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'GOVT WORKING ON COMPREHENSIVE
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NEW DELHI, MONDAY MAY 16, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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MOODY HAPPY TO
CONTINUE WITH
KANE AS OPENER
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Indian shuttlers script historic title triumph

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Dishing out a performance for the ages, India's men's badminton team lifted the Thomas Cup title with a commanding 3-0 win over powerhouse Indonesia on Sunday, a historic triumph that will enhance country's status in the sport.

World Championships medallist Lakshya Sen, Kidambi Srikanth and doubles players Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy delivered when it mattered the most, as they stunned the 14-time champions to win the prestigious team championship for first time ever.

An incredible week culminated in a fitting manner for Indian badminton as the country had never reached the summit clash of the world's most prestigious team event before.

The underdog Indian side had not even reached the last-four stage since 1979 and ended up upsetting formidable Malaysia and Denmark en route the summit clash.



After being off-colour in the knockout stages, young Sen handed India a 1-0 lead with a come-from-behind 8-21 21-17 21-16 win over world number five Anthony Sinisuka Ginting in a superb show of

temperament and skill.

"Being 3-4 points down didn't matter because I knew I was going to play from the better end and I can open up and he will be under pressure," said Sen after the tie.

"This one is for the team they have been backing me throughout. I have played well but not got the results. I'm happy that I pulled the first set for the team," he added.

The country's best doubles

India stun defending champions Indonesia 3-0 to win maiden Thomas Cup

pair of Rankireddy and Shetty then showed nerves of steel as it saved four match points in the second game to eventually outwit Mohammad Ahsan and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo 18-21 23-21 21-19.

In the second singles, Srikanth outclassed Asian games gold medallist Jonatan Christie 21-15 23-21 in 48 minutes to seal the historic victory. The superlative show earned the Indian team a handsome one core reward from the sports ministry.

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Sports Min
announces
₹1 cr reward

New Delhi: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday announced a cash award of ₹1 crore to the Indian men's badminton team which created history by winning the coveted Thomas Cup title for the first time.

Cong to launch 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' on Oct 2

Internal reforms to prepare for Assembly and 2024 LS polls announced

PNS ■ UDAIPUR/NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday announced that it would launch a nationwide 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' from Kanyakumari to Kashmir on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on October 2, this year. Party president Sonia Gandhi, former chief Rahul Gandhi besides all the senior leaders will take part in the yatra to give a fresh lease of life to the party.

The Grand Old Party which concluded its three-day 'Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir' in Udaipur on Sunday also announced wide-ranging organisational reforms to make the party battle-ready for the next round of Assembly elections and the Lok Sabha polls in 2024.

The party stressed on wider representation to those under 50 years of age and enforcing 'one person, one post' and 'one family, one ticket' rules with riders. In its Udaipur Declaration adopted after rigorous deliberations at the 'Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir', the Congress also decided to set up three new departments: Public insight, election management and national training.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi announced that a task force would be set up to initiate organisational reforms.

Some sankalps at Chintan Shivir

- Task force to be set up to initiate reforms within Congress organisation.
- Congress chief to set up advisory group from among Congress Working Committee members to deliberate on political challenges.
- No person should hold one party position for more than five years.
- Congress to apply '1 person, 1

- post', '1 family, 1 ticket' rules with riders
- Ticket for second family member only after five years of party work
- 50 per cent representation to those below 50 years of age at all levels of the organisation
- Congress to set up three new departments: Public insight, election management and national training



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks during the party's 'Nav Sankalp Shivir', in Udaipur

PTI

Rahul stepped up his attack on the Narendra Modi Government, urging the party members to sweat it out to prevent further damage to the nation from the divisive nature of the incumbent regime and the ideology of the RSS.

Rahul said he was ready to undertake the pad yatra (foot march) and urged the party-men to knock on every door of the country where they will find a Congress connect.

"I have no qualms in admitting that we have lost the connection to the grassroots

but neither have we lost hope nor have the people of this country who are fed up with the existing divisive kind of regime. We will sweat it out and I believe every Congress leader and worker believes in the same. I am with you in every fight to resurrect the party and bring the nation back on the path of development and peace for which the Congress is known ever since it fought for Independence," Rahul said amidst a huge round of applause from the gathering.

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Mundka fire: Building owner Lakra arrested

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday arrested Manish Lakra, the owner of the commercial building in outer Delhi's Mundka where a massive fire claimed the lives of at least 27 people.

The police said Lakra — arrested from West Delhi's Ghevra Mod, near the Haryana-Delhi border — was planning to flee to Haridwar in order to evade arrest.

According to police, the building was transferred to Lakra after the death of his father in 2015.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the death of 27 people in the Mundka fire incident. The AAP alleged that "illegal industrial activities" were going on in the building as its owner Lakra enjoyed protection from the BJP leaders. In a media briefing Deputy Commissioner of Police



Officials investigate the Mundka fire, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

(DCP), Outer district Sameer Sharma said on Sunday police received specific inputs that Lakra was going towards Haridwar following which a trap was laid by the police team and he was arrested from Ghevra Mod.

"Lakra's building had a shop on the ground floor and on the first, second and third

floor. There is a company named "Cofe Impax Pvt Ltd" which imports parts of CCTV cameras, and SIM routers. Around 100 employees were working there. He was living in a 2-BHK house on the fourth floor along with his wife mother and two children," said the DCP.

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Putin seriously ill: Ex-British spy

Prez is very ill with blood cancer, says oligarch with close ties to Vladimir in a recording

New Delhi: Russian President Vladimir Putin is "seriously ill" and it is an "element" of what is happening in Ukraine, said a former British spy. "It's not clear exactly what this illness is - whether it's incurable or terminal, or whatever.

But certainly, I think it's part of the equation," he said.

Christopher Steele, who wrote a dossier on Donald Trump and alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US election campaign, told Sky News: "Certainly, from what we're hearing from sources in Russia and elsewhere, is that

Putin is, in fact, quite seriously ill."

Meanwhile, an oligarch with close ties to the Russian leader has reportedly been recorded as saying "Putin is very ill with blood cancer".

In a recording obtained by a US magazine New Lines, the unnamed oligarch was heard discussing Putin's health with a Western venture capitalist.

Speculations around the Russian President's health intensified since the Ukraine war as the leaders appeared frail at public events including the Victory Day celebrations last week.

In the photos and videos doing the rounds on social media, Putin had a thick green cover draped over his legs as he sat among Second World War veterans and senior dignitaries to watch a military parade in Moscow's Red Square.

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Probe ordered into use of force against Kashmiri Pandit protesters

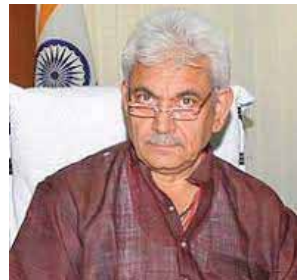
MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Facing allegations of use of "brutal force" against the Kashmiri Pandit employees who were protesting the killing of Rahul Bhat, Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday ordered an enquiry to find out why the police used batons and tear gas shells against peaceful marchers outside Sheikhpora transit camp in Budgam on May 13.

The SIT has been formed to probe into all aspects of Bhat's killing, and it will also look into the tear gas shelling incident. Strict action will be taken against those found guilty," Sinha announced after meeting a delegation of Bharatiya Janata Party leaders at Raj Bhawan in Srinagar.

Sinha also met a delegation of People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) before heading to New Delhi.

According to official sources, Sinha is expected to stay put in the national Capital



for a couple of days. In Delhi, he will attend high-level security review meetings in the backdrop of a fresh surge in the incidents of terrorist violence in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir ahead of the start of Amarnath Yatra from June 30.

The recent incident of the mysterious fire in a passenger bus near Katra town, the base camp for the pilgrims visiting the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Reasi district, is also under the scanner even as forensic teams of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) have collected samples to determine the nature of the blast, if

any. Four persons were killed and 24 others injured on Friday when a fire ripped apart the moving bus, mostly carrying devotees, near Nomai, about 3 kilometers from Katra, shortly after it left for Jammu from the base camp. A team of NIA inspected the wreckage of the bus on Saturday and collected samples during their one-and-a-half-hour stay at the scene.

"The NIA has extended all requisite assistance to J&K Police in the investigation of the case of passenger bus catching fire near Katra on Friday. Detailed forensic probe is continuing to identify the reasons for the cause of fire," the agency said in a tweet.

Though the survivors and the people residing in the vicinity of the incident spoke about hearing the sound of an explosion in the bus, Additional Director General (ADG) of Police, Jammu zone, Mukesh Singh, said the initial probe does not point to use of any blast.

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CAPSULE

10 DEAD IN BUFFALO SUPERMARKET ATTACK

Buffalo: A white 18-year-old man wearing military gear and live streaming with a helmet camera opened fire with a rifle at a supermarket in Buffalo, killing 10 people and wounding three others. P9

'PROBING INDIAN MEDIA REPORT ON LTTE ATTACK'

Colombo: Sri Lanka on Sunday said it is taking all further steps to strengthen the security of the country as it investigates the report published in Indian media that the banned LTTE is planning an attack in the island nation on May 18.

CRICKET WORLD PAYS TRIBUTE TO SYMONDS

New Delhi: Andrew Symonds' sudden death triggered outpouring of emotional tributes in the cricket world with a host of past and present players.

1st Indian layman declared saint by Pope

PTI ■ VATICAN CITY

Devasahayam Pillai, who embraced Christianity in the 18th century, was on Sunday declared a saint by Pope Francis at the Vatican, becoming the first Indian layman to be canonised.

Devasahayam was recommended for the process of Beatification by the Vatican in 2004, at the request of the Kottar diocese, Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council and the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India.

Pope Francis canonised Blessed Devasahayam Pillai along with nine others during a Canonisation Mass in St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Detailed Report on P 9

Record 1.33 lakh flamingos flock to Navi Mumbai wetlands

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Flamingos descending in thousands on the wetland areas of Navi Mumbai is a common sight between November and May, but environmentalists and lovers of the pink-winged guests are thrilled as a record 1.33 lakh migratory birds have been sighted during 2021-22.

No wonder that ahead of the World Migratory Bird Day (WMBFD) celebrated on Saturday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray at a State Cabinet meeting held on Thursday cleared for submission to the Centre the proposal for designating the biodiversity-rich Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS) in Thane-Navi Mumbai belt as a Ramsar site as per the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as



Flamingos flocking the wetlands area of the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary located in the Thane-Navi Mumbai belt

Siddhesh Surve | Pioneer

Waterfowl Habitat is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. Also known as the

Convention on Wetlands, it is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the convention was signed in 1971.

Navi Mumbai wetlands

If approved by the Centre, TCFS — spread over 1,690.5 hectares — will be the first such wetland site in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and the third in Maharashtra to be designated as a Ramsar site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Himself a wildlife and aerial photographer and a naturalist, Uddhav is keen on TCFS being declared as a Ramsar site. His son and State Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray — who had cleared the proposal on December 9 last for final approval by the Chief Minister — is pushing for declaration of TCFS as a Ramsar site.

Between November and May every year, pink-winged guests flock the mudflats, creeks and wetlands of MMR in vast numbers, mostly for feeding purposes from breeding sites in the Gujarat region

as well as Iran. Migration from breeding ground starts after the monsoon when water-filled regions start drying up.

Thousands of people from Mumbai and neighbouring areas through parts of TCFS and other creek areas in MMR to catch a glimpse of the sea of pink in the wetland areas.

The State Government's decision to send a proposal to the Centre to designate the TCFS as a Ramsar site as per the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands could not have come at more appropriate time than now when informed researchers from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), a pan-India wildlife research organisation which has been monitoring, tracking and tagging flamingos since 2018, have recorded highest-ever 1.33 lakh of flamingos in MMR during 2021-22.

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India protests against killings of minorities in Pakistan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking strong exception to the killings of two Sikhs in Peshawar, India on Sunday registered protest on the targeted killings of the minority community in Pakistan. Incidentally Prime Minister Sheebaz Sharif condemned the incident and promised to punish the culprits.

Reacting to the killings, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said here on Sunday that India expects that the Pakistani Government would look after the safety, security and well-being of its minority communities.

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My party wanted to separate Mumbai from BMC: Fadnavis

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Denying that his party had any plans to separate Mumbai from Maharashtra, former chief minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said here on Sunday that his party wanted to “separate” Mumbai from the “corruption” of the Shiv Sena which rules the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Virtually launching the BJP’s campaign for the BMC polls to be held in September-October this year, Fadnavis hit out at chief minister and Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray for his “allegation” that his party wanted to separate Mumbai from Maharashtra. “No one can separate Mumbai from Maharashtra. All we want to do is to separate Mumbai from the corruption and misconduct of

the Shiv Sena which rules the BMC,” he said.

Addressing a rally of North Indian community at Goregaon in north Mumbai, Fadnavis said that if late Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray, if he were to be alive, would have been pained to see that during his son’s rule reciting Hanuman Chalisa would be a sedition and going to Aurangzeb’s tomb would be a protocol.

Vowing to bring down the “Babri” and “Lanka of corruption” of the three-party MVA government comprising Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, Fadnavis retaliated to the allegations made against him by Uddhav at the rally that the latter addressed in Mumbai on Saturday evening.

Slamming Uddhav for ridiculing him that he (Fadnavis) might have gone to Ayodhya for his school or college picnic and

that if he had tried to climb the Masjid the structure would have collapsed under his weight, Fadnavis said: “Yes I had gone to Ayodhya to bring down. In February 1992, I became a corporator and in July the same year I became an Advocate. I had gone to Ayodhya with slogans like Lathi, goli kayenge, mandir waye banayenge. I am proud that I had gone to Ayodhya then.”

Wondering as to why Uddhav felt insulted when he said that no Sena leaders were present at Babri Masjid at that time, Fadnavis used a lyrics of a film to take a dig at the chief minister. “Aare main Ayodha jaa raha tha, Main tho Babri Gira raha tha, mandir bana raha tha, thuje mirchi lagi tho main kya karu?”

Replying to Uddhav’s charge that if he (Fadnavis) had tried to climb the masjid, the structure would have collapsed

under his weight, “Now I weigh 102 kgs, I was weighing 128 kgs...Yes I was in Babri and I was in Budaun jail...we were just waiting where were they, when they would come...let me tell him in the language he understands....if my FSI is now 1.5, then it was 2.5....Yes, I was very much there.”

“No doubt Balsaheb Thackeray was a wagh (tiger) but today there is only one tiger(Prime Minister) Narendra Modi,” he said, accusing the Shiv Sena of faking Hindutva.

He said that BJP would undertake ‘kar seva’ time and again when it came to protecting Hindu culture and traditions.

Refuting Thackeray’s charge that BJP was behaving like a jilted lover, Fadnavis said: “In fact, you took our property, ran away and married someone else...even while there was no official divorce”.

BKU expels Rakesh Tikait

Chauhan chief of new faction

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a politically significant development, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) on Sunday expelled its firebrand leader Rakesh Tikait, the face of the farmers’ protest in 2020.

Apart from Rakesh Tikait, his brother Naresh Tikait has also been removed from the post of BKU’s national president.

Farmer leader Rajesh Singh Chauhan has replaced Naresh Tikait and has been elected as the new BKU (Apolitical) chief.

Chauhan was elected as the new BKU chief in a meeting on Sunday. Rakesh Tikait tried hard to persuade the farmers to

remain united and not to float a new organisation but the farmers’ leaders opposed to political activities refused to budge.

The meeting was organised to commemorate the death anniversary of Mahendra Singh Tikait, the founder of BKU.

Chauhan asserted that the farmers’ body would not work for any political party. He announced the formation of a new faction, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Apolitical).

The farmers’ meeting also elected Harnam Singh Verma as the state president of the BKU (A) and Mangeram Tyagi as national vice-president.

The Tikaits have been accused by farmer leaders of playing politics, and working in the interests of a political party.

With the ouster of the Tikaits, the organisation, which was responsible for spear-heading and leading the farmers’ protest against the three farm laws for nearly a year has been divided into two factions.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Chauhan remarked that a lot of hard work had been put in to create the unified Bhartiya Kisan Union, which was formed to safeguard the interests of the farmers. The organisation under the Tikaits was turned into a “political zone”, he added.

“Today our organisation held a meeting. Our new organisation’s name will be Bharatiya Kisan Union (Apolitical). We have no comment on Rakesh Tikait, or Naresh Tikait; they can keep doing what they want to do. The BKU was turned into a political zone. It was inspired by electoral politics,” the BKU (A) chief said.

He added, “We spoke to Rakesh Tikait and expressed our concerns. We did a lot of hard work to create BKU, but he asked us to support one party. We object to that. Our motive is to look into the problems of farmers. We will not work for any party.”

After the farmers’ protest

fizzled out with the repeal of the three farm laws, Rakesh Tikait was spotted campaigning for political parties. As the spokesperson of the farmers’ outfit, Tikait’s alleged political affiliations had raised eyebrows. In March 2021, he had gone to campaign for the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal’s Nandigram and Kolkata in April last year.

The Bharatiya Janata Party had alleged that “background support” was voiced by Mamata Banerjee to Tikait-led farmers’ protest.

In Uttar Pradesh, his elder brother Naresh Tikait, while addressing the people, said that he hoped that the state would support the Samajwadi Party-Rashtriya Lok Dal coalition candidates in the UP assembly elections.

Although Rakesh Tikait vowed to go to UP voters with the slogan of ‘Defeat BJP’, he did a complete U-turn after the party’s victory and asserted that the people’s wish was paramount.

Mumbai Magistrate’s court remands Ketaki Chitale in police custody

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after she was arrested for sharing an objectionable and derogatory post on Facebook against NCP founder-President Sharad Pawar, a Mumbai magistrate’s court in Thane on Sunday remanded Marathi actress Ketaki Chitale in police custody till Wednesday.

Twenty-nine-year-old Ketki, who was arrested by the Thane Crime branch police from Kalamboli in Navi Mumbai on Saturday evening, was produced before a holiday court at Thane, which sent to police custody till May 18.

Though the objectionable Facebook post shared by the actress did not mention the NCP chief’s full name, it referred to him through his surname as Pawar and mentioned his age as 80 years. The FB post, which described Pawar as “a mosquito”, carried

comments like “hell is waiting” and “you hate Brahmins”. The tweet mentioned the name of Advocate Nitin Bhawe.

Acting on a complaint lodged by one Swapnil Netke, the police had registered a case against Ketki under sections 500 (defamation), 501 (printing or engraving matter known to be defamatory), 505 (2) (making, publishing or circulating any statement, rumour or report promoting enmity, hatred or ill will between classes), 153 A (spreading disharmony among people) of the IPC.

Incidentally, Chitale has been booked under three FIRs by as many police stations in Thane, Pune, Pimpri.

Chitale, who is known for her controversial posts on social media, earned the wrath of the NCP women workers, who hurled ink at her while she was being taken to a police jeep at Kalmboli in Navi Mumbai.

Chitale was manhandled and some ink fell on her hand and clothes.

The post shared by Ketki was the second objectionable post against Pawar that has figured in the social media for the past few days. Earlier on May 11, one Nikhil Bhamre put out a camouflaged “death threat” against the NCP chief. The tweet read thus: Time has come for the ‘Gandhi’ of Baramati... And for Baramati to prepare a Nathuram Godse.... Baramati Uncle apologise”. The tweet was “liked” and “re-tweeted” by scores of twitter users.

Nikhil Bhamre (23), pharmacy student, was also arrested on Saturday for allegedly sharing objectionable social media posts about Pawar.

Bhamre has also been booked under sections 153A, 500, 501, 504 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of IPC.

UP an emerging economy, has best investment opportunities: Yogi

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR/LUCKNOW

Stating that Uttar Pradesh in the last five years had succeeded in providing a safe and secure environment to the investors, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the state had become the favourite destination of the investors and was emerging as the leading economy of the country.

While launching development projects of Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority (GIDA) worth Rs 143.69 crore and handing over land allotment letters to the investors in Gorakhpur on Sunday, the chief minister said, “Uttar Pradesh is moving rapidly towards achieving Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s target of making India a \$ 5 trillion economy by 2024.”

“Prime Minister Narendra

Modi has set an ambitious target of making India a \$ 5 trillion economy. Uttar Pradesh, with the largest population, will play an important role in this. This could be made possible only when the state’s economy becomes a \$ 1 trillion dollar one,” Yogi Adityanath said.

The chief minister said that during the first term of his government, investment proposals worth more than Rs 3 lakh crore were put on the ground. He said on June 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi would lay the foundation stones for investment projects worth more than Rs 75,000 crore in the state’s third groundbreaking ceremony.

The chief minister said that along with big industrial projects, the government was working to bring prosperity in the lives of lakhs of people by including traditional and local

products in One District One Product scheme and running Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana for traditional craftsmen. Yogi said that Gorakhpur, which was once infamous due to criminals and backwardness, was scripting a new story of development.

“A lot of offers from industries are being received here. Such proposals and development work will generate numerous employment opportunities for the youth. The GIDA was established 40 years ago, however, the development started only when the Bharatiya Janata Party formed the government in Uttar Pradesh,” he said.

It is noteworthy that an investment of over Rs 1,000 crore is proposed by the new investors, through which about 2,700 new job opportunities will be created.

Four drown in Ganga

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic incident, four drowned in the river Ganga in Bhadohi on Sunday morning.

Five youths bathing in the river Ganga started drowning on Sunday morning. While one of these youths was rescued, the remaining four were still missing and were feared dead. Divers were searching for the youths.

The incident took place in Bihrojpur Ganga ghat in Gopiganj Kotwali area. Some youths hailing from Kaulapur village had gone to take bath in the river on Sunday morning. While taking bath, five youths went into deep water and suddenly started drowning. A local woman who was also taking bath threw a sari after she heard screams of the victims. She managed to save one of the youths identified as Ashish Mishra, while the remaining four youths drowned in the river. The cops were trying to fish out the bodies at the time of filing the report.

In another incident, a farmer was electrocuted to death in Jalesar police station area of Etah district on Sunday. Station House Officer of Jalesar police station, Irfan Khan, said that in Nagla Dhaniram village, a 35-year-old farmer, Yogesh, had gone to his tube well to water his field and as soon as he switched on the pump, he came in contact with a live wire and was electrocuted.

According to Khan, the policemen who reached the spot on getting information, registered a case and sent the body for post-mortem.

Pankaj Thakur, the district president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), who reached the village on getting information of the farmer’s death, demanded financial assistance for the victim’s family. Thakur also complained of the problem of high voltage in the area which often damaged submersible pumps, lights of houses and other electronic gadgets of the farmers and local residents.

PM arriving in Lko today, to meet Yogi, Mins

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive here to interact with Uttar Pradesh ministers at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s residence in Lucknow on Monday.

Modi is also scheduled to visit Kushinagar where he will attend a programme organised at Mahanirvana Stupa on the occasion of Buddha Purnima the same day.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday visited Kushinagar and reviewed preparations for the prime minister’s tour.

An official spokesman confirmed that the prime minister is scheduled to meet the UP council of ministers at the chief minister’s residence in Lucknow. Uttar Pradesh ministers have recently concluded their visits to all the 18 divisions of the state.

Modi’s interaction with the



Uttar Pradesh ministers may centre on the progress of implementation of development programmes and schemes at the grassroots level in various districts and divisions.

The chief minister issued directives to administrative and police officers at a meeting held at Kushinagar international airport. He said all the preparations should be completed in time. He went to Mahaparinirvana temple, offered prayers and reviewed the arrangements there as well.

Indian shuttlers...

From Page 1

Sen gave a terrific display of his mental fortitude as he recovered from the opening game reversal to outwit his higher-ranked opponent. It was his second win in as many career meetings against Ginting. The match was fast-paced with the two players producing angled returns in the rallies to put each other in awkward positions.

At the break, Ginting was 11-7 up and it was a one-way traffic thereafter as the Indonesian easily walked away with the first game. After the change of sides, Lakshya played better and led 7-4 before entering the break with four-point advantage.

Ginting mounted his attack to narrow the lead to 11-12 but Sen kept a tight grip on the rallies and grabbed five game points and took the match to the decider.

Sen continued to engage his rival in rallies but Ginting rode on his precision to make it 5-1. The Indian showed great temperament as he slowly scripted a comeback, cutting the lead to 6-8.

Mundka fire...

From Page 1

He said on the day of the incident, a sales motivational programme was conducted by the company at 4 pm and all employees had gathered on the second floor.

“After the fire broke out, many people got stuck and couldn’t come out due to smoke and fire inside the building. There was only one exit point at the back side of the building,” said the DCP.

“Lakra was at his residence on the top floor when the fire broke out and he escaped through the adjacent building with his wife and children,” said the police. The local people and firefighters rescued 50-60 people while 27 charred bodies were recovered after the situation was brought under control.

An First Information report (FIR) under sections 304

(Punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 308 (Attempt to commit culpable homicide), 120 (Concealing design to commit offence punishable with imprisonment) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the Indian Penal Code IPC was registered and Harish Goel and Varun Goel, owner of the company, were arrested.

However, the owner of the building Lakra was absconding after the incident. The Goel brothers’ company from where the fire is suspected to have started had been on the premises since 2017.

“A police team was formed to trace and nab Lakra, who had given the building on rent to Goel brothers. Multiple raids were conducted in Delhi and Haryana by the police teams,” said the DCP.



Cows drink water from a water body during a hot summer day, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad

Photo | PTI

India protests against killings...

From Page 1

The two Sikh businessmen — Saljeet Singh (42) and Ranjeet Singh (38) — were shot dead on Sunday by unidentified gunmen in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“We have seen the reports on the brutal killing of two Sikh traders by unidentified armed men in Peshawar. Sadly, this is not the first such case or a rare occurrence,” Bagchi said.

He said “grave concerns” have been expressed by various quarters of the Indian civil society and the Sikh community at this shocking and deplorable incident.

“We have registered our strong protest with the Government of Pakistan on continued targeting of members of the minority community in Pakistan,” Bagchi said.

Record 1.33 lakh....

From Page 1

The BNHS’ annual flamingo monitoring exercise was undertaken this year in the month of March-April for the first time since 2018 owing to successive lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. “Approximately 1,33,000 flamingos were observed this year (during April) across the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS), Sewri-Nhava and adjacent zones. In comparison, 1,03,000 flamingos were spotted in 2020-21 (during February), 96,400 during 2019-20 (February), and 1,20,000 during 2018-19 (March),” Rahul Khot, deputy director, BNHS, said.

According to Khot, the number of lesser flamingos from December 2021-March 2022 has been 65,000 at wetland areas of TCFS, 25,000 at Sewri and 9000 at Nhava. The population of this species has witnessed a marginal increase across all three locations this year.

Probe ordered..

From Page 1

“The bus caught fire on its way from Katra to Jammu. The cause of fire is not confirmed yet,” Singh had told reporters at the scene of the incident, adding a forensic team is looking into the cause of fire.

Meanwhile, J&K BJP Unit Chief, Ravinder Raina, who was leading the delegation along with general secretary (Organisation) Ashok Koul expressed concerns over the killing of innocents and handed over a memorandum to the Lt Governor.

Referring to the demand of posting in safer areas, the Lt-Governor gave an assurance to the BJP delegation that all the PM package employees will be posted at secure District and Tehsil Headquarters and Jammu Kashmir Police will ensure adequate security of employees and their family members.

Cong to launch....

From Page 1

On her part, Sonia Gandhi said, “We will launch a national Kanyakumari to Kashmir Bharat Jodo Yatra beginning on Gandhi Jayanti this year. All of us will participate in it. The Yatra is to strengthen the bonds of social harmony that are under stress, to preserve the foundational values of our Constitution that are under assault and to highlight the day-to-day concerns of crores of our people.”

The party, through its Udaipur declaration, also decided that no person should hold one party position for more than five years in order to give an opportunity to new people. The party has also decided to provide 50 per cent representation to those below 50 years of age at all levels of the organisation.

Putin seriously....

From Page 1

Putin, in a black bomber jacket, was also spotted coughing and was the only person among his group who needed additional coverings to combat the relatively mild 9-degree Celsius weather, reported The Independent.

The Russian oligarch says in the recording that Putin had surgery on his back linked to his blood cancer shortly before ordering the invasion of Ukraine. The President has gone “crazy”, he adds. Recently, a video meeting between Putin and Russian Defence minister Sergei Shoigu, showed him tightly clutching the table, not letting go for the entirety of the 12-minute clip.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BALASORE
“e” Procurement Notice For Road Work

O-207 Identification No.- Online Tender- Road N.C.B. No. 331 for 2022-23.
Letter No. 1437 / Date. 11.05.2022

1.	Name of the work	:- PMGSY Road Work				
2.	Total No. of work	:- 4 No.s(Four)				
3.	Estimated Cost	:- Rs. 293.02 lakhs to Rs.854.55 lakhs (Approximately)				
4.	Eligible Class of Contractor	:- “B”, “A” & Special & Super (of Odisha P.W.D.) or relevant Class of other licensing authorities (as per annexure).				
5.	Period of Completion	:-9 to 11 Calendar months for the work.				
6.	Other details	:-				

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding	Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification.	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O.C.C.E.R.W. Circle, Balasore	Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	From 3	To 4	5	6	7
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Balasore	N.C.B. No 331	At 11.00 A.M	Up to 5.00 P.M.	Up to 5.00 P.M.	At 11.00 A.M.	Will be intimated later

• Further details can be seen from the website: www.pmgstenders.gov.in

Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Balasore.

OIPR-25105/11/0009/2223

Mundka fire: Building owner enjoyed protection from BJP leaders, claims AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the death of 27 people in Mundka fire incident.

The AAP alleged that the "illegal industrial activities" were going on in the building as its owner Manish Lakra enjoyed protection from the saffron party leaders. Lakra was arrested by the Delhi Police on Sunday.

Addressing a Press conference in the national Capital, Durgesh Pathak, the senior AAP leader also showed some pictures in which Lakra was seen with some BJP leaders, including former Mayor of the North Delhi Municipal Corporation.

"The BJP is the real culprit behind the Mundka fire tragedy. The building owner, Lakra and BJP MP Parvesh Verma's chacha Master Azad Singh have deep ties. The BJP's 2015 Delhi Assembly election's campaign office was in this very building that caught fire," said Pathak.

"Being a Lal-Dora area, Industrial



activities were not to be carried out in this building. In 2016, this factory's owners applied for a license for the same. The MCD issued the factory license despite being aware of it.

But after seven-eight months people started complaining which led to the factory licence being cancelled in 2017," said Pathak adding that due to the support from BJP, industrial activities continued at the site even after the cancellation of the license.

"In 2018, the building was sealed by a monitoring committee set up by the Supreme Court and till date the building is sealed on the MCD papers, but industrial activities were being carried out in the factory through a discreet passage," claimed Pathak.

"If there is an individual or an organisation to blame for the 27 innocent lives that were lost in the tragic fire, it is the BJP, its leaders, their flagrant corruption, and their undying greed which had cost us so many poor lives. I urge for a thorough investigation in the matter at the earliest," said Pathak.

L-G gives nod to probe

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Sunday gave nod to magisterial inquiry into the recent fire tragedy in Outer Delhi's Mundka area which claimed the lives of 27 people. According to officials, the District magistrate (West) will probe lapses on the part of the concerned departments and agencies, recommend action against the erring officials and fix responsibility. The DM will also suggest remedial measures to prevent such tragedies in future, the officials said.

According to the officials, the file on the probe has been approved by the LG. The terms of reference of the inquiry include ascertaining the circumstances and the cause of the fire. "The probe will also ascertain lapses on the part of the concerned departments and agencies and their officers in relation to their expected roles. It will fix responsibility of the concerned officials for the lapses and recommend action against erring officials, individuals and agencies," the officials said.

"The probe will also suggest remedial measures to prevent such tragedies in future. As part of the inquiry, the DM will also ascertain if there was any violation of laws," the officials added.

The fire, one of the deadliest in recent years, ripped through a four-storey building in outer Delhi's Mundka area on May 13. It started on the first floor of the building due to a suspect-



ed explosion in an AC, according to fire officials. Nineteen people are still missing.

The magisterial probe into the incident was announced by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal when he visited the spot on Saturday. The Delhi government has announced a compensation of Rs 10 lakh each for the kin of deceased and Rs 50,000 for those injured in fire. Earlier on Sunday, the Delhi Police arrested the owner of the building following multiple raids in the national capital and Haryana.

Kejriwal to hold key meeting with MLAs on anti-encroachment drive today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will on Monday hold a key meeting of Aam Aadmi Party's legislators on the anti-encroachment drive by the BJP-ruled civic bodies in different parts of the city.

The three civic bodies have been carrying out demolitions in several parts of Delhi, including Shaheen Bagh, Madanpur Khadar, New Friends' Colony, Mangolpuri, Karol Bagh, Khyala, and Lodhi Colony. The meeting will begin at 11 am at Kejriwal's official residence in Civil Lines during which a strategy will be chalked out to counter the BJP over the demolition drive, officials said on Sunday.

Earlier, the meeting was scheduled for Saturday but was cancelled following massive fire in a building in Mundka in which 27 people have died.

Delhi Police reaches Raj to arrest Min Joshi's son in rape case

During their first meeting, she alleged, he spiked her drink and took advantage of her

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A team of Delhi Police officials on Sunday reached Jaipur to arrest Rohit Joshi, Rajasthan Minister Mahesh Joshi's son who is accused of rape and has now been asked to appear before them by May 18.

"A police team of officers on Sunday reached Jaipur in connection with the case to nab Joshi who has been absconding. Police teams are conducting a search to locate and trace him," said a senior police official.

This comes days after a 23-year-old woman from Jaipur

has alleged in Delhi that Rohit, the son of Rajasthan Minister for Public Health Engineering, raped her on multiple occasions over a year, following which the Delhi Police has registered a zero FIR initially. A zero FIR can be registered anywhere in the country.

The Delhi Police team visited Joshi's under construction residence in Sen Colony, Jaipur, where it glued a notice for Rohit.

"You are hereby informed that a case has been registered against you at PS Sadar Bazar, Delhi. You are hereby directed to appear before the undersigned and to join investigation by May 18 at 1.00 pm at PS Sadar Bazar along with any relevant record/document available with you," the notice states.

The team did not visit the official residence of Minister Mahesh Joshi. In her complaint, the woman had alleged that she was raped on several

occasions between January 8 last year and April 17 this year. Later, the Delhi Police converted the zero FIR into a regular FIR since the allegations of commission of sexual assault committed in Sadar Bazar police station jurisdiction has also been mentioned.

The case was registered on May 8 at a police station in North District under sections 376 (rape), 328 (causing hurt by means of poison, etc., with intent to commit an offence), 312 (causing miscarriage), 366 (kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel her marriage, etc), 377 (unnatural offences) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, the police said.

The woman had said she developed friendship with Rohit Joshi on Facebook last year and since then they have been in contact.

The two met in Jaipur first and he allegedly invited her to Sawai Madhopur on January 8,

2021.

During their first meeting, she alleged, he spiked her drink and took advantage of it. When she woke up the next morning, he showed her naked photographs and videos which worried her, reads the FIR.

Mentioning about another meeting, she had alleged that Rohit Joshi had also once met her in Delhi and forced himself upon her. "Rohit made me stay at a hotel where he got our names registered as husband and wife.

He then promised to marry me...But then he got drunk and abused me...He would beat me up and make obscene videos of me. He would threaten to upload them and make them viral...", the woman alleged. The complainant further stated in FIR that on August 11, 2021, she found out that she was pregnant with his baby and alleged that he forced her up take a pill but she didn't.

SDMC starts 125 libraries, 73 reading corners in its schools

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With an aim to provide excellent education with advanced infrastructure, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) on Sunday said in association with the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), it had started 125 libraries, and 73 reading corners in the schools under its jurisdiction.

The Commissioner of SDMC, Gyanesh Bharti has shown deep interest in setting up excellent libraries in the corporation schools and bringing about a positive change in the lives of children by motivating them to read good and inspirational books.

According to the Commissioner of SDMC, "The civic body has been establishing well-equipped libraries inside the school premises.

In collaboration with NGOs- Angelica Foundation, Room to Read, and Katha-SDMC's Education Department has set up well-equipped and readers-friendly libraries in as many as 125 schools."

"When a child goes through a good book, a new door of knowledge

opens up for him. Books in these libraries are available for students of all ages studying in the SDMC schools," Bharti said.

"The Education Department, joining hands with Angelica foundation, has set up 56 libraries in Central Zone, 39 schools in South Zone and 30 schools in West Zone while efforts are being made to open similar libraries in Najafgarh Zone also," Bharti informed.

While informing about the places where the libraries are made operational, Bharti said that the libraries have been made operational in Tughlakabad Extension, Kalkaji, Premnagar, Ashram, etc in Central Zone, Ambedkar Nagar, Khanpur, Deoli, Pushp Vihar, RK Puram, etc in South Zone and Tagore Garden, Raghuraj Nagar, Subhash Nagar, etc in West Zone.

He further informed that the civic agency, with the help of an NGO, has also developed Room to Read and Katha, and had started 73 'Reading Corners' in the primary schools where there is no separate room and space for running a full-fledged library.

Post Delhi blaze firefighters put on alert in Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following the massive fire in adjoining Delhi that claimed at least 27 lives, Gautam Buddha Nagar's Police Commissioner, Alok Singh, has put firefighters on alert.

"In view of the massive fire that broke out in a CCTV factory in Delhi, the CP has directed the fire officials to be alert to deal with any situation," a police spokesperson said.

"The firefighters have also been instructed to go to schools, colleges, private companies etc. And hold mock drills in order to spread awareness about controlling a fire in case of any incident and preventing loss of life," the official said.

Fire Service officials from Ecotech 3 station on Saturday held mock drills at multiple firms in Greater Noida. They also engaged the staff and security personnel of the firms to inform them about the measures to be taken in case of a fire, the spokesperson said.

During the mock drills, the firefighters also taught the firm employees and security personnel techniques to handle and use basic firefighting equipment as a first responder to any emergency, the official added.

More such mock drills are being held in other parts of Noida and Greater Noida, and will continue in the future, according to officials.

NDMC to build commercial complex at Yashwant Place

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the aim to provide a commercial space following the vision of the Prime Minister's "Ease of Doing Business", the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Sunday said that they will construct a commercial complex at Yashwant Place, in the national Capital.

According to the Vice-Chairman of NDMC, Satish Upadhyay, a good location in the city attracts and retains the best employees. Prominent location decisions can significantly boost a company's long-term performance. Considering this, NDMC will construct a commercial project at Yashwant Palace.

While giving the technical details of the project, Upadhyay informed that the building will consist of three basements with an area of 4344.60 sqm each, a Lower ground floor with an area of 4208.32 sqm, and a podium ground with an area of 1159.14 sqm. "The total proposed covered area of 8906.77 sqm with Floor Area Ratio (FAR) achieved as 96.81 and the total height of the building is 30m submitted by the Architectural Department with floor wise covered area," Upadhyay informed.

"The building will be a provision of seven storied with the different areas on each floor, first floor 1131.14 sqm, second floor 989.23 sqm, third, fourth, and seventh floors 1163.86 sqm, 1190.49 sqm, and 782.28 sqm respectively," he said. "The general features and major components of project, as informed by Shri Upadhyay, proposed building will be constructed on RCC Framed Structure to meet all design features, prerequisites in line to have Griha three-star rating including provision of Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), dual piping system, structural glazing, etc.

Heatwave continues to bake Delhi, temp up 45.6 degrees Celsius

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Heatwave continues to rattle the national Capital, as Delhi on Sunday witnessed the maximum temperature of 45.6 degrees Celsius which is five notches warmer than the normal temperature for this time of the year.

The minimum temperature recorded at the Safdarjung Observatory was 25 degrees Celsius, which was normal for this season. The relative humidity on Sunday morning at 8:30 was recorded at 40 per cent and 15 per cent in the evening at 5:30.

The weather stations at Ridge, Ayanagar, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, Palam, and Lodhi Road recorded maximum temperatures of 47.2 degrees Celsius, 46.8 degrees Celsius, 49.2 degrees Celsius, 49.1 degrees Celsius, 47.3 degrees Celsius, 46.4 degrees Celsius and 45.8 degrees Celsius respectively, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD).No respite for the people of the capital city as the IMD predicted that no significant change in maximum temperatures over many parts of Northwest and Central India during the next 24 hours and fall by 2-4 degrees Celsius during the subsequent two days."No significant change in maximum temperatures over Gujarat during next days and rise by 2-3 degree celsius," said IMD.



The peak power demand in the national capital on Saturday cloaked at 6380 MW. According to the sources in discoms, the Delhi power demand cloaked 6380 MW at 12 midnight. The city's peak power demand broke the record on Friday. It not only clocked the season's highest of 6829 MW at 11:25 pm, but also the highest ever in the month of May.

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Delhi HC sends man to jail for 45 days for flouting court order

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A man was sentenced to 45-day imprisonment by the Delhi High Court for committing contempt of court. The court observed that the democratic fabric of society would suffer if respect for the judiciary is undermined.

Justice Subramonium Prasad also imposed a fine of Rs 2,000 on the contemnitor who demolished a boundary wall which was built by the petitioner pursuant to a High Court order.

According to the court order dated May 13, "Keeping in view the contumacious conduct of the Respondent No.1/Contemnitor, this court sentences the Respondent No.1/Contemnitor, who is present in Court today, to undergo 45 days of simple imprisonment along with a fine of Rs 2,000. The Respondent No.1/Contemnitor is directed to be taken in custody forthwith."

The contemnitor tendered an unconditional apology to the court for his conduct while claiming that there is a dispute between him and the petitioner regarding the demarcation of their properties which are situated next to each other and, therefore, the demolition of the petitioner's boundary wall was conducted because he was under the misconception that the wall had been constructed on his land.

Justice Prasad opined that the purpose of contempt jurisdiction is to uphold the majesty and dignity of the courts of law and court orders cannot be flouted by using strong arm tactics.

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In Manesar's Karma Lake Land Field, the 'Givemetreestrust' an NGO under the sustainable plantation campaign of 'Peepal Baba' — who has developed the world's largest Peepal-Banyan plant nursery — has launched a tree-planting campaign.

Under the initiative plants including Peepal-Banyan planted in mountains, vacant fields, parks, unused and non-fertile places of villages as well as on the banks of roads, rivers and streams, etc.

The volunteers of Peepal Baba's trust have planted lakhs of saplings so far. Plants prepared from the nursery located at Karma Lake land site of Manesar have been helped to develop green belts in other cities of the National Capital



Region (NCR) including Gurugram. Spread over an area of 55 thousand square kilometres, plants are now providing lifesaving green cover for citizens of Delhi and NCR where approx about 50 million population live here."Gurugram, Noida and Greater Noida of NCR region are the fastest



expanding cities of India, that is, built of concrete. In such a situation, the expansion of greenery is necessary here.

Apart from promoting greenery in the mountain areas of Gurugram, the Sorkha village of Noida has also been

developed as 'Green', which is unique," Peepal Baba explained. The Noida administration has prepared a plan to develop a big 'green belt' with the financial help of HCL to purify the air (oxygen) for the city. The responsibility of get-

ting it done was given to the NGO of Peepal Baba. "During the last six years my environmental volunteers have established a huge urban forest area of 70 thousand trees in this deserted area of Sorkha village," he said.

Cong to connect with masses all over India

To highlight failures of Govt, plight of Indians

PNS ■ UDAIPUR/NEW DELHI

Launching an ambitious programme for the resurrection of his party, Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, will undertake a padyatra from Kashmir to Kanyakumari to connect with the masses. The yatra was announced on the last day of the three-day 'chintan shivir' of the party in Udaipur.

Similar padyatra will be organised in each State by the State leaders to push pro-people agenda and highlight the "failures" of the Government and plight of the people.

Party President Sonia Gandhi also approved a mass agitation programme against the government on inflation and economic issues.

Announcing the grand old party's massive public outreach initiative, Sonia said, "All of us will participate in it.

The Yatra is to strengthen the bonds of social harmony that are under stress, to preserve the foundational values of our Constitution that are under assault and to highlight the day-to-day concerns of crores of our people."

In a lighter vein she said, "Juniors will have to find ways to accommodate seniors like me in this... on how to easily participate in yatra without running out of breath." Long round of applause greeted the remark of the 75-year-old, who has not been in good health for some time and has made few public appearances.

In 2016, kicking off the Congress poll campaign for the next year's assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Sonia Gandhi had to leave a rally midway due to like health.

In an emotional tone Sonia Gandhi said she felt like she had spent an evening with her family. Then, with a smile, she added, "my larger family", to a bout of renewed cheers.

"By now it has become abundantly and painfully clear what Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his colleagues really mean by their slogan maximum governance, minimum government. It means keeping the country in a permanent



state of polarisation, compelling people to live in a constant state of fear and insecurity, viciously targeting victimising and often brutalising the minorities who are an integral part of our society and equal citizens of our Republic," said Sonia.

Addressing the shivir, Rahul Gandhi announced enforcing the 'one family, one ticket' rule and launched fierce attack on RSS and BJP. He said the fight against the RSS and BJP is a fight for India's future

and Congress's role is to reclaim and protect the institutions of this country.

"We are not fighting a national party. We are fighting against every institution. We are fighting against crony capitalists. I want to tell all our workers and leaders, there is no need to fear. This country recognises the truth. I will stand with you in this fight against the BJP and RSS," Rahul said amidst the reverberations of Rahul Gandhi Zindabad.

Rahul Gandhi said the BJP

attacks the Congress as it provides an ideological alternative. The BJP does not target regional parties as they do not have ideological backing, he said.

"Congress's role is to kick start the conversation to protect and reclaim India's institutions. No regional party can do this. We never attacked India's institutions. We never appointed Congressmen to these institutions, unlike the BJP and RSS," he said, blaming BJP for destroying democratic institutions.

Attacking the BJP-led

Centre, the former Congress chief said conversations are not allowed in India. We see conversations being muzzled and we do not understand its consequences, he said.

"Inflation will rise in the near future. Unemployment, inflation, and attacks on India's institutions are on the rise. We have to ensure they don't set the country on fire. Pegasus is not software, it is a way to silence the political class of the country, a way to strangle political conversation," he added.

Manik Saha takes oath as Tripura Chief Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tripura BJP president Manik Saha on Sunday was sworn in as the 12th Chief Minister of the State replacing Biplab Kumar Deb who resigned a day before.

Governor S N Arya administered the oath to Saha, a Rajya Sabha MP, at the Raj Bhavan at Agartala, the State Capital.

"Will work for the people of Tripura, taking further the development agenda of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Will focus on the law and order situation," Saha said after the swearing-in ceremony.

"There are no challenges," he said when asked about the change of guard in the state months ahead of the assembly elections.

About a year ahead of the assembly polls in Tripura, the BJP on Saturday elected State Saha, a dentist, as a new Chief Minister of the North-Eastern amidst increasing factional



fighting in the state's ruling party.

There was surprise and resentment over the choice of the new incumbent as Saha was elected to Rajya Sabha from the state barely two months ago. The BJP which created history in 2018 by trouncing the 25-year-old left front government in 2018 faces stiff challenge from the Congress, the Left, and an aggressive Trinamool Congress.

The elections to the 60-member Tripura Assembly will be held by February-March, next year.

Bangladeshis held in cross-border money laundering case by ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has carried out search operations at 11 premises linked to Bangladeshi nationals and their associates across West Bengal and arrested a citizen of that country, along with others, wanted in a 10,000 crore Bangladesh Taka bank fraud case there.

Out of the two Bangladeshi nationals whose premises were searched — Proshanta Kumar Halder and Prithvi Kumar Halder, the former was nabbed along with his five other associates during these searches, the ED said in a statement here on Sunday.

Proshanta Kumar Halder was found in the disguised identity of an Indian citizen as Shibshankar Halder.

During the searches, it was revealed that he along with his other associates fraud-

ulently obtained various government identities like Ration Card from the State of West Bengal, Indian Voter ID card, PAN (Permanent Account Number) and Aadhar card.

"The ED has ascertained that these Bangladesh nationals have also managed to float companies in India on the basis of fraudulently obtained identities and have even purchased properties in West Bengal," the ED said.

It has been further revealed that the subject case is an offence of Cross Border Implication under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Proshanta Kumar Halder has been found to be accused in approximately 10,000 crore Bangladesh Taka Bank fraud in Bangladesh and alleged to have siphoned off money outside Bangladesh to various countries, it said.

"Besides Bangladesh and Indian passports, he was also found in possession of a Grenada passport. It has also been learnt that the Interpol has issued a Red Corner Notice (RCN) against Proshanta Kumar Halder," it said.

The ED has arrested all the six persons including mastermind Proshanta Kumar Halder alias Shibshankar Halder under PMLA.

Besides Halder, the other five arrested are Swapan Maitra alias Swapan Mistry, Uttam Maitra alias Uttam Mistry, Imam Hossian alias Imon Halder, Amama Sultana alias Sharmee Halder and Pranesh Kumar Halder.

All the arrested persons were produced before the Special Court (PMLA) which remanded five of the accused persons to the ED custody and one accused to judicial custody.

BSF seizes contraband items

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) on Sunday said its troops in Tripura have seized a huge quantity of contraband items, including 20.5 Kg of Ganja and rescued 29 cattle heads having a combined seizure value worth Rs 2,29,33,241 along with 10,500 Bangladeshi Taka. The force also apprehended two notorious smugglers in different operations on Saturday and Sunday.

"During the wee hours of 14th May 2022, on specific Intelligence input, the troops of Border Out Post (BOP) Srinagar, Ex-109 Battalion, BSF conducted a special joint operation along with Police and successfully recovered huge consignment of 102 Bunches containing assorted clothing items along with one Omni van (TR 03 H 0330), one Bajaj Platina Motorcycle (TR 08 C 9243) and three Mobile Phones having total seizure value amounting to Rs. 2,22,98,000 from a



godown under Police Station-Srinagar (Manu Bazar), Sub Division- Sabroom, District-South Tripura," the BSF said in a statement here.

The paramilitary also apprehended two notorious smugglers--- Madhu Data, 55, along with his associate Pranam Majumdar, 35.

The apprehended persons along with seized mobile phones have been handed over to the

police station Manu Bazar under Sabroom subdivision of South Tripura and remaining seized items along with mentioned vehicles have been handed over to Customs- Sabroom for further course of action, it said. Besides this, the vigilant troops of BSF Tripura also rescued 29 cattle heads and seized 20.5 Kg Ganja and other contraband items having collective seizure value of Rs 6,35,241

besides 10,500/- Bangladeshi Taka in different operations on Indo-Bangladesh International Borders in intervening night of Saturday/Sunday.

"Vigilant BSF troops deployed on the extreme frontiers of the country in Tripura State are effectively manning the International Border and considerably seizing various contraband items on a regular basis from the bordering areas,

thus successfully restricting the trans-border illegal movement of smuggling goods," it said. In its persistent efforts in curbing the menace of trans-border smuggling on the Indo-Bangladesh International Border, BSF Tripura is regularly conducting 'Special Operations' effectively nullifying the nefarious designs of syndicates involved in such activities, it added.

Govt: Country has constraints in availability of domestic coal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country is facing constraints in the domestic coal availability and the rest of the dry fuel demand needs to be met with imports, according to the Coal Ministry.

The Ministry has also emphasised that coal block holders -- both captive and commercial -- have a major role to play in mitigating the coal shortfall situation. Domestic coal production is about 800 million tonnes, according to the coal additional secretary, who is also the chairperson of an inter-ministerial panel on coal linkages for the power sector.

The inter-ministerial panel met recently to consider the requests for coal linkages to central/state sector power plants and to review the status of existing coal linkages.

The additional coal secretary stated that "there are constraints in domestic coal availability and the domestic coal production is roughly about 800 MT".

"Therefore, the rest of the coal demand of the country has to be met through imports from other countries", according to the minutes of the meeting on fuel linkages.

Coal Secretary A K Jain had earlier attributed the low coal stocks at power plants to several factors such as heightened power demand due to the boom in the economy post-COVID-19, the early arrival of summer, a rise in the price of gas and imported coal and a sharp fall in electricity generation by coastal thermal power plants. He had added that a slew of measures is already underway to enhance the total power supply in the country.

Antibiotics overuse can harm microbes: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Antibiotics are life-saving drugs, but their indiscriminate usage can also harm the beneficial microbes that live in the human gut, researchers have said after they found that following antibiotic treatment, some patients are at risk of developing inflammation or opportunistic infections such as Candidiasis.

And if the intestines become damaged by chemotherapy or surgery, then the Candida can get out of the gut and cause a bloodstream infection, they said in the study published in Cell Host and Microbe.

Gut microbiomes are generally known to carry genetically encoded strategies to survive contact with antibiotics.

But the study, led by researchers from the University of Birmingham in the UK and the US National Institutes of

Health, discovered that antibiotics disrupt the immune system in the intestines, meaning that fungal infections become poorly controlled in that area.

The team also found that where fungal infections developed, gut bacteria were also able to escape, leading to the additional risk of bacterial infection. While the study, published in Cell Host and Microbe, demonstrated the potential for immune-boosting drugs, the researchers said their work also highlights how antibiotics can have additional effects on our bodies that affect how we fight infection and disease.

This in turn underscores the importance of careful stewardship of available antibiotics.

"We knew that antibiotics make fungal infections worse, but the discovery that bacterial co-infections can also develop through these interactions in the gut was surprising. These factors can add up to a complicated clinical situation -- and by understanding these underlying causes, doctors will be better able to treat these patients effectively," said lead author Dr. Rebecca Drummond, fungal immunologist at Birmingham.

In the study, the team used mice treated with a broad-spectrum antibiotic cocktail and then infected these animals with Candida albicans, the most common fungus that causes invasive candidiasis in humans. They found that although infected mice had increased mortality, this was caused by infection in the intestine, rather than in the kidneys or other organs.

In a further step, the team pinpointed what parts of the immune system were missing from the gut after antibiotic treatment, and then added these back into the mice using immune-boosting drugs similar to those used in humans.

They found this approach helped reduce the severity of the fungal infection. The researchers followed up the experiment by studying hospital records, where they were able to show that similar co-infections might occur in humans after they have been treated with antibiotics.

An estimated 1.2 million people worldwide died in 2019 from antibiotic-resistant infections, and this number is predicted to increase ten-fold by 2050. The new "findings demonstrate the possible consequences of using antibiotics in patients who are at risk of developing fungal infections," said Dr. Drummond.

"If we limit or change how we prescribe antibiotics we can help reduce the number of people who become very ill from these additional infections -- as well as tackling the huge and growing problem of antibiotic resistance."

DGFT directs regional authorities to issue RCs to wheat exporters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade has directed its regional authorities to issue registration of contracts to the wheat exporters who have irrevocable letters of credit, so that they can honour their contracts.

The direction came after the government banned wheat exports but allowed the overseas shipments for which irrevocable LoC (Letters of Credit) have been issued on or before May 13. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) is an arm of the commerce ministry which deals with exports and imports related matters.

"All RA (Regional Authorities) under the DGFT are hereby directed to issue

Registration of Contracts (RC) to the exporters of wheat, preferably within a prescribed time limit of 24 hours, on submission of application, complete in all respects, by the exporters," the DGFT has said in a trade notice.

It has added that the wheat export on humanitarian ground as aid/assistance/government-to-government shall be allowed on a case to case basis, with the specific approval of the competent authority.

India's wheat exports stood at an all-time high of 7 million tonnes, valuing USD 2.05 billion, in 2021-22 fiscal year on better demand for Indian wheat from overseas. Of the total wheat exports, around 50 per cent of shipments were exported to Bangladesh in the last fiscal.

'Over-counter painkillers linked to increased risks in pregnancy'

Researchers at the University of Aberdeen in the UK analysed data from more than 151,000 pregnancies over 30 years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Would-be moms should not take painkiller pills over-the-counter and instead take medical advice. A study has found that maternal use of over-the-counter painkillers is about one and a half times more likely to increase the risk of delivering a baby with health issues. The researchers of the study have called for a reassessment of medical advice about the use of analgesics during pregnancy. The study is published in BMJ Open.

University of Aberdeen in the UK analysed data from more than 151,000 pregnancies over 30 years.

The team looked at medical notes for non-prescribed maternal consumption of five common painkillers, paracetamol, aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), diclofenac, naproxen, and ibuprofen, either as single compounds or in combinations.

Among mothers who took painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen during pregnancy, the risk of a preterm delivery before 37 weeks was 50 per cent more likely, while the risk of stillbirth was 33 per cent.

Other risks of using painkillers include neural tube defects (64 per cent more likely); admission to a neonatal unit (57 per cent more likely); neonatal death (56 per cent

more likely); and birthweight under 2.5 kg (28 per cent more likely), among others, revealed the study published in BMJ Open.

"It should be reinforced that paracetamol in combination with NSAIDs is associated with a higher risk and pregnant women should always consult their doctor or midwife before taking any over-the-counter drugs. We would encourage a strong reinforcement of the official advice for pregnant women," said Aikaterini Zafeiri from the University.

Between 30 per cent and 80 per cent of women globally use non-prescription painkillers in pregnancy to relieve pain for common pregnancy symptoms such as flu, fever, and inflammatory or rheumatological conditions.

However, current evidence

regarding safety of use during pregnancy varies widely, with some drugs considered safe and others not.

Overall, nearly three in ten women have taken over-the-counter analgesics during pregnancy, a figure which more than doubled to 60 per cent during the last seven years of the 30-year study period. This suggests use is growing rapidly.

"In light of the study findings, the ease of access to non-prescription painkillers, in combination with availability of misinformation as well as correct information through the internet, raises safety concerns," Zafeiri said.

"This is especially when misinformed or partially-informed self-medication decisions are taken during pregnancy without medical advice," she added.



Amravati MP Navneet Rana with her husband MLA Ravi Rana and their followers stage a march from their residence in North Avenue towards the Hanuman Temple in Connaught Place to recite the Hanuman Chalisa, in New Delhi.

Photo | PTI

TN Min slammed for ‘pani puri sellers’ swipe at Hindi speakers

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Senior BJP leader and Uttar Pradesh's former Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma on Sunday attacked TN Higher Education Minister K Ponmudy, terming his Friday statement mocking Hindi-speaking people as one showing "his (the TN Minister's) narrow mindset" and "lack of knowledge".

In his address to the 37th convocation of Bharathiar University in Coimbatore, Ponmudy had on Friday asserted that the State Government will continue with the two-language formula as its policy and decried any alleged attempt of Hindi imposition.

Questioning claims that learning Hindi will fetch jobs, Ponmudy had asked who is selling 'pani puri' in the city (Coimbatore) now, an obvious reference to the predominantly Hindi-speaking vendors involved in the trade.

"Many said you will get jobs if you learn Hindi. Is it so...look here in Coimbatore, who is selling pani puri. It is them (Hindi-speaking individuals)," Ponmudy had asserted while addressing the varsity convocation function.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, Sharma said,

"Languages can neither be divided by boundaries nor can it be confined within boundaries. Language does not need any advocacy."

"The usefulness of a language can be understood only by a person who understands the importance of the language. A person who knows more languages, his/her voice is more effective," he added.

Sharpening his attack, Sharma said, "Opposing Hindi may give some short-term political benefits but it will not help in realising the concept of 'sarve bhavantu sukhinaah' (let all be happy) and 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam' (the world is one family)."

To blunt the Tamil Nadu stand against Hindi, Sharma cited the example of former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and attributed his understanding of the people's issue to his knowledge of many languages.

"Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao knew nine Indian languages and seven foreign languages. And, it was the reason that he was able to emotionally connect with local residents of the place he used to visit," he said.

"The statement by the Tamil Nadu Minister has not only insulted the majority of



the Hindi-speaking people but also the language, which is called the 'bindi' of India," Sharma said.

The BJP leader also accused the Tamil Nadu Minister of having a "narrow mindset". "The statement by the Tamil Nadu Minister shows his narrow mindset and one which shows lack of knowledge. A person should not be judged by his occupation, but by qualities," Sharma added.

The former UP deputy CM also advised Ponmudy to study Hindi, saying only then, he will be able to understand its speciality and that he will experience happiness, and establish harmony between Hindi and Tamil.

Addressing the convocation function at Bharathiar

‘Sense of insecurity among Kashmiri Pandit employees increasing in valley’

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir unit of BJP on Sunday said a sense of "insecurity" among Kashmiri Pandit employees is increasing due to the recent spurt in killings of Hindus by terrorists, asserting that an exodus of members of the community from the valley will be a "black spot" on the initiatives of the Government.

In a memorandum to Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha by a BJP delegation led by its J&K unit president Ravinder Raina, which called on Sinha at Raj Bhavan here, the party also said it will be a "disastrous step" if the Kashmiri Pandit (KP) employees leave the valley.

The BJP's memorandum to LG comes in the aftermath of the killing of Rahul Bhat, a Kashmiri Pandit government employee, which has sparked protests by community members.

"The sense of insecurity is increasing high among Kashmiri Pandits employed under the prime minister's package due to chain of killings of Hindus in valley during the past over a year. Repeated assurances were given to them at each time the killing of any Hindu took place that it won't be repeated. And Rahul Bhat's

killing in a busy government office in broad daylight by terrorists has shattered them," the memorandum read.

The BJP said the KP employees, who protested the Bhat's killing, faced batons and teargas shelling instead of getting a sense of security by the administration of the Union Territory.

"Some of them were injured and a video of which went viral resulting in anti-BJP and anti-Modi ji sloganeering by them, which was seen for the first time in the past three decades in Jammu and Kashmir," the party said.

The BJP said that on Friday, the administration locked gates of the transit complexes housing KP employees and their families "denying" the movement to markets to get food, vegetables and milk and, as per their grievances, they could not send their children to school.

"They are not bonded labourers brought here. What happened in the day was a protest and (they) clashed with police to open gates. It was heating touch instead of confidence building measure, they alleged. The alienation drew them (to) raise anti-Modi ji and anti-BJP slogans during protests in Jammu, Srinagar, Baramulla-Kupwara, Vessu,



Mattan and outside the UT," it said.

The party said it was because of this treatment given by the administration that the employees want to leave the valley, which will be a "disastrous step" and a "black spot" on the initiatives of the government.

"Despite sitting on dharna, neither the administration officials nor head of UT, the KPs say, has reached to them to give them a sense of confidence and assurance. They (KP employees) are hell bent (on) mass resignation," the party said.

The BJP said the minority Kashmiri Hindus and Sikhs are "losing confidence" as they say the lower and middle section bureaucracy and officialdom has the same eco-system as that of the previous period.

During the Congress rule, the party said, when the special employment policy was

framed, a 'bond to serve in Kashmir till retirement' was made the main condition to getting employment.

"This clause is in violation of the Constitution of India and a grave human rights violation meant to give them bad sense of being 'bonded labourer' (and) not an employee," the memorandum said.

Saying there was an urgent need for reaching out to the protesting employees by the LG in order to provide them a sense of security, confidence and belongingness, the party suggested that the clause of 'bond' of the previous employment policy needs to be done away with to address this demand of employees.

"As the employees in J-K are central government employees, policy should also include providing them jobs in Central services too," the party said.

Multi-disciplinary study confirms Mahabharat true chronicle of history

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A new study incorporating archaeology, astronomy, carbon dating, geography, hydrology, archaeo-botany and a host of scientific methods have established that the Mahabharat era was not mythology but a part of the history of ancient India.

Saroj Bala, a Delhi-based former Indian Revenue Service officer who quit her Government job as a Member of the Central Board of Direct Taxes to undertake research that took her more than a decade to complete has found that the Mahabharat was fought in 3139 BCE (Before Current Era) which is more than 5,000 years ago.

"Though the Mahabharat contains more than 1,00,000 verses and 200 references to planetary positions, most of the studies undertaken hitherto had focussed on just 30 to 40 verses and then fixed many different astronomical and archaeological dates for Mahabharat war spanning the period from 5567 BCE to 575 BCE. This had enabled the pseudo-scholars to declare that Mahabharat was only a mythological story composed by Poet Vyas and that it had nothing to do with the history of India," says Saroj Bala.

All proofs from multiple disciplines of

science were correlated with the text of Mahabharat. The uniqueness of the research was the deployment of Planetarium and Stellarium software.

Detailed evidence from archaeology, archaeobotany, geography and geology, oceanography and hydrology, remote sensing and genetic studies was gathered and after that was beautifully woven into the story. These support the astronomical data sequence," said Saroj Bala.

The Planetarium and Stellarium software used by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and has proved its efficacy and replicability over the years.

Dr. Gyaneshwar Chaubey, department of molecular biology, Benares Hindu University who was a collaborator of the studies regarding the authenticity of the people and places mentioned in Mahabharat said that there was no need to doubt the tribes and places featured in the work. "The tribes were found to possess the Indian genes, and we could establish that this was the same genes that were found in the oldest identified Indians," said Prof Chaubey.

Saroj Bala has determined the exact date and times of most of the major happenings in Mahabharat through astronomical studies. She says that Bhishma Pitamah commenced his heavenward

trip on January 14, 3138 BCE, the day Sun began its Northward journey (Uttarayan). These dates were reached by deploying Planetarium Gold software, the same as that is being used by NASA.

"The study by Saroj Bala is the scientific reconstruction of ancient Indian history without any leftist or rightist basis. Sooner or later, the world would adopt her scientific methodology for rewriting the sequence of events of the remote past," said Dr S Kalyanaraman, director, Saraswati Research Centre, Chennai. It was Dr Kalyanaraman who is credited with the studies that proved the existence of the River Saraswati, a holy river which finds mentioned in the great Indian epics.

KK Muhammed, Project Archaeological Director, Aga Khan Foundation, Hyderabad, who has held vast studies on Mahabharata, does not concur with florid exaggerations and oriental hyperboles. He points out references to 'Astras' like Narayani Astra, Brahma Astra and Pasupati Astra (weapon) capable of splitting into millions of self-guiding missiles and devastating the target. Similarly, the deployment of 18 Akshauhinis in the war should be taken with a fistful of salt as each Akshauhini consists of, 21,870 elephants, 21,870 chariots, 65, 610 horses, and 1,09, 350-foot soldiers.

‘TMC leaders who had joined BJP not treated well in party’

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With general elections less than a couple of years away another Trinamool Congress-turned-BJP leader Arjun Singh has unfurled the flag of rebellion targeting the Bengal BJP leadership for the saffron party's "pitiable condition" in the State.

In what critics saw early signs of Singh's gharwapsi exercise (returning to the TMC) the Barrackpore saffron MP on Sunday said that "the TMC leaders who had joined the BJP are not treated well in the party ... they get little importance and their views are not considered."

When reminded that he had been given plum posts and was always invited in important meetings the BJP leader who is also the party's State vice president said, "giving posts is one thing and giving power to act is another ... if you give somebody a pen and do not give him ink then how that person will write."

Though Singh would not for now train his guns at the central leadership he attacked the State leaders for "engaging in facebook and WhatsApp politics instead of going to the grassroots." He said, "In States like Bengal people's issues are not fought in the Net ... you have to go down to the grassroots level ... this is not being done ... this is the reason why the party lost the Asansol by-elections by 3 lakh votes."

Singh who has been con-



spicuously absent from a number of state party programmes in the recent weeks had openly revolted against the

Centre's jute policy. He has threatened to "start a continued movement if the Centre does not withdraw the ceiling it has imposed on the price of raw jute which is causing harm to both the farmers and the factories."

As he was quickly summoned by Union Textile Minister for an urgent meeting where some proposals were made Singh later said he "will not be satisfied with lollypops."

He also supported Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's views on jute prices and said he would support the Chief Minister if called upon to do so. He said that "Mamata Banerjee has fought her way up ... she has fought for the people by being within them."

Most of Singh's relatives have already left the party and joined the TMC after the BJP suffered a massive defeat in

the last year's State polls.

When asked as to whether his change of posture should be taken as some kind of his future plans related to his return to the TMC he said, "I will not do anything in secrecy ... whatever I will do I will do in open taking the views of the people."

When asked to comment on Singh's statements Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said "the national leadership or the State party president will speak about him as he is a senior leader."

The BJP which won 77 seats in the Assembly elections coming up in the second place replacing the Left Front has failed win a single election after that. The party has also suffered exodus with a large number of workers leaving the party and joining the ruling TMC in the recent days. At least eight MLAs have left the BJP and a number of others have been openly criticizing the party's lines and have withdrawn from the party's WhatsApp groups meant for the legislatures.

Kejriwal joins hands with Twenty20, says they ‘will change Kerala’

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala electorate would have Ka fourth alternative in time for the 2024 Lok Sabha election, according to Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi and the founder of the AAP. Addressing a mammoth public rally at Kizhakkambalam on Sunday evening, Kejriwal declared the formation of People's Welfare Front in which the AAP and Twenty20, a regional outfit launched by Sabu Jacob of the Kitey Group are the main constituents.

"Kerala needs a change and we in AAP assures you that we would replicate the Delhi and Punjab magic in this State. Kerala is facing a lot of crisis and needs welfare measures to address the crisis haunting the State," said Kejriwal.

Before addressing the public gathering, Kejriwal visited various establishments launched by the Twenty 20 party over the last six years at Kizhakkambalam. According to sources in Twenty 20 who accompanied him, Kejriwal expressed satisfaction over welfare measures initiated by the regional outfit. Sabu Jacob had opened super markets and health centres in various Panchayats where the Twenty 20 has been in power for the last six years.

As on date, Kerala is divid-



ed between the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress -led UDF while the BJP-led NDA remains as a non-starter in the State. The Twenty 20 has proved its mettle in the 2020 local body elections by retaining all the panchayaths the party had won in 2015. Though the party failed to make any impact in the 2021 assembly polls, it could tilt the balance in many assembly constituencies.

But political commentators like C R Neelakantan preferred to keep their fingers crossed over the prospectus of the AAP-Twenty 20 Front. "The AAP is a highly centralized party and the ground realities in Kerala are different from that of Delhi and Punjab. The Twenty 20 concept itself is wrong as it denies the voice of the common man from being heard. I am sure the AAP-Twenty 20 combination would not be able to make any impact in the State," said Neelakantan.

Raj trader's murder: Cong deputy chief whip, 7 others booked

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan Government's deputy chief whip in the State Assembly Mahendra Choudhary and seven others have been booked for their alleged involvement in the murder of a trader in Nagaur district, officials said on Sunday.

Jaipal Poonia, a salt trader, was shot dead by around six men in broad daylight in Nawan town in Nagaur district on Saturday.

Poonia's family has accused Choudhary and his associates of being involved in

the attack. Choudhary termed the allegation baseless and politically motivated.

A case against Choudhary and seven others was lodged at Nawan Police Station under Indian Penal Code sections 302 (murder) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) following a complaint by the family of Poonia, police said.

In the FIR lodged by the victim's wife, she alleged that on the directions of Choudhary, who is the ruling Congress MLA from Nawan, his brother Moti Singh, Moolchand Saini, Virendra Saini and others killed her

husband.

"My husband left home at 10.30 am for court on Saturday but returned at 11 am, saying that the hearing would be held at 12.30 pm. While having lunch, he told me that the MLA and others are trying to implicate him in a false case. He said he was getting threats and may be killed," Poonia's wife alleged in the complaint.

According to police, Poonia has several criminal cases registered against him.

Reacting to the allegation, Choudhary said, "All the charges are baseless and politically motivated."

Tamil anthem echoes in the Vatican, TN CM Stalin hails move

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu's State song, the invocation to mother Tamil was sung in an event, which was part of the canonisation ceremony of Devasahayam Pillai at the Vatican.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin posted a tweet, picking a verse from the invocation song, that signified that Tamil is honoured and acclaimed in all the directions.

Devasahayam Pillai, who embraced Christianity in the 18th century, on Sunday became the first Indian lay man to be declared a saint by Pope Francis during an impressive canonisation ceremony at the Vatican.

Tamil Nadu Minister of Minorities Welfare Gingee KS Masthan who represented the State government in the ceremony, tweeted that the Tamil language was honoured by rendering the invocation to mother Tamil at the canonisation (cultural) programme of Devasahayam Pillai in Vatican.

The song was sung by six nuns from Tamil Nadu.

Minister for IT and Digital Services Manoj Thangaraj and Chairman of TN Minorities Commission S Peter Alphonse were part of the official delegation from Tamil Nadu.

The Tamil anthem is known in Tamil as 'Tamil Thai Vaazhthu.' The invocation, 'Neerurum Kadalutha' is a poem authored by renowned Tamil scholar professor P Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897), the author of the popular drama 'Manonmaniam (1891).' He is reverentially addressed as Manonmaiam Sundaranar and the Tirunelveli-based State-run varsity is named after him.

Last year, the Tamil Nadu government had announced Tamil Thaaai Vaazhthu as the state anthem.

The invocation enjoys official status since 1970 and the then Chief Minister, late M Karunanidhi-led DMK government had issued a Government Order in this regard.

Diluted ethos

The Congress seems to have abandoned its core philosophy; it’s emulating others

The Congress has to find its lost creed to revive itself. It may have given ground to the BJP nationally. It may be a junior partner in alliance Governments in some States. What cannot be denied, however, is its core vote bank across the country. It is the only national rival of the BJP. It is in a direct fight with the ruling party in half the Lok Sabha seats. What it has failed to do is win. The reason for its embarrassing existence is losing hold of the national narrative that characterised it for nearly 70 years. It was a combination of Nehruvian nationalism and secularism that remained its core despite the party banking on questionable and corrosive characteristics over the years. In a country that thrived on wearing religion and its public practice on its sleeve, the Congress saw no contradiction in practising secularism. Yes, there were exceptions, violent exceptions, but these were still exceptions. However, faced with a dynamic and rejuvenated plank of the BJP’s Hindutva nationalism, the Congress appeared to wilt. Self-doubt ate away at its core, weakening its secular resolve. It began to ape its political rival to survive. It swapped the secular banner with what it called ‘soft Hindutva’, realising quite late that it had lost its creed in the process. It began to wander in the wilderness of a potent ideology it fought to keep at bay in the past.

Rahul Gandhi on a temple spree wearing the Hindu sacred thread, his supporters calling him a ‘janeu-dhari Brahmin’, was the image Congress workers were armed with to carry on with their politics. Leaders like Kamal Nath issued more circulars about celebrating Hindu festivals than governance in Madhya Pradesh. Today, at a political crossroads, the Congress introspects where it went wrong. It went wrong because it abandoned its path.

It can correct itself by getting back its narrative that advertises its core philosophy instead of emulating rival ideologies. It would do well to recall how Jawaharlal Nehru’s active intervention in Ayodhya stemmed religious passions from aggravating in 1949. His stand was reflected in the Congress victory in both parliamentary constituencies in Faizabad. That was political will in action. It was not based on surrendering Congress’ ideology to mime someone else’s. NT Rama Rao came up with Telugu ‘pride’ to counter the Congress narrative in Andhra Pradesh. Lalu Yadav’s answer to ‘Kamandal’ was Mandal. In contrast, Rajiv Gandhi allowed a religious ceremony at the disputed Ayodhya site. Simply opposing Hindutva or adopting soft Hindutva is as good as surrendering one’s identity. There is nothing called ‘soft’ Hindutva, incidentally. It is all about having a counter-narrative to carry a strong, parallel conversation within the country. The Congress needs to explain to itself why its voice is subdued when anti-secular issues like ‘hijab’ or ‘halal’ controversies erupt. Celebrating festivals is secular; promoting festivals of only one religion is not. That, in sum, is the creed.



Abortion rights protesters march through Mission Dolores Park, San Francisco

AP

Going backwards

The Gyanvapi complex video survey and subsequent unrest are issues best avoided

A survey of part of the Kashi Vishwanath temple Gyanvapi mosque complex in Varanasi is underway. It began on Friday as per a court’s order and quickly ran into a controversy. The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which manages the Gyanvapi mosque, is against the videography of the complex. They say it is against their belief. As the survey began, protesters shouted slogans at the site and loud noises were made in TV newsrooms. The survey, along with the videography, is being done by court-appointed advocate commissioner Ajai Kumar and his team. The survey was ordered by a Varanasi civil court on April 26 on a 2021 petition by five women, who sought daily prayers and worship rights at the Maa Shringar Gauri Sthal, which is in the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi complex. The court ordered a survey of the entire area of plot number 9130, which includes Maa Shringar Gauri Sthal and the Gyanvapi complex. The court has asked the survey report to be presented before the next hearing in the case on May 17. There is the fear that the city’s law and order may be disturbed as tempers are running high.

Unfortunately, the development has opened a Pandora’s box at a time when the society is already suffering from the plague of schism. There has been a sudden surge in claims on the ASI-protected monuments. Petitioners are mushrooming everywhere and claiming that these monuments were once Hindu shrines or temples. Recently people have staked a claim on Qutub Minar, Taj Mahal, Humayun’s Tomb, and so on. Gyanvapi mosque happens to be just one of the many sites on the radar of right-wing elements. Besides, reaching conclusions on half-baked theories and flimsy evidence are a travesty of justice. For instance, the survey being conducted in the Gyanvapi complex is not even by the ASI, which is a competent authority. ‘Correcting’ history is fraught with dangerous consequences and does nobody any good, including to the plaintiff. The country has suffered enough for 30 years in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition; numerous lives were lost, property worth crores destroyed and social fabric tattered beyond repair. If we again go down that path, we may end up burning the country yet again.

New prospects in India-Nepal ties

The bonhomie between the neighbours was re-established when Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba came here in April

Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba concluded a three-day visit to India on April 3, 2022. He arrived in India with a 25-member delegation on his maiden overseas visit after assuming office in July 2021. Prime Minister Deuba was scheduled to visit India earlier in January this year to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Summit. However, due to the rise in COVID-19 cases in India, the visit was postponed.

Prime Minister Deuba’s July visit assumed great importance in India-Nepal bilateral ties considering Nepal’s assertive stance over a border dispute with India over the past three years. During the previous administration, then Prime Minister KP Oli chose to politicise the border row rather than resolving it through diplomatic means. The number of high-level delegations from Nepal to India had also gone low in the last three years.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Deuba has made efforts in resolving misunderstandings with India and his India visit has opened up more avenues of cooperation and helped to fill the existing thaw. Soon after Prime Minister Deuba took office, a delegation of the ruling Nepali Congress Party led by the former Foreign Minister of Nepal, Prakash Sharan Mahat, had come to India in October 2021.

Beyond Politics: The latest visit of Prime Minister Deuba has proved to be more outcome-oriented. In the past seven decades of formal diplomatic ties, India and Nepal have proved their economic potential, and, to date, India is the largest trading partner of Nepal. However, due to the low export volume from Nepal to India, a large trade deficit remains an existing challenge for Nepal. On many occasions, political parties in Nepal have made it a political agenda. Meanwhile, there are no political solutions to resolving the trade imbalance since Nepal does not have substantial industry outputs to export finished goods to India.

Despite these challenges, the two countries have shifted focus to more viable areas of coopera-



tion. These include connectivity, energy, digital, and infrastructure development.

Connectivity: Connectivity is an important aspect of India-Nepal cooperation in the present context. As a landlocked country, Nepal’s third-country trade takes place through the Indian ports of Haldia in West Bengal and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and the imported goods reach Nepal through twenty-two designated trade routes between India and the Nepal border. To give a major boost to border trade, the two countries are working to upgrade major check posts to facilitate smooth trade.

There is also a focus on upgrading the highway infrastructure in southern Nepal with India’s assistance which will further reduce the travel time. Other than improving the existing road infrastructure, the Prime Minister Modi-led Government has attached great importance to the railway connectivity with Nepal, India’s next-door neighbour. Since

India’s bilateral ties are primarily based on people-to-

“DURING THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION, THEN PRIME MINISTER KP OLI CHOSE TO POLITICISE THE BORDER ROW RATHER THAN RESOLVING IT THROUGH DIPLOMATIC MEANS

people ties, the rail connectivity boosts the shared cultural and religious bonhomie.

During his visit to India, Prime Minister Deuba jointly inaugurated the launch and operationalisation of a 35-km-long cross-border rail link from Jaynagar in Bihar to Kurtha in Nepal. This railway route is a benchmark in providing connectivity to pilgrims travelling from India to Janakpur, which is the birthplace of Hindu Goddess, Sita. The freight services through Jaynagar-Kurtha will also contribute to advancing the trade ties. The Jaynagar-Kurtha section is part of the 68.7-km-long Jaynagar-Bijalpura-Bardidas rail link, which has been entirely built with Indian assistance and, so far, India has spent nearly ₹550 crore (INR) on the project.

Vision statement on the power sector: The ‘Vision Statement on the Power Sector’ was the major highlight of Prime Minister Deuba’s visit to India. The statement was jointly launched by the two Prime Ministers. The major points in the statement include joint



RISHI GUPTA

development of power generation projects in Nepal, development of cross-border transmission lines and, most importantly, bi-directional power trade with appropriate access to electricity markets in both countries based on mutual benefits, and market demands.

It is noteworthy that Nepal is home to thousands of Himalayan rivers and, with advanced technology in place, these rivers can provide uninterrupted power to Nepal and then it can export the surplus power to neighbouring countries, including India and Bangladesh, and India has already agreed to purchase power from Nepal.

Over the past few decades, India has also advocated exploring Nepal’s hydropower potential for mutual benefits. Meanwhile, projects like the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project were signed in 1996 but, to date, even the Detailed Project Report has not been prepared. Despite these challenges, the two Governments are working towards exploring the hydropower potential and the recent progress made in the 900 MW Arun-III hydro-electric project in Nepal is a welcome step. Also, the joint inauguration of the 90-km-long 132 KVDC Solu Corridor Transmission line and substation built under the Line of Credit extended by India further contribute to the sector.

Conclusion: Prime Minister Deuba’s visit to India has exhibited positive and tangible outcomes. The visit re-energised the ‘special ties’ between India and Nepal as these aim to improve bilateral trade and economic relations. The visit also signified India’s commitments toward Nepal under its ‘Neighbourhood First Policy’.

(This is the first instalment of a two-part series on Indo-Nepal relations.)

(The author is a Research Associate with the Vivekananda International Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE CORRUPT BABU-NETA NEXUS

Sir — The column by Manoj Nath on the failure of the IAS is very relevant as we see a clear polarisation of these officers whenever a new Government takes charge. It is more rampant in State Governments. They always indulge in oneupmanship by taking pains to highlight the misdeeds of the previous political setup. One good thing is that we see a few of them displaying utmost integrity to the nation by refusing to toe the line of their political bosses whenever unethical administrative measures are undertaken. This is all the more noticeable in the security setup. The benefits are plum postings and post-retirement employments.

A classmate, I remember, refused to accede to the request of his Minister during posting of commercial tax officers at check posts as he wanted to have only officers of unimpeachable integrity. He challenged the Minister to do his own liking and publish the list under his authority. However, we also find some IAS officers always associated with corrupt deals of their political bosses. Many politicians are good at corruption and they carry it out with impunity. Ultimately if the citizens vote without fail, say 85% or so, during elections, the political parties will be scared to go awry.

J Kannan | Hyderabad

INDIA AS THE DIABETIC CAPITAL

Sir — It is a well known fact that India holds the dubious distinction of being the diabetic capital of the world. Moreover, the danger of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) has grown exponentially over the years due to processed food items and fast food industry. It has given rise to diseases like cancer, diabetes, obesity, lifestyle diseases and cardiovascular diseases. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is planning to introduce a star rating system to assess the quality of food products. But it has met with opposition from nutrition and health experts as such a mechanism can be misleading because it does not reveal the ingredient percentage and their true nutritive value.

Gruesome fires becoming routine



Fire accidents in big cities and, that too, in multi-storeyed buildings, cause extensive human deaths and damage as we witnessed in Delhi. An inferno of enormous proportion causes extensive financial damage as well. Internal security in high-rise buildings is taken for granted, resulting in major fire accidents in, say, Delhi and Mumbai. The take-it-easy policy and the single-minded approach of making profits within the area available cramps the working space and there is no

escape route when a fire breaks out. Moreover, the roads are cramped and overcrowded, thus preventing the entry of fire services to enter the fire-affected area as narrow roads prevent the entry of fire engines from reaching in time and starting the relief and rescue operations.

The lack of fire audit offers scope for major fires in the Capital and in the nation’s commercial capital. Such was the fury of the fire in the four-storeyed building that rescuers are still frantically searching for survivors, with 29 people remaining unaccountable for. The sorry state of affairs could be seen as distraught relatives gathered outside the building in the hope of getting news about their near and dear ones. But the hope that some of their relatives could still be alive amid the smouldering embers is ebbing by the hour. The single entry-exit point created chaos and confusion.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

Moreover, in a country where access to education and literacy is unevenly distributed, a pictorial representation of warnings is a better option rather than going for star ratings. Similar procedures can be replicated in the case of packaged foods. The SC’s direction to carry pictorial warnings on tobacco-related products in 2019 was a momentous step in this direction. A recent survey by the Health Ministry revealed that about 62 per cent of cigarette smokers and 52 per cent of bidi smokers had even started thinking about quitting.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Sir — The Supreme Court of India has asked the Centre and the States to refrain from registering any FIR under the age-old contentious sedition law till the time the Union Government re-examines and reconsiders the provision of this law. This order came when the Centre decided to file a petition before the Supreme Court

to review this law in an appropriate forum. The law was enacted by the British raj in 1870 to suppress the freedom movement. The law states that no citizen by any means should bring hatred and contempt against the Government.

This law is contrary to our fundamental rights, the right to freedom of speech under Article 19 1 (A). This draconian law was designed to suppress dissent. As we have now entered into 75 years of Independence, we must protect the human rights and freedom of all the people of India. No law is eternal; this law has become outdated and needs an amendment to cherish democratic values and to allow a more tolerant public sphere in the country. Better late than never, the Indian Government has taken the first step, so now the law should be amended soon.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Cuttack

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

It’s my parting gift to the party. Good luck and goodbye, Congress!

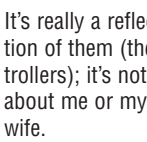


Punjab Cong ex-chief —Sunil Jakhar



Ukrainians are doing their maximum to drive out the invaders.

Ukraine President —Volodymyr Zelenskyy



It’s really a reflection of them (the trolls); it’s not about me or my wife.



Actor —Ranveer Singh



It could well be my last game for Bayern, though I can’t be sure.

Bayern Munich player —Robert Lewandowski



This Govt is selling off public sector companies, diluting job reservation in Govt entities.



Congress leader —Salman Khurshid

FIRST COLUMN

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PHILIPPINES?

Pact between Marcos, Duterte families shaped the vote



Bongbong' Marcos didn't just win the presidential election in the Philippines this week. He won it by a two-to-one landslide, despite the fact that he is the extremely entitled son of a former president who stole at least ten billion dollars and a mother who spent the loot partly on the world's most extensive collection of designer shoes (3,000 pairs).

Moreover, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, to give him his real name, has virtually no accomplishments other than that name. Yet his name and his inherited wealth, originally stolen from the parents of the people who voted for him, have enabled him to hold various political offices almost continuously (apart from five years in exile) since he was 23.

Equally deplorable is the electoral triumph of his vice-presidential ally, Sara Duterte, daughter of the mass murderer Rodrigo Duterte. The latter is leaving the presidency at the end of his six-year term, still wildly popular despite the many thousands of extra-judicial killings of alleged 'drug fiends' that he has ordered.



Indeed, those killings are precisely why Rodrigo Duterte is so popular, and his daughter basks in the reflected glory of his violence. A lot of Filipinos adore politicians and other prominent people who are loud, rude and macho - but it's more complicated than that. Sometimes they elect murderers and thieves; sometimes they elect apprentice saints.

The senior Ferdinand Marcos was legitimately elected president in 1965 but declared martial law when he was nearing the end of his second term in 1972. Martial law lasted for another fourteen years, with Marcos's henchmen dividing their time between stealing public funds and torturing or killing perceived opponents.

After that first President Marcos ran the country's economy into the ground, he was ousted in 1986 in the first of the 'people power' non-violent revolutions. The saintly Cory Aquino, whose husband had been assassinated on Marcos's orders, was elected to the presidency, while everybody applauded the Philippines' restored democracy.

But in 1998 the Filipinos elected Joseph 'Erap' Estrada, a former movie star famed for playing the villain, in another landslide. After the fall of Estrada there were two modestly competent and non-criminal presidents - and then, in 2016, Rodrigo Duterte. Another landslide, of course, and if Duterte stole a lot in the past six years it has not yet been exposed, but he killed even more people than Marcos Senior.

The Philippines is a leading contender for the title of 'world's most populist country', which is hard to explain because its lost twin behaves in a quite different way. Just to the west of the Philippines is Indonesia, another country of many islands whose people are ethnically and linguistically very close to the Filipinos.

Per capita income is about 30% higher in Indonesia, mainly because of oil, but the economies are basically quite similar. Both countries lived for decades under murderous dictators, and both finally overthrew them in non-violent revolutions, the Philippines in 1986, Indonesia in 1998.

However, since Indonesia became a democracy it has elected only presidents who were neither killers nor thieves, while the Filipinos hurl themselves enthusiastically at any plausible fraud who gains a bit of notoriety. Why?

Two hypotheses, both weak, come to mind. First, the Philippines has an unusually powerful elite of big, rich families with strong regional bases. This week's vote, for example, was shaped by a recent alliance between the Marcos family (northern and central Philippines) and the Duterte family (southern Philippines).

The other hypothesis? Ninety-nine percent of adult Filipinos are online, and Filipinos aged 16 to 64 spend on average nearly four hours a day connected to social networks.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'The Shortest History of War'. The views expressed are personal.)

Leveraging digitech for popularising science

Scientific temper can be imparted in society only if we deliver science to each one of them. It is not an easy task

Contemporary society is built on materials of science. But unless the common man understands what the scientists discover in our laboratories, science becomes meaningless. Communicating science to the public—whether through the media, museums, or outreach - is now a burgeoning global industry.

The question of who should communicate science to the public has been debated several times in the long history of science. Most of the scientific community members are interested in communicating with their peer group through scholarly publications. Unfortunately, to digest this scholarly publication is beyond the capacity of the common man. A good scientist is not necessarily a good communicator. Nobel laureate Paul Dirac was achingly shy and could not face reporters. He had even thought of refusing the Nobel Prize in order to shun publicity.

The main reason is that most of these great scientists incur lots of knowledge that they often find difficult to translate into lay man's language. When these scientists make landmark discoveries, they are overwhelmed by their achievements and try to explain them using scientific jargon, which often becomes dull for a non-science person. This will be misinterpreted and appear sinister, leading to misunderstanding and fear among the public.

Even though communication skills can be enhanced through training or by reading specified books, it's an inherent quality of a person that, in turn, depends on the passion for the subject one has. We can see such power when we listen to the speeches of our former President, the late Dr Abdul Kalam, even though his accent and pronunciation may not be at par with western standards. Many of our great scientists in the pre-independence era like Sir C V Raman and Sir JCBose were lively speakers because of their passion for research and their subject of interest.

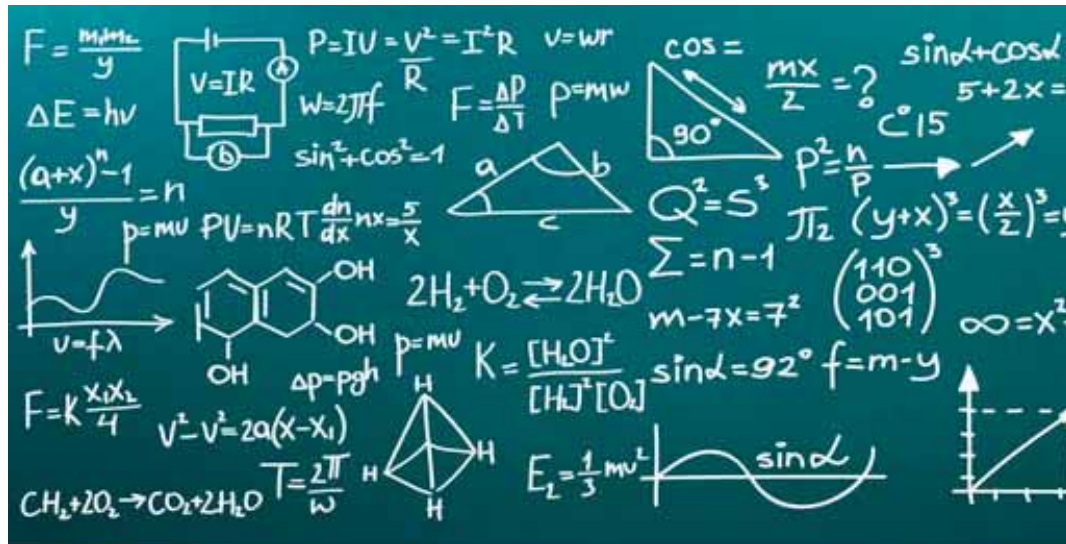
Gone are the days when engaging in popular science communication was seen as career suicide. Every prospective young researcher nowadays is expected to be a practitioner, someone who is willing to carry science out of the lab and into the culture. The field has now moved away from didactic, top-down approaches to communication to consider more inclusive approaches to communication that emphasize the need to engage a wider range of so-called 'public' in decisions about science, stemming from an initial concern among scientists and politicians that the general public lacked an understanding and appreciation of science.

In fact, Public Engagement in Science and Technology (PEST) continues to be a key priority as governments around the globe seek to encourage citizens to participate in debates about new emerging science, such as quantum technology, nanotechnology, gene-editing, or stem cells. Whether personal or societal, tackling



UNLESS THE COMMON MAN UNDERSTANDS WHAT SCIENTISTS DISCOVER IN OUR LABORATORIES, SCIENCE BECOMES MEANINGLESS. EXPLAINING SCIENCE TO THE PUBLIC IS NOW A BURGEONING GLOBAL INDUSTRY

(Dharmapalan is a science communicator and columnist. Tripathi is an assistant at Vigyan Prasara, Government of India, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)



global problems, such as climate change, also requires citizens to engage with science and technology. A science communicator of this age should be aware of science and technology, the economy, social structure of society and should have a world view of science.

Engaging diverse people in the community is a challenging task. Society includes varied types of people, a scientifically elite group, illiterate people, students, retired people, homemakers, old age people etc. Scientific temper can be imparted in society only if we deliver science to each one of them. This is an arduous task, and conventional science communication practices may not be sufficient. A storytelling mode or puppet show maybe not be liked by the older people. Similarly, a science magazine or newspaper cannot be understood by an illiterate group. If science should be propagated among the masses in this century, we need to explore alternative strategies for harnessing the potential of digital technology.

The covid pandemic has shown the strength of digital media. When all communication channels stopped functioning, it was the intelligent phones that acted as a friend for millions of people across the globe. Every section of society uses smartphones as an entertainment source and information source. People started believing what was delivered through Whatsapp, and it acted as a knowledge resource for millions. Whatsapp has achieved what our universities failed to do for hundreds of years. Of course, the information through Whatsapp was not regulated, and many misinformations also were forwarded to people that few believed blindly.

We need to promote a reliable

and authentic digital platform for scientific information dissemination. India's mammoth internet user base of 500 million, split between 305 million urban Indians and 195 million rural Indians, can be reached with authentic science and technology content. Government has to give impetus to digital tools like OTT in science communication activities. OTT stands for Over-the-top. This means streaming across different devices whenever we want, possible because of "over-the-top," a convenient little term that explains the new delivery method of film and TV content over the internet. The beauty of OTT platforms is that one can view videos on their handset. There is no need for antennae or cable connections.

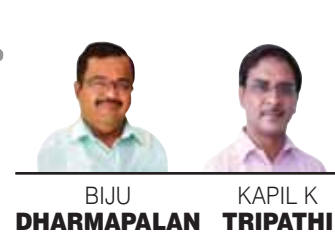
The gaining popularity of OTT among the public is due to their cost-effectiveness, easy connectivity and broader outreach. The contents can be viewed by a person sitting in polar regions also if they have internet connectivity. Thanks to OTT video distribution technology, people now have a plethora of options at their fingertips. They can watch content on a variety of devices, including Smart TVs, Roku, PCs, tablets, smartphones, and gaming consoles. They can also use "app switching" to access numerous distributors for speciality programmes and view channels, providing them more control over the content they buy and watch.

In science communication, OTT platforms can be used to show live programmes or recorded videos on various topics. The public can directly interact with scientists working in remote corners of the world, for example, from our research stations in Antarctica or

Arctic regions. During the covid lockdown period, most of the scientific information was delivered to the public through the India Science, the OTT channel managed by the Department of Science and Technology. This science channel has made 681 programmes to disseminate corona-related information alone, apart from other regular shows. Unlike different science communication modes like print magazines or science demonstration lectures, OTT is cost-effective and has a broader reach. All types of science content can be streamed through it. Moreover, the peers from the science can directly interact with the viewers making it more authentic.

The generation who grew up during the pandemic has adapted to using smartphones either for entertainment or economic transactions. Even kids are comfortable playing and gaining knowledge through smartphones. Similarly, even illiterate persons in society are comfortable using smartphones, and they enjoy the video messages being forwarded to them.

Today's generation may not like the traditional forms of science communication like magazines, drama or puppet shows. They are interested in animation and virtual reality. OTT has shown its strength in the entertainment industry by replacing the stress given to cinema halls. Similarly, many infotainment channels like Discovery, National Geographic, Animal Planet, History etc. have started their OTT versions sensing its benefits. Science policymakers should give thrust to science communication by leveraging the potential of digital technologies to suit the new generation of our citizens.



BIJU DHARMAPALAN KAPIL K. TRIPATHI

Climate resilience: \$94 trillion investment at stake

Nobody can prevent climate change but the world cannot also plunge into investing billions of dollars down an abyss

Amid rising disaster risk threats to infrastructure, the world plans massive investments of \$94 trillion for disaster resilience in the India-initiated Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

The catch line is what the world invested in 200 years is to be accomplished in 20 years. The global infrastructure investment is estimated at \$2.7 billion a year. Insurance giant Lloyds was quoted as saying 12 percent funds are getting lost in disasters and 88 percent funds going into rebuilding. A disaster related to weather, climate or water hazard occurred every day on average over the past 50 years - killing 115 people and causing US\$ 202 million in losses daily, according to a new report of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The



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

costs are to rise as inflation rises and interest rates hiked. Prime Minister Narendra Modi says that infrastructure is about people and providing them high quality, dependable, and sustainable services in an equitable manner. The fourth international conference of CDRI in New Delhi does not focus on financing but sees infra plus green nature in totality through integrated approach of community-based efforts. An effort to save public fund! Many cities across the world and island nations are at great risks. In India, for example, cities like Bhubaneswar, Vishakhapatnam, Chennai and Kolkata are perceived to be at climatic risk, says Kaushal Kishore, member-secretary of NDMA, the co-



chair of ICDRI says. It is stated that the existing methods and tools of disaster risk reduction, and climate risk management in particular, provide powerful capacities for substantially reducing risks and adapting to climate change. In focus are healthcare post pandemic, earthquakes, floods, rising cyclones in India's east

and west coasts and looks at the destruction of telecom towers, roads, ports and urban infra. At least \$10 billion is required immediately for poverty reduction and flagship healthcare. What are to be saved are telecom towers, power plants, digital infra, transportation and communication. The experts discuss various earthquakes, floods and cyclones in Haiti, Nepal, Pakistan, and Peru. Kamran Akbar of World Bank says, "disaster brings the best and worst of the people" for reconstruction to restoration of livelihood. They build blocks and reconstruct the local infra. The finances definitely have to be fine-tuned. Furthermore, new changes, such as Arctic ice melting, are happening faster than was pre-

dicted by the IPCC reports. It seems that the future is more serious and challenging. Such meets discuss whether this can be stopped with pouring of funds and sharing by large private entities. The 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan built on a quake-prone area, close to the sea could have been prevented had it been built elsewhere. Not much is known to have been discussed about problems of the Three Gorge Dam of China that often overflows and leads to accumulation of massive turbid water. There are instances of severe Kerala floods due to dam busts, changing river courses and topography. Now India builds nine major dams including in fragile Arunachal, Manipur and Mizoram. The most circumsp



THE BJP IS PLAYING UGLY POLITICS. WE DIDN'T RECOGNISE IT THEN, BUT THEY ARE OUR ENEMY. —SHIV SENA CHIEF UDDHAV THACKERAY



THACKERAY'S SPEECH HAS TURNED OUT TO BE YET ANOTHER 'TAUNT BOMB'... IT WILL GET A REPLY. —BJP LEADER DEVENDRA FADNIS

Russians stymied in Ukraine; Finland favours joining NATO

AP ■ KYIV

Almost three months after Russia shocked the world by invading Ukraine, its military faced a bogged-down war, the prospect of a bigger NATO and a defending country buoyed by its win in a hugely popular pan-European music competition on Sunday.

Finland announced it would apply to join NATO, as top diplomats from the Western alliance, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, gathered Sunday in Berlin to discuss the war.

Sweden's governing party plans to announce its position on seeking NATO membership later Sunday.

The two nonaligned Nordic nations becoming part of the alliance would pose an affront to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has cited NATO's post-Cold War expansion in Eastern Europe as a threat to Russia. NATO says it is a purely defensive alliance.

Ukraine said it was holding off Russian offensives Sunday in the country's east. Western military officials said the campaign Moscow launched there after its forces failed to seize Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, had slowed to a snail's pace.

"The brutal invasion (by) Russia is losing momen-



tum," NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana said.

"We know that with the bravery of the Ukrainian people and army, and with our help, Ukraine can win this war."

Ukraine, meanwhile, celebrated a morale-boosting victory in the Eurovision Song Contest.

The folk-rap ensemble Kalush Orchestra won the

glitzy, televised Eurovision contest with its song "Stefania,"

which has become a popular anthem among Ukrainians during the war. Votes from home viewers across Europe cemented the victory.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed his nation would claim the customary honour of hosting the next annual competition.

"Step by step, we are forcing the occupiers to leave the Ukrainian land," Zelenskyy said.

Russian and Ukrainian

fighters are engaged in a grinding battle for the country's eastern industrial heartland, the Donbas.

Ukraine's most experienced and best-equipped soldiers are based in eastern Ukraine, where they have fought Moscow-backed separatists for eight years.

The Ukrainian military said Sunday that it had held off a renewed Russian offensive near Bakhmut and Slavyansk, in the eastern Donesk region.

A regional official said Russian troops also made renewed attempts at a breakthrough near the eastern city of Izium early Sunday, but were held back by Ukrainian forces.

"The enemy is constantly checking the positions of our armed forces, trying to break through them, but has had no success and again suffered heavy human and equipment losses," Oleh Sinegubov, the governor of Ukraine's Kharkiv region, wrote in a Telegram post.

His claims could not be independently verified.

Britain's Defense Ministry said in its daily intelligence update Sunday that the Russian army had lost up to one-third of the combat strength it committed to Ukraine in late February and continued to suffer "consistently high levels of attrition" while failing to gain any substantial territory.

"Russia's Donbas offensive has lost momentum and fallen significantly behind schedule," the ministry said on Twitter, adding that the forces are suffering "continued low morale and reduced combat effectiveness."

"Under the current conditions, Russia is unlikely to dramatically accelerate its rate of advance over the next 30 days," the ministry said.

The assessments of Russia's war performance by Ukraine's supporters came as Russian troops retreated from around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, after bombarding it for weeks.

The largely Russian-speaking city with a prewar population of 1.4 million is only 80 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the Russian city of Belgorod, and was a key military objective earlier in the war, when Moscow hoped to capture and hold major cities.

Ukraine's military has said Moscow is focused now instead on guarding supply routes, while launching mortar, artillery and airstrikes in an attempt to deplete Ukrainian forces and destroy fortifications in the country's east.

Ukrainian troops are clearing villages on the outskirts of Kharkiv after pushing the Russians back, and some residents were returning.

"The war has shifted to a new level of distance artillery fighting -- we fire at them, they fire at us," said a Ukrainian commander who gave only his first name, Serhii.

Russia is also striking railways, factories and other infrastructure across Ukraine. A Russian missile hit "military infrastructure facilities" in the Yavoriv district of western

Ukraine, near the border with Poland. Early Sunday morning.

There was no immediate information on dead or injured, Lviv Regional Governor Maksym Kozzytskyy posted on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia has targeted rail facilities and other critical infrastructure in western Ukraine a major gateway for NATO-supplied weapons. Western officials have said despite the attacks there has been no appreciable impact on Ukraine's ability to resupply its forces.

After failing to capture Kyiv following the February 24 invasion, Putin has shifted his focus eastward to the Donbas, aiming to seize territory not already occupied by the Moscow-backed separatists.

Airstrikes and artillery barges make it extremely dangerous for journalists to move around in the east, hindering efforts to get a full picture of the fighting. But it appears to be a back-and-forth slog without major breakthroughs on either side. In his nightly address Saturday, Zelenskyy said "the situation in Donbas remains very difficult" and Russian troops were "still trying to come out at least somewhat victorious."

In the southern Donbas, the Azov Sea port of Mariupol

is now largely under Russian control, except for a few hundred Ukrainian troops who have refused to surrender and remain holed up in the Azovstal steel factory.

A convoy of between 500 and 1,000 cars carrying civilians out of Mariupol reportedly was able to reach the Ukrainian-held city of Zaporizhzhia on Saturday. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk had said authorities were negotiating the evacuation of 60 severely wounded troops from the steel plant.

Turkey's presidential spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, said the country had offered to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers and civilians by ship from Azovstal, according to official state broadcaster TRT.

Kalin said Russian and Ukrainian officials had not given Turkey a clear answer regarding the evacuation plan, but that it was still on the table.

The invasion of Ukraine has other countries along Russia's flank worried they could be next. The government of long-neutral Finland, which shares both a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border and the Gulf of Finland with Russia, formally announced Sunday that it would apply for NATO membership.

West says Russians losing momentum

AP ■ BERLIN

Almost three months after Russia shocked the world by invading Ukraine, its military faced a bogged-down war, the prospect of a bigger NATO and an opponent buoyed by its wins on and off the battlefield Sunday.

Finland decided to seek NATO membership as top diplomats from the Western alliance met in Berlin.

The leaders of the militarily neutral country said the invasion had changed Europe's security landscape, although NATO's chief declared that "Russia's war in Ukraine is not going as Moscow had planned."

"Ukraine can win this war," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, adding that the alliance must continue to give the country military support.

Sweden's governing party plans to announce its position on applying to join NATO later Sunday. The two non-aligned Nordic nations becoming part of the alliance would pose an affront to Russian



President Vladimir Putin, who has cited NATO's post-Cold War expansion in Eastern Europe as a threat to Russia. NATO says it is a purely defensive alliance.

While Moscow lost ground on the diplomatic front, Russian forces were failing to make territorial gains in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine said it was holding off Russian offensives Sunday

in the country's east, and Western military officials said the campaign Moscow launched there after its forces failed to seize Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, had slowed to a snail's pace.

Ukraine, meanwhile, celebrated a morale-boosting victory in the Eurovision Song Contest. Folk-rap ensemble Kalush Orchestra won the

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petition ntest with its song "Stefania," which has become a popular anthem among Ukrainians during the war.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed his nation would claim the customary winner's honor of hosting the next annual competition.

"Step by step, we are forcing the occupiers to leave the Ukrainian land," Zelenskyy said. Russian and Ukrainian fighters are engaged in a grinding battle for the country's eastern industrial heartland, the Donbas.

Ukraine's most experienced and best-equipped soldiers are based in eastern Ukraine, where they have fought Moscow-backed separatists for eight years. Even with its setbacks, Russia continues to inflict death and destruction across Ukraine.

Over the weekend, Russian forces hit a chemical plant and 11 high-rise buildings in Siverodonetsk, in the Luhansk area of the Donbas, the regional governor said. He said nine people were injured.

Putin warns Finland that NATO membership would harm relations

AP ■ HELSINKI

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned his Finnish counterpart Saturday that relations between the two neighbours could be "negatively affected" if Finland follows through with plans to apply for NATO membership.

The Kremlin's press service said in a statement that Putin told Sauli Niinisto Finland's abandonment "of its traditional policy of military neutrality would be an error since there are no threats to Finland's security."

"Such a change in the country's foreign policy could negatively affect Russian-Finnish relations, which had been built in the spirit of good neighborliness and partnership for many years, and were mutually beneficial," the statement added. The response came after Niinisto told Putin in a phone conversation that the militarily non-aligned Nordic country,



which has a complex history with its huge eastern neighbor, "will decide to apply for NATO membership in the coming days."

Niinisto's office said in a statement that Finnish head of state told Putin how starkly Finland's security environment had changed after Moscow's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, and pointed to Russia's demands for Finland to refrain from seeking membership of 30-nation Western military alliance. "The discussion (with Putin) was straightforward and unam-

biguous and was held without exaggeration. Avoiding tensions was considered important," said Niinisto, Finland's president since 2012 and one of a handful of Western leaders who has been in regular dialogue with Putin over past decade.

Niinisto pointed out that he already told Putin at their first meeting in 2012 that "each independent nation would maximize its own security." "That is still the case. By joining NATO, Finland will strengthen its own security and assume its responsibilities," Niinisto said.

Niinisto stressed that Finland, despite its likely future membership in NATO, wants to continue to deal with Russia bilaterally in "practical issues generated by border neighborhood" and hopes to engage with Moscow "in a professional manner."

According to Kremlin statement, the two leaders also discussed Russia's "military operation" in Ukraine, and possibility of achieving a political solution. Putin said negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv had been suspended due to Ukraine's "lack of interest in a serious and constructive dialogue."

The phone call was conducted on Finland's initiative, Niinisto's office said. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border with Russia, the longest by any European Union member. Niinisto and Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin on Thursday jointly endorsed their country's NATO bid

NATO mulls expanding alliance

AP ■ BERLIN

A senior NATO official says Russia's military advance in Ukraine appears to be faltering and he expressed hope that Kyiv can win the war.

Top NATO diplomats are meeting Sunday in Berlin to discuss providing further support to Ukraine and moves by Finland, Sweden and others to join the western alliance in the face of threats from Russia.

"The brutal invasion (by) Russia is losing momentum," NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana told reporters. "We know that with the bravery of the Ukrainian people and army, and with our help, Ukraine can win this war." Geoana, who was chairing the meeting while NATO Secretary General Jens



Stoltenberg recovers from a COVID-19 infection, said Ukraine's supporters were "united, we are strong, will continue to help Ukraine in winning this war." One key issue being discussed in Berlin is expansion of NATO beyond its current 30 member states. Finland and Sweden have already taken steps toward joining the alliance, while Georgia's bid is again being discussed despite dire warnings from Moscow about the con-

sequences if its neighbour becomes part of NATO. "Finland and Sweden are already the closest partners of NATO," Geoana said, adding that he expected allies to view their applications positively.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said her country and others made clear during a dinner late Saturday that they would be willing to fast-track the national ratification process for Finland and Sweden.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy defiant as Russia retreats from Kharkiv

AP ■ KYIV

Fresh off his country's Eurovision win, a defiant Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed early Sunday to one day host the song contest in the embattled city of Mariupol, which is almost entirely in Russian hands aside from a stalwart group of a few hundred Ukrainian fighters who continue to hold out in a steel factory.

Ukraine's military said the Russian forces are now pulling back from the northeastern city to focus on guarding supply routes, while launching mortar, artillery and airstrikes in the eastern region of Donetsk in an attempt to "deplete Ukrainian forces and destroy fortifications." Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Ukraine was

"entering a new — long-term — phase of the war."

Russian forces control a horseshoe-shaped swath of territory in the Ukrainian areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, which make up the eastern Donbas region, along the border of the industrial region where Ukraine has battled Moscow-backed separatists since 2014.

In the southern Donbas, the Azov Sea port of Mariupol is now largely in Russian control, except for the few hundred troops left in the steel factory.

A convoy of between 500 and 1,000 cars carrying civilians out of the city was reportedly able to reach the Ukrainian-held city of Zaporizhzhia on Saturday, while Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Vereshchuk said they were negotiating the evacuation of 60 wounded troops.

McConnell, GOP senators meet Zelenskyy in surprise Kyiv stop

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and a delegation of GOP senators met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv during an unannounced visit Saturday, delivering the latest show of American solidarity with the country at war with Russia.

"Our delegation reaffirmed to President Zelenskyy that the United States stands squarely behind Ukraine and will sustain our support until Ukraine wins this war," McConnell said in a statement released after the delegation had left Ukraine. A video posted on Zelenskyy's Telegram account showed McConnell, R-Ky., and Sens.

Susan Collins of Maine, John Barrasso of Wyoming and John Cornyn of Texas greeting him in the capital. Zelenskyy, in an Instagram post, called the visit "a strong signal of bipartisan support for Ukraine from the United States Congress and the American people."

Later, in his nightly video address, Zelenskyy said he believed that the senators' trip showed "the strong connection between the Ukrainian and American people."

We discussed various areas of support for our country, including defence and finance, as well as strengthening sanctions against Russia. The trip came at a time when the Senate is working to approve a nearly USD 40 billion package for

Ukraine, a substantial infusion of support that will push American aid to the region well above USD 50 billion.

The measure includes USD 6 billion for Ukraine for intelligence, equipment and training for its forces, plus USD 4 billion in financing to help Ukraine and NATO allies build up their militaries.

Passage was delayed Thursday by Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, who demanded the inclusion of a proposal to have an inspector general scrutinise the new spending.

But final approval is not in doubt and could come in the week ahead, reflecting overwhelming support in Congress for replenishing the Ukrainian war effort.

Neutral Europe recedes as Finns, Swedes edge toward NATO

AP ■ BERLIN

With Finland and Sweden taking steps to join NATO, the list of "neutral" countries in Europe appears poised to shrink. Like two Nordic countries, other nations joined European Union for its promise economic and political unity without taking sides in East-West divide that has endured beyond end of Cold war.

But security concerns over Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine changed calculus for Finland and Sweden which have long espoused neutrality and caused other traditionally "neutral" countries to re-think what that term really means for them. Finland said it will decide on NATO membership in coming days while Sweden could follow suit as public opinion in both

Nordic countries has swelled in favour of membership. While EU members are committed to coming to each other's defense in case of an external attack, the pledge has largely remained on paper as NATO's might overshadows bloc's own notions of collective defence.

Yet, Turkey could still pour cold water on NATO ambitions of both Finland and Sweden. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, NATO member's president said his country is "not of a favourable opinion" of idea because of alleged Nordic country support for Kurdish militants and others that Turkey considers as terrorists. "This is key thing about neutrality: It means different things to different people," said historian Samuel Kruizinga of University of Amsterdam. Here's a look at

some countries that have enshrined "neutrality" into their laws or generally considered themselves neutral in showdown between United States and Russia and their respective affiliates. Austria, Ireland, Cyprus and Malta are EU members that have not joined NATO, and Switzerland has stayed out of both.

SWITZERLAND Arguably most renowned neutral country in Europe, Switzerland has enshrined neutrality into its constitution and Swiss voters decided decades ago to stay out of EU. But its government has been at pains in recent weeks to explain its concept of neutrality after lining up behind EU sanctions against Russia - and Swiss neutrality is analyzed almost daily in local media these days.

Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra wins Eurovision amid war



AP ■ TURIN (ITALY)

Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra won the Eurovision Song Contest in the early hours of Sunday in a clear show of popular support for the war-ravaged nation that went beyond music.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed victory, Ukraine's third since its 2003 Eurovision debut, and said "we will do our best" to host next year's contest

in hotly contested port city of Mariupol. He underlined "Ukrainian Mariupol," adding: "free, peaceful, rebuilt!"

"I am sure our victorious chord in battle with enemy is not far off," Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram messaging app. Kalush Orchestra's front man, Oleh Psiuk, took advantage of enormous global audience, last year numbering more than 180 million, to make impassioned plea to free fighters still trapped beneath a sprawling steel plant in

Mariupol following their performance.

"Help Azovstal, right now? Psiuk implored from beneath a bright bucket hat that has become band's trademark among fans.

He later told a news conference that people can help by "spreading information, talking out this, reaching out to governments to help." Kalush Orchestra's song, "Stefania," was the sentimental and bookmakers' favorite among 25 competing performers in grand finale. The public vote from home, via text message or Eurovision app, proved decisive, lifting them above British Tik Tok star Sam Ryder, who led after national juries in 40 countries cast their votes. The 439 fan votes is highest number of televote points ever received in a Eurovision contest, now in its 66th year.

Eurovision win in hand, Ukraine band releases new video

Turin (Italy): Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra, fresh off its Eurovision victory, released a new music video on Sunday of its winning hit "Stefania" that features scenes of war-ravaged Ukraine and women in combat gear, as the annual song contest took on ever more political tones.

The video was released hours after Kalush Orchestra brought Ukraine its third Eurovision win, pulling ahead

of Britain in the grand final after votes from some of estimated 200 million viewers from 40 participating countries were tallied. Band members posed for photos and signed autographs outside their Turin hotel on Sunday, en route to an interview with Italian host broadcaster RAI. They must return to Ukraine on Monday after being given special permission to leave country to attend competition. **AP**

ute to his mother. But since Russia's Feb. 24 invasion it has become an anthem to motherland, with lyrics that pledge: "I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed."

Sri Lankan Prez urges lawmakers to work together for a solution

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Embattled Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Sunday called on all lawmakers to unite and work immediately for a solution to the people's pressing problems when the country is in "dire straits" amid the worst economic crisis.

In his remarks on the occasion of Vesak Poya Day, the President said: "We must be mindful of the current situation and unite around a programme that can deliver a fair determination to all."

Vesak Poya Day commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha. The three events in his life are said to have happened on the same date.

"...Resilience is essential in difficult situations. At this juncture, when the country is in

dire straits, all the people's representatives must work together immediately for a solution on behalf of all citizens.

The true goal should be to reach the desired target without deviating from the primary goal," he said.

Newly-appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also issued a message on the occasion, stressing that the commitment to restore the lives of the people is a commitment made to Lord Buddha.

Stating that restraint and stability should be restored within Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister emphasised that the Buddha's Dhamma, which has the most valuable philosophical meaning, also functions as practical state political guidance.

On Saturday, four ministers

were appointed to the Cabinet but the Opposition parties have refused to be part of an all-party government.

The Leader of the Opposition, Sajith Premadasa, in his message said that Lord Buddha revealed to the world the message of making the world better through altruism instead of ambition, opportunism and selfishness.

He pointed out that the teachings of Lord Buddha can also be applied in practice in modern life.

The Indian High Commission in Colombo also wished all Sri Lankans on the occasion of Vesak Poya Day.

"High Commission of India wishes a blessed #Vesak #Poya Day," the mission tweeted. Sri Lanka is going through the worst economic crisis since independence in 1948. A crippling shortage of foreign

reserves has led to long queues for fuel, cooking gas and other essentials while power cuts and soaring food prices heaped misery on the people.

The economic crisis also triggered a political crisis in Sri Lanka and a demand for the resignation of the powerful Rajapaksas.

President Rajapaksa sacked his Cabinet and appointed a younger Cabinet as a response to the demand for his resignation. A continuous protest opposite his secretariat has now gone on for well over a month. On Monday, Gotabaya Rajapaksa's elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned as the prime minister to make way for the president to appoint an interim all political party government. Wickremesinghe was appointed the country's new prime minister on Thursday.

PM Wickremesinghe extends support to protesters demanding Rajapaksa's resignation

PTI ■ COLOMBO

In an unusual move, Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has extended public support to the protesters, who have been camping at a popular beach-front here for over a month calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation for mishandling the country's worst economic crisis.

The Prime Minister on Saturday said he had appointed a committee to look after the interests of the 'Gota Go Home' village protesters who have been camping at Colombo's Galle Face Green since April 9.

Wickremesinghe, who was appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa as Prime Minister after asking his elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa to quit, said the young protesters in the village would be safeguarded and their views

would be sought for the shaping of future policy.

In an interview with the BBC Sinhala Service, the Prime Minister said the 'Gota Go Gama' protest should be continued to bring a change in the political system in the country and let the country's youth take the responsibility to lead.

Wickremesinghe, the 73-year-old United National Party (UNP) leader, was appointed as Sri Lanka's 26th prime minister on Thursday as the country was without a government since Monday when prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned after violence erupted following an attack on the anti-government protesters by his supporters.

The attack triggered widespread violence against Rajapaksa loyalists, leaving nine people dead and wounding over 200 others.

Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Party



(SLPP) has extended their support to Wickremesinghe and almost all parties represented in the 225-member Parliament have said although they wouldn't be a party to Wickremesinghe's government they would support him in his effort to pull Sri Lanka out of the current economic crisis.

Political sources said two more ministers are to be appointed to the interim Cabinet on Sunday. Rajapaksa

appointed four of them on Saturday. At least 78 parliamentarians, including the former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, had faced arson attacks on their private properties during the unrest on May 9.

At the government parliamentary group meeting held on Saturday, the attendance was low as parliamentarians still fear for their lives despite the imposition of curfew.

2 Sikh businessmen killed in broad daylight in Pak; PM Sharif says 'act of terrorism'

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Two Sikh businessmen were shot dead on Sunday by unidentified gunmen in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the latest targeted terrorist attack against the minority community in the restive province bordering Afghanistan.

Saljeet Singh, 42, and Ranjeet Singh, 38, died on the spot after being attacked by two bike-borne assailants in the morning, according to the police.

The attackers fled after carrying out the attack.

The two Sikhs were in the

business of spices and had shops in the Bata Tal bazaar in Sarband, about 17 kms from Peshawar.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the killing.

The Counter-Terrorism Department registered a case of murder of the two Sikh men, Saddar Superintendent of Police Aqi Hussain told Geo News.

"The incident appears to be a terrorist attack. The CCTV footage will be acquired and the suspects will be arrested soon," he said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the inci-

dent and directed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan to ensure immediate arrest and punishment of the culprits.

He also urged the chief minister to ensure steps for the protection of the lives and properties of the citizens, particularly of non-Muslims.

Sharif expressed sympathies with the bereaved families of the deceased.

He observed that enmity with Pakistan was the reason behind this "act of terrorism" and resolved to eliminate the enemies of the country, the report said.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah criticised the

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for the attack and sought a report from the provincial chief secretary and inspector general of police.

"The KP government has terribly failed at protecting the minorities," Sanaullah said, indicating past incidents of violence against Sikhs in the province.

He urged law enforcement agencies and the provincial government led by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to ensure the security of minorities.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan condemned the attack and directed the police to take

immediate steps to arrest the culprits.

He said that the incident was a conspiracy to disrupt the inter-faith harmony in the province.

The Chief Minister said that justice will be provided to the families of the deceased.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari called for the immediate arrest of those involved.

"No one will be allowed to disturb inter-faith harmony in the country and harm national unity," he said in a statement, adding that the Pakistan Peoples Party was the country's real representative party and would not

abandon the Sikh community.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan condemned the killing.

"This is not the first time that the Sikh community in KP has been targeted and we demand that the KP police identify and arrest the perpetrators promptly," it said.

It also called on the government to "make it clear that violence against religious minorities will not be tolerated".

The All Pakistan Ulama Council (APUC) also condemned the killing.

APUC head Tahir Ashrafi

Three children among six killed in suicide blast in Pak's North Waziristan

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Three children and as many soldiers of the Pakistan Army were killed in a suicide blast on Sunday in Pakistan's restive North Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, the Army said.

The incident occurred in the Miran Shah town, some 250 kms from here, the Army's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement.

The children were aged between 4 to 11 years, it said, adding that three soldiers also died in the incident.

"Intelligence agencies are investigating to find out about (the) suicide bomber and his handlers/facilitators," the ISPR added. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the suicide attack and expressed grief over

the lives lost.

In a statement, he offered his condolences to the families of the children.

"The killers of innocent children are the enemies of both Islam and humanity. We will not sit idle until this brutality is eradicated," he said, vowing to punish the facilitators of the attacker.

Taking to Twitter, the prime minister also said: "Blood of our soldiers and citizens is a debt on us that we will repay by eradicating terrorism from our country."

Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb also condemned the attack and offered her condolences.

According to Radio Pakistan, the minister said miscreants wanted to "destabilise law and order in the country".



Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also condemned the attack.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan condemned the blast.

Last month, two Pakistan Army soldiers were killed in the Sararogha area of South

Waziristan district during a gun battle with terrorists.

On April 23, three soldiers were killed in the Dewagar area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district during an exchange of fire with terrorists from across the Afghan border.

AP ■ BUFFALO

A teenage gunman wearing military gear and livestreaming with a helmet camera opened fire with a rifle at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket in what authorities described as "racially motivated violent extremism", killing 10 people and wounding three others Saturday before he surrendered.

Police officials said the 18-year-old gunman, who is white, was wearing body armour and military-style clothing when he pulled up and opened fire at people at a Tops Friendly Market, the shooting streamed via a camera affixed to the man's helmet.

"He exited his vehicle. He was very heavily armed. He had tactical gear. He had a tactical helmet on. He had a camera that he was livestreaming what he was doing," city Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said at a news conference afterward.

Gramaglia said the gunman initially shot four people outside the store, three fatally. Inside the store, a security guard who was a retired Buffalo police officer fired multiple shots at the gunman and struck him, but the bullet hit the gunman's bulletproof vest and had no effect, Gramaglia added. The commissioner said the gunman then killed the security guard.

Video also captured the suspect as he walked into the supermarket where he shot several other victims, according to authorities.

Police said 11 of the victims were Black and two were white. The supermarket is in a predominantly Black neighbourhood a few kilometers north of downtown Buffalo.

"This is the worst nightmare that any community can face, and we are hurting and we are seething right now," Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said at the news conference. "The depth of pain that families are feeling and that all of us are feeling right now cannot even be explained."

Gramaglia said Buffalo police entered the store and confronted the gunman in the vestibule.

"At that point the suspect put the gun to his own neck. Buffalo police personnel -- two patrol officers -- talked the suspect into dropping the gun. He dropped the gun, took off

some of his tactical gear, surrendered at that point. And he was led outside, put in a police car," he said.

The suspected gunman was later identified as Payton Gendron, of Conklin, a New York state community about 200 miles (320 kilometres) southeast of Buffalo, two law enforcement officials told The Associated

Press. The officials were not permitted to speak publicly on the matter and did so on the condition of anonymity.

Wearing a hospital gown, Gendron was arraigned in court Saturday evening on first-degree murder charges and ordered detained without bail.

Another court hearing is scheduled for next week.

At the earlier news briefing, Erie County Sheriff John Garcia pointedly called the shooting a hate crime.

"This was pure evil. It was straight up racially-motivated hate crime from somebody outside of our community, outside of the City of Good neighbours.... Coming into our community and trying to inflict that evil upon us," Garcia said.

Elsewhere, NAACP President Derrick Johnson issued a statement in which he called the shooting "absolutely devastating".

"Our hearts are with the



community and all who have been impacted by this terrible tragedy. Hate and racism have no place in America. We are shattered, extremely angered and praying for the victims' families and loved ones," he added.

Separately, the Rev. Al Sharpton called on the White House to convene a meeting with Black, Jewish and Asian "to underscore the Federal government (is) escalating its efforts against hate crimes". In a tweet, Sharpton said that "leaders of all these communities should stand together on this!"

The shooting came little more than a year after a March 2021 attack at a King Soopers grocery in Boulder, Colorado, that killed 10 people. Investigators have not released any information about why they believe

the man charged in that attack targeted the supermarket.

At the scene in Buffalo on Saturday afternoon, police closed off an entire block, lined by spectators, and yellow police tape surrounded the full parking lot.

Witnesses Braedyn Kephart and Shane Hill, both 20, pulled into the parking lot just as the shooter was exiting. They described him as a white male in his late teens or early twenties sporting full camo, a black helmet and what appeared to be a rifle.

North Korea reports 15 more suspected Covid-19 deaths

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea has confirmed 15 more deaths and hundreds of thousands of additional patients with fevers as it mobilises more than a million health and other workers to try to suppress the country's first COVID-19 outbreak, state media reported Sunday.

After maintaining a widely disputed claim that it's been coronavirus-free for more than two years, North Korea announced Thursday that it had found its first COVID-19 patients since the pandemic began.

It said a fever has spread across the country "explosively" since late April but hasn't disclosed exactly how many COVID-19 cases were found. Some experts say North Korea lacks the diagnostic kits needed to test a large number of suspected COVID-19 patients.

The additional deaths reported Sunday took the country's reported fever-related fatalities to 42. The official Korean Central News Agency also reported that another 296,180 people with fevers had been tallied, taking the

reported total to 820,620.

The outbreak has triggered concern about a humanitarian crisis in North Korea because most of the country's 26 million people are believed to be unvaccinated against the coronavirus and its public health care system has been in shambles for decades. Some experts say North Korea might suffer huge fatalities if it doesn't immediately receive outside shipments of vaccines, medicines and other medical supplies.

"Without COVID-19 test kits, North Korea is resorting to body temperature checks to guess at infections. But with such a very inferior and inaccurate method of examination, it's impossible to find asymptomatic virus carriers and control viral surges," said analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute.

"As North Korea's (suspected) COVID-19 infections are explosively increasing, its death toll is expected to continue to rise," Cheong added. Since Thursday, North Korea has imposed a nationwide lockdown to fight the virus.

Devasahayam Pillai becomes 1st Indian layman to be declared saint

PTI ■ VATICAN CITY

Devasahayam Pillai, who embraced Christianity in the 18th century, on Sunday became the first Indian layman to be declared a saint by Pope Francis during an impressive canonisation ceremony here at the Vatican. Devasahayam was recommended for the process of Beatification by the Vatican in 2004, at the request of the Kottar diocese, Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council and the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India.

Pope Francis, 85, canonised Blessed Devasahayam during a Canonisation Mass in St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

A miracle attributed to Devasahayam was recognised by Pope Francis in 2014, clearing the path to his canonisation in 2022. It was the first canonisation ceremony at the Vatican in over two years. Pope Francis, who has been complaining of strained ligaments in his right knee for months, used a wheelchair to preside over the ceremony. Nine others, including four women, were also canonised along with Devasahayam. "Our calling is to serve the Gospel and our brothers and sisters, to offer our lives without expecting anything in return, or any worldly glory," the Pope said during the ceremony.

"Being disciples of Jesus and advancing on the path of holiness means first and foremost letting ourselves be transfigured by the power of God's love," he said. A group of Indians holding the tricolour cheered from the gathering when Devasahayam's name was announced.

With the completion of the process, Pillai, who took the name "Lazarus" after embracing Christianity in 1745, became the first lay person from India to become a saint.

Devasahayam was born on April 23, 1712 as Neelakanta Pillai into a Hindu Nair family, at Nattalam in Kanyakumari district, which was part of the erstwhile Travancore kingdom. He was an official in the court of Travancore's Maharaja Marthanda Varma when he was instructed into the Catholic faith by a Dutch naval commander. "Lazarus" or "Devasahayam" in Malayalam, translates to "God is my help". While preaching, he particularly insisted on the equality of all people, despite caste differences. This aroused the hatred of the higher classes, and he was arrested in 1749. After enduring increasing hardships, he received the crown of martyrdom when he was shot on 14 January 1752," a note prepared by the Vatican earlier had said.

Sites linked with his life and death are in Kottar Diocese, in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concern that Mr. Gopi Ram, Mr. Ranbir Singh, Mr. Shiv Kumar, Mahavir Singh all S/o Late Sh. Dhani Ram & Mrs. Mahendri Devi W/o Late Sh. Raghubir Singh R/o Vill. Sultanpur, Tehsil-Maharuli, New Delhi-110030 who are the original allottee/ owners of property / Plot No. SH-193, Sector-145, Noida (U.P.) had sold the said property on General Power of Attorney basis to the following perosn(s). General Power of Attorney was executed on 02 April 2022 in favour of Mrs. Mohini Chahar W/o Sh. Ajit Chahar R/o A-95, Sector-49, Noida, Distt. G.B. Nagar, (U.P.) which is registered and the Agreement to Sell was not registered. Because the Agreement to Sell is not registered so it is informed to all concern that the said Property/Plot No. SH-193, Sector-145, Noida (U.P.) is going to be transferred in favour of Chanchal Arora W/o Pawan Kumar Arora and Raj Kumar Arora S/o Late Shyam Lal Arora both are R/o B-48, Sector-55, Noida (U.P.). If any one has/have any objection he/she may file his/her objection along with the sufficient proof in the Residential Department of the Noida Authority within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Chanchal Arora W/o Pawan Kumar Arora and Raj Kumar Arora S/o Late Shyam Lal Arora

IN THE COURT OF ADDITIONAL DISTRICT JUDGE, HOSUR MCOP No: 95/2014

Mari W/o R.A.Martin, No.36-1,1st Cross,Santhi Nagar, Hosur Town & Taluk, Krishnagiri DistrictPetitioner Vs Susila Transpost Pvt Ltd (R3) Shop No.9, Maruthi Parking O Gurgaon, Gurgaon, Haryiana- 122001.

NOTICE

Please take notice that the above Petitioner has filed the above claim petition for the injuries sustained in the road accident. The above case is posted to 15/07/2022 for your appearance. You are hereby directed to appear before this Honourable Court on 15/07/2022 at 10.00 AM either in person or through pleader and state your objections if any. Failing which, the Honourable Court will be pleased to pass an exparte order against you. /By the order of Court/ G.MUNIYANDI, B.Sc., B.L., ADVOCATE HOSUR

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Mrs. Payal Jain intends to purchase Built up Second Floor, without roof rights, measuring 65.88sq.meters of property bearing No.168, Rect. No. 12, Killa No. 28, Situated at Old Anarkali, Near Lachman Dass Building, Village: Khureji/Khas, Illaga: Shahdara, Delhi 110 051 from Mrs. Hem Lata Jain (registered owner by virtue of registered Sale Deed dated 09.03.2018) who had lost/misplaced Original Sale Deed dated 24.04.2015 in favour of Mrs. Sanju and now my client is mortgaging the said property with LIC HFL. If anybody including Bank, Financial Institutions, persons, relative has any claim, right, interest whatsoever in the said property shall also inform within 15 days to the undersigned with documentary evidence. In the event of no response to this notice, than our client shall procure that title of the said property is unencumbered and clear.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Appeal No. 694/2021 Pabitra Mohan Swain Appellant/Applicant VS Aadhar Infraholding Limited Respondent To, Aadhar Infraholding Ltd. B-63, Sector-57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 201301 Subject:-Regarding Appeal U/s 44 of the RERA Act, 2016. You are hereby informed that the said appeal, was taken up for hearing on 28.04.2022. You are therefore directed to be present before the Tribunal either in person or through legal representative as provided U/s 56 of the Act to oppose reply the Appeal otherwise the said appeal will be heard ex-parte in your absence. Now the case is fixed for hearing on 23.05.2022. \$\$/ Joint Registrar UPREAT, Lucknow The U.P. Real Estate Appellate Tribunal Indira Bhawan 4th floor, Ashok Marg, Lucknow

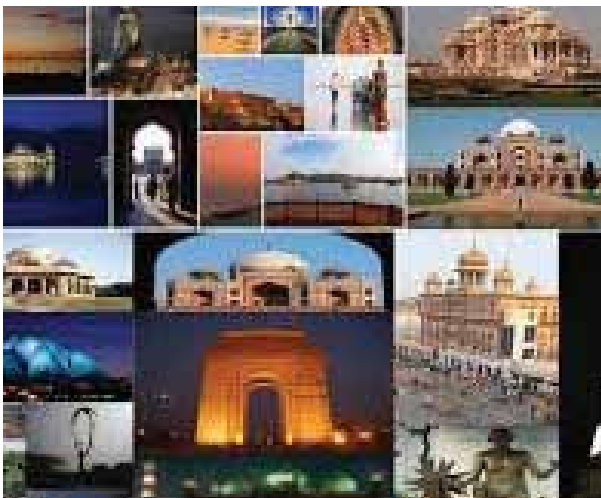
Govt working on comprehensive national tourism policy: GK Reddy

Mumbai: Union Tourism and Culture Minister G Kishan Reddy on Sunday said that the government is working towards a comprehensive national tourism policy to give an impetus to the tourism industry.

Addressing the last day of the two-day India International Cruise Conference here, Reddy also urged the industry stakeholders to prepare a road map for the development of the cruise tourism industry and asked them to create an action plan on cruise tourism in a mission-mode.

The government is taking a slew of initiatives to promote river cruise tourism, which include river front development, increasing the number of cruise ships to 1,000, infrastructure development for water parks, among others, he said at the event hosted by the Ports, Shipping and Waterways Ministry in collaboration with industry body Ficci.

During the day, as many as eight memorandum of understanding (MoUs) were signed between Mumbai Port Trust, Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and various



cruise services operators in the presence of Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal and Reddy.

The domestic river cruise industry is at a nascent stage with an initial focus on NW 1 (Ganga) and NW 2 (Brahmaputra) servicing around 13,000 passenger movements in 2019, across 100 cruise trips, accounting for around 1 per cent of the glob-

al river cruise market.

However, this segment of tourism also got impacted due to COVID-19 pandemic and is now looking at revival.

Globally the river cruise market has grown at around 5 per cent over the last few years and is expected to constitute around 37 per cent of the cruise market by 2027.

Europe has been driving growth with around 60 per cent share of river cruise vessels in

the world with rivers Danube in Europe and Yangtze in China dominating the river cruise market globally.

"We are working on a comprehensive national tourism policy to promote the tourism industry. It will also bring in important stakeholders including the various state governments together," Reddy said.

Calling for international cruise operators to invest in the domestic cruise tourism industry, the Union Tourism Minister said that the government will facilitate all that is required to set up business here. "We need to concentrate both on domestic and international tourism.

This is high time we work together and explore the potential of tourism in the country," the Minister said.

He said that India would be hosting the G23 Summit next year, during which some 120 conferences on different subjects, including on cruise tourism, are expected to be organized across various cities in the country, adding that, "We should utilize this opportunity with proper branding. **PTI**

PSB frauds fell 51% to ₹40K cr; number of cases not falling fast enough: RBI

New Delhi: Public sector banks reported over 51 per cent dip in the amount involved in frauds to Rs 40,295.25 crore during the financial year ended March 2022, the Reserve Bank of India has said.

The 12 PSBs (Public Sector Banks) had reported frauds worth Rs 81,921.54 crore in preceding fiscal 2020-21, the Reserve Bank has said in response to an application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

However, the number of fraud cases didn't fall at the same pace as a total of 7,940 frauds reported by the PSBs in 2021-22, against 9,933 incidents reported in FY21, said the RBI's reply to Madhya Pradesh-based RTI activist Chandrashekhar Gaur.

According to the RBI data on frauds reported by PSBs in all categories during FY22, the highest amount of Rs 9,528.95 crore was reported by the city-based Punjab National Bank (PNB), involving 431 such incidents.

The country's largest lender State Bank of India reported frauds worth Rs 6,932.37 crore in as many as

4,192 cases -- reflecting incidents of a large number of small value frauds.

Bank of India reported frauds worth Rs 5,923.99 crore (209 incidents), followed by Bank of Baroda at Rs 3,989.36 crore (280); Union Bank of India Rs 3,939 crore (627), while Canara Bank reported frauds worth Rs 3,230.18 crore in just 90 cases -- showing that the transactions were of high value frauds.

Among others, Indian Bank customers faced frauds amounting to Rs 2,038.28 crore in 211 cases; Indian Overseas Bank Rs 1,733.80 crore (312); Bank of Maharashtra Rs 1,139.36 crore (72 cases); Central Bank of India Rs 773.37 crore; UCO Bank Rs 611.54 crore (114 crore) and Punjab & Sind Bank reported frauds of Rs 455.04 crore in as many as 159 incidents.

RBI said that the data may change subject to rectification/update made subsequent to first reporting of banks (in respect of individual frauds). As per the RBI reply, the amount of frauds worth less than Rs 1 lakh has been recorded from April 1, 2017. **PTI**

Sale of low-unit price packs jumps as inflation soars



New Delhi: FMCG manufacturers are opting to reduce product weight rather than price of items targeted at lower-end consumers, while resorting to single-digit price increase on some large packs and launching 'bridge packs', as they seek to overcome the impact of commodity price rise and unprecedented inflation.

Besides, they are also using economical packaging, recycled products, and cutting spending on advertising and marketing to counter sudden spur in costs due to geopolitical crises such as the Russia-Ukraine War as well as the export ban of Palm oil from Indonesia.

The growing commodity prices and unprecedented inflation touching a new high, has forced the consumers to tighten their purse strings and opt for the low-unit price (LUP) packs to maintain their household budgets.

Homegrown FMCG maker Dabur India has responded to this challenge with a mix of pricing actions and cost control measures, said its CEO Mohit Malhotra.

"In the urban markets, where the per capita income is higher and consumers have the spending power, we have taken up prices in larger packs. In the rural markets, on the other hand, where LUP packs are sold, we have seen grammage reduction to protect sacred price points like Re 1, Rs 5 and Rs 10," he said.

With no sign of inflation coming down in the coming quarters, FMCG companies are fighting back through grammage cuts, launch bridge packs and a single-digit price increase on some large packs.

Recently several companies have reduced the grammage of their products available at popular price points, ranging from soaps to noodles, chips to Aloo Bhujia and biscuits to chocolates.

"We have observed that some consumers have shifted to affordable packs or LUPs to manage their monthly grocery budget. We have also increased supplies of LUPs of our key brands across categories to meet this consumer need," Malhotra said.

While Parle Products Senior Category Head Mayank Shah said there are "some early signs" of downtrading, consumers turning to value packs, as the sale of low unit price packs is slightly going up.

"In terms of smaller packs, there is a bit of traction happening given the situation," he said.

Downtrading refers to the practice of switching from expensive products to cheaper alternatives by customers in a bid to conserve cash.

According to retail intelligence platform Bizom, there is a "definite increase" in the consumption of products across lower price points in both urban and rural centres in the January-March quarter in comparison to the July-September quarter.

This is mainly on account of Hyper Price inflation from edible oils which is a key ingredient in the Indian food plate, it said.

"There are signs of significant downtrading among FMCG products across both urban and rural India. Price inflation remains the key driver of this shift across categories especially among those where oil, wheat and other inflationary commodities remain a key input ingredient," said Bizom Chief of Growth & Insights Akshay D'Souza.

Edelweiss Financial Services Executive Vice President Abneesh Roy said the consumer is trying to save money by buying smaller packs and this is happening across all FMCG categories. **PTI**

Created over 11.6 lakh jobs; enabled \$5 bn in exports: Amazon India

New Delhi: E-commerce major Amazon India on Sunday said it has cumulatively created more than 11.6 lakh direct and indirect jobs, enabled nearly USD 5 billion in cumulative exports and digitised over 40 lakh MSMEs in the country till date.

In January 2020, at the first edition of its annual event Amazon Smbhav, the company had pledged to digitise 1 crore MSMEs (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises), enable USD 10 billion in cumulative exports and create 20 lakh jobs in India by 2025.

"Amazon India today shared updates on its key pledges for India and announced that it has cumulatively created more than 11.6 lakh direct and indirect jobs, enabled nearly USD 5 billion in cumulative exports and digitised over 40 lakh MSMEs in India till date," the company said in a statement.

The jobs created includes direct jobs as well as employment opportunities it spurred in seller community and affiliated industries like packaging, logistics, transportation and delivery.

Amazon has also doubled its exports pledge to now enable

USD 20 billion in cumulative exports from India by 2025. Last year, at Amazon Smbhav 2021, the company had announced the Amazon Smbhav Venture Fund to invest in startups and entrepreneurs focused on technology innovations.

The fund is focused on supporting entrepreneurs and startups that are doing innovative work in the area of Small and Medium Business (SMB) digitisation. As part of the fund, Amazon has already invested in 'MyGlam', 'Mixchange' and 'Small Case'. Manish Tiwary, Country Manager, India Consumer Business Amazon India, believes that technology and mobile internet will continue to positively impact India's economic growth, with Amazon poised to play a larger role in the country's digital transformation and a modern, thriving digital economy.

"As we continue to work with MSMEs across the country, we remain committed to bringing new tools and technology that will unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of Indian businesses, boost exports from the country and help create jobs at scale," Tiwary said. **PTI**

Premature redemption price of gold bond fixed at ₹5,115/unit

Mumbai: The price for premature redemption of sovereign gold bond (SGB) due on Tuesday has been fixed at Rs 5,115 per unit, an RBI release said.

Premature redemption of Gold Bond is permitted after the fifth year from the date of issue and the due date of SGB 2016-17, Series III issued on November 17, 2016 is May 17, 2022.

The redemption price of SGB is based on the average closing price of gold of 999 purity of the week (Monday-Friday) preceding the date of redemption as published by the India Bullion and Jewellers Association Ltd (IBJA).

"Accordingly, the redemption price for the second premature redemption due on May 17, 2022 shall be Rs 5,115 per unit of SGB based on the simple average of closing price of gold for the week May 09-13, 2022," the RBI said in a statement.

The issue price of the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2016-17, Series III was Rs 2,957 per gram of gold. The nominal value of the bond was fixed on the basis of average closing price for gold of 999 purity (October 17-21, 2016)



published by the IBJA at Rs 3,007 per gram. The government, in consultation with the RBI, had offered a discount of Rs 50 per gram on the nominal value of the sovereign gold bond.

The RBI issues the bonds on behalf of the Government of India which are sold through banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices, and NSE and BSE.

As regards taxation, Deepak Jain, Chief Executive,

TaxManager.In, a tax e-filing and compliance management portal, said the interest earned from SGB will be taxable as income from other sources while TDS is not applicable on the bond.

He said the rules on the taxation of capital gains on redemption of SGB are very clear that after the maturity of 8 years lock-in period - the entire gains are exempted or tax free.

However, if the SGB is redeemed after the lock-in

period of 5 years and before the maturity period of 8 years, the gains accumulated on the redemption will be long term capital gains and it will be taxed at 20 per cent with indexation benefit, Jain said.

If the indexation benefit is not opted then 10 per cent tax rate will apply, he said.

Col Sanjeev Govila (Retd.), who runs a Sebi-registered financial advisory firm, Hum Fauji Initiative, opined that SGBs are primarily bought for buying gold as a long-term asset allocation strategy which, apart from the capital appreciation, also gives a 2.5 per cent annual interest.

According to him, SGB 2016-17 Series III bonds have given "very good returns" of about 13.5 per cent annualised including the interest earned.

"With the current uncertainty on inflation stickiness and GDP growth outlooks, it would be good to hold on to these SGBs," he added.

The scheme was launched in November 2015 with an objective to reduce the demand for physical gold and shift a part of the domestic savings - used for the purchase of the yellow metal -- into financial savings. **PTI**

Goa CM Pramod Sawant meets Tata Sons Group's senior officials, discusses investment

Panaji: Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Saturday met with senior management officials of the Tata Sons Group and discussed various ways to boost investment in the coastal state.

Sawant along with Industries Minister Mauvin Godinho and Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel interacted with the Chairman Tata Sons Group, N Chandrasekharan, Noel Tata and other top CEOs to boost investments in Goa.

During the meeting, the opportunities in all the sectors like IT, Aviation manufacturing, Retail, Hospitality, Training centres for hospitality and soft skills were discussed, according to an official statement.



The Goa State Industries Association played a key role in arranging this crucial meeting with an agenda to boost MSME growth, the statement added.

Tata Sons Group Chairman was impressed by the earnestness of the CM and Industries

Ministers holistic approach towards employment generation and "promised to immediately plan an internal meeting with their top CEOs to promote new-generation businesses for Goa," it added. **PTI**

Inter-ministerial consultations on May 18 ahead of WTO meet in June: Official

New Delhi: The commerce ministry has convened an inter-ministerial meeting on May 18 to hold consultations on issues that are likely to figure prominently in the forthcoming meeting of the highest decision-making body of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva next month, an official said.

The 12th ministerial conference of the WTO is scheduled from June 12-15 in Geneva. The 164-member multilateral body frames global trade rules and adjudicates trade disputes among member nations.

Issues which are expected to figure in the meeting includes a proposed agree-

ment on fisheries subsidies; agriculture; digital trade or e-commerce; WTO's response to pandemic including TRIPS (trade related aspects of intellectual property rights) waiver; Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) matters like trade and gender, trade and MSME; reforms in the WTO like appellate body crisis, special and differential treatment.

JSI is a negotiating method started by a certain group of WTO member countries on some specific issues without following the rule of consensus decision-making, which involves all the members of the WTO. Members are negotiating a proposed fisheries subsidies agreement.



post-Covid because of a lot of spending by various governments. At the same time, sup-

ply had not caught up.

So there is a reason why we have seen a very big increase in steel prices. Now we are seeing a slight correction in steel prices," JSW Steel joint MD Seshagiri Rao had commented recently at the ET Awards ceremony.

He, however, said it was anybody's guess whether steel prices had peaked out.

Tata Steel MD & CEO T V Narendran, however, have a contrarian view and had said recently that as far as "first quarter" of this year (FY23) is concerned, "we expect in India the prices to be Rs 8,000-8,500 per tonne higher than fourth



The objective is to discipline subsidies for sustainable fishing, eliminate IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing subsidies and prohibit them from contributing to

overcapacity and overfishing.

The official said that secretaries from different departments, including agriculture, environment, consumer affairs, animal husbandry, fisheries, women and child development, MSME, electronics and IT, and pharmaceuticals are expected to participate in the day-long deliberations. Representatives from different bodies such as Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), RIS, NCAER, ICRIER and National Academy of Agricultural Sciences are also invited for the consultations. "This will be a consultation meeting on WTO issues in preparation for the 12th ministerial conference," the official added. **PTI**

Steel prices ease over 10%, coal crisis playing havoc on secondary steelmakers

Kolkata: Steel sector players are facing some heat owing to high input commodity prices as finished steel products have begun to decline since April after the Russia-Ukraine war broke out.

Prices in the long products segment have declined on an average of 10-15 per cent to Rs 57,000 per tonne in Kolkata market from a high of Rs 65,000 a tonne. Coal which is a key raw material for the secondary steel producers has turned out to be the major pain point, officials said.

Steel prices from leading players were higher at Rs 75,000-76,000 per tonne at its

peak. "Steel products, be it construction like TMT bars and structurals have come down between 10 and 15 per cent due to sluggish demand and are expected to ease a little more before it settles. While our costs have soared," Steel Rolling Mills Association chairman Vivek Adukia told PTI.

"Our costs have increased by 50 per cent despite a compromise on quality of inputs, secondary steel producers using Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) require high quality thermal coal to make sponge iron.

The imported coal price which was USD 120 per tonne

had shot up to USD 300 per tonne after the war broke out. The price is not sustainable unless passed through," he said.

"Steel prices, which have been on a song for the past two years, are finally set to correct on weak seasonality, and may trade at around Rs 60,000 per tonne by the end of the current fiscal year, down from the Rs 76,000 per tonne peak it scaled last month", rating agency Crisil said in its latest report.

A PSU steel maker without divulging details said there had been some easing in the price of steel.

"Demand has gone up

quarter which will cover the cost increases that we are facing due to high coal prices."

According to Koustav Mazumdar, an associate director with the agency, the onset of the weak demand season because of the monsoon and less-lucrative exports mean domestic steel prices should begin easing and ultimately move towards Rs 60,000/tonne by March 2023, down from the Rs 76,000/tonne peak it scaled in just last month, which will still be well above the pre-pandemic levels.

Adukia said steel companies are now forced to import coal for survival as Coal India

is not lending its ears to their demand.

"As Coal India is not listening to our plea that coal is "not" for fuel but a key raw material and so we should be treated as a priority sector. We have approached the state government to speak to the city headquartered miner on our behalf," Adukia said. "If coal prices in the international market do not decline then 30-40 per cent of the secondary steel units will have to scale down production or close down. There are about 65 secondary units in West Bengal and about one lakh employment is associated," he said. **PTI**

employees is changing.

"Employees across India now hold more control in the job market, with more than half of respondents saying they are likely to quit in the next 12 months - driven mostly by a desire for higher total pay, better career opportunities and flexibility amid rising inflation, a shrinking labour market and an increase in jobs offering flexible working," the EY 2022 Work Reimagined Survey said.

EY India, Partner & India Leader, Workforce Advisory Services, Anurag Malik said, the survey says that the balance of power has shifted to favour employees. **PTI**

Titans tame CSK to secure top-two finish

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Wridhiman Saha's solid 67 not out after a top-class bowling performance set up Gujarat Titans' seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in the IPL here on Sunday, securing a top-two finish in the team standings.

Gujarat bowlers put up a clinical show to restrict CSK to a below-par 133/5 despite a fine half-century by Ruturaj Gaikwad.

Saha, who struck eight boundaries and a six in his 57-ball knock, anchored the chase nicely to get Gujarat home in 19.1 overs.

While CSK were already out of the play-off race, the win for Gujarat guarantees them a top-two finish on the points table in their debut season, providing them with two opportunities to reach the final.

Saha first added 59 runs in just 7.1 overs with Shubman Gill (18; 3x4) to lay the foundation of the win.

CSK tried to make a mini comeback by grabbing two quick wickets in the middle overs but it was too little and too late.

Saha, who was dropped by Ruturaj on 21, went hammer and tongs as he pummeled a listless CSK attack in the power-play.

The wicketkeeper-batter made his intent clear by striking three boundaries in the opening over off Mukesh Choudhary (0/28) and then played shots at will, including his only six in the fifth over.

However, CSK debutant pacer Matheesha Pathirana (2/24) trapped Gill in the front of the wickets in the eight over. Hardik Pandya (7) became Pathirana's second victim as Gujarat slipped to 100/3.

But with no run-rate pressure, David Miller (15 not out off 20 balls; 1x4) and Saha completed the chase without any hiccups.

Earlier, CSK lost opener Dewon Conway (5) in the third over as Mohammed Shami (2/19) gave Gujarat the first breakthrough. Shami's angled delivery from round the wicket moved away after pitching which Conway nicked it to wicket-keeper Wridhimman Saha.

Gaikwad (53 off 49 balls) first forged



a 57-run second wicket stand off 39 balls with Moeen Ali (21 off 17; 2x6) and then added another 48-runs with Narayan Jagadeesan, who also struck an unbeaten 39 off 33 balls, for the third wicket.

CSK however suffered a middle-order collapse and could add only 24 runs in the last five overs.

Gaikwad, who hit four boundaries and a six, initially played with caution, as CSK crawled to 15/1 after four overs, as Hardik Pandya (0/8) and Shami did not give them a chance to free their arms.

Gaikwad then upped the ante in the fifth over, in which Yash Dayal leaked 15 runs.

The right-handed batter was brutal on Dayal hammering him for two boundaries and a six over fine-leg.

In the next over, Moeen smashed two successive sixes off leg-spinner Rashid Khan (1/31), a pull and a sweep shot, as

CSK added 17 runs of the sixth over and raced to 47/1 after the power-play.

Gaikwad played the odd shot even as he and Ali completed the 50-run stand for the second wicket in just 32 balls.

When it looked like the duo would score big, it was left-arm spinner R Sai Kishore (1/31), who broke the stand by removing Ali, who gave a sitter to Rashid Khan at deep-mid-wicket, in the ninth over. Jagadeesan started with a boundary, but the fall of wicket stemmed the flow of runs.

After 13 overs, CSK at 90/2, were set for a big-score.

Jagadeesan then launched into Sai Kishore (1/31), hitting him for a boundary and a maximum in the 15th over, where CSK amassed 13 runs.

But Gujarat pegged back CSK by removing Gaikwad, who was caught at deep mid-wicket and Shivam Dube (0) in quick succession as they slipped.

ROYAL WIN FOR RAJASTHAN



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal and opening bowler Trent Boult were stars on Sunday (May 15) at the Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai as the Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan Royals (RR) defeated KL Rahul's Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) by 24 runs in Match Number 63 of the ongoing 2022 season of the Indian Premier League.

With the win over the IPL

debutants, the 2008 winners moved to the second position in the league table and have almost confirmed their place in the playoffs for the first time since the 2018 edition of the world's richest franchise cricket league.

Chasing the target of 179 runs, LSG could only manage to reach 154 for 8. They suffered a double blow early in the third over of the innings when Boult removed Quinton de Kock (7) and Ayush Badoni (0)

on successive balls. And just when they were starting to recover from it, Prasidh Krishna removed KL Rahul for 10, making it 29-3 for LSG in 5.3 overs.

Deepak Hooda (59 from 39 balls) tried to revive the innings along with Krunal Pandya (25) and added 65 runs for the fourth wicket but failed to take the side past the finish line.

Boult (4-0-18-2), Obed McCoy (4-0-35-2), Prasidh Krishna (4-0-32-2) each took

► pointstable

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	GT (Q)	13	10	3	0	20	0.391
2.	RR	13	8	5	0	16	0.304
3.	LSG	13	8	5	0	16	0.262
4.	RCB	13	7	6	0	14	-0.323
5.	DC	12	6	6	0	12	0.210
6.	KKR	13	6	7	0	12	0.160
7.	PBKS	12	6	6	0	10	0.023
8.	SRH	12	5	7	0	10	-0.270
9.	CSK	13	4	9	0	8	-0.206
10.	MI	12	3	9	0	6	-0.613

► boundarymeter

4s	1720
6s	885

two wickets for the Royals, while Yuzvendra Chahal, and Ravichandran Ashwin each dismissed one batter.

Earlier, batting first after winning the toss, Rajasthan Royals rode on Yashasvi Jaiswal's 29-ball 41 and Devdutt Padikkal's 39 from 18 balls to post a fighting total of 178 runs for the loss of six wickets.

Ravi Bishnoi was the most successful bowler for LSG, picking up 2/31 in four overs, while Jason Holder, Avesh Khan, and Ayush Badoni also picked up a wicket each.

RR's final league stage match is against defending champions Chennai Super Kings on Friday (May 20), while KL Rahul-led Super Giants will face Kolkata Knight Riders on Wednesday (May 18) at Dr. DY Patil Sports Academy in Navi Mumbai.

DC & PBKS clash in must-win game

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Two teams struggling for consistency, Delhi Capitals and Punjab Kings, will aim to outdo each other in a bid to keep their play-off hopes alive in the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

Both teams are yet to string back-to-back wins this season but neither side can afford another defeat in their remaining leagues games.

Punjab are seventh on the points table with 12 points and a Net Run Rate of +0.023. The Capitals also have a dozen points and are fifth thanks to healthy NRR of +0.210, which will benefit them if two or more teams end on the same number of points.

The Capitals head to the fixture high on confidence after an eight wicket-win over Rajasthan Royals while Punjab pummeled RCB.

While opener David Warner continues to enjoy his purple patch, the second opening slot remains a cause of concern with Mandeep Singh and Srikar Bharat failing miserably



Punjab vs Delhi
Live from 7:30pm IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

in Prithvi Shaw's absence, who has also not fared well this season.

To DC's relief Mitchell Marsh finally joined the party. The big-hitting all-rounder

shook off the rust to star with the bat and ball against RR. His and Warner's role will be crucial.

They will have to navigate through a bowling attack ably led by Kagiso Rabada, who is

Shaw discharged from hospital

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Delhi Capitals opener Prithvi Shaw has been discharged from the hospital after undergoing treatment for a bout of typhoid, the franchise said on Sunday.

The 22-year-old had been admitted to a hospital due to high fever earlier this month.

"Delhi Capitals opener Prithvi Shaw has been discharged from the hospital where he was being treated

for a bout of typhoid," DC said in a statement.

The opener is being monitored by the Capitals' medical team.

"Shaw has returned to the team hotel where he is currently recuperating, while being monitored by the DC medical team," it added.

Shaw last played on May 1 against Lucknow Super Giants. Since then, he has missed the Capitals' last three matches.

His return will be a major boost for the team.

the highest wicket taker among pacers this season.

The ever-improving Arshdeep Singh has been brilliant for Punjab, especially in the death overs, landing yorkers at will while Rahul Chahar has been expensive.

The DC bowling department, on the other hand, was right on the mark against RR.

Against the flamboyant Jonny Bairstow, Liam Livingstone, Shikhar Dhawan and Bhanuka Rajapaksa, the

Delhi bowlers will have their task cut out.

The English duo of Bairstow and Livingstone can tear apart any attack as it show against RCB.

Dhawan has been Punjab's leading-run getter with 400 plus and he will be expected rise to the occasion in a do-or-die game. Bairstow has found his groove after being promoted to the top alongside Dhawan and that is a big positive for the team.

Moody happy to continue with Kane as opener

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Defending the decision to persist with the out-of-form Kane Williamson at the top, Sunrisers Hyderabad coach Tom Moody said "why change something that's working for something that's not working," adding that the other batters in the side are excelling in their roles.

Skipper Williamson is enduring a wretched run in this season of the IPL. The Kiwi has collected just 208 runs from 12 games at an average of 18.92. "Rahul Tripathi has batted exceptionally well at No 3 and (Aiden) Markram has been one of the leading batters in the tournament at No 4," Moody defended the move to retain Markram and Tripathi at No 3 and 4 respectively, at the post-match press conference.

"So, we felt why change something that's working for something that's not working."

Williamson has struggled to get going in this edition. In the 54-run loss to Kolkata Knight Riders on Saturday, the skipper hit 9 off 17 balls.

"We have trusted Kane with his



quality, there's no question of his world-class quality. So, that's why we haven't made that move because as we have seen throughout the tournament

where the batting has been functioning really well.

"That is Abhishek Sharma at the top of the order, Tripathi at 3, Markram 4 and (Nicholas) Pooran 5."

The Sunrisers were on course to seal off a playoff berth after they were on a five-match winning streak, but things have gone awry for them since then as they have now lost five games on the trot, severely denting their hopes of qualifying for the next stage.

"We did get on a nice winning roll, started to play some good cricket and had everyone available for selection and then we missed a game that we should've won to make it six in a row," Moody said.

Moody said the team lost "a little bit of confidence" when the two of its frontline bowlers -- Washington Sundar and T Natarajan -- suffered injuries.

"Then we had injuries to Washington and Natarajan. Every team has their injuries, but they play pretty key roles for us in the side and that's where I think we lost a little bit of confidence and also as a bowling unit a bit of rhythm to our game and method to our defence of 120 balls."

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia cricketer Andrew Symonds, one of the finest all-rounders and a two-time World Cup winner, has died in a tragic car accident, leaving the cricketing world in shock.

He was 46 and is survived by his wife and two young children.

Cricket Australia has now lost three prominent figures in the past two months. Spin legend Shane Warne and former wicketkeeper Rodney Marsh had died within hours of each other in March.

According to a statement issued by Queensland police, the accident happened in Hervey Range Road, about 50 km outside Townsville in northeast Australia on Saturday night.

An attacking batter, who could also bowl both medium pace and spin and an outstanding fielder, Symonds featured in 26 Tests, 198 ODIs and 14 T20Is in a successful career between 1998 and 2009.



He helped Australia win the ODI world Cups in 2003 and 2007 and was one of the key members of Australia's Test side in the 2000s.

With the ball, he snared a total of 165 wickets in his international career, including 24 in Tests, 133 in ODIs and 8 in T20Is. One of his greatest moments on the cricketing field came

when he blasted 143 off 125 balls after coming on to bat with Australia at 86 for four against Pakistan in the opening ODI of the 2003 World Cup.

Symonds scored 5088 runs, including six hundreds, in his ODI career since making debut in 1998. He also featured in 14 T20Is and averaged 48.14, besides playing in the IPL for now-

defunct Deccan Chargers and Mumbai Indians in the final stages of his career.

Playing for the Chargers, he had slammed a 53-ball 117 not out against Rajasthan Royals in the inaugural edition.

He also hit 1462 runs with two hundreds and 10 fifties after being picked for the Tests in 2004 against Sri Lanka.

He went on to hit a scintillating 156 against England in the Boxing Day Test in 2006-07 before making a career-best 162 against India at Sydney in 2008.

The Sydney Test, however, went on to become the most controversial moment of his career due to the 'Monkey Gate' scandal involving India spinner Harbhajan Singh.

Symonds, lovingly known as 'Roy', also had his share of controversies.

He was axed from the two ODIs during Australia's tour of England in 2005 after he turned up drunk for a match against Bangladesh.

QUADRUPLE DREAM LIVES ON

Liverpool beat Chelsea in shoot-out to win FA Cup title

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool held their nerve to win the FA Cup for the first time since 2006 after a dramatic penalty shoot-out against Chelsea as the quadruple chasers kept their history bid alive on Saturday.

Jurgen Klopp's side won 6-5 on penalties at Wembley as Greek defender Kostas Tsimikas was the unlikely hero with the decisive kick after Alisson Becker kept out Mason Mount's effort.

A hard-fought final had finished a 0-0 draw after extra-time, setting the stage for a nerve-jangling shoot-out that featured misses by Chelsea's Cesar Azpilicueta and Sadio Mane, whose shot was saved by Edouard Mendy when he had a chance to clinch the trophy.

For the second time this season, Liverpool emerged victorious against Chelsea on penalties, having already beaten them 11-10 following another 0-0 draw in the League Cup final in February.

Liverpool's triumph keeps them in the hunt to become the first English team to win all four major trophies in a single season.

With two prizes already secured, the Reds will hope for a slip from Premier League leaders



Manchester City, who are three points clear of them in the title race with two games left for both teams.

Even if Liverpool are unable to

win a second English title in three seasons, they could still cap an astonishing campaign by winning the Champions League final

against Real Madrid in Paris on May 28.

With that ambition in mind, Klopp's only concern as he danced

jubilantly in front of the Liverpool supporters amid a swirling mist of red flare smoke was whether his team will be at full strength

Klopp says 'nails are gone' after penalty drama

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp said his "nails are gone" after his side beat Chelsea on penalties in a final for the second time this season to win the FA Cup.

Victory keeps Liverpool on track for a unique quadruple but the result is agonising for Chelsea, who also lost to Klopp's team on penalties in the League Cup final in February.

"Outstanding, it was an incredible, intense game against Chelsea," Klopp told the BBC.

"They would have deserved it exactly the same way, like in the Carabao (League) Cup -- that's

how small the margins are.

"I couldn't be more proud of my boys, the shift they put in, how hard they fought, early changes. I think Virgil (van Dijk, who was substituted) is fine but his muscle was hurt.

"All of these things, missing good chances, overcoming good moments from Chelsea, then having really good moments ourselves.

"Then in the penalty shootout, it was nerve-racking, my nails are gone but I really feel for Chelsea -- for the second time, 120 minutes and you get nothing, that's too hard. But for us I'm pretty happy.

against Real.

Liverpool lost Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk to injuries that could rule them out of their last two Premier League games next week and will spark fears about their ability to recover in time for the Champions League final.

Liverpool have won both domestic cups in the same season for the first time since 2000-01, with Klopp getting his hands on the famous old trophy for the first time.

For Chelsea, it was a painful third successive FA Cup final defeat after previous losses to Leicester and Arsenal.

FA CUP WIN A HUGE BOOST FOR QUAD BID: ALISSON

London: Liverpool hero Alisson Becker said the team's FA Cup final victory against Chelsea on penalties would give them a huge confidence boost as they chase a historic quadruple.

"It was a shame we didn't score during normal time, but it was a proper fight after in extra time, anything could happen," he told the BBC.

"We kept a clean sheet, it went to penalties and after the boys were unbelievable with scoring the goals and then I just needed to save the last one. I am so happy."



Venezia frustate Roma's European ambitions

AP ■ ROME

David Okereke scored within the first minute as Venezia frustrated European hopefuls AS Roma 1-1 at the Stadio Olimpico hours after being relegated from Serie A on Saturday.

Salernitana's 1-1 draw at Empoli earlier in the day had sent down bottom team Venezia who had rejoined the top flight last summer.

Spezia ensured top flight safety with a 3-2 comeback win at Udinese as Salernitana boosted their chances of survival with a seventh consecutive match unbeaten to move out of the relegation zone with one match left to play.

In Rome, Okereke's flicked header 50 seconds into the

game shocked Jose Mourinho's side who are sixth and battling for a Europa League place with Fiorentina just one point behind before travelling to Sampdoria on Monday.

Roma proved wasteful in their final game of the season in the Stadio Olimpico, hitting the woodwork four times with more than 40 shots on goal against 10-man Venezia who had Sofian Kiyine send off in the first half.

Roma substitute Eldor Shomurodov blasted in the equaliser in the 76th minute but the result is a blow for Roma's European qualification hopes.

The capital side next play away to Torino, before next Wednesday's Europa Conference League final against Feyenoord.

Man City keep title fate in their hands

AP ■ LONDON

Manchester City staged a thrilling fightback from two goals down to keep the destiny of the Premier League title in their hands, but Riyad Mahrez's late penalty miss forced the leaders to settle for a dramatic 2-2 draw at West Ham on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side were in danger of gifting second placed Liverpool a title lifeline after West Ham's Jarrod Bowen struck twice in the first half.

But City's stirring recovery showed the character that has already brought them three titles in the last four seasons.

Jack Grealish got one back soon after the interval and Vladimir Coufal's own goal completed City's escape act.

It should have been even better for City, but Mahrez's penalty was saved by Lukasz Fabianski with five minutes left.

While that was a bitter blow to Guardiola, who stood ashen-faced on the touchline, in the circumstances City will be relieved to have moved four points clear of Liverpool with a goal difference seven better than their rivals.

They will retain the title if Jurgen Klopp's side lose their game in hand at Southampton on Tuesday.

If Liverpool beat Southampton to close the gap to one point, Guardiola's men can still clinch the trophy with a victory against Aston Villa at the Etihad Stadium on May 22.

A title race for the ages could well go down to the last day of the season, when Liverpool host Wolves, as it did when City piped the Reds to first place in 2019.



Guardiola said this week he wants players with a "special mentality" as he looks to bolster his squad for next season, personalities who, like him, wake up every day obsessed with winning.

City's enthralling revival to extend their unbeaten league run to 11 matches showed Guardiola already has plenty of fighters in his squad, although he might not put Mahrez on penalty duties again for a while.

Aymeric Laporte and Fernandinho were passed fit in start in City's defence

after suffering injuries in Wednesday's win at Wolves.

But City were already without injured defenders Ruben Dias, John Stones and Kyle Walker and they didn't look comfortable at the back from the opening moments.

Craig Dawson got behind Oleksandr Zinchenko to meet Pablo Fornals' cross, but with the goal at his mercy, the West Ham defender headed over. That early threat seemed to fluster City, who controlled possession

but found it difficult to create clear chances with West Ham happy to defend deep and strike on the counter.

Just as City looked set to turn the screw, they were hit with a sucker punch in the 24th minute.

Fornals' opportunistic pass caught Laporte and Zinchenko trying to play offside and Bowen nipped in behind, rounding Ederson before slotting home from a tight angle.

Although West Ham had nothing to play for, they had already beaten

Kane sends Spurs into top 4

AP ■ LONDON

Harry Kane's penalty moved Tottenham into the Premier League top four as Antonio Conte's men held their nerve to beat Burnley 1-0 on Sunday.

Spurs move two points ahead of north London rivals Arsenal, who travel to Newcastle on Monday, in the battle for fourth place.

Tottenham still need a slip up from the Gunners to return to the Champions League next season, but upped the pressure on Mikel Arteta's men.

Defeat leaves Burnley outside the relegation zone only on goal difference with two games of the season to go.

Buoyed by Thursday's 3-0 win over Arsenal to keep the race for a place in the Champions League alive, Spurs flew out of the traps.

Kane had a goalbound header cleared off the line by Nathan Collins before Nick Pope produced the first of a string of saves by pounced on his England teammate's header.

Liverpool and Chelsea at home and this was no easy ride for City as David Moyes' game-plan exposed the flaws in the leaders' commitment to all-out attack.

'Barca financial situation could dictate De Jong future'

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez suggested on Saturday the club's dire financial situation could force them to consider selling Frenkie de Jong this summer.

De Jong joined Barca for 75 million euros from Ajax in 2019 and while he has been a solid performer and a regular starter at Camp Nou, the Dutchman has not quite lived up to expectations.

With the likes of Pedri, Gavi, Nico Gonzalez and Sergio Busquets all competing for spots in midfield, Barcelona could view the 25-year-old De Jong as an opportunity to raise funds.

"He is a very important player, he has been a starter almost always. He is a fundamental footballer," said Xavi in a press conference on Saturday. "Then there is the financial situation of the club, which we depend on. He should be a big part of this era of the club but we'll see what happens." La Liga have set Barca's spending limit at minus 144 million euros for the upcoming summer transfer window, after financial losses were found to be 242 million euros more than expected.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said at the start of the season the club were 1.35 bil-



lion euros in debt, with La Liga rules stating they would have to save four euros for every one spent on new additions.

"The circumstances of the club dictate everything," said Xavi. "We depend on the financial situation. In a few days we will know where we are and we have to start planning now." Barca are, though, interested in Robert Lewandowski, the 33-year-old striker who said on Saturday he will not be extending his Bayern Munich contract, which expires in June 2023.

Asked about buying older players, Xavi said: "It doesn't stop me. I signed Dani Alves at 38. It's not about age, it's about performance."

Lewandowski confirms he wants to leave Bayern

AP ■ MUNICH

Robert Lewandowski confirmed on Saturday that he wants to leave Bayern Munich this summer amid reports Barcelona are ready to offer the 33-year-old star striker a three-year contract.

Lewandowski banged in his 35th league goal this campaign in a 2-2 draw at Wolfsburg on the last weekend of the Bundesliga season, then



dropped a bombshell. "It could well be my last game for Bayern. I can't say 100 percent, but it could be. We have to find the best solution for the club and me," he told streaming service Viaplay. Lewandowski confirmed to Sky that he has told Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic he will not extend his contract, which expires in 2023 and "that when an offer comes, we have to think about it".

Coach Vimal hopes Thomas Cup win will do wonders for badminton

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Indian men's badminton team coach Vimal Kumar on Sunday hoped the historic Thomas Cup triumph would do the same to the country's shuttle sport what the 1983 World Cup win did to cricket.

In beating 14-time winners Indonesia 3-0 in the summit showdown in Bangkok, Lakshya Sen, Kidambi Srikanth and the doubles duo of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy conjured one of the most remarkable feats in the country's sporting history.

It was no surprise that Kumar was unable to describe the historic victory.

"I have no words to describe it, we always had hopes but the way the players played, they just put up a performance out of the blue. It was really fantastic. We had such a poor record against Indonesia and to win 3-0 is incredible," Kumar told PTI from Bangkok.

The unassuming coach, who goes about his job quietly, added, "In 1983, when India won the cricket World Cup, the euphoria was something else but cricket was always a very popular sport and I hope with this performance, now badminton can also become so popular."

"It has always been about individual achievements but this was a team performance and I hope the popularity of the sports goes up from here on."

Kumar rated this as Indian badminton's biggest ever achievement.

"I will rate this the biggest ever. Of course, Prakash and Gopi winning All



England, Sindhu winning, all great achievements but as a team what we have done, we couldn't deliver as a team (earlier). You call one a badminton nation when you win a team championships, so I will rate it as the best.

"I am happy that I could see this in my life time. It is a dream come true for me."

India, who has never reached the last-four stage since 1979, ended up getting the better of formidable Malaysia and Denmark en route to the summit clash in this edition of the tournament.

Needless to say, the triumph on the day when it mattered the most sparked off wild celebrations in the Indian camp, less than 48 hours after they rejoiced their win over

Denmark.

"I have never seen them so enthusiastic, it is a achievement of pure team spirit which I haven't seen in the past. We always had good players but priority was on individual players and tournaments. We have a balanced team and it did the trick."

"In each match what the doubles players have done is amazing, earlier we were dependent on singles but Satwik and Chirag pulled out all the pressure matches, so lot of credit to Lakshya, Srikanth and HS Prannoy, for they delivered when it mattered. I am fortunate, lucky coach to be here with them," Kumar said.

"It is the best achievement of Indian badminton, and I feel so proud to be part of this historic team. It is a fantastic bunch of players."

Vimal also credited Srikanth and Prannoy for playing an important role in motivating the players.

"I will give a lot of credit to these guys, they would sit down with players, speak to them and motivate each other."

"When the older player takes initiative and motivates the players, their comforting words make a big difference. They firmly believed they will be able to win and that belief turned things for us. It was a fantastic team effort. Coaches worked hard, so overall this is a fantastic effort."

Asked if Srikanth has regained his mojo after struggling for 3-4 years since his exploits in 2017, Vimal said: "Yes, I think so, we were seeing glimpses of it in World Championships, he was showing progress but for three years he didn't do well."