

OPINION 6

PM'S VISIT TO RENEW
THE CULTURAL BOND

WORLD 8

LANKA'S NEW GOVT GETS
OPP SUPPORT WITH RIDERS

MONEY 10

SENSEX JUMPS 274 POINTS,
NIFTY CLIMBS TO 15,873

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY MAY 17, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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India-Nepal ties solid like Himalayas: Modi

I know when a grand temple of Shri Ram is being built in India, people of Nepal are equally happy: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/ AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/LUMBINI (NEPAL)

India and Nepal on Monday explored ways to further strengthen their historical ties with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that the growing friendship between the two countries will work for the benefit of the entire humanity amid the kind of global situation emerging today.

On a day-long visit to the Himalayan nation at the invitation of his Nepalese counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, Modi also said the relations between India and Nepal are unshakeable like the Himalayas.

After offering prayers at the Maya Devi temple in Lumbini on the occasion of the Buddha Purnima, the PM said, "The devotion to Lord Buddha binds us together, makes us members of one family."

"India and Nepal's ever-strengthening friendship and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba during an event on the 2,566th Buddha Jayanti and Lumbini Day 2022, in Lumbini, Nepal on Monday PTI

our closeness will benefit the entire humanity in the kind of global conditions that are emerging," Modi said. He was addressing the International Buddhist Conference in Lumbini. Located in the Terai plains of southern Nepal, Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is one of the holiest places of Buddhism.

The Prime Minister also said, "I know that today when a grand temple of Lord Shri Ram is being built in India, the people of Nepal are equally happy."

Modi attended the 2,566th Buddha Jayanti Celebration at International Convention Center and Meditation Hall accompanied by Deuba and his

spouse Arzu Rana Deuba. Several Nepalese Ministers were among the other dignitaries present.

"Buddha is the embodiment of the collective understanding of humanity," Modi told the gathering that included monks, Buddhist scholars and international participants.

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'Shivling' found, court seals Gyanvapi portion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A Varanasi court on Monday ordered the district magistrate to seal a portion of the Gyanvapi mosque premises after the Hindu side claimed that a "shivling" was found there during the survey on the third day. The court also ordered the district administration to prohibit the entry of any person to the area.

The Court Commissioner and his team completed the survey and videography of the Gyanvapi premises, believed by Hindus to be the ancient Adi Visheshwar premises, and will submit the report to the court on Tuesday. The court ordered sealing of the premises even before submission of the report by the Court Commissioner.

Court Commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra and his team started conducting the survey of the rest part of the Gyanvapi premises on the third day at 8 am and completed the work in about two hours. During the survey led by the Court Commissioner, the Commissioners Vishal Singh and Ajay Pratap Singh, advocates of the plaintiff and defendants, were present.

The Hindu side claimed that a "shivling" was found in a portion of Gyanvapi premises during the survey. It also



Policemen stand guard during the third and last day of a videographic survey at Gyanvapi complex in Varanasi on Monday PTI

claimed that the "shivling" is Nandi-faced and the place where it has been found is located in the Gyanvapi mosque complex.

Advocate of the plaintiff (five women who filed the plea) Hari Shankar Jain submitted an application in the court of Civil Judge (Senior Division) Ravi Kumar Diwakar on Monday morning seeking directive to the CRPF commandant to seal the place where the shivling was found as it was an important evidence in the case.

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SC to hear plea against Gyanvapi survey today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday will hear a petition against a Varanasi court for survey of the Gyanvapi mosque complex. A bench, comprising Justices DY Chandrachud and PS Narasimha will hear an appeal filed against the survey by Committee of Management of

Ajnuman Intezamina Masjid, Varanasi.

The petitioners approached the SC on Friday seeking urgent hearing to stop the survey. The court-mandated videography survey of the Gyanvapi complex concluded on Monday on the third day amid tight security. The survey, which started at 8 am, concluded around 10.15 am.

S-W monsoon debuts over Andaman & Nicobar Islands

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Southwest monsoon advanced into the Andaman and Nicobar islands on Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said here, signalling the start of the four-month seasonal rains that are crucial to the largely agri-dependent economy.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands and adjoining areas have been experiencing rainfall due to strengthening south-westerly winds in the lower tropospheric levels, the weather office said.

The onset of monsoon over Andaman and Nicobar islands happened a day late as the IMD had earlier said that the seasonal rain would cover the region on May 15.

"Conditions are favourable for further advance of south-west monsoon into some more parts of south Bay of Bengal, entire Andaman Sea & Andaman Islands...", the IMD said in a statement here.

China boosting infra along Arunachal border: Army

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/ AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

Even as New Delhi and Beijing are trying to break the deadlock at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, China is rapidly enhancing its infrastructure across the border in the east in Arunachal Pradesh.

Sounding this note of caution, Eastern Command Chief Lt General RP Kalita revealed on Monday that China has built villages close to the LAC which can be used for dual purpose. However, he assured that India has also stepped up its efforts to improve connectivity to meet any challenge.

"Across the Line of Actual Control in the Tibet region, a lot of infrastructure development is going on. The other side is constantly upgrading their road, rail and air connectivity so that they are in a better position to respond to a situation or mobilise forces,"



Kalita said at a Press conference in Guwahati.

The Chinese authorities have built border villages close to the LAC that can be used for dual purposes, Kalita said.

"We are continuously monitoring the situation. We are also upgrading our infrastructure and capabilities as well as the mechanism to handle the situation. These have put us in a robust position," he added.

The Indian Army Commander acknowledged that difficult terrain and inclement weather conditions have been the biggest chal-

lenges while enhancing capabilities and infrastructure in forward locations.

His observations came against the backdrop of China having already constructed several airports and helipads besides train and road connectivity in the Tibetan plateau thereby ensuring all weather back up to its troops on the border facing India.

Over the years, China has built all-weather roads leading right up to the border with India all across the 4,000 km long LAC stretching from Ladakh in the west to

Arunachal Pradesh in the east.

The Indian Government too is making serious efforts to counter the Chinese buildup. The Ministry of Home Affairs in April informed the Lok Sabha that the Government has allocated six times more funds for infrastructure development along the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh. It has been increased from ₹42.87 crore in 2020-21 to ₹249.12 crore in 2021-22.

Addressing BRO personnel on the occasion of its 63rd Raising Day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had said the Government, on its part, is making all efforts to provide the required support to the BRO in this direction. Rajnath described the development of border areas as a major part of the government's comprehensive defence strategy, noting it will bolster the security apparatus of the country and bring a positive change in the lives of people residing in remote areas.

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Wheat prices hit record high in EU mkts after India export ban

AFP ■ PARIS

Wheat prices surged to a new record high in European trading on Monday after India decided to ban exports of the commodity as a heatwave hit production.

The price jumped to 435 euros (\$453) per tonne as the Euronext market opened, up from the previous record of 422 euros reached on Friday.

Global wheat prices have soared on supply fears since Russia's February invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, which previously accounted for 12 per cent of global exports.

The spike, exacerbated by fertiliser shortages and poor harvests, has fuelled inflation globally and raised fears of famine and social unrest in poorer countries.

India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, said on Saturday that it was banning exports after its hottest March on record, with traders needing express Government approval to enter into new



China defends India's decision

New Delhi: Amid G7 industrialised nations' criticism of India over its decision to ban export of wheat, China has come to India's defence, saying blaming developing countries like India won't solve the global food crisis.

deals. New Delhi said the move was needed to protect the food security of its own 1.4 billion people in the face of lower production and sharply higher global prices.

Some parts of India have seen prices in wheat and flour jump 20 to 40 per cent in recent weeks, Commerce Secretary

BVR Subrahmanyam said on Sunday. Because of the sharp rise in global prices, some farmers were selling to traders and not to the Government.

This got the Government worried about its buffer stock of almost 20 million tonnes — depleted by the pandemic — needed for handouts to millions of poor families and to avert any possible famine.

Export deals agreed before the directive issued on 13 May could still be honoured but future shipments needed Government approval, it said.

However, exports could also take place if New Delhi approved requests from other governments "to meet their food security needs".

India, which possesses major buffer stocks, previously said it was ready to help fill some of the supply shortages caused by the Ukraine war.

Only last week India said it would send delegations to Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere to discuss boosting wheat exports. It was unclear whether these visits will now go ahead.

Regional parties rap Rahul for 'lack of ideology' comment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Regional parties, including Rallies of the Congress, reacted sharply to former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi's contention that they "lack the ideology" to take on the BJP and the RSS.

While the TMC slammed Rahul for his remarks, UPA partners RJD, JMM questioned the credentials of the Congress leader to comment on regional parties. Congress ally DMK preferred not to comment on the issue, while the Shiv Sena with whom the Congress is in alliance in the Maharashtra Government, avoided any direct criticism of the Congress but said regional parties have been at the forefront of leading the Opposition against the BJP's authoritarian decisions. "Even in the fight at the



Centre, it has been regional parties who have strongly thwarted any attempts made to undermine constitutional democracy. Maharashtra has been at the forefront of this resistance and has shown how regional aspirations and national ambitions can seamlessly merge for the betterment of the country. To dismiss that would be yet another mistake by Congress," Shiv Sena leader

and a Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi said.

One the other hand, the JMM said it is Rahul's self-assessment and he is entitled to his opinion, but asked who gave Rahul the authority to comment on ideology.

"How are we running the party without any ideology? The fact remains that it is these regional parties on which the Congress is dependent for

a fight or a win, be it the JMM in Jharkhand or the RJD in Bihar," said a JMM spokesperson in Ranchi.

The JMM and the Congress are in a coalition Government in Jharkhand.

Speaking at the Chintan Shivir, Rahul said the Congress was mounting an ideological resistance to the onslaught of the RSS, unlike regional parties which "lack an ideology" and "have different approaches".

The RJD, another Congress ally, also called Rahul's statement "unfortunate". RJD MP Manoj Jha said had the former Congress president been mindful of the outcome of poll fights against the BJP, he would have realised "the ideological and electoral commitment that is brought by such regional outfits, which he said do not have the capacity".

Continued on Page 2

Omicron in vaccinated produces better immunity than booster dose

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of a massive surge in Covid-cases in pockets of many countries like China, a new study has said Omicron infections produced even better immune responses than a booster shot in vaccinated people.

The study hints that people who are vaccinated and then get infected by the Omicron variant may have better antibodies to deal with a vast range of Covid variants. The study has been published in a preprint on the bioRxiv server.

However, the authors of the study conducted by vaccine maker BioNTech SE and the University of Washington have warned people and cautioned that they shouldn't seek out



infections in response to the findings.

John Wherry, a professor and director of the Institute for Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania, who reviewed the study, told a new agency that breakthrough infections

should be thought of as essentially equivalent to another dose of vaccine and that if someone had Covid recently, they could wait before getting another booster shot.

The researchers have argued that offering people an

Omicron-adapted booster shot may be more beneficial than multiple ones with the original vaccines. "We are at the point where we may want to consider having a different vaccine to boost people," David Veeler, an assistant professor at the University of Washington told the news agency.

The researchers also identified antibodies in the nasal mucus of these patients, which could help them neutralise the virus as soon as it enters the body.

Meanwhile, the study also found that response was missing in unvaccinated people who had caught Omicron as their first exposure to the virus and they warned that the remaining unvaccinated could be dangerous if a new variant that is significantly different emerges.

India slams OIC for remark on delimitation exercise in J&K

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

India has slammed the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) over its remark on the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, and strictly warned it to refrain from carrying out its 'communal' agenda against India at the behest of one country (Pakistan).

In response to media queries on this issue, the spokesman of the Ministry of the External Affairs, Arindam Bagchi, said, "We are dismayed that the OIC Secretariat has once again made unwarranted comments on the internal affairs of India."

On numerous occasions, India has categorically rejected the assertions made by the OIC Secretariat on the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which is an integral and inalienable part of India, Bagchi said.

Expressing the 'deep concerns' over the development in J&K, the OIC said that the delimitation exercise conduct-



ed recently was in direct contravention of the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and international law.

A statement shared by the OIC on Twitter read, "Referring to the long-standing and principled position on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute and relevant decisions of the Islamic Summit and OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, the General Secretariat reiterates its solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their just quest for the right of self-determination, in accordance with relevant UNSC resolu-

tions."

Following the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 dividing the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir in two union territories, the Delimitation Commission was appointed to redraw the Assembly constituencies of J&K. The Commission submitted its report on May 5, recommending 90 Assembly constituencies in the Union Territory.

Out of the 90, 43 seats are in Jammu and 47 in Kashmir region, which was earlier 37 for Jammu and 46 for the Kashmir Valley.

UPPCL to put prepaid power meters to cut T&D losses

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL), in its bid to cut down aggregate technical and commercial losses, has decided to launch a state-wide drive for installing smart prepaid meters at the premises of domestic and commercial category consumers and on distribution transformers.

Principal Secretary (Energy) and Chairman of UPPCL, M Devraj, said that the Government of India had earmarked funds for metering and other associated works to be carried out under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS). He said the UPPCL was going to install as many as 73,27,988 smart prepaid meters in Varanasi discom, 75,28,737 in Lucknow discom, 53,54,069 in Agra discom, 61,43,361 in Meerut discom and 62,500 meters in KESCo distribution network.

Apart from metering, other works that will be covered under the RDSS are laying of

armed cables in consumers' premises, converting LT lines into aerial bunch conductor cables, separating the agriculture feeders, and strengthening 33 kV and 11 kV lines.

To execute the works, the Central government has earmarked a sum of Rs 4,543.78 lakh for Varanasi discom, Rs 4,165.32 lakh for Lucknow discom, Rs 3,71.57 lakh for Agra discom, Rs 3,403.01 lakh for Meerut discom and Rs 614.93 lakh for KESCo (Kanpur Electricity Supply Company).

The UPPCL aims to replace all the low tension power distribution lines with aerial bunch conductors (ABCs) to contain power theft. The much-hyped smart electricity meter project had run into rough weather in August 2020 after a glitch that resulted in a massive power outage in major cities of the state. The UPPCL was forced to suspend the process of installation of 40 lakh meters in the state.

The UP government, taking a tough stand on the mass tripping of smart meters on

Janmashtami, had directed the UPPCL to stop the installation of the smart meters immediately to avoid any further inconvenience to the people and to proceed with it only after ensuring that the meters were of good quality and tamper proof.

Many areas of Uttar Pradesh had suddenly plunged into darkness for many hours in 2020 after 1.6 lakh smart meter connections snapped in several cities, including Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Gorakhpur, Meerut, Moradabad, Mathura, Aligarh Saharanpur, Jhansi, Bareilly and Faizabad (now Ayodhya), forcing thousands of angry consumers to protest outside sub-stations.

The smart meter programme is meant for reforming the power sector and is one of the operational performance parameters of UDAY, (Ujwal discom assurance Yojana), the bailout scheme for the ailing discoms formulated by the Centre.

Anti-breeding drive on as vector-borne diseases rise: SDMC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the vector-borne diseases are rapidly increasing in the national Capital, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) on Monday said that it has conducted 'mother foci detection drive' to detect the breeding of mosquito and destroying its larvae, aiming to prevent the spread of these diseases.

According to a senior SDMC official, during the campaign, the civic agency has conducted inspections of 771 construction sites and 461 Government offices in all its four zones to check the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes, out of which 168 construction sites and 25 Government offices were found breeding of Aedes mosquitoes.

"The concerned department has sent 106 legal notices and filed 77 prosecutions against the owners and care takers of premises where mos-

quito larvae was found and out of which 14 legal notices and eight prosecutions were issued to government departments," he said.

"Mosquito breeding was detected at premises of Delhi Jal Board's booster pumping station in Deer park, DPSRU construction site; Central Public Works Department's ITD construction in Sewa Nagar; Raj Kumar Amrit Kaur collage in Lajpat Nagar-IV; NBCC's Dr Karni Singh shooting range, Delhi Transport Corporation bus depot in Tehkhan; police station at Sunlight Colony, Anuj Kumar Rai swimming pool at Sarvodaya Kanya Vidhyalaya No-1, new staff quarter at Tihar, etc," he informed.

"At the premises of government buildings and offices, mosquito breeding was found mainly in underground tank and the corporation asked the stakeholders to ensure checking on a weekly basis," said a senior official.

Fire breaks out in shelter near Parliament

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fire broke out on Monday in a temporary shelter for workers near Parliament House in central Delhi.

However, no one was reported injured in the incident.

According to a senior official of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), the information regarding the blaze in the high-security area was received at 4.16 PM, following which five fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

"The fire was in two containers and it has been doused. The process of cooling is underway," he said.

Around 2 lakh hit by floods in Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI/HAFLONG

Around 2 lakh people in 20 districts of Assam have been affected by floods, with the hill district of Dima Hasao getting cut off from the rest of the state after landslides triggered by incessant rain snapped rail and road links, an official bulletin said on Monday.

Two flood-related deaths were reported in Cachar district, while three fatalities due to landslides were earlier recorded in Dima Hasao.

Around 1,97,248 people have been affected by the deluge, with Hojai and Cachar being the worst hit with 78,157 and 51,357 people affected population respectively, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) bulletin said.

Altogether 652 villages in 46 revenue circles in 20 districts have been affected so far, it said.

Around 55 relief camps have been opened in seven districts, sheltering 32,959 people. Another 12 relief distribution centres are also operational in different affected districts.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Fire and Emergency Services, besides locals, have been carrying out rescue operations in the flood-hit areas.

Embankments have been breached at 16 locations in different districts in the last 24 hours. Roads, bridges and houses have been completed or partially damaged in several areas. Communication channels have also been snapped in Dima Hasao.

"Due to landslides, the district cannot be approached from outside. All roads and railways leading to Haflong is blocked since May 15," the bulletin said.

A Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) release in Guwahati said evacuation of about 2,800 passengers of two trains, which were stranded along the Lumding-Badarpur

section in Dima Hasao for the last two days due to landslides and waterlogging on tracks, was completed on Monday.

Many passengers were airlifted by the Indian Air Force even as incessant rain impeded rescue operations which were underway since Saturday, it said.

"Having rescued and evacuated all the passengers, the Railways is now putting its efforts in restoring the damaged line and re-starting the train services to South Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram," it said.

The New Haflong Railway Station is completely inundated with debris and an empty passenger train standing at the station has been washed off from the tracks due to a massive landslide, it said.

Around 18 trains have been cancelled.

Haryana issues toll-free number to curb corruption in Govt depts

Gurugram:

To fight against corruption across Haryana the state government has issued a toll-free number 1800-180-2022 and a four-digit number 1064 on Monday, the district spokesperson said.

Deputy Commissioner Gurugram Nishant Kumar Yadav said that it is mandatory to display the toll-free number 1800-180-2022 and the four-digit 1064 number in all government offices as per the instructions of the government.

"I have directed all the heads of departments to ensure that these numbers are displayed at prominent places in their respective office premises so that the public does not face difficulty in filing complaints against corruption with the State Vigilance Bureau," Yadav said.



He informed that both these numbers are presently operational at State Vigilance Bureau Headquarters, Panchkula for registering complaints against corruption.

Earlier in April, the state government had started a toll-free number 1800 -180-2137 in the office of the Finance Commissioner Revenue and Chief Secretary Haryana to curb corruption in Tehsils.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public is hereby informed that my client Mrs. Maya Devi and Rashi Sankhla intend to purchase House No.25, Block A-1, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-63 from Sh. Pradeep Goel and Smt. Nirmla Goel. In case any person has any right, title, interest, claim of whatsoever nature by way of sale, gift, lease, heirship, possession or by any other nature in respect of aforesaid property, the same should be known in writing to me at the address mentioned below with the documentary proof within 7 days from the date of publication, failing which it shall be construed that such claim is waived, abandoned

Sd/- Arvind Kumar, Advocate Ch. No.A-8, Amar Nath Monga Block, Western wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

Government of Madhya Pradesh
Office of the Engineer-in-Chief
Water Resources Department,
Jal Sansadhan Bhawan, Tulsī Nagar, Bhopal (M.P.)
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Bids for following works are invited on website <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> Last Date of purchase/download of Bid Document and submission of bid is **31.05.2022, 17:30 hrs.** Any amendment/modification can be seen only on the website. Detailed N.I.T. and other details can be viewed on above mentioned website.

S. No.	Tender No.	Work	District	Amount (Lakhs)
1.	2022_WRD_202665	Rehabilitation and resettlement work under Banda Irrigation Project	Sagar	3863.13
2.	2022_WRD_202666	On Turnkey Basis:- Construction of Jamdarra Tank, as per detailed scope of work but not limited to that.	Sagar	1322.07

G-12824/22 Chief Engineer (Procurement)

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E - TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these website any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

Fresh - Tender work

S. N.	Job No.	Name of Work	Tender Amount (Rs. In Lacs)	Publication
a)	Upto Rs. 30.0 lacs			
1	07/DGM (NTCY) S.M./E/M-III 2022-23	SITC of Surveillance Security System Work for Command Control Center Building near Mahamaya Flyover sector-94, Noida	Rs. 43.31	1 st Time

The Above tender can be uploaded by date **30.05.2022 upto 5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date **31.05.2022 at 11.00 AM**.

Office Sector-39
Sr. Manager E&M-III, Noida

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Regional parties....

From Page 1

Jha noted that Rahul's own statement ran contrary to the declaration adopted by the Congress at the Chintan Shivir about keeping options open for alliances with "like-minded parties".

One of the major emerging Opposition party and an erstwhile UPA partner, TMC said it was the Congress that was handing over seats to the BJP on a platter in places where the two parties are in a direct fight. TMC leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sumitima Dev said we are not contesting every seat, but the BJP is strong wherever the Congress is the primary Opposition. He said,

"The BJP has not been able to defeat M K Stalin (Tamil Nadu), Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal), or for that matter YS Jagan Mohan Reddy (Andhra Pradesh), to name a few. In that sense, the BJP is happy to have the Congress as a national party because it suits them. The reality is the Congress is unable to defeat the BJP. Dev quit the Congress in August last year.

Rejecting Rahul's logic TMC MP Saugato Roy said Akbar Road was losing its relevance in Indian politics every day. "The Congress is a spent force. They have lost all the States save Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh... Rahul Gandhi knows it well that the Congress is not strong enough to challenge the BJP... so in order to tone up his party cadres he is making such speeches but they have to realise that the TMC has come up as the real alternative to the BJP," he said. On their part AAP, which defeated Congress from their bastion in Punjab this year, asked how the grand old party thought it was in a position to fight communal forces, given that it remains beset with infighting. "Even in States like Madhya Pradesh, which voted the Congress to power, its candidates put themselves up for sale. The party has no presence in major states like UP and Tamil Nadu. And what is national and regional? For years, it has been a junior

partner to parties like the SP, DMK," AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said.

Talasan Srinivas Yadav, a senior leader of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi and a Minister, said, "Rahul should first consider the condition of his party all over India and then make such comments... Their status has been exposed in the Uttar Pradesh election results."

BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said, "The results that regional parties have been showing in their respective states is evidence enough of the efficacy of these parties. From Delhi to Kerala, regional parties are being trusted by the people and given more and more responsibilities."

‘Shivling’ found....

From Page 1

He also sought the court's directive to the district magistrate to prohibit the entry of any person to this area.

The order of sealing the spot is a violation of 1991 Act, says AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on a petitioner's claim that "shivling" found in Gyanvapi masjid. "It's a fountain, not shivling. Every masjid has this fountain. Why the claim was not raised by commissioner of the court? The order of sealing the spot is a violation of 1991 Act: AIMIM chief," Owaisi tweeted.

The district magistrate, commissioner of police and commandant of CRPF would be responsible for the security of the sealed area, the court said. In the meantime, the team of Mishra completed the survey of the Gyanvapi premises. During the survey, both sides and their advocates were present besides the represen-

tatives of government, district administration and police commissionerate.

The advocates of the Hindu side claimed that evidences were found in favor of their case while the advocates of the Muslim side claimed that nothing was found during the survey. The advocates of both sides avoided disclosing what was found during the survey.

During the survey, there was a heavy deployment of security personnel in and outside the Gyanvapi premises for security and the devotees were allowed to go to Kashi Vishwanath temple for worship from another gate instead of Gate No 4. Civil Judge (Senior Division) Ravi Kumar Diwakar had appointed Mishra as the court commissioner to conduct the survey and videography of the Gyanvapi premises on a petition filed by five Delhi-based women seeking permission to worship at Shringar Gauri temple and other idols located on

the Gyanvapi premises. When the court Commissioner started the survey on May 6, the advocates of the defendant objected, raising questions over his fairness and the survey was stopped that day due to the protest by the Muslim side.

The Anjuman Intejamia Masjid Committee, which is also a party in the case, filed a petition in the court on May 7 demanding that the court Commissioner be replaced. On the same day, the plaintiff also filed a petition seeking permission to survey the basement of the Gyanvapi premises also. The court rejected the plea of the Anjuman Intejamia Masjid Committee to replace the court Commissioner but appointed two Commissioners to accompany the court Commissioner during the survey and ordered the survey of the entire premises, including the basement. The survey and videography of the premises on the court order began on May 14.

From Page 1

He also noted, "The energy of the place where Lord Buddha was born, gives a different feeling. I was happy to see that the Mahabodhi sapling I had gifted in 2014 for this place is now growing into a tree."

Deuba said he was extremely happy to welcome PM Modi to the sacred land of Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha — the apostle of peace.

"Delighted to have the presence of PM Modi at this special ceremony in this sacred land," he said.

Earlier, Modi held bilateral talks with his Nepalese counterpart at Lumbini. It was Modi's fifth visit to Nepal since 2014. The two leaders later discussed ways to strengthen ongoing cooperation and develop new areas in the multifaceted bilateral partnership. The two sides inked and exchanged six MoUs on coop-

India-Nepal...

eration in cultural and educational sectors. These included the construction of the Lumbini Museum in Nepal, and the establishment of the Dr Ambedkar Chair for Buddhist Studies in Lumbini Buddhist University.

Ahead of his visit, Modi had said his visit to Nepal was intended to further deepen the "time-honoured" linkages between the two countries, adding both sides will continue to build on the shared understanding to expand ties in multiple areas, including hydropower and connectivity.

"Our ties with Nepal are unparalleled. The civilisational and people-to-people contacts between India and Nepal form the enduring edifice of our close relationship," Modi had said in his departure statement.

Modi along with Deuba also laid the foundation stone for the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture

and Heritage in the Lumbini Monastic Zone here. The Centre will be a world-class facility welcoming pilgrims and tourists from all over the world to enjoy the essence of spiritual aspects of Buddhism.

The Centre will be a modern building, NetZero compliant in terms of energy, water and waste handling, and will house prayer halls, meditation centres, library, exhibition hall, cafeteria, offices and other amenities, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

The Centre will be constructed by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), New Delhi, on a plot allocated to the IBC by the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), under an agreement between the IBC and the LDT signed in March 2022, it said.

After the "shilanyas" ceremony, which was performed by monks belonging to three major Buddhist traditions, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana, the two Prime Ministers also unveiled a model of the Centre.

Won't stand 63L Delhiites becoming homeless: Kejriwal

If BJP-led MCD razes shops, homes of 63 lakh people in Delhi, which are considered illegal, it would be biggest destruction in Independent India: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hitting out at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and accusing it of playing dirty politics over its anti-encroachment drive in the national Capital, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said if bulldozers raze shops and houses of 63 lakh people in Delhi, which are considered illegal, it would be the biggest destruction in Independent India.

The meeting, being held at the Chief Minister's residence, was attended by almost all the ruling AAP MLAs in Delhi.

The BJP-ruled municipal corporations 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.

At a meeting with legislators on the matter, Kejriwal told them that they should be ready

to go to jail for opposing the anti-encroachment drive being carried out by the BJP-led municipal corporations. "Delhi is not a planned city. It has developed and expanded over the past 75 years in a manner that over 80 per cent of the current residences and properties can be termed as illegal or encroachments," said Kejriwal. "The method of eradicating encroachment that the BJP has resorted to is highly improper.

There are no required documents being considered, no timely notices or warnings being issued. They are simply barging into colonies with bulldozers and demolishing homes and shops as they please," Kejriwal claimed.

"The BJP has conspired to tear down every single unauthorised colony in Delhi. These colonies are collectively home to 50 lakh people. They have further planned to demolish all slum clusters which house around 10 lakh poor people,"



Kejriwal said. "They have also created a list of three lakh other properties across the city where people have not stuck to their building plans and made some minor alterations like balcony extension or construction of an extra room.

Here, they have decided to destroy all such partly-made encroachments," said the Chief Minister. "A total of 63 lakh people will have their homes destroyed, which I believe is going to be the biggest demolition drive in the history of Independent India. This is highly unfortunate, and

extremely unjustified. Before the elections, the BJP had said that people residing in unauthorised colonies would be given property rights, that proper homes would replace the slums for the population that lives there," said the AAP National Convener.

"We discourage illegal settlements and encroachments because we want our Delhi to flourish as a beautiful State. However, neither the AAP, nor the people of Delhi will tolerate the BJP displacing 63 lakh people, destroying their livelihoods, and leaving them home-

less," he said. "Now that the BJP-ruled MCD's tenure is about to end on May 18, they no longer

possess constitutional power to carry out extensive demolitions and take such major legal

decisions. They must face a free and fair election and every single person in Delhi knows that

once proper elections are held, the AAP will come to power in MCD," said Kejriwal.

Delhi CM trying to scare people over anti-encroachment drive: BJP

City's bona fide residents will not be harmed even if they live in unauthorised colonies, slums: Adesh Gupta



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday accused Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of trying to scare and blackmail people over the civic bodies' anti-encroachment drive.

The move comes after Kejriwal claimed at a press briefing that the BJP-ruled municipal corporations have planned to demolish houses

and shops which are considered illegal, and that will render 63 lakh people homeless. Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said that the city's bona fide residents will not be harmed even if they live in unauthorised colonies or slum clusters.

But no bona fide Delhiite living in unauthorised colonies or slum clusters needed to worry as the BJP and the Modi Government stand with them, he said. In response, Gupta addressed a press conference, accusing Kejriwal of "simply

feigning ignorance", and "lying, once again." "Kejriwal has expressed his pain so I want to assure that no Bangladeshis, Rohingyas, rioters and those involved in illegal activities and who are protected by AAP will be spared," he said.

Kejriwal does not want to face the truth over the anti-encroachment drive, he said. "Once again, Kejriwal has tried to scare the people of Delhi. This blackmailing will not continue Kejriwal ji, people know how big a liar you are! There are not 63 lakh houses in Delhi as you have claimed," he said. The Modi Government has given ownership rights to 40 lakh people in unauthorised colonies, which the AAP could not do despite being in power for over seven years, he said. "The Kejriwal Government kept the file for regularisation of unau-

thorised colonies and Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makan scheme files for three-four years before the Centre took it forward and readied 15,000 houses so far," he charged.

He said the BJP helped people and worked for the development of the city during the party's 15-year rule in the three municipal corporations.

Gupta also charged that AAP MLAs and volunteers were demanding money from people by "scaring them and promising help" in saving their houses from demolition.

"I have received complaints from Paschim Vihar and Burari. AAP MLAs are indulging in this reprehensible thing asking volunteers of the party to go to people to tell them that their houses will be demolished and demand money from them to save them," he alleged.

Water woes worsen as Yamuna almost dries up

Delhi Govt has sent an 'SOS' to Haryana, urging it to release water

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the severe heatwave, Delhiites have been facing a water crisis for the last five days as the Yamuna has 'almost dried up.' The Delhi Government had also sent an 'SOS' to its neighbouring State Haryana, urging it to release water.

The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has written thrice to the Haryana Irrigation Department in this connection in a fortnight and had shot off request letters on May 12, May 3 and April 30.

"We are taking all measures necessary to meet the demand but the situation is worsening by the day due to the intense heat and Haryana releasing less water in the river," said an official on condition of anonymity.

Following the scarcity of water in the Capital, the DJB on Monday issued an advisory stating that the water supply in several parts of will be affected on May 17 morning.

The officials claimed that the water level at Wazirabad pond was recorded at 669.40 feet against the normal level of 674.50 feet and the production

capacity at Chandrawal and Okhla water treatment plants has also dipped as the Yamuna has "almost dried up." According to the DJB's advisory, the areas to be affected are Civil lines, Hindu Rao Hospital, Kamla Nagar, Shakti Nagar, Karol Bagh, Pahar Ganj and NDMC areas; New Rajinder Nagar, Patel Nagar, Baljeet Nagar, Prem Nagar, Inderpuri, Kalkaji, Govindpuri, Tagalkabad, Sangam Vihar, Ambedkar Nagar.

"Pralhadpur, Ramleela Ground, Delhi Gate, Subhash Park, Model Town, Gulabi Bagh, Punjabi Bagh, Jahangirpuri, Moolchand, South Extension, Greater Kailash, Burari, parts of cantonment areas and South Delhi," advisory said in a statement.

"Due to depletion of pond level of Yamuna at Wazirabad Water Works 669.40 feet against the normal level of 674.50 feet and reduction in release of raw water by Haryana in river Yamuna, water production has been affected from Water Treatment Plants at Wazirabad, Chandrawal and Okhla. Water supply shall be affected since the Morning of 17.05.2022; till the pond level improves to normal," advisory stated.

The DJB also advised the people of the capital city to make judicious use of water, to avoid any inconvenience. The water level in the Wazirabad

pond on Saturday stood at 670.40 feet against the normal level of 674.50 feet. Last year in July, the pond level had dropped to 667 feet, prompting the DJB to move the Supreme Court seeking directions to Haryana to release additional water in the Yamuna.

Haryana supplies a total of 610 million gallons of water a day to Delhi through two canals, Carrier-Lined Channel (CLC), Delhi Sub-Branch (DSB), and the Yamuna.

The CLC and the DSB are supplied water from Hathni Kund via Munak canal and the Bhakra Beas Management Board. Besides, Delhi receives 253 MGD from Uttar Pradesh through the Upper Ganga Canal, and 90 MGD is drawn from ranney wells and tube wells installed across the city.

The SOS sent on Thursday stated, "Even flow via CLC (Carrier-Lined Channel) and DSB (Delhi Sub-Branch) is fluctuating... The lifting of 120 cusec of water from the Wazirabad pond is affected due to low pond level. This will affect water production adversely. Due to peak summer, the water requirement is more."

"It is requested to supply 150 cusec of raw water additionally through DD-8/river route, so as to ensure that 120 cusec of raw water reaches the Wazirabad pond in this time of crisis, till the arrival of monsoon," it further stated.

Heatwave continues to burn Capital city

Thunderstorm may bring temperature down today: IMD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The intense summer heat continued to bother the people of the national Capital on Monday, as Delhi witnessed a minimum temperature of 30.8 degrees Celsius that was four notches warmer than normal for this time of the year.

The maximum temperature recorded at the Safdarjung Observatory was 42.4 degrees Celsius that was two notches above the normal for this season.

The relative humidity at 8:30 on Sunday morning was recorded at 22 per cent and 20 per cent at 5:30 in the evening.

The weather stations at the Ridge, Ayanagar, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, Palam, and Lodhi Road recorded maximum temperatures of 43.1 degrees Celsius, 43.4 degrees Celsius, 44 degrees Celsius, 44.7 degrees Celsius, 43.3 degrees Celsius, 42.8 degrees Celsius and 42.8 degrees Celsius respectively, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD said a thunderstorm or a dust storm may



bring the mercury down by a few notches on Tuesday. On Sunday, Delhi saw a tormenting heatwave pushing the mercury up to 49.2 degrees Celsius at Mungeshpur in northwest Delhi and 49.1 degrees Celsius at Najafgarh in the southwest parts of the city.

Maximum temperatures had reached unbearable highs of 48.4 degrees Celsius at the Sports Complex, 47.5 degrees Celsius at Jafarpur, 47.3 degrees

Celsius at Pitampura and 47.2 degrees Celsius at the Ridge. The temperature will start rising again on Wednesday and may hit the 45-degree mark on Friday, the IMD said.

The Met office has issued a "yellow" alert warning of a heatwave in parts of the city on Friday. The Capital may witness light rain, thunderstorm and gusty winds under the influence of a fresh western disturbance on Sunday.

Govt panel to select 5 markets for redevelopment

The eight-member committee will submit its report by May 20

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The eight-member committee formed by Delhi Government will select five prominent markets for redevelopment as per announcement made by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in Rozgar Budget for 2022-23. The committee will submit its report by May 20. According to officials, the committee will

comprise representatives of School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), the Public Works Department (PWD) and Delhi Jal Board (DJB) besides two traders' association representatives.

It will be headed by chief project manager of Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation (DTTDC), Brijesh Goyal, chairman of Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) and one of members of committee, said panel will have its first meeting on May 17. Earlier, the Delhi Government had invited applications from various market associations to select five mar-

kets under redevelopment plan. The last date for submitting online applications was May 6. "Fifty market associations had applied under market redevelopment plan that will be considered in selection process.

Only those markets that have submitted applications will be considered for selection under redevelopment project," Goyal said.

The online application sought details like approximate number of shops in market; unique products, shops, food hubs in the market; five key infrastructural issues in market; how market association can assist Government in

market redevelopment. The retail market redevelopment project announced in Rozgar Budget 2022-23 last month in Assembly seeks to upgrade five selected markets from all over Delhi in phase-1. The Government has allocated Rs 100 crore for programme in 2022-23 financial year and creation of over 1.5 lakh job opportunities is estimated through the initiative.

The DTTDC is implementing redevelopment project. The Government aims to redesign, decongest and redevelop selected markets to create job opportunities by stimulating business activities there.

Ensure security of Kashmiri Pandits, CM tells Centre after Bhat's killing

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of the recent killing of a Kashmiri Pandit in Budgam, the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday urged the Centre to take steps to ensure the security of the community.

Rahul Bhat, who had got the job of a clerk under the special employment package for migrants in 2010-11, was gunned down by terrorists inside the teshil office in Chadoora town of central Kashmir's Budgam district on

Thursday. In an online briefing, the chief minister said that a Kashmiri Pandit was killed inside his office by terrorists and it felt like a premeditated killing.

"The Indian Army killed two terrorists in just 24 hours after the incident. But today a question plagues the nation — why aren't the Kashmiri Pandits safe in Kashmir even today?," said Kejriwal. "A large number of Kashmiri Pandit youths were sent back to work in Kashmir under a special package. After this incident, all Kashmiri

Pandits living in the region are completely terrified. When these people set out to protest to voice their anger against the brutal killing, they were met with brute action. They were stopped. Their voices were suppressed. They had to face teargas and lathicharge," said Kejriwal.

"This is not the time for anyone to play politics. This is not a political issue but a national issue. Kashmiri Pandits want security. They don't feel safe there," said Kejriwal. "If Kashmiri Pandits

don't get proper security in their homeland then how will the Kashmiri migrants living all over the country rehabilitate to their homes? There won't be any assurance greater than law and order that will motivate them to rehabilitate the valley," said Kejriwal.

"With folded hands I request the Centre, please do whatever you can and help the Kashmiri Pandits lead a dignified life. No matter how much it costs, every provision needed must be implemented," Kejriwal added.

Live-in couple commits suicide in Gurugram

GURUGRAM: A couple in a live-in relationship allegedly committed suicide by hanging themselves from a ceiling fan under the Sushant Lok police station area on Sunday, the police said on Monday.

The couple appeared to have killed themselves on Sunday night at their rented accommodation. The incident came to light on Monday morning after neighbours reported the matter to police, the police said. The woman was identified as Nancy (28), and the man as Ashwani (29). Both

were residents of a village in Delhi. However, the police did not find any suicide note on the spot.

"The couple was in a live-in relationship and was residing here in Gurugram for past 1.5 years. The man was a chef in a Delhi based hotel while the woman was working at a leading food delivery giant. We have sent body for autopsy and have contacted their family members for further investigation," Poonam Hooda, station house officer of Sushant Lok police station said. SR

NHRC team visits Mundka fire site for inspection

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A team of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Monday visited Mundka to inspect the site, which claimed 27 lives and injured 17 people three days ago.

The team led by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sunil Kumar Meena, comprises four members. The NHRC on Sunday sent a notice to the Delhi government in connection with the May 13 fire. It observed that the incident established that the city authorities had "learnt little" from sim-



ilar incidents in the past. The NHRC sought a report from the chief secretary within two weeks that would include action taken against those

responsible, fixing the culpability and status of disbursement of the relief or rehabilitation granted by the government, if any.

The team led by DIG Meena and comprising Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) M S Gill, DSP Kulbir Singh, and inspectors Kulwant Singh and Arun Tyagi visited the accident site and conducted an on-spot inquiry, a senior NHRC official said.

Police have recovered 27 bodies from the building. As of Sunday, 14 of them had been identified as women and six as men. Nineteen people are still

missing. The fire, one of the deadliest in recent years, ripped through a four-storey building in Mundka. It started on the first floor of the building due to a suspected explosion in an AC, according to fire officials.

In its notice to the Delhi government, the NHRC had observed that going by the contents of media reports, "this appears to be the worst case of gross violation of human rights of the victims due to utter apathy (of) and complete dereliction of statutory duties by public servants in the national capital of Delhi, causing loss of valuable lives due to the fire."

DJB workers stab colleague, head constable in Burari

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following an altercation, two Delhi Jal Board (DJB) workers allegedly stabbed a colleague and a head constable, who was sent to spot, was also attacked by one of accused. The incident occurred in Burari area on Sunday.

Police said that one accused identified as Virender has been arrested while a manhunt has been initiated to nab Brijesh, who is absconding. Sunil, 22, who was stabbed after a heated argument with two men, and Head Constable Praveen have

been admitted to hospital. Virender, who was shot in leg by Assistant Sub Inspector Sanjeev in self defence, has also been hospitalised, said Sagar Singh Kalsi, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district. ASI Sanjeev and Head Constable Praveen were part of police team sent to spot.

A case has been lodged under Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) and sections pertaining to attack on public servant on duty at Burari police station.

Caste-based census in State won't be delayed, says Nitish

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The politics on caste census in OBC-dominated Bihar has again gained traction with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday asserting that the work begun on a State-level caste-based census will not be “delayed” anymore.

Talking to newspersons in Patna, the Chief Minister said he had also made this known to leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav who met him last week to discuss the issue.

“Zyada der nahin legega (it will not take long)..... We will convene an all-party meeting where representatives can give their suggestions. It will be followed by a cabinet approval. Modalities like how many officials to deploy etc will also be worked out,” said Kumar.

The JD(U) leader said the proposed all-party meeting could have taken place earlier but for “other engagements like elections which kept all busy”.

“Humne unko bata diya hai (I have told him),” said Kumar when asked about the meeting he had with Yadav, his former deputy, who had been alleging



procrastination on the issue.

In Bihar, the BJP is on the same page as the JD (U) given the political ramifications it has. However, the Modi Government has remained non-committal despite a strong demand for it from many political parties, including BJP's allies. Resolutions have even been passed in 2019 and 2020, unanimously, by the state legislature in Bihar in support of the caste census.

In August 2021, BJP's Lok Sabha MP Sanghamitra Maurya too echoed the demand of the caste enumeration. NDA ally (besides JDU) Apna Dal had also called for the caste census following the passage of the Constitution 127 A Amendment Bill, 2021,

which restores the power of states to identify OBCs that are socially and economically backward.

The centre too had then mulled over the possibility of a caste census but backtracked on it after a while. “The central government has not enumerated caste-wise population other than Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) since independence,” Lok Sabha was informed by the Government on February 08, 2022, without any elaboration.

Prior to this on August 23, 2021, Nitish Kumar had led an all party delegation and met Prime Minister Narendra Modi apprising him of the wish of all parties in Bihar to have a caste census.

The numerically dominating OBCs in the state to which some of the key leaders in the state like Kumar, JD(U)'s Upendra Kushwah and the opposition RJD leader Tejeswi Yadav belong to, are seeking the caste census to gain influence in the state politics. State BJP leaders too are backing the move notwithstanding the centre's non-committal stance on it. The BJP and JDU leaders in Bihar have been trading charges against each other for delaying the caste census.

Blaming the BJP, Kushwaha said that because of the BJP, no decision is being made about the caste census. Hitting out at the BJP, Kushwaha further said because of the BJP, the all-party meeting is not being held and no decision is being taken regarding the caste census.

Reacting to Kushwaha, BJP spokesperson Ram Sagar Singh said, “It seems Kushwaha does not listen to Nitish Kumar's statement properly. Kumar himself has said that work is going on the matter of the caste census. Kushwaha should first consult with Kumar before asking these questions.”

Cong deliberates upon issue of use of EVMs in Chintan Shivir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/UDAIPUR

The Congress is giving a serious thought to opposing the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the next Lok Sabha polls in 2024 and demanding the restoration of the paper ballot system.

The party deliberated upon the issue in one of the closed-door meetings at the Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir.

Sources said senior Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan raised the issue during the deliberations in the party's panel on political issues at the three-day 'Chintan Shivir'.

“A lot of talk took place on EVM and the way fraud is taking place. It is my personal opinion that (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi will not change anything even if we petition or request him. There is only one option -- we will have to defeat him and have to write in our manifesto that we will remove EVMs and go back to paper ballots.... Can't do anything before that,” the former Maharashtra Chief Minister remarked in his address to the group.

The party could even

promise the restoration of the ballot paper system of voting in its manifesto, sources said.

While Congress has remained neutral in its stand on the EVMs even after successive electoral loss, regional parties have from time to time raked up the issue questioning the authenticity of the EVMs.

The BSP, SP, RJD and AAP have on many occasions vented their opposition against the EVMs and some parties also held a hackathon challenge to prove that the EVMs can be hacked and tampered to suit results in favour of the ruling party. The claims remained unsubstantiated though. The Election Commission of India has categorically asserted that the EVMs in use in India can neither be hacked nor be hacked.

AAP leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had accused the BJP of “programming” the electronic voting machines to win the polls and said the Opposition parties will carry out a nationwide campaign on discrepancies in EVMs.

Ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, leaders of



Opposition parties had even moved the Supreme Court demanding verification of at least 50% of votes cast in the Lok Sabha elections against the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail slips.

Leaders of 21 Opposition parties, including the Congress, Telugu Desam Party, Samajwadi Party, Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) had also jointly addressed a press conference in Delhi in April

2019 to highlight matters regarding transparency in the election process and protection of voter rights, and gave a call to “save democracy”.

While Naidu cited examples from countries like Germany, The Netherlands and Ireland which have chosen to go back to using paper ballots in their elections, Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said there was a “serious question mark” on the election process.

Modi trying to create 2 Hindustans, one for rich, other for poor: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BANSWARA

A day after the Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir in Udaipur, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Monday addressed rally in neighbouring Banswara in Rajasthan where he accused the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of trying to create two “Hindustans”, one for the rich and the other for the poor.

Rahul also lashed out at Modi over the state of the economy, accusing him of destroying the economy which was “strengthened” by the former UPA Government.

The Congress, he said, works to connect with all while the BJP works to create a divide. The BJP and Modi want to create two Hindustans, one for the rich and select two-three industrialists, and the other of Dalits, farmers, the poor and underprivileged while the Congress wants only one Hindustan, he said, adding, “This is the fight in the country,” the Congress leader said.

“The Congress says that we have to move forward while connecting with all, respect and protect the culture of all. The BJP works to divide,



'crush' and 'suppress'. (BJP) works to remove history and culture of tribals,” he said in the tribal dominated area of southern Rajasthan.

“We work to connect while they work to divide. We help the weaker and they help selected top industrialists,” he said. Rahul, who has been targeting the government over the state of the economy and issue of unemployment, said, “The BJP government has attacked our economy. The PM did demonetisation, wrongly implemented GST due to which the economy got destroyed. UPA worked to strengthen the economy but Narendra Modi caused harm to our economy”.

“Every youth knows that they cannot get jobs in Hindustan today. Inflation is increasing,” he said. He further said the Centre brought three

laws against farmers which had to be withdrawn after protests and charged that two-three select industrialists were supposed to get full advantage of the laws.

Noting that there is a very old and deep relation of the Congress with tribals, he said, “We protect your history, we don't want to suppress or delete your history.

When we had the UPA government at the Centre, we had brought historic laws to protect the forest and water of tribals”.

Praising the Ashok Gehlot led Congress government, Rahul said it is working for the interest of farmers, tribals, Dalits and all sections of society.

He also appreciated the initiative of the state government to open English medium government schools.

Centre begins process of appointment of next Lokpal chairperson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has begun the process for appointment of the next chief of Lokpal as the incumbent Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose is set to complete his term on May 27.

A Lokpal chief and its members are appointed by the President after obtaining the recommendations of a selection committee headed by Prime Minister and comprising the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of Opposition in the Lower House, the Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him, and an eminent jurist as recommended by the chairperson and members of the selection panel.

The Prime Minister-led selection committee shall for the purposes of selecting the Chairperson and members of the Lokpal and for preparing a panel of persons to be considered for such appointment, constitute a search committee consisting of at least seven persons of standing and having

special knowledge and expertise in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, policy making, finance including insurance and banking, law and management, according to the Lokpal Act.

The Lokpal is headed by a Chairperson and can have eight members -- four judicial and the rest non-judicial. At present, there are six members in the Lokpal and the two posts of judicial members have been lying vacant for over two years. A Lokpal chief and members are appointed for a term of five years or until attaining the age of 70 years.

Justice Ghose, who was born on May 28, 1952, will be completing his term as the Lokpal chief after completing 70 years of age. Justice Dilip B Bhosale resigned as a Lokpal member in January 2020, citing personal reasons, nine months after he was appointed to the post. Another Lokpal member, Justice (retired) Ajay Kumar Tripathi died after suffering a cardiac arrest at the AIIMS Trauma Centre here on May 2, 2020.

CBI seeks Hong Kong help in its probe into diamonds import with inflated invoices

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has sent a judicial request to Hong Kong seeking assistance in its probe into a racket allegedly involved in importing diamonds with inflated invoices worth Rs 156 crore to camouflage money laundering.

The CBI dispatched the letters rogatory (judicial request) to the Secretary for Justice, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, seeking details about transactions and accounts flagged during the probe.

After getting a go ahead from the Union Home Ministry as required under Section 166 A of the Criminal Procedure Code, the agency submitted its application before a special court in Mumbai which issued the LR.

The letters rogatory refers to a legal plea from a court of one country to another seeking assistance in the probe of a criminal case.

In January 2020, the agency had booked 17 individuals and companies, including three Mumbai-based senior Customs officials, for allegedly being part of a money laundering racket using over-invoiced import of diamonds worth over Rs 156 crore.

Since the diamonds were imported to India from Hong Kong, the CBI, through the LR, is seeking assistance from law enforcement agencies of that country to take the probe forward, officials said.

The case was referred to the CBI after a Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) probe found alleged involvement of Customs officials in the conspiracy. The DRI probe had alleged that Hong Kong-based businessman Girish Kadel had imported rough diamonds from Switzerland to Hong Kong in the name of his four companies.

Kadel, having Belgian passports and business interests in India, had exported some of these diamonds to India through 14 consignments in the name of two companies -- Antique Exim Pvt Ltd and Tanman Jewels -- showing over-invoiced value of Rs 156.28 crore. The DRI had found during revaluation that the actual value of the 14 consignments was just Rs 1.03 crore.

The CBI probe has revealed that Kadel allegedly conspired to import rough diamonds at highly exaggerated value with a view to siphon off the excess foreign exchange overseas to cover the differential cost of other imports as well as to park money abroad for unlawful activities.

Nadda interacts with 14 foreign diplomats in ‘Know BJP’ prog

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In his second interaction with the diplomats in the ongoing “know BJP” programme, BJP national president JP Nadda on Monday interacted here at the BJP head office with a group of 14 heads of missions to India, including those from the USA and Australia and Israel.

BJP National General Secretary Arun Singh, National Vice-President DK Aruna, Party in charge of Foreign Affairs Vijay Chauthaiwale, BJP National Spokesperson Syed Zafar Islam among others were also present during the interaction.

Welcome address was given by Convenor of Overseas Cell Dr Vijay Chauthaiwale. Diplomats were shown a short-film since the inception of Bharatiya Jana Sangh 1951 and the BJP in 1980.

Diplomats were taken through BJP's political journey from two MPS to 303 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Nadda spoke about the importance of the day chosen to have the 2nd round of these meetings with the ambassadors - the day is marked as birth of Buddha (Buddh Purnima).

He said while on this day Prime Minister Modi is offering prayers at Gautam Buddha's birth place in



Lumbini, Nepal - the day is also marked as the 8th year anniversary when BJP first came to serve in Union Government winning full majority in Parliament with 282 seats in 2014.

The BJP President spoke with the diplomats on the policies of the Modi Government as well as the party structure and its various departments and the event, according to a statement by the BJP.

The foreing guests made a number of queries during Question- Answer session on the party's ideology and political economic agenda in coming years under the current leadership.

Diplomats from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Fiji, South Wales, Denmark and Canada

and Indonesia also attended the meeting.

On April 6, the BJP's Foundation Day, Nadda had launched the initiative “Know BJP” specifically to address the overseas audience and had over four-hour-long interaction including question-hour session preceded by a documentary detailing party's political history, ideology, structure and programme, with the Head of Missions of 13 countries of the world.

BJP intends to continue such interactions with small groups of foreign diplomats in the future too. Exchanges of delegations with political parties from different countries are also being planned in due course of time, said a BJP statement.

Raj's Ramgarh Vishdhari Sanctuary notified as India's 52nd tiger reserve

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The striped big cats on Monday got a new home in Rajasthan's Ramgarh Vishdhari Sanctuary which was notified as India's 52nd tiger reserve. This is Rajasthan's fourth tiger reserve after Ranthambore, Sariska and Mukundra.

“Pleased to note Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve has been notified today. The 52nd Reserve of India will conserve biodiversity and bring in ecotourism and development to the area. Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, we are committed to preserving our wildlife,” Union Environment Minister Bhopender Yadav tweeted.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had given in-principle approval to make Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining areas as tiger reserves on July 5 last year. The total area of 1,017 sqkm has been identified as the reserve area comprising two forest blocks of Bhilwara, territorial forest block of Bundi and Indargarh, which fall under the buffer zone of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (RTR).

“The newly notified tiger reserve includes the tiger habitat between Ranthambore Tiger Reserve in the northeast and Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve on the southern side and facilitates dispersal of tigers from Ranthambore Tiger Reserve,” Yadav tweeted.

The floristic diversity of this new tiger reserve makes it an important area for research and education. Historic and cultural sites like Bhimlat, Ramgarh palace would encourage eco tourism and provide employment opportunities to local communities, he said.

In 2013, the Rajasthan government had upgraded Mukundra hills sanctuary as the third tiger reserve. According to reports, environmentalist and lawyer, Tapeshwar Singh Bhati said, “The movement of big cats from Ranthambore is frequent in the reserve. The move will strengthen tiger conservation. Three tigers were recorded in the 1997 census in the sanctuary.

However, the tigers were believed to have disappeared from the sanctuary in 1999. According to the “Status of Tigers in India” report released in 2019, there are 2,967 tigers in 20 states across the country.

Threats from groups in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan figure in RATS meet in SCO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Situation in Afghanistan with Special focus on dealing with the threat from groups active in the Taliban-ruled nation figured prominently in a meeting here on Monday of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) under the aegis of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation.

Counter terrorism experts from Pakistan, China and Russia besides host India took part in the four-day conclave starting Monday.

A three-member Pakistani delegation is taking part in the

meet.

It is the first such representation from across the border since Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assumed charge. India had participated in a similar meeting of the RATS in Pabbi, Pakistan last year.

“I thank India for hosting the key meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's anti-terror body Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in New Delhi today. The security and humanitarian situation has worsened in Afghanistan over the past 9 months,” Afghan envoy Farid Mamundzay tweeted.

“We expect this meeting to raise and propose solutions to all important issues related to the security situation in Afghanistan. Sincere regional security cooperation particularly from neighbouring countries is the only way forward for peace and development in Afghanistan and in the region,” he added.

India has not recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and has been pitching for the formation of a truly inclusive government in Kabul besides insisting that Afghan soil must not be used for any terrorist activities against any country.

Post Chintan Shivir resolutions on reviving party

Cong pulls out big guns for Thrikkakara bypolls

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Following the three-day Chintan Shivir at Udaipur, the Congress in Kerala has upped the ante in the campaign for the Thrikkakara Assembly constituency where a bypoll is scheduled for May 31.

K Sudhakaran, president of KPCC and VD Satheshan, Leader of the Opposition have stationed themselves in the constituency and have deployed all the Congress MLAs for the campaign. Uma Thomas, the widow of PT Thomas who has been representing the constituency since 2011 is the Congress candidate from Thrikkakara.

"Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is camping in Thrikkakkara because he is not confident of the victory of the CPI(M) candidate. Moreover, the situation in Kerala has taken a turn for the worse since the

assembly election that was held in 2021," said Sudhakaran who took time off to speak to the media on Monday.

Sudhakaran said the proposed Silver Line Semi High Speed Rail connecting Thiruvananthapuram and Kasaragod has antagonised the electorate in the State because of the high handed attitude of the CPI(M). "People are fed up with the silence of the Government over the rehabilitation proposal for those who lose their lands to the rail project. The law and order situation in the State as well as the exodus of entrepreneurs are other important factors which the CPI(M) may find it difficult to explain," said the KPCC chief.

Sudhakaran said that he does not think the Twenty 20, the regional outfit launched by entrepreneur Sabu Jacob which has more than 13,000 votes in the constituency would vote for

the CPI(M) candidate Dr Jo Joseph. "If the Twenty 20 decides to cast its votes to the Congress candidate, we will welcome the same. I too read about the People's Welfare Front, an alliance formed by the Twenty 20 and the AAP in Kerala to fight the 2024 Lok Sabha Polls," he said. The KPCC chief said that if the AAP-Twenty 20 combo decides to vote for the Congress, he would not say no to them. "Yes, I know we are rivals but that does not prevent us from seeking vote from them," he said. The Twenty-20 has not fielded any one for the bye-election.

The face off between Twenty-20 and the CPI(M) took a turn for the worse on Monday as Sreenijan, CPI(M) MLA who is also the son-in-law of former chief justice of India K G Balakrishnan took to the social media to to humiliate and ridicule Sabu Jacob.

Ex-MLA Mishra, wife, daughter booked for bid to kill Gyanpur MLA

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Former MLA Vijay Mishra faces more trouble after the Bhadohi police registered a case against him, his wife and daughter and three others for hatching a conspiracy to kill Gyanpur MLA Vipul Dubey.

Mishra, a four-time MLA from Gyanpur, lost to Dubey in the recently concluded assembly elections in the state. While Mishra contested from jail on Pragatishheel Manav Samaj Party ticket, Dubey contested as NISHAD Party nominee.

Police said they registered the FIR after an inquiry into a viral video in which some people were heard planning to kill Dubey. "Two accused, identified as Saddam Hussain and Shiv Kumar Tiwari alias Sonu , both residents of Bhadohi, have been arrested. The role of other accused, including Vijay Mishra's wife Ramlali Mishra, is being probed," Bhadohi's Superintendent of Police Anil Kumar said.



Vijay Mishra is presently lodged in jail following his arrest in a land-grabbing case in 2020, filed by his relative Krishna Mohan Tiwari.

Krishna Mohan's son Rajkamal Tiwari said that two persons, who identified themselves as Saddam Hussain and Shiv Kumar, came to his residence on May 11 thinking it to be Mishra's residence and wanted to meet Ramlali Mishra, police said.

"The accused told Tiwari that Ramlali had promised them money. They told Tiwari that they had been asked to kill MLA Vipul Dubey and his close aide Manoj Mishra," a police officer said.

Gold-studded historic Jama Masjid of Aligarh

Row as civic body terms mosque as public property

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

Controversy has arisen regarding the historic and gold-studded Jama Masjid of Aligarh. In response to an RTI, the Municipal Corporation has said that it is built on a public place. After the BJP politicised the issue, Municipal Commissioner Gaurang Rathi gave a clarification.

In response to an RTI, the Municipal Corporation had described it as a public property as well as a historical heritage of the city. Politics intensified over the civic body's comment and BJP leaders are demanding removal of Jama Masjid from public property. In response, SP leaders are asking the administration to take strict steps on such issues. Now, the Municipal Corporation is on the backfoot in this matter.

The intensification of the politics regarding the Jama Masjid has started with the reply given by the Municipal Corporation to RTI activist Pandit Keshav Dev Sharma.



The corporation had said in response that the construction of Jama Masjid at Uparkot was done 300 years ago in a public place. This mosque is a historical heritage, in which the ownership of this mosque has not been shown to anyone.

After receiving the RTI reply, Keshav Dev has written a letter to the District Magistrate to immediately demolish the mosque, saying that the mosque is illegal.

He has said that if the mosque is not demolished, he will take refuge in the court.

The construction of Jama Masjid was started in the year 1724 by the governor of Kol tehsil, Sabit Khan, which was completed in the year 1728.

BJP leader and former mayor Shakuntala Bharti said that the mosque has been declared illegal in response to the RTI given by the Municipal Corporation regarding Jama Masjid. So what is illegal should be broken. Be it a mosque or something. She said that of course Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's bulldozer will run here too.

Tension in Meerut after BJP leader killed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Communal tension prevailed in Meerut after a local Bharatiya Janata Party leader was killed over a petty dispute.

Former BJP MLA and other party leaders later staged a protest and also accused the local police of not receiving calls. They alleged the involvement of Samajwadi Party leader in the killing. The protesters were somehow pacified by assuring them of prompt arrest of the assailant.

Reports said that Akshay Tyagi, a resident of Kuankheda village of Parikshitgarh area claimed that his brother, 26-year-old Vaibhav Tyagi, had an altercation with one Shoaib, a resident of the village, about a month ago. He said the dispute was resolved after some senior citizens intervened. He said that on Sunday, there was an altercation between the two sides and Vaibhav went to the local police station and filed a complaint citing threat to his life.

Maya: Govt should follow principles of Buddha

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Monday took jibe at leaders of the rival parties, saying that just bowing before the statue of Gautam Buddha would do nothing as even today life could be blessed only by following the principles and the path shown by him.

Mayawati also greeted the followers of Lord Buddha on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. She also claimed that during the BSP rule in Uttar Pradesh, she followed the principles of Lord Buddha.

In a statement issued by the BSP headquarters in Lucknow, Mayawati said, "To bow down is a different matter but by following the principles of saints, gurus and great men like Gautam Buddha, the goal of making people's lives happy can be achieved."

The BSP chief said, "That is why there is a need to make sincere efforts to make the country a Jagadguru once again by following the principles of Gautam Buddha, rising above



all kinds of malice and narrow-mindedness, for which the BSP is striving and struggling. There is no going back on this objective."

She said in the campaign to bring social and economic changes, the society as well as the governments would have to remove the difference between words and deeds by making their intentions pure and honest, and this would be a true tribute to Lord Buddha.

Mayawati said that Gautam Buddha adorned Indian history with truthful knowledge in the form of 'Jyoti Punj' of Asia. She said among his followers, Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and the great Emperor Ashoka laid a strong founda-

tion for social revolution by establishing Bahujan Hitay and Bahujan Sukhay as the basic thread of their constitution.

She said that the BSP ran its government on the policy of Sarvajana Hitay Sarvajana Sukhay when it came to power in UP.

Mayawati said that under the principles of Gautam Buddha, the BSP government had started the Ambedkar Gram Sabha Samagra Vikas Yojana very effectively and villages were equipped with basic facilities. The BSP chief alleged that this was not liked by the opponents and it did not mean anything to them.

Referring to the work done in the name of Gautam Buddha, Mayawati said that district Gautam Buddha Nagar and Mahamaya Nagar were established by the BSP government on May 6, 1997, while on Buddha Purnima on May 25, 1997, Shravasti district and on April 4, 1997 Kausambi district came into existence. She said that on May 22, 1997 the name of Padrauna was changed to Kushinagar.

Ineligible people told to return ration cards in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Political pundits believe that the free ration scheme helped the Bharatiya Janata Party to win the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. Buoyed by the victory, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath declared that his government would continue to give free ration to 15,00,000 eligible, poor people across the state for the next three months.

But in April, the government issued an order asking the ineligible individuals to surrender their ration cards by May 20 or face punitive actions like lodging of FIRs against them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ration card holders were given free ration twice a month — once from the Centre and the other time from the Uttar Pradesh government. There were complaints that many non-eligible persons were getting ration but the government preferred to look the other way because of the assembly elections.

The government guidelines specify that the residents are ineligible to hold a ration card if one of the members of



the family pays income tax, more than one member holds an arms licence, or if a member has an annual income of more than Rs 3 lakh in urban areas and Rs 2 lakh in rural areas, or he/she owns a house, flat or a commercial space of more than 100 square feet area. Families who own a four-wheeler/tractor/harvester/air-conditioner or generator set at home are considered ineligible to hold ration cards as well, the guideline says.

A senior official said the district administration would send recovery notices to those

ineligible people who do not submit their ration cards by May 20 and may even lodge FIRs against them under provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure. He said the recovery would be made as per the guidelines.

Individuals can surrender their ration cards at their block offices or the office of the district supply officer, the official said.

All district magistrates have issued orders accordingly. According to officials, the "recovery process" includes imposing penalties at a rate of

Rs24 for a kilogram of wheat and Rs32 for a kilogram of rice from the time ineligible households started availing ration.

There are two types of ration cards — Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cards and Priority Household cards. Families with an annual income of less than Rs 3 lakh per annum in urban areas and Rs 2 lakh in rural areas are eligible for priority household cards. People who have no house, fixed income or working skills — essentially, the poorest strata of the society — are eligible for AAY cards.

Wheat procurement in UP till month end

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Wheat procurement has been extended till May 31 in Uttar Pradesh.

The procurement of the Rabi crop was scheduled to end on May 15.

The Union Food Ministry, for augmenting wheat procurement for the Central pool, has also extended the date in six other states including Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. Wheat procurement was scheduled to end on May 10 in Rajasthan and on May 15 in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh.

Wheat procurement in the ongoing 2022-23 marketing year began in April. The maximum wheat is procured in the

first few months of the year.

"The Centre has asked wheat producing states and Union territories with procurement closing dates expiring early to continue procurement till May 31, 2022," said an official of the Food and Civil Supplies department.

The nodal agency, Food Corporation of India (FCI), has also been asked to continue with wheat procurement under the central pool. The extended period is expected to benefit farmers. The decision comes in the wake of requests by state governments and union territories to continue the procurement process. Meanwhile, the procurement of wheat under the Central pool is progressing smoothly in states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand,

Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Rajasthan.

The wheat procurement by the government agencies has been less so far this year mainly due to the higher market prices than the minimum support price (MSP) as a result of which farmers have been selling wheat to private traders.

The government on May 13 banned the export of wheat to rein in high prices of wheat, except in case of irrevocable letter of credit and requests from neighbouring and food-affected countries. The government's wheat procurement reached 18 million ton till May 14 of the ongoing 2022-23 marketing year, less than 36.7 million ton in 2021. Wheat procurement target has been revised to 19.5 million ton from earlier target of 44.4 million ton for this year.

ODOP push to UP exports

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Government has claimed despite the novel coronavirus pandemic, the State fared exceedingly well in terms of exports. From April 2020-2021 to March 2022, UP's exports increased from Rs.1,07,423.5 crore to Rs.1,40123.5 crore, an increase of about 30 per cent. In this, the contribution of One District One Product (ODOP) scheme is about 72 per cent. Significantly, the exports have increased by 2,747 per cent in projected goods for special purposes.

The export share of the UP government's flagship ODOP scheme, which was launched on the first Foundation Day of Uttar Pradesh in January 2018, is noteworthy in itself. This is also an indication that ODOP can become the growth engine of Uttar Pradesh's economy in the coming years. Not only this, ODOP will also play an important role in achieving the

goal of one trillion dollar economy set by Uttar Pradesh government.

In view of this, common facility centres (CFCs) are being set up to provide facilities to all the stakeholders related to these products under ODOP scheme in various districts. Out of these five CFCs are ready functioning while some others will be ready soon. The CFCs of some districts are also to be launched soon.

Keeping in view the possibilities of ODOP scheme, the government has set a target of doubling its exports and employment generation in the next five years. It is to be recalled that during the first term of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, about 25 lakh people got employment/self-employment at the local level from the ODOP scheme. The Yogi government 2.0 aims to double the export as well as employment or self-employment opportunities in the next five years.

Row over AIMIM leader Owaisi's visit to Aurangzeb's tomb

Cong seeks to corner BJP over Fadnavis' visit

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid a controversy over the BJP's demand for slapping sedition charge against AIMIM leader Akbaruddin Owaisi over his visit to Aurangzeb's tomb at Aurangabad, the Congress on Monday wondered as to what was holding the Modi Government from restricting or banning the entry to the infamous Mughal emperor's tomb which comes under the jurisdiction of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

While posting photographs and videos of several BJP leaders who had visited the burial site of the late Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb at Khuldabad in Aurangabad on his twitter handle, Maharashtra Congress

general secretary Sachin Savant said: "Aurangzeb's tomb is under jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India. Modi Government can control, restrict or even ban entry. Why does Modi Govt not register complaints against Owaisi?" .

Seeking to corner former chief minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis over the visit of a BJP leader to Aurangzeb's tomb at Aurangabad, Savant posted the photograph of a BJP leader visiting the Aurangzeb's tomb and tweeted: "Watch Khalid Qureshi, VP of BJP's Minority Affairs, doing what fadnavis ji described"

"Also, BJP national executive member and spokesperson, Jammu and Kashmir Waqf Board president Dr Darakshan

Andrabi had visited Aurangzeb's tomb during the Corona period. When Fadnavis was CM Asaduddin Owaisi had gone to the grave in 2019. So why blame MVA govt for no action (against Owaisi)?" , Savant asked.

Savant came down heavily on BJP, MNS and the Independent MP Navneet Kaur-Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana for blaming the MVA government for Telangana MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi's visit to Aurangabad's tomb.

It may be recalled that following Owaisi's visit to Aurangzeb's tomb on May 12, BJP MLA Ram Kadam had said that if the State government had the guts, they ought to slap a sedition charge on the

JD(U) seeks apology from Raj for derogatory remarks against north Indians

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



and harassment against them, allegedly at his instigation, in Maharashtra.

Tyagi said Thackeray must apologise for his utterances and actions allegedly against north Indians and offer assurance of not repeating them in future if he wanted the protests against his visit to be withdrawn.

JD(U) nominates Anil Hegde for Rajya Sabha

PTI ■ PATNA

Ruling Janata Dal (United) or JD (U) on Monday named Anil Hegde, who is from Karnataka, as its candidate for the by-poll to a vacant Bihar Rajya Sabha seat on May 30. Mahendra Prasad's death in December necessitated the by-poll.

Hedge, a veteran socialist leader, was a close associate of late former defence minister George Fernandes. He is also JD (U)'s national election officer.

A JD (U) leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the announcement of Hegde's nomination came as a surprise but it is a reward for a man working silently for the organisation and the party. "The party has recognised his contribution," said the leader. He indicated that they were expecting the nominee to be from Bihar.



Children play inside a water pipe on a hot summer day in New Delhi Monday

PTI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Union Minister and senior BJP leader Narayan Rane said here on Monday that the "foul" language used by Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray against his predecessor Devendra Fadnavis and the RSS was a "blot" on the culture and traditions of the state.

AIMIM leader.

"We dare the Uddhav Thackeray government to take action under sedition charges

Addressing a news conference at the State BJP headquarters in south Mumbai, Rane said that at his party workers' rally held on Saturday, Uddhav had nothing to talk about his government's achievements during the last two and half years. "Like always, the chief minister heaped abuses on the BJP leaders and RSS," he said.

against Owaisi. They should now display their courage and act against him for this anti-national act," Kadam had said.

India's model

The number of the so-called 'neutral' countries across the globe is shrinking

Russia attacked Ukraine and the world is topsy-turvy since then. Grounded political theories of how nations conduct and secure themselves are going for a toss. By the time the conflict concludes, the world may see the emergence of refurbished systems of how nations, as individuals or groups, behave with one another. The conflict drew the world's attention to India and its stand on not condemning Russia. For weeks, the West pressured India to change its stand by offering both sops and veiled threats. India did not budge from its stand. It abstained from voting on the United Nations resolutions condemning Russia. At the same time, it defended Ukraine's sovereignty and its right to territorial integrity. It sent, and continues to send, medical and other aid to that country. Reams were written trying to understand how India backed its longstanding friendship with Russia while it simultaneously associated with the US at the QUAD, tolerated China in BRICS, and thanked Europe for an invite as a guest at the G-7 Summit. It is said that India has shifted from its Nehruvian stance of non-alignment to the present multi-alignment model. The latest country to change its national status is Finland, followed by Sweden. Determined neutrals for decades, they now want to join NATO because Russia makes them insecure. Their presence bolsters NATO and, by extension, the US. But we are not going into that. Finland shares a long border with Russia and a messy past with the former communist country.

To that extent, the Ukraine invasion may be seen as a valid reason for Finland to dump its neutrality. With Finland and Sweden ready to join NATO, the number of Europe's neutrals has shrunk. Other countries are also reviewing their neutral status. Switzerland, Europe's most famous neutral, wonders how it can call itself neutral when it has backed European Union sanctions on Russia. Its shrinking neutrality will churn European politics in the coming days. Ireland has backed sanctions on Russia but is militarily neutral, sending only non-weaponry aid to Ukraine. Malta, Austria and Cyprus are still assessing their neutrality. Europe first saw the link between politics and economics and that led to its awareness that military alliances like NATO can achieve collective security. Not all neutrals appreciated this concept. Some refused to join the European Economic Community as that would weaken their neutral status. Ireland joined, arguing that the resultant economic prosperity was no threat to its neutrality. Spain joined both NATO and EEC believing the two were inseparable and that it was worth paying the political price of joining NATO to encash the EEC's economic benefits. However, the then Soviet threat never influenced their decisions. Unlike at present. In Finland's case, more than the Russian threat, the concerns are also about its ageing population and the pressures of maintaining its welfare State model in the face of undulating export figures. Will joining NATO resolve Finland's non-security problems? Time will tell.

PICTALK



Devotees celebrate 'Buddha Purnima', at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar

PM's visit to renew the cultural bond

PM Modi's ongoing visit to Nepal signifies a turning point in bilateral relations as it aims to boost shared cultural heritage amid the peoples



RISHI GUPTA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a four-day visit to Nepal in the middle of this month to mark the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Buddha at His birthplace in Lumbini, Nepal. Modi's travel plan included flying by helicopter to Lumbini in Nepal from the recently inaugurated Kushinagar International Airport in Uttar Pradesh. The Prime Minister's helicopter ride will mark an important event in the history of shared Buddhist heritage between the two countries. Modi's visit to Nepal comes in the backdrop of the recently concluded visit of Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to India in April.

It is noteworthy that lord Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, and he achieved Mahanirvana in Kushinagar, India. And Prime Minister Modi's visit signifies the efforts made to promote religious tourism and connectivity between India and Nepal. Hence, the trip is important from the socio-cultural, religious, economic and connectivity perspectives. It is Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Nepal since his re-election in May 2019 and the fifth such trip in the last eight years where Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will welcome him. The bilateral talks between the two Prime Ministers will provide a big push to India's 'Neighborhood First Policy' as well as the agreements that were signed during PM Deuba's visit to Delhi in April.

Rejuvenating Cultural Bond: In recent years, strategic discussions around India-Nepal relations have been suggestive of building bilateral ties based on economic and development cooperation instead of focusing more on the cultural and *Roti-Beti* narrative. There is also a sense among the Nepalese observers that mainstream issues often get ignored behind the veil of *Roti-Beti* ties. As a result, economic ties must be prioritised to facilitate shared development. Such discussions had become more prominent in the light of economic disruptions at the India-Nepal border in 2015. However, contrary to these



observations on India's Nepal policy, observers find China's newfound love for cultural diplomacy with Nepal an impactful initiative.

It is also noteworthy that China is leaving no stone unturned to bring socio-cultural and religious elements in creating a cultural narrative around its ties with Nepal. While China inherited most of its socio-cultural and religious connections with Nepal after annexing Tibet in 1950, such bonds between Nepal and India have been ancient, effortless and natural. Also, the rise of the Chinese footprint in Nepal had led to a sudden downturn in India-Nepal relations. However, the people-to-people ties and the cultural exchanges were always firm.

China had overtaken the top spot in Foreign Direct Investment in Nepal in mid-2014, followed by the signing of the Belt and Road Initiative by Nepal in May 2017. However, within seven years, the China bubble has burst, considering no progress made on the agreements signed under the much-hyped Belt and Road Initiative.

In this light, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Lumbini where he is slated to visit the sacred Mayadevi temple to offer prayers and lay the foundation of a Centre for

ECONOMIC TIES BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES MUST BE PRIORITISED TO FACILITATE SHARED DEVELOPMENT. SUCH DISCUSSIONS HAD BECOME MORE PROMINENT IN THE LIGHT OF ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS AT THE INDIA-NEPAL BORDER IN 2015

Buddhist culture and heritage within the Lumbini Monastic Zone rejuvenates the Buddhist connection between India and Nepal. This bond is visible from the lakhs of Nepalese tourists visiting Buddhist sites in India, including Kushinagar, Bodhi Gaya and Sarnath, and they also visit famous Hindu temples and go to Banaras to perform prayers for their ancestors. Similarly, Indian tourists visit Nepal in huge numbers every year to visit Pashupatinath and other sacred sites. Therefore, Prime Minister Modi's visit is a welcome step in rejuvenating the cultural connection.

News vistas: From day one in office, PM Modi has emphasised putting 'Neighborhood First' and his early trips to Bhutan and Nepal are testimonies in this regard. In pursuing these foreign policy goals, India has struck a fine balance between ancient ties and present needs. While the current visit rejuvenates ancient cultural bonds, Nepalese Prime Minister Deuba's visit to Delhi in April focused on the potential in two areas of cooperation.

Connectivity is on the top priority which includes improved cross-border land connectivity, modernisation of transit points for the import of goods from third countries to Nepal through Indian ports,

and expanding railway connectivity to all important regions of Nepal from India. Second, the release of the Vision Statement on the Power Sector in April was among the most awaited diplomatic declarations. Nepal holding huge hydropower potential and India as a leading technical expert in the field, make the two countries 'natural' partners in mutual progress and growth. Also, India is a reliable market for Nepal to export excess power to India and other neighboring countries.

Hence, the hydropower cooperation is a win-win deal for the two countries. **Conclusion:** After a strained period of seven years, the India-Nepal ties are moving towards normalcy. The recent high-level exchanges between the countries indicate a bonhomie based on the fundamentals of shared ancient socio-cultural, religious, philosophical and historical heritage. At the same time, these exchanges are in sync with the prospects and potential development cooperation.

(This is the concluding 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

PROTECTION FOR GYANVAPI SHIVLING

Sir — Glad to read that the Varanasi court has issued an urgent order regarding the Gyanvapi survey that a section of the Gyanvapi mosque will be sealed off for now for the protection of the Shivling that has been discovered on the property and that no unauthorised person will be allowed to enter the sealed portion of the mosque. The court has ordered that only authorised personnel should be deployed near the sealed area of the mosque to ensure that nobody else enters the area. The District Magistrate, Commissioner and CRPF commandant will be deployed to ensure the "safety of the Shivling".

This order was passed soon after the videography survey of the Gyanvapi mosque was completed, when the petitioner submitted that a Shivling was found inside the well of the *masjid*. The court, thereafter, ordered the sealing of the area for further investigation. The exercise was conducted in accordance with the Varanasi Civil Court's order to continue the survey despite objections from the mosque authorities. The Muslim community had raised a lot of protests against the video survey, but their demands were dismissed. Tension continues to prevail in the area and the local residents are living under the shadow of fear.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

'NOW OR NEVER' APPROACH WITH PAK

Sir — The nation needs to be united in the face of the onslaught by certain fissiparous tendencies. We will have to emerge out of the prevailing narratives of majoritarianism and minorities. The Right, Left or Centralist idealism or ideological thinking will not bear any result except self-destruction. We will have to think and profess only as Indians, and nothing less or else, if we all want to survive and thrive. Narrow, parochial approaches have to be abandoned. The killing of Kashmiri Pandits shows that a lot more needs to be done to establish

A red-letter day for Indian sports



On May 15, 2022, the high-flying Indian badminton team did what had never happened in the history of the Thomas Cup. We will never forget Bangkok where India overwhelmed Indonesia, a 14-time champion and six-time runners up, 3-0 in their maiden final appearance. India have, however, won the bronze medal in 1952, 1955 and 1979. A Thomas Cup win is something one can only

dream about (it is akin to the Davis Cup in lawn tennis) and to win it so decisively is a great feat. One hopes that it becomes a watershed moment in Indian badminton the same way the 1983 World Cup victory was for cricket. It is a milestone set by this Indian team, where each of the players had their own value.

Lakshya Sen, the star player, lost to a higher ranked in the quarters and semis but made a great comeback in the final, to rally from a set down to beat Anthony Ginting 7-21, 21-17, 21-16. Kidambi Srikanth stood like a wall in all matches — quarterfinals, semis and then the final, playing the match of his lifetime. Equally importantly, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty pair again and again, proving why they are among the top 10. With this victory, India has become only the sixth country after China, Indonesia, Japan, Denmark and Malaysia to win the Thomas Cup.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

There is also the need for a dialogue with Pakistan on the lines of the Simla Agreement. Recently, we have lost one more Hindu Pandit to the bullets of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Only when terrorism stops can India engage with Pakistan. Looking at the state of affairs in Pakistan, India has nothing to gain from them. We have waited for so long and, with the new Ministry in place there, we can give it one more try. If our move doesn't yield results, then attack is the best form of defence.

Nikhil Krishnan | Trichy

THE THREAT OF FREQUENT HEATWAVES

Sir — A punishing heatwave has gripped India. What is the most alarming feature of this heatwave is that the effects of global warming have pushed India and its neighbouring countries to the levels where the climate is becoming a core threat to human health ('Dealing with impact of heatwaves in India', May 13).

Heatwaves around the world have become frequently common and hotter because of climate change, according to Friederike Otto, a Climatologist at the University of Oxford. Ms Otto adds that the heatwaves will continue to get hotter and fiercer until humans stop burning fossil fuels.

Experts say that before climate change became the norm, such intensity of heat would have been noticed about only once in about every 50 years in India. However, it is now expected to occur once every four years. The heatwaves have led to cascading impacts not just on human health, but also on ecosystems like agriculture, water and energy supplies. Experts say that climate change can definitely be controlled, which will involve a substantial reduction in fossil fuel use, widespread electrification, improved energy efficiency and use of alternative fuels such as hydrogen.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

We will continue to work for the development of the State as per the PM's guidelines.

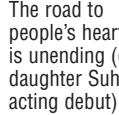


Tripura Chief Minister
— Manik Saha



Not everything went to plan during our pandemic response.

Australia Prime Minister
— Scott Morrison



The road to people's heart is unending (on daughter Suhana's acting debut).

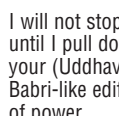


Actor
— Shah Rukh Khan



As far as the world of sports goes in India, this is it.

Chief national coach
— Pullela Gopichand



I will not stop until I pull down your (Uddhav's) Babri-like edifice of power.

Maharashtra ex-CM
— Devendra Fadnis

Head held high

India's historic Thomas Cup win will go a long way in promoting other sports, too

In what's nothing short of a stupendous achievement for India in the annals of global sporting events, our badminton players turned the final match at the Thomas Cup finals into a game of 'goodminton' for the population of the entire country. On the sheer scale of matting the odds, displaying the grit, and living through the proverbial blood, sweat and tears, our players were not one iota less heroic than the iconic 1983 Cricket World Cup-winning team. What makes this historic victory sweeter — only five countries have so far won the prestigious trophy in the tournament's 73-year history since it came into existence, and it was India's maiden appearance in the tournament's finals — is that it was clinched against an opponent as formidable as Indonesia, which is a 14-time champion and six-time runners up, and the latter was beaten comprehensively by a 3-0 margin. In the past, though, India did manage to lay its hands on the bronze medal thrice, in 1952, 1955 and 1979. For the uninitiated, in team sports among badminton-playing countries, a Thomas Cup victory is like a nation winning the Davis Cup in lawn tennis. The Thomas Cup is sometimes referred to as the World Men's Team Championships.

It's time to celebrate the historic victory and savour the moment, of course! However, what mustn't be lost to the nation's eye in the gloss of the golden confetti is how to keep this momentum going. Our Sports Minister has already envisioned a historic medal haul in the next Olympics. But only wishing for great results will not get us anywhere. What needs to be done on the ground is that, apart from cricket, the Government needs to earmark funds to give a genuine thrust to players and athletes from different disciplines. The accomplishment on the badminton court in Bangkok also underlines the need for top-notch training and provision for infrastructural facilities. We must go out hunting for outstanding district-level players and athletes, and build them quality infrastructure there, apart from making sure that they receive nutritious diet and training. In fact, all these things considered and delivered together would go a long way, in fact to the top of the podium frequently, in making India a sporting nation that can hold its own in the galaxy of sports superpowers!

FIRST COLUMN

INDIA SLIPS ON FREEDOM OF PRESS INDEX

India owes it to its free press for its positive world image



BRIJENDER SINGH PANWAR

The ranking of India in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index has fallen to 150 out of 180 countries. The countries lower than India include Sudan (151), Russia (155), Pakistan (157), Bangladesh (162) and China (175). The top three positions went to Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Last year, India was ranked eight points higher at 142. The ranking is based on the performance of the respective country in five broad categories - political context, legal framework, economic context, socio-cultural context and safety of journalists. India's ranking was lowest in the safety of journalists' category (163) and the best in legal framework category (120). Reporters Without Borders, an International NGO having a consultative status with the United Nations, flags a "two-fold increase in polarisation amplified by information chaos-that is media polarisation fuelling divisions within countries, as well as polarisation between countries at the international level". It further notes that "within democratic societies, divisions are growing" due to spread of "opinion media", modelled on Fox News, and the rise of "disinformation circuits" amplified by how social media functions. Commenting on the press of India, the report says "the violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis". The report described India, as "one of the world's most dangerous countries for the media".

The report further says "journalists are exposed to all kinds of physical violence including police violence, ambushes by political activists and deadly reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt local officials". In the context of "socio-economic" aspect of press freedom, the report states "the enormous diversity of Indian society is barely reflected in the mainstream media, for the most part, only Hindu men from upper castes hold senior positions in journalism or are media executives - a bias that is reflected in media content". Under the category of "political context", the report states that though originally, a product of anti-colonial movement, the Indian Press used to be seen as fairly progressive, but, things changed radically in the 2010s when lot of political interference by ruling central and state governments and the dominance of big families, corporate families in media has been noticed. Under the "economic context", the report, described Indian media as a "colossus with a feet of clay", points out that "media outlets largely depend on advertising contracts with local and regional Governments" and at the national level, the central government has seen that it can exploit this to impose its own narrative, and is now spending more than Rs 130 billion a year on advertisements in the print and online media alone. Revisiting the recent incidents of attacks on journalists while they were reporting from the field, we find that the situation is indeed dangerous.

The incidents which come to mind are putting a journalist in jail for highlighting the grave irregularities in distribution of mid-day meal in Uttar Pradesh, imprisoning a journalist from Kerala who went to cover the incident of burning of a rape victim in Uttar Pradesh, booking a journalist on flimsy grounds for reporting the farmer's movement in Delhi, detaining by the police of two women reporters in Tripura for tweeting and reporting from the scene of violence in the state. In most of the cases, the judiciary came to the rescue of the victimised journalists and that explains the better performance of the "legal framework" in the Reporters Without Borders estimation index. The Governments should realize that India is noticed at international forums because of its image as a vibrant democracy and we owe this status to our free press.

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

Food politics hits subsidy reforms

The Government should look at ways for pruning subsidy. Indeed, there is an unprecedented scope for it



UTTAM GUPTA

The Union Government has extended the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for a further period of six months till September 30, 2022. Having already spent over ₹260,000 crore during the first five phases (the scheme has been in operation since April 2020, the fifth phase ended on March 31, 2022), it will need another ₹80,000 crore during April - September, 2022.

Is the extension justified?

In March 2020, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the Scheme to mitigate the hardship suffered by people due to a major disruption in economic activity and resultant loss of jobs and income in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Under it, the Government would give five kg of rice or wheat per person per month for "free" to around 800 million people through the Public Distribution System (PDS) initially for a period of three months till June 30, 2020. It would also give for "free" one kg of pulses per household.

This was in addition to five kg of cereals per person per month that 800 million beneficiaries are already getting at a heavily-subsidised price of ₹3 per kg rice, Rs 2 per kg wheat and ₹1 per kg cereals through PDS under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

On June 30, 2020, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi announced extension of the scheme for five months till November 30, 2020 with a slight change to provide one kg grams (instead of leaving the choice of pulse to the beneficiary) free to each family per month. In a third round, it was extended for four months till March 31, 2021. During 2021-22, the Scheme got two more extensions of six months each ending March 31, 2022.

During 2020-21, economic activity had remained disrupted almost throughout the year (during the first two quarters, even as growth in gross domestic product or GDP was substantially 'negative' at 24.4 percent and 7.4 percent respectively, in the third/fourth quarters, the revival was marginal at 0.5 percent/1.6 percent) with GDP registering a 'negative' growth of 6.6 percent. As a result, with large-scale drying up of income sources, there was a valid justification for mitigation help that PMGKAY provided as basic food (albeit free).

During the first two quarters of 2021-22, even as the country was afflicted by a second devastating Covid wave leading to hospitalization and deaths on a much larger scale (especially during the April - June 2021), this didn't come in the way of economic revival. In fact, GDP growth rates for the first and second quarters of 2021-22 were 20.3 percent and 8.5 percent respectively. The pace of recovery continued during the third and fourth quarters also despite the third wave. The year ended up with GDP growth of 8.9 percent.

Unambiguously, 2021-22 was an year of economic resurrection and opening up of work and income earning opportunities. Therefore, a case for continuing the mitigation assistance during the year was much weaker more so, during the second half.

During 2022-23, the economy has entered a phase of consolidation. Though, there are headwind from a turbulent geo-political situation especially Ukraine crisis which may lead to some moderation in growth from the high of 8.9 percent in the previous year, it is unlikely that this would trigger any significant job/income loss. Hence, extension of the Scheme during the current year is untenable.

Supply of free food comes at a heavy cost to the exchequer. The expenses under the Scheme arrived at by multiplying the per unit cost of purchase from the farmers namely minimum support price (MSP) plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) by the quantity of food given to the beneficiaries - is estimated at ₹340,000 crore for all the six phases put together.

By dispensing with the fifth and sixth phase, the Government could have saved ₹150,000 crore.

While, subsidy given under PMGKAY is one time (triggered by extraordinary event such as Covid), a bigger worry is mammoth subsidy incurred by the Centre under NFSA on giving 5 kg of cereals per month to 800 million persons @ ₹2/3/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals which is more or less close to free. And, this subsidy [(MSP + HDC - 2/3/1) x quantity] is recurring.

The expenditure on food subsidy (including due to PMGKAY) was ₹219,000 crore during 2019-20, ₹525,000 crore during 2020-21 and ₹286,000 crore during 2021-22 - a cumulative spend of ₹10,30,000 crore in these three years. Excluding the expenses related to PMGKAY of ₹260,000 crore during this period, the spend on subsidy under NFSA was still huge at ₹770,000 crore.

Meanwhile, the budget allocation for 2022-23 is ₹207,000 crore. This takes the aggregate for four years (2019-20 to 2022-23) close to ₹10,00,000 crore or around ₹250,000 crore annually. Merely relaxing fiscal deficit (FD) target year-after-year to support the ballooning expenses on food subsidy - besides escalating fertilizer subsidy (this is what the FM has done all these years) is not the way to go as this pushes the debt to unsustainable level.

The Government should look at ways for pruning subsidy. Indeed, there is unprecedented scope for it.

The present coverage is 820 million or nearly 2/3rds of the population: Fundamentally, subsidized food is meant for the poor and their number is much less. Even as per the Shanta Kumar committee (2015) recommendation, the number of people eligible for subsidized food should be cut from 67 percent to 40 percent. Denying subsidy to 27 percent or around 380 million will result in saving of about ₹64,000 crore annually (28x5x380x12). This is based on a beneficiary taking all of his/her 5 kg monthly quota as wheat and subsidy @ ₹28 per kg [(MSP: 20 + HDC: 10) - issue price: 2].

The committee also recommended that, sans poorest of the poor under 'Antyodaya Anna Yojana' (AAY), others should pay 50 percent of the MSP. Their number works out to 320 million (820 million - 380 million - 120 million being the number under AAY). They will be charged ₹10 per kg of wheat (50 percent of its MSP), implying saving of ₹8 per kg. Acting on this recommendation would yield annual saving of about ₹15,000 crore (8x5x320x12).

The current issue price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg wheat/rice/coarse cereals was specified in the NFSA legislation. The law enacted in 2013 had frozen these rates for three years. Since, 2016 thus, there is no legal bar on increasing the price. An increase in price by ₹1 per kg can yield savings of ₹5000 crore per annum.

There is also scope for substantial savings by curbing pilferage. But that won't be possible under the existing dispensation of giving food at subsidized price. Pilferage can be eliminated if only subsidy is credited to the account of the beneficiary through direct benefit transfer or DBT mode.

But our political brass doesn't have the gumption to make even a small move on reforming the extant regime. This is because in every election, victory prospects have got intertwined with making 'basic needs' available at subsidized price or even free to a predominant share of the population.

THERE IS SCOPE FOR SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS BY CURBING PILFERAGE. BUT THAT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE UNDER THE EXISTING DISPENSATION OF GIVING FOOD AT SUBSIDISED PRICE. PILFERAGE CAN BE ELIMINATED IF ONLY SUBSIDY IS CREDITED TO THE BENEFICIARY THROUGH THE DBT MODE

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

India's top cricket body, the BCCI, is not yet taxed

The issue of taxing the income of BCCI needs to be re-examined even though it is registered as a charitable body



SHSHANK SAURAV

Cricket fever has gripped the nation and BCCI has decided to renew the media rights of Indian Premier League (IPL) in June 2022. Floor price for the auction has been kept at ₹32,890 crore for a five-year period of 2023 to 2027 and the auction is expected to fetch more than ₹35,000 crore. In the previous year, BCCI added two new franchises in IPL for a whopping sum of ₹12,715 crore. Anyway, BCCI is world's richest cricket association and as per media reports, its net worth at March 2021 was more than ₹18,000 crore.

IPL has taken the commercialization of cricket to a new height and revenue authorities also noted this phenomenon. BCCI is registered as a charitable organization and its income is exempt from tax, subject to fulfilment of conditions imposed under the Income Tax Act, 1961. Issue of taxing the income of BCCI was taken up by the tax department and it sought to revoke the exemption granted to BCCI. This was challenged before the Mumbai bench of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) and the November 2021 order [ITA No. 3301/Mum/2019] came in favour of BCCI. However, even the ITAT carved out in its order that the pertinent issue examined by the tribunal is related only to granting the registration to BCCI and it has not examined the issue of taxability of IPL income.

Various state cricket boards have got tax reliefs on their income but this doesn't settle the matter for BCCI. In fact, the Gujarat High Court in the matter of Director of Income Tax (E Vs Gujarat Cricket Association [Tax Appeal No. 268 of 2012 which was decided on 27 September 2019] had categorically said that 'undoubtedly the activities of BCCI are commercial in nature'. Para 163 of the said order grants relief to Gujarat Cricket Association on the ground that activities of BCCI (which are of commercial in nature) are different from the assessee and the assessee has merely received donation from BCCI. In a similar issue related to Chandigarh Lawn Tennis Association Vs ITO (Exemptions), the Chandigarh ITAT bench [ITA No. 1382/CHD/2016] held that income from organizing Davis Cup matches is liable to tax u/s 2(15) of the Income Tax Act, 1961. There are various other judgements also where it has been affirmed that if any organization which is engaged in advancement of any other object of general public utility, then it must pass the test prescribed u/s 2(15) of the Act otherwise section 13(8) of the Act will become applicable and exemption will be given on a Y-o-Y basis. Such originations can continue to hold their registration but impact of section 2(15) has to be considered while computing their tax-exempt income.

The Football Association of Britain is also registered as a non-profit corporation but in the previous FY it has paid around 20 million GBP as tax and a further provision of 4.8 million GBP is made towards deferred tax (a future tax liability). IPL also runs on similar model of British football clubs and therefore an inference can be drawn.

There was a time when Supreme Court had to intervene into the affairs of the BCCI and former C&AG Vindoo Rai was appointed as interim president on the direction of the court. The apex court approved the memorandum of association and rules & regulations of BCCI in August 2018 and it was expected that the revised framework will provide much needed transparency. Chapter 8 of the Supreme Court approved rules & regulations is dedicated to transparency and it mandates BCCI to upload details of financial outlay etc. on its website. Annual accounts, financial and compliance reports etc. are also to be updated on the official website (www.bcci.tv) but surprisingly, annual reports after FY 2016-17 are not available. Elaborate rules have been made to avoid the conflict of interest in the conduct of BCCI and all such instances are also to be disclosed on the website. Its high time when the apex court asks the cricketing body to submit a compliance status report on all the recommendations. In fact, rules and regulations are by-laws of the entity and they must be complied in letter and spirit.

A rich sporting body like BCCI which is managed by politicians, (both from UPA and NDA) and optics are very much important in politics. A lavish manner of conducting the tournaments and resisting the tax payment, conducting the affairs in an opaque manner, etc., are not giving a good perception about the apex cricketing body.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

BECAUSE OF THE BJP'S SUPPORT, INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY CONTINUED AT THE (MUNDKA BLAZE) SITE.
— AAP MCD INCHARGE DURGESH PATHAK



IT'S A BASELESS AND BLATANT LIE. THE AAP IS DOING POLITICS OVER A HUMAN TRAGEDY.
— DELHI BJP SPOKESPERSON PRAVEEN SHANKAR KAPOOR

Lanka's new Govt gets Opp support with riders

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's main Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) on Monday said it would offer conditional support to the interim all-party government headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to help tackle the country's crippling economic and political crisis.

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

"As a responsible political party, Samagi Jana Balawegaya believes saving the country from the current crisis is of the utmost importance," the SJB said in a statement.

"Accordingly, without taking any portfolio and on behalf of the betterment of the country, SJB in its parliamentary group discussion today decided to fully support the current government in its efforts on economic recovery," it said.

But the support came with certain riders.

"If the government groups try to accommodate defections



from SJB or connect SJB parliamentarians for activities that are against the SJB principles, the parliamentary group has decided to unconditionally withdraw this support," it added.

The SJB had earlier declined to support Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister of the interim all-party government, saying the 73-year-old had no mandate since he was a solo representative of his party in the 225-member Parliament.

Following his appointment last week, Wickremesinghe wrote to SJB leader Sajith Premadasa urging for bipartisanship.

"We all know very well that Sri Lanka is facing a colossal economic, social, and political crisis. It is irrefutable that we must all unite to end this crisis that's intensifying every day and to establish a stable economy. All of us have a historic responsibility to secure the future of the next generation, given that our actions in this moment will decide the path of this country," Wickremesinghe wrote.

SJB's conditional support notwithstanding, Wickremesinghe on Monday said that the 21st Amendment to the Constitution to curb the presidential powers will be dis-

cussed with the Attorney General's Department so that it can be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

The 21st Amendment is expected to annul the 20A which gave unfettered powers to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa after abolishing the 19th Amendment which had made Parliament powerful over the president.

"21st Amendment: This will be taken up for discussion with the Attorney General's Department tomorrow (Monday) and then be presented to Cabinet for approval," Wickremesinghe tweeted.

Newly-appointed PM says his aim is to save crisis-hit Lanka

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's newly-appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Monday that his aim is to save the crisis-hit country, and not a person, family or group, in an apparent reference to the Rajapaksa family and its former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa.

In his first televised address to the nation after becoming the prime minister last week, the 73-year-old United National Party (UNP) leader also said that US dollars will be sourced from open markets to pay for petrol, crude, furnace oil shipments currently in Sri Lankan waters.

Wickremesinghe 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.

"My aim is to save the country," Prime Minister Wickremesinghe said. "I am not here to save a person, family or group." He said a relief budget will be introduced to replace the 2022 Development Budget.

The powerful Rajapaksa family tightened their grip on power after their massive victory in the general elections in August 2020, which allowed them to amend the Constitution to restore presidential powers and install close family members in key positions.

In his 2019 presidential bid, Gotabaya Rajapaksa won a convincing mandate for a presidency during which he sought

6 months in, Biden's infrastructure plan has 4,300 projects

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Six months after the signing of President Joe Biden's USD 1 trillion infrastructure package, the government said Monday there are 4,300 projects underway with more than USD 110 billion in funding announced — milestones the administration is publicly heralding as midterm politics intensify.

White House senior adviser Mitch Landrieu, the former mayor of New Orleans, said the roads, bridges and other projects are laying "a foundation for tremendous growth into the future."

Landrieu said Biden and members of his administration have made more than 125 trips to highlight the bipartisan investments in infrastructure. He declined to predict how much the storytelling will resonate with voters as construction starts.

"I think that if Americans step back, we will all have to admit that for the last 50 years we've had the need to do this and we haven't found the will or the way to get it done," Landrieu told reporters. He added that this is a "wonderful



down payment" on infrastructure needs in the country that total roughly USD 7 trillion.

The administration made a strategic calculation that delivering results would help Democrats retain control of the House and the Senate in this year's elections. Infrastructure was a rare source of bipartisan unity as Biden struck a deal that attracted several Republican senators. The law contains money to expand internet access and replace lead water pipes and for rail and public transit projects and investments to address climate change.

US deaths from Covid hit 1 mn

AP ■ NEW YORK, MAY

The US death toll from COVID-19 hit 1 million on Monday, a once-unimaginable figure that only hints at the multitudes of loved ones and friends staggered by grief and frustration.

The confirmed number of dead is equivalent to a 9/11 attack every day for 336 days. It is roughly equal to how many Americans died in the Civil War and World War II combined. It's as if Boston and Pittsburgh were wiped out.

"It is hard to imagine a million people plucked from this earth," said Jennifer Nuzzo, who leads a new pandemic center at the Brown University School of Public Health in Providence, Rhode Island.

"It's still happening and we are letting it happen." Some of those left behind say they cannot return to normal. They replay their loved ones' voicemail messages. Or watch old videos to see them dance. When other people say they are done with the virus, they bristle with anger or ache in silence. "Normal! I hate that word," said Julie Wallace, 55, of Elyria, Ohio, who lost her husband to COVID-19 in 2020.

"All of us never get to go back to normal." Three out of every four deaths were people 65 and older. More men died than women. White people made up most of the deaths overall.

But Black, Hispanic and Native American people have been roughly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as their white counterparts.

Most deaths happened in urban areas, but rural places — where opposition to masks and vaccinations tends to run high — paid a heavy price at times.

The death toll less than 2 1/2 years into the outbreak is based on death certificate data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.



But the real number of lives lost to COVID-19, either directly or indirectly, as a result of the disruption of the health care system in the world's richest country, is believed to be far higher.

The milestone comes more than three months after the US reached 900,000 dead. The pace has slowed since a harrowing winter surge fueled by the omicron variant. The US is averaging about 300 COVID-19 deaths per day, compared with a peak of about 3,400 a day in January 2021.

The largest bell at Washington National Cathedral in the nation's capital tolled 1,000 times a week ago, once for every 1,000 deaths. President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered flags lowered to half-staff and called each life "an irreplaceable loss."

"As a nation, we must not grow numb to such sorrow," he said in a statement. "To heal, we must remember."

More than half the deaths occurred since vaccines became available in December of 2020. Two-thirds of Americans are fully vaccinated, and nearly half of them have had at least one booster dose. But demand for the vaccine has

plummeted, and the campaign to put shots in arms has been plagued by misinformation, distrust and political polarization.

Unvaccinated people have a 10 times greater risk of dying of COVID-19 than the fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

"To me, that is what is just so particularly heartbreaking," Nuzzo said. Vaccines are safe and greatly reduce the likelihood of severe illness, she said. They "largely take the possibility of death off the table."

Angelina Proia, 36, of New York, lost her father to COVID-19 in April 2020. She runs a support group for grieving families on Facebook and has seen it divided over vaccinations. She has booed people from the group for spreading misinformation.

"I don't want to hear conspiracy theories. I don't want to hear anti-science," said Proia, who wishes her father could have been vaccinated.

Sara Atkins, 42, of Wynnwood, Pennsylvania, channels her grief into fighting for global vaccination and better access to health care to honour her father, Andy Rotman-Zaid, who died of COVID-19 in December 2020.

"My father gave me marching orders to end it and make sure it doesn't happen again," Atkins said of the pandemic. "He told me, Politicize the hell out of my death if I die of this."

Julie Wallace and her husband, Lewis Dunlap, had cellphone numbers one digit apart. She continues paying to keep his number. She calls it just to hear his voice.

"It's just so important to hear that sometimes," she said. "It gives you a little bit of reassurance while also tearing your heart out."

Some have offered solace in poetry. In Philadelphia, poet and social worker Trapeta Mayson, created a 24-hour poetry hotline called Healing Verse. Traffic to the Academy of American Poets' poets.Org website rose during the pandemic.

Kim blasts pandemic response as North Korean outbreak surges

AP ■ SEOUL/ SOUTH KOREA

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un criticised officials over slow medicine deliveries and mobilised the military to respond to a surge in suspected Covid-19 infections, as his nation struggled to contain a fever that has reportedly killed dozens and sickened nearly a million others in a span of three days.

North Korean health authorities said Monday that eight more people died and an additional 392,920 were newly found to have feverish symptoms. That brings the death toll to 50 and illnesses to more than 1.2 million, respectively. It's a sharp jump from six dead and 350,000 sick reported last Friday, a day after the North said that it found that an unspecified number of people in capital Pyongyang tested positive for the omicron variant.

Kim has acknowledged that the fast-spreading fever, highly likely driven by COVID-19, is causing "great upheaval" in the country, and outside experts say the true scale of the outbreak is likely much bigger than what's described in the state-controlled media.

Some suspect that North Korea has understated its fatalities or illnesses to shield Kim's leadership from criticism. The



North likely lacks test kits and other tools to detect virus carriers with no or mild symptoms, which means that several million might already have been infected.

"When people die, North Korean authorities will say they've died of overwork or from natural deaths, not because of COVID-19," said Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea. Nam said the North is likely understating the death toll to protect "the dignity of its supreme leader."

While neighboring South Korea and China have offered to send medical supplies and other help, experts say it's too

late to inoculate the North's 26 million people, and that the only realistic outside help would be offering limited supplies of vaccines to reduce deaths among high-risk groups, including the elderly and people with preexisting conditions.

It's also unclear whether and how soon Kim would accept outside offers of aid because he has previously rallied for unity at home to guard against the pandemic without resorting to foreign help.

State media didn't specify how many of the fever cases were confirmed as COVID-19. Among the 50 fatalities, North Korea officially identified only

one as a COVID-19 case so far.

North Korea is believed to be mostly relying on isolating people with symptoms at shelters. Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute said the North's limited number of test kits are likely mainly reserved for the ruling elite.

Failing to slow the virus could have dire consequences for North Korea, considering its broken health care system and that its people are believed to be unvaccinated. There's also malnourishment and chronic poverty.

The North imposed what it described as maximum preventive measures that restricted travel between cities and counties, and Kim ordered public health officials, teachers and others to identify people with fevers so they could be quarantined. As of Sunday, more than 564,860 people were in quarantine, North Korea's state media reported.

The explosive growth in fever cases may underscore how fast omicron could travel across an unvaccinated population without access to proper health tools, and fatalities will surely jump in coming weeks considering time lags between infections and deaths, said Jung Jae-hun, a professor of preventive medicine at South Korea's Gachon University.

Catholic leader blasts Israeli conduct at journalist funeral

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The top Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land on Monday condemned the police beating of mourners carrying the casket of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, accusing the authorities of violating human rights and disrespecting the Catholic Church.

Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa told reporters at St. Joseph Hospital in Jerusalem that Friday's incident, broadcast around the world, was a "disproportionate use of force" to the Palestinian flag-waving crowd of thousands proceeding from the hospital to a nearby Catholic church in Jerusalem's Old City.

The attack drew worldwide condemnation and added to the shock and outrage of Abu Akleh's killing as she covered a shootout in the occupied West Bank.

The police attack, Pizzaballa told reporters, "is a severe violation of international norms and regulations, including the fundamental human right of freedom of religion, which must be observed also in a public space." He spoke as the leaders and clergy of other Christian churches sat nearby.

There was no immediate Israeli response. Israel and the Palestinians are locked in a war of narratives over Abu Akleh's killing. The reporter, a Palestinian-American, a Catholic and a 25-year veteran of the satellite channel, was shot Wednesday while covering an Israeli military raid in the Jenin refugee camp. She was wearing a blue vest clearly marked "Press." Abu Akleh was a household name across the Arab world, known for documenting the hardship of Palestinian life under Israeli rule.

Palestinian officials and witnesses, including journalists who were with her, say she was killed by army fire. The military, after initially saying Palestinian gunmen might have been



responsible, later backtracked and now says it's not clear who fired the deadly bullet.

The funeral violence caused another international uproar, with the United States and the United Nations among Israel's critics.

Israeli police have claimed that they agreed with funeral arrangements ahead of time with Abu Akleh's family, and that a crowd of mourners violated that agreement by marching with the coffin, instead of driving with it, and shouting nationalistic slogans.

But Abu Akleh's brother, Anton, disputed those claims. He said Monday that the family had given the funeral arrangements to Israeli police, and said the police did not want slogans or Palestinian flags. But he said "this is something we cannot control."

Anton, who was one of the pallbearers, said police also wanted to know the funeral route, and there was no other agreement. "We wanted to put the coffin in the car," he said. "We were going to the car when they attacked us."

Israeli police launched an investigation into the conduct of the officers who attacked the mourners, causing the pallbearers to nearly drop the casket.

Sheriff: 2 dead, 3 hospitalised in Houston market shooting

AP ■ HOUSTON

Two people were killed and three more were taken to a hospital with injuries after a shooting Sunday at a bustling Houston flea market, authorities said.

The shooting at the open-air market arose from an "altercation" that involved at least two guns and all five of the people, according to Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez. He said no "innocent bystanders" were injured.



Investigators believe one of the people hospitalised was among those who opened fire and two more suspected shooters were detained at the scene, a sheriff's deputy told KTRK-TV.

Thousands of people were shopping at the market 22 kilometers north of Houston's downtown when the shooting began around 1 pm Sunday, Gonzalez said on Twitter.

The sheriff said multiple shots were fired and that deputies recovered two pis-

tols from the scene.

Authorities did not immediately provide further information about what led to the shooting but said all the people involved were men in their 20s who appeared to know each other.

The shooting in Houston came the day after a white 18-year-old shot and killed 10 people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket in what officials described as a massacre aimed at killing as many Black people as possible.

Terrified with frequent attacks, Chinese nationals teaching Mandarin in Pakistan called back

PTI ■ KARACHI

Chinese nationals teaching Mandarin in different parts of Pakistan have left for home after being called back by Beijing following the recent deadly attacks targeting them, an official of the Karachi University said on Monday.

Their departure came weeks after a burqa-clad Baloch woman suicide bomber struck a van inside Pakistan's prestigious University of Karachi, killing three Chinese teachers, including the head of the department, and their local driver, in the latest targeted attack against Chinese citizens in the country's financial capital. The banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) linked Majeed Brigade claimed responsibility for the

attack on the teachers that took place on April 26 near China-built Confucius Institute - a non-profit institute teaching Chinese language to local pupils - in the university. An official at the University of Karachi said that the Chinese teachers who were teaching at the Confucius Institute on the campus left for home on Sunday. "There were other Chinese teachers working at different campuses in the country and they left yesterday," he said.

Director of the Confucius Institute at the Karachi University, Dr Nasir Uddin, said that the departure of the Chinese teachers was a big setback for the students learning Mandarin.

"We have around 500 students enrolled at the institute and we are now considering

having online classes for them so that their term is completed," he said. He said that the teachers at the different Confucius Institutes in the country have been called back by their government.

Nasir Uddin said that the Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational set-up which aims to teach Mandarin, deepen international understanding of the language, and Chinese culture, and promote people-to-people exchanges between China and Pakistan.

The BLA suicide bomb attack on April 26 had killed the head of the institute, Huang Guiping, and two other Chinese teachers, Chen Sai and Ding Mupeng, while their local driver Khalid Nawaz also died in the blast.

British national scales Mt Everest for 16th time, becomes first non Nepalese to do so: Report

PIT ■ KATHMANDU

Kenton Cool, a 48-year-old British national, has scaled the world's highest peak Mount Everest for the 16th time, becoming the first non-Nepalese to do so, a media report said on Monday.

Cool, who hails from Gloucestershire, a county in South West England, reached the top of Mount Everest for the 16th time early on Sunday morning, The Guardian reported, citing the instagram page of Cool. Cool's initial push for the summit was delayed due to high winds, which forced his team to wait below the peak.

Many Nepali guides who help tourists to climb the mountain have completed substantially more ascents of Everest.

The current record-holder is Kami Rita, a Sherpa who last week climbed the mountain for the 26th time at the age of 52.

In an Instagram post, Cool paid tribute to the local guides, who he said had "worked super hard on our behalf", calling them the "superheroes of the mountain", the report said.

Cool has previously climbed Everest with other mountaineers. Cool values his achievement as he was told he would never walk again unaided after he shattered both heel bones in a rock-climbing accident in 1996, the report said.

May is the most popular time to climb the world's highest peak, and the Nepali government has issued 316 permits to climb Everest during the current peak season.

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: left;"> <div> ICICI Bank Whereas The undersigned hereby the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited. </div> </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> Symbolic Possession Notice Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd. 4/10, Mythree Tower, Bommanhalli Hosur Main Road Bangalore- 560068 </div> </div>				
Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Arul Samuel & S Mery/ Flat No.501, 5th Floor, Heights 8, Temple Green-Heights, Phase II, Old No.180 New No.135 Mathur Village Sripurumpudur Tk S No. 27/1 Pt Kancheepuram-602105 LBCHE00002054499 & LBCHE00002055255.	"A" Schedule All that piece and parcel of land situate at Old No.180, New No.135, Mathur Village, Sripurumpudur Taluk, kancheepuram District comprised in S.Nos. and extent as detailed below, or thereabouts and bounded on the : Item Nos. Survey Nos. Extent Cents SQ.Ft. North Survey Nos. South Survey Nos. East Survey Nos. West Survey Nos. 1. 30/2 Part 14.25 6,207.30 30/2 Part 30/3 part 30/5 Part 32/7 part 2 30/5 Part 1.75 762.30 30/5 Part 30/3 Part 30/6 Part 30/2 Part 30/3 19.00 8,276.40 33/2 33/2 34/1 Part 33/3 Part 33/5 4 33/5 Part 5.25 2,286.90 33/3 Part 33/7 part 33/4 part & 33/7 33/5 Part 5 34/1 Part 52.00 22.65 10 32/7 Part 34/1 Part 35/2 Part 33/2 part 33/4 & 33/7 Part 6 34/2 Part 19.00 8,276.40 34/2 Part 34/2 part & 34/5 34/2 part 7 34/3 Part 6.00 2,613.60 34/3 part 34/4 part 93/1A Part 34/3 Part 8 35/2 Part 12.50 5,445.00 35/2 Part 35/2 part 35/3 Part 34/1 Part 34/2 Part 3 & 35/2 Part 9 93/1B 33.00 14,374.80 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 93/1C 93/1A 10 35/3 Part 57.50 25,047.00 35/3 Part 93/1A Part 93/1B & 93/1C 35/3 Part 35/2 Part 11 93/1A Part 30.50 13,285.80 35/1 Part & 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 93/1B Part 34/3 Part 34/4 & 34/5 part 12 93/1C 30.00 13,068.00 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 92/1 & 92/2 93/1B 13 33/2 Part 11.00 4,791.60 33/2 Part 33/4 part 34/1 part 33/3 part 14 137/4 Part 11.25 4,900.50 137/2 part 137/5 Part 137/6 Part 137/4 Part 15 137/5 Part 10.50 4,573.80 137/4 Part 132/1 Part 137/6 Part 137/5 Part 16 32/7 Part 12.50 5,445.00 32/7 Part 34/1 part 35/2 Part 32/7 Part 17 33/7 Part 8.00 3,484.80 33/4 & 33/5 Part 33/7 Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part & 33/7 part 18 34/4 18.00 7,840.80 34/3 34/5 93/1A Part 34/1 part & 34/2 Part Wester 19 34/5 18.00 7,840.80 34/3 34/4 93/1A Part & 93/2 Part 34/2 Part 20 92/2 Part 6.25 2,722.50 92/1 Part 94/1 part 92/2 Part 93/1C part 21 93/2 59.00 25,700.40 93/1A 93/1B & 93/1C 137/4 Part & 137/6 94/1 Part 34/5 Part 137/1 & 137/2 22 137/1 Part 23.25 10,127.70 34/5 Part 137/2 Part 93/2 Part 137/1 Part 23 137/2 Part 17.00 7,405.20 137/1 Part 137/4 Part 93/2 Part 137/2 Part 24 33/1 Part 0.50 217.80 33/1 part 33/2 Part 33/2 Part 33/3 Part 25 33/3 part 6.00 2,613.60 33/3 Part 33/5 Part 33/2 Part & 33/3 Part 33/4 Part 26 92/1 30.00 13,068.00 35/3 part & 92/1 part 92/1 Part & 92/1 Part 92/1 part 35/3 part & 93/1C Part 27 137/6 1500 6,534.00 93/2 part 133 part 94/1 part & 136 137/4, 137/5 & 132/1 28 94/1 Part 64.75 28,205.10 92/2 Part & 94/1 part 94/1 Part 94/1 Part 93/2 & 137/4 Part Total 591.75 257,766.30 Situated within the Registration District of chengalpet & Sub Registration District Sunguvarchathiram. :B" SCHEDULE 293.5 Sq.ft., Undivided share and interest in all that piece and parcel of land more particularly described in "A" Schedule above written. Date of Symbolic Possession 11th May 2022.	02.07.2021 Rs. 25,80,556/-	Chennai

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : May 11, 2022
Place: Delhi NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

Sensex jumps nearly 274 points in early trade, Nifty climbs to 15,873



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Sensex jumped nearly 274 points in early trade on

Monday, tracking significant gains in US markets and buying in index majors Reliance Industries and HDFC. The 30-

share BSE benchmark was trading 273.74 points higher at 53,067.36 in early deals. The broader NSE Nifty gained 91.1 points to 15,873.25. Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel, Titan, Maruti, Bajaj Finance, M&M, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries and HDFC were the biggest gainers in early trade.

In contrast, UltraTech Cement, Dr Reddy's, Nestle and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards.

Markets in Asia were trading on a mixed note, with Hong Kong, Seoul and Shanghai quoting marginally lower, while Tokyo traded higher.

Stock exchanges in the US had ended with smart gains on

Friday. "Cautious trend could prevail as the street will anxiously await the WPI inflation numbers slated to trickle in on Tuesday," said Prashanth Tapse, Vice President (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.57 per cent to USD 109.80 per barrel. In the previous trade on Friday, the BSE benchmark declined 136.69 points or 0.26 per cent to end at 52,793.62. The NSE Nifty dipped 25.85 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 15,782.15.

Continuing their selling spree, foreign institutional investors offloaded shares worth Rs 3,780.08 crore on Friday, according to stock exchange data.

Adani offers to acquire 26% of Ambuja Cements, ACC from open market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after announcing USD 10.5 billion deal to acquire Holcim's India business, the Adani family has made an open offer to acquire a 26 per cent stake each in its two listed companies Ambuja Cements and ACC Ltd from public shareholders.

The Asia's richest man Gautam Adani's group on Monday through its Mauritius-based subsidiary Endeavour Trade and Investment has made an open offer at Rs 385 per share for Ambuja Cements Ltd and Rs 2,300 per share for ACC Ltd.

For Ambuja Cements, Adani group has made an open offer to its public shareholders to acquire up to 51.63 crore equity shares, representing 26

per cent of the expanded share capital, aggregating to a total consideration of Rs 19,879.57 crore. While for ACC Ltd, Adani group has offered to acquire up to 4.89 crore shares held by public shareholders, representing 26 per cent of the expanded share capital, aggregating to a total consideration of Rs 11,259.97 crore.

This would be "subject to the receipt of the Required Statutory Approval," it said.

The public announcement was jointly issued by ICICI Securities and Deutsche Equities India, the joint managers to the open offer at bourses. This open offer has been triggered following the execution of the share purchase agreement between the Adani group and Holcim to acquire controlling stake in

the latter's businesses in India "for an aggregate consideration of USD equivalent to Rs 50,181.04 crore". Endeavour Trade and Investment is promoted by Acropolis Trade and Investment Ltd.

"The ultimate beneficial ownership of Acropolis Trade and Investment Ltd is held by certain members of the Adani family," the notice said.

On Sunday, Adani group announced a deal to acquire a controlling stake in Holcim Ltd's businesses in India for USD 10.5 billion (Rs 81,300 crore approximately), marking the ports-to-energy conglomerate's entry into the cement sector. The Adani Group will acquire 63.1 per cent of Ambuja Cements Ltd along with related assets. Ambuja's local subsidiaries include ACC



Ltd, which is also publicly traded. "The Adani Family, through an offshore special purpose vehicle, announced that it had entered into definitive agreements for the acquisition of Switzerland-based Holcim Ltd's entire stake in two of India's leading cement companies - Ambuja Cements Ltd and ACC Ltd," the group said in a statement. Holcim, through its subsidiaries, holds 63.19 per cent in Ambuja Cements and 54.53 per cent in ACC (of which 50.05 per cent is held through Ambuja Cements).

Inflation increase due to war impact; RBI may hike rates by 75 bps by August: SBI economists

PTI ■ MUMBAI

At least 59 per cent of the accelerated inflation is attributable to the impact of the geopolitical conflict triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, economists at SBI said on Monday.

In the face of the heightened inflation situation – the headline number touched nearly 7.8 per cent for April, and the RBI is set to hike rates by another 0.75 per cent to get the repo rate back to the pre-pandemic level of 5.15 per cent, they added.

The economists said they did a study of the Russian invasion's impact on inflation, which revealed that 59 per cent of the jump in prices is due to geopolitical events.

Using February as the base case, the study revealed that because of war alone, food and beverages, fuel, light and transport contributed 52 per cent of the increase, while another 7 per cent impact came from the jump in input prices for the FMCG sector.

Stating that the inflation is unlikely to correct anytime soon, the note said there is a difference between rural and urban areas when it comes to price rises. The former are impacted more by higher food price pressures, while the latter are showing more impact because of the fuel price hikes.

SBI hikes lending rate by 0.1 per cent, EMLs to go up

New Delhi: The country's largest lender State Bank of India has raised its marginal cost of funds based lending rate by 10 basis points or 0.1 per cent across all tenures, a move that will lead to an increase in EMLs for borrowers. This is the second hike in a month raising the cost by 0.2 per cent with the two consecutive increases. The revision follows an off-cycle rate increase by Reserve Bank earlier this month. (PTI)

Hero MotoCorp expects two-wheeler industry to see double-digit growth in FY2023

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp expects the two-wheeler industry to bounce back in the current fiscal with economic activity picking up and high grain prices augmenting rural incomes.

With macro economic indicators looking positive, the company expects industry to grow in double digits in current financial year. "The macro indicators are really looking good, the GST collection we have all seen is all-time high in April, the e-way bills have picked up, I would say all sectors of economy have opened up," Hero

MotoCorp CFO Niranjan Gupta said in an analyst call.

Grain prices are high, they are augmenting rural income, monsoon forecast is decent, and so on and so forth, and it is clearly evident also that while Covid may not have gone away, everyone has learned now to get on with their livelihoods and hence consumer confidence and spending are bouncing back easily and actually solidly, he noted.

"Already, we are seeing signs in April and we have no reason to believe why two-wheeler industry cannot grow double-digit in FY2023," Gupta stated.

CNG price hiked by ₹2 per kg

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The price of CNG in the national Capital has been hiked by Rs 2 per kg, the 12th increase in rates in just over two months.

CNG in the national Capital territory of Delhi now costs Rs 73.61 per kg, up from Rs 71.61 per kg, according to the information posted on the website of Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) -- the firm which retails CNG and piped cooking gas in the national capital and adjoining cities.

This is the 12th increase in price since March 7. In all, the CNG price has risen by Rs 17.6 per kg during this period. This includes a Rs 7.50 per kg hike in the month of April alone. In the last one year, prices have increased by Rs 30.21 per kg or



60 per cent, according to data compiled by PTI. However, the rates of gas piped to household kitchens, called piped natural gas (PNG), remain unchanged at Rs 45.86 per scm.

City gas distributors have been periodically raising prices since October last year, when domestic as well as international gas prices started to climb as economies the world over recovered from the pandemic-induced slowdown. Prices rose by Rs 8.74 per kg in the last three months of 2021, and from January there was a

steady increase of about 50 paise a kg almost every week. The rates have gone up after the government more than doubled the price of natural gas to USD 6.1 per million British thermal unit from April 1. Natural gas when compressed becomes CNG for use as fuel in automobiles. The same gas is piped to household kitchens and industries for cooking and other purposes.

Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL) has priced Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) at Rs 76 per kg in Mumbai. Prices vary from city to city depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT. The increase in CNG prices follows a Rs 10 per litre hike in petrol and diesel prices in 16 days and a Rs 100 per cylinder increase in the cooking gas LPG rates.

Ban on wheat exports 'anti-farmer' move, say Punjab farmers' unions

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Farmers' unions in Punjab on Monday dubbed the Centre's decision of banning wheat exports as an "anti-farmer" move, saying that the Union government is not letting them reap the gains due to higher prices of their crops in the overseas markets.

They also slammed the Centre for not announcing a bonus of Rs 500 per quintal of wheat, as demanded by them to compensate the drop in the yield on account of shrivelled grains due to intense heat wave in March.

The Union government has banned wheat exports in a bid to check high prices amid concerns over lower wheat output this year.

According to the government, the decision will help control retail prices of wheat and wheat flour, which have risen by an average 14-20 per cent in the last one year, besides meeting the foodgrain requirement of neighbouring and vulnerable countries.

A number of farmers, especially big wheat growers, in Punjab have stored the crop in anticipation of fetching higher returns later, said farmers. "It is an anti-farmer decision," Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan said on Monday. He said the export



ban will hit those farmers who had stored the crop in anticipation of fetching higher returns when the prices would increase in the domestic market.

Bharti Kisan Union (Lakhowal) general secretary Harinder Singh Lakhowal too condemned the central government's decision. "This decision is not in the interest of farmers," said Lakhowal, adding that the government should have continued with the export to take advantage of higher prices in the international market.

Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal on Sunday had slammed the Centre's decision of banning wheat exports, saying that this move will cause a drop in demand for the crop and farmers will be the worst sufferers.

The Punjab government on Sunday ordered continuation of wheat procurement operations at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) at 232 mandis in the state till May 31. The state's food and civil sup-

plies minister Lal Chand Katarachak on Sunday said that the restriction on wheat exports was likely to result in a dip in prices of the food grain in the domestic market.

"As a result, some farmers who had stored the wheat produce in anticipation of fetching higher prices later, might have a rethink now and opt to sell the wheat. Therefore, it was important that the facility of government purchase at MSP continues to be available to them in order to avoid distress sale," Katarachak had said.

Wheat production in Punjab is expected to drop by around 30 lakh metric tonnes (MT) to 147 MT as against the projection of 177 lakh MT on account of adverse impact on crop yield due to sudden high temperature in the month of March.

Wheat procurement from Punjab is also expected to miss the target of 132 lakh MT due to lower yield. Out of a total arrival of 102.27 lakh MT in grain markets so far, the government procurement agencies have bought 96.17 lakh MT while private traders purchased 6.10 lakh MT, according to official data.

Punjab Roller Flour Millers Association president Naresh Ghai, however, hailed the Centre's move, saying that the ban on exports would help in stabilising wheat prices.

Govt puts Pawan Hans sale on hold over NCLT order against winning consortium member

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has put on hold the sale of Pawan Hans as it is legally examining an NCLT order against Almas Global, which is the biggest shareholder in the winning consortium, an official said on Monday.

Last month, the government selected M/s Star9 Mobility Pvt Ltd, a consortium of M/s Big Charter Private Ltd, M/s Maharaja Aviation Private Ltd and M/s Almas Global Opportunity Fund SPC, as the winning bidder for Pawan Hans.

While Big Charter and Maharaja Aviation own 26 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, in the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) M/s Star9 Mobility Pvt Ltd, Almas Global Opportunity Fund SPC holds 49 per cent.

The official said the letter of award to the winning consortium has not been issued as legal views are being taken. "We will do a legal examination of NCLT order before proceeding further. Letter of Award has not been issued," the official said.

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had last month passed an order reportedly after Almas Global failed to make payments to creditors of a Kolkata-based company



under an approved resolution plan. This is the second strategic disinvestment that has run into rough weather. Earlier, the sale of Central Electronics Ltd (CEL) too was stalled on account of certain allegations against the winning bidder.

The government had in November last year approved the highest price bid of Rs 210 crore by Delhi-based Nandal Finance and Leasing Pvt Ltd for the sale of 100 per cent equity shareholding of the government in CEL - a CPSE under the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR).

"The Letter of Intent (LoI) has not been issued to successful bidder and put on hold pending examination of specific allegation regarding bidder," Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad informed Parliament in February. Pawan Hans is a 51:49 joint venture of government and ONGC.

You don't go after big fish but harass poor farmers': SC to Bank on OTS scheme

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has pulled up the Bank of Maharashtra for challenging an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court directing it to accept One Time Settlement (OTS) proposal of farmers and issue them sanction letters, saying the bank does not go after big fish but is only harassing poor farmers.

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant took note of the High Court order and said that there is nothing wrong with it and will not interfere with it.

"In the facts and circumstances of the present case, we are of the view that the direction of the High Court is eminently just and fair.

Hence, it is not necessary for the Court to exercise its jurisdiction under Article 136 of the Constitution.

The Special Leave Petitions are accordingly dismissed. However, the question of law is kept open to be dealt with in an appropriate case", the bench said in its order passed on May 13.

During the hearing, the bench said, "You don't go after big fish and only harass poor farmers, who have paid 95 per cent of amount.

Crude oil futures gain on spot demand



New Delhi: Crude oil prices on Monday rose by Rs 37 to Rs 8,548 per barrel as participants widened positions on a firm spot demand. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for May delivery traded higher by Rs 37 or 0.43 per cent at Rs 8,548 per barrel in 7,239 lots.

Analysts said the raising of bets by participants kept crude oil prices higher in futures trade. Globally, West Texas Intermediate crude oil was down by 0.83 per cent at USD 109.57 per barrel, while Brent crude traded 1.19 per cent lower at USD 110.22 per barrel in New York. (PTI)

Gold declines ₹46 amid weak global trends

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices dipped by Rs 46 to Rs 49,754 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with global trends, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal finished at Rs 49,800 per 10 gram. Silver, however, gained Rs 213 to Rs 59,452 per kg from Rs 59,239 per kg in the previous trade.

"Spot gold prices for 24 carat gold at Delhi were down by Rs 46 in line with decline in global gold prices," said Tapan Patel, Senior Analyst (Commodities), HDFC Securities. In the international market, gold was trading lower at USD 1,797 per ounce



and silver was marginally lower at USD 20.96 per ounce. "Gold prices traded weak with spot gold prices at COMEX trading 0.77 per cent down at \$1,797 per ounce on Monday. Gold prices traded under pressure on stronger dollar despite of fall in bond yields," he added.



Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM), the flagship CSR initiative of NTPC Ltd in empowering young girls, to realise their dreams has achieved newer heights of success. NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated energy company, has received widespread acclaim for supporting the uplift of girls, with focus on girl child from villages around NTPC projects. Further, it is planning to conduct its GEM initiative in about 35 project locations during this year. GEM programme has empowered girls from across the country and made them aware of basic education, health and self-defence. With this initiative, NTPC aims to help these girls break the glass ceiling and dispel misconception about female foeticide in rural areas. The initiative has created a space for children to showcase their talents and capabilities. As a responsible corporate citizen, NTPC started Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) back in 2018 and contributed to the empowerment of unfortunate girls in vicinity of its project locations

PNS

POWERGRID Infra Investment Trust completes one year of listing

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

India's first Infrastructure Investment Trust by a Maharatna CPSE, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited ("POWERGRID") (NSE: POWERGRID; BSE: 532898), completed one year of listing, on May 14, 2022, with excellent performance.

PGInvIT units have given a capital return of 37% to its unitholders on the Offer Price of ₹100, during the period outperforming the benchmark indices on the bourses. Total returns to unitholders is about 45% including an aggregate distribution of ₹7.50 per unit paid by PGInvIT since listing. PGInvIT came out with its Initial Public Offer in April 2021.

The issue received overwhelming response of the investors and was oversubscribed 4.83 times, despite

being launched in the midst of very difficult pandemic and volatile market conditions.

Pursuant to the approval by the Union Cabinet in September 2020, POWERGRID, through PGInvIT, monetized five of its SPVs that it had acquired under Tariff Based Competitive Bidding mechanism of Govt. of India.

The National Monetisation Pipeline of Govt. of India envisages monetization of about ₹45,200 crore by POWERGRID during FY2022-25. PGInvIT is a public listed InvIT set up under SEBI InvIT Regulations.

IDBI Trusteeship Services Limited is the Trustee, and POWERGRID is its Sponsor and Project Manager. POWERGRID Unchahar Transmission Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of POWERGRID is Investment Manager to PGInvIT.

Mandhana, Harmanpreet, Deepti to captain in Women's T20 Challenge



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian players Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur and Deepti Sharma were on Monday named captains of the three teams for the Women's T20 Challenge to be played in Pune from May 23.

The BCCI announced 16-member squads for each of three teams — Harmanpreet-led Supernovas, Mandhana-led Trailblazers and Deepti-led Velocity.

Trailblazers had won the previous edition held in 2020.

Veteran India cricketers Mithali Raj, Jhulan Goswami and Shikha Pandey, who all played in the previous edition, are the notable absentees in the squads.

A BCCI official said India greets Mithali and Jhulan have been rested. Both were expect-

Deandra Dottin and Hayley Matthews.

South African captain Sune Luus and Wolvaardt will represent Supernovas and Velocity respectively.

The performers in the recently held Senior Women's T20 Trophy have also been rewarded. The tournament's leading run getter K P Navgire and leading wickettaker Aarti Kedar will play for Velocity.

The upcoming edition is expected to be the last one with BCCI planning a full fledged Women's IPL from next year.

SQUADS

Supernovas: Harmanpreet Kaur (captain), Taniya Bhatia, *Alana King, Ayush Soni, Chandu V, *Deandra Dottin, Harleen Deol, Meghna Singh, Monica Patel, Muskan Malik, Pooja Vastrakar, Priya Punia, Rashi Kanojia, *Sophie Ecclestone, *Sune Luus, Mansi Joshi.

Trailblazers: Smriti Mandhana (captain), Poonam Yadav, Arundhati Reddy, *Hayley Matthews, Jemimah Rodrigues, Priyanka Priyadarshini, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Renuka Singh, Richa Ghosh, S. Meghana, Saiqa Ishaque, *Salma Khatun, *Sharmin Akter, *Sophia Brown, Sujata Mallik, S.B.Pokharkar.

Velocity: Deepti Sharma (captain), Sneha Rana, Shafali Verma, *Ayabonga Khaka, K.P. Navgire, *Kathryn Cross, Keerthi James, *Laura Wolvaardt, Maya Sonawane, *Natthakan Chantham, Radha Yadav, Aarti Kedar, Shivali Shinde, Simran Bahadur, Yastika Bhatia, Pranavi Chandra.

DELHI IN TOP 4

Mitchell Marsh, Shardul Thakur shine in DC's 17-run win

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Spinners Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav were inspirational in the middle overs even as Shardul Thakur complemented the duo with a career-best IPL figures as Delhi Capitals inched closer towards play-off qualifications beating Punjab Kings by 17 runs in an IPL match on Monday.

Invited to bat, DC posted 159 for 7 courtesy Mitchell Marsh's 48-ball 63 and then restricted Punjab to 142 for 9. Thakur (4/36), Axar (2/14) and Kuldeep (2/14) shared eight wickets among them while Anrich Nortje got the important wicket of Jonny Bairstow.

It is between overs 6-14 where Delhi won the game as Kuldeep and Axar cumulatively gave away only 28 runs in seven overs with four wickets between them.

With this win, DC jumped a place to fourth with 14 points from 13 matches. Royal Challengers Bangalore (14 from 13 matches) have same points as DC but they were pushed down to fifth spot as they have -0.323 NRR compared +0.255 of Delhi.

Punjab, who remained at seventh spot with 12 points from 13 matches, are virtually out of reckoning for a play-offs berth as they also have a -0.043 net run rate.

Chasing 160 for a win, Punjab suffered a batting collapse after a good start. Jitesh Sharma (44 of 34 balls) and Rahul Chahar (25 not out off 24 balls) made a late fight back with a 41-run stand -- highest in their run chase -- for the eighth wicket but that proved to be too little too late.

Punjab began on a promising note with in-form Jonny Bairstow punishing Khaleel Ahmed and Nortje with fours and sixes to take his side to 27 for no loss at the end of third over.

But from there the collapse began



as five Punjab batsmen gone back to the hut one after the other as they were reduced to for 5 at the end of the eighth

over. Bairstow (28 off 15 balls) fell to Nortje in the fourth over before a struggling Shrdul Thakur took two wickets

► 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.	DC	13	7	6	0	14	0.255
5.	RCB	13	7	6	0	14	-0.323
6.	KKR	13	6	7	0	12	0.160
7.	PBKS	13	6	7	0	12	-0.043
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	1745
6s	896

-- that of Bhanuka Rajapaksa (4) and Shikhar Dhawan (19) -- in three balls in the sixth over to change the complexion of the game.

Punjab were 54 for 3 at the end of powerplay and three balls later Axar Patel claimed his 100th IPL wicket with a special one -- that of Punjab captain Mayank Agarwal's scalp .

Mayank (0), who has been struggling this season, went for a cut to an arm ball but it went through the gap between bat and pad to crash into the middle stump. There was no respite for Punjab as Liam Livingstone was out in the eighth over, stumped by Rishabh Pant for Kuldeep's first wicket. Kuldeep returned for his second over to dismiss Harpreet Bar (1) with him wrong-un beating the batter before going through the gate to crash into the stumps.

It was all over for Punjab by then as they were reduced to 68 for 6 at the halfway mark.

Punjab needed 39 off the final three overs but David Warner pulled off a fine catch at long off to dismiss Jitesh ended the game in favour of DC.

Sunrisers meet MI in must-win game

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Their play-off chances hanging by a thread, Sunrisers Hyderabad will need to snap their five-match losing streak when they take on an already eliminated Mumbai Indians in the IPL here on Tuesday.

It has been a rollercoaster ride for SRH who won five games in a row before losing the next five.

SRH, if they win their two remaining games including the one against MI, will jump to 14 points and then be left hoping that the other results go their way to have an outside chance of making the play-offs.

But a loss against Mumbai at the Wankhede stadium will surely eliminate them, as there are already seven teams now with 12 or more points.

Hyderabad will need to put up a much improved show with the bat. Skipper Williamson is enduring a wretched run in this season and the Kiwi has collected just 208 runs from 12 games at an average of 18.92. He needs to find his mojo.

Head coach Tom Moody



defended the move to open with an out-of-form Williamson and the New Zealander will need to prove his

coach right.

His opening partner Abhishek Sharma, who chipped in with a 43 in the last game,

Mumbai vs Hyderabad
Live from 7:30pm IST
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needs to convert the starts to big scores. But the duo would have their task cut out against a formidable Mumbai attack on a track that helps pacers.

SRH have the necessary fire-power in the middle-order with the likes of Rahul Tripathi, Aiden Markram and swash-buckling Nicholas Pooran, but consistency has been an issue.

Their middle-order crumbled in their last game against Kolkata Knight Riders, which they lost by 54 runs, and hence the three would need to fire in unison.

Equally crucial is the role of Washington Sundar and Shashank Singh as finishers.

The formidable Sunrisers pace attack includes Umrans Malik, who has been a revelation, while the others like Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Marco Jansen, who can trouble Rohit with the delivery that comes in, and yorker specialist T Natarajan have fared well.

The MI batters will need to be wary of Malik, who is

improving after every game and already has 18 wickets.

MI will take confidence from their five-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings, whom they bundled out for 97 and probably look to dent SRH's chances.

But for Mumbai, the form of skipper Rohit Sharma and IPL's costliest buy Ishan Kishan are huge concerns. The duo needs to provide an aggressive start, especially in the absence of Suryakumar Yadav.

Tilak Varma, who has been one of the finds of the season, once again needs to shoulder responsibility in the middle-order, which lacks experience. And it wouldn't be easy for the likes of Daniel Sams, Tim David, Tristan Stubbs and Ramandeep Singh to counter the varied SRH attack.

As far as the MI bowling is concerned, pacer Sams is right on the money and can wreak havoc at the start. The ever-reliable Jasprit Bumrah and Riley Meredith have also played their parts while rookie spinner Kumar Kartikeya Singh has been providing necessary breakthroughs in the middle overs.

Felt that season didn't really start for us till the first win: David



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Explosive Mumbai Indians batter Tim David on Monday said that he felt that their season only started once they won their first game in the IPL after eight straight defeats.

MI are still last among 10 teams but David has contributed in all three wins so far with his lusty hitting at the back-end.

"Kind of felt like the season didn't really start for us till we

MI sign Akash Madhwal as SKY's replacement

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians have roped in Uttarakhand pacer Akash Madhwal as a replacement for batter Suryakumar Yadav, who was ruled out of the IPL owing to a left forearm muscle injury.

Madhwal is a 28-year old medium-pacer, who has played 15 T20s and taken 15



wickets at an average of 26.60. He will join MI at the price of INR 20 Lakh.

got that first win. Since then, we have played some really good cricket," David said on the eve of the team's penultimate league game against Sunrisers Hyderabad to be played at the Wankhede stadium on Tuesday.

"We have won three of our last four games and there has been a good feeling in the team," David added.

On personal front, picking his skipper Rohit Sharma's

brains was helpful.

"Obviously, Rohit's played a lot of cricket, so it is about trying to gain some of his experiences, staying calm, things that work in Indian conditions, and how we want to play as a team together."

"It's been a good experience to share the dressing room with him and hopefully, it can continue," maintained David, who has 106 runs from six IPL games.

Hetmyer returns, likely to be available for CSK game

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rajasthan Royals batter Shimron Hetmyer, who had flown to Guyana for the birth of his first child, has rejoined the squad and is likely to be available for the side's final league match on Friday.

The big-hitting West Indian had flown to Guyana for the birth of his son on May 8, missing the matches against Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants.

"Hetmyer is back and is currently in quarantine," an IPL source said.

The Royals, who sit second on the points table, are on course for a top two finish after they defeated Lucknow Super Giants by 24 runs.

They take on Chennai Super Kings in their final league-stage game on Friday.

The 25-year-old Hetmyer, who was bought by the Royals for ₹8.5 crore in the auction, has been a vital cog for the former champions this season.

He has managed 291 runs from eleven appearances at a fantastic strike rate of 166.29 along with an impressive batting average of 72.75.

Injured Rahane out of IPL, to miss England tour

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A jinkya Rahane, already through a rough phase with the bat, has now suffered a serious grade III hamstring injury during the IPL game against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH). He will have to remain off the field for at least four weeks. The injury is eventually set to rule him out of the India tour of England in June-July. Selectors may go for the Indian team for the tour of England within time of a week. The team is likely to depart for England round about June 16.

Rahane shall leave the bio bubble of Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) today (May 16) evening. Rahane was not seen on the field during SRH's innings, at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune after getting injured in Match 61 of IPL 2022. Rahane scored 133 runs in seven games while opening for KKR. According to reports, Rahane will be reporting at the National Cricket Academy, Bangalore for further regulations. The former India vice-captain may need more than four weeks of rehab.

Rahane, not being there with the team may not be epicenter of the dis-



cussion, as Hanuma Vihari and Shreyas Iyer are the top contenders for his place. The test specialist of India, along with Cheteshwar Pujara, was dropped from the Indian squad

for a home series against Sri Lanka, earlier this year.

Considering his poor run since several months, Rahane still had chances to make it into the squad if

not in the playing XI, for England tour. While Pujara, gazing at his County run for Sussex so far, can certainly get back to the team.

SELECTION COMMITTEE TO PICK 2 SQUADS

Chetan Sharma led selection committee will pick two squads; one for a T20I home series against South Africa (SA) and other for the England tour. India will play five T20 internationals against SA, between June 9 to June 19, at Delhi, Cuttack, Vizag, Rajkot and Bengaluru.

Regulars like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant, Mohammad Shami, Ravi Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are set to be rested for the series. The squad will feature bests from the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2022 and may be led by Shikhar Dhawan.

Besides, Suryakumar Yadav's fitness would be another concern to look at. The selectors' meeting is supposed to happen physically and not virtually. The coaching staff too, will have to divide duties if BCCI is planning to send the SA series squad to Ireland for two T20 internationals. These games will be played at Dublin on June 26 and 28.

Medvedev keen for clay play before Paris



AP ■ GENEVA

Daniil Medvedev said he was ready and raring to go as he returns from a hernia operation, tuning up for next week's French Open on the Geneva clay.

The world number two underwent surgery last month after losing in the quarter-finals in Miami, missing the

early clay-court season.

"It's never been easy for me on a clay court to start good straight away. So even one tournament is going to be good to prepare," he told reporters late Sunday.

"I'm feeling good physically, I'm feeling ready."

The US Open champion said playing in this week's 28-man, best-of-three-sets tournament in Geneva would help him sharpen up for the best-of-five Grand Slam in Paris.

"From what I can see, the conditions are very similar to Roland-Garros, where the balls fly around and the clay is fairly hard," the 26-year-old Russian said.

"The most important thing for me is to play at least one match -- of course I'm hoping to play more -- in order to be ready to play five-set matches, if I have to."

"Even one, two or three matches here could help me be more ready to play at Roland-Garros."



Satwik-Chirag pull out of Thailand Open

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Star doubles pairing of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who played a pivotal role in India's historic Thomas Cup triumph, pulled out of the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

It is learnt that Chirag suffered some niggles during the tournament and the pair has informed the Badminton Association of India on Monday about their decision to skip the event this week.

The world No 8 pair had lost just one match in the Thomas Cup — against Chinese Taipei and brought India back into the contest after initial reversals against Malaysia and Denmark in the quarterfinals and semifinals here.

Among Indian others in fray, World Championships

Silver medallist Kidambi Srikanth, seeded eighth, who had stayed unbeaten with six wins at Thomas Cup, will face Brice Leverdez, while HS Prannoy, who had pulled off wins in the deciding third singles in the knockout stages, meets Malaysia's Daren Liew.

Tokyo Olympian B Sai Praneeth will lock horns with Japan's Koki Watanabe, while Sourabh Verma faces France's Toma Junior Popov.

In women's singles, double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu will be playing a qualifier, while Saina Nehwal will be pitted against Korea Kim Ga Eun.

In men's doubles, MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila, and Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnuvardhan Goud Panjala, and Shyam Prasad and S Sunijith, Manu Attri and B Sumeeeth Attri, Ishaan Bhatnagar and Sai Pratheek K, are the in fray.

Milan clubs take title race to final day

AP ■ MILAN

Lautaro Martinez ensured the Serie A title race will head into the final week of the season on Sunday with a brace in Inter Milan's 3-1 win at Cagliari to stay two points behind leaders AC Milan.

Reigning champions Inter had to win to have any hope of retaining their league crown after Milan beat Atalanta 2-0 earlier in the day.

And goals in each half from Mattia Darmian's and Martinez ensured that Simone Inzaghi's side would push their local rivals down to the wire with a hard-fought victory in Sardinia.

Cagliari meanwhile stay two points behind Salernitana, who sit just outside the relegation zone.

Simone Inzaghi's Inter could have been tired after a thrilling, extra-time Italian Cup triumph over old foes Juventus on Wednesday but came through a tricky test against a side scrapping for their top flight lives.

They had already had a Milan Skriniar goal ruled out for handball when Darmian did put the away side ahead, and once Martinez lashed home his first six minutes after the break he thought that was that.

Charalampos Lykogiannis thumped home from distance almost straight afterwards to give Cagliari hope of getting an unlikely result, but with six minutes remaining Martinez dinked home his second to calm Inter nerves.

On the final day Inter host Sampdoria, who are now safe thanks to defeat for 18th-placed Cagliari, while Milan travel to Sassuolo needing



just a point to secure their first Scudetto since 2011.

Stefano Pioli's side have the better of the season's two Milan derbies meaning that if the two teams finish level on points it will be Milan who take the title.

They hold the advantage over Inter thanks to strikes from Rafael Leao and Theo Hernandez which sealed their win over Atalanta in front of a packed San Siro.

Leao broke through after 56 minutes, picking up a Messias through ball before firing between the legs of Atalanta goalkeeper Juan Musso, with Hernandez adding a second 19 minutes later following a brilliant solo run through the Atalanta defence.

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored on his final home game for Napoli, a 3-0 win over Genoa, who are now relegated to Serie B.

It was an emotional final match for Insigne at the Diego Maradona Stadium after 12 years in his hometown club. The Napoli captain will join MLS club Toronto FC as a free agent from July 1.

Liverpool assess Salah, Van Dijk ahead of Southampton clash

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Jurgen Klopp said Liverpool were assessing the fitness of Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk as they prepare for their must-win Premier League match against Southampton on Tuesday.

The quadruple-chasing Reds were given fresh hope they could pip Manchester City to the title when Pep Guardiola's team dropped two points in a 2-2 draw at West Ham on Sunday.

Defending champions City, with one

game remaining, are four points clear at the top of the table with a significantly better goal difference than their rivals, who have two games left.

Liverpool beat Chelsea on penalties in the FA Cup final at the weekend to complete the second leg of a potential quadruple.

But Klopp is waiting to find out the extent of injuries to top-scorer Salah and defensive talisman Van Dijk, who were both forced off at Wembley on Saturday.

Defender Andy Robertson was also

taken off in the latter stages due to cramp, while Klopp confirmed that Fabinho would not be involved at Southampton after suffering a muscle injury at Aston Villa last week.

"This process has not finished yet because we only played the 120 minutes two days ago," Klopp told reporters on Monday.

"So when the boys arrive today I have to make a lot of decisions. Then we will line up a team.

"What I can promise and definite-

ly say is we will line up a team only for one reason — to try to win the game at Southampton, as difficult as it is, because that obviously is the job to do.

"We have to see who is able to help. The 30 extra minutes (at Wembley) made a big difference, but we have to see," Liverpool, who face Real Madrid in the Champions League final later this month, can cut City's lead to a single point with victory at St Mary's, but Klopp does not expect Guardiola's side to slip up again.

Luis Suarez emotional after final home game: Atletico will remain 'in my heart'



AP ■ MADRID

Luis Suarez said he will always have Atletico Madrid in his heart after the striker waved goodbye to the club's home fans following a 1-1 draw against Sevilla on Sunday.

The result meant Sevilla finally confirmed their place in La Liga's top four as a late equaliser by Youssef En-Nesyri at the Wanda Metropolitano

secured qualification for the Champions League.

"Thank you Lucho for making us champions," read a giant banner unfurled in the crowd before kick-off while Suarez was visibly tearful as he paraded the pitch with his family after full-time.

The 35-year-old is set to leave Atletico when his two-year contract expires this summer. After being forced out by cash-

strapped Barcelona in 2020, Suarez exacted revenge by proving instrumental in Atletico's monumental La Liga title triumph last season, when he scored 21 goals in 32 league appearances and finished as the team's top scorer.

He has been useful but less emphatic this term, scoring 14 goals in 48 appearances and his own dip from last year's high standards has been symptomatic of Atletico's malaise more generally.

Suarez has often started on the bench since the turn of the year, with Joao Felix increasingly preferred by Atletico coach Diego Simeone.

"I thank all the Atletico fans, every one of them," said Suarez afterwards.

"The love they gave me since I arrived has been amazing and I will not forget it. I tried to return it on the pitch, I gave myself 200 per cent to a club that opened its doors to me. "I will always carry the affection of this club with me after not being able to enjoy myself the previous season. I will take Atletico with me in my heart."

Jose Gimenez's first-half header looked set to give Atletico victory and with Real Betis beating Granada, Sevilla's fight for fourth would have gone down to a nail-biting final day. Instead, En-Nesyri nodded in

Barca seal 2nd place



AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona sealed second place although a drab, goalless draw away at Getafe extends an underwhelming end to the campaign for the Catalans. The result, though, suited both teams as a point guaranteed Getafe's survival.

Cadiz are right in the middle of the relegation fight and left the Nuevo Mirandilla disappointed, despite a 1-1 draw at home to already-crowned champions Real Madrid. Carlo

Anelotti continues to rotate his team ahead of the Champions League final against Liverpool on May 28 and Cadiz were the latest team to profit, with Karim Benzema, Thibaut Courtois and Luka Modric all left at home.

Madrid took the lead when Mariano Diaz steered in and while Cadiz equalised through Ruben Sobrino, they could have won it when Andrey Lunin brought down Alvaro Negredo and the referee pointed to the spot.

Oliver Torres' cross with five minutes remaining to earn Sevilla the point they needed to guarantee their top-four spot,

after a hugely disappointing few weeks that has seen their coach Julen Lopetegui come under pressure.

Mbappe wins French league's best player award for 3rd time

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe won the French league's best player award for the third time in his career on Sunday, then diplomatically swerved a question about his future.

Mbappe is out of contract at PSG next month and touted to join Karim Benzema at Real Madrid in what would be a formidable attack force.

Mbappe said he didn't want to announce his decision during the ceremony but added "Yes, pretty much" when asked if he's made his mind up over whether to stay or go.

Mbappe is the league's top scorer with 25 goals for the French champion and has netted 36 in all competitions.

The awards are given annually by the National Union of Professional Football Players (UNFP) to players in France's top two divisions.

The 23-year-old France star won the award last year — when Mbappe netted a career-high 42 goals overall — and in 2019.

"It's always an honor to be here. Winning for a third time in a row is incredible," Mbappe said. "I've felt the recognition this season more than ever." Although PSG comfortably won the league title — which it surprisingly lost to Lille last season — Mbappe's goals and assists masked glaring shortcomings which were ruthlessly exposed by Madrid in the round of 16 in the Champions League.

Mbappe has scored 168 goals for PSG since joining from Monaco in a deal worth 180 million euros five years ago, the second highest tally in the club's history behind former teammate Edinson Cavani with 200 goals.

"I want to keep improving," Mbappe said, laughing when the on-stage interviewer asked if he thought he could overtake Cavani at PSG, which would obviously mean staying there.

"I'm already very happy to be in the top three,"



said Mbappe, who overtook Zlatan Ibrahimovic's PSG tally of 156 goals.

In other awards, Bruno Genesio of Rennes was named best coach. The former Lyon coach was criticized early in the season but stuck to his principles.

Fourth-place Rennes has played some of the best attacking soccer in France, scoring 80 goals in 37 games and only five fewer than top scorers PSG.

The best goalkeeper award went to PSG's Gianluigi Donnarumma, and 21-year-old Marseille defender William Saliba, who is on loan from Premier League team Arsenal, was the best young player.

Boxing World Championships: Nikhat, Manisha and Parveen confirm medals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian boxers Nikhat Zareen (52kg), Manisha (57kg) and Parveen (63kg) continued their stellar run at the IBA Women's World Boxing Championships in Istanbul on Monday by advancing to the semifinals of their respective events after thrilling victories.

Confirming their first World C'ships medals with a place in the semifinals, Nikhat out-punched England's Charley-Sian Davison 5-0 while young Parveen got the better off Shoiria Zulkaynarova of Tajikistan with an identical margin.

Manisha, on the other hand, dispatched Mongolia's Namuun Monkhor in a hard-fought quarter-final by a 4-1 split decision.

Continuing her stellar run from the prestigious Strandja Memorial tournament where she won the Gold earlier this year, Nikhat handed India its



first medal at this year's tournament with an impressive victory.

The 25-year-old Telangana boxer was all pumped up in her highly physical bout against

Davison. Both boxers were attacking each other ferociously in the first round.

However, the second round was a one way street as Nikhat pounded her opponent with terrific body shots to tire her out while also landing clean and sharp punches.

With the two rounds in the bag, Nikhat then displayed her defensive skills as she no longer felt the need to be on the offensive in the final few minutes of her quarterfinal bout.

The former junior world champion will next square off against Caroline De Almeida of Brazil, who thrashed the 2018 Commonwealth Games silver winner Carly McNaul of Ireland by unanimous decision.

The 24-year-old Manisha moved around the ring and used her long reach to great effect as she had three clean punches in the closely fought last eight contest.

Vinesh, Sakshi book CWG berths



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Sakshi Malik finally found a way to defeat nemesis Sonam Malik and sealed her place in the Indian team for the Commonwealth Games while Vinesh Phogat did just enough against Antim to emerge winner in the 53kg category trials here on Monday.

Sonam, who recovered from a left leg injury, had made it a habit of beating the

2016 Olympic Bronze medallist at the WFI trials but the day belonged to Sakshi, who beat the young wrestler 8-1.

Later in the final, Sakshi outplayed Manisha 7-1 to ensure that she will be on the plane to Birmingham, where the Games will begin from July 28.

Manisha had ousted Sangeeta Phogat, wife of Bajrang Punia, 7-5 in the semifinals.

Vinesh, another star who has been struggling right from the Tokyo Games,

began well as she did not concede a point till the final.

In the final against Antim, she was trailing 0-3 but found a two-point scoring move to reduce deficit. Antim got a bit defensive and tried to maintain distance. In this attempt, she fled the mat and Vinesh challenged referee's decision of not awarding a point.

She won the challenge and since hers was the last scoring point, she won the trials.

It will be a first big-ticket event after her Tokyo Games debacle, where she made an early exit after entering the event as the favourite. What followed her was a harrowing time where she was suspended by WFI for indiscipline during the Games.

After WFI lifted the suspension, Vinesh found the going tough due to mental health issues. She pulled out of the World Championship trials in August last year and has not competed since.

Expectedly, Anshu Malik (57kg), Divya Kakran (68kg) won their trials.

In the final between two World Championship medallists, Anshu beat formidable Sarita Mor 2-1 while Divya won by technical superiority against Nisha Dahiya.

Pooja Gehlot (50kg) and Pooja Sihag (76kg) claimed the other berths in the Indian team.