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on Sunday addressed the 'Ahimsa Yatra Sampannata Samaroh Karyakram' of 'Shwetambar Terapanth' and complimented them for completing 18,000-kilometer 'padayatra' in three countries.

The Prime Minister recalled the centuries old tradition of Indian saints that "emphasizes constant movement."

He specially noted that the 'Shwetambar Terapanth' has made abdication of lethargy into a spiritual pledge.

Addressing virtually Modi complimented Acharya Mahashraman for completing 18,000-kilometer 'padayatra' in three countries and praised its theme — harmony, morality, and deaddiction.

The Prime Minister lauded the Acharya for expanding

the tradition of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam' and propagating the mantra of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' as a spiritual pledge.

The Prime Minister also recalled his long association with the Shwetambara Terapanth and remembered his earlier statement that "ye Tera panth hain, ye Mera panth hain" (This Terapanth is My path).

Modi underlined the importance of the 'padayatra' that was flagged off from the Red Fort in 2014 and noted the coincidence that he himself started his new journey as Prime Minister of India in the same year.

He said real self-realization is possible only in the absence of any kind of addiction. Freedom from addiction leads to the merging of self with the universe and welfare of all is realized, said Modi.

India to operate 3,200 flights weekly during summer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 3,200 flights will be operated from India per week during this year's summer schedule which commenced from Sunday. According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), 60 foreign airlines of 40 countries except China have been given the approval to operate 1783 departures per week to/from India while 1466 flights per week have been approved to 43 destinations in 27 countries for Indian carriers.

The ban on international scheduled flights was lifted on Saturday after more than two years. With the reopening of scheduled international flights, passengers will find airfares to certain flights drop and more options available to route their journeys.

The DGCA said that the Summer Schedule 2022 is effective from March 27, 2022,

till October 29, 2022. A "scheduled" international air service is a series of flights that are operated by airlines as per the published timetable. However, there are a few new airlines which include India Salam Air, Air Arabia Abu Dhabi, Qantas, and American airlines, to begin airline operations with India.

As per the approved schedule, IndiGo will operate 505 departures per week, followed by Air India at 361, Air India Express 340, Spicejet at 130, GoAir (GoFirst now) at 74 and Vistara at 56.

The Indian carriers have been approved to operate to UAE, Kuwait, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Qatar, Maldives, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Turkey, Malaysia, UK, France, Kenya, Germany, US, Canada, Myanmar, Australia, Israel, Bahrain, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Russia.

In a statement, IndiGo said that it will resume scheduled international flights on 150 plus routes in a phased manner during the next month. According to a statement from the airline, scheduled operations to destinations in Thailand have already commenced from March 27. The airline to operate international flights from Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Kozhikode, Kochi, Chandigarh, Tiruchirappalli, Thiruvananthapuram, and Mangaluru.

"The international destinations include Dammam, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Jeddah, Riyadh, Doha, Bangkok, Phuket, Singapore, Colombo, Dubai, Kathmandu, Maldives, and Dhaka," it said. Scheduled operations on more than 150 routes will be restarted in a phased manner through

the month of April, it noted.

In addition to these flights, IndiGo has also announced the commencement of bookings for flights to Muscat and Kuala Lumpur starting operations in May 2022 and, to Istanbul in June 2022.

Out of the approved schedule, Gulf-based carriers like Emirates will operate 170 departures per week, followed by Oman Air at 115, Air Arabia at 110, Qatar Airways at 99, Gulf Air at 82, Etihad Airways at 80, Saudi Arabian Airlines at 63 and Kuwait Airways at 56.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka Airlines will operate 128 departures per week, Singapore Airlines at 65, British Airways at 49, Thai Airways at 36, Lufthansa German at 32, Malaysia Airlines at 30, Japan Air Lines at 22, Air France at 20, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines at 18 and Aeroflot Russian Airlines at 6.

Climate change to come as boon for Lantana Camara weed

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change will come as a boon to the alien invasive species of Lantana Camara, a weed that is great in adapting as it can tolerate high temperatures and moisture. The species which came as an ornamental plant in India in the early 1800s now threatens about 300,000 sq. km of Indian forests.

With calculations for present (2020) and future (2050), the study — with area pertaining to Jharkhand — was aimed to understand the potential risk zones prone to the invasion of the perennial ornamental plant, the Lantana Camara, known as Raimunia in Hindi.

Results showed the presence of Camara invasion in more than 13 percent of the geographical area of Jharkhand,

Chotanagpur plateau, which may expand up to 20-26 percent by 2050 depending upon emission scenarios as characterized by the four different temperature rise scenarios in future," the study 'Modelling the potential risk zone of Lantana Camara invasion and response to climate change in eastern India' said. The study is published recently in the journal Ecological Processes.

The observation should ring alarm bell among the policymakers as yet another study "Expanding niche and degrading forests: Key to the successful global invasion of Lantana camara (sensu lato)" published in Global Ecology and Conservation reported that lantana occupies 154,000 sq.km forests (more than 40 percent by area) in India's tiger range. Among forests, Shivalik Hills in



the North, fragmented deciduous forests of Central India, and Southern western Ghats are worst hit by its invasion.

The present study in Jharkhand region has been conducted by a team of Sharad Tiwari, S N Mishra, Basant Kumar, S N Vaidya, Brojo Gopal Ghosh, SK Mujibar Rahaman, Masjuda Khatun and Sanjoy Garai from Institute of Forest Productivity, Lalgutwa, Ranchi; Dharmendra

Kumar from Department of IT, Jharkhand Government and Amit Kumar from the Department of Geoinformatics, Central University of Jharkhand.

Lantana Camara of the Verbenaceae family has more than 600 varieties and is a native terrestrial weed of South and Central American origin, which is considered among the top 10 worst invasive species by the IUCN.

The study noted that the weed distribution has adversely impacted the population stratification, regeneration, and anticipated future composition of tree communities in tropical dry deciduous forests of India. "The species, due to its wide eco-tolerance has dominated varied landscapes including disturbed areas, along streams, open and disturbed forests, and riparian vegetation," it said.

"Importantly, the temperature seasonality was observed as the most contributing factor for the distribution of L. Camara for current and future scenarios across all possible climate scenarios depending on temperature rise. Suitable habitat for L. Camara mostly occurred under natural vegetation (66.05 -percent of critical risk zones (CRZ) and 60.71

per cent of high-risk zones (HRZ)) and agriculture landscape (29.51 per cent of CRZ and 34.48 percent of HRZ).

It also found the inability of L. Camara to penetrate through the intact native virgin forests, in contrast to its abundant distribution along with agricultural land and in open and disturbed forest areas including wide distribution in Betla National Park.

The researchers have now recommended prioritisation of sensitive natural sites at the verge of greater invasion threat and adoption of native tree and grass-based intervention models to address invasion issues; support richer biodiversity and environmental amelioration and outreach programs to educate people with the harmful effects of L. camara and other similar invasive species.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to develop sophisticated missiles within the country, the Indian scientists on Sunday successfully conducted two tests of the Army version of the medium-range surface to air missile (MRSAM).

The missile can destroy airborne hostile targets like fighter jets, subsonic and supersonic missiles and rockets.

Giving details of the tests, officials said the successful launches were carried out at 10.30 am by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

With a strike range of nearly 100 km, the 4.5-meter long supersonic quick reaction missile weighs around 2.7 ton and can carry a payload of 60 kg.

Each MRSAM unit comprises one command and control system, multi-functional surveillance tracking radar, threat alert radar, mobile launcher, combat management system, mobile power and radar power systems apart from the missile.

The air version of the MRSAM system has already been handed over to IAF. The missile is designed to provide point and area air defence for ground assets against a wide range of threats. Travelling at a speed of Mach 2, it can achieve high degrees of maneuverability at the terminal phase.

The latest flight tests were carried out as part of the live firing trials against high-speed aerial targets. The missiles

intercepted the aerial targets and destroyed them completely, registering direct hits at both the ranges. The first launch was to intercept a medium altitude long range target and second launch was for proving the capability of a low altitude short range target, officials said.

This MRSAM version is a Surface-to-Air Missile developed jointly by the DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Israel for use by the Indian Army.

The MRSAM Army weapon system comprises multi-function radar, mobile launcher system and other vehicles. The flight tests were carried out with the weapon system in deliverable configuration.

The performance of the weapon system was validated through the flight data captured by range instruments like radars, electro-optical tracking systems and telemetry deployed by ITR, Chandipur. The flight tests were carried out in the presence of senior officials from the DRDO and the Indian Army.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO, Indian Army and the Industry for the successful flight tests of MRSAM-Army. He said, both the successful tests establish the capability of the weapon system in intercepting targets at critical ranges.

The DRDO chief G Satheesh Reddy complimented the teams involved in the successful flight trial of the Army version of MRSAM and said these tests are the major milestones for an 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

BIRBHUM PROBE

Don't use CBI as political tool, Mamata warns BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday warned the Opposition parties particularly the BJP against manipulating the CBI investigation into the Birbhum killings saying her Government would extend all cooperation to the Central agency but her party would descend on the streets if the investigators were found to be politically motivated.

"CBI's success rate in investigating cases is known to everyone. It has failed to find out the Nobel medallion of Rabindranath Tagore, it has failed to ensure justice in Nandigram and Netai killings ... still we have no problem if they can find out the real culprits in the Rampurhat case. But I want to warn the Opposition parties including the BJP that they should refrain from using the CBI to use it as

a political weapon in this case or otherwise we will be start a massive movement," Banerjee told a gathering in Siliguri.

The Chief Minister on Sunday started a five-day tour of North Bengal.

Ten people including six women and two children were last week hacked and then burnt to death when rival factions of the ruling Trinamool Congress mounted a retaliatory attack on some families in Bagtui village in Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum district.

The attack came within hours of the murder of Bhadu Sheikh also a TMC pranchay-at deputy pradhan.

Saying that the opposition BJP, Left and Congress were hatching a big conspiracy to stall the Deucha Pachami coal mining project in Birbhum that would generate lakhs of jobs, Banerjee said "the opposition is trying to disturb the

project by hatching conspiracies like the one at Rampurhat." Deucha Pachami coal mines reported to be Asia's second largest proposed colliery has been facing obstacles from local tribal population who are reluctant to leave their lands.

Banerjee's diatribe came even as sources said that prime accused Sheikh Anarul Hussein had told the CBI sleuths that he had spoken to a "topmost" leader of his party in Birbhum about how some people had set houses on fire. To this the said leader had asked him to ignore the incident and let some houses burn.

Meanwhile, sources said that the CBI had recovered weapons like sickles and spuds that could have been used to hack the victims. The central agency had started a temporary camp at Rampurhat where they have been interrogating the accused and the witnesses.

43-day annual Amarnath yatra in J&K to begin on June 30

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The 43-day holy Amarnath pilgrimage will commence on June 30 with all Covid protocols in place and will culminate, as per the tradition, on the day of Raksha Bandhan, August 11, 2022.

The online registration for Amarnathji Yatra will start from April 11. The decision was taken in the 41st Board meeting chaired by LG Manoj Sinha at the Raj Bhavan on Sunday.

Amarnath Shrine board has also decided that the Yatra would commence simultaneously from both the routes — the Pahalgam track in Anantnag district and Baltal in Ganderbal district. The board has also decided to put in place a daily route-wise pilgrims ceiling to 10,000 excluding Yatri's who would travel by helicopters. The board has also decided to extend the free-of-cost battery car service for Yatri's at 2.75 Km-long Baltal to Domel stretch. The government is also planning to introduce a RFID system for pilgrims to track their movement en-route to ensure their well-being.

For those who cannot per-



form pilgrimage the board has decided to organise live telecasts of morning and evening Aarti (Prayers) for devotees across the globe. 'Amarnathji Yatra' App has been made available on the Google play store to get real time information about the Yatra, weather and for availing several services online.

The Lt Governor during the meeting also directed for sending special invites to Akhada Parishads, Acharya Parishads for facilitation of Sadhu and Sant Samaj.

During the Board meeting, the Lt Governor, Members of the Board- Swami Avdheshanand Giri Ji Maharaj; D. C. Raina, Kailash Mehra Sadhu; K. N. Rai; K.N. Shrivastava; Pitambar Lal Gupta; Dr. Shailesh Raina; Prof. Vishwamurti Shastri and the

senior officers of UT administration also had in-depth discussions on various issues on the upcoming Yatra.

The Lt Governor called on the officials to be proactive and ensure elaborate arrangements for conducting smooth Yatra as a large number of devotees are expected to arrive to pay their obeisance at the Holy Cave this year. He also said

He laid special emphasis on providing best-in-class health facilities to all the visiting devotees and service providers, strengthening telecommunication channels for Yatri's, besides use of latest technological measures to achieve optimal synergy between the different government departments and agencies.

Nitishwar Kumar, CEO,

SASB gave a brief overview of the route map of the holy Shrine and various services being made available by the SASB en route and at the holy Cave.

It was informed that key preparations have been made for this year's Yatra. With increased capacity for accommodation, new Yatri Niwas Bhawans, augmented health facilities, upgraded tracks, telecommunication facilities, Heli Services, SASB App, year-long Insurance for Ponywaalas, many unique initiatives have been taken for the benefit of Yatri's and service providers. Rahul Singh, Addl. CEO, SASB briefed the meeting about the activities and development works being carried out in connection with the annual Yatra, besides presenting Agenda items before the Board.

Several suggestions and inputs were presented by the members of SASB which included sustained media campaign via social media, mobile app and youtube videos for facilitating people with all the information regarding the Yatra viz-a viz: how to avail yatra services, do's and don'ts, mandatory health checkups.

The Lt Governor said that all the suggestions made by the

board members will be acted upon by the concerned officers of UT administration and SASB. He further directed the officers to complete all the ongoing infrastructure upgradation works by May end.

The Lt Governor stressed on ensuring world-class sanitation arrangement on the track and in Yatra camps. He said that all the utilities on the track routes should be ready and made functional well before the commencement of yatra.

The Lt Governor also called for wide publicity of the information regarding Shri Amarnathji Yatra-2022. He further directed the officials to explore the possibility of involving additional public and private Banks and their branches for providing yatra permits.

The Lt Governor also suggested engaging research fellows for promoting and generating authentic literature and research books with regard to Shri Amarnathji Shrine.

Dilbag Singh, DGP briefed the Board about the detailed security arrangement plan for the yatra. He said that besides mountain rescue teams, JKP will also install camps of health and medical care for the yatri's.

J&K cop, brother killed in Budgam terror attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The central Kashmir district of Budgam on Sunday witnessed huge assembly of mourners outside the residence of Special police officer Ishfaq Ahmad Dar, killed in the terror attack along with his younger brother.

The young siblings aged 24 and 23 were targeted by the 'unidentified' terrorists inside their house late Saturday evening. According to a police spokesman Ishfaq Ahmad attained martyrdom in the indiscriminate firing while his brother Umer succumbed to his fatal injuries early Sunday morning.

The duo were laid to rest in their native Chatabugh village of Budgam. According to eyewitness reports, thousands of villagers from nearby villages attended the funeral procession.

Elderly women were seen offering floral tributes during the funeral procession



while close relatives wept inconsolably.

Earlier, senior police and civil officers also attended a wreath laying ceremony at district police lines in Budgam before dispatching mortal remains of SPO to his native village. IGP Kashmir range Vijay Kumar also visited the residence of the SPO and paid condolences to the bereaved family. In the recent days, Budgam has witnessed three incidents of targeted killings while members of the Panchayati Raj institutions continue to remain on the radar of the terrorist outfits.

Industrial strike: Attendance must, says Bengal Govt to staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Government had issued a notice cancelling all the leaves of the State Government employees and directing them to mandatorily attend office on March 28 and 29 the two days when the Left trade unions have called an all-India industrial strike.

The leaves taken if any without justification would be considered as "dies non" leading to deduction of salary and breakage in service officials said.

It says "in view of a call given by different trade unions and others for a 48-hour nationwide strike on 28th and 29th March, 2022, it has been decided that all state government offices shall remain open and all the employees shall report for duty on those days.

It has been decided that no casual leave or any other leave for absence

either in the first half or in the second half or for the whole day shall be granted to any employee on the above-mentioned dates."

It further asked "all Heads of Offices/Controlling Authorities concerned" to "issue Show-Cause notice to the employee(s) concerned, who will remain absent on March 28, 2022 and March 29, 2022 or on any of these 2 (two) dates, asking him/her to explain why action would not be taken against him/her for such unauthorised absence.

On receipt of satisfactory reply, leave due and admissible may be granted on production of documentary evidence on the grounds mentioned above."

The strike has been called by a number of Left and Congress trade unions in protest against the alleged anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national policies" of the central Government.

No 'hijab' during board exam: K'taka Minister

Bagalkote (Karnataka): Karnataka Primary and Secondary Education Minister B C Nagesh on Sunday said wearing of hijab (head scarf) would not be allowed during the 10th standard examination of the State board. The exam starts from Monday and ends on April 11.

More than 8.76 lakh students are appearing for the exam in over 40,000 halls in 3,440 centres across the State. "After the High Court order, we've not allowed that (hijab). We've given clarification that they (students with hijab) can come into the campus wearing the hijab but they cannot put it on in the classroom. The same condition will apply during the exams," Nagesh told reporters here.

He said there would not be re-examination for those who skip the exam. Replying to a query, he said lawyers of the Supreme Court have argued for hijab before the Full Bench of the High Court, after which the verdict was delivered. The petitioners had challenged the government notification which banned usage of any cloth that could disturb peace, harmony and public order, and contended that wearing of hijab was a fundamental right, the Minister said.

He added that the petitioners had also



questioned the powers given to the college development committee but the High Court dismissed them. It held that those who want to attend college have to abide by the uniform dress code, the Minister said. He said the rule must be strictly followed.

"According to the Karnataka Education Act and the Rules, religious sentiments should not be part of the uniform dress rule. The same notification, the HC has upheld. Tomorrow, there is no scope of violation of the dress code," Nagesh said.

He said arrangements have been made to ensure that the exam takes place smoothly. Meanwhile in Hubballi, over 120 km from here, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai appealed to the students to write the exam without fear.

PTI

Hathras rape: Voice sample of Congress leader Sheoraj taken

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH/HATHRAS

In the Hathras rape incident, the difficulties of Congress leader Sheoraj's Jeevan did not diminish. The process of voice matching has been done against him in the cases related to making provocative statements lodged against him in Gandhipark and Chandpa police stations of Hathras.

Both these cases are being investigated by the Bareilly unit of STF and the investigator called Sheoraj Jeevan to Lucknow and got sampling done in the Forensic Science Laboratory for voice matching. If there is a voice match in the sampling, then Sheoraj Jeevan can be arrested.

It may be recalled that

Hathras was in the headlines not only in the country but around the world in September-2020.

There on 14 September 2020, a 19-year-old girl from the neglected section of the society was gang raped. Four upper caste youths allegedly carried out this heinous act and fled leaving her covered in blood in the field. The girl had serious injuries. After the incident, she was first treated at a hospital in Aligarh. Then when the condition started getting serious, she was taken to Delhi.

There, about 11 days after the incident, she died. Late in the evening the same day, the body was taken to her village. There the Uttar Pradesh Police and the administration forcibly cremated the body of the victim girl at 3.30 am.



Children play while swimming in the Hooghly river, on a hot summer day, in Nadia on Sunday

PTI

'87% Mins in Yogi Govt crorepatis'

Lucknow: As many as 87 per cent Ministers are crorepatis; 49 per cent have criminal cases against them and another 44 per cent have serious criminal cases against them as per the data compiled by the UP Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). In the Yogi Adityanath Government 2.0 just five or 11 per cent women are Ministers, according to an analysis released by the ADR on Saturday.

The two organisations analysed the self-sworn affidavits of 45 out of 53 Ministers, including Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, from the data filed by the candidates in their respective nomination papers for 2022 UP Assembly elections.

Giving out details, the analysis says 22 Ministers (49 per cent) have declared crimi-

nal cases against themselves while 20 Ministers (44 per cent) have declared serious criminal cases against them. Out of the 45 Ministers analysed, 39 (87 per cent) are crorepatis with average assets worth ₹ 9 crore.

The minister with the highest declared assets is Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh from Tiloi constituency with assets worth ₹ 58.07 crore while the one with lowest declared total assets is Dharamveer Singh, a member of Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, with assets worth ₹ 42.91 lakh.

A total of 27 Ministers have declared liabilities out of which the minister with the highest liabilities is Rakesh Sachan of Bhognipur constituency with ₹8.17 crore of liabilities.

PNS

Akhilesh reiterates demand for caste-based census

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has demanded caste-based census for enumerating the numerical strength of each caste group in the state.

The SP chief charged that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party Government has so far ignored the demand for the caste-based census to deny the Other Backward Classes their rightful share in the power structure.

Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday met representatives of several bodies of OBCs, including Tailik Sahu Rathore Samaj, and several others.

He said the SP had consistently raised the demand for caste-based census and all social groups of OBCs trusted only the SP as this party could alone fulfill their aspirations.

Ahead of the recently concluded UP assembly election, Akhilesh Yadav had promised to go in for caste-based census in UP if voted to power. He had alleged that the BJP-led Central government was shy of conducting it, fearing that the caste census in the country would lead to the backward class peo-



ple demanding their rights and due respect.

Interestingly, during the seven phases of the UP Assembly elections, Akhilesh Yadav did not mention this issue. The SP chief had conducted a state-wide election campaign from November 2021 to the end of February this year.

Addressing the delegates at the SP state office here on Sunday, Akhilesh Yadav said, "The BJP Government at the Centre does not want to conduct caste census as it knows that backwards will demand their right and due respect after it. This is the biggest demand of backwards and Dalits,"

Promising to launch a sustained campaign demanding caste-based census, Akhilesh Yadav said the SP would ensure that the backwards got their rights.

He alleged that the BJP was conspiring to abolish reservations for Scheduled Castes and OBCs in government jobs and educational institutions.

Alleging that the BJP intended to monopolise power both at the Centre and the State, Akhilesh Yadav said, "The wealth of the nation has now been centralised in a few hands and a parallel economy is flourishing under the BJP rule."

Maya makes nephew Anand BSP national coordinator

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party national president Mayawati, on Sunday, appointed three chief coordinators and dissolved the entire executive body of the party in Uttar Pradesh. She also gave a big responsibility to her nephew Akash Anand, making him the national coordinator of the BSP.

Reviewing the reasons for the humiliating defeat of the party here on Sunday, Mayawati dissolved the entire executive body of the Uttar Pradesh unit except for removing the state president and district presidents.

She appointed three chief coordinators for Uttar Pradesh. In a statement, Mayawati said the party had decided to retain its state president Bhim Rajbhar and had appointed three state coordinators — former Meerut MP Munkad Ali, former Azamgarh MLC Vijay Pratap and Rajkumar Gautam of

Bulandshahr.

The State coordinators will visit all 18 divisions in the state to examine the party's influence in those regions and give Mayawati their feedback, the statement said.

The BSP chief said her objective was to strengthen the party and for this, she had made Akash Anand, her nephew, the party's national coordinator.

Along with this, she also made former leader of the BSP Legislature Party, Shah Alam alias Guddu Jamali, the BSP candidate in the Azamgarh Lok Sabha by-election.

Guddu Jamali was the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimin candidate from Mubarakpur in Azamgarh in the assembly elections and was the only AIMIM candidate who did not lose his security and was runner-up with Samajwadi Party winning the seat.

Jamali, a BSP MLA between 2017 and 2022, also held the posi-

tion of its legislature party leader in the last Uttar Pradesh Assembly but was sacked shortly before polls. He returned to BSP recently.

In the meeting, Mayawati reviewed the election results and said that all the workers should get involved whole heartedly in further preparations. She also said that those working in the organisation would be promoted and alerted the inactive workers.

Mayawati also called 402 party candidates who lost the election in the meeting to review the defeat. Sector in-charge, district president, BAMCEF and brotherhood committee convener were also present in the meeting at the BSP state office held under the chairmanship of Mayawati.

The strategy for the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 was also decided in the meeting. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BSP fought in alliance with the SP and won 10 seats.

On March 11, Mayawati had admitted that her party's rout in the Uttar Pradesh assembly election was a "lesson". However, the BSP supremo had asked party workers to not feel discouraged, promising to make a comeback.


"We should learn from it, introspect, and carry forward our party movement, and come back to power," Mayawati had said.

"Before 2017, Bharatiya Janata Party did not have a good stake in Uttar Pradesh. Likewise, today, Congress is also undergoing the same phase as BJP... UP election result is a lesson for us to continue putting in efforts," she said.

In the 2022 UP Assembly elections, the BSP could win only one seat out of 403 assembly seats in the state. After this humiliating performance, political pundits say that the BSP is almost over. A large part of the BSP vote bank has also shifted to BJP and other parties.


FIRST COLUMN

THE MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Civil society is supposed to be run by an executive which implements the regulations; the legislature which drafts the regulations and the judiciary which adjudicates in matters of controversy. The structural versions of the three can vary from one form of governance to another or from one entity to another. In case of kingship it is one form of executive; in case of the presidential form of governance, it is another form of executive; in case of parliamentary form of governance, it is yet another form of executive. In course of time, in the evolution of French history, there came the recognition that beyond the three forms of institutions of executive, legislature and judiciary there was a need to recognise a fourth set. This came to be termed as the fourth estate. It was the press. It meant that public opinion if expressed and channelised in a sufficiently identified form



it could be an impact making stream. Gradually, this so-called fourth estate acquired power enough to receive sufficient attention from the executive, the legislature and judiciary. Its power gradually increased as the electronic media became popular than print. The growing influence of digitalisation also extended the range and influence of the electronic media. Today, the power of the electronic media is immense. Like all situations of power manipulation, it has also become a sought-after part of the scene. The slant of news can be manipulated to create the necessary impact on governance. The manipulation takes the slant of the political orientation and at times of the political institutions. Awareness of this is necessary for the strengthening of a responsible and healthy governance system. An interesting case in point is the media representation of the movie, The Kashmir Files. It would be easy to recognise that the reported treatment, experiences and fate of many Hindus in the Kashmir valley, through parts of the 1990s, was most unfortunate, and perhaps verged on the barbaric. The skill of the so-called left, which has a track record of whipping up mass sentiments in matters big and small, subject to their political convenience, is widely recognised. They have reaped the harvest of such interventions from a period going back, at least, to the Vietnam war. The so-called rightists have also attempted to do the same, but often their reach, methodology and impact have been less powerful than that of the leftists. The result is there for all to see. The purpose of elaborating the above is to show how the selection of the content, the language of the presentation and the extent of repetition is central to the extent of impact the effort makes. The issue is of matching the method with the nature of the audience being targeted. Today, the media has various incarnations, even within the print and the electronics media. In print, the language becomes critical. The English print goes a distance and so does what is printed in Indian languages. The segmentation of the English-reading public or the public which reads one or the other of Indian languages could be significant. Each constituency has to be handled in a different manner and each constituency has its own political value. In the electronic medium, the social media has acquired progressively a more impactful position. At times entire movements have been influenced. The skill formation in manipulating this as of now is insufficiently institutionalised. It appears to be handled by acts of association and personal contact. This is an understandable phase in any stream of specialisation. Schools of journalism need to develop a more strengthened research wing to look into these issues.

(The writer is a management consultant. The views expressed are personal.)

Lesson for China lurks in the Ukraine affair?



NISHTHA KAUSHIKI

As Beijing monitored the BRI progress as an essential element for its economic expansion, Russia’s political elite worked on the concept of Greater Eurasia



IN EITHER CASE, CHINA CAN SOON FIND ITSELF IN A FINANCIAL OVERSTRETCH. IN CASE OF EVOLVING GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES, BEIJING HAS TO RELY ON ITS OCEANIC ROUTE, WHICH IS LONGER, MORE EXPENSIVE, AND DOMINATED BY ITS MALACCA DILEMMA. THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONUNDRUM ENHANCES THE GEOPOLITICS AROUND THE TRANS-SHIPMENT CONTAINER HUBS

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




Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company Ltd (CNODC) acquired a 10 per cent stake under the BRI framework in the Arctic LNG 2 project, increasing its economic entanglement, much to the liking of Putin. Russia well understands the importance of its land route. In 2021, container traffic transported between Europe and China via Russia increased by 47 per cent, and various logistical agencies estimated that the cargo shipment via the Trans-Siberian corridor could have reached a million TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units) in 2023 had the current crisis been not there. With the sanctions, the current route via Russia, Belarus, and Poland is blocked for the next few years, and it becomes pertinent for China to switch over to some other options for its trade. China was slightly cautious as it did not want to put all its eggs in one basket; the Central Asia-West Asia corridor is a glaring example. China also made strategic inroads in Turkey through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway route that transports cargo from Asia to Europe in just 15 days and bypasses Russia. This is the current first option that Beijing now has. The Middle or the Trans-Caucasus transport corridor via Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is now critical to China given the sanctions on Russian Railways. One of the associated problems with it is the infrastructural and logistical limitations. Even half of the cargo load the Trans-Siberian route handles can choke this route, and hence the problem would persist. Currently, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia use the Iğdır-Dilucu-Nakhchivan via Kars Railway Project that was encouraged by Russia, European Council and NATO under the International North-South Corridor (INSTC) as it was a win-win situation that brought not only regional peace but also saved transit costs for all. Before the outbreak of the crisis, Turkey further proposed the extension route to connect it to the Southern Corridor through BRI funding, i.e., Iran and Pakistan. And this is the second option that China has. Before reaching Turkey for further transportation, it would involve transit through Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. One of the main infrastructural bottlenecks is the differences in the rail spacing or gauge of the railway tracks. At the moment, the intersecting point of the BTK railway route is in Ahilkelek, Georgia. The new option geographically bypasses Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, resulting in a possible clash of interests. Geopolitical issues seem to come into the Chinese way to connect the Middle and the South corridors. The pertinent question is where Chinese-funded BRI roads lead if the US decides to act tough on both Iran and Pakistan or either of them? Already China has committed \$400 billion and \$62 billion, respectively, for Iran and Pakistan. If China continues to support Russia over the Ukrainian issue, it could perhaps be inviting financial countermeasures for itself. On the other hand, given the fragile economic situation and the current political discontent, any turmoil in Pakistan could result in its blacklisting in the FATF having financial implications. Also, the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), apart from Islamabad strained relations with Iran over issues such as the treatment of Hazara Shias in Pakistan, can create potential risks for Chinese investments. In case the US decides to revive the Iran nuclear deal just for the time being but does not compromise on the politically most sensitive issue, i.e., lifting terrorism sanctions on Revolutionary Guards, the deal cannot survive for long. If China pursues its BRI projects during this phase, it might soon find itself in the midst of the breakdown of the Iran nuclear deal. It will be tough for Beijing to make Pakistan and Iran financially stable besides taking care of its finances and other OBOR Projects. The US would not go soft on Russia, Iran, and Pakistan simultaneously. Then there is the Taliban factor in Afghanistan which can ruin its connectivity dreams by either sabotaging it or blackmailing Beijing for recognition, grants and financial assistance. In either case, China can soon find itself in a financial overstretch. In case of evolving geopolitical uncertainties, Beijing has to rely on its Oceanic route, which is longer, more expensive, and dominated by its Malacca Dilemma. The current geopolitical conundrum enhances the geopolitics around the transshipment container hubs while having implications that will reshape the South Asian security architecture. At the juncture, one can recall Putins words- “Anyone who doesn’t regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who wants it restored has no brains”.

The pitfalls of industry-academics collaboration

While recruiting people from the industry, UGC should ensure that their influence doesn’t dilute the rigorous academic environment on campuses

The recent proposal from the UGC chairman to induct members from the industry as professors and associate professors, without looking at their qualification, has met with scepticism from the academic community.


Before going into the merits and demerits of this proposal, let's explore the current education scenario in our tertiary universities and colleges. One of its drawbacks is that even after spending 17 or 20-plus years in education, students lack the necessary skills for employability. A post-graduate student cannot explain the application of his specialization to society. Neither can the teacher. In most colleges, post-graduation classes are conducted like a tuition centre, where capsule notes are distributed.



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

(The writer is an academic and columnist. The views expressed are personal.)

The culture of teaching by referring to research or review papers from peer-reviewed journals rarely followed even though it is the right way to provide up-to-date knowledge in a particular subject. The syllabus of most universities is prepared in a teacher-centric way. The only concern while designing the syllabus is how to maintain the necessary workload so that posts can be protected. The practical syllabus of science subjects is mostly outdated, that there has been no considerable revision during the past 75 years. Advanced topics taught in colleges are taught at school level abroad. In most colleges there is hardly any interaction between various departments. Posing out of such an environment, how can the graduates get employment? It's no surprise that many science




students, even after having M.Sc. and PhD degrees, struggle to get jobs. They lack essential skills needed for employment and don't know how to draft a letter or handle banking operations. Higher education in our country badly needs drastic reforms. But these should start not from our universities alone, but should be initiated in our colleges, from where a larger section of students gets trained. The recent proposal to induct people


from the industry into academics is a welcome step but should be dealt with caution. People from industry can motivate students to become entrepreneurs. They have the practical knowledge of how to build an industry from scratch. Most of the successful entrepreneurs in this world are not academically meritorious students. They were either university dropouts or mediocre students. A faculty from industry can help students understand the practical application of topics they learn in the classroom. For example, a pharma industry person can help students learn ethnobotany to develop a product from traditional knowledge.

However, the Government should provide a clear guideline for such recruitments. While academics largely follow an

POINT COUNTERPOINT



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI SLEEPS FOR ONLY TWO HOURS AND WORKS FOR 22 HOURS EVERYDAY.
— MAHARASHTRA BJP CHIEF CHANDRAKANT PATIL



SYCOPHANTS HAD BEEN THERE EARLIER, TOO.... BUT WE NEVER SAW SUCH SYCOPHANTS EARLIER.
— SHIV SENA MP SANJAY RAUT

open knowledge culture, the industry follows a closed knowledge culture. Industry always keeps its knowledge confidential and doesn't encourage sharing of knowledge. In many industries, the employee is not allowed to carry even a piece of paper from the office, fearing information leakage.

Most industries do not value academic degrees, and they give more emphasis on skill and productivity.

Industries rarely follow ethics or humanitarian values. Their only mantra is success through marketing. But the purpose of education is to provide knowledge and develop culturally enriched, value-driven citizens for the country.

Research is one area where we must tread with caution. Most industries don't support or

encourage basic research. They promote research that yields immediate results as products. In many areas of science, this may not be possible. The influence of industry people may ultimately dilute the importance of fundamental research. In the long run, the country cannot survive without primary research.

While recruiting people from the industry, UGC should make sure that their influence doesn't spoil the academic environment on our campuses. We should tap only the positive culture from the industry, like their management skills, their skill in identifying a potential new product etc. They can help a researcher scale-up their research output.

The new rule may badly affect the prospects of young researchers who toiled the most

productive period of their life for research. If there is an option for faculty recruitment from industries, there is no meaning in spending 3 to 8 years for a PhD degree, and most of them will make a career in industry rather than in research. This will ultimately affect the research scenario in the country.

We need to protect the aspirations of our youngsters while engaging people from the industry in academics. Instead of giving permanent positions, UGC can think of engaging with people from industries as visiting or adjunct professors. Industries can also be allowed to start research centres inside the campuses so that students would be benefited, but the key for running the education should always be with the people from the academics.

Rocket attacks hit Ukraine’s Lviv as Biden visits Poland

AP ■ LVIV

Russian rockets struck the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Saturday while President Joe Biden visited neighbouring Poland, a reminder that Moscow is willing to strike anywhere in Ukraine despite its claim to be focusing its offensive on the country’s east.

The back-to-back airstrikes shook the city that has become a haven for an estimated 200,000 people who have had to flee their hometowns.

Lviv had been largely spared since the invasion began, although missiles struck an aircraft repair facility near the main airport a week ago.

Among the many who sought refuge in Lviv was Olana Ukrainets, a 34-year-old IT worker from the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

"When I came to Lviv, I was sure that all these alarms wouldn't have any results," Ukrainets told The Associated Press from a bomb shelter after the blasts.

"Sometimes when I heard them at night, I just stayed in bed. Today, I changed my mind and I should hide every time. ... None of the Ukrainian cities are safe now." The city was home to about 700,000 people before the invasion. Some who no longer feel safe

here will head for nearby Poland. Biden met there Saturday with refugees in a show of solidarity, though he was in the capital, Warsaw, and far from the Ukrainian border, which is about 45 miles (72 kilometers) west of Lviv.

Lviv also has become a humanitarian staging ground for Ukraine, and the attacks could further complicate the already challenging process of sending aid to the rest of the country.

The first strike involved two Russian rockets that hit an industrial area in the north-eastern outskirts of Lviv and apparently injured five people, the regional governor, Maksym Kozzytsky, said on Facebook.

A thick, black plume of smoke billowed from the site for hours.

A second rocket attack occurred just outside the city hours later and caused three explosions, Kozzytsky told a press briefing as another round of air raid sirens wailed. He said an oil facility and factory connected to the military, both in areas where people live, were struck Saturday, though he didn't give more details.

In the dim, crowded bomb shelter under an apartment block a short ways from the first blast site, Ukrainets said she couldn't believe she had to hide again after fleeing from



Kharkiv, one of the most bombarded cities of the war.

"We were on one side of the street and saw it on the other side," she said. "We saw fire. I said to my friend, What's this? Then we heard the sound of an explosion and glass breaking.

We tried to hide between buildings. I don't know what the target was." Kozzytsky said a man was detained on suspicion of espionage at one of the explosion sites Saturday after police found that he had recorded a rocket flying toward the target

and striking it. Police also found on his telephone photos of checkpoints in the region, which Kozzytsky said had been sent to two Russian telephone numbers.

The day's events were enough to make some people in Lviv prepare to move again, said Michael Bociurkiw, a senior fellow with the Atlantic Council who was in the city. "I saw some Kyiv cars being packed up," he said. It was a significant turn in a week where the city had begun "roaring

back" to life after weeks of war, he said.

He believes the city could remain a target, noting that Lviv was the birthplace of Ukrainian nationalism. "It's getting closer," he said of the war. Some witnesses were in shock. "It was really close," said Inga Kapitula, a 24-year-old IT worker who said she was 100 or 200 meters (yards) away from the first attack and felt the blast wave. "When it happens, your body's in stress and you're super calm and organised."

‘My personal tragedy’: Ukrainians brace for attack on Odesa

AP ■ ODESA

The Black Sea port of Odesa is mining its beaches and rushing to defend its cultural heritage from a feared Mariupol-style fate in the face of growing alarm that the strategic city might be next as Russia attempts to strip Ukraine of its coastline.

The multi-cultural jewel, dear to Ukrainian hearts and even Russian ones, would be a hugely strategic win for Russia. It is the country's largest port, crucial to grain and other exports, and headquarters for the Ukrainian navy.

Bombardment from the sea last weekend further raised worries that the city is in Russia's sights.

Residents say Russian President Vladimir Putin would be insane to take Odesa with the brutal approach that has left other Ukrainian cities in ruins. Once a gilded powerhouse of the Russian empire, Odesa includes one of the finest opera houses in Europe and the famed Potemkin Steps between the city and the sea, featured in Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 silent film masterpiece "Battleship Potemkin."

But after a month of grueling war, people say they can't predict anything anymore.

"The only thing we're really afraid of is that the other side has no principles whatsoever,"

said Valerii Novak, a local businessman.

He never considered himself a Ukrainian patriot, but when Russia invaded, something "just clicked" in him. He has refused to leave Odesa and joined thousands of people in basic training in how to use a gun.

Now he and other Odesa residents watch Russian warships move closer, in provocation. Western officials call the Russian ships a mix of surface combatants and the kinds used to put naval infantry ashore.

The seizure of Odesa and the strip of land farther west also would allow Moscow to build a land corridor to the separatist Trans-Dniester region of neighboring Moldova that hosts a Russian military base.

A senior U.S. Defense official said this past week the U.S. Didn't see indications that ships in the Black Sea were firing on Odesa as they had last weekend. He spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive subject. "It's difficult to know what this indicates," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said of last weekend's bombardment.

"Is it the prelude to an assault on Odesa? Is it a diversionary tactic to sort of hold and fix Ukrainian troops in the south so that they can't come to the relief of their comrades in Mariupol or in Kyiv?"

Shelled city in north Ukraine fears becoming ‘next Mariupol’

AP ■ LVIV

Nights are spent huddling underground from Russian strikes pounding their encircled city into rubble. Daylight hours are devoted to hunting down drinkable water and braving the risk of standing in line for the little food available as shells and bombs rain down.

In the second month of Russia's invasion, this is what now passes for life in Chernihiv, a besieged city in northern Ukraine where death is everywhere.

It isn't - yet - quite as synonymous with atrocious human suffering as the pulverized southern city of Mariupol.

But similarly blockaded and pounded from afar by Russian troops, Chernihiv's remaining residents are terrified that each blast, bomb and body that lies uncollected on the streets ensnares them in the same macabre trap of unescapable killings and destruction.

"In basements at night, everyone is talking about one thing: Chernihiv becoming (the) next Mariupol," said 38-year-old resident Ihor Kazmerchak, a linguistics scholar.

He spoke to The Associated Press by cellphone, amid incessant beeps signalling that his battery was dying. The city is without power, running water and heating.

Kharkiv nuclear facility again hit by shelling



AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's nuclear watchdog says that a nuclear research facility in Kharkiv again has come under shelling by Russia and the fighting makes it impossible to assess the damage.

The State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate said that the neutron source experimental facility in the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology came under fire Saturday.

Ukrainian authorities have previously reported that Russian shelling damaged buildings at the Kharkiv facility, but there has been no release of radiation.

The newly built neutron source facility is intended for the research and production of radioisotopes for medical and industrial needs.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has said that the nuclear material in the facility is always subcritical and the inventory of radioactive material is very low, reducing the risks of radiation release.

Kharkiv has been besieged by Russian forces since the start of the invasion and has come under repeated shelling of its residential buildings and critical infrastructure.

Ukraine's nuclear facilities have been threatened by the Russian invasion.

Thousands turn up for London Mayor’s Ukraine solidarity march

PTI ■ LONDON

Thousands of Londoners turned up for a march and vigil called by the city's mayor for a message of solidarity with the people of Ukraine in its ongoing conflict with Russia.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced over GBP 1.1 million in funding to support migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum in London in his speech at the end of the march at Trafalgar Square on Saturday.

The square had been dressed in the Ukrainian colours of blue and yellow for the vigil, which marked addresses by Ukrainian politicians, celebrities and anti-war activists.

"I'm proud that today Londoners are uniting to send a message of support to the people of Ukraine. These innocent people have been through unimaginable pain and suffering over the last month, and by joining together, we are showing that we stand with them," said Khan.

"I'm also pleased to announce that London will be giving more than GBP 1.1 million to support migrants, refugees and people seeking

asylum in the capital, including those coming from Ukraine. We have a proud history of providing sanctuary to those fleeing conflict, and this funding will ensure that support is there to help in their time of need," he said.

The crowds chanted "We stand with Ukraine" and carried banners reading "Stop Putin's war" as the mayor of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, appeared virtually on the big screen at Trafalgar Square amid cheers.

The Ambassador of Ukraine to the UK, Vadym Prystaiko, addressed the gathering to declare that the UK's help during the Russia-Ukraine conflict will "never be forgotten". The London Mayor also announced GBP 50,000 funding to match donations for the Here for Good Ukraine Advice Project, which will provide specialist immigration advice to Londoners and their families seeking to access the Ukraine Family Scheme and other routes opened for refugees in the UK.

"It has been devastating to see this horrific ongoing attack against the people of Ukraine, and my thoughts are with them at this terrible time," said popular British actress Dame Helen

Mirren.

"All of our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine at this horrendous time for their country. It's important that the world unites to show them that they have our support in their time of need, and I'm so glad that London is joining as one to send a message of solidarity loud and clear," added fellow actress Dame Julie Walters.

The march was organised in partnership with the European Movement UK, CIRCA and the Yoko Ono "Imagine Peace" project, with support from Landsec, which owns Piccadilly Lights.

Hanya Dezyk, Board Director of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, added: "We are heartened that Londoners and visitors from across the UK will be joining together in London to send a message of solidarity with the people of Ukraine."

"It has been incredibly difficult for Ukrainians living in the UK and across the world to see what is happening to our homeland, and the sight of people uniting in the streets in our name gives us hope and strengthens our resolve to fight for Ukraine's freedom."

Ukraine intel: Russia may try to split country

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's military intelligence chief says that Russia could try to break Ukraine in two.

Kyrylo Budanov said in remarks released by the Defense Ministry on Sunday that Russian President Vladimir Putin has realised "he can't swallow the entire country" and would likely try to split the country under "the Korean scenario."

That's a reference to the decades-old division between North and South Korea.

Budanov said that "the occupiers will try to pull the occupied territories into a single quasi-state structure and pit it against independent Ukraine." He pointed to Russian attempts to set up parallel government structures in occupied cities and to bar people from using the Ukrainian currency, the hryvnia. Budanov predicted that Ukrainian resistance will grow into a "total" guerrilla warfare, derailing Russia's attempts.

French President Emmanuel Macron has distanced himself from U.S.

President Joe Biden's comment that Vladimir Putin "cannot remain in power." He is urging efforts to de-escalate tensions.

Macron, who has spoken several times to the Russian president in so far unsuccessful peace-making efforts, is due to speak again with Putin Sunday or Monday.

"We should be factual and ... Do everything so that the situation doesn't get out of control," Macron said Sunday on France-3 television, when asked about Biden's remark.

Macron said: "I wouldn't use those terms, because I continue to speak to President Putin, because what we want to do collectively is that we want to stop the war Russia launched in Ukraine, without waging war and without an escalation."

He stressed that the U.S. Remains an important ally, saying, "We share many common values, but those who live next to Russia are the Europeans." Macron said he will talk with Putin about a proposed humanitarian corridor for the besieged city of Mariupol, also discussed with Turkey and Greece.

Russia blocks German newspaper’s website

AP ■ BERLIN

Russian authorities have blocked the website of German newspaper Bild, part of their efforts to control the message on Ukraine.

Communications and media regulator Roskomnadzor said Sunday it blocked Bild's website at prosecutors' request. Instagram and Facebook were already blocked in Russia after Roskomnadzor said they were being used to call for violence against Russian soldiers.

Russian authorities also have shut access to foreign media websites, including BBC, European news network Euronews, the US government-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, German broadcaster Deutsche Welle and Latvia-based website Meduza. Bild says it has been putting Russian-language reports on Russia's war in Ukraine and its slide toward "totalitarian dictatorship" on its website, and parts of its live video broadcasts have been subtitled in Russian.

It noted that it also has a Russian-language Telegram channel.

Zelenskyy: West needs more courage in helping Ukraine fight

AP ■ LVIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the West of lacking courage as his country fights to stave off Russia's invasion, making an exasperated plea for fighter jets and tanks to sustain a defense in a conflict that has ground into a war of attrition.

Speaking after US President Joe Biden met with senior Ukrainian officials in Poland on Saturday, Zelenskyy lashed out at the West's "ping-pong about who and how should hand over jets and other defensive weapons to us" while Russian missile attacks kill and trap civilians.

"I've talked to the defenders of Mariupol today. I'm in constant contact with them. Their determination, heroism and firmness are astonishing," Zelenskyy said in a video address early Sunday, referring to the besieged southern city that has suffered some of the war's greatest deprivations and horrors. "If only those who have been thinking for 31 days



on how to hand over dozens of jets and tanks had 1% of their courage." Russia's invasion of Ukraine, now in its 32nd day, has stalled in many areas, its aim to quickly encircle the capital, Kyiv, and force its surrender faltering in the face of staunch Ukrainian resistance - bolstered by weapons from the U.S. And other Western allies.

However, Western military aid has, so far, not included fighter jets. A proposal to transfer Polish planes to Ukraine via the United States was scrapped amid NATO concerns about getting drawn into a military conflict with Russia.

"So, who is in charge of the Euro-Atlantic community? Is it still Moscow, thanks to its scare tactics?" Zelenskyy exclaimed as he delivered his pointed remarks. "Our partners must step up their aid to Ukraine."

Britain's defense ministry said Sunday that the battlefield across northern Ukraine remains largely static as local Ukrainian counterattacks hamper Russian attempts to reorganize their forces. It said Russia's forces looked to be trying to encircle Ukrainian forces directly facing the separatist regions in the country's east.

Why Telegram became the go-to app for Ukrainians

Despite being rife with Russian disinformation

AP ■ DARWIN

For weeks, Russia's military assault on Ukraine has been complemented by full-fledged information warfare. The Kremlin has propagandised Russian state media, and is trying to control the narrative online too.

We've seen a bombardment of "imposter content" circulating - including fake news reports and deepfake videos - while Ukrainians and the rest of the world have scrambled to find ways to tell the real story of the invasion.

The instant messaging app Telegram has surfaced as one of the most important channels through which to do so. But what is it about Telegram that has millions flocking to it amid the chaos?

Telegram is one of the most popular social apps in Ukraine and Russia, and has

been since before the invasion began. It's a free cloud-based app that allows users to send and receive messages, calls, photos, videos, audio and other files.

The platform was first created in 2013 by Russian-born tech entrepreneur Pavel Durov - a figure who has butted heads with the increasingly authoritarian Russian state on numerous occasions.

Now Telegram is providing some clarity in a foggy environment of (mostly Russian) disinformation. It has even been a go-to point of contact for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Telegram has several key features that make it an appealing option for communications relating to the war.

It facilitates public and private groups of up to 200,000 users (where individuals can send messages and interact), and channels (which allow one-way broadcasting to channel subscribers).

Russia sowing deep hatred among Ukrainians: Zelenskyy

AP ■ LVIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy angrily warned Moscow that it is sowing a deep hatred for Russia among his people, as constant artillery barrages and aerial bombings are reducing cities to rubble, killing civilians and driving others into shelters, leaving them to scrounge for food and water to survive.

"You are doing everything so that our people themselves leave the Russian language, because the Russian language will now be associated only with you, with your explosions and murders, your crimes," Zelenskyy said in an impassioned video address late Saturday.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has ground into a war of attrition in many places, with the toll on civilians rising as Moscow seeks to pound cities into submission from entrenched positions.

War shakes Europe path to energy independence, climate goals: Experts

AP ■ BERLIN

Before Russia's war in Ukraine, Europe's most pressing energy policy goal was reducing carbon emissions that cause climate change.

Now, officials are fixated on rapidly reducing the continent's reliance on Russian oil and natural gas — and that means friction between security and climate goals, at least in the short term.

To wean itself from Russian energy supplies as quickly as possible, Europe will need to burn more coal and build more pipelines and terminals to import fossil fuels from elsewhere.

This dramatic shift comes amid soaring fuel costs for motorists, homeowners and businesses, and as political leaders reassess the geopolitical risks from being so energy-dependent on Russia.

In 2021, the European Union imported roughly 40% of its gas and 25% of its oil from Russia — an economic relationship that officials had thought would prevent hostile

ities, but is instead financing them.

While some are calling for an immediate boycott of all Russian oil and gas, the EU plans to reduce Russian gas imports by two-thirds by the end of this year, and to eliminate them altogether before 2030.

This "will not be easy," said Paolo Gentiloni, the EU's top economic official. But, he added, "it can be done."

In the near-term, ending energy ties with Russia puts the focus on securing alternative sources of fossil fuels. But longer term, the geopolitical and price pressures stoked by Russia's war in Ukraine may actually accelerate Europe's transition away from oil, gas and coal.

Experts say the war has served as a reminder that renewable energy isn't just good for the climate, but also for national security. That could help speed up the development of wind and solar power, as well as provide a boost to conservation and energy-efficiency initiatives.

Jaishankar calls on Maldivian Prez Solih

Discusses special partnership between two countries

PTI ■ MALE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday called on Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in Addu City and discussed the special partnership between the two countries.

Jaishankar, who arrived here on Saturday, also conveyed the personal greetings and good wishes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to President Solih.

"An honour to be received by President @ibusolih of Maldives. Conveyed the personal greetings and good wishes of PM @narendramodi. Discussed the special partnership between our two countries that has produced so many substantive outcomes during his tenure," he tweeted.

Jaishankar also had a "fruitful meeting" with Maldives Home Minister Imran Abdulla.

"A fruitful meeting with @shimranAb, Home Minister

of Maldives.

Discussed capacity building and training cooperation in law enforcement.

Appreciate his strong support for #IndiaMaldives special partnership" he tweeted.

Jaishankar said he was privileged to join President Solih in the inauguration of the National College of Police and Law Enforcement (NCPLE), which underlines India's strong support for law enforcement.

"The NCPLE will assist the Maldives Police Service to train its officers and enhance its crime-fighting capacities," Jaishankar had said at a joint press appearance with Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid on Saturday.

"Ground-breaking of the Addu roads project, similarly emphasizes our development partnership. Also signed an agreement for Addu reclamation and shore protection. Handing over of coastal radar system strengthens the security of Maldives," he said in another tweet.

"Opening of the Drug Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre reflects our P2P connect. The new



eco-tourism zone is a statement of our shared environmental commitment. A good day for #IndiaMaldives development cooperation," the minister tweeted.

Jaishankar also laid a wreath at Addu Atoll Memorial.

"From the pages of history, a visit to Gan. Paid my homage to the Indian soldiers commemorated at the Addu Atoll Memorial," he tweeted.

On Saturday, Jaishankar

said the "time-tested" relationship between India and the Maldives is a "force for stability" in the region and the shared responsibility of the two countries is to nurture and strengthen it.

Jaishankar held wide-ranging discussions with his Maldivian counterpart on the bilateral partnership and the two leaders took stock of ongoing projects and initiatives across a very wide range of sectors.

The two ministers also had

a discussion on regional security and maritime safety issues.

India and the Maldives also agreed to mutually recognise the COVID-19 vaccine certificates issued by each other, a move that will facilitate easier travel between the two countries and give a boost to the tourism sector. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean region and the bilateral defence and security ties have been on an upward trajectory in the last few years.

India inaugurates drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre in Maldives

PTI ■ MALE

India on Sunday jointly inaugurated a drug detoxification and rehabilitation centre in the Maldives with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar saying that drug addiction is a health and social issue that requires infrastructure, science, but most of all understanding and compassion to treat.

Jaishankar made the remarks while participating in the joint inauguration of Vilunu Drug Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre in the Maldives' Addu city - funded jointly by India and the Maldivian government.

He said that the centre is the first of the 20 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) to be completed.

Jaishankar said that it was completed within one year, despite the logistical challenges of the Covid pandemic.

"While drug trafficking is a crime and obviously deserves zero tolerance, drug addiction is a health and social issue that

requires infrastructure, science, but most of all understanding and compassion to treat.

"The process of de-addiction and rehabilitation requires infrastructure and trained professionals. I am glad to hear that this centre is now functional with 24 trained staff in place, and will start in-house rehab processes next week for 20 patients," Jaishankar said.

The minister wished the Ministry of Health, the National Drug Agency, the Addu City Council and the people of Addu all the very best in this endeavour to assist their communities, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

"I want to say it today amidst you that India will stand by you in these efforts," he said.

India-Maldives partnership in the health sector- of which this centre is one component - has a long tradition. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Male has been a linchpin of Maldives' tertiary healthcare for decades. Maldivian doctors and specialists receive training

in Indian institutions, Jaishankar said.

"During the pandemic, we were able to create an air corridor for thousands of Maldivians seeking advanced healthcare in India.

"Our gathering here today is also a celebration of your success in the fight against COVID-19. I congratulate President (Ibrahim Mohamed) Solih, his Government and the people of Maldives for the resilience you have shown. I am proud of our cooperation with the Maldives in this difficult journey through the last two years," the minister said.

The High Impact Community Development Projects are conceptualised and implemented the world over by the Local and City Councils. This is in fact what defines, what really sets apart these projects. And what it does because it has local ownership and local buy in, it ensures timely implementation because the councils have a direct stake in their success, Jaishankar said.

Blinken tries to calm allies ahead of possible Iran deal

AP ■ JERUSALEM

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday tried to soothe the fears of Israel and its Gulf Arab allies ahead of the possible renewal of global powers' international nuclear deal with Iran.

Blinken made the comments shortly before joining his counterparts from Israel and four Arab countries at a special gathering where the Iranian nuclear deal was expected to top the agenda. Israel and many of its neighbors are fiercely opposed to the deal, which they believe with embolden and enrich Iran.

"When it comes to the most important element, we see eye-to-eye," Blinken told a news conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid in Jerusalem. "We are both committed, both determined that Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon."

The Biden administration has been working to renew the 2015 nuclear deal, which placed curbs on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for billions of dollars in sanctions relief. With support from Israel, the Trump administration withdrew from the deal in 2018, causing it to unravel.

Although Iran has since raced ahead with its nuclear



program, Israel and Gulf Arab countries are deeply concerned about restoring the original deal. Israel fears it does not include enough safeguards to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Both Israel and its Gulf allies also believe that relief from economic sanctions will allow Iran to step up its military activities across the region, including support for hostile militant groups.

Blinken said the U.S. Believes that restoring the nuclear deal "is the best way to put Iran's program back in the box it was in." He added: "Our commitment to the core principle of Iran never acquiring a nuclear weapon is unwavering."

He also vowed to cooperate with Israel to counter Iran's "aggressive behavior" across the region.

It remains unclear if or when the nuclear deal will be

renewed, but there are indications it could be soon despite several last-minute snags. The negotiations have been complicated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia is among the six global powers negotiating with Iran, and condemnations by the U.S. And other western powers involved in the talks have added an element of uncertainty to the talks.

If a deal is reached, Israel has repeatedly noted that it is not a party to the agreement and reserves the right to take action, including a potential military strike, against Iran if it feels it is necessary.

"Israel and the United States will continue to work together to prevent a nuclear Iran. At the same time, Israel will do anything we believe is needed to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Anything," Lapid said.

EU envoy in Tehran amid hopes to restore nuclear agreement

AP ■ Tehran,

A leading European Union diplomat held talks in Tehran on Sunday, Iran's state-run media reported, amid hopes that an agreement to restore Iran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers could be completed.

The meetings between the EU's envoy, Enrique Mora, and Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani come at a sensitive moment for talks to revive the deal, as the glimmers of a resolution to some of the thorniest issues in the negotiations have emerged.

The report on the talks in Tehran gave scant detail, saying only that the diplomats discussed the latest on the nuclear agreement, with Kani repeating that Iran believed a deal was within reach if America was "realistic" in its demands.

Former President Donald Trump abandoned the nuclear deal in 2018 and re-imposed crushing sanctions.

Iran gradually breached the agreement with a massive expansion of its nuclear work.

Nuclear talks broke off earlier this month as last-minute wrangles in Vienna coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and financial sanctions

imposed by the West on Moscow.

But officials have since made encouraging noises. Russia appeared to back down from its earlier demand that its trade with Iran be exempted from Western sanctions.

And for the first time, Iran's top diplomat on Saturday publicly signaled flexibility over Tehran's demand that Washington stop designating the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard, its powerful paramilitary force, as a foreign terrorist organisation.

The prospect of the designation's removal had alarmed America's Mideast allies, such as Israel, which fiercely opposed the original nuclear deal and argued that easing sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard would embolden Iranian-backed militant groups from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis in Yemen.

In a visible sign that shared regional anxiety over a renewed nuclear deal was growing, the Israeli government hastily arranged an unprecedented summit of top diplomats from Arab countries that have normalised ties with Israel along with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

With eye to China investment, Taliban now preserve Buddhas

AP ■ KABUL

The ancient Buddha statues sit in serene meditation in the caves carved into the russet cliffs of rural Afghanistan.

Hundreds of metres below lies what is believed to be the world's largest deposit of copper.

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are pinning their hopes on Beijing to turn that rich vein into revenue to salvage the cash-starved country amid crippling international sanctions.

The fighters standing guard by the rocky hillside may once have considered destroying the terracotta Buddhas.

Two decades ago when the Islamic hard-line Taliban were first in power, they sparked world outrage by blowing up gigantic Buddha statues in another part of the country, calling them pagan symbols that must be purged.

But now they are intent on preserving the relics of the Mes Aynak copper mine. Doing so is key to unlocking billions in Chinese investment, said Hakimullah Mubarez, the Taliban head of security at the site, peering into the remnants of a monastery built by first-century Buddhist monks.

"Protecting them is very important to us and the Chinese," he said.

Previously, Mubarez com-

manded a Taliban combat unit in the surrounding mountains battling with US-backed Afghan forces.

When those troops capitulated last year, his men rushed to secure the site. "We knew it would be important for the country," he said.

The Taliban's spectacular reversal illustrates the powerful allure of Afghanistan's untapped mining sector.

Successful authorities have seen the country's mineral riches, estimated to be worth \$1 trillion, as the key to a prosperous future, but none have been able to develop them amid the continual war and violence.

Now, multiple countries, including Iran, Russia and Turkey are looking to invest, filling the vacuum left in the wake of the chaotic US withdrawal.

But Beijing is the most assertive. At Mes Aynak, it could become the first major power to take on a large-scale project in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, potentially redrawing Asia's geopolitical map.

In 2008, the administration of Hamid Karzai signed a 30-year contract with a Chinese joint venture called MCC to extract high-grade copper from Mes Aynak. Studies show the site holds up to 12 million tons of the mineral.

But the project got tied up in logistical and contract problems, and it never got past some initial test shafts before it ground to a halt when Chinese staff left in 2014 because of continued violence.

Mere months after the Taliban seized Kabul in August, consolidating power over the country, the group's newly installed acting Minister for Mining and Petroleum Shabbuddin Dilawar urged his staff to re-engage Chinese state-run companies.

Ziad Rashidi, the ministry's director of foreign relations, approached the consortium made up by MCC, China Metallurgical Group Corporation and Jiangxi Copper Ltd. Dilawar has had two virtual meetings with MCC in the last six months, according to company and ministry officials.

He urged them to return to the mine, terms unchanged from the 2008 contract.

A technical committee from MCC is due in Kabul in the coming weeks to address the remaining obstacles. Relocating the artifacts is key. But MCC is also seeking to renegotiate terms, particularly to reduce taxes and slash the 19.5% royalty rate by nearly half, the percentage owed to the government per ton of copper sold.

Chinese FM Wang meets Nepal President Bhandari, discusses bilateral ties

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday called on Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari and discussed various matters of bilateral relations.

Wang, who holds the rank of a State Councillor - a high ranking position in the executive organ of the Chinese government, also held separate meetings with two former prime ministers - Chairman of CPN-UML K P Sharma Oli and Chairman of CPN (Maoist Center) Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', My Republica newspaper reported.

In his talks with President Bhandari, "various matters of Nepal-China relations were discussed on the occasion," the paper said. During the meeting, various aspects of bilateral ties and cooperation were discussed, officials at the President's Office were quoted as saying by The Kathmandu Post newspaper.

"It was a courtesy meeting. Foreign Minister Wang Yi apprised the President of the agreements signed between Nepal and China," said Tika Dhakal, a communication expert of the President.

Bhandari conveyed to Wang that Kathmandu attaches great importance to Nepal-China ties and thanked the Chinese government for its support to Nepal, he said.

"Through the Chinese foreign minister, President



Bhandari has sent a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping that our country and Nepali people are thankful for the continuous support of China," Dhakal added.

During the meeting with Wang, CPN-UML leader Oli urged the Chinese government to expedite implementation of the projects related to Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) such as railway, irrigation, education and health.

The Chinese minister responded to the party's call positively and said they were ready to cooperate with Nepal for its development and prosperity, assuring of contribution to undertake BRI-related projects and to regularize them.

In his meeting with Wang, Prachanda also urged China to expeditiously bring into implementation projects related to physical infrastructures agreed earlier under the BRI. His party, which is part of the coalition partner, said that taking forward these projects considered important for Nepal's economic and social development in a timely manner would have a positive impact.

Pak PM Imran to hold show of strength in Islamabad as no-trust vote looms

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Ahead of the crucial no-trust vote, Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan will hold a major public rally in Islamabad with thousands of his supporters travelling to the capital from different cities in special trains arranged by the government on Sunday.

Pakistan has been on the edge since Opposition parties on March 8 submitted the no-confidence motion before the National Assembly Secretariat, alleging that the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government led by Prime Minister Khan was responsible for the economic crisis and the spiralling inflation in the country.

Two special trains have been mobilised by the national transporter, Pakistan Railways, from Lahore and Islamabad at the request of the government to transport its workers.

Thousands of supporters of the prime minister are coming in trains, public vehicles and private cars to attend the "historic" rally of the ruling party.

The PTI caravan coming from Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and other cities will reach the Parade Ground here to attend the rally under the theme of 'Amr Bil Maroof' (enjoin the good).

"The public meeting will be the largest in the history of the country and have a great impact," Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood told reporters on Saturday.

The call for the rally was

given by prime minister Khan as he has been trying to present his fight against a "group of crooked opposition leaders", but still many believe that gathering could be his swan song due to the odds of no-confidence heavily decked against him.

Separately, an equally-charged political event will be held in Islamabad on Monday by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of the Opposition parties.

The PDM comprising the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) retaliated to hold their power show a day later that will coincide with the National Assembly session when the no-confidence motion is set to be formally moved in the house.

The JUI-F supporters have started moving under the supervision of local leaders, JUI-F spokesperson Aslam Ghauri told the media.

They are mainly coming from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan where the party has a lot of support. Some of them have already reached Hakla Interchange near Islamabad.

Another big protest march led by PML-N vice presidents Maryam Nawaz and her cousin Hamza Shehbaz, who is the son of Shehbaz Sharif, started from Lahore on Saturday. Travelling on the historic GT Road, they are scheduled to reach Islamabad on Monday to attend the opposition rally.



"It (the march) will be the last nail in the coffin of the PTI government," Maryam told her supporters.

Interior minister Sheikh Rashid warned that the Opposition would not be allowed to block any main roads for political activities as it was against the direction of the Supreme Court.

"We have deployed paramilitary Rangers and Frontier Corps along the Srinagar Highway and any effort to block it will be resisted," he said.

Rashid said that more than 15,000 security personnel would be deployed for keeping law and order and also warned to call the Army in case of any untoward incident.

The political temperature has been slowly reaching a boiling point in the wake of the no-trust move by the Opposition on March 8. The make and break point for prime minister Khan is likely to be reached by the end of next week.

The Opposition parties are

German State election offers 1st test since Scholz took over

AP ■ BERLIN

The western German state of Saarland is holding an election Sunday that offers the country's first test at the ballot box since Chancellor Olaf Scholz's national government took office in December.

Polls before the election for the state legislature point to a solid lead for Scholz's center-left Social Democrats in a region led since 1999 by the center-right Christian Democratic Union party of former Chancellor Angela Merkel.

That doesn't necessarily have much to do with what has been a turbulent first 100 days for Scholz's three-party coalition,

during which Russia's war in Ukraine prompted the chancellor to upend German defense policy and Germany to welcome large numbers of refugees.

Germany also is grappling with a persistent wave of coronavirus infections, recently seeing over 200,000 cases per day.

All the same, it's the first of three state elections within two months - all in regions currently led by CDU governors - that will help set the political tone for the coming year.

The most important vote, on May 15, is in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia.

Second 'black box' found in China Eastern plane crash

AP ■ BEIJING

The second "black box" has been recovered from the crash of a China Eastern Boeing 737-800 that killed all 132 people on board last week, Chinese state media said Sunday.

Firefighters taking part in the search found the recorder, an orange cylinder, on a mountain slope about 1.5 meters (5 feet) underground, state broadcaster CCTV said. Experts confirmed it was the second black box. The impact of the crash scattered debris widely and created a 20-meter- (65-foot-) deep pit in the side of the mountain.

Searchers had been looking for the flight data recorder after finding the cockpit voice recorder four days ago. The two recorders should help investigators determine what caused the plane to plummet from 29,000 feet (8,800 meters) and into a forested mountainside in southern China.

India, UAE trade pact may come into force from May 1: Goyal

PTI ■ DUBAI

The free trade agreement between India and the UAE is likely to come into effect from May 1 this year, under which domestic exporters of as many as 6,090 goods from sectors like textiles, agriculture, dry fruits, gem and jewellery would get duty-free access to the UAE market, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed by India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in February which aims to boost bilateral trade to USD 100 billion in the next five years from current USD 60 billion.

The minister said that the detailed text of the pact has been released in public domain and now "we are trying to complete all our paperwork, all the customs notifications expeditiously. We hope it can be operationalised by May 1, 2022".

Overall, the UAE is offering duty elimination on over 97 per cent of its products which account for 99 per cent of Indian exports here in value terms. Immediate duty-free access covers all labour-inten-



sive sectors such as gems and jewellery, textiles and apparel, agricultural and fish products, leather, footwear, and sport goods, Pharmaceuticals and Medical devices, and many engineering products.

"Currently, we are exporting about USD 26 billion worth of goods to the UAE , almost 90 per cent of them will get total tariff (or customs duty) elimination on Day 1 itself. Going forward in the next 5-7 or ten years, the rest of the 9.5 per cent (about 1,270 goods) will also get zero duty," Goyal said at the Dubai Expo here.

Explaining the importance of the pact, he said the UAE also

opened doors for the rest of the Middle East, some parts of Africa and Europe.

"This opens up huge opportunities for Indian businesses," he said adding the pact also opens doors to several service sectors which will expand job opportunities for Indian young boys and girls.

Key areas of India's interest are computer related services, audio visual, education, health, tourism, travel, professionals services like nursing, engineering, and accountancy.

"We are also working for mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) of professionals and skilled services , so that if they

approve our nursing colleges then the nursing degree from that college will get automatic recognition here and vice versa," he said.

On the other hand, India has offered significant concessions on goods of export interest to the UAE and that include dates, petroleum products (crude, LPG, Naptha), petrochemicals (polyethylene, polypropylene and poly vinyl chloride), metals (aluminium, copper, nickel, iron and steel), minerals (limestone, cement).

India will be giving duty-free access to 7,694 goods on the day of implementation of the agreement. Around 2,400 goods would get zero duty in 5-10 years time period.

As part of protective measures in the pact, there are stringent rules of origin criteria that reflect the requirement for substantial processing of up to 40 per cent for most of the products and wholly obtained criteria for agricultural products.

When asked about free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Goyal said: "we are at an advanced stage of discussion on the scope of the agreement. I believe that discussions will get over in the next 15-20 days".

Leading cinema exhibitors PVR, INOX Leisure to merge, create entity with 1,500 screens

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading film exhibition players PVR Ltd and INOX Leisure Ltd on Sunday announced a merger deal to create the largest multiplex chain in the country with a network of more than 1,500 screens.

The boards of directors of the two companies at their meetings held on Sunday approved an all-stock amalgamation of INOX with PVR, the two companies said in separate regulatory filings.

The announcement comes at a time when the film exhibition industry has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and significant pressures on the theatrical business from the accelerated growth of digital OTT platforms.

The combined entity will be named as PVR INOX Ltd with the branding of existing screens to continue as PVR and INOX respectively.

New cinemas opened post the merger will be branded as PVR INOX, it added.

As per the agreement, INOX will merge with PVR in a share swap ratio of 3 shares of PVR for every 10 shares of

INOX.

"Post the merger, the promoters of INOX will become co-promoters in the merged entity along with the existing promoters of PVR," the filing said.

PVR Promoters will have a 10.62 per cent stake while INOX promoters will have a 16.66 per cent stake in the combined entity, it added.

When the merger comes into effect, the board of the merged company would be reconstituted with total board strength of 10 members and both the promoter families having equal representation on the Board with two board seats each.

The merger will unlock significant complementarity and growth potential and offers compelling revenue and cost synergies, the statements added.

PVR's Ajay Bijli would be appointed as the Managing Director and Sanjeev Kumar would be appointed as the Executive Director of the merged entity.

Inox's Pavan Kumar Jain would be appointed as the Non-Executive Chairman of the Board and Siddharth Jain would

be appointed as Non-Executive Non-Independent Director in the combined entity.

Explaining the rationale behind the merger, PVR CMD Ajay Bijli told reporters that the pandemic bruised the film exhibition industry quite badly for the last two years and the 'decibel level of OTT platforms also increased' challenging the industry.

"We believe that India is a market where the number one form of entertainment for people is to go out and watch movies on the big screen (and it) still remains (but) that got impacted. We felt that by coming together of two brands who have the same vision, a qualitative approach towards giving a great consumer experience and strengthening our balance sheets will only propel the industry forward and make sure that the exhibition sector continues to thrive," he added.

Bijli, however, asserted that the challenges of the last two years were not the trigger for the merger saying "this industry has always grown organically and inorganically consolidation, mergers are not something new to this industry".

Aster DM Healthcare to invest ₹500 cr in TN, inks MoU with Govt

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Healthcare major Aster DM Healthcare on Sunday said it has earmarked Rs 500 crore investment to set up hospitals in Tamil Nadu and has signed a memorandum of understanding with the government in this connection.

The MoU proposed include setting up of hospitals, pharmacies and laboratories in the state aimed at providing quality healthcare to the people, a press release said here.

During the maiden overseas trip undertaken by Chief Minister M K Stalin to Dubai on Saturday, Aster DM Healthcare founder-chairman and managing director Azad Moopen exchanged documents with the Guidance Tamil Nadu Managing Director and CEO, Pooja Kulkarni for establishing the healthcare facilities in the state.The investment by Aster DM Healthcare would help the healthcare provider to further expand its services to all South Indian states.

Aster DM Healthcare has a predominant presence in southern and western states in India.

'Indian online higher education market to reach \$5 bn by 2025'

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

Driven by the pandemic, the online higher education and life-long learning market in India is poised to reach \$5 billion by 2025, a new report has said.

Online higher education is emerging as the fastest growing sub-segment of the edtech sector. The user base for online higher education grew by 75 per cent in 2021, despite a three times growth in the average ticket size compared to the K12 segment.

In fact, the market size for online higher education in India is now comparable to the largest edtech segments (K6-12 including test preparation), the report showed.

According to Bengaluru-based market research firm RedSeer, the macro-economic factors that will drive this growth include relaxation in regulations governing degrees, supply-side capacity gaps, realisation of the need for higher education among students and professionals, and transition to the credit system.

"India's booming edtech market, which saw multiple startups and increased funding during the pandemic, is expecting further boost on the back of growth in higher education and lifelong learning segments. It's safe to say that online higher education has impressed us all by emerging as the fastest growing sub-segment," said Abhishek Gupta, engagement manager, RedSeer.

Joshi announces CSR projs for development of aspirational district Darrang in Assam

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday announced several CSR projects of state-owned CIL for the development of aspirational district Darrang in Assam.

Joshi visited Darrang during his second day of visit to the North-Eastern State of Assam on Sunday.

Joshi announced CSR projects worth Rs 2 crore in Darrang, to be implemented by Coal India Ltd, the coal ministry said in a statement.

Commerce and Industry Minister of Assam Chandra Mohan Patowary was also present on the



occasion. These CSR projects of Coal India Ltd will help in providing better education and healthcare to the people of Darrang, Joshi said.

Under the CSR projects announced by Joshi, CIL will help construct additional class rooms in

19 government schools of Darrang and take up five projects for improvement of healthcare infrastructure at different government health centres in this aspirational district.

Coal India has either taken up or completed seven CSR projects worth around Rs 23 crore for inclusive development of Assam in the last five financial years starting from 2016-17.

Out of these seven projects, four projects namely financial assistances for setting up of solid waste management plant in Kamakhya, promotional and preventive health-

care through increased awareness in rural population, promotion of preventive healthcare through NILA and Provision of water Ambulance in Majuli have been completed.

MoU for financial assistance for setting up 40 bed ICU facility at Government Medical Hospital, Silchar has been signed and remaining two projects namely financial assistance for rehabilitation and livelihood development at Majuli and financial assistance for skill training of 50 students conducted through CIPET Guwahati are going on.

IPO fundraising at highest ever in 2021-22

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 52 Indian corporates raised an all-time high Rs 1.11 lakh crore through main board IPOs in the financial year 2021-22. This was despite the last quarter seeing only five IPOs, according to Pranav Haldea, Managing Director, Prime database.

The 2021-22 IPO amount was over 3.5 times Rs 31,268 crore raised through 30 IPOs in 2020-21. The previous best year was 2017-18 in which Rs 81,553 crore was raised.

IPOs from new age loss-making technology startups, strong retail participation and huge listing gains were the other key highlights of 2021-22.

Overall public equity fundraising, however, dropped to Rs 1.70 lakh crore from Rs 1.90 lakh crore in the preceding year.

The largest IPO in 2021-22, which was also the largest Indian IPO ever, was from One 97 Communications (Paytm) for Rs 18,300 crore. This was followed by Zomato (Rs 9,375 crore), Star Health (Rs 6,019 crore), PB Fintech (Policybazaar) (Rs 5,710 crore), Sona BLW (Rs 5,550 crore) and FSN E-Commerce (Nykaa) (Rs 5,350 crore). As can be seen, four out of the top 6 IPOs were from new age technology companies (NATCs) which together raised Rs 38,734 crore.

The average deal size was a high Rs 2,143 crore.

The overall response from the public, according to Prime Database, was very good. Of the 50 IPOs for which data is available as of now, 29 IPOs received a mega response of more than 10 times (of which 5 IPOs more than 100 times) while 8 IPOs were oversub-

scribed by more than 3 times. The balance 13 IPOs were oversubscribed between 1 to 3 times.

The year witnessed tremendous response from retail investors as well. The average number of applications from retail was 14.05 lakh, in comparison to 12.73 lakh in 2020-21 and 6.88 lakh in 2019-20. The highest number of applications from retail in 2021-22 were received by Glenmark Life Sciences (33.95 lakhs) followed by Devyani International (32.67 lakhs) and Latent View (31.87 lakhs).

The amount of shares applied for by retail by value was 17 per cent higher than the total IPO mobilisation (147 per cent in 2020-21) showing the strength and interest of retail investors during the year. However, the total allocation to retail was just Rs 22,017 crore

which was 20 per cent of the total IPO mobilisation (down from 32 per cent in 2020-21).

According to Haldea, success of the IPOs was further buoyed by strong listing performance. Of the 50 IPOs which have got listed thus far, 30 gave a return of over 10 per cent (based on closing price on listing date).

Sigachi Industries gave a stupendous return of 270 per cent followed by Paras Defence (185 per cent) and Latent View (148 per cent). 32 of the 50 IPOs are trading above the issue price (closing price of 15th March, 2022).

Average listing gain was 33 per cent, in comparison to 36 per cent in 2020-21 and 24 per cent in 2019-20. Twenty-two out of the 52 IPOs that hit the market had a prior PE/VC investor who sold shares in the IPO.

Urgent need to move towards green steel: Min

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Steel Minister Ram Chandra Prasad Singh on Sunday highlighted the need to move towards green steel, saying the use of hydrogen in the iron ore and steel sector would help reduce coal imports.

He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an ambitious vision on Hydrogen.

"Iron and steel industry will be big beneficiary as coal can be replaced by hydrogen and our dependency on import of coal also will reduce," he said.

Speaking during the day-long National Conference on 'Making India Atmanirbhar in Steel - Role of Secondary Steel Sector', Singh said the suggestions from the industry will be considered and seamless, transparent and flexible process is the avowed aim of the Centre.

He said that industry has made great strides in production by moving from 22 million tonnes in 1991 to 120 million tonnes in 2021-22.

He said that strategy needs to be devised to reach the target of 300 million tonnes by 2030 and 500

million tonnes by 2047.

The Minister of State for Steel Faggan Singh Kulaste in his address urged the industry to be vocal about their requirements and put views of the industry forward with the confidence that they will be heard and the Government will work towards establishing an industry- friendly environment in our country.

Secondary steel sector is a diverse industry in itself. Ideas generated through the conference will be helpful in setting policy directions for the government.

The Minister of State for MSME Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma brought out various assistance being extended to the MSMEs by the government and further exhorted upon the industry to come up with their suggestions which can strengthen the MSME sector in general and steel sector in particular.

The conference has been organised with aim of providing a platform to players in the Secondary Steel sector to share their views on the challenges faced by the sector and ways in which the Ministry can create an ecosystem in which the industry can thrive.

Ola e-scooter catches fire in Pune, firm investigating matter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ola Electric on Saturday said it is investigating the incident of its electric scooter catching fire in Pune and will take appropriate action.

A video of the company's electric scooter catching fire has been widely circulated on social media with users raising questions over the safety standards of the vehicle.Reacting to the incident, Ola co-founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal said in a tweet: "Safety is top priority. We're investigating this and will fix it."

In a detailed statement on Twitter, the Bengaluru-based company stated: "We are aware of an incident in Pune that happened with one of our scooters in Pune and are investigating to understand the root cause and will share updates in the next few days."

The company further said it is constantly in touch with the customer "who is absolutely safe".

Asserting that vehicle safety is of paramount importance for it, Ola Electric said, "We take this one incident seriously and will take appropriate action and share more in coming days."This is the first safety-related incident reported since the company started deliveries of the electric scooter. It had earlier faced issues with delivery timelines.



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Faridabad-based electric vehicle maker, a part of the Anglian Omega Group, Omega Seiki Mobility (OSM) has signed a joint venture pact with the Egyptian e-commerce last-mile delivery firm Rabbit Express to tap the African market.

Under the JV, in which OSM will hold up to 26 per cent stake and Rabbit Express the remaining stake, the latter will initially export its two and three-wheelers to the African market and later the two partners will set up a manufacturing facility in capital city Cairo,

OSM founder and Chairman Uday Narang said.

Besides, OSM will also lend technological support to its Egyptian partner, he said.

The JV will see an investment of USD 10 million to begin with, and once the manufacturing facility comes into being it is expected to be scaled up to USD 50 million, Hani Mohammed Moshref, Chief Executive Officer, Rabbit Express said.

Rabbit Express, which is 40 per cent owned by Ibnsina Pharmacy, has a fleet of 5,000 vehicles serving several e-commerce clients in Egypt. A USD 2-billion market cap company,

Apple reaches 60% sales share mark for 1st time since 2017

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

Driven by strong 5G upgrades for the iPhone 12 and iPhone 13 series, Apple reached the 60 per cent sales share mark globally last year - for the first time since 2017.

According to a new report, the delayed launch of Apple devices in 2020 also pushed demand to 2021.

Apple, with its strong brand power, is in the best position to gain Huawei's premium smartphone users, says a new report by Counterpoint Research.

"This is also indicated by Apple's growth in China, where the brand reached its highest ever market share in Q4 2021. Apple was the top OEM (original equipment manufacturer)



in the premium segment in every region in 2021," the report showed.In 2021, the growth in the premium smartphone segment outpaced the 7 per cent (on-year) growth in the overall global smartphone sales.The premium segment alone contributed to 27 per cent of the global smartphone sales, its highest ever share.

"The premium market growth in 2021 was driven by a mix of factors, including replacement demand, OEM

strategies and supply chain dynamics. Upgrades to the affordable-premium segment in emerging economies and replacement demand for 5G devices in advanced economies continued to drive growth," said Research Director Tarun Pathak. Samsung's sales grew 6 per cent (on-year) in the segment, but the company lost share. The S21 performed better than the pandemic-hit S20. The Galaxy Z Fold and the Flip series, which were launched in H2 2021, also performed well.

"Going forward, the premium segment, driven by the replacement demand across markets, is likely to keep growing and outpace the global smartphone market growth," said senior analyst Varun Mishra.

Bharti Airtel to acquire 7% stake in Avaada KNShorapur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel has entered into an agreement to acquire over 7 per cent stake in Avaada KNShorapur for Rs 1.74 crore as cash consideration, the telecom company said in a regulatory filing on Sunday.

Avaada KNShorapur is a special purpose vehicle formed to own and operate captive power plants, in terms of the regulatory requirement for captive power consumption under electricity laws, it said.

The acquisition does not fall within the purview of 'related party transactions'.

Giving details of the acquisition cost, the company mentioned that it entails Rs 1,74,26,500 in aggregate for buying a total of 17,42,650 equity shares of Rs 10 each. "...The company has entered into an agreement for the acquisition of 7.036 per cent equity stake in Avaada KNShorapur, a special purpose vehicle formed for the purpose of owning and operating the captive power plant, in terms of the regulatory requirement for captive power consumption under electricity laws," the filing said.The objects and effects of the acquisition are "to comply with the regulatory requirement for captive power plants under the provisions of Electricity Act 2003 and Indian Electricity Rules' 2005 and procurement of cost-effective renewable energy".

India out of Women’s WC

South Africa beat Mithali Raj’s side by 3 wickets in the final league stage encounter to dash Women in Blue’s hopes of reaching the World Cup semifinals

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

An inconsistent India crashed out of the Women’s World Cup after suffering a heart-breaking three-wicket defeat against South Africa in a must-win league-stage game that went down to the wire, here on Sunday.

Smriti Mandhana (71), Shafali Verma (53) and skipper Mithali Raj (68)struck half-centuries, setting the platform for India to reach a competitive 274 for seven at the Hagley Oval.

Despite India’s average bowling and fielding, the match last full distance with off-spinner Deepti Sharma needing to defend seven runs in the final over.

A well-set Mignon du Preez was caught in the deep off the penultimate ball, raising hopes of a memorable win for India. The Proteas now needed three runs off the final ball.

However, moments later the umpires ruled that Deepti had overstepped, turning India’s ecstasy into agony in a matter of seconds.

Du Preez eventually hit the winning runs off the final ball and remained unbeaten on 52 to see her team through and finish second in the league stage behind Australia.

As it panned out, Australia, South Africa, England and West Indies reached the last four stage.

In possibly her last match for India, skipper Mithali Raj was left devastated along with her teammates.

India were not consistent enough to make the semifinals and ended fifth in the league stage with three wins and four losses.

South Africa were cruising in their run chase with the in-form Laura Wolvaardt (80 off 79) and Lara Goodall (49 off 69) sharing 125 runs for the second wicket.

India rely heavily on veteran pacer Jhulan Goswami for early breakthroughs and her absence due to a side strain made the task easier for the South Africans.

Harmanpreet Kaur, who made 48 with the bat, got rid of opener Lizelle Lee (6) with a brilliant direct hit before Wolvaardt and Goodall got together and took the game away from the opposition.

Wolvaardt continued her sensational run of form with her fifth



Eng crush B’desh to reach semis

AP ■ WELLINGTON

England cruised into the Women’s World Cup semifinals with a crushing 100-run victory over Bangladesh in their final group stage match on Sunday.

It sealed a dramatic resurgence for the defending champions who had been on the brink of elimination after losing their first three matches in the 50-over competition. They then won all of their remaining four games to secure a place in the top four.

The comprehensive win saw them overtake the West Indies to join top qualifiers Australia and South Africa in the knockout stage. England lost wickets at regular intervals in the first half of



their innings and were 96 for four before Sophia Dunkley, who scored 67, led a middle-order charge to get the score up to a defendable 234 for six.

Bangladesh found it difficult to score against a tight England attack, averaging just 2.79 runs per over until they were all out for 134 with 12 balls remaining.

Player-of-the-match Dunkley

faced just 72 deliveries, scoring eight fours, and featured in a 72-run partnership with Amy Jones (31) for the fifth wicket and then put on 43 with Katherine Brunt (24*) for the sixth wicket.

Salma Khatun, who took the prized England wickets of Heather Knight for six and Nat Sciver for 40, finished with two for 46.Bangladesh never threatened to get near the English total despite a safe start by Shamima Sultana and Sharmin Akhter who put on 42 for the opening wicket. They were tied down by a penetrating England bowling attack led by Sophie Ecclestone who took three wickets in her 10 overs for a miserly 15 runs while Brunt, although wicketless, conceded only seven runs from her five overs.

sure game while their opponents took the field in their last league game having already qualified for the semifinals.

Shafali (53 off 46) and Smriti (71 off 84) shared a 91-run stand off 90 balls for the opening wicket to provide the start India were looking for.

Shafali scored bulk of the runs in the partnership with Smriti and looked at her fluent best en route her maiden World Cup fifty. She put South Africa’s best bowler, pacer Shabnim Ismail under the pump by attacking her from the word go.

Shafali collected three boundaries off Shabnim’s second over including an audacious walk across the off-stump to whip the South African bowler over short-fine leg.

The 18-year-old completed her first fifty of the competition with a boundary over mid-on off pacer Masabata Klaas.

With the way the openers were going about their business, India looked on course for 300 for the second time in the tournament. However, they lost Shafali against the run of play before number three batter Yastika Bhatia got out in a bizarre fashion.

There was a miscommunication over a quick single on the leg side between Shafali and Smriti while Yastika played a sweep shot on to her stumps off spinner Chloe Tryon, leaving India at 96 for two from 91 for no loss.

Mithali and Smriti then got together to regain the lost momentum.

It was a typical Mithali knock as she changed gears after taking her time early on. She released the pressure with a bunch of cut shots off spinners before hitting a sublime cover driver off pacer Marizanne Kapp.

With Mithali joining strong and Harmanpreet joining her in the middle, India found their rhythm back to reach 223 for three in 40 overs.

However, only 51 runs were scored off the last 60 balls for the loss of four wickets as India failed to get the final flourish.

Interestingly, Mithali scored her fifty in a crucial game at the same ground where she scored her maiden World Cup half-century 22 years ago.



I’ve not really thought about my future: Mithali on retirement call

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

She may have earlier hinted at a possible retirement at the end of the Women’s World Cup, but veteran India captain Mithali Raj on Sunday said it’s not the right time to take a call on her future just after the country’s heart-breaking exit from the showpiece.

The 39-year-old Raj, the lone woman cricketer to have played in six World Cups after making her maiden appearance 22 years ago, said she has not even come out of the disappointment of failing to qualify for the semifinals after India’s three-wicket loss to South Africa here.

"You’ve not given me even an hour to think about my future, to go through and process what has just happened today," Raj said in the post-match virtual media interaction, replying to a query about future plans.

"When you have a disappointment and in the campaign which ends like this in a World Cup where you’ve really prepared very hard over a year, it takes time to accept and then probably move on from there."

"Whatever the future holds for each and every player, so I’ve not really thought about my future."

Raj, only the third cricketer (men and women) after Sachin Tendulkar and Javed Minadad to play in six World Cups, had earlier dropped hints about her retirement, saying "life has come full circle" for her as she looked forward "to finishing the journey".

But on Sunday, she said she will take a call on her future career when

the "emotions are settled down".

"I am not in... It would not be appropriate for me to comment on my future, considering that the sort of game that we just played and as emotions are still there," Raj said when prodded if the South Africa match was her last in India colours.

"It needs to settle down before I could sort of have clarity on that and give an answer to that."

Lacking in consistency throughout the World Cup, India lost to South Africa by three wickets in their must-win game to make an exit from the tournament.

"Honestly, right now I don’t have any emotions. I’m just trying to get a hang of how the match has gone through," Raj said.

"Probably it will hit me, maybe tomorrow, because at some point we’ll have to deal with the disappointment. It’s a process that will take time."

The World Cup exit may also have ended the illustrious career of iconic India pacer Jhulan Goswami who missed the match against South Africa because of a side strain.

"There will be generations of players coming and going. The team definitely will have to get going. After every World Cup there is always a change in the team. There will be fresh faces in, there will be some experienced players in," the skipper said.

"Every team has to go through this process of rebuilding the team especially after the ODI World Cup, so that they prepare for the next tournament in another four years. We are no different. The Indian team will probably go through the same transformation."



Medvedev tops Murray at Miami Open

AP ■ MIAMI

Daniil Medvedev never gave Andy Murray a chance.

The top-seeded Medvedev opened his quest at trying to reclaim the world’s No 1 ranking on Saturday by topping Murray 6-4, 6-2 in the second round of the Miami Open. Medvedev never faced a break point in any of his nine service games.

He can reclaim the No 1 spot by making the Miami semifinals.

"I’m happy that I managed, you know, to have zero break points against me," said Medvedev, who had a first-round bye as a seeded player. "I feel like I have some room for improvement. But it was a great match against an amazing player. And I’m happy that I managed to go through."

Only five men in the past 18 years have held the No 1 ranking that is currently held by Novak Djokovic. Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal are also past No 1’s - while Medvedev and Murray are the others. Murray was No 1 from November 2016 through August 2017, and that distinction was handed off between Djokovic, Federer and Nadal since before Medvedev got there for the first time on Feb 28.

Medvedev’s stay was brief; his three-week reign ended officially on Monday when Djokovic returned to the top of the rankings. But with three more wins in Miami, Medvedev would be back on top.

Murray is a two-time Miami Open winner, those victories coming at the tournament’s former home in nearby Key Biscayne. His loss meant only one past Miami men’s winner remains in the field - that being defending champion Hubert Hurkacz, the No 8 seed who defeated Arthur Rinderknech 7-6 (5), 6-2 and moved into the third round.

Meanwhile, Naomi Osaka moved into the fourth round without ever taking the court. Osaka - the former women’s No 1-ranked player who got straight-set wins on Wednesday and Thursday to get into Round 3 — got a walkover victory Saturday when Karolina Muchova withdrew citing a need for recovery.

PTI ■ BASEL

Ace Indian shuttler P V Sindhu clinched her second women’s singles title of the season with a straight game win over Thailand’s Busanan Ongbamrungphan but HS Prannoy went down fighting in the men’s singles final at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Sunday.

Playing her second successive final in the tournament, Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, took 49 minutes to get the better of the fourth seeded Busanan 21-16, 21-8 at the St. Jakobshalle here.

However, Prannoy suffered a 12-21, 18-21 defeat against Asian Games gold medallist and fourth seed Jonatan Christie of Indonesia in a 48-minute summit clash to finish runner-up.

For Sindhu, it was a moment of glory as she finally lifted the trophy after losing to Rio Olympics gold medallist Carolina Marin of Spain in the final of last edition.

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad has happy memories of this venue as she had also claimed the World Championships gold in 2019.

On Sunday, Sindhu registered her 16th win over Busanan in 17 meetings, having lost to the Thai only once -- at the 2019 Hong Kong Open, to claim the Super 300 crown, the second lowest tier of BWF Tour events.

Sindhu had won the Syed Modi International Super 300 in Lucknow in

Sindhu wins Swiss Open title

January this year.

Sindhu rode on her attack to open up a 3-0 lead but Busanan started to stay in the rallies and produced some good quality shots to make it 7-7.

Busanan tried to keep Sindhu away from the net initially, making her move across the court but the Thai was erratic in her finishing, allowing the Indian to go into the break with a narrow two-point lead.

Busanan used her deceptions and drop shots to dictate the rallies but Sindhu relied on her retrieval skills to stay ahead.

A precise return at the backline gave Sindhu four game points and she sealed the first game when Busanan went wide.

Busanan struggled with her length after the change of sides to concede a 0-5 lead early on in the second game. Sindhu looked more aggressive as she troubled the Thai with her acute angle shots to dictate terms.

In full flow, the Indian soon cruised to a decisive nine-point advantage at the interval. She kept a firm grip on the match to gallop to 18-4, riding on her alert front court play and precise returns.

Busanan continued to hit wide and long to eventually hand over 16 match points to the Indian, who pocketed the game and the match comfortably.



Eriksen scores on Denmark return

AP ■ AMSTERDAM

Denmark’s Christian Eriksen made an emotional goal-scoring return to international football on Saturday as England, Germany and Spain carved out friendly victories.

Eriksen found the net two minutes after coming on with a powerful drive in a 4-2 defeat against fellow World Cup qualifiers Netherlands in Amsterdam.

It was his first national team appearance since suffering a cardiac arrest in Denmark’s opening game of the European Championships against Finland in Copenhagen last June.

On Saturday, to the resounding applause of fans and even Dutch manager Louis van Gaal, the 30-year-old came off the bench and raised his hands to the sky in thanks.



His goal was 37th in 110 appearances. It was fitting he scored in the Amsterdam Arena, the home of Ajax.

Eriksen came through the ranks at the Dutch side, making 162 appearances for the club and

winning five trophies, including three consecutive league titles between 2011 and 2013.

Meanwhile, Harry Kane converted a late penalty to close in on the all-time England goal-scoring record and secure a 2-1 win over



Switzerland who will also be at the World Cup in Qatar in November.

Kane netted from the spot to reach 49 England goals, moving him ahead of Gary Lineker and into a second place tie with Bobby Charlton.

Only Wayne Rooney, with 53 goals, has scored more times for England.

Breel Embolo put Switzerland ahead at Wembley after 22 min-

utes in a first half dominated by the visitors before Luke Shaw’s equaliser in first-half injury time.

Kane restored order with his 78th-minute winner.

GERMANS WIN

Chelsea pair Kai Havertz and Timo Werner both hit the net as Germany eased past Israel 2-0 in Sinsheim.

After the Premier League pair scored first-half goals, Germany’s stand-in captain Thomas Mueller and Israel sub Yonatan Cohen both failed to convert late penalty attempts.

Germany head coach Hansi Flick has now won his first eight internationals to extend his record start.

Spain, World Cup winners in 2010, had to work hard to carve out a 2-1 win against Albania in Barcelona, the team’s first game

in Catalonia since 2004.

Ferran Torres opened the scoring for Spain in the 75th minute at Espanyol’s RCDE Stadium with Myrto Uzuni equalising 10 minutes later.

However, Dani Olmo saved Spain’s blushes with a last-minute winner as Spain secured an eighth win in eight matches against Albania.

BELGIUM HELD

Top-ranked Belgium led twice in Dublin but were still held 2-2 by Ireland.

Playing without the influential Kevin de Bruyne, who has been rested for the international window, Belgium took the lead after 12 minutes through Michy Batshuayi who brushed past Seamus Coleman to beat Caoimhin Kelleher in the Irish goal.

CAPITALS GET OFF TO A FLIER

Kuldeep, Lalit & Axar shine as Delhi stun Mumbai Indians



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Lalit Yadav played the innings of his life with an unbeaten 48 while Axar Patel smashed 38 not out off just 17 balls as a depleted Delhi Capitals started their IPL campaign with a stunning four-wicket win over Mumbai Indians here on Sunday.

Chasing a challenging 178, Delhi were down 72 for 5 inside 10 overs but the lesser-known Delhi all-rounder Yadav stayed calm during his 38-ball unbeaten knock to take his side home.

India all-rounder Patel chipped in with a quick fire 17-ball 38 not out as DC overhauled the target with 10 balls to spare.

Yadav smashed four boundaries and two sixes, while Patel had two hours and three maximums as the duo stitched a match-winning 75-run partnership from 30 balls for the seventh wicket.

After an ordinary day with the ball (4-0-40-0), Patel kept his best for the run chase after Delhi lost their key batters -- Prithvi Shaw (38), Rishabh Pant (1), Rovman Powell (0) -- cheaply. Mumbai looked ordinary in their pace attack with Jasprit Bumrah returning wicketless (3.2-0-43-0).

They were also sloppy on the field as Patel made full use of his dropped catch by Daniel Sams on 15.

Sams also leaked 24 runs in the 18th over with Yadav hitting him for back-to-back four and six, while Patel hammered a monstrous six in the final ball to

Rohit fined ₹12 lakh for MI's slow over-rate

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma was on Sunday fined ₹12 lakh after his side maintained a slow over-rate in their IPL match against Delhi Capitals here.

"The Mumbai Indians have been fined after they maintained a slow over rate during their TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2022 match against Delhi Capitals at the Brabourne Stadium, Mumbai on March 27," the IPL said in a media release.

"As it was the team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma was fined ₹12 lakhs."

seal the chase, reaching 179 for 6 in 18.2 overs.

With their star Australian recruit David Warner unavailable for initial few matches, Kiwi recruit Tim Seifert sizzled in his new opening role for Delhi.

He took on Bumrah up front, and lofted the India's

pace spearhead over his head for a boundary. Seifert dished out another stunner against Bumrah, this time a lofted drive over cover in a shot that had class written all over it.

At the other end, Shaw started it off with a six off Basil Thampi as DC cruised to 30 in three overs.

Rohit introduced leg-spinner Murugan Ashwin (4-0-14-2) in the fourth over and that move paid dividends.

Ashwin deceived Seifert with a wrong one to clean up the Kiwi wicketkeeper-batter through the gate.

He next had Mandeep Singh in the space of one delivery with the batter gifting his wicket off a high full toss.

After Ashwin's twin breakthroughs, Thampi (4-0-35-3) rocked Delhi with his triple strikes -- Shaw, Rovman Powell and Shardul Thakur.

Earlier, wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan showed immense maturity as he anchored Mumbai innings to a fighting 177 for 5 with an unbeaten 81.

The 23-year-old opener, who became the most expensive buy of the IPL 2022 auction when MI bought him back for Rs 15.25 crore, proved his worth as he smashed 11 fours and two sixes in his 48-ball unbeaten knock.

After playing a second-fiddle to his skipper Rohit Sharma (41) inside the Power Play, Kishan came on his own to smash his third fifty in a row for MI, and 10th overall.



Punjab beat RCB by 5 wkts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Newly-appointed skipper Faf du Plessis' scintillating 57-ball 88 went in vain as Punjab Kings produced a solid batting display to script a successful chase for a five-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in a thrilling IPL match here on Sunday.

While Du Plessis showed his six-hitting prowess, hammering seven maximums in his whirlwind knock, Virat Kohli also chipped in with an unbeaten 41 off 29 balls and Dinesh Karthik made a quick fire 32 not out as RCB posted a massive 205 for 2 after being invited to bat.

The chase was steep but not impossible and Punjab produced a sensational effort to overhaul the target, scoring 208 for 5 with an entire over to spare.

While Mayank Agarwal (32 off 24) and Shikhar Dhawan (43 off 29) added 71 for the first wicket to lay the foundation for the chase, Bhanuka Rajapaksa (43 off 22) also shone on his IPL debut but Punjab suffered a collapse to be down and out at 156 for 5.

However, Shahrulkh Khan (24 not out off

20 balls) and Odean Smith (25 not out off 8 balls) then joined hands to complete the job in the end. The duo shared a 52-run unbroken stand off just 25 balls for the sixth wicket to take Punjab home.

Smith smashed three sixes and a four off Mohammed Siraj in the 18th over to accumulate 25 runs and bring down the equation to 11 from the final two overs.

Shahrulkh, who hit one four and two maximums, finished the game with a boundary as Mayank Agarwal started his captaincy tenure with a win.

Earlier, RCB skipper du Plessis and Kohli added 118 runs for the second wicket after the former and Anuj Rawat (21) had laid the foundation with their 50 run-stand.

The former South Africa skipper, who got a 'life', made optimum use of it and then upped the ante, as the carnage started from the 12th over when he hammered a towering six off Liam Livingstone.

Du Plessis was brutal on Odean Smith, whom he hammered for a boundary and two successive sixes. He followed it up with two sixes off Harpreet Brar (0/38).

Gujarat, Lucknow aim for winning start on IPL debut

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Armed with hard-hitting all-rounders, new entrants Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants would aim to start their IPL campaign on a winning note when they square off here on Monday.

Gujarat could most likely open with young Shubman Gill and Afghanistan batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who is also a wicket-keeper.

The duo can take any opposition attack to task, but would need to be wary of the bounce at the Wankhede stadium.

Gujarat would heavily bank on the performance of their skipper Hardik Pandya, who has loads of experience playing at the Wankhede with Mumbai Indians.

Known for his six-hitting prowess, Hardik this season will have to take more responsibility with the bat and also bat higher up the order.

And ditto for Rahul Tewatia, who would need to shed his one match IPL wonder tag. Tewatia has already said that he would need to take more responsibility with the willow.

Another key all-rounder for them is Vijay Shankar and his four overs with his medium pace could also make the difference. The three on their day can single-handedly win the game and they would hope



that come Monday, they can fire in unison.

Someone like Karnataka's Abhinav Manohar would need to shoulder responsibility in the middle order along with David Miller.

Key pacer Mohammed Shami will lead the bowling attack and would be looking for a successful run to make a strong case for selection in the India squad for the World Cup in Australia later this year.

Another important cog in their wheel is leggie Rashid Khan, who could relish bowling on the Wankhede track.

For Lucknow, a lot rests on their skipper KL Rahul, who could open the batting with South African Quinton De Kock. With wide range of shots at their disposal, the duo can pummel any attack to submission.

Lucknow too have an array of all-rounders in Deepak Hooda, Krunal Pandya and West Indian Jason Holder, and their role with the bat in the middle order along with Manish Pandey, a seasoned campaigner, is vital.

Another option for the team management is Evin Lewis, an explosive batter.

The bowlers led by Avesh Khan would need to bowl tightly to stop Gujarat batters and another important cog in their wheel is Ravi Bishnoi, who can deceive the batters with his googlies.

It remains to be seen whether the team management play an extra pacer or a spinner and considering that the first game was a low-scoring affair and dew played a part, team winning the toss, would opt to bat first.

Mortaza urges BCB to reward Taskin monetarily for missing IPL



AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

Former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Mortaza wants the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to provide monetary compensation to Taskin Ahmed for not letting him participate in the IPL. The former right-arm seamer also observed that all the hard work done by the seamer during the COVID-induced break has reaped rewards.

BCB denied a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) to Taskin Ahmed for missing the ODI series against South Africa. This was after IPL franchise Lucknow Super Giants approached him to replace their injured pacer Mark Wood. Earlier, Mustafizur

Rahman had also offered words of consolation to his teammate for missing out on the IPL.

When asked for his opinion, Mortaza strongly argued for a compensatory reward for Taskin Ahmed. He thinks such compensation is an incentive for players to keep giving their best.

In an interview with Cricbuzz, when asked about the possibility of a monetary reward for Taskin, the former Bangladesh captain was quoted as saying:

"Certainly. If you look at ECB and see what they are doing with Anderson and Broad, it's not compensation, it's just a reward that they are playing for the country, instead of playing in the IPL. By doing

this, what happens is that players have a good feeling that board is seeing their welfare."

Taskin Ahmed has delivered impressive performances in international cricket of late, most recently against the Proteas. The 26-year-old claimed the Player of the Series award in a historic ODI series victory in South Africa. He took eight wickets in three games, including a fiver in the final ODI at Centurion.

Mortaza underlined that all his rewards are due to the hard yards put in during the COVID-induced break. Nevertheless, he remains keen to see how Taskin Ahmed carries himself amid the fans' and media's attention. The veteran added:

"Of course, Taskin's hard work has paid off. He did hard work during COVID, so now he is getting results. I think he is now passing through his prime, but the most important thing is how he controls, because there will be a different environment when he returns as media, fans, and everyone will be following him. The important thing for him is controlling these things, keeping his feet on the ground and keep on doing what he is doing now. I think he has to realize that his job is only inside the ground... not outside."



Last year we talked about Dhoni relinquishing captaincy this IPL: Fleming

PTI ■ MUMBAI

CSK head coach Stephen Fleming said that MS Dhoni's decision to relinquish captaincy was not a sudden move as they "talked about it" last season.

Fleming, however, said the timing of stepping down from CSK captaincy was left to Dhoni.

"We have talked about it. It is something MS talked about with me during last season. The timing was though his call," Fleming said on Saturday. After 12 seasons, four title triumphs and five runner-up finishes later, the iconic Dhoni on Thursday decided to hand over the captaincy of CSK to his trusted lieutenant, Jadeja.

CSK had said that the 40-year-old will continue to represent the franchise for the "season and beyond". Fleming said the transition from Dhoni to Jadeja has gone nicely. "It has been documented widely to give Jadeja a clean slate going in the series (IPL). It was communicated to (Mr Srinivasan) through the team," Fleming said. "We 100% respect that. It is going to be a bit of a transition period as we develop a relationship with Jadeja and also have MS there. You just don't discard a player just because he doesn't have the captaincy tag. Develop a new captain and you work with the experience you have got, and thankfully we have got quite a bit of that. This is a bit of a change, but we will work through that."

West Indies beat England by 10 wickets, win series

AP ■ GRENADA

West Indies needed just over an hour to complete a crushing 10-wicket victory over England in the decisive third and final Test on the fourth morning at the Grenada National Stadium on Sunday.

Senior pacer Kemar Roach claimed the last two wickets of the tourists' second innings to dismiss them for 120 after resuming at the overnight position of 103 for eight.

Needing just 28 runs for victory, openers Kraigg Brathwaite and John Campbell knocked off the runs in fewer than five overs with Brathwaite, the West Indies captain who was also named man of the series for his tally of 341 runs across the three matches, fittingly getting the winning runs off the bowling of Chris Woakes. This result earned the West Indies a 1-0 series victory following tedious draws in the first two matches in Antigua and Barbados.

England's record of futility in Test series in the Caribbean has now been extended as they have won just one series - 2004 under the leadership of Michael



Vaughan - in the 54 years since Colin Cowdrey's team prevailed 1-0 in five Tests against a home side led by Gary Sobers in 1968.

Inevitably the spotlight fell on England captain Joe Root after this humiliating defeat for his team which followed a crushing Ashes loss in Australia.

"I think I've made it quite clear about how passionately I feel about this team," he said at the end of the match.

"I feel I have the support of the guys behind me to take the team forward and that's not changed. That's not changed at all."

Root did elaborate though on the dis-

appointment of his team's performance in this critical fixture on a surface which was very different from the placid pitches at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and Kensington Oval.

"Yesterday was really a frustrating day, such an important day in the series and we just didn't manage it as well as we could have and as we showed in the first two matches," he explained.

"After a difficult winter it's frustrating after believing that we were making some strides forward."

"I just don't think we read the surface as well as we should have individually," Root added in dealing with England's double batting failure at this venue. "We have made some strides but there's still a lot of learning that needs to be done. It's not going to happen overnight and we are going to have to keep working hard."

In assessing his team's ability to once again turn back an England challenge on home soil, Brathwaite acknowledged that appreciating West Indies' excellent home record against these opponents was important in the preparation for the series.

Zampa ready to lead Aussie attack



AP ■ LAHORE

Having spent most of his career attempting to silence those who doubt him, Adam Zampa will walk onto the Gaddafi Stadium this week with almost no one left to disprove.

Regarded as one of the leading white-ball bowlers in the world, Zampa is the second-most capped player in Australia's depleted squad for their three-match ODI series against Pakistan, starting in Lahore on Tuesday, with skipper

Aaron Finch the only teammate to have played more than the leg-spinner's 125 limited-overs games for Australia.

"I feel like I don't have to look over my shoulder too much with selection (anymore)," Zampa said on Sunday.

"I definitely feel more comfortable in this team. I guess when you're younger, you naturally probably look over your shoulder, you doubt yourself a lot more. (But) you have ups and downs in your career and ups and downs with selection, everything like that adds up ... you build up a bit of a defence, you build up confidence (and) experience."

"I feel like at this point in my career, I've played 65 ODIs and probably the same amount of T20s for Australia, I have built up a game plan, (I have) certain preparation that I feel I need to succeed at this level."

"I've been in this team for six years now. You never probably want to use the word comfortable, but I definitely capped myself in a lot more these days. "Aaron Finch has helped me massively with my game. He backs me in when I'm out there and lets me run my own show with my bowling, and he's been really good with his own ideas as well. He's been a big backer of mine, same with Andrew (McDonald, the interim head coach).