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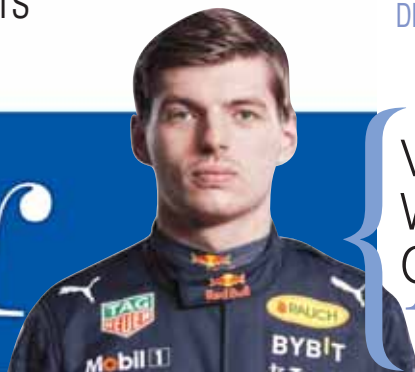
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NEW DELHI, MONDAY MAY 23, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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GRAND PRIX
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Nitish Kumar keeps suspense on RCP

NAVIN UPADHYAY ■ NEW DELHI

Amid talks of strain in the relationship between the BJP and the Janata Dal (U), and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's hint to his MLAs that he would take some big decision in the interest of the nation, the JD(U) has kept suspense on the Rajya Sabha nomination to Union Steel Minister RCP Singh.

"Barring a last-minute surprise, it looks unlikely that the JD(U) will not nominate RCP Singh to the RS for the third time," said a senior JD(U) leader. RCP's Rajya Sabha tenure is ending on July 7.

JD(U) MLAs and Ministers have authorised Nitish Kumar to take a final call on the issue.

Nitish Kumar has been quoted as having said in his meeting with MLAs and Ministers that he could make a "big" decision in the interest of the nation. "That's what he hinted at," said an MLA who was present in the meeting on Saturday.

The denial of an RS berth will mean the end of the road for RCP Singh, unless the BJP adopts him and offers him a nomination from its own quota. RCP Singh is reported to have paid the price for his "closeness" to the BJP leadership. In the event of the JD(U)



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar speaks to media persons after a meeting with senior leaders, in Patna on Sunday

PTI

denying him the ticket, Nitish Kumar's big decision could see him aligning with the RJD once again in Bihar.

Nitish and RCP Singh fell out after the former bureaucrat reportedly sacrificed the party's demand for two ministerial berths in the Union Cabinet and himself joined the Narendra Modi Government when he was heading the JD(U) at its national president. Thereafter, RCP Singh also differed with the JD(U) on contesting the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls against the BJP.

After Nitish removed him from the post of party president, the two leaders have at best shared a "social" relationship.

For the last five days, RCP Singh is camping in Patna, barely one kilometer from the Chief Minister's residence, but the two leaders have not met. On Sunday, while Nitish Kumar drove to the JD(U)'s office and met with senior party leaders and MLAs, RCP Singh was closeted with his supporters at his own residence. Ever since Nitish Kumar met the Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav at an *iftar* party and then held one-on-one talks with him ten days ago, speculations have gained ground that like in 2015, the JD(U) and RJD could once again come together to form a Government to protect "secularism" across the country.

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Hints at taking a 'big' decision

BJP MP Arjun Singh does a Mukul, Babul; rejoins TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In another blow to Bengal BJP, its Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh on Sunday staged a homecoming by rejoining the Trinamool Congress (TMC).

Arjun Singh joined the TMC in the presence of its national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and a host of other leaders from the North 24 Parganas district where his constituency falls.

Singh, a strongman of Bengal's jute belt, had joined the BJP in March 2019 just ahead of the general elections and wrested the Barrackpore parliamentary seat in a fiercely-fought poll from the then sitting TMC MP, Dinesh Trivedi. Incidentally, Trivedi is in the BJP at present.

Singh followed in the footsteps of former Railway Minister and BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy and ex-saffron MP Babul Supriyo to rejoin his old party.

He claimed that no development of Bengal is possible

without the guidance of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

At least half-a-dozen BJP MLAs have already deserted the party and joined the Bengal ruling outfit after it roared back to power with a thumping majority in last year's Assembly elections.

Dwelling on the immediate reasons for his rejoining the TMC, Singh said, "I come from a jute belt and have been the product of jute politics...today, 15 out of the 62 mills are closed and the jute workers and farmers are in big trouble. Centre has an apathetic approach towards them...though there was given a small concession after I raised the issue...I think only Mamata Banerjee can address the issue in the right manner...in fact, I had been supporting her ever since she wrote a letter to the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) Now I will directly work as per her guidance."

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Modi to hold talks with Biden, Japan PM in Tokyo

PM to participate in the second in-person Quad Leaders' Summit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will look to further strengthen the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan during his conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo when he would also attend the Quad summit.

Modi will also hold a bilateral meeting with US President Joe Biden. The Prime Minister is visiting Tokyo, Japan from May 23-24 at the invitation of the Prime Minister of the country.

In his statement ahead of his visit to Japan, the Prime Minister said, "In March 2022, I had the pleasure of hosting Prime Minister Kishida for the 14th India-Japan Annual Summit. During my visit to Tokyo, I look forward to continuing our conversation further, with an aim to strengthen the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership."

Modi further said he will also participate in the second in-person Quad Leaders' Summit, "which will provide an opportunity for the leaders of the four Quad countries to review the progress of Quad



initiatives. We will also exchange views about developments in the Indo-Pacific region and global issues of mutual interest."

Modi said he will hold a bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden, where "we will discuss further consolidation of our multi-faceted bilateral relations with the US. We will also continue our dialogue on regional developments and contemporary global issues."

The newly-elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will be joining the Quad Leaders' Summit for the first time.

"I look forward to a bilateral meeting with him during which the multifaceted cooperation between India and Australia under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and regional and global issues of mutual interest will be discussed," Modi said.



Modi said economic cooperation between India and Japan is an important aspect of the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between the two countries.

"During the March Summit, Prime Minister Kishida and I had announced our intention to realise JPY 5 trillion in public and private investment and financing over the next five years from Japan to India.

"During the forthcoming visit, I will meet with Japanese business leaders with the goal of further strengthening economic linkages between our countries, in pursuit of this objective," Modi said.

"Japan is home to nearly 40,000 members of the Indian diaspora, who are an important anchor in our relations with Japan," the Prime Minister said adding, "I look forward to interacting with them."

Eyeing national role, KCR heads to Punjab

Second meeting
with Kejriwal in
two days; duo
discuss political
situation in country

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal met his Telangana counterpart K Chandrashekar Rao in Delhi on Sunday and discussed a range of topics, including the current political issues.

The second meeting in less than 24 hours between the two Chief Ministers, who also lead two regional political parties — the AAP and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) — assumes significance



Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao with Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal during a meeting, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

in the wake of efforts to float a non-BJP non-Congress political formation ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls to take on the BJP. After a luncheon meeting at Kejriwal's residence, the duo reached Chandigarh to be part of a function in the presence of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

KCR, who is on a week-long visit to Delhi to attend national-level political and social programmes, also met with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday and discussed several national issues including the upcoming Presidential elections.

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Delhi mother, two daughters gas themselves; leave suicide notes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 55-year-old woman and her two daughters were found dead in their house in the posh Vasant Vihar area on Saturday evening. Police suspect that the three died of inhaling deadly poisonous gas and "suffocation". The women have been identified as Manju Srivastava and her daughters - Anshika (30) and Anushka (26).

According to Manoj C, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), southwest district, it is presumed that they died due to suffocation.

Manju's husband had died in April last year due to coronavirus and since then the family was in depression, and she was also bedridden due to illness, police said.

After finding the bodies, police also found three suicide notes. One of the suicide notes read, "Too much deadly gas... carbon monoxide inside. It's



flammable. Please ventilate the room by opening the window and opening the fan. Do not light match, candle or anything!! Be careful while removing the curtain because room is full of hazardous gas. Do not inhale."

The content and veracity of the note are yet to be verified and are still under investigation, said a senior police officer. Police found that the cooking gas cylinder's knob was turned on and an *angithi* (coal fire) was

left burning. The coal fire and lack of ventilation must have led to the build-up of poisonous carbon monoxide in the room, killing the three, police said. Police said a Police Control Room (PCR) call was received at Vasant Vihar police station around 8.55 pm on Saturday in which the caller, a local resident, stated that a house was locked from the inside and the people were not opening the door.

Continued on Page 2

IPL gambling racket busted, six arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has busted an Indian Premier League (IPL) gambling racket and arrested six people in this connection on Sunday.

The accused were identified as Rahul Garg (30), Kunal Garg (30), Sanjeev Kumar (50), Ashok Sharma (51), Dharmatma Sharma (46), and Kanhaiya (21). "We have registered a case under Section 3/4/9/55 Gambling Act at PS Nihal Vihar. All the accused persons were arrested and the investigation was taken up," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Outer Sameer Sharma.

"Acting on a specific input, received by Special Staff on May 15, a team of Delhi Police arrived at the premises with the informer and raided the building where they found six persons gambling on IPL matches using a laptop and other electronic devices," the police

said. According to the police, a special team was formed to conduct this raid under the supervision of the DCP.

From the spot, they also recovered ₹74,740 in cash, 10 mobile phones, two laptops, three internet routers, two LED TVs, voice recorders, call merger microphones, two notebooks (having a record of gambling) and one suitcase carrying a gambling device with five mobile phones (that were used for gambling) being attached to it. Last month, the Delhi Police arrested three people involved in an IPL betting racket in the Vijay Vihar area.

The accused were identified as Tarun, Deepak and Dinesh Khatri. The police had recovered five mobile phones, one laptop, 1 LED TV, ₹1,09,260 cash from their possession. According to MHA officials, over a dozen gambling rackets have been busted across the country this season during the IPL.

CAPSULE

WATER CRISIS LOOMS LARGE OVER DELHI

New Delhi: Delhi's water crisis is likely to worsen in the coming days as UP and HP have "backed out" from plans to give extra water, while Haryana is not keen to pursue a water exchange proposal with the national capital. **P3**

MHA WARNS OFFICERS OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION

New Delhi: Taking note of challenging its transfer order, the Ministry of Home Affairs has warned of disciplinary action "without any further reference" against six DANICS (Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Island Civil Services) officers, working with the Delhi Government, if they fail to join the Lakshadweep Administration "immediately". **P3**

8 KILLED AFTER SUV RAMS INTO TRUCK

Siddharthnagar: An SUV carrying a marriage party rammied into a stationary truck here killing eight people and injuring three, police said on Sunday. **P3**

Remove Italian specs to see work done in NE: Shah to Rahul

PTI ■ NAMSAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday claimed that the BJP has ended the "culture of corruption" in the Northeast and funds meant for development work now get percolated to the last man, whereas the middlemen siphoned off most of the amount during the Congress rule.

Taking a direct swipe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Shah said that he should take out his Italian spectacles to look at the development work done by the double engine Government in Arunachal Pradesh. "Congress leaders ask what happened in eight years, these people are awake with their eyes closed. Rahul Gandhi should take out his Italian spectacles and must have a look at the development work done by PM Modi and CM Pema



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks during a rally in Arunachal Pradesh's Namsal on Sunday

PTI

Khandu," he said.

He alleged that the region had remained neglected during 50 years of the Congress' rule and asserted that it came on the fast track of development only after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014.

Continued on Page 2

No decision on excavation at Qutub Minar: Min

GK Reddy issued clarification after several media reports that excavation can be done in Delhi's iconic Qutub Minar complex, surfaced recently

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Culture Minister GK Reddy clarified on Sunday that no directions for excavation at Delhi's iconic Qutub Minar complex had been issued by the Government.

Asked if the Ministry of Culture had issued directions to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Reddy reportedly said, "No such decision has been taken." The clarification came as media reports that the ASI is to conduct an excavation at the popular tourist site have been doing the rounds.

As in the Gyanvapi mosque row, the Qutub Minar controversy surfaced after the ASI's former regional director Dharamveer Sharma claimed that the structure was constructed by Hindu king Raja Vikramaditya, and not Qutb al-Din Aibak as is believed. Earlier, there were protests and

demands by several Hindu groups regarding the renaming of the Qutub Minar complex amid claims that the place was earlier used for Hindu and Jain temples.

As many as 44 members of two Right-wing groups were detained earlier this month after they recited the Hanuman Chalisa in front of the Qutub Minar complex and demanded it be renamed "Vishnu Stambh".

Recently, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) spokesperson Vinod Bansal also claimed that Qutub Minar was actually "Vishnu Stambh". He said that the monument was built with materials obtained after demolishing 27 Hindu and Jain temples.

One Vishnu Shankar Jain had also filed a petition in Delhi's Saket court demanding the reinstatement of idols of Hindu deities in the complex and rights to prayer at the site.



The matter will be heard on May 24. The court had asked the Centre and ASI to file responses in the matter.

In this atmosphere, the rumours regarding the excavations were sparked off after

Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Govind Mohan, visited the World Heritage monument on Saturday with three historians, four ASI officers and researchers. The ASI officials informed the Secretary that

excavation work in the Qutub Minar complex had not been done since 1991.

Sources had earlier said that the Ministry of Culture had issued instructions to get iconography of idols done at the complex, and that excavation could be started at a distance of 15 meters from the mosque to the south of Qutub Minar. However, on Sunday, GK Reddy clarified that no such decision has been taken.

After Culture Secretary Govind Mohan visited the monument on Saturday, there were media reports that the ASI has been ordered to conduct excavations to ascertain whether Qutub was built by Qutubuddin Aibak or Chandragupta Vikramaditya. However, the Ministry insists that it was a regular site visit by its officials and no such decision has been taken so far.

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Maha, Kerala, Raj reduce VAT on petrol and diesel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI/CHENNAI

Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Kerala have decreased VAT on petrol and diesel after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's call to provide further relief to consumers following a cut in excise duty by the Centre, though some other states appeared reluctant citing their inability to take more strain on revenue.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday wondered whether the states can afford to give up revenue from the Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel unless the Centre devolves more funds or gives them more grants, likening their situation to being between "the devil and the deep sea".

The Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government slashed the VAT on petrol by Rs 2.08 per litre and diesel by Rs 1.44 per litre. A statement issued by the government said

the state exchequer will have to bear an annual loss of Rs 2,500 crore as a result of this decision.

However, the DMK-led government in Tamil Nadu said that it is neither fair nor reasonable to expect states to reduce their taxes.

State Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan said the central government had never consulted states when it increased the taxes and Tamil Nadu was already incurring a loss of over Rs 1,000 crore due to the earlier tax cut announced by the union government in November 2021. Despite the tax reduction announced by the Centre on Saturday, the rates were still high compared to 2014, he pointed out.

"The Union Government's levies on petrol have gone up substantially in the past seven years. Though the revenue to the Union Government has increased manifold, there has not been a matching increase in the revenues to states.

"This is because the Union

Government has increased the cess and surcharge on petrol and diesel while reducing the basic excise duty that is shareable with the states," he averred.

Post the November 2021 reduction in excise duty on petrol by Rs 5 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 10 a litre, 25 states and UTs had cut VAT to give further reprieve to consumers battered by record-high retail prices. States ruled by non-NDA parties like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal did not do so.

Responding to the minister's remarks that states were not consulted by the Centre before increasing fuel prices, BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai wondered if such a practice was followed during the earlier UPA regime, in which the DMK was a key constituent.

Speaking to reporters, he gave a "72-hour" ultimatum to the ruling DMK to implement its poll promise on fuel price cuts. Tamil Nadu's main

Opposition AIADMK also urged the ruling DMK to implement its poll promise of reducing prices of petroleum products.

However, the Left Democratic Front government in Kerala had on Saturday promptly announced a cut in the state tax on the prices of petrol and diesel by Rs 2.41 and Rs 1.36 per litre respectively, following the reduction in fuel prices by the Centre.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot also said the state government will reduce VAT by Rs 2.48 per liter on petrol and Rs 1.16 per liter on diesel.

In Madhya Pradesh, Congress leader Kamal Nath demanded that the BJP government reduce VAT on petroleum products to further bring down the rates.

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati said it was the duty of not only Uttar Pradesh but also of other states to immediately announce a cut in VAT on fuel.

6-yr-old boy falls into borewell in Hoshiarpur

PTI ■ HOSHIAHPUR

A six-year-old boy on Sunday fell into a 100-feet deep borewell in Behrampur village near Garhdiwala here, said officials.

They said a rescue operation is underway.

The boy was playing in a field and climbed a borewell shaft when some stray dogs started chasing him.

The borewell shaft was covered with a jute bag and could not withstand the weight of the boy and gave in causing him to fall into the well. The boy belongs to a family of migrant labourers.

Teams of district administration including a Deputy Commissioner have reached the site.

A team of the National Disaster Response Force has also been called, said officials.

Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said the rescue operation was underway and he was in constant touch with the district administration.

CM Mann leads bicycle rally on drug awareness in Sangrur

PTI ■ SANGRUR

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday led a bicycle rally on drug awareness here and said that his Government was working on multiple plans to eradicate drugs from the society.

More than 15,000 cyclists took part in the rally, according to the government.

Addressing the gathering after flagging it off, the chief minister said, "Sangrur is the land of revolutionaries and today the people of Sangrur have once again gathered for a noble cause."

He said the aim of this rally is to create a mass awareness against the drug menace and wean the youths, who became its victim, away from it, according to an official press release.

Using the adage 'an idle brain is a devil's workshop', Mann said that with more employment opportunities, there will be no space for drugs

in the society.

"Our social bond is so strong that any seed could germinate on the land of Punjab but never the seed of hatred. And when our health and mind are fit, we will together put the state on a high growth trajectory," the CM said.

He said that in the coming days, more such awareness initiatives will be taken to promote physical and mental health of the people.

Mann said his government is working on many plans to eradicate drugs from the society, besides opening of more rehabilitation centres and clinics for better treatment of the drug-addicts.

He also expressed concern over the depleting water table, saying that both water and air have been polluted.

Mann said that his government will start an awareness drive to motivate the farmers to diversify their crops to restore the soil health.

Assam flood: Six more die, 7.2 lakh hit

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam deteriorated on Sunday with six more persons, including two children, losing their lives and nearly 7.2 lakh people coming under the impact of the deluge across 22 districts.

According to the daily flood report of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), four persons drowned in Kamrup revenue circle of Nagaon district.

One person at Doboka in Hojai district and a child at Silchar in Cachar district, too, died due to the flood, it said.

The death toll due to the flood and landslides this year has now gone up to 24 across Assam.

ASDMA said more than 7,19,540 people have been impacted in several districts — Barpeta, Biswanath, Cachar, Darrang, Goalpara, Golaghat, Hailakandi, Jorhat, Kamrup, Karbi Anglong West, Karimganj, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Morigaon, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Udalguri.

Jamia Millia invites applications for free Civil Services coaching

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia's Residential Coaching Academy has invited applications for free coaching for the 2022-2023 Civil Services preliminary and mains exams. In a statement, the university said the academy is inviting applications from minority, SC, ST and women candidates. The last date for submission of the online application form is June 15.

The university will hold an examination on July 2 to select the candidates. The exam will be held in Delhi, Srinagar, Jammu, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Lucknow, Guwahati, Patna, Bengaluru and Malappuram in Kerala.

The Residential Coaching Academy is funded by the

University Grants Commission (UGC) to provide free coaching and residential facilities to students belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities.

"RCA provides free coaching and training to underprivileged students with its round-the-clock library facility and an ecosystem which is one of the best in the country for aspirants of the civil services and other competitive examinations," Jamia Millia Islamia said.

Information about the eligibility, test centres and other details are available on <https://www.jmi.ac.in> and <http://jmicoe.in>.

Ever since its inception, RCA has produced over 245 civil servants and 376 got jobs in other Central and state services.

4 including 2 juveniles held for looting ₹6.64 L

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

A crime branch unit of the Gurugram police nabbed four robbers including two juveniles for looting over Rs 6.64 lakh from a cash collection agent, the police said on Sunday.

The police have recovered Rs 4.8 lakh, 2 iPhones, clothes, shoes, documents and a motorcycle used in the crime.

According to the police, the complainant told the police that on Saturday around 3.40 pm he was going to Udyog Vihar after collecting cash and when he reached Belvedere Rapid Metro Station, three men riding a motorcycle snatched his bag containing ₹ 6,64,413 and his wallet etc.

Acting promptly on the complaint the police apprehended four criminals who

had executed the crime.

The arrested were identified as Prashant aka Golu resident of Mainpuri and Biru resident of Banda, Uttar Pradesh while two were juveniles.

During questioning, Prashant revealed that he used to work as a delivery boy in Xpress B company and had embezzled about 7,000 of the company and left the company 3/4 days back.

"He knows that the complainant used to collect huge cash on a daily basis. He along with his other accomplices planned for the robbery and carried out the crime. The accused bought clothes/shoes worth ₹ 35,000 and 02 iPhones worth ₹ 1,21,000 from robbed cash," Subhash Boken, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said.

Azam, son skip SP legislators' meeting

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Senior leader of Samajwadi Party, Mohammad Azam Khan, who was recently released from jail, and his MLA son Abdullah Azam, skipped a key meeting of SP legislators here on Sunday.

The important meeting of the SP MLAs and MLCs was convened on the eve of the first session of the 18th UP assembly commencing here from Monday.

The meeting was earlier called on Saturday but SP president Akhilesh Yadav had to rush to the national capital to meet Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, it was rescheduled for Sunday.

The meeting was convened to finalise the party's strategy for the budget session of the UP assembly and how to corner the Yogi Adityanath government

on key issues.

However, with Azam Khan and Abdullah Azam skipping the meeting, the worries of the SP leadership may increase in the coming days.

Speculations are once again rife that Azam Khan may take the path of Akhilesh Yadav's uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav who had earlier accused the SP chief of neglect and disrespect.

Former minister and SP MLA Ravidas Mehrotra said, "Azam Khan is not well so he could not come to attend today's meeting. Tomorrow (Monday), both Azam Khan and his son Abdullah will be attending the budget session. Azam Khan will be sitting next to SP chief Akhilesh Yadav in the assembly."

Earlier on Friday, while speaking to the media in Rampur, Azam Khan had said his own people were responsible for his destruction and they were responsible for the

ordeal he was facing for the last two years. However on Saturday Azam Khan said that he was neither upset with the party nor the leadership.

SP MLA from Rampur (Sadar), Mohammad Azam Khan was released from jail after the Supreme Court granted him interim bail in the 89th case registered against him. While his family expressed happiness at getting him back, they were joined by Pragatishheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) chief Shivpal Singh Yadav who has been a steady "support" to Azam Khan.

Akhilesh Yadav did not go to Sitapur to receive Azam Khan when he was released from jail after 27 months. The absence of senior SP leaders has also raised eyebrows of many from the minority community. However, after Khan's release, Akhilesh Yadav, said in a tweet that "lies have moments, not

centuries". He hailed the leader's release from the jail and said by granting bail, the Supreme Court had given new standards to justice.

Meanwhile, addressing the meeting of party MLAs and MLCs, the SP chief said that the assembly should have at least 35 sittings during the budget session. He said a seven-day session was too brief for a debate on the budget and discussions on the issues facing the people of the state.

Akhilesh Yadav said the SP would raise issues like deterioration of law and order, fake encounters, recovery of free food grains and money given under Kisan Samman Nidhi and galloping inflation.

He said the party would demand a special debate on these issues besides debate on recruitment scam, power crisis, unemployment and irregularities in wheat procurement from the farmers.

BJP MP Arjun Singh does a Mukul, Babul,....

From Page 1

On the Bengal BJP's condition" Singh said, "I was given the organisational work but there was no power ... I found that the BJP only does its politics from air-conditioned rooms and Facebook, which may be successful in the other parts of the country, but will be of no help in Bengal ... this is why the Bengal BJP is in the doldrums today ... I tried my best to convince the leaders but failed."

Earlier Singh took the TMC flag from the hands of Abhishek Banerjee at his Camac Street office in South Kolkata.

Singh's decision comes days

after he met Union Textile Minister Piyush Goyal and got the Centre to withdraw the cap on procurement prices of raw jute. Singh also met BJP national president JP Nadda a few days ago.

The Barrackpore MP who was likely to meet Mamata Banerjee said that the Chief Minister would play a big role in the days to come. "Soon the people of India will realise that the Chief Minister is going to play a big role in national politics by showing the nation the way," he said.

Giving a clear indication that he was not resigning from his parliamentary post anytime soon, he said that he would resign only if the two other

TMC MPs from Bengal who had joined the BJP did so by putting in their papers.

Though he would not name Sisir Adhikari and Divyendu Adhikari respectively, the father and brother of Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari, the Barrackpore MP said, "I will resign within two hours of the two TMC MPs who have joined the BJP doing so."

The State BJP said that Singh had succumbed to the administrative pressure from the TMC Government. "There was tremendous administrative pressure on him that he could not take and so he joined the TMC," BJP national vice-president Dilip Ghosh said.

Govt: Excellence centres to boost horticulture and food processing

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government will set up excellence centres and mini excellence centres/ hi-tech nurseries in all the 75 districts in the next five years to boost horticulture and food processing industry in the state, according to a press release issued on Sunday.

Hi-tech nurseries set up by the government at Bahraich, Ambedkar Nagar, Mau, Fatehpur, Aligarh, Rampur and Hapur have already become operational while centres of excellence are under construction in Chandauli, Kaushambi, Saharanpur, Lucknow, Kushinagar and Hapur. The Indo-Israel Centre for Excellence has been established in Basti and Kannauj for fruits and vegetables respectively so that farmers could get quality

seedlings. Furthermore, mini centres of excellence/hi-tech nurseries are under construction at Sonbhadra, Moradabad, Agra, Sant Kabir Nagar, Mahoba, Jhansi, Barabanki, Lucknow, Chandauli, Gonda, Balrampur, Budaun, Firozabad, Shamli and Mirzapur.

The state government led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has set ambitious targets to increase the area of cultivation of horticultural crops from 11.6 per cent to 16 per cent and food processing units from 6 per cent to a whopping 20 per cent during to enhance the overall yield as well as processing of fruits, vegetables and spices.

The government seeks to grow quality saplings and seeds at the excellence centres as well as hi-tech nurseries to increase

production of quality crops. The objective behind the government's move is also to provide sufficient crops for the increasing number of food processing industries.

It is worth mentioning here that Uttar Pradesh has witnessed an increase of 0.7 per cent in the production of fruits and vegetables in the last five years due to expansion of its cultivation in an additional 1.01 lakh hectares, thanks to the initiatives of the Yogi government. The Yogi government is also promoting protected farming through Indo-Israel technology to grow off season vegetables. In the last five years, poly houses/shed nets have been expanded in 177 hectares to enhance yield of flowers and vegetables, benefiting 5,549 farmers.

Bank manager held by CBI in bribe case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The sleuths of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested the branch manager of Union Bank of India in Azamgarh red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000 for sanctioning the loan.

When the CBI found the complaint true, a plan was made to trap the branch manager of the bank. A CBI team went to Azamgarh from Lucknow and sent Hari Om Pratap to meet the branch manager and pay him the demanded money. As soon as branch manager Dharmendra Singh took the bribe money in his hand, the CBI team present nearby caught him red-handed. He was later brought to Lucknow and a case was registered against him before producing him in the designated court.

Bank of India. He alleged that bank manager Dharmendra Kumar had demanded a bribe of Rs 20,000 for sanctioning the loan.

When the CBI found the complaint true, a plan was made to trap the branch manager of the bank. A CBI team went to Azamgarh from Lucknow and sent Hari Om Pratap to meet the branch manager and pay him the demanded money. As soon as branch manager Dharmendra Singh took the bribe money in his hand, the CBI team present nearby caught him red-handed. He was later brought to Lucknow and a case was registered against him before producing him in the designated court.

Nitish Kumar...

From Page 1

Nitish Kumar and his party have strongly opposed the demand for a Uniform Civil Code, implementation of the CAA and the NRC, and the removal of loudspeakers from mosques. Nitish and Tejashwi have also come together on the issue of holding a caste census in Bihar, something which was bitterly opposed by the BJP in the past. The BJP leadership fears that the caste census would revive the ghost of the Mandal Commission and blunt the edge of Hindutva politics.

However, of late, BJP leaders have been singing a different tune and saying they have no objection to the caste census. The climb down is seen as a measure to keep Nitish Kumar in good humour.

The BJP camp suspects that Nitish Kumar and the RJD have already finalised the "deal" and it is only a question of time when it will be made public.

Remove Italian...

From Page 1

Addressing a public rally in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, Shah lashed out at the Congress for questioning Modi on what he did for the region, saying that the Grand Old Party won't be able to see development if it keeps its eyes closed.

"Rahul Gandhi, open your eyes and discard Italian glasses and wear Indian ones. Then only, you could see what development Modi has brought to the region, which your party failed to do in 50 years," he said.

"Development funds for the region were siphoned off by middlemen during the Congress rule. But with the NDA under PM Modi coming to power at the Centre in 2014, the culture of corruption has ended and every single penny is being utilised with utter transparency. The Prime Minister has ensured that development funds get percolated down to the last man," Shah added.

No decision on excavation...

From Page 1

A Delhi court had last month directed the ASI not to remove two idols of Lord Ganesha from the Qutub Minar complex till further directions.

The court passed the order on a suit filed by advocate Hari Shankar Jain on behalf of Jain deity Tirthankar Lord Rishabh Dev, claiming that 27 temples were partly demolished by Qutubdin Aibak, a general in the army of Mohamad Gauri, and Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque was raised inside the complex by reusing the material.

Jain stated that there were two idols of Lord Ganesha, situated on the premises since times immemorial and that he apprehended that the ASI was likely to remove them to one of the National Museums as mere artefacts, news agency PTI had reported.

Delhi Mother, 2 daughters...

From Page 1

Acting on the call, the Station House Officer, along with a police team, reached the spot and found the doors and windows closed and the flat locked from inside.

"The police managed to open the door and found that a gas cylinder was partially opened. As the police went further to check the rooms, they found three bodies lying on the bed and three small incessant candles (angithi) were kept in the room. It is presumed that they died due to suffocation," said the DCP.

"Police team found that the room, in which bodies were found, was completely sealed with foils to prevent the fumes from the angithi leaving the room," said a police official privy to the investigation.

Police suspects that the trio died due to the toxic fumes and by sealing the room with foils, the fumes from angithi had created a room like a 'gas chamber'. "The inquest proceedings have been initiated," police added.

The president of the residential society, M David, said the family turned the house into a "smoke chamber".

Eyeing national...

From Page 1

He is scheduled to meet many other leaders. Sources said KCR and Kejriwal discussed issues of regional and national importance. Significantly, on the party's foundation day in April KCR had passed a resolution and announced to "go national".

Sources informed that issues related to national politics, federalism, States' role in India's gro the Union Government's policies, and other issues were discussed in the meeting with Kejriwal. Telangana Minister V Prashanth Reddy, MPs - Joginapally Santosh Kumar, Nama Nageswara Rao, Ranjith Reddy, Venkatesh Netha Borlakunta, MLA Dr. Anand Methuku, and others were a part of KCR's delegation which also moved to Punjab where the AAP gave a crushing defeat to the ruling Congress in the Assembly polls a couple of months ago.

Sharing the dais with his Punjab and Telangana counterparts at Chandigarh, Kejriwal alleged that the Centre wanted city stadiums to be converted into makeshift jails to house farmers marching into the national Capital to protest against the now-repealed three farm laws.

"The farmer's agitation was for the entire country, and not just for the farmers of Punjab or Haryana. The Central Government wanted to convert stadiums into jails to arrest them, but I did not give permission for this," Kejriwal said at the event organised to pay tributes to the martyrs of the Galwan Valley clash against the Chinese troops and the farmers who died during the anti-farm law stir last year. The compensation of Rs3 lakh each was disbursed to the families of the martyred farmers.

Kejriwal also thanked KCR for the pro-farmers step. "Even I have come out of an andolan - Anna andolan. The Government did similar things at that time... I, too, have stayed in stadiums for days. I understood that it is a ploy to end the kisan andolan," said Kejriwal at the event where prominent farmers' leader Rakesh Tikait was also present.

"Kejriwal is lucky that he got a chance to serve farmers as they sat on Delhi's borders. We, too, would always support our farmer brothers and sisters. We cannot bring back those who have died but we are with you in this pain," KCR said.

Delhi's woes to get worse as UP, HP nix plans to give extra water

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's water crisis is expected to worsen in the coming days as Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh have "backed out" from plans to give extra water, while Haryana is not keen to pursue a water exchange proposal with the national Capital. Amid a scorching heatwave, several parts of the national Capital are facing a water crisis these days.

According to Delhi Jal Board (DJB) officials, proposals involving Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were being pursued since 2019. The two States pulled out around six to eight months ago. Delhi had a plan to exchange 140 million gallons a day (MGD) of treated wastewater for fresh-water from Uttar Pradesh.

"Uttar Pradesh said it could share 270 cusecs of water from the Ganga through the Murad Nagar regulator and Delhi had promised to release an equal amount of treated wastewater to UP from Okhla for irrigation purposes.

"After multiple meetings and field inspections, Uttar



Pradesh wrote to us around six months ago that the idea has been dropped," DJB officials said.

The Centre was in favour of the proposal but Uttar Pradesh denied it. They did not give any reason for doing so, they said. Delhi also held deliberations with Haryana on a proposal to share 20 MGD of treated wastewater for irrigation through Jaunti and Auchandi regulators in lieu of freshwater through Carrier Lined Canal (CLC) and Delhi Sub Branch (DSB).

"Haryana has not agreed to the proposal yet. There is a very slim chance of it happening now," the officials said.

Another official said the

proposal for a water exchange with Haryana is pending at the level of the Upper Yamuna River Board. Delhi generates around 770 MGD of wastewater. The 34 sewage treatment plants located at 20 locations across the city treat up to 570 MGD of sewage.

Around 90 MGD of treated wastewater is being utilised for horticulture in parks and forests, irrigation and DTC depots. The capital is obligated to release 267 MGD of treated wastewater into the Yamuna to maintain the environmental flow.

In December 2019, Himachal Pradesh signed an MoU to sell its share of

Yamuna water to Delhi at Rs 21 crore per annum. Water had to be delivered at Tajewala (in Haryana's Yamuna Nagar district) to Delhi.

According to a statement released at that time, Himachal Pradesh was supposed to "provide regular, daily supply of 368 cusecs (198 MGD) from November to February and 268 cusecs (144 MGD) from March to June every year".

According to a multi-state agreement signed in 1994, Himachal Pradesh gets a three per cent share of Yamuna water.

This share has remained unclaimed since then. It was Haryana which had first

opposed the Himachal Pradesh's plan to sell its share of Yamuna water to Delhi. Haryana contended that its "canals did not have the capacity to carry extra water from Himachal Pradesh to Delhi", another official said.

Thereafter, Himachal Pradesh also "backed out" from the agreement around six months ago. An official said, "Our engineers worked really hard to turn these plans into reality, but the neighbouring states backed out due to political reasons."

Delhi requires around 1,200 MGD of water, while the DJB supplies around 950 MGD. Haryana supplies a total of 610 million gallons of water a day to Delhi through two canals - CLC (368 MGD) and DSB (177) - and the Yamuna (65 MGD). CLC and the DSB are supplied water from Hathni Kund via the Munak canal and 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.

Ashwani Kumar, Gyanesh Bharti assume charge in unified MCD

SAURAV GUPTA ■ NEW DELHI



After 10 long years, the trifurcated Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) once again merged into a single entity on Sunday, as IAS officers Ashwani Kumar and Gyanesh Bharti assumed charge as the new civic body's special officer and commissioner, respectively. Making the unified MCD financially stable will be among the key challenges before Kumar and Bharti.

After assuming the charge on Sunday, Kumar told *The Pioneer* that they would make sure that the MCD gets the appropriate funds from both the State Government and the Central Government as cited in the constitution.

"Our top priority will be the sanitation work in the national capital, to make the city clean. We will ensure that people of the city will get a hygienic environment to live in," he said. Kumar said that he would discuss with officials of MCD to improve its financial health. "The state government has recently released some money to the civic body, he added.

Kumar's appointment as the special officer of the unified MCD is considered significant as he is expected to play a vital role in the functioning of the unified municipal corporation, months before the civic elections.

While informing about the plan to make the corporation work in a more effective and environment friendly way, he said that they will

make the MCD paperless, in order to save the trees and bring digitalisation to the civic body.

"The Civic body will speed up the work at Ghazipur landfill area to avoid any further fire incidents at the place. The further steps for the betterment of the city will be discussed in a meeting with the officials," he added.

A day before taking the charge as the SO of the MCD, Ashwani Kumar along with the Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti and Chief Secretary, Government of NCT Delhi, Naresh Kumar visited the Ghazipur landfill site which has been in the headlines for the past few months and took the stock of the situation.

Meanwhile, in its first order after assuming the charge of MCD commissioner, Bharti made it clear that erstwhile Central Establishment Department (SDMC) shall be the nodal Central Establishment Department of unified MCD. Similarly, the erstwhile Office of CA-cum-FA and the Accounts Department (HQ), SDMC shall be nodal Finance/Accounts Department of unified MCD.

On Sunday, MCD Commissioner welcomed Kumar and introduced officers to him. He also briefed him about the working of the corporation and also briefed him about challenges being faced by the civic body. Senior officials from various departments of the MCD, who were present on the occasion, also greeted both.

Bharti, was the commissioner of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation prior to this assignment, and he was the senior-most among Delhi's erstwhile three municipal commissioners said that his priority will be to provide the best municipal services delivered to the people of Delhi in a transparent manner.

On May 20, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs appointed the Special Officer and Commissioner of the unified Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The Ministry of Home Affairs on Friday appointed IAS officer Ashwini Kumar as the Special Officer and Commissioner of the unified Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

"The planned unification of the MCDs' first administrative step would be to nullify their boundaries. "Unlike the MCD trifurcation in which fresh maps had to be drawn, now one has to just declare that it all comes under one corporation," said Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, leader of the opposition of Delhi Assembly.

Join Lakshadweep admin now or face action: MHA to 6 DANICS officers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of challenging its transfer order, the Ministry of Home Affairs has warned of disciplinary action "without any further reference" against six DANICS (Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Island Civil Services) officers, working with the Delhi Government, if they fail to join the Lakshadweep Administration "immediately".

In a fresh order dated May 20, the MHA directed six officials - Sandeep Kumar Mishra, Sravan Bagaria, Shailendra Singh Parihar, Singare Ramchandra Mahadev, Nitin Kumar Jindal and Rakesh Kumar have been asked to immediately report to the Union Territory (UT) Lakshadweep administration and forward a copy of their joining report, failing which disciplinary action as per

rules will be initiated without any further reference. The ministry has marked its order to all UTs and Chief Secretary of Delhi. They were initially served the transfer order in November last year, after which the officers moved the CAT. They were again served with a reminder in February to join their new posting but that too was ignored as the matter was pending before the CAT.

Sources said that there are over two dozen DANICS officials staying in Delhi despite their transfer order. The MHA has prepared a list of such officials who have refused to go outside Delhi despite their transfer orders.

The fresh order came on May 20, immediately after the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) bench headed by chairperson Manjula Das ruled that there was "no merit" in the applications of

the six DANICS officers challenging the decision of the ministry to transfer them to Lakshadweep.

Dismissing the pleas of six officers challenging the MHA's transfer orders, the CAT Principal bench headed by chairman Manjula Das and member Mohd Jamshed said the transfer of the applicants has been necessitated on account of the development noted therein and the transfer can not be termed as one without reason. In its 23 pages order, the CAT Principal Bench said, "We are of the view that it is not necessary to give the reason in the transfer order itself".

The order said that "It is the settled proposition of law that a government servant cannot disobey the transfer order by not reporting at the place of posting and then go to the court to ventilate his grievances."

"It is his duty to first report for work where he is transferred and to make a representation subsequently as to what may be his personal problems, which has admittedly not been done in the instant case."

The Principal bench also said that no government servant has any legal right to be posted at any particular place since the transfer of an employee appointed to the class or category of transferable posts from one place to another is not only an incident but a condition of service, "necessary too in public interest and efficiency in the public administration". The tendency of not reporting at the place of posting and indulging in litigation has been seriously viewed by the Supreme Court also, the order said while drawing the attention to various judgements from the apex court.

21-yr-old held for SUV stunt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 21-year-old man, who seems to be inspired by Bollywood, was arrested by Noida Police for creating nuisance after his video of balancing himself on two moving SUVs on a Noida road went viral. The accused has been identified as Rajiv (21), a resident of Sorakha village in Gautam Budh Nagar area.

The man had got the video shot for posting it on social media. Police said that the two SUVs used for the stunt have been impounded.

Bollywood actor, Ajay Devgan had performed a stunt of balancing himself on two bikes in movie 'Phool aur Kaante' and again he performed the stunt in 'Golmaal 3' using two cars.



According to Sharad Kant, the Station House Officer (SHO) of sector - 113, a video had surfaced on social media Saturday, purportedly showing a young man balancing himself on two moving SUVs on a Noida road, prompting the local police to take action against him under the Motor Vehicles Act for creating a nuisance with the dangerous stunt.

"Based on the video, the man was traced and arrested. Two SUVs were also

seized," said the SHO.

Meanwhile, Gautam Buddha Nagar Police Commissioner Alok Singh lauded the local police for the prompt action and urged parents and guardians of children and youth to pay attention.

His advice comes in the wake of several videos and short clips emerging on social media where young boys and girls are seen performing stunts on city roads or public places or engaging in acts deemed as "creating nuisance".

Two years ago, a police sub-inspector in Madhya Pradesh performed a similar Ajay Devgn-like stunt atop two Honda City cars in uniform, with a video of the event going viral on social media.

The police officer was later suspended from service and a fine was also imposed on him.

AAP's Amanatullah seeks 'unconditional public apology' from Delhi Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A leader Amanatullah Khan has sent a legal notice to the Delhi Police through his lawyer demanding an "unconditional public apology" for allegedly violating his and his family's "fundamental rights".

Khan, an MLA from Okhla, was recently arrested during an anti-encroachment drive in Madanpur Khadar and had earlier been declared a "bad character" by the Delhi Police. He is currently out of jail on bail.

"Delhi Police is constant-



the dais and did not carry his mobile phone.

"The content posted smacks of malice and I believe that my Twitter account had been hacked by some wrongdoers, for the reasons best known to them. Please enquire & seal the IP address and take appropriate action of cybercrime at the earliest in accordance with law and oblige," reads the complaint copy.

The Delhi Police took to Twitter to inform and tweet the photo of the complaint by the Congress leader with a request to him to submit the device claimed to have been hacked for further investigation.

"Thank you @adhirrcinc for bringing the issue to our notice. It's requested that you submit us the devices which you claim to have been hacked for conducting the investigation on the basis of the complaint made by you. Looking forward to your co-operation. Legal action is being taken," Delhi Police wrote on Twitter.

ly targeting me. This time Delhi Police attacked my right to live with dignity besides defaming my family. Delhi Police is weaving imaginary stories about me without any evidence," Khan tweeted Sunday sharing the copy of the notice.

The legal notice sent to Delhi Police Commissioner on Saturday by Khan's lawyer demanded an "unconditional, written, public apology" to his wife and children allegedly for "brazen infraction" by the force of their fundamental rights.

The notice claimed that Khan, who is also the chairman of Delhi Waqf Board, was

"peacefully" protesting against the anti-encroachment drive by South MCD in the interest of the local public on May 12.

The proposal for declaring Khan a "bad character" was sent on March 28 by the Jamia Nagar Police Station in Southeast district and was approved on March 30.

A total of 18 FIRs have been registered against him, the document said. According to the police, a person who has involvement in several cases, including that of murder and attempt to murder, and can disturb peace in an area is declared a "bad character".

45-yr-old woman dies, son injured after car collides with divider

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a tragic incident, a 45-year-old woman died while her son was injured after their Mahindra Scorpio car collided with the divider at Northwest Delhi's Satyawati flyover in the early hours of Sunday.

According to police, the mother and son were returning home after attending a function when the incident occurred and the car was being driven by the son.

"The impact of the accident was such that the woman was thrown out of the car and fell off the flyover. The car was crushed in front," said police.

Police said that the CCTV cameras installed in and around the accident spot are being analysed to ascertain the sequence of the incident

Police said that the victim Poonam Bhatia succumbed to her injuries while her 21-year-old son Vats Bhatia, both residents of Ashok Vihar in Northwest Delhi, is still under treatment at Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital.

According to Usha Rangnani, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district, at around 5 AM, a police control room (PCR) call regarding an accident was received at Satyawati Flyover Bharat Nagar Police Station following which a police team was dispatched for the spot. "When the local police reached the spot, they found a Scorpio vehicle bearing Delhi registration number in mangled state. According to the preliminary enquiry, after the car hit the divider at Satyawati Flyover, the driver lost its control," said the DCP. "Both were immediately shifted to Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital, where the woman succumbed to her injuries."

City records 39.3 degrees C, a notch less than normal around this time of year

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital on Sunday witnessed a maximum temperature of 39.3 degrees Celsius, which was one notch less than the normal for this time of the year.

The minimum temperature recorded at the Safdarjung Observatory was 23.1 degrees Celsius, which was three notches colder than the normal for this season.

The relative humidity on Saturday morning at 8:30 was recorded at 50 per cent and 31 per cent in the evening at 5:30.

The weather stations at Ridge, Ayazgarh, Mungeshpur, Najafgarh, Pitampura, Palam, and Lodhi Road recorded maximum temperatures of 40.2 degrees Celsius, 40.6 degrees Celsius, 41.9 degrees Celsius, 41.1 degrees Celsius, 40.5 degrees Celsius, 40.2 degrees Celsius and 39.4 degrees Celsius respectively.

The IMD said the wet spell over



Northwest and East India from 22nd to 24th with peak intensity on 23rd May over Northwest India and on 23rd and 24th May over East India.

"Fall in maximum temperatures by 3-5 degree Celsius over many parts of Northwest India and Central India during next three days and rise by 2-4 degree Celsius," predicted the IMD.

"No significant change in maximum temperatures over Gujarat state

during next three days and rise by 2-3 degree Celsius," it said.

"No significant change in maximum temperatures is very likely over rest parts of the country during next three days," IMD further predicted.

Meanwhile, the peak power demand in the national capital on Saturday cloaked 5786 at 12:47 pm late night.

According to the sources in discoms, Delhi's peak power demand has increased by 10 per cent since May 1. Since April 1, the city's peak power demand has increased by over 58 per cent.

"In May so far, the peak power demand has been higher on 100 per cent of the corresponding days of May of 2021, 2020, and 2019," he said.

"Earlier, in April 2022, the peak power demand had been higher on 100 per cent of the corresponding days in respect to that of April 2021, 2020, and 2019. Moreover, on seven occasions in April 2022, Delhi's peak power demand clocked the highest ever in April, each breaking the previous record in quick succession. On April 19, it was 5735 MW, 5761 MW on April 20, 5781 MW on August 21, 5786 MW on April 27, 6050 MW on April 28, and 6197 on April 29 and 6036 MW on April 30," he added.

Completed 66% of desilting of drains: MCD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Sunday said that it has removed about 60,000 metric tonnes of silt and completed nearly 66 per cent of the work of desilting of drains. The civic body also said that the remaining work will be completed by June 15. However, the MCD statement came after the AAP leader Durgesh Pathak alleged that with monsoon approaching, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled that MCD fails to make preparations to desilt drains in time to avoid water-logging.

Amit Kumar, Director of the Directorate of Press and Information, said that the Civic Agency has so far removed about 60000 metric tonnes of silt from various drains, completing about 66 per cent of the total target and the remaining work will be completed by June 15.

"The silt taken out from the

drains is being sent to the landfill site and its monitoring is being done through RFID tags. The entire process is fully computerized and there is no manual interference. The MCD is fully committed to providing better and improved civic amenities to the citizens," he said.

Meanwhile, the AAP leader, Durgesh Pathak said that monsoon showers are on the verge of hitting the national Capital and 95 per cent of drains come under BJP-ruled MCD's purview but they haven't even started cleaning them yet.

"It is May 22 today, and there isn't much time left before June 5 floats by, and the monsoons are upon us. Despite a mere 10-15 days remaining, the BJP-ruled MCD has not yet begun the process of cleaning the silt out of drains measuring 60 foot or less, which cover 95 per cent of Delhi's drainage system," Pathak claimed.

"It is important to bring this dismal state of affairs to public

notice, of how the BJP-led MCD is failing to fulfill its basic responsibilities. If the due process had been followed, the process of cleaning out these drains, which come under the BJP-led MCD, should have been completed by now. But it is appalling to note that the work has not even been started," said Pathak.

"An interesting fact of the matter is that over a thousand bulldozers are required for the cleaning of these small-medium sized drains across Delhi. But the previously trifurcated MCDs - South, East, and North - all combined do not possess more than 50 bulldozers," said Pathak. "I ask the BJP leaders and councilors - do you wish to see all of Delhi submerged in the water this year as well? Do you want to see a repeat of the destruction that rains cause, to see the slums get washed away yet again? You are gambling with the lives of lakhs of innocent people," said Pathak.

Golden chapter in India’s sporting history: PM on recent successes

Win in Thomas, Uber Cups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Describing India’s win in the Thomas Cup and Uber Cup team of the badminton champions as a “golden chapter in Indian sporting history”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who interacted with the players on Sunday asked them that they should “keep the momentum going”.

The players spoke with Prime Minister and talked about different aspects of their game, life beyond badminton, and more. Kidambi Srikanth talked about the great feeling among the player about being recognized by the Prime Minister in such a proud way.

The Prime Minister asked the team captain about his leadership style and challenges. Srikanth told that individually, everyone was performing great and the task was to bring out their best as a team. He also expressed his happiness over the privilege of playing the crucial deciding match.

On being asked by the Prime Minister about his world number 1 ranking and Gold in Thomas Cup, the ace shuttler said that both the milestones were his dreams and he is delighted to have achieved them. The Prime Minister said that due to not so great performance in earlier years, the Thomas cup was not very much talked about and he said it took some time in the country to sink in the enormity of the achievement of this team.

Modi said “On behalf of the entire country I congratulate you and your entire team as after decades, the Indian flag has been firmly planted. This is not a small feat...Keeping the nerve and team together under tremendous pressure is something that I can understand very well. I congratulated you on phone but now I am feeling the joy of complimenting you in person”.

“This is like a golden chapter in India’s sporting history and champions like you and



players of your generation are the authors of this. We need to keep this momentum going”, he said. Chirag Shetty also narrated his journey of the tournament and recalled coming to PM residence with Olympic Contingent. The Prime Minister said that he noted the disappointment among a few players when some of them could not win a medal at the Olympics.

“One defeat is not the end, one needs determination and passion in life. Victory is a natural outcome for such people, you have shown that”, he said. The Prime Minister told the team that they will win many more medals in the course of time. They have to play a lot and bloom (khelna bhi hai khilna bhi hai) and have to take the country into the world of sports.

“Now India can’t lag behind. Your victories are inspiring the generations for sports”, The Prime Minister added.

The Prime Minister thanked Lakshya Sen for bringing ‘Bal Mithai’ from Almora, Uttarakhand, as promised during the telephone call immediately after the victory, according to Prime Minister’s Office. “I want to keep winning medals for India and keep meeting you like this”, said the young badminton ace.

The Prime Minister enquired about the bout of food poisoning that Lakshya faced during the tournament. When asked about his advice for young children who are taking up the sport, Lakshya asked them to devote their full attention to training.

Railway staffers working as personal staff of Min of State for Railways removed

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a major decision, the Railway Board in one go “removed” more than two dozen railway employees working in the capacity of the personal staff of a Minister of State for Railways.

The officials including those in the ranks of Deputy Director, Section Officer, and Protocol Officers were reportedly removed on charges of corruption operating. Sources said of the total of 27 staffers 9 are lowly-placed peons. They have punished for are seeking favours like transfer postings, reservations in lieu of money, and bookings at rail guest houses etc.

Sources said the staffers who are full-time rail employees were attached to a Minister of State after the last reshuffle in July.

An order issued by the Rail Board Secretary’s office dated May 20 directed the 27 employees to go back to their parent office and leave the Rail Ministers secretariat without

any delay.

“Various kinds of corrupt practices were going on, and based on intelligence information the action has been taken. Further investigations about the alleged involvement of private parties like travel agents and tourist sector agents are underway. If anyone is found guilty, they can be dismissed from the services as is being done in recent times,” said a senior rail official.

Charges of sale of emergency rail reservation quota are also being investigated and the nexus of rail staff including the peons and other lower staff will also be looked upon, sources said.

Sources said many of the 27 employees used to engage with the Railways zonal General Managers, DRMs and others and seek favour by misusing the name of MoS.

“The officials are being directed to report back to their respective controlling authority. The ministerial officials and rail reservation officials should place all the files,



records, documents pen drive, and electronic storage devices with official data, and office stationery securely in the office and hand them over to the nominated caretaker from the Secretary rail board also each of the ministerial staff should prepare a note of pending work and work in progress on their hands and note should be handed to the caretaker.” Said the Railway Board order attaching the names of all the officials attached to the MoS, a copy of which is the with The Pioneer.

Acting tough against the officials falling either in the

category of nonperformers or corrupt, Indian Railways in the last few months have dismissed at least 100 officials including top Secretary level officers as well. Last week also Railways dismissed from services for 20 class one officials including eight Joint Secretaries level officers.

The move is part of the Union government’s efforts to weed out non-performers. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, after he took over as Rail Minister in July 2021, has been warning officials “to take VRS and sit at home” if they do not perform.

Modi to visit HP, Gujarat by month end to address rallies, functions

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

The election tone in the poll-bound Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat will be set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who will be visiting both the States by the month-end and address rallies and public functions.

Modi is expected to be in Gujarat on May 29 and Himachal Pradesh on May 31.

Prime Minister is to visit Rajkot, Gujarat, on May 29, and inaugurate a new hospital and other projects. Since September 2021, when Bhupendra Patel took over from Vijay Rupani as Chief Minister, Modi has been regularly reaching out to the public in Gujarat through his various virtual addresses while inaugurating development projects or attending cultural or social events.

Modi will also attend a public event in Gandhinagar. BJP is in power in Gujarat for the last 27 years and seeks to retain power again as Congress and the new political entrant AAP are expected to throw a challenge to the saffron party in the home state of the Prime Minister.

BJP did win the last Gujarat assembly elections but not before facing a good fight from the Congress which won 77 seats against BJP’s 99 in 182 Gujarat assembly. This time around, AAP could play a spoilsport for the Congress by eating into its ‘secular votes’ in the state.

In a setback to the Congress in Gujarat, influential patidar leader Hardik



Patel suddenly quit the Congress this week.

Hardik is speculated to join the BJP which he has, so far, denied.

In Himachal Pradesh Modi is to address a big public rally in Shimla, the state Capital on May 31.

State Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has set the target of over 50,000 strong gatherings at the Prime Minister’s rally.

As in Gujarat, BJP will be facing anti-incumbency factors and an equal challenge from Congress, the main opposition, in Himachal Pradesh.

BJP had faced humiliating defeat at the hands of Congress in the by-elections of Mandi parliamentary seat along with

Arki, Fatehpur, and Jubbalkotkhai assembly seats in November 2021.

Pratibha Singh, wife of late Congress CM Virbhadr Singh, who for the third-time won the Mandi LS seat in the bypoll, has recently been appointed Congress state Chief. Congress is seeking to encash her husband’s image who was a nine-time MLA and six-time chief minister and five-time MP.

But unlike the BJP, Congress factionalism in the state unit is quite visible and may damage its poll prospects.

Himachal is also a home state of BJP’s National President

JP Nadra who has been frequently visiting the hill state for lat two months and organising booth-level meetings of BJP workers. According to sources, henceforth Modi will visit Himachal Pradesh once or twice each month and keep the campaign tempo high for the party. BJP president has already announced that the incumbent BJP Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur will continue to be CM face of the party, suggesting there will not be any last-minute change like those in Tripura, Gujarat, or Uttarakhand.

In the 2017 assembly poll BJP won 44 seats in Himachal Pradesh while Congress collected 21 seats in the 68-member state assembly.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday attacked the Modi Government over the Centre’s cut in fuel prices by saying the BJP is resorting to “trickery” and is creating an “optical delusion”. The party remarked that even after the cut in excise duty, the prices of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinder are much higher than in April 2014.

Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram said whether the states can afford to give up revenue from VAT on petrol and diesel unless the Centre devolves more funds or gives them more grants, likening their situation to being between “the devil and the deep sea”.

The senior Congress leader remarks come a day after the government announced Rs 8 per litre cut in excise duty on petrol and Rs 6 reduction on diesel.

“The notification on reduction of duty on Petrol and Diesel is now available. FM used the words ‘Excise Duty’, but the reduction is in Additional Excise Duty which is not shared with the states. Hence, contrary to what I said yesterday, the entire burden of the reduction falls on the Centre. To that extent, I stand corrected,” Chidambaram said.

“The states are getting very little by way of share of duties on petrol and diesel, he said, noting that their revenue is from VAT on petrol and diesel. I wonder if they can afford to give up that revenue unless

the Centre devolved more funds or gave them more grants,” Chidambaram said.

Congress spokesman Gaurav Vallabh said the BJP government’s cluelessness about the economy and financial management has been open for a long now. “Instead of accepting it and seeking guidance from experts, BJP only resorts to trick-

ery to create an optical delusion,” Vallabh said at AICC press conference.

He added, in April 2014, the excise duty on petrol was Rs 9.48 per litre, and today (Sunday), after reduction, it is Rs 19.9 a litre. There is still an increase of Rs 10.52 per litre. If it is compared to the excise duty from 2014, it is more than double. Regarding diesel, in April 2014, the excise duty was Rs 3.56 per litre. Today, after reduction, it is Rs 15.8 a litre. It is more than four times. It is 444 per cent more than April 2014. Petrol prices have increased by Rs 10 per litre in the last 60 days and then comes a reduction of Rs 9.5 a litre. Isn’t this trickery? Diesel prices have increased by Rs 10 per litre in the last 60 days and then comes a reduction of Rs 7



per litre. How is this welfare?,” Vallabh said.

LPG prices have increased by 142 per cent between May 2014 and May 2022. After the “generous” reduction of Rs 200, prices are still 94 per cent higher than in May 2014. LPG prices have increased by more than Rs 400 in the last 18 months. In May 2014, LPG Cylinder prices were at Rs 414. In May 2022, it is Rs 803 only for Ujjawala cylinders. The prices are almost twice what it was in 2014, he pointed out.

“The true face of the BJP’s devotion to the poor lies in the CMIE report in 2021, which mentioned that the income of 97 per cent of Indians fell during the pandemic. Of course, there are certain close friends of the government whose welfare is making headlines every day

FM rebuts Opp’s criticism of excise duty cut, says move does not impact States sharing of taxes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday rebutted the Opposition’s criticism of excise duty cut impacting share of States in Central taxes, saying the Rs 8 a litre cut in petrol and Rs 6 reduction in diesel have been done in road and infrastructure cess levied on the two fuels, collection on which was never shared with states.

First, former union finance minister P Chidambaram and then other Opposition leaders

stated that the reduction in excise duty announced on Saturday evening would reduce the share of states in central taxes.

Chidambaram on Sunday retracted his statement saying the cut in the levies accrues to the central government alone.

Taking to Twitter, Sitharaman said she is sharing some useful facts on levies on petrol and diesel for the benefit of all.

“Basic Excise Duty (BED), Special Additional Excise duty (SAED), Road & Infrastructure

Cess (RIC) and Agriculture & Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC) together constitute Excise Duty on petrol and diesel.

Basic ED is sharable with states. SAED, RIC & AIDC are non-sharable,” she said.

The excise duty reduction of Rs 8 per litre on petrol and Rs 6 a litre on diesel has entirely been made in RIC. This was the case even in November 2021 when tax on petrol was cut by Rs 5 and that on diesel by Rs 10, she said.

As per the centre-state tax

sharing formula, 41 per cent of taxes collected by the Centre go to states. These however do not include collections from levy of cess. Most of the tax on petrol and diesel is made up of cess.

While total incidence of central tax on petrol prior to Saturday’s cut was Rs 27.90 per litre, basic excise duty was only Rs 1.40 a litre. Similarly, out of Rs 21.80 a litre total central tax on diesel, basic excise duty was only Rs 1.80.

Special additional excise duty of Rs 11 a litre on petrol

and Rs 8 per litre on diesel was levied. A Rs 2.50 a litre agriculture infrastructure and development cess (AIDC) was levied on petrol and Rs 4 per litre on diesel.

Petrol commanded Rs 13 a litre additional excise duty in form of RIC and Rs 8 of such tax was levied on per litre of diesel. This has been cut in Saturday’s excise reduction. Only Rs 1.40 per litre BED collected on petrol and Rs 1.80 on diesel are shared with states. The SAED, AIDC and RIC are not shared.

Basic ED which is sharable with states has not been touched. Therefore, the entire burden of these two duty cuts (made in Nov, 21 and yesterday) is borne by the Centre,” she said.

“The duty reduction made yesterday has an implication of Rs 1,00,000 cr a year for Centre. The duty reduction made in November’21 has an implication of Rs 1,20,000 cr a year for Centre. Total revenue implication to Centre, on these two duty cuts is thus Rs 2,20,000 cr a year.”

Chidambaram had on Saturday evening stated that the cut in excise duty was “equal to rob Peter more & pay Peter less”.

“FM’s exhortation to States is meaningless. When she cuts Central Excise by one rupee, 41 paise of that rupee belongs to the States,” he had stated.

On Sunday, he retracted saying contrary to what he had said on Saturday “the entire burden of the reduction falls on the Centre. To that extent, I stand corrected.”

Sitharaman said RBI data

shows total developmental expenditure incurred by the Modi government during 2014-22 was Rs 90.9 lakh crore.

“In contrast, only Rs 49.2 lakh crore was spent on developmental expenditure during 2004-14.” “The expenditure incurred by our Govt under @PMOIndia @narendramodi includes Rs 24.85 lakh crore spent so far on food, fuel and fertiliser subsidies and Rs 26.3 lakh crore on capital creation. Over the 10 years of UPA, only Rs 13.9 lakh crore was spent on subsidies,” she added.

FinMin issues directives for infra projects to be routed through PM GatiShakti’s NPG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All logistics and connectivity infrastructure projects, entailing investment of over Rs 500 crore, would now route through the network planning group (NPG) constituted under the PM GatiShakti initiative with the Finance Ministry issuing the necessary instructions and creation of the national master plan digital platform, an official said.

According to an office memorandum of the department of expenditure dated April 28, a revised format has been issued for Public Investment Board (PIB)/Delegated Investment Board (DIB) project proposals.

The revised format of the

PIB/DIB memorandum...Will apply to all the PIB/DIB proposals for new projects submitted on or after April 28, 2022,” it has said.

As per the revised format, proposals should include whether the project has components of logistics or infrastructure connectivity; and whether it has been examined by NPG for convergence and integration at the conceptualisation or feasibility study stage.

The PM GatiShakti plan was announced last year with an aim to break departmental silos and bring in more holistic and integrated planning and execution of projects with a view to addressing the issues of multi-modal and last-mile connectivities.

India, Dhaka begin 2-day CORPAT in Bay of Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Aimed at securing their maritime interests, India and Bangladesh on Sunday commenced the two-day Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) in the Northern Bay of Bengal. The exercise is taking place along the International Maritime Boundary. Giving details of the joint patrolling, Navy officials said here, it is the fourth edition of the Indian Navy-Bangladesh Navy Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT). The last CORPAT was conducted in October 2020. Two indigenously built Indian warships - Kora, a guided-missile corvette and Sumedha, an offshore patrol vessel are par-

ticipating in the exercise along with Bangladesh Navy ships Ali Haider and Abu Ubaidah. In addition, maritime patrol aircraft of both navies would also be participating in the Coordinated Patrol.

The regular conduct of CORPATs has strengthened mutual understanding and enhanced interoperability between both the navies in countering transnational maritime threats at sea.

Given the close ties between the two countries, the Indian Navy and Bangladesh Navy cooperate in various operational engagements, which include bilateral exercise ‘BON-GOSAGAR’ and CORPAT. Ships of the two Navies also visit each other’s ports on a regular basis.

Centre forms 3-member panel to investigate Ramban tunnel collapse

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has constituted a committee of 3 independent experts to investigate the reasons for recent collapse of a part of under-construction tunnel in Ramban in Jammu-Srinagar highway and suggest remedial measures.

State-owned National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has already initiated procedure to handle such emergency situation and also taking all possible measures to avoid such incidents in future, an official statement said on Sunday. “A committee of 3 independent eminent experts has been constituted by the central government which has already moved to the site to investigate the reasons for slide/collapse and remedial measures thereof... Further

action will be taken based on report of committee,” it said.

According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) office order, Professor J T Sahu of IIT Delhi will be the chairman of the committee, and it will submit the report to the ministry within 10 days.

According to the official statement, the stretch between Digdole and Khooni Nallah of Ramban Banihal section is prone to frequent landslide and shooting stones due to fragile geology.

Considering the strategic importance of maintaining all-weather connectivity to Srinagar and after assessing the challenges in ensuring stability of hill slopes on existing alignment, tunnels, viaducts are proposed under 3 packages in Ramban-Banihal section, it

said.

“On 19.05.2022 around 10.30 to 11 PM, land slide and shooting of stones started while the execution of portal support installation work of adit at Khooni Nallah was also being done. Before workers could be moved out, suddenly huge rock mass fell above the false steel portal erected for construction of adit which caved in leading to trapping of 12 workers at that spot,” the statement said.

Senior NHAI officers immediately reached the site and rescue work was immediately started by SDRF, NDRE, J&K Police, the statement said adding two workers were rescued immediately and were hospitalized; and all possible medical aid is being extended to them.

It said the trapped workers did not survive and bodies of

10 trapped workers were recovered by last Saturday evening.

Those whose life could not be saved are being given workman compensation and additional ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh by EPC contractor which amounts to at least Rs 15 lakh.

The injured are also being adequately compensated and in addition, the UT administration has announced ex-gratia relief of Rs 1 lakh.

It is yet to be determined whether the incident occurred due to work being executed or due to natural reasons, the statement added.

The twin tube tunnel work in 4-laning from Digdole to Panthyal on Jammu-Srinagar highway was awarded to Ceigall India Limited in JV with Patel Engineering Limited. The construction work started on February 1, 2022.

Arunachal jewel in India's crown: Shah

People greet with 'Jai Hind' instead of 'namaste': HM

PTI ■ NAMSAI (ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

Terming Arunachal Pradesh as a 'jewel in India's crown', Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted that people of the northeastern State bordering China are filled with patriotism and greet each other with 'Jai Hind' instead of the usual 'Namaste'.

Shah, while addressing a rally after signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Arunachal Pradesh Government and the National Defence University (NDU) for the establishment of a campus at Pasighat in East Siang district, said the institution will give the youths of the State the opportunity to serve the country.

"Whenever we come to Arunachal Pradesh, we return with energy and patriotism. There is probably no other place in the country other than Arunachal Pradesh where people greet each other with 'Jai

Hind' instead of the usual 'Namaste'," Shah said.

He said that after Gujarat, the second campus of the NDU will be in Arunachal Pradesh.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has established two famous universities in the country – the National Defence University and the National Forensic Science University.

"The defence university will create trained manpower for the army and paramilitary forces. The youths of Arunachal Pradesh are not only patriotic but also physically fit. The institution will provide them the opportunity to serve the nation," the Union home minister said.

He said projects worth Rs 1,180 crore are either completed or will be inaugurated soon.

"A total of 33,466 families and 800 self-help groups in the state were benefited through various start-ups worth Rs 394 crore, while 22 projects worth Rs 436 crore have been completed and inaugurated during the day and another 25 projects worth Rs 350 crore would be launched soon," he said.

Shah inaugurated and laid the foundation for 40 projects worth around Rs 1,000 crore during the day.

He said the 2,000 MW



Lower Subansiri hydroelectric power project will be operational by 2023, and it will benefit the state immensely. Work on the 2,880 MW Dibang multipurpose project, the biggest in the world, will start soon while the 600 MW Kameng project is already functioning.

Shah said that when Chief Minister Pema Khandu assumed charge, the state's annual budget was only Rs 12,500 crore, but it has now increased to Rs 26,000 crore. Similarly, the state's GDP has also tripled to Rs 30,000 crore from Rs 10,000 crore.

"Around 3,000 villages have 4G connectivity while plans are afoot to expand it to 1,680 more villages," he said.

Under the border village illumination programme, work to provide street lighting to 700

villages is underway while construction of foot tracks in border areas is also on, he said.

"When the country celebrates 100 years of Independence, the states in Northeast will be at par in terms of development with those in other parts of the country," he said.

"For PM Modi, development should begin with Arunachal Pradesh. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he had instructed that the vaccines should first be provided to Arunachal Pradesh and now the state is free from the infection," the Union home minister said.

Shah, who laid the foundation of a 51-feet-bronze statue of sage Parshuram at Parshuram Kund in Lohit district on Saturday evening, said that the site has an immense potential to attract tourists.

"Within five years, Parshuram Kund will become a major tourist hub of the country with a railway line connecting it. A survey is underway for the project," he said.

Shah said that the NDA government had started development initiatives in the state and now it has good road, railway, air and digital connectivity and soon, Itanagar will get a greenfield airport.

Focus on being self-reliant in Defence technology, Rajnath tells stakeholders



PTI ■ NAGPUR

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday asked stakeholders in the sector to focus on being "self-reliant in defence technology while keeping pace with technology outside".

During his visit to Nagpur in Maharashtra, Singh also asked defence commanders to follow the correct maintenance and operational practices with the safety of personnel in mind, a release from a defence spokesperson said.

Air Marshal Shashiker Chaudhary, AOC-in-C Maintenance Command, and

other dignitaries from civil and military establishments received Singh on his arrival at the airport here.

Singh interacted with some defence sector stakeholders at the airport, the release said.

He was briefed about various activities undertaken by defence establishments, including the Army, the Air Force & defence PSUs, in this region, it said.

While addressing the defence sector stakeholders, Singh advised them to focus on being "atmanirbhar (self-reliant) in defence technology while keeping pace with technology outside".

Recruitment scam in Bengal schools: CBI registers FIR against 5

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The CBI has filed an FIR against five members of an advisory panel of the West Bengal School Service Commission in connection with its probe into alleged irregularities in recruitment to Group C posts in state government-aided schools, an official said on Sunday.

The central agency named the advisory committee's former chairman Shanti Prasad Sinha, SSC's ex-chairman Soumitra Sarkar, commission's former secretary Ashok Kumar Saha and its ex-programming officer Samarjit Acharya in the FIR. It also mentioned Kalyanmoy Ganguly, the president of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education in the first information report.

The CBI slapped charges of criminal conspiracy, cheating and forgery against them, the official said.

The agency has asked the five officials to submit "details of their bank balance and income tax returns as well as details of properties they have purchased in the names of

other people", the agency official said.

In its FIR, the central agency also mentioned that the SSC advisory panel was formed "on the insistence" of the then education minister Partha Chatterjee, he said.

The development came after state minister Paresw Adhikari was interrogated for the third consecutive day on Saturday on the 'illegal' appointment of his daughter as a teacher in a government-aided school. The agency had also quizzed Chatterjee in connection with its investigation into the alleged irregularities in recruitment to schools.

Chatterjee, who is now the industry and commerce minister of the Mamata Banerjee government, was the education minister when the alleged illegal appointments were made.

A division bench of the Calcutta High Court on May 18 upheld a single bench order for CBI inquiry into "illegal" appointments made in government-aided schools by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education on the recommendations of the SSC.

Illegal slaughterhouse busted in Aligarh, 37 arrested

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

A slaughterhouse (kattighar) was being run illegally in Chherat-based Hind Agro Industries Limited. On the complaints that were coming for several days, it was raided by a joint team of police-administrative officers and the whole game was caught.

The team arrested 37 people from the spot while illegally slaughtering animals on the ground and ignoring the rules. Illegal harvesting was being done here without ante-mortem and post-mortem. Its video also went viral on social media. The factory was running closed for about 18 years. But recently got the license till 2024. Apart from 37 arrested in this case, factory owner Samar Qureshi, production head Abdul Rauf and general manager Abid Qadeer are also named as accused.

A team led by SDM Kol Sanjeev Ojha and CO Civil Lines Shwetabh Pandey reached Hind Agro Industries Limited. Here the police force laid siege and arrested 37 people from the spot. Here the

slaughter was being done illegally on the ground instead of the machine.

Along with this, the illegal disposal of debris was also found. The meat of about 45 animals and their remains and equipment have been recovered from the spot. Sampling has been done by calling the vet and the meat was destroyed.

According to SDM Kol Sanjeev Ojha, Hind Agro Industries Chherat is lying closed since 2004. The factory owner has given it on rent to the contractor. Electricity connection has been cut due to non-payment of outstanding bills. Buffaloes and manual slaughter of buffaloes were found in the cattle slaughter house.

He told that the cattle were being slaughtered through factory owner Samar Qureshi, Production Head Abdul Rauf and General Manager Abid Qadeer. During this time the vet was not in the factory.

According to the rules, animals can be slaughtered only from eight to five in the morning, but the factory owners were getting

the animals slaughtered at night. Even three years ago, this factory was considered guilty of spreading pollution. He said that the pollution control board has permission to open the factory. License has also been received till 2024.

A report has been registered against 37 people in the police station under the Animal Cruelty Act, Prevention and Control of Pollution and thr Food Security Act. These accused include Zubair, Suhail, Bilal, Suhail Miraj, Rahat Qureshi, Pappu Khan, Javid, Mohammad Kalim Qureshi, Sadab Qureshi, Advocate Qureshi, Salman Qureshi, Aleem Abbasi, Khalid Qureshi, Navi alias Navia, Mohammad Chhote Qureshi, Afsar Qureshi, Wasim Qureshi. , Kafeel Qureshi, Haseen Qureshi, Raheesh Qureshi, Salman, Shanu Qureshi, Rizwan Qureshi, Afsar Ali, Imran Qureshi, Asif Qureshi, Sarfaraz Qureshi, Alim Dhoobi, Faissal Qureshi, Tauseef Qureshi, Ishtyaq Ahmed, Faizan Qureshi, Anas Qureshi, Irfan Qureshi , Asif Qureshi and Dilshad Rajput.

UP Govt: No order to surrender ration card, false reports circulating



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Sunday made it clear that no new order had been issued in the State regarding surrender or cancellation of ration cards.

Refuting misleading and false reports circulated in this regard in a section of the media, Food Commissioner Saurav Babu said that ration card verification was a normal process and it took place from time to time. He said baseless reports were being circulated regarding surrender of ration

cards and new eligibility criteria.

The food commissioner further clarified that the eligibility and ineligibility criteria of household ration cards were ascertained as per the government order (GO) dated October 07, 2014 and no changes were made to it since then.

He also said that no ration card holder could be declared ineligible on the basis of having a pucca house, electricity connection, weapon licence, motorcycle owner, poultry/cow rearing farm.

RS polls: Will support any candidate chosen by Shiv Sena, says Pawar

PTI ■ PUNE

NCP chief Sharad Pawar has said his party will support Sambhajiraje Chhatrapati or any other candidate chosen by the Shiv Sena in the upcoming polls to six Rajya Sabha seats in Maharashtra.

Pawar was talking to reporters after meeting representatives some Brahmin community organisations in Pune on Saturday.

The tenure of six Rajya Sabha members from Maharashtra — Piyush Goyal, Vinay Sahastrabudde and Vikas Mahatme (all three from the BJP), P Chidambaram (Congress), Praful Patel (NCP) and Sanjay Raut (Shiv Sena) ends on July 4.

The polls are scheduled on June 10. The BJP can win two Rajya Sabha seats with the number of MLAs it has, while the ruling allies Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP in Maharashtra can win a seat each. The contest will, therefore, be for the sixth seat. Sambhajiraje, a member



of the Kolhapur royal family and descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, was earlier a President-nominated member of the Upper House of Parliament.

He recently announced that he would contest the next election to the Rajya Sabha as an independent candidate, and appealed to all parties to back him. To a query from reporters here on Saturday, Pawar said, "Two years ago, we had demanded two seats (in the Rajya Sabha) and we got those. But, this time, we will get one seat."

Mayawati asks State Govts to reduce VAT on fuel

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Welcoming the Centre's decision to slash the excise duty on petrol and diesel besides giving relief on LPG cylinders connections sanctioned under Ujjwala Scheme, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday said it was now the duty of State Governments, including that of Uttar Pradesh, to immediately announce a similar cut in the value-added-tax (VAT) on fuel.

In a tweet in Hindi, Mayawati said: "After a long time, the Centre has given some relief, by reducing charges on petrol- diesel, to the people who were forced to live a miserable life due to rising inflation, poverty, unemployment and

stress. Now, it is the responsibility of Uttar Pradesh and other states to follow the advice of the Centre and immediately reduce VAT (on diesel and petrol)."

"Similarly, the Central and state governments, while sacrificing their political interest, should pay attention to national problems, which are becoming serious day-by-day, so that life can normalise," the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said in another tweet. Petrol price on Sunday was slashed by Rs 8.69 a litre and that of diesel by Rs 7.05 per litre following the government's decision to cut excise duty on auto fuels, giving relief to consumers battered by high fuel prices that had pushed inflation to a record high.

OC suspended over custodial death: Assam DGP

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Director General of Police (DGP) Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta on Sunday said that the in-charge of Bataadrava police station, which was burnt down on the previous day by locals over allegations of custodial death, has been suspended. Mahanta also claimed that those involved in the burning down of the police station with criminal records in it were not grieving relatives of the deceased but were history-sheeters, and asserted that this was not a simple action-reaction incident and there is much more to it.

"We take this unfortunate death very seriously and have put the OC of Bataadrava police station in Nagaon district on suspension. If there is any foul

play at our end, we mean to find that and punish the guilty according to law. No two ways about it," he said.

Narrating the incident in a long Facebook post on the DGP's official page, Mahanta said that 39-year-old Safiqul Islam was brought to the police station at 9.30 PM on May 20 after receiving a complaint of him being in a drunken state.

"He was in fact lying on a public road before he was brought in. He was booked after a medical check-up. The next day he was released and handed over to his wife. His wife even gave him some water/food."

"Later he complained of sickness and he was taken to two hospitals, one after another. Unfortunately, he was declared dead," he said.

After this, a mob had set

ablaze the police station and several two-wheelers on Saturday afternoon alleging that the fish trader died due to police torture. Speaking about the violence, Mahanta said, "What took place later that day, we all know. Some local bad elements took law into their own hands and burnt down the thana. These bad elements came in all forms — women, men, young and old. But the preparedness with which they came, the ferocious and organised attack they staged on the police force has made us think deeper."

The DGP asserted that Assam Police does not think the attackers were grieving relatives of the deceased, but as it has identified "they were bad characters and their relatives with criminal records that were within the thana."

Bihar Police accused of demolishing nine huts in Bengal's Malda district

PTI ■ MALDA (WB)

Bihar Police has allegedly demolished nine huts in West Bengal's Malda district along the inter-State boundary and also beaten up several residents including women when they protested the drive, officials said on Sunday. Malda district administration claimed the incident happened in Sadlichak gram panchayat area in Harishchandrapur 2 block on the West Bengal side of a road that marks the inter-state border on Friday night and bulldozers were used to demolish the huts.

"Nine houses belonging to three families have been demolished in West Bengal.

Higher authorities have been informed and the matter was discussed with the Katihar district administration of Bihar," Malda District Magistrate Rajarshi Mitra said.

The uprooted people, who claimed to have been residing on the government land for generations, lodged a police complaint and alleged that a TMC supporter Ganesh Pramanik had bribed Bihar Police personnel to carry out the demolition drive to clear the land which shares border with his property.

They alleged that Pramanik frequently quarrelled with the affected people asking them to vacate the government land. "We are living under the

open sky and are drenched in rain and haven't eaten food as Bihar Police destroyed our stocks. We need help," an affected person said.

Maldaha Uttar BJP MP Khagen Murmu, who visited the spot, said, "This village and the mouza falls within West Bengal. Bihar is on the other side of the road. All of a sudden without any provocation, Bihar Police demolished these huts on the West Bengal side."

"These poor people have been living here for decades. I have come to know that adjacent to the land on which these demolished huts stood, there are lands of some TMC members and they wanted the area to be cleared and bribed

Deferred Ayodhya visit as developments around it were ploy to 'trap' MNS workers into legal hassles: Raj Thackeray

PTI ■ PUNE

MNS chief Raj Thackeray on Sunday claimed that political developments around his proposed Ayodhya visit were a ploy to "trap" his party workers into legal tangles and hence, he decided to defer his trip to the Uttar Pradesh city.

Addressing an indoor rally at a hall in Pune city of Maharashtra, Thackeray said he has to undergo a surgery on June 1 and after recovering from it, he would again address a public meeting.

He reiterated that the MNS workers will resume agitation if loudspeakers atop mosques do not follow the noise rules. Thackeray had earlier asked his partymen to play 'Hanuman Chalisa' outside mosques where loudspeakers play



'ajzaan'.

Amid the controversy over an AIMIM leader's recent visit to Mughal ruler Aurangzeb's tomb in Aurangabad city of Maharashtra, the MNS leader appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Centre to change the name of Aurangabad to Sambhaji Nagar

and to bring the Uniform Civil Code.

Taking a swipe at NCP chief who had addressed a rally braving rain before the Maharashtra Assembly polls in 2019, Thackeray said, "We were planning a gathering in an open space, but considering the possibility of rain, we decided

to hold it indoors. Also, there are no elections nearby to stand in rain for giving a speech."

On Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray recently slamming the BJP's "fake Hindutva", the MNS president said, "The CM claimed their Hindutva is real. Are they talking about a washing powder, like who's detergent is better than the other?"

He claimed the MNS has shown "results" on the issue of Hindutva, in the wake of his party's protest against loud-speakers on mosques.

On Friday, Raj Thackeray had announced that his visit to Ayodhya scheduled on June 5 has been put on hold for now, and said he would share the details about it during his Sunday rally in Pune.

UP Assembly goes paperless

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another milestone towards creating a transparent mechanism after further strengthening good governance by expanding procedures like direct benefit transfer (DBT) and extending online services to crores of beneficiaries, Uttar Pradesh also became the first State in the entire country to make the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly completely digital and paperless.

Giving this information here on Sunday evening, a Government spokesman claimed that right from the time Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath came to power in Uttar Pradesh after securing a landslide victory in 2017, there has been a huge emphasis on introducing technology in the functioning of the government and bringing in transparency.

Leaving no stone unturned to make India's most populous State truly a digital State, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) service centre at the State Assembly's premises in the presence of Speaker Satish Mahana earlier on Thursday, the spokesman added while claiming that UP was the first State to do so.

Now, under e-Vidhan (digitalisation/digitisation of legislatures) initiative, the MLAs will have electronic tablets installed on their desks in the assembly to continually update them about the proceedings of the House, the questions taken up and their answers, agenda of the day, notices, etc. Also, the assembly will have fixed seats for each of the 403 members.

Moreover, it goes without saying that for a state to become fully digitised, the

process of payments and transactions over digital platforms is the backbone of the movement.

In this sequence, various government services have been made available online by the Yogi Adityanath government in the last five years. At present, as per the National Government Services Portal, about 178 services are available online in Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is amongst the best performing states in the country in using the DBT system for the beneficiaries to get the benefits of government schemes directly into their bank accounts.

To strengthen the vision of minimum government and maximum governance, more and more government schemes are being made available online. For the convenience of women, female students, senior citizens, farmers, athletes in getting financial assistance in the form

of scholarships, grants, pension, medical aid or under schemes like PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, technology has been put in use to eliminate the role of touts, thereby eradicating corruption. From the year 2017 till now, the Uttar Pradesh government has set a record and has transferred more than Rs 3 lakh crore to the beneficiaries through DBT. In the year 2020-21 alone, a sum of Rs 56,000 crore had reached the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. In pursuance of the directives of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, as many as 137 schemes of 27 government departments have been linked to this system. Besides, during COVID-19 crisis, lakhs of farmers, MGNREGA beneficiaries, labourers, workers, women, old and disabled citizens and pensioners were provided benefits without any delay in a hassle-free manner.

FIRST COLUMN

THE CAUSES OF RUPEE HITTING ALL-TIME LOW

Policy intervention could reverse the trend



RAVI KUMAR GUPTA



SARTHAK KANSAL

The rupee has shown a lot of irregularities since January,2022. The Rupee stood 73.77 against the Dollar on 12th January,2022 and since then it is in downward trend. On 16th May,2022, the Indian rupee fell to an all-time low of 77.81 against the previous low of 76.98 against the USD.

The increase in the rate hike by the Fed earlier this week by 50 bps has created a huge demand for USD in local markets. Foreign investors are pulling their money out of the Indian stock market owing to greater demand for USD. The outflow of foreign investors has pulled 1.5 lakh crores so far from the Indian stock market. This has caused a huge gap to be filled by domestic investors.About one-fifth of India's total imports are accounted by crude oil. Because of the Russia-Ukraine war, crude oil prices have skyrocketed. The cost per barrel has broken all records after the 2008 recession and came to a high of \$123.70 in the year 2022.This has caused the strengthening of the USD and caused a major concern in the current account deficit of India.

It is expected to hit a 10 year high of 3.3% of GDP this year, causing the rupee to fall even more.While China and Japan are unable to adjust their monetary policy according to the US federal rate hike, it has drastically affected the value of their currencies along with major Asian currencies.



Performing poorly, the rupee was bound to be affected.The lockdown in China has made it difficult to deal with a lot of companies, which has caused the yuan to depreciate further, affecting sentiments of emerging market currencies.Economists believe the dollar is strengthening not only as a result of aggressive Fed policy, but also as a result of weak rising sentiment. There is a greater risk in the market because of the Russia-Ukraine war and a tighter lockdown in China. Therefore, the significance of safe currency in a changing world increases.Food inflation, which accounts for almost half of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), has been increasing in multilevel due to the global rise in the price of vegetables and cooking oil. A global supply shortage has caused the inflation level to reach an all-time high.Wholesale price index of India also jumped to an all-time high of 15.1% in April 2022 compared to the previous 14.6% in March 2022.All these factors are putting pressure on emerging markets like India causing them to depreciate against the USD.

To ensure the safety of the rupee, the Reserve Bank of India has started selling large chunks of foreign reserves. The \$642.5 billion foreign Reserve has fallen to \$597.7 billion because of selling. There is a continuous fall in weekly foreign Reserve. The Reserve Bank of India also increased the repo rate by 40 basis points, changing from 4% to 4.40% and CRR increased by 50 basis points (4.5%) to tackle inflation among the falling rupees.Feweconomists believe that the rupee will continue to lose as there is a significant difference in long-term inflation between India and the USA. On the other hand, someeconomistscontend that value of the rupee will rise again through intervention of tools of monetary policy.

(Gupta is Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Management Science and Kansal is in Computer Science Junior Year, Madan Mohan Malaviya University of Technology, Gorakhpur, India. The views expressed are personal.)

Bihar and industry: Will the twain meet?

The perception that Bihar is off limits for industry is passe now, according to the Minister for Industry in the State, Shahnawaz Hussain

The list of participants at the Bihar Investors Meet in Delhi on May 12 made a very impressive reading indeed- Adani, ITC, HUL, Coca Cola, Amazon, Flipkart, Samsung, Amul, Britannia Industries, Usha Martin, Honda, L&T, Arvind Mills, TATA Bluescope, Shree Cement, Ambuja Cement, to name a few. Presence of M A Yusuf Ali, Chairman, LuLu group International from Dubai, was the icing on the cake. ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri and many other notable industry biggies embellished the occasion.

The man of the moment, Bihar Minister for Industry Shahnawaz Hussain, said things which even diehard Biharis will find tough to stomach. He went on to declare that Bihar is now the most favoured investment destination in the country. The perception that Bihar is off limits for industry is passe now, the minister asserted claiming that the perception particularly changed quickly after he took up the reins.

Those who used to say that when it comes to industry Bihar was not even worth a needle must be rubbing their eyes in disbelief after watching the milestone that the Investors Meet turned out to be, he said. "I am going to take the road shows to Mumbai, Surat and other cities of the country including Patna, and even to Dubai. The grand success of Investors Meet is symptomatic of the fact that the perception was unmistakably changed and Industrialization of the state is a fait accompli, the beginning of which is marked by establishment of first ever ethanol plant and Pepsi's bottling plant."

Mega Food Park, Mega Textile Park, Mega Leather Park, IT Park, Ethanol Plants and youth from all over India seeking jobs in Bihar et al-- the promises that Hussain portrayed seemed so unreal.But you cannot fault Mr Hussain for dreaming. No one did. Despite not believing what he dreamt, people had glowing words for his efforts and his chasing of gold at the end of the rainbow. It is said if you can dream it, you can do it - in the light of this saying all wished him all the best.

As for political stability, a sine qua non for industry, the minister said that there are no ifs and buts about the continuation of Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar till 2025. Like an oracle he gushed - "Listen to my prediction, the day is bound to come when youth from other states will come to Bihar for jobs".

Though showering profuse praise on Shahnawaz Hussain for showing the nerve and determination to embark on the perilous path, Doubting Thomases as ever are dubbing it as nothing but "jumlas." His claim of change in perception about Bihar among investors had few taker sin the media and he had to evade questions regarding it. The fact is there has been non-existent growth in industry in Bihar in the last 30 years, export being less than 1 percent.

Not to talk of others, even Neeraj Kumar, State President, Commerce Cell of



AN ETHANOL PLANT HAS BEEN A DREAM OF MODI AND BIHAR EMERGED AS THE FIRST STATE TO TAKE IT UP. TEXTILE AND LEATHER POLICIES ARE IN THE OFFING AND ONCE THEY ARE IN PLACE, INVESTMENT PROPOSALS WILL POUR IN. FOOD PARK, MEGA TEXTILE PARK, LOGISTIC PARK, LEATHER PARKS ARE IN THE PIPELINE

(The writer is a journalist who has served for long in Bihar. The views expressed are personal.)



Bihar BJP and MD, Asian Pharmaceutical Ltd, refused to buy Hussain's optimism. Talking to this writer, Kumar said that in a state where a single road takes at least 10 years to be built, industrialization is at best a leap of faith.

Acquisition of land fragmented into small holdings will be the greatest hurdle. Illustrious peasant leaders of yore Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Sir Ganesh Dutta had tried to consolidate the land but their efforts were frustrated by the erstwhile govt which fragmented big chunks of land into small acreages and distributed among people on caste lines.

Today, thousands of farmers will have to be aggregated for land for single industry.The question of law and order is forever an intimidating one.

But Hussain found a cheer leader in Ajay Kumar, a renowned Urologist in Patna and former president of Indian Medical Association (IMA). He said Hussain is sincere in his intent and has raised hopes of industries dawning on Bihar. He advised Hussain to put his energy in roping in Bihar owned pharmaceutical honchos and bring them home for investing in the state. If only Bihari pharmaceutical honchos producing medicines outside come to state to manufacture, the state would turn into a pharma hub in no time. Over 120 Bihari pharma leaders, many of them majors, manufac-

ture medicines outside Bihar. The irony is that Biharis are the biggest consumer of medicines but strangely enough not a single pharma company representative made it to the Investors Meet. Hussain made a fervent appeal to them in their absenteeia to come home to invest.

Unwittingly echoing Chief minister Nitish Kumar, Shahnawaz himself dubbed industrialization of the state as impossible when he said that his party always assigns him impossible tasks and he was never found wanting. Nitish Kumar not long ago said without pretence that Bihar being landlocked is unfit for industrialization.

Hussain said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has mandated him to pull out all stops to bring industries to Bihar and he has his full blessings. The ethanol plant has been a dream of Modi and Bihar emerged as the first state to take it up. Textile and leather policies are in the offing and once they are in place, investment proposals will pour in. Food Park, Mega Textile Park, Logistic Park, leather parks are in the pipeline.

MOUs are flaunted in any Investors' meet but they were conspicuous by near absence. Hussain rationalised it by saying that the meet was organised just to fathom the interests of industrialist. The interest they evinced was palpable. Hussains goodwill in the media

was equally palpable which spared him many blushes. The rough edges around gaps in Investors Meet were safely put on the back burner. Questions around CM Nitish Kumar could have queered the pitch. The absence of Nitish Kumar itself was tricky issue.

However, Hussain must be given credit for creating buzz around an issue which has always been a no go in Bihar. Making a spectacle of over 170 companies out of which 30 were majors in different domains is not a mean achievement. It certainly speaks a volume about Hussain's capability to create event and must have raised his stock among BJP leaders. But he should also hedge his bets as such shows might have triggered his detractors in the party into action. To his credit,the prohibition questiondid not rear its head.

Giving it a reel touch, Hussain said the era of Prakash Jha's famous Gangajal had unarguably been replaced by that of Good Newz, a recent hit film about treatment of infertility through assisted birthing technology IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) meaning out of womb. The resemblance is spot on as the Investors Meet to turn the industrially sterile Bihar into a manufacturing hub was also held in Delhi, i.e., outside Bihar. The venue itself was pregnant with meaning.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE BJP WILL TALK ABOUT THE CONGRESS, ITS WORKERS AND LEADERS, BUT NOT ABOUT REGIONAL PARTIES BECAUSE ...THEY CANNOT DEFEAT THE BJP.
—CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI



IN MY VIEW, THE 'CHINTAN SHIVIR' FAILED TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING MEANINGFUL OTHER THAN PROLONGING THE STATUS QUO.
—ELECTION STRATEGIST PRASHANT KISHOR

The religious economy: \$40 billion and growing

Indians undertake more pilgrimages than business trips and spend more on pilgrimage than travel for education purposes

The temple economy is as large as the Indian budget and is sustaining the country. Its contours across religious denominations - Hindu, Muslim and Christians - are much wider than expected. It is changing the society and its financial parameters.

The NSSO survey estimates that temple economy is worth Rs 3.02 lakh crore or about \$40 billion and 2.32 percent of GDP. In reality it may be larger. It includes everything from flowers, oil, lamps, perfumes, bangles, sindur, images and puja dresses. It is driven by the vast majority of informal unprotected labour.

The 2022-23 Central government revenue is Rs 19,34,706 crore and mere six temples collected Rs 24000 crore in cash alone. There are 5 lakh temples,



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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

7 lakh mosques and 35,000 churches in this country. Top officials as devotees give a kick.

Donations for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya collected in 2021 is Rs 5450 crore, almost equal to Rs 5000-crore defence budget. It surpassed the collection in the first phase.

Others are Tirumala Tirupati, Rs 3023 crore; Vaishno Devi, Rs 2000 crore, Ambaji, Rs 4134 crore (Rs 5163 crore in 2019-20), Dwarkadhish, Rs 1172 crore, Somnath, Rs 1205 crore, Golden Temple, Rs 690 crore. Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Krishna Janmabhoomi in Mathura, Banke Bihar Mandir in Vrindavan, Padmanabha mandir, Siddhivinayak mandir and Kashi Vishvanath mandir have similar large earnings. Gold donations at different temples vary from 130 kg at Tirupati



to 380 kg at Shirdi.

The Pew Global Attitude survey shows that more than 25 percent of Indians reported having become more religious over the past four-five years. Between 2007 and 2015, the share of respondents in India who perceived religion to be very important increased by 11 percent to 80 percent now.

Ram Mandir movement and the court verdict has been a game changer. It has poured in

huge funding into a region that was one of the most backward. It boosted funding for mosques and Islamic shrines too. During pandemic the silent real estate boom took place in Ayodhya, Varanasi, Vindhyachal, Mirzapur and Mathura. Land prices soared in the most backward places. The premium on land is unprecedented.

Whether religious activities can sustain such places would be interesting to observe. The enthusiasm is high but would it surpass the next industrial revival?

The domestic religious tourism is surpassing the number of foreign visitors. Over 100 crore domestic visits to new destinations suggest there is churning beyond Delhi-Agra-Jaipur golden triangle.

The NSSO figures suggest

that 55 percent of Hindus undertake religious pilgrimages patronizing mid and small sized hotels. Expenses on religious travel are Rs 2,717 per day/person, expenses on social travel, Rs 1,068 per day/person, expenditure on educational travel, Rs 2,286 per day/person. That comes to expenditure on religious travel of Rs 1316 crore per day and an annual expenditure on religious travel of Rs 4.74 lakh crore

This NSSO data says that Indians do more pilgrimage than business trips and spend more on pilgrimage than traveling for education purposes.

The government has chalked out religious circuit tourism. The Ramayana circuit is over the life philosophy of Lord Ram. Along with this, the Char Dham road project has

also been prepared. The government has also strengthened the Buddha circuit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi relaunched Varanasi corridor, Kedardham and Badridham. The government is renovating about 50 thousand temples in Jammu and Kashmir. No other prime minister made the visit to religious shrines an event.

The dargahs of Chisti, Aulia, Charar-e-Sharif, Jama masjid of Bhopal, Delhi and other shrines have large income in cash and kinds. Similarly various churches also have decent incomes. The movement for Ram temple in Ayodhya stated to have increased the incomes for most Hindu and Muslim shrines. The earnings of the Hindu temples are known to some extent but whether it is the

Ajmer dargah or other Muslim shrines they are shy of telling the approximate figures.

The holy fund is changing the politics, hospital administration and even university portals and more. Dishing out degrees is not difficult and that becomes a money spinner.

During demonetization, some heads of mutts were in the news for their wide connections and effective delivery. Their services were not limited to India. They could deliver new currency notes with ease even in dollars to Dubai, Canada, England or other destinations at premium price. The hawala linkages help.

They are good at balance sheet manipulations Even scrapped notes were exchanged with élan. Yes, these are done to adjust the murky money.

Russia presses Donbas offensive as Polish leader visits Kyiv

AP ■ POKROVSK (UKRAINE)

Russia pressed its offensive in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region on Sunday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the outcome of the gruelling conflict would determine whether his country's fate lies with the West or under Moscow's domination.

After declaring its full control of a sprawling seaside steel plant that was the last defence holdout in the port city of Mariupol, the Russian military launched artillery and missile attacks in Ukraine's industrial heartland, seeking to expand the territory Moscow-backed separatists have held since 2014.

In a Saturday night video address to the nation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the situation in the Donbas as "really hard" but "the fact that we are able to say this on the 87th day of a full-scale war against Russia is good news."

"Every day that our defend-

ers take away from these offensive plans of Russia, disrupting them, is a concrete contribution to the approach of the main day. The desired day that we are all looking forward to and fighting for: Victory Day," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy's remarks came as Poland's president prepared to meet with him to support Ukraine's goal of becoming a candidate for European Union membership, a issue set to be decided at an EU summit in late June.

As the West rallies behind Ukraine, Polish President Andrzej Duda made an unannounced visit to Kyiv and on Sunday became the first foreign leader to address the Ukrainian parliament since the start of the war.

Poland, which has welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees since Russia invaded its neighbour, has become a major gateway for Western humanitarian aid and weapons going into Ukraine.

The government in Warsaw also is a strong sup-



porter of Ukraine's desire to join the European Union.

Zelenskyy stressed on Saturday that the EU should consider Ukraine's desire to join the 27-nation bloc as soon as possible within the context

of Russia's invasion.

"I want to emphasize that our European integration path is not just about politics," Zelenskyy said. "It's about quality of life. And about the fact that Ukrainians perceive the

values of life in the same way as the vast majority of Europeans."

Russia appeared to have made slow grinding moves forward in the Donbas in recent days. It intensified efforts

to capture Sievierodonetsk, the main city under Ukrainian control in Luhansk province, which together with Donetsk province makes up the Donbas. Luhansk Gov. Serhii Haidai said the only functioning hospital in the city has just three doctors and enough supplies for 10 days.

On Sunday, the British Ministry of Defence said Russia's only operational company of BMP-T Terminator tank support vehicles, which are designed to protect main battle tanks, "has likely been deployed to the Sievierodonetsk axis of the Donbas offensive".

It said, however, with a maximum of 10 of the vehicles deployed, "they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the campaign".

In a general staff morning report, Russia also said that it was preparing to resume its offensive toward Slovyansk, a city in Donetsk province that is critical to Russia's objective of capturing all of eastern Ukraine and saw fierce fighting last

month after Moscow's troops backed off from Kyiv.

Russian shelling on Saturday killed seven civilians and injured 10 more elsewhere in Donetsk province, the regional governor said.

A monastery in the village of Bohorodichne was evacuated after being hit by a Russian airstrike, the regional police said Saturday.

About 100 monks, nuns and children had been seeking safe shelter in the basement of the church and no one was hurt, the police said in a Facebook post.

Zelenskyy on Saturday emphasized that the Donbas remains part of Ukraine and his forces were fighting to liberate it.

With Russia claiming to have taken prisoner nearly 2,500 Ukrainian fighters from the besieged Mariupol steel plant, concerns grew about their fate and the future facing remaining residents of the city, now in ruins with more than 20,000 residents feared dead.

The Russian Defence

Ministry released video of Ukrainian soldiers being detained after announcing that its forces had removed the last holdouts from the Mariupol plant's extensive underground tunnels. It said a total of 2,439 had surrendered.

Family members of the fighters, who came from a variety of military and law enforcement units, have pleaded for them to be given rights as prisoners of war and eventually returned to Ukraine.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Saturday that Ukraine "will fight for the return" of every one of them.

The Russian Defence Ministry on Saturday released video of its troops taking into custody Serhiy Volynsky, the commander of the Ukrainian Navy's 36th Special Marine Brigade, which was one of the main forces defending the steel plant.

The Associated Press has not been able to independently verify the date, location and conditions of the video.

Albanese elected Australia's leader in complex poll result

AP ■ SYDNEY

Australians awoke on Sunday to a new Prime Minister in Anthony Albanese, the centre-left Labour Party leader whose ascension to the nation's top job from being raised in social housing by a single mother on a disability pension was said to reflect the changed fabric of the country today.

The 59-year-old career politician, who has described himself as the only candidate with a "non-Anglo Celtic name" to run for prime minister in the 121 years the office has existed, referred to his humble upbringing in the inner-Sydney suburb of Camperdown while thanking electors for making him the country's 31st leader.

"It says a lot about our great country that a son of a single mom who was a disability pensioner, who grew up in public housing down the road in Camperdown, can stand before you tonight as Australia's prime minister," Albanese told jubilant supporters after tipping Scott Morrison out of office to end nine years of conservative rule.

"Every parent wants more



for the next generation than they had. My mother dreamt of a better life for me. And I hope that my journey in life inspires Australians to reach for the stars," he said.

But it remained unclear whether Albanese's party could form a majority government or have to rely on the support of an increased number of independents and minor party lawmakers who won seats in Saturday's election, in results analysts described as extremely complicated, and which also mirrored the face of modern Australia.

With counting set to continue for many days as postal votes are tallied, one prospect that emerged was that Albanese

may need to be sworn in as acting prime minister - possibly as early as Sunday - to attend Tuesday's Quad summit in Tokyo with US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The election delivered a clear rebuke to Australia's traditional two-party system, both to Labour and the heavily defeated conservative coalition led by the Liberal party's outgoing Prime Minister Morrison.

The major parties bled votes to fringe parties and independents, including in many seats considered Labour or coalition strongholds.

Needing 76 seats in the lower Parliamentary chamber, the House of Representatives, to govern in their own right, Labour on Sunday morning had won 72, with 66.3% of votes counted, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

The Liberal-National coalition had secured just 50 - drastically down from its bare-majority 76 in the 2019 poll, in what analysts called a fierce rejection of Morrison and his team's handling of many issues in its three-year term including climate, COVID-19, women's rights, political integrity and natural disasters such as bushfires and floods.

A total of 15 seats had been declared for independents or minor party candidates. Of these, three were from the environment-centric Green party and 12 were non-aligned politicians, with up to nine of those so-called teal independents.

In a new wave in Australian politics, the teal independents are marketed as a greener shade than the Liberal Party's traditional blue colour and want stronger government action on reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions than either the government or Labour are proposing.

Most of their successful candidates are women, their success seen partly as a repudiation of Morrison for his handling of gender issues including sex scandals that have rocked Parliament during his latest three-year term.

While Labour will form either a majority or minority government, both major parties lost ground, with support for the coalition dropping by more than 6% from the 2019 election, and Labour's vote falling by around 1.2% as of Sunday morning.

Albanese vowed to bring Australians together in a government of unity, to increase investment in social services and to "end the climate wars."

"My Labour team will work every day to bring Australians together. And I will lead a government worthy of the people of Australia," he said.

Albanese, who revealed in a 2016 interview he had tracked down his biological father in Italy in 2009, four years before his death, said his surname and that of new government Senate leader Penny Wong, who is of Chinese ancestry, reflected modern, multi-cultural Australia.

Lanka's 21st Amendment to Constitution likely to come up for Cabinet approval today

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Minister of Justice Shas said that the 21st Amendment to the Constitution will be referred to the Cabinet for approval on Monday, a media report said on Sunday, paving the way to curb the unfettered powers of embattled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

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.

The amendment would make it impossible for those with dual citizenship to hold a seat in Parliament, the News First news portal quoted Minister of Justice Dr Wijayadasa Rajapaksa as saying.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who is facing growing demand for his resignation for mismanaging the country's economy, had relinquished his US citizenship in April 2019 before contesting the



presidential elections.

In addition to the existing Independent Commissions, the National Audit Commission and the Procurement Commission will be amended as Independent Commissions, the report said.

Wijeyadasa Rajapaksa said that the 21st Amendment to the Constitution seeks to further strengthen the powers of the existing commissions and to make them independent as well.

The minister said that the new amendment also proposes for the appointment of the

Governor of the Central Bank to come under the Constitutional Council.

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 full presidential powers over Parliament.

Sri Lanka is grappling with an unprecedented economic turmoil since its independence from Britain in 1948.

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

The economic crisis has also triggered a political crisis in Sri Lanka and a demand for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Ship carrying relief materials from India for Sri Lankan people reaches Colombo

PTI ■ COLOMBO

An Indian ship carrying urgent relief supplies like rice, life-saving medicines and milk powder for the people of crisis-hit Sri Lanka arrived in Colombo on Sunday and the consignment was handed over to the government in the island nation.

Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay handed over to Lankan Foreign Minister G L Peiris the consignment which consists of 9,000 metric tonne (MT) of rice, 50 MT of milk powder and more than 25 MT of drugs and other medical supplies.

"Sri Lanka today received Rs. 2 Billion worth Humanitarian aid including milk powder, rice and medicines from India. Our sincere gratitude to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Hon. @mkstalin and the People of India for the support extended. I also appreciate the assistance given

by the @IndainSL and CWC Leader @S_Thondaman in Sri Lanka," Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe tweeted.

This is also the first consignment under a larger USD 16 million commitment of 40,000 MT of rice, 500 MT of milk powder and medicines by Government of Tamil Nadu, an official release said.

"A message of care!!! From the people of India to the people of Sri Lanka... High Commissioner handed over rice, milk powder & medicines worth more than SLR 2 billion to Hon'ble FM Prof.G.L Peiris in #Colombo today," the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka tweeted.

"More consignments from #India to follow," it said in another tweet. Speaking at the ceremony here attended by several Lankan ministers, Foreign Minister Peiris said "India has not sent any assistance anywhere of this scale ever before".

"They are to assist us more for which we would be grateful," Peiris said, adding that India had so far extended assistance worth USD 4.5 billion.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin had flagged off the ship laden with relief supplies, the first to be dispatched to Sri Lanka, from Chennai on Wednesday.

The items shall be distributed among vulnerable and needy sections in various parts of Sri Lanka including Northern, Eastern, Central and Western Provinces by Government of Sri Lanka in the coming days.

"More humanitarian consignments and other forms of assistance from India shall follow. Multi-pronged endeavour by both the Government and people of India underlines the importance attached to Sri Lanka and reflects their concerns for the well-being of its people," said the release.

Support extended to Sri

Lanka ranges from economic assistance worth around USD 3.5 billion, supply of vaccines, testing kits, close to 1000 MT of liquid oxygen to combat COVID-19, immediate response by Indian Navy and Coast Guard to mitigate marine disasters etc, it added.

Sri Lanka is going through the worst economic crisis since independence in 1948.

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

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

India has said that as an eternal and reliable friend of Sri Lanka, New Delhi is fully supportive of the island nation's democracy, stability and economic recovery.

Bangkok votes for Governor in 1st election since 2014 coup

AP ■ BANGKOK

Voters in the Thai capital headed to the polls Sunday to elect a new governor in a contest delayed by a military coup that still reflects a divided country with main candidates either supported by the conservative establishment or the liberal opposition.

A record 31 candidates entered the race, but the battle being watched most closely is between two who registered as independents.

One is former Transport Minister Chadchart Sittipunt, a front-runner, and the other Asawin Kwanmuang, who served as the military-appointed governor since 2016. He stepped down in March to contest the election.

The candidates campaigned on issues including congestion, pollution and persistent flooding. There are 4.4 million registered voters in the city, the country's biggest.

Apart from governor, they're also electing city council members. Bangkok's last gubernatorial election was in 2013, a year before the military toppled a democratically elected government.

Neither the main opposition party in Parliament, Pheu Thai, nor the ruling Palang Pracharath party, associated with the military and the ruling conservative establishment, officially have candidates on the ballot.

However, 55-year-old Chadchart is seen by both supporters and opponents as a proxy for Pheu Thai, for which he stood as a prime ministerial candidate in the 2019 general election. He served as transport minister in a Pheu Thai government in 2012-2014.

His main rival is 71-year-old Asawin, who was appointed governor in 2016 by Prayuth Chan-ocha. As army commander, Prayuth seized

power in the 2014 coup to lead a military regime, and he dismissed the previous governor over corruption allegations. Prayuth was returned to office following the 2019 election as prime minister in a coalition government.

Prayuth, in power for eight years, is expected soon to face a no-confidence motion in Parliament, and rivals on his own side have long been rumored to be seeking to remove him. Even if he survives, there must be a general election by early next year.

Prayuth was able to rule by decree as head of a military government but has struggled within the limits of parliamentary democracy, taking fire especially for fumbling Thailand's coronavirus vaccination program and recovery plan.

Other candidates include Suchatvee Suwansawat of the Democrat Party. He's seen as having an outside chance if

conservative voters support him instead of Asawin. The Democrats have historically been a power in Bangkok but have fractured badly in the past two decades of polarized politics that have seen street violence and two coups.

A fourth candidate whose results will be carefully watched is Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn from the progressive opposition Move Forward Party, which takes a more critical stance than Pheu Thai toward the government.

Political science professor Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University noted this was the first significant election since the 2014 coup.

"People are hungry to have a say," he said in an email to The Associated Press. "The result, if it clearly goes against ruling Palang Pracharath, would be consequential for Parliament, Prayuth and no-confidence."

Giuliani grilled for hours by Jan 6 committee

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Rudy Giuliani, who as a lawyer for then-President Donald Trump pushed bogus legal challenges to the 2020 election, met for hours with the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a person familiar with the interview said Saturday. The interview with Giuliani took place virtually and lasted for much of the day on Friday, according to the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

A spokesperson for the

committee declined to comment. Giuliani had been scheduled to meet with the committee earlier this month, but a spokesperson for the panel said that meeting was rescheduled.

The former New York mayor is seen as a critical aide for the committee, which has interviewed nearly 1,000 witnesses, including family members of Trump and advisers in his inner circle. The panel plans a series of hearings in June. In January, the committee subpoenaed Giuliani and other members of the Trump legal team who sought to overturn election results.

US Special Coordinator for Tibetan issues Uzra Zeya calls on Deuba

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya called on Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Sunday and the duo discussed a range of issues of mutual interest, including ways to boost bilateral ties.

The meeting between Deuba and Zeya - who is also the US Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights - was held at the prime minister's residence here in Baluwatar.

"It was a pleasure receiving the US delegation led by Under

Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights @UnderSecStateJ. We exchanged views on Nepal-US relations and matters of mutual interests," Deuba said in a tweet.

During the meeting, discussions were held on Nepal-US bilateral relations and various topics of mutual interest, according to Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Zeya, who is leading a US delegation, arrived here on Friday in connection with a three-day visit to Nepal, the ministry said.

After arriving in Nepal,

Zeya announced America's USD 659 million assistance to Nepal.

"Happy to celebrate with @USAmbNepal & @USEmbassyNepal the new @USAID-Nepal assistance agreement which will provide \$659M to support our shared vision for a democratic and prosperous future," she said in a tweet.

On Friday, she met the International Women of Courage awardees Bhumika Shrestha and Muskan Khatun. Zeya expressed her happiness over the meeting with the two women who have been felicitated for their work in the

LGBTQI+ rights movement and against acid attacks, respectively.

She also visited the Boudha Stupa and praised Nepal's rich religious, architectural, and cultural history.

Zeya visited India before arriving in Nepal. During her visit to India from May 17-20, she met senior government officials, including Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, and the discussions focused on global and regional issues of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

Zeya also visited Dharamshala where she met

the Dalai Lama on Thursday and discussed the rich traditions of freedom and democracy in the United States and India.

The Tibetan government-in-exile, in a press statement on Thursday, said Zeya expressed US President Joe Biden and the American people's greetings to the Dalai Lama.

She visited the Central Tibetan Administration on Wednesday and held discussions with its leadership. Zeya also visited the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, and the Tibet Museum, and also met with members of

the Tibetan civil society, according to the statement.

China sharply criticised Zeya's meeting with the Dalai Lama and her visit to Dharamshala, saying it violated Washington's commitment that Tibet is part of China and it does not support Tibetan separatists. "Tibet is part of China and Tibetan religious affairs are China's internal affairs," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing on Thursday when asked about the Indian-origin senior US diplomat's meeting with the 86-year-old top Tibetan Buddhist leader.

Cost overruns of ₹4.83 L cr impact 425 infra projects

New Delhi: As many as 425 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than Rs 4.83 lakh crore, according to a report.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which monitors infrastructure projects of Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,579 projects, 425 projects reported cost overruns and as many as 664 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,579 projects was Rs 21,95,196.72 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 26,78,365.62 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,83,168.90 crore (22.01 per cent of the original cost)," the ministry's latest report for March 2022 said.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till March 2022 stood at Rs 13,88,760.73 crore, which is 51.85 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, the number of delayed projects decreased to 561, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion.

Further, for 606 projects neither the year of commis-



sioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported.

Out of the 664 delayed projects, 94 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 124 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 331 projects for 25-60 months and 115 projects have been delayed for 61 months and above.

The average time overrun in these 664 delayed projects was 42.41 months.

Reasons for time overruns as reported by various project implementing agencies include delay in land acquisition, delay in obtaining forest and environment clearances, and lack of infrastructure support and

linkages.

Delay in tie-up for project financing, delay in finalisation of detailed engineering, change in scope, delay in tendering, ordering and equipment supply, and law and order problems are among the other reasons. The report also cited state-wide lockdowns due to COVID-19 as a reason for the delay in implementation of these projects.

It has also been observed that project agencies are not reporting revised cost estimates and commissioning schedules for many projects, which suggests that time/cost overrun figures are under-reported, it stated. **PTI**

Taxpayers can now claim refund of IGST on ocean freight: Experts

New Delhi: Taxpayers who have paid GST on 'Ocean Freight' on imported goods will be entitled to claim refunds, following the Supreme Court verdict, provided they have not claimed input tax credit, experts said.

Giving its ruling in the Mohit Minerals case, the Supreme Court held that since the Indian importer is liable to pay IGST on the 'composite supply', comprising of supply of goods and supply of services of transportation, insurance, etc in a CIF (Cost Insurance Freight) contract, a separate levy on the Indian importer for the 'supply of services' by the shipping line would be in violation of ... The CGST Act.

In this particular case, the company had challenged the validity of the CBIC notification regarding levy of Integrated GST on ocean freight in the Gujarat High Court. The Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Gujarat High Court which had favoured the company.

Tax Connect Advisory Services Partner Vivek Jalan said this is a big relief for importers and GST taxpayers. "Infact those taxpayers who had already paid the GST may also seek a refund of the same now".



Naresh Sheth, Partner, N A Shah Associates said, "Such levy, in substance, was a tax on transactions between two foreign parties taking place outside India which apparently is beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the Indian Government."

Jalan further said generally, the value of imported goods is CIF and includes the Cost, Insurance and Freight components. Hence Customs Duty and GST is charged on such value.

"However, CBIC also sought to levy GST @5 per cent on the value of Imported goods considering 10 per cent of the value of imported goods as

deemed ocean freight," Jalan added.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said the Supreme Court has upheld the Gujarat High Court judgement categorizing the levy of IGST on ocean freight services as unconstitutional.

This is a dual levy of IGST as the same has already suffered tax as part of the value of goods. Moreover, these services are received by the foreign exporter, thus the Indian importer shall not be held liable to pay GST on the same, he said.

"Through this, a window of opportunity has been opened for the importers who have

already paid the tax to demand refund from the exchequer," Mohan added.

Federation of Indian Export organisations (FIEO) DG Ajay Sahai said FIEO has already represented that ocean freight on goods imported on CIF basis should not be charged as it is tantamount to double taxation, adding to the liquidity problem.

"While the set off of IGST on imports was available but after a time lag, it was adding to the challenges for manufacturers and exporters," Sahai said.

Nangia Andersen LLP, Director- Indirect Tax, Tanushree Roy said levy of reverse charge on ocean freight is now unconstitutional in view of the landmark judgement of the Supreme Court of India in ocean freight matter.

"Indian importers (who had paid GST under RCM on Ocean Freight) should evaluate the possibility of filing refund claims for claiming the said amounts (to the extent not utilized as input credit).

"Further, importers who had not paid the tax on import of such Ocean Freight services would no longer be required to pay GST on such services in view of the said judgement," Roy said. **PTI**

Excise duty cut on petrol to help pare logistics cost; promote exports'

New Delhi: Excise duty cut on petrol and diesel and rationalisation of customs duties on goods such as raw material for plastic and steel will help reduce logistics cost, promote competitiveness of manufacturing and exports of value-added goods, exporters said on Sunday.

The government on Saturday announced reduction in excise duty on petrol by a record Rs 8 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 6 per litre. It also cut import duty on raw material of steel and plastic and increased export duty on iron ore and steel intermediates.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President A Sakthivel said these measures will bring down the domestic prices of key inputs thereby softening inflation.

"This will also add to the competitiveness of the manufacturing and export sector and will further push value-added exports from the country. These proactive measures will also ease the logistics pressure and bring down the freight bill of the country as in some cases the same raw material was being exported from the country and subsequently being imported by the downstream users," he said.

Sharing similar views, leading Mumbai-based exporter and Chairman of Technocraft Industries, Sharad Kumar Saraf said reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel will reduce logistics costs and will support exports particularly of commodities which are freight sensitive. "Export duty on iron ore and semi finished steel products like HR coils and bars already has a desired effect. Steel prices have started softening and this will have a significant positive impact on our engineering exports. The government must be complimented for such actions," Saraf said.

Ludhiana-based Hand Tools Association President S C Ralhan too said the iron and steel industry should pass on the benefits to the engineering sector, particularly the MSME units, which are reeling under the impact of high iron and steel prices. Plastics Export Promotion Council Chairman Arvind Goenka said it is a welcome move that will help the plastic processors be more competitive in the domestic market for sure. "India's polymer production is much lower than consumption leading to polymer imports worth USD 15 billion in FY 2021. **PTI**

Greenko to supply green power to ArcelorMittal, Ayana Renewable, 3 States from Kurnool plant



Kurnool: Greenko Group will supply green power to ArcelorMittal, Ayana Renewable Power and three states from its 5,230 MW renewable energy plant being set up here, a top company official said.

The plant which is being set up at a cost of USD 3 billion is the world's largest renewable energy storage project. Global steel giant ArcelorMittal has made an investment of around USD 600 million for 1,000 MW capacity of the project.

Out of 5,230 MW, 3,000 MW is solar, 550 MW wind and 1,680 MW is pump storage capacity. The daily storage capacity of the project will be 10,800 MW.

"Renewable energy will be supplied to ArcelorMittal, Ayana (Renewable Power) and discoms in Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Bihar," the company's Joint Managing Director Mahesh Kolli told PTI.

The power will be supplied out of 1,680 storage capacity, Kolli said, adding that while ArcelorMittal will take away 250 MW for its plant operated by JV company AMNS India at

Hazira, Gujarat, Ayana Renewable Power will get 550 MW and the rest will be supplied to the said states.

"Most of the PPAs (power purchase agreements) have been signed for supply of green power," Greenko Group CEO and MD Anil Chalamalasetty said in reply to the question on agreements for buying power.

However, he did not share any further information related to tariff etc.

The project is expected to be commissioned by 2023, he said and informed that once the project is operational it will help avoid 15 million tonnes (MT) of carbon dioxide, which is equal to the emissions coming out of 3 million cars.

"With this project, we have pioneered the concept of storage... This was possible due to policy support at the national level and of the state government," the CEO had said.

Hyderabad-based Greenko Group is among the largest renewable energy (RE) companies with an installed capacity of 7.5 gigawatt across solar, wind and hydro generation assets spread in 15 states. **PTI**

ONGC repairs damage Cyclone Tauktae caused to its offshore installations

New Delhi: State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has repaired 100 offshore installations in the Arabian Sea that were damaged by Cyclone Tauktae a year ago, the company said.

Western offshore was hit by the cyclone Tauktae during May 16-17, 2021. On May 17, 2021, Barge P-305, deployed by Afcons for work it was doing for ONGC, lost all anchors and hit a wellhead platform after drifting.

The sinking of Afcons' Barge P-305 and a tug boat Varaprada killed 86 persons.

"ONGC overhauls damages caused by Cyclone #Tauktae in offshore installations on Arabian Sea. 100 platforms (76 unmanned, 24 process platform jackets) restored, using 1052 tons of Indigenous-sourced materials," ONGC said in a tweet.

Western offshore produces

bulk of India's oil and natural gas.

ONGC has 14 process platforms, 2 floating production and storage (FPSO) units, one floating storage and offloading (FSO) and 229 unmanned platforms, 25 drilling rigs and 50 offshore vessels.

To support offshore project works, 22 barges were deployed.

Following the accident, ONGC hired DNV GL Energy India Pvt Ltd, a renowned international safety consultant, for carrying out an assessment of the safety management system in the company. The three-phase project is of 18 months duration and is to be completed by April 6, 2023.

To facilitate single point authority for vessel information and management (VIM) in offshore, Marine Cell has been created at Mumbai headed by Master Mariner with the



responsibility of managerial safety of all vessels operated by the company.

Marine Cell will be the single point availability of all information, pre and post deployment of all vessels and monitoring their movement

in offshore.

The Cell will ensure sea worthiness of all vessels operating for ONGC, according to a report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Petroleum and Natural Gas, which looked into the accident.

DLF net debt dips 45% to ₹2,680 cr in FY 22; aims further debt reduction in medium-term

New Delhi: Realty major DLF's net debt fell 45 per cent during the last fiscal year to Rs 2,680 crore on the back of better sales of residential properties that improved its cash flow.

According to an investor presentation, DLF's net debt stood at Rs 2,680 crore as on March 31, 2022. Its net debt stood at Rs 4,885 crore at the end of 2020-21 financial year.

"Net Debt reduction of Rs 2,205 crore in FY22. Consistent reduction from operational surplus," the presentation said.

DLF said that it is committed to further debt reduction in the medium-term.

The cash flow from the sale of completed properties and receivables from sale of ongoing projects would be sufficient to discharge all current liabilities.

The company said the launch of new projects would



help generate healthy cash flows.

During the last fiscal, DLF's sales bookings jumped over two-fold to Rs 7,273 crore, driven by better demand for its properties, especially luxury homes. Its sales bookings stood at Rs 3,084 crore in the 2020-21.

DLF highlighted that this has been its strongest performance in the last 10 years.

The company said it would continue to focus on tapping newer geographies by bringing new products.

It would launch new projects at multiple price points across segments to meet grow-

ing demand.

As per the presentation, DLF would focus on increasing market share in core geographies and monetizing land banks.

"High margin products coupled with calibrated price hikes to offset inflationary pressure; consistent value enhancement across the product portfolio," the presentation said.

Recently, DLF reported a 16 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit at Rs 405.33 crore for the quarter ended March due to lower-income. Its net profit stood at Rs 480.94 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income declined to Rs 1,652.13 crore during the March quarter, from Rs 1,906.59 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year. **PTI**

No capital aid from Govt needed now: Punjab & Sind Bank MD

New Delhi: Punjab & Sind Bank would not require further capital infusion from the government to meet growth needs during the current fiscal year, the top official of the bank said.

During the previous two years, the government infused Rs 5,500 crore and Rs 4,600 crore through non-interest bearing recap bonds. With the infusion of Rs 4,600 crore, the government holding in the bank increased to 98.25 per cent as on March 31, 2022.

Capital adequacy ratio of the bank improved to 18.54 per cent in March 2022 from 17.06 per cent as at March-end 2021 with the help of capital support

from the government, bank's MD and CEO S Krishnan said.

The bank is sufficiently capitalised to meet expected credit growth in this financial year and may not need support from the government, he said.

As far as loan growth is concerned, he said, it is expected to grow at 8-10 per cent in FY23. He further said the bank has strengthened its balance sheet by making additional provisions and it has proactively made 100 per cent provisions in all fraud cases.

The state-owned bank has not sought any dispensation from the Reserve Bank for staggering the provision. **PTI**

The bank last month declared Srei Infrastructure Finance with outstanding dues of Rs 510.16 crore and Srei Equipment Finance Ltd with outstanding dues of Rs 724.18 crore accounts as fraud.

In October last year, the RBI had superseded the board of directors of the two Srei group firms and appointed an administrator, following governance issues and default in payment obligations. It also initiated a corporate insolvency resolution process against both companies. According to some estimates, banks have about Rs 28,000 crore exposure to Srei, and bondholders. **PTI**

PNB earns over ₹645 crore through ATM transaction charges in FY-2022

New Delhi: Public sector lender Punjab National Bank has said it earned over Rs 645 crore by levying ATM transaction charges on customers during the financial year 2021-22.

Revenue earned by PNB from ATM transaction charges stood at Rs 645.67 crore in financial year 2021-22, the bank said in response to an application seeking information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Besides, the country's second largest lender collected Rs 239.09 crore in the form of

penalty imposed on customers who failed to maintain minimum balance or quarterly/monthly average balance in their bank accounts, according to the bank's response to Madhya Pradesh-based RTI applicant Chandrashekar Gaur.

In 2020-21, the bank had earned Rs 170 crore by levying charges on customers for not maintaining minimum balance in their accounts.

This amount was collected from 8,518,953 accounts during FY22. To a query on the number of zero balance

accounts with the bank, PNB (Punjab National Bank) said there were a total of 67,637,918 such accounts as of March 31, 2022.

Going by the trend for the last four financial years from 2018-19 to 2021-22, it was revealed that the zero balance accounts in PNB have gone up steadily over these years.

As of March 31, 2019, there were 28,203,379 zero balance accounts at PNB, which increased to 30,583,184 by the end of March 2020 and further to 59,496,731 as of March 31, 2021. **PTI**

Sun Pharma recalls over 10,000 bottles of generic anti-depression drug in United States

New Delhi: Drug major Sun Pharma is recalling around 10,500 bottles of a generic drug meant for the treatment of major depressive disorders in the US market following a customer complaint.

According to the latest enforcement report of the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), the US arm of the domestic pharma major is recalling 10,548 bottles of bupropion hydrochloride extended-release tablets in the American market.

The drug is used to treat depression and prevent Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). It is also used to help people stop smoking.

As per the USFDA, the company is recalling the affected lot due to "presence of foreign substance: Customer complaint for the presence of dark, gritty substance found within the bottle, which was determined to be activated carbon from the desiccant canister inside the bottle".

The drugmaker is recalling the product in 150 and 200 mg strengths, it added.

The company is recalling 9,804 bottles of 150 mg strength and 744 bottles of 200 mg strength, the US health regulator stated.

The affected lot of the medication was manufactured by the drug maker in its Halol (Gujarat) based manufacturing plant. In the US, the medication was distributed by New Jersey-based Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Inc.

The company initiated the Class III nationwide (US) voluntary recall on April 29 this

As per USFDA, a Class III recall is initiated in a "situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product is not likely to cause adverse health consequences."

year.

As per USFDA, a Class III recall is initiated in a "situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product is not likely to cause adverse health consequences."

Earlier this month, Sun Pharma had said that the USFDA issued a 'Form 483' with ten observations after inspecting its Halol plant in Gujarat.

As per US FDA, a Form 483 is issued to a firm's management at the conclusion of an inspection when the investigator has observed any conditions that in its judgment may constitute violations of the Food Drug and Cosmetic (FD&C) Act and related Acts.

The US health regulator conducted a Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) inspection of the Halol facility from April 26 to May 9, the Mumbai-based drug maker had said in a regulatory filing.

The Mumbai-based Sun Pharmaceutical Industries is the fourth largest specialty generic pharmaceutical company in the world with global revenues of over USD 4.5 billion.


With over 40 manufacturing facilities, it sells medicines in over 100 countries across the globe. **PTI**

KIDS & SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

Cases of childhood myopia are on the rise in India and the world. It shows no signs of abating. Ophthalmologists flag concerns that an increasing number of kids are spending more time on digital screens like TV, computer and mobile and less on outdoor activities. The All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS) has issued first-of-its kind guidelines for prevention and management of childhood myopia. The HEALTH PIONEER reports



Yoga Power



Dr. Ishwar V Basavaraddi, Director, MDNIY, under Ayush Ministry, says though it is not easy, kids can be encouraged to do yoga to strengthen their eye muscles. “Before starting these practices it is recommended to splash your eyes with cold water a few times. Some of the yoga for eyes are Netra shakti Vikasaka, that will help to increase blood circulation and strengthen the ocular muscles.

Eye blinking, Up and down movements (using thumb), Nasigra drishti -Nose tip Gazing, Bhrumadhya Drishti-Gazing in between eyebrows and Palming of eyes can be practiced with kids. Among, asanas are Tadasana, Trikonasana, Ardha chakrasana, Paschimottanasana, Ustrasana, Bhujangasana, Dhanurasana, Matsyasana, Shavasana. The yoga expert said some studies have shown yoga asanas are beneficial for the kids above 14 years of age.

While there have been many guidelines published by pediatric ophthalmologists from the west, there have been no such practice patterns available for Indian ophthalmologists and what would be the preferred clinical practice for our country. This document, “Consensus Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Childhood Myopia” hopes to fill this void and provide guidelines in the Indian scenario, says Dr Namrata Sharma, pediatric ophthalmologist, AIIMS, Delhi.

The goal is to spread awareness about the dangers of myopia and ultimately reinforce the benefits associated with implementing myopia management treatment during early childhood, pointed out Stating that the myopia epidemic will affect half of the global population by 2050, she tells you.

The onset of myopia usually occurs between six and 13 years of age. “Cases of shortsightedness in urban settings in India are all set to spike to 48 per cent by 2050. Cases are on the increase in rural areas also,” the ophthalmologists dwelled deeper into the threat creeping in the kids’ world at the AIOS meet.

The Members broke down cases from their real-life experiences to highlight the significant risks that are associated with myopia in children.

“Unattended or uncorrected short-sightedness is the most common cause of vision loss. In fact, too often, myopia is considered a simple refractive error that can be easily remedied with spectacles or contact lenses. But myopia can lead to physical changes in the eye’s structure, increasing the risk for retinal complications, cataracts and glaucoma, Dr Nayak says.

“While in some children it remains stable, others show gradual progression



SIMPLE LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS LIKE MAKING CHILDREN SPEND MORE TIME OUTDOORS, EXPOSING THEM TO NATURAL LIGHTS DURING CLASS RECESS AND LESS SCREEN TIME ARE SOME OF THE WAYS TO CHECK MYOPIA PROGRESSION, AS PER DOCTORS

till the age of 18 to 20 years. This makes the 2nd part of preventing and arresting the progress of Myopia, equally important,” he adds.

It is mandatory to seek immediate intervention to prevent complications in adulthood, the members were unison in their views.

Simple lifestyle modifications like making children spend more time outdoors, exposing them to natural lights during class recess and less screen time are some of the ways to check Myopia progression, they note.

The guidelines deal with the various aspects of myopia such as classification, appropriate clinical evaluation, and corrective options of management, counseling and guidelines for the measures taken for arrest of progression in myopia.

“There is an urgent need to address this potential public health crisis and raise awareness among ophthalmologists about the various modifiable environmental risk factors for myopia, available anti myopia interventions and their correct usage,” adds Prof. Rohit Saxena from Dr Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, Delhi.

In fact, near doubling of myopia

prevalence in both rural and urban children aged 11-15 years has been noticed while data is not available for high myopia, the doctors says.

“Though the prevalence is comparatively less in India, considering the huge population of the country the actual numbers may be staggering,” chips in Dr Namrata Sharma who also happens to be the general secretary of the AIOS.

Apart from the prominence of genetic factors where the risk factor for development of myopia in children doubles when both the parents are near-sighted, environmental factors and the digital boom has also added to the myopia burden.

“Though the prevalence is comparatively less in India, considering the huge population of the country the actual numbers may be staggering,” she says.

The doctors note that parental myopia and a younger age (5 to 8 years) at myopia onset may identify those children to monitor more closely, as they are more likely to have progressive myopia. Children who are found to have difficulty reading the eye chart or complain of difficulty seeing in school should be evaluated promptly.

“Hence, it is important that parents and teachers are made aware of how to identify onset of myopia in kids and when identifying what steps needed to check its progression. Facts should be presented in simple, uncomplicated terms and should include available options to mitigate the risk.”

The document also dwells in detail about the usefulness and limitations of optical Interventions like spectacles, contact Lenses, orthokeratology or multifocal soft contact lenses besides pharmacological Interventions like low dose atropine therapy.

BEYOND THE STETHOSCOPE

When not pursuing their profession, a breed of doctors prefer to wear different hats to keep themselves fit and centered. The HEALTH PIONEER tries to catch up with them every week.



Dr Sunil Kumar

Spirited And Unflinching

A stressful demanding job with long work hours is routine for this Additional Professional and Surgery Oncologist at AIIMS, Delhi, where high-risk cancer patients come for treatment from across India.

However, that doesn't deter Dr Sunil Kumar to visit the Narayan Medical College (Jamuahar) in Bihar on the first Saturday of every month to not only provide free treatment to the cancer patients but also educate locals about the hazards of the fatal disease including those caused by products like tobacco and alcohol.

And he has been doing this religiously for the past nine years under the Chandrakanti Devi Cancer Foundation in Bihar, set up in the name of his mother, a cancer survivor herself.

He says matter-of-factly that many are not lucky like his mother to get timely treatment. “Though treatment is free at AIIMS, many of the patients cannot afford the travel costs to Delhi. Some do not have a relative to accompany them. The others are old while many are diagnosed with cancer at an advanced stage. Our foundation tries to reach out to them to ensure that detection and treatment is at the earliest. These patients are suggested alternative treatments in neighbouring hospitals for palliative care.”

This foundation runs a cancer clinic where free consultation with treatment planning is done, and if advanced treatment at AIIMS is needed, the patients are provided with all the assistance.

Born to a middle-income family--his father was a Class 3 government employee—Dr Kumar knows the hurdles and challenges of healthcare in the remote parts of the country.

“The motivation to help the needy rose from the circumstances around me. I wanted to contribute my bit to the society,” he says modestly.

His foundation has no financial backup to help the needy. “Right now we are paying from our pockets. We do not have a dedicated person to help every patient apply for cancer treatment under government schemes to avail benefits,” he says.

“But once we can afford it, we will provide financial assistance and a volunteer to travel with the patient,” he points out. And he is confident about achieving it. That's the spirit Doc!

As told to Archana Jyoti (Medicos may write to us at healthp100@gmail.com)

News Briefs

DOCS SAVE LIFE OF WOMAN WITH RARE DISORDER

A 19-year-old woman from Uttar Pradesh, who suffered from primary pulmonary hypertension — a rare condition found in just one or two persons per 10 lakh people — was successfully treated at the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital (SGRH) here. The woman had a history of shortness of breath, malaise, persistent nausea, and palpitation which her parents correlated with her unwillingness to attend school.

Dr. Atul Kakar, Vice Chairman, Department of Medicine, diagnosed that the woman had symptoms suggestive of pulmonary artery hypertension (PAH). “The patient was started on drugs to decrease PAH which included endothelin receptor antagonist along with phosphodiesterase 5 inhibitor. These drugs are now available for the treatment of this rare disease,” said Dr. Kakar who also arranged for the funds from Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Relief Fund, the hospital said.

CRANBERRIES CAN IMPROVE MEMORY: STUDY

Adding cranberries to your diet, particularly in middle age, could help improve memory and brain function, and lower 'bad' cholesterol, according to new research that highlights the neuroprotective potential of cranberries, says a study published in the Frontiers in Nutrition.

BLOOD TEST TO DETECT EARLY-STAGE BOWEL CANCER

UK researchers have developed a novel blood test that can detect early-stage bowel cancer in 80 per cent cases. Bowel cancer begins in the large bowel. Depending on where the cancer starts, bowel cancer is sometimes called colon or rectal cancer. It takes one of the longest waiting times for diagnosis and treatments. Researchers at Swansea University developed the blood test using Raman spectrometry and a recent trial showed the test picked up about 80 percent of early-stage cancers.

APP FOR INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE PATIENT

ICMR DG, Dr Balram Bhargava, released the 'IBD NutriCare App' for inflammatory bowel disease patients on the occasion of World Inflammatory Bowel Disease Day on May 19. This Android and iOS-based digital health platform in the form of a smartphone application is developed and validated for real-time tracking of dietary details and recording the data on a large scale for patients with IBD, said the ICMR.

Assistive Technology: Bridge The Gap

People in need of assistive technology (AT) include older people and the disabled besides those affected with communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health conditions, gradual functional decline or loss of intrinsic capacity and by humanitarian crises. However, a lot remains to be desired, finds out THE HEALTH PIONEER

Way back in 2013, Dr Uma Tuli, a rehabilitation expert and founder of Amar Jyoti School for children with disability had pointed out that mostly people in the sector are forgotten when assistive technology (AT) is talked about. “We need to consider ways to develop assistive technology for making inclusive education a reality. We introduce so many things, but if we do not look at their accessibility, the work remains half done. We have to look at education with a holistic approach to make vocational training a part of the curriculum. We need to have structured sports and cultural activities for the differently-abled,” she had noted.

It's now 2022. Seems not much has changed in the world of the PwDs. A report “The Global Report on Assistive

Technology” jointly released by the WHO and UNICEF recently has noted that almost one billion children and adults with disabilities and older persons in need of AT are denied access.

It reveals that more than 2.5 billion people need one or more assistive products, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, or apps that support communication and cognition. Yet nearly one billion of them are denied access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where access can be as low as 3% of the need for these life-changing products.

The report presents evidence for the first time on the global need for and access to assistive products and provides a series of recommendations to expand availability and access, raise awareness of the need, and implement inclusion policies to improve the lives of millions of



people.

“AT is a life changer – it opens the door to education for children with impairments, employment and social interaction for adults living with disabilities, and an independent life of dignity for older persons,” said WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus while releasing the report.

“Nearly 240 million children have disabilities. Denying children the right to the products they need to thrive doesn't only harm individual kids, it deprives families and their communities of everything they could contribute if their needs were met,” added UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “Without access to assis-

tive technology, children with disabilities will continue to miss out on their education, continue to be at a greater risk of child labor and continue to be subjected to stigma and discrimination, undermining their confidence and wellbeing.”

Dr Satendra Singh who is a member of the Standards Development Group to develop global WHO Standards for Wheelchair Service Provision to assist Member States in setting up, improving or transforming their systems to improve access to wheelchair services is not happy with the steps being taken to ensure AT in India.

“The Union Health Ministry has included the assistive products under the list of health products vide notification S.O. 648(E) dated 11th February, 2020 under Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020

which is in force since 1st April 2020.

“In lieu of above notification, it is the duty of medical professionals to prescribe the assistive products as per medical requirements, which means all the procedures and precautions will be required for prescription of assistive products/technologies. However, their draft National List of Essential Assistive Products (NLEAP) was full of errors as it did not consult health professionals with disabilities.

“Nepal and Tajikistan have formulated the list of assistive products involving people with disabilities at all stages. We are still waiting for the finalised NLEAP,” rued Dr Satendra Singh.

It's time to achieve the goals of Inclusive India.

PBKS SIGN OFF WITH WIN

► **pointstable**

Po.	TEAM	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1.	GT (Q)	14	10	4	0	20	0.316
2.	RR (Q)	14	9	5	0	18	0.298
3.	LSG (Q)	14	9	5	0	18	0.251
4.	RCB (Q)	14	8	6	0	16	-0.253
5.	DC	14	7	7	0	14	0.204
6.	PBKS	14	7	7	0	14	0.126
7.	KKR	14	6	8	0	12	0.146
8.	SRH	14	6	8	0	12	-0.379
9.	CSK	14	4	10	0	8	-0.203
10.	MI	14	4	10	0	8	-0.506

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Punjab Kings ended their campaign on a winning note, crushing an already demoralised Sunrisers Hyderabad by five wickets in an inconsequential final IPL league match here on Sunday.

Batting first, Sunrisers Hyderabad managed only 157 for 8 on a good batting track.

But it was never going to be enough as Liam Livingstone made mincemeat of a hapless SRH attack, scoring 49 not out off 22 balls, and also hitting the coveted 1000th six of the tournament.

Shikhar Dhawan (39 off 32 balls) and Jitesh Sharma (19 off 7 balls) also contributed handsomely to the team's cause as the chase was completed in just 15.1 overs. Punjab Kings, who haven't made the play-offs since their final appearance in 2014, finished sixth while the Sunrisers ended their high-spending IPL

► **boundarymeter**

4s

1910

6s

1001

on eighth in the 10-team competition. For Livingstone, it was all about smashing big sixes once again as he hit five in all, while Dhawan helped himself to two fours and two sixes.

It was Jonny Bairstow (23 off 15 balls), who straightaway attacked Bhuvneshwar Kumar

and Washington Sundar, with a flurry of boundaries to set the tempo.

It helped Dhawan to play his accumulating game as Punjab maintained their philosophy of all out attack even as Sunrisers dropped some sitters on the field. Worst was Washington

Sundar's blooper when Livingstone tried to hit Jagadeesha Suchit against the turn and offered a dolly at point. There were too many on-field bingles with Roamrio Shepherd's 15th over going for 23 runs.

Earlier, Punjab Kings

bowlers showed a lot of discipline, restricting SRH to 157 for 8 in 20 overs.

Arshdeep Singh (0/25 in 4 overs) celebrated his maiden India call-up with another parsimonious spell but it was his state team colleague Harpreet Brar (3/26 in 4 overs).

Thank you, Mumbai, we will remember this one: Kohli

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Thank you, Mumbai, we will remember this one," said Virat Kohli after Royal Challengers Bangalore sneaked into the playoffs following Mumbai Indians' thrilling five-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their last game of the IPL here.

On Saturday, MI chased down a victory target of 160 in 19.1 overs to knockout Delhi from the competition and paved the way for RCB's entry as the fourth and final team in the knockout stage.

"It was unbelievable. The emotions in the changing room were unbelievable. Thank you, Mumbai, we will remember this one," Kohli said in a release.

RCB had defeated table-toppers Gujarat Titans by eight wickets in their final league match to keep their hopes alive for a playoff, which depended on the clash between DC and MI.

Delhi needed to win the match to make it to the play-offs but they came a cropper against bottom-placed MI.

RCB skipper Faf Du Plessis said the entire team watched the match together and was cheering each and every move made by the Mumbai team.

"It was so good, I think first of all it was really nice to see that everyone was here from the start of the game, so we watched it together," he said.



"We were all shouting for every wicket that Mumbai got and then when they are chasing every boundary. It's good for everyone to watch together and then the celebration towards the end was awesome to be a part of."

RCB will now take on third-placed Lucknow Super Giants in the Eliminator at Edens Gardens on May 25.

"The last game we played we felt almost like we played our best game of cricket of this campaign so far and that is how you want to enter the knockout stages, so we need-

ed someone to do us a favour and Mumbai did that for us, we are very thankful for that," Du Plessis said. "Obviously now the work starts again, and we get our work mode back on." RCB has never ever won the IPL and allrounder Glenn Maxwell feels the team is very close to achieving that dream.

"Amazing result for us tonight. There is just one small step in us going further, we are that close to making history for RCB in this tournament. We needed another team, but from now on it's all us."



India face Pak in Asia Cup hockey opener

PTI ■ JAKARTA

A second-string Indian men's hockey team will have to tactfully deal with the pressure when it opens its title defence against arch-rivals Pakistan in the Asia Cup here on Monday.

While Pakistan has fielded quite a few new faces in the tournament, India will be represented by its 'A' team under the leadership of veteran Birendra Lakra, who came out of retirement after the Tokyo Olympics.

For India, the Asia Cup provides a platform to test its bench strength ahead of a busy season, that includes the Birmingham Commonwealth Games and the FIH World Cup next year for which the Tokyo Olympic medallists have already qualified as the host nation.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is looking at the tournament to make the cut for the

2023 World Cup in Bhubaneswar. The top three teams in Asia will qualify directly for the January showpiece.

Both India and Pakistan have won the Asia Cup thrice each.

India had won the last edition in 2017 by beating Malaysia in the final in Dhaka.

India's 20-member squad, to be coached by former captain Sardar Singh, was originally supposed to be led by Tokyo Olympic bronze medallist Rupinder Pal Singh, who also came out of retirement but a wrist injury ruled him out of the tournament.

The Indian squad includes another veteran in SV Sunil, who too returned from retirement and is regarded as a livewire on the field.

Sunil, who had missed the Tokyo Olympics squad due to an injury, will serve as Lakra's deputy.

Umran, Arshdeep get India call up

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir pace sensation Umran Malik on Sunday earned an expected India call-up for the upcoming five-match T20 International home series against South Africa starting June 9.

Umran has picked up 21 wickets in 13 games for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL but it's his ability to bowl consistently at 95 miles per hour that has caught the imagination of all and sundry with calls for his immediate selection in top-flight cricket. Along with Umran, Punjab Kings' death overs specialist Arshdeep Singh has also earned his maiden national call-up.

As reported on July 14 by PTI, regular captain Rohit Sharma, star batter Virat Kohli, pacers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami have all been rested for the white-ball series in which Rishabh Pant will be the vice-captain.

Rohit, Kohli, Bumrah, Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja will all fly to England on June 15 for the one-off Test against England at Edgbaston from July 1-5 and will be joined by Cheteshwar Pujara, who has earned a recall to the 17-member Indian Test team after a stupendous show in English County Championship for Sussex. Ditto for all-rounder Hardik Pandya, who has successfully led new franchise Gujarat Titans into IPL play-offs



and has been consistent with the bat, besides bowling a few overs at brisk pace.

While former players and experts have all spoken in unison about Umran's selection in the national team, it wouldn't have been a cakewalk had Lucknow Super Giants pacer Mohsin Khan been fully fit.

While Umran has 21 wickets (before Sunday's game), most of which came in the first phase when batters were getting used to his pace, it is understood that the selectors were far more impressed with Mohsin.

The Uttar Pradesh left-armers has taken 13 wickets from 8 matches at an astounding economy rate of 5.93 compared to Umran's 8.93 in 13 games. However, Mohsin's dodgy hamstring made the decision easier for Chetan Sharma's committee, which also picked Arshdeep especially for his death overs bowling for Punjab Kings.

Jammu celebrates Umran's selection

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Jammu express Umran Malik Sunday earned the Team India cap after the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced India's squad for the five-match T20 International Home series against South Africa starting June 9.

In Jammu, celebrations broke instantly in the old city area where his father Abdul Rashid Malik runs a fresh fruit/vegetable shop. He was greeted and garlanded by the local residents and a victory procession was also taken out in the main streets via Gujjar Nagar area.

The shopkeepers and passersby greeted him, distributed sweets in jubilation. Large number of youngsters were seen dancing on the drum beats in celebration.

Thanking God Almighty Umran's father prayed for his best performance in the upcoming series in South Africa.

"I am very happy. My son has made all of us proud by earning the cap of Team India. All his hard work has been acknowledged and he is going to realise his dream of playing for the country", said Abdul Rashid.

"Today I want to thank the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the people of India and all his

well wishers for blessing my son and backing him while he was performing well during the IPL series".

Ever since Umran started bowling in the ongoing IPL series he won hearts of cricket lovers with his best performance on the field. He bowled fastest bowls of the season and earned 13 awards in a row for bowling fastest deliveries.

Back home, his sisters and mother were busy receiving visitors who assembled at their residence to greet the family and celebrate the selection of their youngest son in TEAM INDIA.

Political leaders and sports administrators congratulated him on earning the cap of TEAM INDIA.

Former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted Well done Umran. "Well done Umran Malik. We will be watching the forthcoming T20 series against the Proteas very keenly".

Senior BJP leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Prof Nirmal Singh posted a tweet congratulating the Jammu speedster. "Congratulations to Speedster of Jammu Umran Malik for his selection in the Indian Cricket team for the upcoming T20 series against South Africa. A proud moment for J&K".

Secretary J&K sports council Nuzhat Gull in a tweet said,



Rohit not losing sleep over poor form

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma admitted that a lot of things didn't go his way with the bat but he is not losing sleep over his "disappointing" season as he is just one "minor adjustment" away from finding form again. Rohit endured his worst IPL season, failing to score a single half-century for the first time since his debut in the inaugural edition in 2008. The swashbuckling opener managed to score just 248 runs at an average of 19.14 and a strike rate of 120.17 in 14 outings. "A lot of things that I wanted to do didn't happen. I am very disappointed with me season. But this has happened with me earlier as well, so it's not something I am going through for the first time," Rohit said after MI's last match of the season on Saturday.

"I know cricket doesn't end here; there is a lot of cricket ahead."

Thiem exits French Open on 1st day

PNS ■ PARIS

Two-time French Open runner-up Dominic Thiem said he was "a few more months" away from returning to his best after crashing out in the first round at Roland Garros for the second straight year.

Thiem's ranking has slipped to 194 after a lengthy battle with a wrist injury. He has lost 10 tour-level matches in a row following a 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 defeat to Hugo Dellien of Bolivia on Sunday.

The 2020 US Open champion has yet to win a match in six attempts since his comeback in March. His last victory came in Rome just over a year ago.

"It's not the greatest feeling to go in a Grand Slam knowing that all is not perfect in practice. I don't play like I would like to in practice," said Thiem.



"It was not a good match at all, but it is what it is. I

knew that it's going to take time, that the level is extreme-

ly high from all the players competing here and I'm not

there yet."

The 28-year-old Austrian, a former world number three, reached at least the quarter-finals at Roland Garros five years running from 2016 to 2020. He finished runner-up to Rafael Nadal in 2018 and 2019.

"The key is just to be patient, continue being patient, work on the stuff which is not working and then it will come back, but it will take time," said Thiem.

"I cannot say now I'm disappointed, I'll work hard for a week and then next tournament I'm playing super well."

"I have to be patient and I think it's going to take a few more months until I can really say, okay, now I'm ready to beat those top guys again."

Dellien, ranked 87th, recorded only his third Grand Slam main-draw win. He made the second round of the French Open and US Open in 2019.

VERSTAPPEN WINS SPANISH GRAND PRIX

AFF ■ MONTMELÓ

Sergio Perez took second for Sa Red Bull 1-2 at the Montmelo circuit behind the world champion where in 2016 Verstappen had opened his F1 account as a teenager.

Leclerc was sitting comfortably in the lead from pole until lap 23 when a sudden loss of power proved fatal to his Ferrari.

The man from Monaco arrived in Catalonia 19 points in front in the title race, but left it six points behind Verstappen ahead of his home race next weekend. Verstappen had to overcome being blown off the circuit and into the gravel by a gust of wind early on and some technical niggles.

"Difficult beginning but a good end! I tried to stay focussed, which is not always easy," he said.



Mercedes showed improved form after a bumpy start to the season with George Russell claiming third. Lewis Hamilton in the

other Mercedes threaded his way through the field after being forced into the pits shortly after the start with a puncture to take fifth.

MAN CITY WIN PREMIER LEAGUE

AGENCIES ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City won the title after they completed a remarkable turnaround to beat Aston Villa 3-2.

Pep Guardiola's side knew that a win here against Aston Villa would hand them a third Premier League title in four years.

And they went close to scoring after just nine minutes as Gabriel Jesus shut down goalkeeper Robin Olsen but the blocked pass went just wide of the Villa goal.

But it was Steven Gerrard's side who opened the scoring on 36 minutes as Matty Cash headed past Ederson.

After the break City were going all out for an equaliser but Jesus's sliding effort somehow went over the bar.

It was Villa who got their second though as Coutinho turned Aymeric Laporte and finished well.

But City did get one back with 15 minutes to go as Ilkay Gundogan headed in at the far post before Rodri slotted one in from the edge of the area to make the score level.

And it was Gundogan who put City ahead with eight minutes to go as he virtually secured the title for Guardiola's men.

Liverpool beat Wolves 3-1 at Anfield but couldn't claim the title after Manchester City's win.

Liverpool needed Aston Villa to do them a favour if an unlikely Premier League title was on the cards - but first they had to get their job done



against Wolves.

But they got off to the worst possible start as Neto ghosted into the area and

tapped in from close range.

Jürgen Klopp's side soon got themselves back into the game though as Sadio Mané

raced in and finished well.

Into the second half and the home side had a goal disallowed after 50 minutes as

Mané was slipped in but his

strike was ruled out for offside.

They did get their goal late on as Mohamed Salah joined

the action and bundled one in

from close range before Andy

Robertson got a third.

Leeds won 2-1 against 10-

LIVERPOOL BEAT WOLVES 3-1 AT ANFIELD BUT COULDN'T CLAIM THE TITLE AFTER MANCHESTER CITY'S WIN.

man Brentford and avoided relegation to the Championship. Jesse Marsch's side travelled to west London knowing that things were out of their hands in the relegation zone as they needed to better Burnley's result at Newcastle.

The Yorkshire side thought they had opened the scoring on 18 minutes but Joe Gelhardt's goal was disallowed for offside after a VAR call.

Leeds were fully on top here and after the break went close to finally getting that goal only for Rodrigo's one-on-one effort to hit the goalkeeper.

But they did get their goal on 55 minutes as Raphinha slotted in a penalty after being taken out inside the area.

Brentford made things nervy for Leeds late on as Sergi Canos levelled things up but the Spaniard was then sent off for two bookable offences.

But Leeds got a goal right in stoppage time to confirm their top flight status next season.

Burnley were relegated after a decade in the Premier League as they lost 2-1 to

Newcastle.

An in-form Newcastle went to Turf Moor looking to upset Burnley and send the Claret's down to the Championship.

Joelinton was in the wars early on as he got stretched off after a collision in midfield but the Magpies took the lead on 18 minutes as Callum Wilson struck home a penalty.

After the break Eddie Howe's side got their second as Wilson tapped in from close range.

Burnley's best player this season - Maxwell Cornet - pulled one back for the home side with the home crowd now urging their side on for an equaliser.

Tottenham claimed fourth place and a spot in next season's Champions League as they beat Norwich 5-0.

It was advantage Tottenham in the race for that final Champions League place as they knew that a win at Norwich would take them into Europe next season.

Antonio Conte's side were on top early on and needed just 15 minutes to take the lead as Dejan Kulusevski finished well. Spurs then cemented their place in the top four as Harry Kane doubled their lead just after the half hour mark.

In the second half Kulusevski scored an absolute screamer to all but secure their top four status.

Heung-min Son wasn't going to let the day go by without a goal as he got his 22nd of the season and then netted his 23rd to go top of the Golden Boot race.

Marseille secure CL place

AP ■ PARIS

Marseille clinched automatic qualification for next season's Champions League group stage on a final night of the French Ligue 1 season on Saturday.

Marseille began the day in third place -- which only offered a place in the Champions League third qualifying round -- behind Monaco on goal difference, meaning they needed to better the principality club's result to finish second as they each completed their campaigns.

The 1993 Champions League winners duly fulfilled their part of the bargain as they crushed Strasbourg 4-0 at a packed Velodrome with Brazilian international Gerson scoring twice either side of a Cengiz Under goal before Cedric Bakambu wrapped up the victory late on.

Seconds after that goal went in, bedlam ensued among the more than 60,000 home supporters as news filtered through that Monaco had conceded an injury-time goal to draw 2-2 away at Lens.



Fiorentina beat Juve to reach Conference League

AP ■ FLORENCE

Fiorentina will return to European football for the first time in five years after beating Juventus 2-0 to qualify for next season's Conference League.

Alfred Duncan's finish on the stroke of half-time and Nicolas Gonzalez's late penalty gave Vincenzo Italiano's side the win they needed to guarantee continental competition.

Fiorentina ensured seventh spot in Italy's top flight, three points ahead of Atlanta who lost 1-0 at home to Empoli and miss out on Europe for the first time since Gian Piero Gasperini took over as coach in 2016.

Giorgio Chiellini made his final appearance in a Juve shirt in a typically feisty match between big rivals and he left the field with a bleeding head after a clash with Fiorentina forward Krzysztof Piatek in build up to Duncan's winner.

The 37-year-old didn't come back out for the second half and ended his Juve career unable to help his team salvage something from the match.

Lazio closed their season in fifth, a point and one place above local rivals Rome after an entertaining 3-3 home draw with Verona.

ANATOLY KARPOV- THE MOST ORIGINAL PLAYER

■ PRAVIN THIPSAY

In the series 'Champion born this month', I wish to present a story on a champion who can be considered to be the most original player of all times, someone who never followed the known paths of the Chess strategy, someone who never worked hard, someone who was criticised of 'having no clue of what Chess is', someone who wouldn't elaborate on his thinking process and yet someone who was the most feared opponent for almost two decades because not many could guess his next move! Yes, I am talking of the one and the only one Anatoly Karpov!

Anatoly Evgenevich Karpov was born on 23rd May, 1951 at Zlatoust, Russia in a normal simple Russian family. He showed exceptional talent in defeating well known Chess players very early in life and improved much faster than other players of his age. In fact, as a boy, he was better than his friends in all intellectual activities and even card games.

In 1969, Karpov won the World Junior Chess Crown, thereby becoming a real force to reckon with. The Western Chess world started taking him a bit seriously but still, he was never considered to be a genius because the Chess fraternity did not possess the objectivity to assess the depth of Karpov's play. When Karpov won the World Championship Throne in 1975 due to 'forfeit' by Bobby Fischer, the Western media looked down upon Karpov as if it was his fault. However, despite all this, Karpov reigned supreme for a full decade before losing the World Championship Match to the 'Child of change', Garry Kasparov. (We presented a story on Gary Kasparov in our issue



of 13th April, 2022).

Even today, Karpov is known to be unique and unparalleled in several aspects of Chess. Probably he is the strongest endgame player of all times, with deep sense of endgame planning and strategy, combined with engine-like accuracy. Karpov's ability of improving his position without letting the opponent have a slightest clue of it often angered of his opponents. He possessed the unique quality of easily winning 'drawn' endgames. Karpov is probably the only Chess player who remained the World Championship Challenger for almost a decade after losing the World Chess Crown. In fact, Kasparov and his team took several years to find the right way of fighting Karpov, which involved a multi-fold complex strategy. Karpov's contribution to

closed Ruy Lopez (Spanish) opening and the Boleslavsky Pawn structure in Sicilian defence is unparalleled. One of his moves in the Spanish opening, against Grandmaster Unzicker, is still known as 'Move of the (20th)Century'.

Today I have chosen a little known game of Karpov for two reasons. Firstly, it exhibits his extraordinary positional understanding at tender age of 15 and secondly, it is the first known game of a variation which is now known as 'Karpov Variation'.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 Bb7 11.d4 Nc4 12.b3 Nb6 13.Nbd2

This was the commonly occurring position in the 1950s and 1960s, and the assessment was that White was slightly better. Perhaps the assessment is correct but Karpov's way of handling it with Black resulted in remarkable changes in strategic beliefs in the Spanish opening.

13...Nfd7! 14.Nf1 c5 15.Ne3 g6 16.Bb2 Bf6! Black is trying to provoke White in advancing the 'd' Pawn. 17.Qe2 Qc7 18.dxe5?! 18.d5 leads to a sharp position with active play for both sides. 18...Nxe5! Probably White expected 18...dxe5? 19.c4! when Black's pieces are not well placed to occupy the 'd4' square. 19.Nxe5 Bxe5! 20.Bd3 c4! The most ambitious and accurate continuation. Black strives for initiative on the Queen side. 21.bxc4 Na4! 22.Rac1 b4! 23.Nd1 a5?! 23...Nxb2! was better. 24.Ba1! Rfd8 25.Qc2 Bc6 26.Rb1 Nc5!

27.Ne3 Ba4 28.Qd2 b3! Black has succeeded in creating a 'Passed Pawn on the Queen side, despite being a 'Pawn down'. 29.Nd5 Qa7 30.Bf1 Rdb8 31.Kh1 bxa2 32.Qxa2 Bb3 33.Qe2 a4 34.f4 Bg7 35.f5 Re8! An important decision, the Black King Rook occupies the semi-open 'e' file and successfully interferes with White's King side attack. 36.Qg4 Bc2! 37.Rb2 Rxe4 38.Rxe4 Bxe4 39.fxg6 39.f6 Bf8 is completely hopeless for White. 39...hxg6 40.Rd2 Nb3 41.Rd1 Bc2! 42.Re1 Qf2! The decisive infiltration into White's camp. 43.Qe2 Qxe2 44.Bxe2 44.Rxe2 loses to Nxa1 44...Re8! Now White can't avoid loss of at least a piece. 45.Bb2 Bd3 46.Nf4 Bxc4! Black intends to attack the White Knight on 'f4' which is defending the 'pinned' White Bishop on 'e2'. 47.Kg1 g5 47...Bh6 was equally good. For example, 48.Kf2 Bxf4 49.Bxc4 Bg3+! etc. 48.Kf2! Nd2! But not 48...gxf4? 49.Bxc4 49.Bd3 49.Bxc4 Rxe1 50.Kxe1 Nxc4 leads to loss of at least one piece for White. 49...Rb8! White resigned in view of 49...Rb8 50.Ba3 Be5! 51.Bxc4 Nxc4 when he can't save both the attacked pieces. This game brought about several important strategic changes to the then established ideas in Spanish opening. 0-1 (Pravin Thipsay is a Grandmaster and former national champion.)

Lyon beat Barca to claim eighth Women's CL

AP ■ TURIN

Lyon won the Women's Champions League on Saturday after beating Barcelona 3-1 to be crowned queens of Europe for a record-extending eighth time.

First half goals from Amandine Henry, Ada Hegerberg and Catarina Macario were enough to take the title from pre-match holders Barca, who pulled one back through captain Alexia Putellas just before half-time.

Expectation was high among Barca fans, who descended in large numbers on the Allianz Stadium in Turin to watch a team who have been tipped to end Lyon's dominance of the women's game in Europe.

However they couldn't come back from going three goals down in the first 33 minutes.

"I'm super happy to have scored because it helped us settle in to the match. It will remain engraved in my memory," said Henry after



her blockbuster finish.

"I'm not used to scoring but this will give me even more confidence and more desire to keep playing."

The damage was done in a whirlwind opening period in which Lyon showed their

European pedigree and for large tracts steamrollered Barca.

Henry opened the scoring in the sixth minute with a beautiful strike which came out of nowhere, the France icon picking up the ball way

out before letting off a rocket which Sandra Panos could only grasp at in vain.

From there Lyon kicked into gear and Hegerberg had her 59th goal in 60 Champions League appearances in the 23rd minute

when she calmly nodded in Selma Bacha's cross from close range.

Ten minutes later Barca's heads were spinning after a baffling defensive mix-up left Macario with a tap-in to make it three from almost on the goal line.

Barca looked dead and buried but Ballon d'Or holder Putellas dragged her team back into it four minutes before the break when she saved Caroline Graham Hansen's miscued cross by lashing home a low first-time finish.

Patricia Guijarro thought she had cut the deficit to just one in the most spectacular way possible when she launched an audacious shot from just after the half-way line which crashed back out from the underside of the bar.

From there Barca were the better team but lacked the killer touch, with Ana-Maria Crnogorcecovic volleying a great chance wide with seven minutes remaining highlighting a wastefulness which in the end cost them their European crown.

Rangers win Scottish Cup

AP ■ GLASGOW

Rangers ended a tumultuous week by winning the Scottish Cup after beating Hearts 2-0 after extra time in the final.



Rangers lost the Europa League final on Wednesday night in a penalty shootout, and it went into another extra time on Saturday thanks to Craig Gordon's save with his foot from Joe Aribo near the end of regulation time at Hampden Park.

However, they dug deep yet again and two goals in three minutes by substitutes Ryan Jack and Scott Wright on Saturday gave them the Scottish Cup for the first time since 2009.



Leipzig win DFB-Pokal on penalties

AP ■ BERLIN

Ten-man RB Leipzig lifted the German Cup at the third attempt on Saturday by winning the final 4-2 on penalties having fought back to draw 1-1 against Freiburg after extra-time.

Maximilian Eggestein gave Freiburg an early lead at Berlin's Olympic Stadium before Christopher Nkunku equalised inside 90 minutes after Leipzig had Marcel Halstenberg sent off.

Leipzig's triumph comes having lost on their previous German Cup finals appearances to Bayern Munich in 2019, then Dortmund last season.

It is the first major title won by RB Leipzig, who are backed by energy drinks giants Red Bull and were only founded in 2009.

"That's crazy, we played 60 minutes with ten men," Leipzig managing director Oliver Mintzlaff told ARD.

"We're going to party hard, this is an historic evening for us."

They shot up Germany's football pyramid with four promotions in seven years to reach the Bundesliga in 2016/17, twice finishing second to Bayern Munich in the last six years.