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NEW DELHI, MONDAY OCTOBER 31, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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60 dead in Guj cable bridge collapse

Many missing after old bridge that had recently reopened after repairs snapped

PTI ■ MORBI (GUJARAT)

At least 60 people were killed and scores went missing after a nearly century-old suspension bridge on the Machchhu River in Gujarat's Morbi city collapsed on Sunday evening, officials said. There was a rush of people on the bridge, which was reopened for the public just four days ago following the renovation work, when it snapped around 6.30 PM, they said. "At least 60 people have died in the Morbi suspension bridge collapse as our hospital has so far received that many bodies," Superintendent of Morbi Civil Hospital Dr Pradip Dudhrajia said.

Gujarat Minister Brijesh Merja confirmed that around 60 people have died in the tragedy.

Eyewitnesses said that there were several women, children and others on the hanging bridge when it snapped, plunging them into the water below. Due to the Diwali vacation and being a Sunday, there was a rush of people on the bridge, which is a major tourist attraction.

A private operator had carried out the repair work of the bridge for nearly six months before it was reopened to the public on the Gujarati New Year day celebrated on October 26. A fire department official said that boats were being used to rescue people from the river.

"We are carrying out rescue work using boats. There are around 40-50 people in the



The collapsed portion of an old suspension bridge over the Machchhu River, in Morbi district on Sunday

PTI

river," the official said.

In a tweet, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said he was saddened by the tragedy.

"Relief and rescue operations by the administration are going on. The administration has been instructed to arrange immediate treatment for the injured. I am in constant contact with the district administration in this regard," he said.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a tweet that Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, who is currently in Gujarat, spoke to Patel and officials regarding the mishap.

"He (PM Modi) has sought urgent mobilisation of teams for rescue operations. He has asked that the situation be closely and continuously monitored, and extend all possible help to those affected," the PMO said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will soon reach the site of the collapse.

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'Aerospace, Def to be pillars of self-reliant India'

'Make-in-India', 'Make-for-world' boosting strength: Modi at C-295 aircraft building facility launch

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that in the coming years, the Defence and aerospace sectors will be the two important pillars for making India 'Atmanirbhar' and that by 2025 the country's Defence manufacturing scale would cross \$25 billion.

"India with 'Make-in-India, Make for the World' approach is enhancing its strength further," he said. Modi was addressing the gathering in Vadodara after laying the foundation stone of the manufacturing facility for the production of C-295 medium transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF) by a consortium of

aerospace major Airbus and the Tata Group at a cost of ₹22,000 crore.

Modi, who is on a three-day tour to Rajasthan and Gujarat, where elections will be announced in the next few days, said that 'Made-in-India' passenger planes would soon be a reality as his Government had helped increase the 'Ease of Doing Business' in the country. The Prime Minister has been launching a slew of developmental projects across poll-bound Gujarat over the last few months. His ongoing visit will be no different. He is also scheduled to address BJP workers across all 182 Assembly constituencies.

The inauguration of the C-295 aircraft manufacturing plant was attended by Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Airbus Chief Commercial Officer Christian Scherer and Tata Sons Chairperson N Chandrasekaran. "The Defence corridors being established in States like Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu would power the Defence exports.

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Post-Galwan, ITBP reskilling its men in unarmed combat



RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

After the Galwan incident of 2020, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) that secures the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China has changed its basic training modules and so far trained as many as 20,000 combatised and non-combatised personnel in a range of new unarmed combat techniques to immobilise and incapacitate the adversaries.

The reskilling move comes after the Galwan Valley incident in eastern Ladakh on May 5, 2020, in which 20 Indian Army personnel suffered casualties at the hands of the Chinese PLA that resorted to medieval tactics to inflict fatal injuries on the Indian

troops. The new unarmed combat tactics will comprise 15-20 manoeuvres as part of the basic training course for the new recruits as well as refresher course for the already serving personnel.

The ITBP has a strength of 98,000 personnel.

The unarmed combat techniques will empower the troops to channelise their raw physical power in such a manner that can inflict a deadly punch to the opponent, officials said.

While the basic training course is of 44 weeks' duration, the refresher courses are for 24 weeks. Both the training courses are compulsory for all ranks up to the level of Commandants.

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T'langana 10th State to nix general consent to CBI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana has become 10th State to withdraw the general consent to the CBI, which means the agency has to take prior consent for a probe from the State Government on a case-to-case basis.

In fact, the Telangana Government had withdrawn the general consent in an order issued on August 30 itself but it came to public knowledge only after the State's Additional Advocate General (AAG)

informed the Telangana High Court about it during arguments on a petition filed by the BJP seeking a CBI probe into the TRS MLAs' poaching case.

The development comes after the BJP and TRS have indulged in a war of words over several issues in the recent past leading to much acrimony between the two parties.

The three persons, who allegedly tried to "poach" four TRS legislators, were arrested and remanded to judicial cus-



tody on Saturday.

The Government's Home (Special) Department had issued an order-GO Ms No 51 on August 30 withdrawing all previous general consents issued by it under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, the AAG informed the court.

"...The learned Additional Advocate General submitted that the petitioner does not have locus standi to file this writ petition. GO Ms No 51, Home (Special) Department, dated 30.08.2022 was issued by

the Government of Telangana withdrawing all previous general consents issued by the State Government under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946 (for short 'the Act'), the High Court said in its order.

Before Telangana, nine other States that have withdrawn consent to the CBI are namely Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Mizoram.



Devotees perform rituals of Chhath Puja festival in a canal in Jalandhar on Sunday

PTI

Delhi Govt forms 586 teams to execute CAQM construction ban

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the air quality of Delhi-NCR continues to worsen, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Sunday announced that the AAP Government has decided to implement the Commission for Air Quality Management's (CAQM) order and set up 586 teams to ensure strict implementation of the ban on construction and demolition activities in the Capital. Besides, the Government agencies also decided to use 521 water sprinklers, 233 anti-smog guns, and 150 mobile anti-smog guns to curb pollution in Delhi.

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SC to hear PILs on CAA today; Centre says dismiss them

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) will come up for hearing in the Supreme Court on Monday when it reopens after a nine-day Diwali vacation.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Uday Umesh Lalit, Justices S Ravindra Bhat and Bela M Trivedi has listed for hearing as many as 232 petitions, mostly PILs, on October 31 on the issue of the CAA alone.

However, the Centre on Sunday urged the court to dismiss the pleas. Earlier, the Bench headed by CJI Lalit, who is scheduled to demit office on November 8, had said that the pleas challenging the CAA will be referred to a three-judge Bench.

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S Korea in one week mourning; toll may rise

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared a one-week national mourning period on Sunday and ordered flags at Government buildings and public offices to fly at half-staff after a horrific Saturday night Halloween crowd surge claimed 151 lives.

World leaders and the Pope offered condolences at the tragedy. Along with the US, UK, China, Japan, France and Singapore, India, too, expressed shock and grief at the loss of lives. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday condoled the deaths and said India stands in solidarity with that country during this difficult time.

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Wire files complaint against its researcher over Meta stories

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Wire has filed a complaint against its researcher, Devesh Kumar, at the Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police, a day after the Delhi Police registered an FIR against its founder and editors in connection with the Meta stories. The stories, subsequently retracted, had reported that BJP IT cell head Amit Malviya used his special privileges at social media giant Meta to take down over 700 posts.

According to the officer, the complaint was sent via e-mail to the Special Commissioner of Police (Crime) on Saturday against Kumar alleging fabrication and



forgery by Kumar in the portal's recent Meta stories. "We are looking into the matter. No FIR is lodged so far in the matter," police said.

In his complaint, the Wire has alleged that Kumar has a "malintent" towards The Wire, its editors, and staff and has "fabricated and supplied documents, e-mails and other material such as videos with a view to damage its reputation. He has done so either on his own or at the behest of other unknown persons". The com-

plaint has also claimed that according to a review by The Wire, Kumar had "supplied fabricated material, including the documents and e-mails and videos from Instagram and Meta".

Earlier on Saturday, the Delhi Police had filed an FIR against 'The Wire' and its editors based on a complaint by Malviya, who accused it of "cheating and forgery" and "tarnishing" his reputation. "A case has been filed. Investigation will be initiated and necessary action will be taken," the officer said.

Malviya had on Friday said he will pursue criminal and civil proceedings against the portal over stories, since retracted, which insinuated

that he enjoyed a special privilege on Meta platforms through which he could get any story taken down if he believed it was against the BJP's interests.

The complaint was filed for various offences punishable under sections 420 (cheating), 468 and 469 (forgery), 471 (fraud), 500 (defamation) r/w 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (criminal act) of the Indian Penal Code.

Though 'The Wire' has apologised to its readers and withdrawn the stories, the BJP leader had noted that the news portal did not offer him an apology despite "maligning and tarnishing my reputation and causing serious harm to my professional career".

Post-Galwan, ITBP reskilling its men in...

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The new training module comprises 15-20 different fight manoeuvres taken from various martial arts techniques like judo, karate and krav maga (an Israeli martial art, which is derived from a combination of techniques used in aikido, boxing and wrestling) which involve moves like punching, kicking, throwing, joint lock and pinning down an adversary.

The new recruits will undergo three-month training in the martial arts which are being imparted by seasoned ITBP trainers who will expose and hone the new recruits at the Basic Training Centre (BTC) at Bhanu in Panchkula before their induction into the border guarding force.

"The new unarmed combat technique involves both defensive and offensive moves. We brought in this module for

our troops last year on the directions of our former director general Sanjay Arora. The combat skills will render the opponent immobile and can also incapacitate them," ITBP Inspector General Ishwar Singh Duhan said.

Duhan heads the BTC at Bhanu, about 25 km from Chandigarh.

The Chinese PLA troops used stones, nail-studded sticks, iron rods and clubs in carrying out brutal attacks on Indian soldiers after they protested the erection of a surveillance post by China on the Indian side of the LAC at Galwan in eastern Ladakh in June, 2020 leading to 20 casualties on the Indian side while China belatedly claimed only four of its troops were liquidated.

The Russian official news agency TASS had reported that 45 Chinese servicemen were

killed in the Galwan Valley clash. An American Intelligence report pegged the number of casualties on the Chinese side at 35.

Duhan said the force has also introduced special training capsules aimed at enhancing the "physical capacity" of the troops deployed in some of the most arduous posts along the LAC who continuously face harsh weather conditions like snow blizzards, avalanches and thin oxygen levels.

"We have now put in place a plan where a troop deployed on the border and higher altitudes will not be deployed for more than 90 days at a stretch. Logistics have been put in place that will ensure timely replacement of troops from the border posts," the IG said.

The ITBP studied a number of scientific parameters and got inputs from the DRDO's Defence Institute of

Physiology Allied Sciences (DIPAS) that showed how prolonged deployment of personnel can bring about "irreparable damage" to the human body.

It was then decided that troops deployed at high-altitude need to be rotated every three months.

The Galwan incident triggered a lingering border standoff in eastern Ladakh which continues till date in Demchok and Depsang regions, leading to strained bilateral relations between the two countries.

However, the two sides completed the disengagement process last year on the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area following a series of military and diplomatic talks. Last month, the two sides completed disengagement from the Patrolling Point 15 in the Gogra-Hotsprings area.

Moosewala's father threatens to leave country, withdraw FIR in murder case

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Sidhu Moosewala's father on Sunday threatened to withdraw the FIR in his son's murder case and leave the country if the slain singer was linked with gangsters.

Giving an ultimatum to the state machinery till November 25 to hear him out, an emotional Balkaur Singh claimed that his son was killed under a well-planned conspiracy and said he was not ready to accept the allegations that his son was killed as part of a gang rivalry.

Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29.

Singh said the family had been cooperating very well with the administration in probing the case, but this was



perhaps considered as their "weakness".

"It has been five months (since the death of Sidhu Moosewala). We are counting days and time is passing by," he said addressing a gathering at Moosa village in Mansa.

Singh said he was against holding any dharna but wanted the officers concerned to hear his appeal. "My son was killed under a well-planned conspiracy," he claimed.

"I want to tell the government through the media that if you make my son part of gangsters, I will make things easy for you and will take back the FIR on November 25.

Munugode bypoll: EC asks BJP candidate to explain money transfers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the November 3 Munugode assembly bypoll, the Election Commission Sunday asked BJP candidate K Rajagopal Reddy to explain the transfer of over Rs 5 crore from his family-owned firm's account to 23 people and entities within the constituency.

In a letter to Reddy, the poll panel has also asked him to ensure that the Rs 5.24 crore in question is not used to induce voters.

Reddy has been asked to explain the fund transactions by 4 pm on October 31. The decision to seek clarification from Reddy was taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar.

The TRS had approached the poll panel over the transactions. It had alleged that the amount was meant to induce

voters by withdrawing cash from these transferee accounts.

"As a transferee, if done by you or under your direction by a family-owned company as alleged, it is a duty cast on you to ensure that this fund transferred to different 23 bank accounts are not used for voter inducement, as alleged, which is a corrupt practice," the EC letter said.

The poll panel also reminded the BJP candidate of the provisions of the model code relating to corrupt practices during campaigning.

"You are directed to clarify the position and status covering all aspects as mentioned in the representation about the alleged transaction purported to be done to induce voters in Munugode AC, on or before 31 October 31, 4:00 pm to enable the commission to take appropriate decision," the letter read.

Fire at factory located on premises of resort linked to Ankita murder

PTI ■ RISHIKESH/DEHRADUN

A fire broke out on Sunday in an gooseberry candy factory located on the premises of a resort linked to the Ankita Bhandari murder case in Uttarakhand's Rishikesh.

The incident took place at 10 am in the Yamkeshwar area of Pauri district, officials said.

No casualties have been reported till now. An official said prima facie the accident took place due to overheating of an inverter installed in the factory.

On the other hand, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Jot Singh Bisht termed the factory fire as another "conspiracy to destroy evidence" of the murder.

Liquor worth ₹100 cr sold on weekend preceding Diwali

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 48 lakh bottles of liquor worth over Rs 100 crore were sold in Delhi on the weekend preceding Diwali. People celebrated Diwali with pomp on Monday after two years of muted festivities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Diwali, October 24 (Monday), was a dry day in the national capital. "That led to a rush on the weekend from Friday to Sunday with heavy liquor sales across the city," said a senior excise department officer.

"More than 48 lakh bottles were sold on Friday-Sunday, worth over Rs 100 crore, ahead of Diwali on October 24," he said. The average daily sale of liquor in Delhi is around 12.50 lakh



bottles, the officer said.

Giving details, officials said 13.56 lakh bottles worth over Rs 30 lakh were sold on Friday and 15.09 lakh bottles worth nearly Rs 32 lakh on Saturday. On Diwali eve on October 23, a record sale of more than 19.42 lakh bottles worth over Rs 42 lakh was recorded, they said.

The excise business in Delhi has been hit hard with liquor policy of the Arvind Kejriwal government coming under scanner and an ongoing CBI probe into an alleged

"scam" in its implementation.

The Excise Policy 2021-22 was withdrawn by the Kejriwal government after the CBI probe was recommended by Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena into alleged violations of rules and procedural lapses in its implementation from November 17, 2021.

Retail licences issued to private parties for 849 liquor vends under the policy ceased to exist from August 31 this year. The government decided to revert to old excise regime that was operational before November 17, 2021. Under the old excise regime, the Delhi government undertakings are running over 460 liquor vends across the city.

The number of liquor vends run by the four undertakings is expected to go up to 700 by the year end, officials added.

Delhi Govt forms 586 teams to execute construction...

From Page 1

The air quality in Delhi-NCR continued to remain in the "very poor" category on Sunday.

The overall Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city stood at 350. Anand Vihar (AQI 468) was the most polluted place in the Capital. Wazirpur (412), Vivek Vihar (423) and Jahangirpuri (407) were among the monitoring stations that recorded "severe" air quality.

The share of stubble burning in Delhi PM2.5 pollution rose to 26 per cent on Sunday, the highest this year so far, amid an increase in farm fires and favourable conditions for transport of emissions to Delhi-NCR. On Saturday, farm fires accounted for 21 per cent of the PM2.5 pollution in the national Capital.

Addressing a press conference, Rai announced that the Government has set up 586 teams to ensure strict implementation of the ban on construction and demolition activities in the Capital. These teams will monitor the implementation of the ban on construction and demolition activities.

Besides, 120 enforcement teams of the Delhi Government's transport department and the city police will implement restriction on plying of BS III petrol and BS IV diesel four-wheeler in the national Capital if such curbs are imposed.

"According to weather experts, the wind speed will be 4-5 kmph from November 1 and it is predicted that the

AQI might cross 400 (severe). We had a meeting with all construction authorities - PWD, MCD, Railways, DDA and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee - on Sunday, and decided to implement the stage three of the Graded Response Plan Action," Rai said. Earlier, he held a high level meeting with officials to discuss the the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) order, implementing the stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

Rai also blamed the vehicular emissions from Government buses operating in Uttar Pradesh for the rise in pollution at Anand Vihar and Vivek Vihar areas in Delhi. Rai also said Anand Vihar and Vivek Vihar have been reporting high pollution levels continuously which could be due to construction work related to Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) and emission from the Government buses coming from neighbouring State.

"Diesel-run buses have an important role in high pollution levels at the Delhi-UP border. We request the UP Government to run CNG buses in the NCR districts at least. This will help bring down air pollution," he said. He requested the Uttar Pradesh Government to use CNG buses in the national Capital region, saying diesel-run buses have a big role in high pollution levels at the Delhi-UP border.

Rai said the Government will also deploy fire tenders to sprinkle water at

pollution hotspots. "We have directed the user agency to strictly follow the dust pollution control norms. The Government has deployed 15 anti-smog guns in those areas in addition to seven water sprinklers of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi," he said.

Under stage III, the CAQM have been asked to enforce a strict ban on construction and demolition activities in the NCR, except for essential projects and non-polluting activities such as plumbing, carpentry, interior decoration and electrical works.

The ban on construction and demolition activities covers earthwork for excavation, boring and drilling; fabrication and welding operations; loading and unloading of construction material; transfer of raw material, including fly ash, either manually or through conveyor belts and vehicular movement on unpaved roads. It also bans the operation of batching plants; laying of sewer lines, waterline, drainage work and electric cabling through open trench system; cutting and fixing of tiles, stones and other flooring materials; grinding activities; piling work; water proofing work; road construction and repair works, including paving of sidewalks, pathways and central verges among others. Brick kilns, hot mix plants and stone crushers not operating on clean fuels, and mining and associated activities in the NCR have also been banned.

SC to hear 232 PILs on...

From Page 1

The 2019 amended law seeks to grant Indian citizenship to non-Muslim migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, and Parsi communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have come to the country till 2014.

The Opposition has opposed the legislation over the exclusion of Muslims, terming it partisan and violating Article 14 of the Constitution that guarantees equality to all.

The lead plea on the issue was filed by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). The IUML has claimed the Act violates the fundamental Right to Equality and intends to grant citizenship to a section of illegal immigrants by making an exclusion based on religion.

Seeking a response from the Central Government in four weeks to a batch of pleas challenging the CAA, the top court had also restrained High Courts in the country from proceedings with pending petitions on the issue.

Meanwhile, the Centre on Sunday urged the Supreme

Court to dismiss pleas challenging the validity of the CAA, stressing that it does not encourage "illegal migration" as is a "focused law" which grants citizenship only to members of six specified communities who came on or before December 31, 2014. In a detailed 150-page affidavit, the Ministry of Home Affairs said, "Parliament is competent to make laws for the whole or any part of the territory of India as provided in Article 245 (1) of The Constitution of India."

Several petitions have been filed challenging the constitutional validity of the amended law, including by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, RJD leader Manoj Jha, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, and AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi.

Muslim body Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, All Assam Students Union (AASU), Peace Party, CPI, NGO 'Rihai Manch', advocate ML Sharma, and law students have also approached the Supreme Court challenging the Act.

Anti-CAA protests had singled the country and even led

to months-long sit-ins like in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi.

In January 2020, the apex court made it clear it will not stay the operation of the CAA without hearing the Centre.

Besides the pleas on CAA, the apex court, according to the list of businesses uploaded on its website, is also scheduled to hear a PIL filed by advocate Ashwini Upadhyay.

It seeks directions to the Centre and the states to publish draft legislations prominently on government websites and in the public domain at least 60 days before they are introduced in Parliament and state assemblies.

The CJI-led bench would also hear another PIL seeking to establish special anti-corruption courts in every district to decide cases related to various economic offences like money laundering and tax evasion within one year.

The top court would also consider a PIL for a direction to the Centre to declare the Law Commission as a "statutory body" and appoint the chairperson and members to the panel.

60 dead in Guj cable bridge...

From Page 1

"I am deeply saddened by the accident in Morbi. I have spoken to Harsh Sanghvi, Minister of State for Home, Gujarat and other officials in this regard. The administration has been directed to provide immediate treatment to the injured," Shah tweeted in Hindi.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rushed three teams to Morbi.

NDRF Director-General (DG) Atul Karwal told PTI that three teams have been moved from State Capital Gandhinagar and Vadodara. Another team will be airlifted in some time and it will move via road from Rajkot to the accident site, he said.

The teams comprise senior officers and rescuers, and they are carrying the required equipment, Karwal said.

S Korea in one week mourning; toll may...

From Page 1

There were chaotic and tragic scenes on Sunday as concerned relatives raced to hospitals in search of their loved ones, mostly in their teens and 20s, who got trapped and crushed after a huge Halloween party crowd surged into a narrow alley in a nightlife district in Seoul.

There were concerns that Saturday's death toll of 151 could grow as 24 people among the 104 being treated for injuries were in a critical condition, according to Seoul City's disaster headquarters.

The city Government said more than 2,600 people have called or visited a nearby city office reporting missing relatives and asking officials to confirm whether they were among those injured or dead after the

crush.

Witnesses said the crowd surge in the Itaewon area on Saturday night caused "a hell-like" chaos as people fell on each other "like dominos." Some people were bleeding from their noses and mouths while being given CPR, witnesses said, while others clad in Halloween costumes continued to sing and dance nearby, possibly without knowing the severity of the situation.

"I still can't believe what has happened. It was like a hell," said Kim Mi Sung, an official at a non-profit organisation that promotes tourism in Itaewon. Kim said she performed CPR on 10 people who were unconscious and nine of them were declared dead on the spot. Kim said the 10 were mostly women wearing witch outfits and other

Halloween costumes.

The crowd surge is the country's worst disaster in years. Tens of thousands of people were believed to have gathered in Itaewon for Halloween festivities. Witnesses said the streets were so densely clogged with people and slow-moving vehicles that it was practically impossible for emergency workers and ambulances to reach the alley near Hamilton Hotel swiftly. The dead included 19 foreigners, said Choi Seong-beom, chief of Seoul's Yeongsan fire department, whose jurisdiction includes Itaewon. South Korea's Foreign Ministry did not confirm the nationalities of those victims, but it said it alerted those countries' embassies in Seoul.

The Chinese state news agency Xinhua said at least

three Chinese nationals were killed.

The bodies of the dead were being kept at 42 hospitals in Seoul and nearby Gyeonggi province, according to Seoul City, which said it will instruct crematoriums to burn more bodies per day as part of plans to support funeral proceedings. Around 100 businesses in the Hamilton Hotel area have agreed to shut down their shops through Monday to reduce the number of partygoers who would come to the streets through Halloween Day.

An estimated 100,000 people had gathered in Itaewon for the country's biggest outdoor Halloween festivities since the pandemic began. The South Korean Government eased Covid-19 restrictions in recent months.

‘Aerospace, Def to be pillars of self-reliant...

From Page 1

The earlier Government believed that India should focus on being a service industry. But today, we are progressing in the service industry as well as emerging as the largest manufacturing sector of the world," he said.

Listing the achievements of his Government, Modi said, "From semiconductors to aircraft, India is working to reach the top spot across different manufacturing sectors. Within the last eight years, companies from more than 160 countries have invested in all Indian States."

Hailing India's progress in both the service sector and manufacturing sector, Modi said, the Government is giving equal importance to the public and private sectors. "India

is working with a new mindset and new work culture to create schemes that boost our manufacturing sector," he said.

Modi lauded the new economic reforms saying that they are transforming the manufacturing sector in India. "Along with this, a change in perspective is playing a vital role in expanding businesses. New India focuses on a competitive environment while ensuring quality in the production sector," he said and attacked the previous Congress Government at the Centre, saying, "The earlier Government's mindset did not have trust in the talent of Indians."

Referring to the aircraft project, Modi said more than 100 MSME suppliers will be associated with this project.

"The UDAN scheme has also given our aviation sector a big boost. In the coming years, India will require over 2,000 aircraft. Today we have taken a step towards meeting this global demand," he said.

"India will create its identity as a global aviation hub. The transport aircraft that will be manufactured here will not only give power to our Army but also develop a new ecosystem of manufacturing aircraft. Soon, India will witness the passenger aircraft that will be made with the tag of 'Make In India,'" announced the Prime Minister.

On Monday, he would pay homage to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at the Statue of Unity, Kevadia, on his birth anniversary. He will also participate in the National Unity Day cele-

brations to mark Patel's birth anniversary and address a gathering.

In the afternoon, he will visit Tharad town in Banaskantha district to inaugurate or perform groundbreaking for various projects in this parched region, mostly related to water supply, worth Rs 8,000 crore. Some of these projects include water distribution pipelines, construction of a canal and construction of 56 check dams.

On November 1, Modi will attend an event at Mangadh Hill in neighbouring Rajasthan and then reach Jabughoda in Gujarat's Panchmahal district to launch various developmental projects.

Modi will also address people at the venue.

People celebrate Chhath festival with fervour in Delhi



Photo by Ranjan Dimri



Photo by Ranjan Dimri

Devotees throng ghats in large numbers for puja

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After two years of restrictions owing to Covid-19, thousands of devotees thronged ghats and makeshift ponds across the Capital on Sunday to worship the Sun God as part of Chhath Puja celebrations.

Chhath Puja, which involves the offering of 'arghya' to the Sun god by the fasting women in knee-deep water, is hugely popular among Purvanchalis — people belonging to Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh — living in Delhi. Devotees, especially women keeping the arduous 36-hour-long fast 'Nirjala Vrat', sang devotional and folk songs and offered 'arghya' to the Sun God while standing in knee deep water at ghats or makeshift ponds.

Chhath puja is celebrated on the sixth day after Diwali and is also known as Surya Sashthi as it is dedicated to the Sun God. It is one of the most popular festivals in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

After two years of Covid-induced restrictions, Chhath Puja is being celebrated this year at public places on a large

scale in Delhi. Abha Singh, a devotee and resident of Indraprastha Colony, said inflation has impacted people a lot but this is a sacred festival. "I have been doing Chhath for the last 20 years. Day by day, its popularity is increasing and more people are celebrating it.

"Arrangements are good but it needs to be improved. After two years of Covid, we have come here at a ghat. Hope Chhath Maiya will bless everyone and fulfil every one's wishes," Singh said. Devotees worshipped the setting sun on Sunday evening. They will also worship the rising sun on Monday morning.

It involves offering 'arghya' to the Sun god by fasting women in knee-deep water. Some devotees said they were not allowed to enter Yamuna for the Puja but had to offer prayers and 'arghya' in makeshift ghats there.

"We are here for Chhath Puja. The government has made good arrangements but we have been asked not to enter Yamuna and instead perform the rituals in ghats made near the river," Raghunath Kant, a resident of Laxmi Nagar who

visited ITO ghat for Chhath Puja, said. The Delhi Government has made 1,100 ghats for Chhath Puja across the city this year and has increased the budget 10 times from Rs 2.5 crore in 2014 to nearly Rs 25 crore. Another devotee Ratnesh Jha said it was joyous moment to finally celebrate Chhath Puja on the riverside after two years.

"For the last two years, there were no public celebrations because of the coronavirus pandemic but this year, all have gathered to celebrate Chhath together. This is a special feeling. The government has also made good arrangements for the festival," Jha said.

Meanwhile, several devotees expressed displeasure over the administration in the national capital has put a ban on Chhath Puja festivities in the Yamuna river at Delhi's ITO ghat and Wazirabad Road ghat following the National Green Tribunal's order.

All the paths leading to the Yamuna river have been closed and civil defence volunteers have been deployed on the road.

Sisodia, AAP Mins take part in Chhath celebrations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Ministers and MLAs took part in the Chhath Puja celebration in their areas. Earlier they inspected the ghats to take stock of the preparations.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai along with Burari MLA Sanjiv Jha took part in the chhath puja celebration in Burari. Rai also participated in the Babarpur chhath puja samiti programme.

Revenue Minister Kailash Gahlot participated in the Jai Vihar-Najafgarh ghat. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia also visited ghats to take blessing from devotees. Durgesh Pathak went to Pusa ghat to take part in the chhath puja.

Earlier, Delhi Ministers and MLAs on Sunday inspected ghats and parks in various areas in Delhi to take stock of the preparations for the Chhath.

Sisodia inspected the Tyagi Chhath Ghat at Patparganj and Environment Minister Gopal Rai inspected the ghat at Pradhan Enclave.

Delhi Revenue Minister Kailash Gahlot on Sunday visited Chhath Ghats in Qutub

Vihar and Dabri Mor to take stock of preparations for the festival.

Sisodia met the devotees while taking stock of the arrangements. He said that the Kejriwal Government has made great arrangements for Chhath Puja in Delhi.

"The devotees did not face any kind of difficulties. After the formation of the Kejriwal government in Delhi, the celebrations of Chhath Puja have

been greatly improved," he said. During the visit Gahlot checked preparations regarding sanitation, lighting, water supply, making of temporary ponds, installation of CCTVs among others.

At Dabri Mor Chhath Ghats, Gahlot also interacted with fasting women and asked them about preparation regarding the festival.

"Just went to Qutub Vihar-Matiala and inspected

the Chhath Puja Ghat. People are very happy with the arrangements made by Delhi government.

The members of Chhath Committee expressed their gratitude to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal area MLA Gulab Singh Yadav," Gahlot tweeted after the visit.

Delhi Jal Board Vice Chairman and AAP MLA Saurabh Bharadwaj also visited Chhath Ghats at Astha

Kunj in East of Kailash area and took stock of preparations there.

Apart from this, Aam Aadmi Party MLA Shri Durgesh Pathak took note of the preparations at DDA Park, Naraina Vihar Club.

MLA Shri Dilip Pandey inspected the Signature Apartment Ghat in Mukherjee Nagar, and MLA Sanjeev Jha took stock of the preparations in the Pradhan Enclave.



Parties spar over pollution in Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Politics over Chhath intensified in the national Capital on Sunday with the ruling AAP and the Opposition BJP and the Congress over pollution in the Yamuna river and preparation at ghats for the festival.

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, on Sunday, criticised Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over the Chhath Puja preparations. Taking a dig at Kejriwal's Gujarat tour, he said, "As pollution rises, CM Kejriwal should've stayed in Delhi to prepare for Chhath Puja, instead he's touring Gujarat as he doesn't want to facilitate devotees here.

If he isn't concerned about Delhi, he should go to Punjab & become CM there." BJP MP Parvesh Verma shared several



videos on Twitter and said devotees were sad that water was not available at the temporary ponds created for them to celebrate the festival. He also shared purported videos of the Yamuna flowing froth due to pollution since 2015 and said "those 5 years will never come", referring to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's promise to clean the river.

Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh



also shared a video of froth in the Yamuna river at the Mathura barrage in Uttar Pradesh, taking a dig at the BJP. This prompted Verma to hit back at Singh, saying the Yamuna flowed from Delhi towards UP and questioning the AAP MP's education.

Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar accompanied by many Chhath devotees staged a protest at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) office near ITO

alleging lack of preparations at the ghats and restrictions on celebrating the festival at only designated places along the Yamuna. Delhi Congress President Ch Anil Kumar on Sunday alleged that the Kejriwal Government has hurt the religious sentiments of over 50 lakh people from the Poorvanchal region by denying them permission to hold their most important religious festival, Chhath Puja, at the Yamuna river banks with the false claim that the NGT has not given permission.

Kumar said that while the UP Government has allowed devotees to hold Chhath Puja at the Yamuna bank of the Kalindi Kunj area near Noida, devotees in Delhi are being slapped with a fine of Rs 5000, though NGT has not issued any order against Chhath Puja at

Jain getting home-made food in jail, alleges ED

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that Delhi Minister Satyendar Jain, arrested in an alleged money laundering case, is being given VIP treatment inside the Tihar jail. In its affidavit to the court, the ED has alleged that Satyendar Jain is getting massages and is also regularly meeting the co-accused in the case.

Reacting on the development, Delhi BJP demanded strict action against Tihar jail officials. He said that this is not possible without the connivance of jail authorities. The ED said that Jain is getting all facilities including massage in Tihar jail. It accused Jain, who is also the prisons minister, of taking unfair advantage of his position. "As per the footage,



the jail superintendent meets Jain every day, which is against the rules," said ED, adding that homemade food is provided to him in jail, defying the court order.

The ED further alleged that Jain's wife Poonam Jain comes to meet him often in the cell, which is against the jail manual and he often meets with other accused, Ankush Jain and Vaibhav Jain, who are also locked up in Tihar Jail, it



said. Denying all the claims made by the ED, the Tihar jail administration, said that no one from outside visited Jain's cell. "However, during the headcount in the morning, all the prisoners present in the ward can talk to each other. The co-accused that is being talked about is also in the same ward in which Mr Jain is, so they can talk among themselves, it said. "After the head count, when everyone goes to



their own cell, they cannot go to each other's cell," it said. On the charges of Jain using gadgets, the Tihar administration has also denied that Jain has access to any kind of electronic gadget.

Leader of Opposition, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that Jain still remains a minister in the Delhi government and held the health as well as prison department before his arrest on May 30.

DJB officer bathes in Yamuna water day after spat with BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after he filed a complaint against BJP MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma and Delhi BJP leader Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga for "obstructing discharge of official duty and criminal intimidation", a Delhi Jal Board Director, Treatment and Quality Control, Sanjay Sharma on Sunday took a bath — on camera — on the banks with water collected from the river to prove that the chemicals used were completely safe. Sharma took on the challenge and used the Yamuna water to bathe with, assuring devotees that it is safe to take a holy dip.

A video of officials taking a boat ride to collect the water from the river — which Sharma

then pours on himself — is doing rounds on social media. "Today in front of all the media, the Director Quality of Delhi Government DJB - Sanjay Sharma took a bath with water from Yamuna. He said the water is absolutely safe for bathing. Glory to the Chhath Maiya!", AAP MLA and spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj shared a video of a DJB officer taking a bath on the banks with water collected from Yamuna.

Speaking to the media, Sharma said, "I took a bath just to clarify that the water is safe. My skin is well. Some leaders were trying to spread the lies that the board is spraying a harmful chemical in the water. I just took the bath in front of all the media."

AQI plunges to 'severe' in some areas, respite likely from tomorrow

New Delhi: The overall air quality index (AQI) in Delhi was in the 'very poor' category on Sunday and deteriorated to the 'severe' category in some areas. The AQI in Delhi stood at 367 at 9 AM and it improved to 352 at 4 PM.

Data showed Anand Vihar (AQI 449) was the most polluted place in the capital, followed by NSIT Dwarka station reported the AQI of 412, Jahangir Puri- 409, Vivek Vihar — 408, and Wazirpur — 401.

However, out of the total 34 stations, most of the stations in the city recorded the AQI in the 'Very poor' category are Alipur- 384, Ashok Vihar 396 R K Puram 354, Bawana- 393, DTU — 389, Narela — 388, Shadipur — 389, ITO — 350, Mundka — 398, Nehru Nagar — 363, Patparganj — 374, Punjabi Bagh — 354, and Sonia Vihar — 383," data stated. The air quality in the neighbouring cities of

Ghaziabad (344), Noida (342), Greater Noida (321), Gurugram (327) and Faridabad (382) also recorded "very poor" AQI on Sunday.

The 24-hour average AQI on Saturday was 397, the worst since January. It was 354 on Thursday, 271 on Wednesday, 302 on Tuesday and 312 on Monday (Diwali).

V K Soni, head of the India Meteorological Department's Environment Monitoring and Research Centre, said a layer of smog lingered over the Delhi-NCR on Saturday amid adverse meteorological conditions and it is likely to persist for two more days. Some respite is likely from Tuesday. SAFAR, a forecasting agency under Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, said that the share of stubble burning in Delhi's pollution rose to 21 per cent on Saturday, the highest this year. **SR**

Stubble burning share in pollution rises to 26% in Delhi

New Delhi: The share of stubble burning in Delhi PM2.5 pollution rose to 26 per cent on Sunday, the highest this year so far, amid an increase in farm fires and favourable conditions for transport of emissions to Delhi-NCR. On Saturday, farm fires accounted for 21 per cent of the PM2.5 pollution in the national capital.

Data from the Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modeling from Space, of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute showed Punjab reported 1,761 farm fires in Punjab on Sunday, 1,898 on Saturday, 2,067 — the highest so far this season — on Friday and 1,111 on Thursday. During the corresponding in



2020 and 2021, the state had reported 23,187 and 8,856 stubble burning incidents respectively. It logged 112 and 43 cases of stubble burning in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, respectively, on Sunday. A total 22546 cases of stubble

burning have been reported from Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan between September 15 and October 30 this year. PM2.5 are fine particles that are 2.5 microns or less in diameter

and can travel deep into the respiratory tract, reaching the lungs and entering the bloodstream.

The contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's PM2.5 pollution remained low (up to 7 per cent) till Friday due to a prolonged rain spell in early October and slow transport-level winds which were not strong enough to carry smoke from farm fires to the national capital.

On Diwali (October 24), stubble burning contributed five to eight per cent to the total PM2.5 pollution in Delhi. The share of farm fires in Delhi's PM2.5 pollution was 25 per cent on Diwali in 2021, 32 per cent in 2020 and 19 per cent in 2019. **SR**

Adhere to timely promotion of personnel, para forces told



Shah takes serious view of Departmental Promotion Committee meetings not being held as per model calendar

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

With Union Home Minister Amit Shah taking a serious view of Departmental Promotion Committee meetings not being held as per the model calendar, leading to delays in promotions of paramilitary officers and men, the Ministry has

directed all the paramilitary forces to strictly adhere to the model calendar and DoPT rules for timely promotion of personnel. Despite clear directions from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Central Armed Police Forces or paramilitary forces/Assam Rifles through reports suggest that as many as 71 DPCs for vacancy year 2022 are held up due to various reasons. As per the circulated model calendar of DoPT, these DPCs should have been conducted by December 31, 2021. Lack of holding DPC meetings for men and officers according to the Model Calendar is affecting timely promotions

despite clear vacancies, sources said. Taking a serious view on the lack of timely conduct of the DPC, Shah has directed all the departments and security forces to ensure that Annual Performance Appraisal Reports (APARs) are conducted in the scheduled time frame in line with the DOPT's Model Calendar and instructions issued from the Ministry from time to time. The Ministry further directed the security forces and departments under it to strictly adhere to the time schedule of the Model Calendar for current vacancies and suitably formulate modalities of future DPCs as per the

instructions in this connection. The instructions have been issued by the Police II Division of the Union Home Ministry and the communication has been sent to all the paramilitary forces. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force and Sasashtra Seema Bal (SSB) besides Assam Rifles have been directed to follow the model calendar of holding DPCs to ensure deserving candidates from the subordinate as well as officer categories are promoted in a timely manner. Lack of timely promotion of officers and men is a known demoral-

izing factor for serving Force personnel and serves as an additional stress factor besides the already difficult and challenging service conditions of such personnel who are often posted in remote locations, away from their families and face insurgents and terrorists as their normal call of duty, insiders said. In the past, the Forces have faced a spate of premature retirements through the Voluntary Retirement Schemes (VRS) and lack of timely promotion is estimated to be a major factor for such drastic moves by the personnel. The DPCs are not being held despite the DoPT's Model Calendar being circulated to

them way back in 2017. Cadre officers believe the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers who helm these Forces at the top deliberately scuttled the bid to conduct timely DPCs so as to maintain the dominance and superiority of the IPS officers in the Forces. While cadre officers are also recruited through competitive examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) form the bulk of the officer category, the IPS officers come on deputation from various State cadres for a limited number of years, officials said, adding their rightful due is being denied through lack of DPC meetings.

PM exhorts Indians to adopt solar power

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked people to adopt solar power in a big way which, he said, would not only save their electricity bill and cut cost of electricity-generated production but also give them an opportunity to sell it and earn money. Modi began his conversation in his monthly radio-talk 'mann ki baat' by greeting people on 'Chhath' festival. "Today, Chhath, the great festival of sun worship is being celebrated in many parts of the country. Lakhs of devotees have reached their villages, their homes, their families to be a part of the 'Chhath' festival. I pray that Chhath Maiya bless everyone with prosperity and well being", he said. The tradition of worshipping the Sun is a proof of how deep our culture, our faith, is related to nature, said Modi. "Through this puja the importance of sunlight in our life has been illustrated. Along with this, the message has also been conveyed that ups and downs

are an integral part of life. Therefore, we should maintain a uniform poise have in every situation", said the Prime Minister. While talking of Sun worship, Modi drew people's attention to the benefits of solar energy accruing in all activities including business. "So today, along with worshipping the Sun, why not also discuss his boon! This blessing of Sun God is - 'Solar Energy'... today, we have become one of the largest countries to generate electricity from solar energy," said Modi. The Prime Minister mentioned Modhera village in Gujarat becoming the first fully-lighted solar village in the country and informed listeners as how solar energy is changing the lives of the poor and middle class of the country. Modi revealed it was the wish of the Secretary General of the UN himself to visit Modhera, the first solar-electrified village in India. In Tamil Nadu, he said, there is a farmer in Kancheepuram, Thiru K. Ezilon who taking the benefit of 'PM Kusum Yojana' got a

solar pumpset of ten horse-power installed in his farm. "Now they do not have to spend anything on electricity for their farm. They are not even dependent on the government's electricity supply for irrigation in the field any more. "Similarly, in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, another beneficiary farmer of 'KusumYojana' is - Kamalji Meena. Kamal ji installed a solar pump in the field, due to which his expenses have come down." The Prime Minister pointed that the solar energy is also providing people opportunities to earn money too. Can you ever imagine that on using electricity for a month, instead of getting your electricity bill, you get paid for electricity? Solar energy has also demonstrated that. After talking about the Solar energy, the Prime Minister drew attention towards space saying a few days ago India has placed 36 satellites in space simultaneously. He said since the space sector was opened for India's youth and revolutionary changes have started coming in



it. Talking of research, the Prime Minister said he had talked about "making this decade the Techade of India." "I loved seeing this; our IIT's students have also taken over its command. This month on 14-15 October, all 23 IITs came on one platform for the first time to showcase their innovations and research projects. displayed more than 75 best projects. Healthcare, Agriculture, Robotics, Semiconductors, 5G Communications, these projects were made on many such

themes." He mentioned about a team from IIT Bhubaneswar developing a portable ventilator for new born babies. It runs on battery and can be used easily in remote areas. While speaking on the theme of protecting environment, the Prime Minister cited Suresh Kumar from Bangalore, Karnataka, who 20 years ago took initiative to rejuvenate a forest of Sahakarnagar in the city. "The saplings have grown into 40 feet tall huge trees. Now their beauty captivates everyone's mind," he said.

J&K pride of every Indian, time to take advantage of new possibilities: Modi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described Jammu and Kashmir as the pride of every Indian, and said that it is time to leave behind the old challenges and take full benefit of new possibilities. Addressing the Jammu and Kashmir Rozgar Mela through video conferencing, he also said that there is a need to work with a new approach and new thinking for fast-paced development. "We are committed to taking benefits of development equally to all sections and citizens," Modi said. "Jammu and Kashmir is the pride of every Indian. Together we have to take Jammu and Kashmir to new heights," he added. He congratulated 3,000 youths who received appointment letters to work in the government in 20 different places in Jammu and Kashmir. These youths will get opportunities to serve in various departments like PWD, Health Department, Food and Civil Supplies



Department, Animal Husbandry, Jal Shakti, and Education-Culture, he added. The prime minister further said that preparations are in full swing to hand out more than 700 appointment letters in other departments in the coming days. Referring to a record increase in the number of tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir, the prime minister said the tourism sector in the state received a boost due to the infrastructural developments and increased connectivity. "It is our endeavour that the benefits of government schemes reach every section of society without any discrimi-

nation", the prime minister remarked. He also informed that efforts are on to strengthen the health and education infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir with the opening of two new AIIMS, seven new medical colleges, two state cancer institutes and 15 nursing colleges. He said efforts are underway to improve connectivity to Kashmir by trains. Speaking on how the people of Jammu and Kashmir have always emphasised and appreciated transparency, the prime minister urged the youth who are coming into government services to make it a priority. The prime minister recalled, "Whenever I used to meet the people of Jammu and Kashmir earlier, I always felt their pain. It was the pain of corruption in the system. People of Jammu and Kashmir hate corruption." The prime minister further praised Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and his team for the remarkable work done to uproot the evils of corruption.

Cong seeks apology from Rijiju over his criticism of Nehru's handling of Kashmir

Cong hits back at BJP, says its leaders have no idea of contemporary history

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday took its attack to the BJP camp for raking up the issue of Kashmir's accession to India and criticising the handling of the situation by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress hit out at BJP saying its leaders have no idea of contemporary history and that they must account for what has happened under its rule there rather than blaming Nehru and other former Prime Ministers. Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claimed he spoke to a BJP ideologue about Union Minister Kiren Rijiju's criticism of Nehru on the Kashmir issue and was told that Nehru being vilified is one thing, but the erstwhile ruler Hari Singh being exalted as a benevolent hero "takes the cake". Rijiju had stated that Nehru's "blunders", which



included enacting Article 370 and taking dispute with Pakistan to United Nations, caused much tragedy, drained country's resources and cost thousands of lives of soldiers and civilians in militancy. "I spoke to a BJP ideologue this morning about Rijiju, the latest entrant to the club of Distortions," Ramesh said in a tweet. "He (the BJP ideologue) sent me the following message: The strange thing is, Nehru being vilified is one thing, Hari Singh being exalted as some sort of upright & benevolent hero takes the cake," the senior Congress leader said without naming the "BJP ideologue". Hari Singh was the last ruling Maharaja of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. He signed Instrument of Accession to India. Rijiju wrote an article for a portal citing 'five Nehruvian blunders', including floating the idea of a plebiscite and terming Jammu and Kashmir's accession provision-

al. The Minister had said it was important to realise past mistakes to build a new future and added he has not tweaked history but stated facts to set record straight. Congress has demanded an apology from Rijiju over his criticism of Nehru's handling of the Kashmir issue and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to rein in Ministers from making "irresponsible statements". Slamming Rijiju, senior Congress leader Anand Sharma had said, "I can only pity the mental bankruptcy of Minister Rijiju. He has no understanding of history, there is no proof, no evidence." "I would say the Prime Minister should rein in Ministers from making such untrue, false and irresponsible statements as have been made in this regard. The account of that period in 1947 has been carefully documented not by one but more than one person who were directly associated with the merger of princely states," Sharma said. The BJP on Thursday used the 75th anniversary of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India to slam Nehru for his "blunders" on issue and asserted that Prime Minister Modi corrected them by nullifying Article 370, which granted the erstwhile state special rights.

Cong will reinstate old pension scheme in Gujarat if elected, promises Rahul



New Delhi: The Congress will provide fixed jobs for contractual workers, bring back the old pension scheme (OPS) and ensure timely promotions if it comes to power in Gujarat, former party chief Rahul Gandhi said on Sunday. In a tweet in Hindi, Rahul said it is the Congress' firm promise — "fixed jobs for contractual workers, bringing back the old pension scheme and timely promotions". "Implemented it in Rajasthan, now employees will get their due as soon as Congress government is formed in Gujarat," he said said using the hashtag 'Congress degi pakki naukri'. The Assembly elections in the state are expected to be announced in next few days.

Chirag to campaign for BJP candidates in Bihar by-polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

In very much on expected lines, Chirag Paswan, who heads the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) on Sunday announced to campaign for the BJP in by-polls to the two Assembly segments in Bihar. Paswan heads the splinter group of the LJP, founded by his late father Ram Vilas Paswan. The 39-year-old MP from Jamui went into a huddle with party colleagues soon after landing before telling journalists "Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) will campaign for the BJP in the by-elections to Mokama and Gopalganj. The decision has been taken after a long meeting Saturday night with Union Home Minister Amit Shah with whom I have been in touch for quite some time". Paswan ducked queries as to whether he had given up the insistence on expulsion from NDA of his uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras, whose rebellion last year had caused a split in the party founded by his father. "I am right now speaking only about the by-elections for Mokama and Gopalganj. It took a long time for us to arrive



at a decision. Only two days are left before the campaign comes to an end. Our party will do its best to ensure the victory of the BJP candidates", said Paswan. There have been speculations that Paswan, whose father held a berth in the Union Council of Ministers till his death, may also be considered for the same in the next reshuffle in a bid to assuage the humiliation he felt upon Paras entering the cabinet after splitting LJP. Paswan did not make any direct reference to any "reward" that may be waiting for him but dropped some hints saying "there were a number of points that I discussed with Shah. A meeting with him and our

respected Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled next month". He also continued with his diatribe against Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whose JD(U) has been alleging that "Chirag model" was used by the BJP to weaken it in the 2020 assembly polls. "I have always believed that Nitish Kumar does not have the vision to pull my home state out of the morass of backwardness. His 'saat nishchay' programme is an eyewash. Basic necessities like piped water and pucca roads cannot be held up as an indicator of progress", said Paswan, who, then as the president of the undivided LJP, had caused JD(U)'s tally to plummet by fielding candidates, many of them BJP rebels,

in the assembly polls. "I strongly believe that Bihar needs to think big. We must work towards becoming a hub of education and development in the IT sector. This was my Bihar First Bihari First vision which has always been held in contempt by the chief minister and his party. I can not do anything that facilitates his stay in power", said Paswan. After the split in the LJP, a large part of the party's rank and file had sided with Paras but Chirag Paswan evidently seemed to enjoy the support of the masses who were sympathetic towards him over having lost his father and the party in quick succession. His support to the BJP, facing a stiff contest from the resurgent, and now in power, RJD in both assembly seats, brings the promise of a sizeable chunk of Dalit votes, especially of the assertive and numerically strong "Dusadhs". The by-elections are being seen as the first test of strength for the BJP, which has been weakened with the exit from NDA of Nitish Kumar two months ago, and the "Mahagathbandhan" comprising RJD, Congress and Left which he joined subsequently.

Brightening creams have steroids, warn dermatologists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Be careful with brightening creams and products! Many contain potent steroids, dermatologists have warned, concerned at the rising number of patients with serious side effects due to usage of such creams. They say that gullible consumers have been at the receiving end in the absence of any awareness and stringent regulation norms for such products. The doctors have also strongly favoured a ban on Over the Counter (OTC) sale of such cosmetic items to prevent their misuse. "Steroid abuse has become very prevalent these days. "Steroids in the form of cream



on our face can trigger problems which include redness and hair on faces, thin skin of the

face and a burning sensation. The biggest cause of the rise of side effects of these steroids is

their availability over the counter. I request everyone to not use steroid cream without

consulting doctors," said Dr Manish Jangra, a dermatologist at Delhi-based Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital. In fact, the doctors at the RML Hospital's Dermatology department have taken up a cudgel on behalf of the patients, launching a campaign against the skin creams containing steroids that are being sold as an OTC drug. They have also demanded a ban on steroids in skin creams. According to them, most of the patients who come to the outpatient department (OPD) are those who have been continuously using creams containing steroids which often results in various side effects, such as serious skin infections, leaving the skin damaged for years even after prolonged treatments. "A unique meeting

of top researchers of IADVL (Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists) and allied sciences working on dermatophytosis was held in Delhi on October 16. India is facing a huge problem of an almost epidemic-like spread of superficial fungal infection of the skin also called ringworm. A common problem that is faced is the self-use of steroid creams by patients that make the infection worse and even more difficult to treat. Such steroid creams are freely available without prescriptions in the country despite repeated attempts by IADVL to ban their over-the-counter availability," said Dr Kabir Sardana, professor of

dermatology at RML Hospital. He explained that the organism causing the infection has changed, and a new species has emerged which has been named Trichophyton indotineae. This new species, which emerged in India and has now spread to many parts of the world, causes infections that are more difficult to treat. According to a recent white paper published in Endocrine Abstracts (2020), men and women who abuse corticosteroid creams for skin lightening might be at risk of developing lower baseline cortisol levels, a sign of weakened cortisol function. In addition, it has been reported these steroid-based creams are being wrongly used

to treat fungal infections in the groin area. Since the skin in the genitals is already sensitive, using steroid creams or ointments over that area can lead to severe damage even though they might temporarily mask the infection and give relief, says a report quoting dermatologist Dr Nishita Ranka Bagmar. She said that while, in India, most topical steroids are only available on prescriptions. Unfortunately, most of these restricted creams can still be bought over-the-counter country-wide. We require strict regulations to avoid entirely selling these strong steroids over the counter. Only then can this abuse be controlled, she added.

Bid to humiliate Opp, disturb federal structure, says Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With a galaxy of her senior cabinet colleagues and party leaders coming under the scanner of the judiciary and central investigating agencies Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday once again cried conspiracy to subvert the Indian federal fabric but congratulated Chief Justice of India UU Lalit for "his efforts to restore public confidence on judiciary."

"Social prestige is everything that we have ... if you lose that social prestige you lose everything ... there is an attempt to humiliate us," Banerjee told at a function at the National University of Juridical Sciences.

Without naming the BJP Government in the Centre or



for that matter a section of Judges in the Calcutta High Court, the Chief Minister said "Today all the powers are being used by a section of people today to unnecessarily humiliate and harass others others ... I call upon the judiciary and the readers of law to see that the federal structure should not get disturbed in this manner ... because if this (trend) goes on then things may move towards the presidential form of Government ... where will be the democracy then ... I request you all to please save

the democracy."

Though a section of the higher judiciary had often come under attack from the Trinamool Congress leadership --- particularly after the Calcutta High Court passed a series of orders directing Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate the school level recruitment scam, coal and cattle smuggling cases --- Banerjee however praised Chief Justice of India UU Lalit for his effort to "restore public confidence on the judiciary."

She said "though I do not know whether it would be the right place to say this I must congratulate Chief Justice Lalit because he has shown what judiciary is ... though he is retiring shortly I think ... he has restored confidence on

judiciary."

Banerjee's ruling Trinamool Congress has been under intense pressure in the wake of the arrest of her senior cabinet minister Partha Chatterjee, TMC MLA and former primary education board chairman Manik Bhattacharya and Trinamool national executive member Anubrata Mondal for their alleged involvement in school recruitment scams and coal and cattle smuggling in that order.

Reacting to her veiled attack on the Centre Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said "the Chief Minister has become afraid in the wake of the actions being taken against corruption and so she used the NUJS platform to express her insecurity."

Modiji, speak on fuel price rise, unemployment: Rahul

PTI ■ SHADNAGAR (TELANGANA)

Slamming Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "price rise and unemployment" in the country, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asked as to why the Prime Minister is not addressing the issues.

Speaking at a meeting as a part of 'Bharat Jodo Yatra,' Gandhi alleged that government schools, colleges and universities in Telangana are being privatised by the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao-led TRS government.

"Narendra Modiji, say something. Gas cylinder's cost is now Rs 1,000. Petrol price used to be Rs 70 (per litre). Narendra Modi used to mention in every speech that petrol cost has gone up to Rs 70. Now, it has crossed Rs 100. Diesel

used to be Rs 56 (per litre). Now, it has become Rs 100, but Narendra Modi does not say anything on that," Gandhi charged.

Alleging that BJP and TRS are trying to suppress people's voices, the Congress leader said his ongoing march replicates true India wherein public concerns are heard.

Gandhi alleged that BJP toppled governments in Goa and other States by using money power.

Describing BJP and TRS are the same and create drama during elections, he claimed that both spend hundreds of crores during polls.

He alleged that Modi ensures that his three or four industrialist-friends get all the business.

The Gandhi scion said no force can stop his yatra from



reaching Kashmir.

He said Telangana students have informed him that schools, colleges and universities in the State are being privatised and assured that if Congress comes to power here, it would stop the privatisation and more funds would be pumped into government educational institutions.

According to him, demonetisation in 2016 and goods and services tax (GST) negatively



impacted small and medium-scale businesses.

Alleging that Dharani, Telangana's integrated land records management system, is faulty, Gandhi said when his party comes into power the problems would be solved.

Health and education are neglected in the State and all the money spent on Dharani and irrigation projects so that KCR family gets good commission, he further alleged.

Yatra proved Rahul Gandhi's leadership abilities: Shatrughan

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has proved his leadership abilities through the Bharat Jodo Yatra, TMC MP Shatrughan Sinha said.

In an interview to PTI, Sinha said Gandhi's 3,570-km-long march that began in Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu will help the Congress double its tally in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The Congress won 52 seats in 2019 elections.

"Bharat Jodo Yatra is getting a very good response. Rahul Gandhi's charisma has started working, and he is getting an excellent response from the people. I feel that Gandhi's yatra will help double the tally of the Congress in Parliament in the next Lok Sabha polls," he said.

"This is a 'yatra' in a true sense as Gandhi is walking unlike 'Rath yatras' by BJP leaders. Lakhs of people are coming out in his support. He has proved his leadership qual-



ities. People have accepted him as a leader. And, those who made fun of him as 'Pappu' and didn't take him seriously have been proved wrong," Sinha added.

The actor-turned-politician won the Asansol Lok Sabha seat on Trinamool Congress ticket in a bypoll in April this year. Before fighting the election on a TMC ticket, he had switched over to the Congress from the BJP in 2019.

"BJP leaders are making fun of Gandhi, but let them also conduct a similar yatra on foot if they have the fire in their belly. The magic spell of Rahul Gandhi will work in the next elections, I feel and I want it to happen," Sinha said.

Speaking on the Gujarat

elections, the TMC leader said Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal would either emerge as the "kingmaker or the king" himself.

"In Gujarat, Kejriwal will either emerge as the king or the kingmaker. There is a churning in the saffron camp in Gujarat. The BJP cannot milk Hindutva or the Ram Mandir issue every time. Kejriwal has played a masterstroke through his demand of photos of Goddess Laxmi and Lord Ganesh on currency notes," he said.

Last week, Kejriwal appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to print images of Lord Ganesh and Goddess Lakshmi on currency notes for the progress of the country.

"Kejriwal has paid the BJP back with the same coin. The BJP used to act as if they were the master of the 'Hindutva school of politics' but Kejriwal is now the headmaster of that school. The BJP can neither swallow it nor discard it," Sinha said.

Port Blair homestay raided in gang rape case involving ex-Chief Secy

PTI ■ PORT BLAIR

A homestay in Port Blair's Dollygunj was searched by the police on Sunday as part of the investigation into the gang rape of a 21-year-old woman in which former chief secretary of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Jitendra Narain is an accused, officials said.

The gang rape survivor accompanied members of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), formed to probe the case, to the homestay during the search, they said.

The SIT along with a forensic team and the survivor reached the homestay around 12.30 pm for the search operation, they added.

The room where the woman was taken to by the homestay's owner was examined by the investigators, officials said.

Besides Narain, the homestay's owner, Labour Commissioner RL Rishi and a



police inspector were named in the police case lodged in connection with the gang rape.

The team was seen coming out of the homestay with envelopes. When approached by journalists, the investigators refused to make any comment.

"The survivor was asked to identify the place and the room where she was taken to by the homestay's owner," said a relative of the woman who was accompanying her.

Narain, who was questioned on Friday and Saturday, is likely to be interrogated on Monday as well, a source said.

He is unlikely to leave Port Blair till Friday as the airport on

the island will be shut from Tuesday because of runway repair works.

Narain is being kept at a private resort. The senior official arrived here to face questioning following a Calcutta High Court order.

The FIR was registered on October 1 when Narain was posted as the chairman and managing director of the Delhi Financial Corporation. The Centre suspended him on October 17. The woman claimed that as her father and stepmother did not take care of her financial needs, she needed a job and was introduced by some people to the labour commissioner as he was close to the then chief secretary.

She alleged in the FIR that the chief secretary appointed "7,800 candidates" in various departments in the administration of the islands "on the basis of recommendation only" and without any "formal interview".

BJP trying to buy 20-30 TRS MLAs, topple Govt, alleges Telangana CM

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Sunday accused the BJP of 'trying to buy' 20 or 30 MLAs of the ruling TRS and topple his government and claimed that 'brokers' from Delhi offered the sitting legislators Rs 100 crore each.

Addressing a poll rally at bypoll-bound Munugode segment, Rao said, however, the legislators, who are 'sons of the soil,' rebuffed the offer.

Hitting back, the BJP said the MLAs were not worth Rs 100 crore and asserted it had no intention of toppling the TRS government.

Rao said, "You have seen yesterday. (BJP thinks) there is one KCR who is talking loudly. Let's see his (political) end. They have sent brokers to buy each MLA for Rs 100 crore. They wanted to buy 20 or 30 MLAs and topple KCR's government and encroach Telangana so that they can implement privatisation as per their will."

His statement comes a day after three people who tried to "poach" four TRS legislators were arrested and remanded to judicial custody.

The CM paraded all the four legislators during the public meeting, praising them that such people were required in

politics.

Based on a complaint by P Rohith Reddy, one of the TRS legislators, cases under relevant sections - criminal conspiracy, offering bribe and provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 - were filed against Ramachandra Bharati alias Satish Sharma, Nanda Kumar and Simhayaji Swamy -- on October 26 night.

According to the FIR copy, Rohith Reddy alleged that the accused offered him Rs 100 crore and in return the legislator had to leave the TRS and contest as a BJP candidate in the upcoming Assembly elections.

"Four sons of soil (MLAs)

came with me (today for the meeting). Day before yesterday some Delhi brokers came to buy our Telangana self-respect and offered Rs 100 crore. But our sons of soil hit them with their left footwear saying they were not for sale," the CM said, adding they wanted to purchase the legislators like "cattle" in the open market.

Rao sought a reply from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on whether such things were good for society.

"Who provided Rs 100 crore that was offered to the MLAs? Inquiry has to be done into this. Who is behind the issue? Are they (whoever mas-termined the issue) entitled to

continue in their respective posts?" Rao asked.

He further said people's silence on these 'poaching' issues will become a curse one day. Urging people to vote for TRS candidate Prabhakar Reddy in the bypoll, Rao alleged that the BJP was mandating installation of electricity meters for agriculture pump sets and asking domestic consumers to replace their electricity meters, which would cost Rs 30,000 each.

According to Rao, there is no country in the world, except India, that has 50 per cent irrigable land and a conspiracy was being hatched to handover farmlands to corporates,

though the nation has sufficient manpower and other resources.

Rao also promised that all pending works in Munugode will be completed on time. PTI GDK SA

Responding to Rao's charges, senior BJP leader and Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy said: "Today you call them Delhi brokers. I am asking. Through brokerism (sic) only you encouraged all the MLAs who have joined your party earlier."

He sought to know if any of the BJP leaders had gone to TRS MLAs' farmhouse or promised money to them. "Do we have so much money? Are they such great MLAs so that



each one would cost Rs 100 crore?" he asked.

"I am conveying one thing. KCR garu, we have no intention of toppling your government. You may have the idea of toppling your own government and acquire sympathy so

that it becomes an agenda in the elections. Our party does not have such intentions.

Already you have lost your respect among people. People are loathing you and your party," Reddy told a press conference.

5 killed, 2 hurt in building collapse in Amravati

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

At least five persons were killed and two others injured when a two-storey dilapidated building located near Prabhat Cinema chowk at Amravati in eastern Maharashtra collapsed on Sunday afternoon.

The building, which once housed Rajendra Lodge, had been declared as "dangerous" and served an eviction notice to the occupants by the Amravati Municipal Corporation (AMC) four years ago. Most of the occupants had vacated the place, while bag selling shops were open on the ground.

The work of pulling down the two upper damaged floors was on for the past two days, when the structure collapsed all of a sudden at 1 pm on Sunday. All the five bodies were recovered from under the debris by the evening.

"The building was eighty years' old. The occupants had repeatedly been told by the authorities to vacate the place as it was on the verge of collapse. However, a few of the occupants had not vacated the



building despite the warnings," a local shopkeeper Jitendra Singh said.

Tweeting about the Amravati building collapse, Maharashtra's deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis said: "The debris clearance is currently on. I am in touch with the Amravati district collector. The divisional commissioner has been directed to hold a comprehensive inquiry into the incident."

Mourning the death of five persons in the mishap, Fadnavis said: "I share the grief of the bereaved families. An assistance of Rs 5 lakh is being given to each of the families of those killed, from the chief minister's relief fund. The state government will bear the expenditure of the medical treatment to be given to those injured in the incident," the deputy chief minister said.

J&K Police recovers arms dropped by drones from Pakistan; 2 arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir police claimed to have arrested two persons after recovering an arms consignment airdropped from across the International Border with Pakistan through a drone in the Baspur Bangla area of RS Pura.

This is the fourth incident of recovery of arms consignment airdropped using a drone in the region.

A case FIR no. 196/2022 U/S 13,16,18 ULAP has been registered in police station RS Pura.

The arms consignment consisted of Pistol -4, Magazine -8, P/rounds- 47, police spokesman said.

According to a police spokesman, a suspicious movement of a drone was observed in the general area of Baspur Bangla, RS Pura on the intervening night of October 27-28. With the help of technical surveillance mounted in the border area the police teams reportedly picked up a few suspects and subjected



them to sustained questioning regarding their unauthorised movement in the border area during the same time when the drone movement was observed.

According to a police spokesman, Chander Bose S/O of Vasdev, R/O Doda picked up the arms consignment at the behest of a person namely Shamsher Singh S/O Prem Singh R/O Camp Gole Gujral Jammu. According to police,

both were in touch with an OGW namely Balvinder R/O Jammu (Now settled in Europe). Police spokesman said, "all the arrested persons and the OGW are working for a banned terrorist organisation. Balvinder was coordinating with both the accused in India and the handlers of the consignment in Pakistan".

Nitish in talks with Kerala, TN's local parties to make pan-India presence ahead of 2024

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI/CHENNAI

Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar and the Opposition's likely candidate for the post of Prime Minister is certain to get footprints over the southern States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu soon. The Janata Dal (U)'s top leadership is holding hectic discussions with former socialists, secularists and liberals heading fringe parties in these States for a possible merger so that Nitish Kumar would get a pan India presence, according to Saleem Madavoor, Kerala general secretary of Loktantrik Janata Dal.

The LJJD in Kerala is headed by Shreyams Kumar, son of late M P Veerendra Kumar, a member of Rajya Sabha and owner of Mathrubhumi daily. Veerendra Kumar who had merged the JD(S) in the State with JD(U) was forced to quit his membership of Rajya Sabha following Nitish Kumar's liaison with the BJP. After quitting his membership in Rajya Sabha, Veerendra Kumar had joined the LJJD and the Left Democratic Front. K Krishnan Kutty, the LJJD's lone



member in the Assembly is the minister for power in the CPI(M)-led Government.

"Our party is against communalists like the BJP, dynasty politics and any kind of compromise with the Sangh Parivar. Since Nitish Kumar ended his ties with the Hindu communalist elements and the Sangh Parivar, there is a consensus among the party members that we should accept the former as our national leader," said Saleem Madavoor.

Though Veerendra Kumar and former Prime Minister H D Deva Gowda were in the JD(S), Gowda's secret parleys with the BJP led the former to come out of the Gowda Dal and cast his lot with Sharad Yadav.

"Sharad Yadav is not a popular leader and people in Kerala do not have any idea

about him. Hence we prefer Nitish Kumar who is the man of hour," said a senior LJJD leader in the State.

Tamil Nadu too would see a major shift towards Nitish Kumar in months to come. Since Chief Minister M K Stalin has made it known that he is not interested in the top job of the country, chances are that the DMK would opt for Nitish as Prime Minister. The JD(U) makes its appearance in the State only during the time of election but this time some of the letter-head parties would come together so that Nitish gets a launching pad from Tamil Nadu.

Moreover the stance of PMK, the political outfit of the Vanniyar community, which has a considerable vote share in the State is likely to dump the BJP and join Team Nitish Kumar. Dr Ramdoss, the party founder, is getting impatient as his dream of anointing his son Anbumani Ramadoss as chief minister is getting delayed. Even if Chief Minister Stalin may decide to call it a day, the first family of the DMK has made it clear that Uthayanidhi, son of Stalin, would be the heir.

PM, TN Guv, Stalin pay tributes to Thevar



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar was remembered on Sunday on the occasion of his 115th birth anniversary, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi and Chief Minister M K Stalin among a host of leaders paying rich tributes to the late freedom fighter.

Rival AIADMK leaders K Palaniswami and O Panneerselvam were among those who paid tributes to Thevar.

"I bow to the great Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar on the occasion of his Guru Pooja. I also recall his outstanding contribution to our nation, particularly in furthering social empowerment, farmer welfare and removing poverty. His ideals will always inspire us," Modi tweeted.

Is AAP saffronised?

With its version of Hindutva, Kejriwal is challenging the BJP’s monopoly over Hindutva

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s suggestion a few days ago about printing the pictures of Lord Ganesha and Goddess Lakshmi on fresh currency notes doesn’t appear to be a one-off remark. It looks like the Aam Aadmi Party chief is consciously working on an agenda—the agenda of Hindutva. The Bharatiya Janata Party has promised in poll-bound Gujarat that it would constitute a committee, under a retired high court judge, on the implementation of the uniform civil code (UCC). Kejriwal has lambasted and lampooned the promise, saying that the saffron party is bluffing. The BJP had pledged the same thing before the Assembly election in Uttarakhand, he said. But, he added, after winning the election, “the committee went back home.” Now, just before the Gujarat poll, it talks about another committee. This committee will also go back home after the election, he quipped. He is entering a territory, that of Hindutva, over which the BJP claims to have proprietorship. For decades, the BJP had three ‘core issues’—building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370, and UCC. No other party showed much interest in these issues, for these were regarded as ‘communal.’ Of course, there is the Shiv Sena but it has never been focused on the core Hindutva issues; besides, it has always been a regional outfit. AAP, on the other hand, is on an expansion drive—how successful it becomes is another matter.



Further, AAP was born as a ‘secular’ party, comprising a lot of Left-leaning progressive intellectuals and progressives; most of them are out of the party though; like all other parties, AAP is also heavily centralized, Kejriwal being the centre. This is the reason that public intellectuals and liberals were shocked by his view on the pictures of gods and goddesses on currency notes; but Kejriwal doesn’t care two hoots about their fulminations; now he is a politician, not an activist; realpolitik rather than radicalism guides his path. Angrier than the liberals are BJP leaders, for they have been the sole votaries of Hindutva so far. In Kejriwal and AAP, they may see not just a political rival but also an ideological adversary. They faced the quandary when responding to his gods-goddesses-on-notes gimmick; and now this guy is trying to score brownie points even on the core issue of UCC. It has become clear that he is not like other non-BJP leaders who shy away from UCC. So, what would the BJP do with the problem called Kejriwal? The saffron party may find some comfort from the fact, as we mentioned in earlier edits, that non-BJP parties playing the Hindutva card have not fared well. But then many things that have happened in the last few years never happened before; never before, for instance, did a ragtag rainbow coalition of activists and idealists coalesce into a successful political party running two state governments. But AAP did that—and now it’s getting saffronised. The BJP is rightly worried.



Devotees offer prayers to the Sun god on the occasion of Chhath Puja, at Dadar Beach in Mumbai

Shinde losing sheen

With big ticket projects making a beeline to Gujarat, the new dispensation is under the attack

Maharashtra losing one project after another has enraged the state and raised the political temperature. The latest to go is the TATAs project to aircrafts with Airbus. All these projects have been shifted or relocated to the prime minister's home state Gujarat which is going to the hustings shortly. Gujarat state elections are indeed big reason for the BJP’s focus shifting to it and ignoring the newly gained Maharashtra. Now with these mega projects coming in, the Gujarat BJP unit has something up its sleeve to showcase to the electorate. Its development plank is seriously eroded and the new entrant in the state AAP is making life difficult for it. The prestige of the prime minister is at stake and so the central government would do anything in its power to win the state. BJP state units claim that the center supports it is reinforced with such projects falling in its lap; doesn't matter if they are at the cost of neighboring state. This has precariously placed the Shinde government which was installed by the BJP by breaking the Shiv Sena. It is embarrassment for him as he is unable to defend the interests of Maharashtra. Sensing the vulnerability of Shinde Shiv Sena’s Udhav faction has upped its ante and attacked Shinde for being left out in the cold by his mentors.



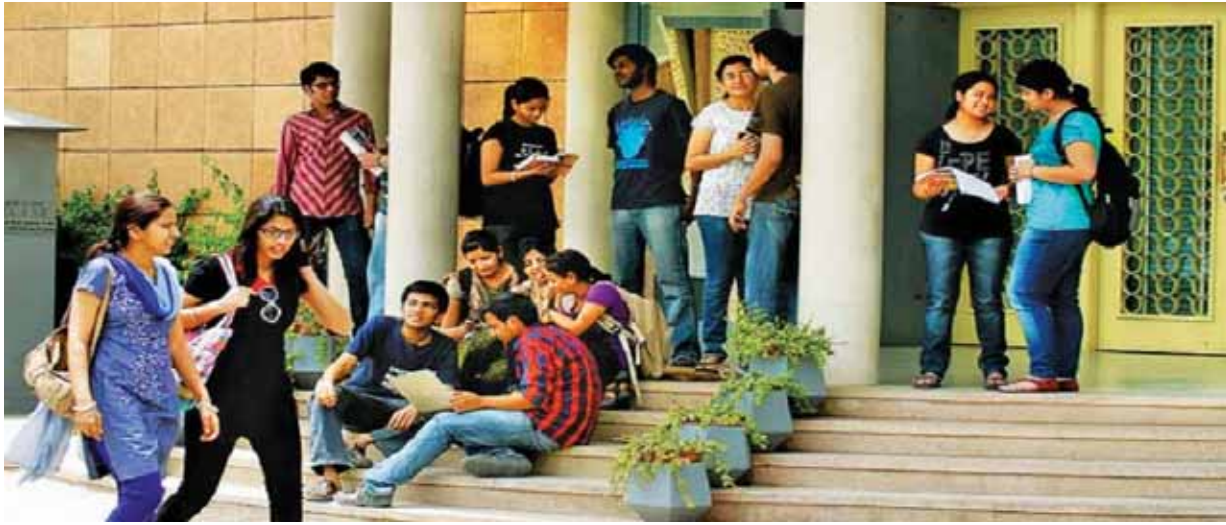
To add to the woes of Shinde disgruntled Union minister Nitin Gadkari has made a common cause with Shiv Sena. He has sought investments from the Tata Group in and around Nagpur, citing strengths like infrastructure, land availability, and connectivity in his home city after two mega projects have been taken away to Gujarat. In a letter to Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran, Gadkari appealed to him to make investments in Nagpur especially those engaged in businesses like steel, auto, consumer products, IT services, and aviation. The letter shared with the media comes after Maharashtra lost several big-ticket projects to neighbouring Gujarat, including Rs 1.5 lakh crore Foxconn-Vedanta project on chip manufacturing and the ₹22,000 crore Tata’s aircraft manufacturing project. This also gives credence to stories of differences between Fadnavis and Shinde on several counts. That even senior leaders like Gadkari are pained about Maharashtra's loss would be difficult for the state unit of the BJP to brush aside easily. It is time for Shinde to think out of the box to regain his lost ground else he might lose it all.

Re-energizing the education system

In ancient India Guru was divine and education a pious profession. We must inculcate that culture to revamp our present education system



JS RAJPUT



Some two decades ago, I was invited to deliver a keynote address at a UNESCO Conference attended by over 200 delegates from around 35 countries. I presented a picture of how India has progressed along in eradicating illiteracy and enhancing its literacy rate despite daunting challenges faced in terms of inadequate human and financial resources, social inhibitions, linguistic variations, diversities of varied kinds, and much more that lead to rather insurmountable impediments. The challenging circumstances required determined efforts to offer access to education to every child. The most critical consideration in assessing India's progress in education is a four-fold increase in its population. Despite it, India has moved upwards of the 18 percent literacy rate to around 80 percent at this stage. It is a global experience that as the literacy rate moves upward, extra efforts are needed to bring the remaining groups within the fold of education. India had already entered that phase over a decade ago. The post-independence journey in education has also confronted numerous social and cultural inhibitions, including serious reservations about achieving an attitudinal transformation that is best described in realizing the transition from ‘why educate girls’ to the universal demand for good quality education, coupled with appropriate skills in a good school! For the educated young, it is competition all around and hence quality is the crucial requirement.

We have gone through serious futuristic initiatives aimed at quality enhancement, achieving excellence in learner attainments, vocationalization and skill orientation, assimilation of information and communication technology, and allied advancements. In that particular presentation, one also emphasized how moral, ethical, and humanistic values; as also the democratic and constitutional values were integrated into the process of teaching and learning. One gentleman insisted on making some observations based on his last couple of years in India,

mostly with some voluntary organizations. He painted a picture of “darkness all around in Indian educational policies and initiatives”, finally concluding that the Indian system of education is on the verge of collapse. He wanted me to elaborate on why it has not already collapsed! Though posed by a foreigner in a foreign land, such ‘onslaughts’ were not new for me.

Seasoned critics are indeed very helpful in generating fresh ideas for improvement and refinements in educational policies and programs. On that particular occasion, the core and kernel of my response were that India is now conscious of its inheritance of a great ancient tradition of knowledge quest, its utilization for the welfare of the people; and transfer to the generations ahead. And this tradition has shown the strength to withstand the worst of onslaught for thousands of years. Yes; it was bruised and weakened, but has never withered away. It places the learned, the wise, and the dispenser of knowledge on the highest pedestal in society. This tradition persists in the teaching community of India even today. The Guru is given the dignity of divinity. Guru - the dispenser of knowledge, wisdom, and values - shapes the society, and creates the future of the country.



THE PLAN FOR CREATING A TRANSFORMED SYSTEM OF LEARNING AND TEACHING, ACQUIRING SKILLS AND SELF-CONFIDENCE IN ONE’S CAPACITY TO INNOVATE, ENVISION, AND CREATE HAS BEEN BEFORE THE NATION FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS

Even in times of globalization, no one once appointed as a teacher could ignore the essence of the traditional expectations from him. That his life, conduct, and devotion to duty must be worth emulation. As teachers, they become part of a value system that exhorts them to perform with competence, and commitment. And therefore, my friend the Indian education system shall never collapse.

The plan for creating a transformed system of learning and teaching, acquiring skills and self-confidence in one's capacity to innovate, envision, and create has been before the nation for the last two years. Over the years my conviction that finally, it is the teacher that determines the extent of success or failure of any new policy initiative, no matter how brilliant and pragmatic it may be. India has around 96.8 Lakh school teachers, and 15 Lakh College and University teachers. This is the huge transformational force that - one is sure - would lead India to its destined place in the comity of nations.

I must concede that they are serious aberrations in role perception amongst teachers at each stage which are unacceptable and deserve to be remedied. Take the case of vacancies of teachers in schools and colleges. It is unthinkable and unacceptable in any education-

ally alert and active education system. We have schools without teachers, and central universities with more than half of their sanctioned academic posts remaining vacant, but the system works. It must be conceded that the public trust and faith in public-funded schools, colleges, and universities have suffered - exceptions apart - serious erosion of credibility. It would be unwise to attribute it to the huge expansion of several institutions at each stage which was necessary and inevitable. It would reveal the astonishing levels of commitment and dedication of teachers working even under trying situations.

The master key to educational reorientation revolves around pragmatic comprehension of what MK Gandhi wrote after reading "Unto This Last": "A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from work." Give the teacher of every stage due respect and dignity in dealing with him, let the bureaucracy treat teachers as VIPs, and one could guarantee visible enhancement in the work culture, and hence in learner attainments.

(Thw writer works in education, social cohesion, and religious amity. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MORE PERKS FOR THE WOMEN'S TEAM

Sir — We are all happy to hear the Indian women's cricketers will now receive Rs 15 lakh per Test, Rs 6 lakh per ODI, and Rs 3 lakh per T20I, the same as their male counterparts. They deserve it because Indian women have had significant success in recent months. They followed their silver-medal finish at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in August with a record 3-0 ODI series sweep of England in England in September. In October, India beat Sri Lanka to clinch a record seventh Asia Cup crown in Bangladesh.

Hence BCCI's decision is a significant step forward for women's cricket and the game overall. Particularly when the women cricketers do not get revenue on par (the tickets are not sold at an equal rate, and the sponsorship rates are not equal) with men it is correct to encourage women with more fees as this would attract more and more women to play cricket which would definitely increase the standard in the long run. So, paying the same match fee for the women's team is a tricky but good step ahead. Don't forget as things stand, there are no changes to the BCCI's annual retainers for women players. Currently, those in the highest retainer bracket take home INR 50 lakh, while Grade B and Grade C are valued at INR 30 lakh and INR 10 lakh respectively. In comparison, the male cricketers are divided into four categories with Grade A+ players taking home INR 7 crore, and those in Grades A, B, and C collecting INR 5 crore, 3 crore, and 1 crore respectively. Compared to the money standard the women cricketers' Grade A player's standard is 50% below the C player's status. Even then it is correct to encourage women with more fees as this would attract more and more women to play cricket which would definitely increase the standard in the long run.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

SHINDE LOSES FOUR PROJECTS

Sir — After getting slammed by opposition parties Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said that the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister have assured

One nation, one police uniform policy



Prime Minister Narendra Modi has raised the pitch for a one nation, one police uniform policy. Earlier, Modi had batted for one nation, one election. The response from the opposition parties was negative. One nation, one ration card was launched on August 9, 2019. With this, the ration card holders are enjoying the advantage of buying ration in any part of India without any hassles. Identical uniform for police in all the states is not bad. Law and order are on the State list. It is the prerogative of the states to take a call on uniform policy. As such non-BJP-ruled states cannot be expected to fall in line. Good or bad, the opposition parties are accustomed to opposing anything that comes from the ruling party. As such its implementation is not

very easy. As a first step, all BJP-ruled states can do it. Because the same party governments in states are amenable to accepting the proposal of the central government. Since more states are ruled by BJP than opposition parties, more states can have the same police uniform. In due course of time, if the non-BJP ruled states are handed over to BJP from the future election results, those states can also prescribe the same uniforms. The apprehension of opposition parties taking over the BJP-ruled states in the future elections and reverting the police uniforms to the earlier ones or with some changes must be put on the back burner. Being skeptical about the opposition parties accepting his suggestion, Modi has asked the states to think over the proposal. Decisions are taken by the government of the day according to the changing times and needs. The ruling dispensation of the states where 5 years have not been completed must be ready for some compromise to go for a new experiment. Common uniforms will give a common identity to law enforcement as citizens will recognize police personnel anywhere in India. However, a badge denoting the name of the state to which the police belong can be at display on the uniform.

KV Seetharamaih | Bengaluru

him of full support for the development and growth of the state. Addressing hundreds of Shiv Sainiks on Monday night during his first visit to his hometown Thane after taking over as the CM, Shinde said the risk that he took (referring to political developments over the last fortnight) has been appreciated by people, despite criticism from certain quarters. With this Shinde is under pressure for losing three big projects to Gujarat for which the people of Maharashtra are very angry with him and his government. And may teach him and his MLAs a lesson in future elections.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

NO RECOGNITION OF ONLINE PHD

Sir — It refers to " Online Ph.D. offered by Ed-Tech firms with foreign varisities not recognized: UGC, AICTE ". It is a

welcome move by UGC and AICTE to clarify these PhD programs because if they are not recognized then it is both a waste of time and money for the students who enroll themselves for these courses. It is also good that GoI is in the process of regulating the Ed-Tech sector because this sector is growing amidst huge demand for online courses under the current scenario. So ideally it should be a win-win proposition for all stakeholders, Ed-Tech companies, and students. When technology is becoming a critical part of our lives it is essential that companies do not engage in abusing the power they have.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Azam Khan has been bearing the brunt for strongly opposing and challenging communal forces inside the Assembly and Parliament and outside as well to secure the secular credentials of Indian Constitution.



SP chief —Akhilesh Yadav

We have warned of Russia's plans to ruin the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Now Moscow uses a false pretext to block the grain corridor.I call on all states to demand Russia to stop its hunger games.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister —Dmytro Kuleba

In our times we couldn't experiment but today the generation does and why shouldn't they?



Actor —Jaya Bachchan

It's my responsibility to make sure that I'm in the crease and leave at the right time,"... the bowlers are well within their rights to take off the bails if the non-striker is backing up

New Zealand batter —Glenn Phillips

Kejriwal opposed Ram Mandir, insulted Hindu deities, and had to sack a minister. Kejriwal stoked new propaganda so that his corruption isn't discussed.



Union Minister —Anurag Thakur

FIRST COLUMN

GOD OUR ONLY HOME, REST IS TEMPORARY

God is the only home one can aspire for with spirituality



AJIT BISHNOI

What do you call a home? Is it a place where one lives permanently? If so, no place will qualify to be called a home, because we don't live permanently at any one place. Suppose someone has a nice three-bedroom home in a posh colony. Is this a place where one can really find shelter? If one could, why would so many of us remain lost in thoughts even after we have settled in our so-called home? Because, this home is a shelter in the lower sense, i.e., from the elements or which provides us all types of comforts.

What should be called a home then? God of course. Lord Krishna explains in the Bhagavad Gita verse #9.18. "He is the goal, maintainer, Lord, witness, home, shelter/refuge and friend." If we have a home, we would like it to be maintained very nicely. What is a home if the essentials are missing? From my personal experience, I can emphatically state that God has been my maintainer wherever I have lived. Everything we see is owned by Him only. Yes, God is the real owner of everything. God maintains 'sannyasis', who have renounced pursuing material goals. They lack nothing as they busy themselves in spiritual activities. To qualify for such privilege, one must be linked with God or who will do so in future, which God knows already.



Lord Krishna says He is our 'Swami'. The real Lord states about Himself, "Whatever there is opulent, effulgent or even energetic, all that you should know as produced from a fragment of My splendour." (#10.41) God is my Swami in every sense; I turn to Him for everything I need like guidance, Him being omniscient; help, because He is omnipotent; and 'shakti' of all kinds like 'atmabala' (inner strength) intellectual power; mental strength; physical strength, power to tolerate, etc. We need all these to have a meaningful life.

God is also a witness to whatever we do or not do, i.e., our duties. Only then He decides whether we deserve His special attention or not. Is God not omnipresent? God has eyes, ears, etc., in this world pervading all. (#13.13) Then, we come to Lord's statement that 'He is our home'. Wherever we live will be God's property only, which He allowed us to use temporarily. That is the material part. A real home is not that only, which gives us shelter in the material sense, but which gives us in the spiritual sense also. God is the only one who we can really call our refuge. Only when we have taken shelter of God, will we feel safe. Those who have done so will vouch for this fact. Others do not feel safe, no matter what they do to make them feel safe.

Now we come to the last word, which explains everything. God is our friend, a real friend, who is waiting for us to turn to Him. He won't force us, because we enjoy free will; we must take His shelter willingly. Then, all the words of the verse quoted earlier begin to make sense. Our real goal has to be God only. God is our real home. We have been waiting for life after life. He is the only shelter worth taking refuge in. And, lastly, God is the only friend who can help in all kinds of situations.

Therefore, become a friend of God with spirituality as instructed by Him in spiritual texts. Then, your so-called home will become your real home, not just a shelter from elements.

(The author is a spiritual teacher)

Tax surge a cushion to bear hit from subsidies



UTTAM GUPTA

But tax collection buoyancy has been slowing down since the last year, which calls for tightening slippages

In the past, a shortfall in tax receipts of the Union government vis-à-vis the budget estimate (BE) and excess of expenditure over BE led to high fiscal deficit (FD) year after year. To rein in FD, it often took recourse to non-tax receipts such as dividend from public sector undertakings (PSUs), proceeds from selling government shares in one PSU to another, transfer of surplus by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), proceeds from sale of spectrum for telecom services, etc.

This was unsustainable as reliance on non-tax receipts is unreliable. For instance, dividend from a PSU depends on a host of factors specific to the undertakings and there is no certainty that it will deliver a target amount. For instance, during 2017-18, ONGC, an upstream oil and gas exploration and production company in the public sector was asked to buy 51.11 per cent of government's shares in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL), helping it to garner over ₹30,000 crore and, thus, achieve its FD target. In the process, ONGC was burdened with an extra debt.

Since 2021-22, the situation has changed drastically with tax collections exceeding the target by a substantial margin even as slippage in expenditure has continued unabated. The good thing is that the surplus in tax collection has offset the excess in expenditure over BE, thereby helping the government keep FD within the target – not having to rely much on the non-tax receipts.

During 2021-22, the gross tax revenue (GTR)—including total direct tax collection, proceeds from Goods and Services Tax or GST, customs and excise duty—net of refunds were ₹27,10,000 crore, which was higher than the budget estimate (BE) of ₹22,20,000 crore by a whopping ₹490,000 crore. The collection was even higher than the revised estimate (RE) of ₹25,20,000 crore (as given by FM Nirmala Sitharaman in the budget for 2022-23 on February 1, 2022) by ₹1,90,000 crore.

As per the Finance Commission (FC) formula 41 per cent of tax receipts of the Union government – excluding cess collections, which are not part of the divisible pool – are shared with states. After these mandatory transfers to states, the net tax revenue (NTR) of the Centre was around ₹18,50,000 crore, which was Rs 300,000 crore higher than the BE of ₹15,50,000 crore. It was even higher than the RE of ₹17,65,000 crore by ₹85,000 crore.

The excess of ₹300,000 crore in actual NTR of the Centre over the BE helped in making up for the slippage of about ₹284,500 crore in other areas of revenue and expenditure viz. proceeds from disinvestment in CPSUs: ₹161,500 crore (actual: ₹13,500 crore minus BE: ₹175,000



ACCORDING TO REVENUE SECRETARY TARUN BAJAJ, THE AIM IS FOR 30 PER CENT GROWTH IN DIRECT TAX COLLECTION AGAINST 16 PER CENT GROWTH ASSUMED PREVIOUSLY. IN THAT SCENARIO, THE ADDITIONAL GTR WOULD BE ₹425,000 CRORE

(The author is a policy analyst)



crore); fertilizer subsidy: ₹80,000 crore (actual: ₹160,000 crore minus BE: ₹80,000 crore); food subsidy: 43,000 crore (actual: ₹286,000 crore minus BE: ₹243,000 crore).

As a consequence, the FD for 2021-22 at 6.7 per cent of GDP (gross domestic product) turned out to be even lower than BE at 6.8 per cent. For 2022-23, Sitharaman set the GTR target ₹27,60,000 crore. Against this, the collection during the first six months of the year was ₹13,49,000 crore (this includes direct tax proceeds up to October 2, 2022, central GST collection up to September 30, 2022 and customs and excise duty or CED till August 31, 2022). Deducting devolution to states of ₹376,000 crore, NTR of the Centre works out to ₹973,000 crore against BE of ₹19,35,000 crore for the year.

Of the year's targeted tax revenue, already, the government has collected a little over 50 per cent during the first half. Normally, the second half shows greater buoyancy in collection because of substantial pick up in economic activity during the festival season (Oct-Nov) as also the fact that most persons pay their tax liability towards the year end [for instance, 16 per cent of the taxes (pre-devolution) collected during 2021-22 were paid in March 2022]. Considering these factors and including September 2022 figure for CED, the GTR during 2022-23 is estimated to be around ₹30,50,000 crore (but for the loss of revenue due to cut in central excise duty on petrol and diesel affected in

May 2022 – estimated at ₹90,000 crore, this would have been even higher at ₹3140,000 crore), which is ₹290,000 crore higher than the BE. Correspondingly, the NTR of the Centre, (post-devolution) is expected to be about ₹21,00,000 crore – ₹165,000 crore more than BE.

According to Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj, the aim is for 30 per cent growth in direct tax collection against 16 per cent growth assumed previously. In that scenario, the additional GTR would be ₹425,000 crore. Correspondingly, the NTR would be ₹250,000 crore more.

On the other hand, the government faces massive slippage in the expenditure on various subsidies. On fertilizer subsidy, it is expected to spend ₹250,000 crore against BE of ₹109,000 crore, leading to excess of ₹141,000 crore. The food subsidy is likely to overshoot the BE ₹207,000 crore by about ₹130,000 crore, thanks to the continuation of the delivery of free foodgrains under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) till December 2022.

Add to this ₹22,000 crore given to the state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) to compensate them for the under-recoveries on supply of domestic LPG between June 2020 and June 2022 (during this period, against increase in the international prices of LPG by around 300 per cent, the OMCs were allowed hike of only 70 per cent in domestic LPG prices, leading to under-recovery), this leads to an additional subsidy payment of

₹293,000 crore.

In the non-tax receipt area too, against the target of ₹65,000 crore from proceeds of the disinvestment of government's shareholding in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), so far, it has realized only ₹25,000 crore. Considering that the big ticket sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has been put on hold and sale of the LIC stake in IDBI is stuck, the year is expected to end with a shortfall of about ₹30,000 crore.

Overall, the government could be staring at a slippage of over ₹320,000 crore. Of this, around ₹250,000 crore is expected to be neutralized by excess tax collection over BE, leaving an uncovered gap of just ₹70,000 crore. This works out to a mere 0.25 per cent of the GDP. But, for the excess tax cushion, the slippage from the BE of FD (6.4 per cent) would have been 1.25 per cent.

The turnaround in tax collection is undoubtedly a creditable achievement of the Modi government. However, there is a dire need for prudent management of subsidies keeping in mind the fact that the tax cushion is not unlimited (during 2022-23, tax buoyancy – growth in collection against nominal GDP expansion – at 1 is much lower than 1.7 during 2021-22).

In major areas viz. food, fertilizers, fuel, substantial savings is possible by restricting coverage, cutting costs, improving efficiency, etc. For instance, free foodgrains under PMGKAY during April–December 2022 was uncalled for.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

BJP IS PREPARING TO PUT THE PHOTOS OF SAVARKAR AND MODI ON THE NOTES. THAT IS WHY IT IS OPPOSING THE PHOTO OF LORD GANESHA-LAKSHMI —AAP LEADER SANJAY SINGH



HOW CAN WE DENY MODI JI (A PHOTO ON CURRENCY) WHO IS EPITOME OF GREATNESS. HIS EFFORTS TO MAKE INDIA GREAT WOULD BE REMEMBERED FOREVER —BJP LEADER RAM KADAM

Demand for gold, cars, houses grew in Diwali

The Diwali consumer data shows that the Indian economy may shine with a revival in demand

While newly-elected British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is being celebrated with great glee, it is not he but the Indian consumers who are adding glory to India. They have taken enough strides this Diwali to turn the corner for the Indian economy after gloomy years of the pandemic shut country.

Indian consumers are back with enthusiasm but there are grey areas indicative of the post-Covid bumps. Amid such a scenario, gold, housing and automobiles made a significant mark. Consumers purchased 39 tonnes of gold and billions of rupee purchases of housing units, cars, white and brown goods, textiles, garments, and other purchases.



SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The author is a senior journalist)

Demand for gold grew by 80 per cent in the domestic market in the July-September quarter following a strong pick-up in economic activity and improved consumer demand, said Pankaj Arora, president of All India Jewellery and Gold Federation. As per its estimates, sales of gold and silver coins, notes, sculptures, and utensils in the country peaked at Rs 25,000 crore. The Indian Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA) pegs it at Rs 19,500 crore a little higher than 2021.

There are indications of economic buoyancy coming back. The ANAROCK July-September housing sales data are up 41 per cent, possibly touching three lakh units as the trend was for 2009-2014. Since that year sales dropped

by almost 68 per cent in Delhi and NCR and 27 per cent around Mumbai. The worst was 2016 when unit sales dropped drastically due to demonetisation followed by the unveiling of RERA and GST. The housing is double-taxed. It has stamp duty and now also GST, which should better be waved off. The housing sales rise despite interest rate hike is encouraging.

Similarly, car sales jumped by 10.94 per cent to 1,464,001 during Navaratri and Diwali against 2021 sales of 1,319,647 units, according to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations of India (FADA). Sales rebounded as semiconductor shortages eased. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers

(SIAM) said that the production for the month also rose 88 per cent to 372,126. Sales of entry level passenger cars grew by 38.4 per cent or 1,026,309 units, while two-wheeler sales rose by 13 per cent at 1,735,199 units.

Though gold purchases considered auspicious may have taken place almost uniformly across, there has been subdued sales of FMCG products in the rural areas with retail inflation holding firm. The Marico group noted that the sales in the rural areas are much below the norm.

Confectionery sales declined 10.3 per cent and beverages and home care slumped by 2.5 and 5.5 per cent owing to change of preferences and quality complaints about the products.

Neighbourhood political relations also have an impact on dry fruits and spices. The machineries have been careful and slow in clearing the dry fruit packages of raisins, pistachios, apricot, figs, asafoetida and shah jeera coming from Afghanistan transiting through the Wagah border.

The textile segment also had an average business. Surat's textile mills could have about Rs 8000 crore or 50 per cent less sales. The retail demand has been low indicating that people at large are avoiding purchases. Wholesalers are not picking up garments, sarees and other fabric because of a market singed by high prices and miserly consumer behaviour, according to Confederation of All India Traders. Huge inven-

tory from the last two years with retailers has cut overall sales.

Often it is alluded that e-commerce led by global giants has affected the retail business. According to the World Bank, e-commerce is only 1.6 per cent of the total Indian retail business. The e-commerce firms expected that their sales would reach \$11.8 billion, according to Shopify, before Diwali but so far they have not come out with a figure of the final sales. Softbank-propelled Meesho claimed there have been low-ticket purchases and two majors – Flipkart and Amazon – clocked the larger share of the \$5.7 billion or Rs 40,000 crore festive sales, with mobile phones leading the sales.

Global instability, infla-

tion, and the Ukraine war are hitting the country despite efforts at a higher growth trajectory. This growth is now swinging below 7 per cent with over 7.4 per cent (cumulative 23.6 per cent) inflation. It is beyond the RBI comfort zone.

Does it mean that by volume India could surpass Britain? Not unlikely but a lot remains to be done to be actually becoming the fifth largest economy as during covid certain hardships increased and indicators plummeted. Indian per capita GDP is \$2,277.43 and the UK's \$49,761. The UK has a robust trade balance. Diwali has given hopes that by the coming year India would get rid of the glitches and make its journey more meaningful.

Russia suspends Ukraine grain deal over ship attack claim

AP ■ KYIV

Russia announced Saturday that it will immediately suspend its implementation of a U.N.-brokered grain deal that has seen more than 9 million tonnes of grain exported from Ukraine during the war and has brought down soaring global food prices.

Ukraine accused Russia of creating a world "hunger games."

The Russian Defence Ministry cited an alleged Ukrainian drone attack Saturday against Russia's Black Sea Fleet ships moored off the coast of occupied Crimea as the reason for the move.



A Russian tank damaged in recent fighting is seen in the field near the recently retaken village of Kamianka, Kharkiv region, Ukraine, on Sunday.

AP Photo

Ukraine has denied the attack, saying that the Russians mishandled their own weapons.

The Russian declaration came one day after U.N. Chief Antonio Guterres urged Russia and Ukraine to renew the grain export deal, which was scheduled to expire on Nov. 19.

Guterres also urged other countries, mainly in the West, to expedite the removal of obstacles blocking Russian grain and fertiliser exports.

The U.N. Chief said the grain deal — brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July — helps "to cushion the suffering that this global cost-of-living crisis is inflicting on billions of people," his spokesman said.

U.N. Officials were in touch with Russian authorities over the announced suspension.

"It is vital that all parties refrain from any action that would imperil the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which is a critical humanitarian effort that is clearly having a positive impact on access to food for millions of people," said Guterres' spokesman, Stéphane

Dujarric.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the Russian move "predictable." He accused Moscow of "blockading" ships carrying grain since September. Currently, he said, 176 vessels are backed up at sea, carrying more than 2 million tonnes of food.

"This is a transparent attempt by Russia to return to the threat of large-scale famine in Africa and Asia," Zelenskyy said Saturday in his nightly video address.

He called for a tough response against Russia from international bodies like the U.N. And the G-20.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, accused Russia of playing "hunger games" by imperiling global food shipments.

In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the suspension was regrettable and urged "all parties to keep this essential, life-saving Initiative functioning,"

"Any act by Russia to disrupt these critical grain exports is essentially a statement that people and families around the world should pay more for food or go hungry," Blinken said in a statement Saturday night.

"In suspending this arrangement, Russia is again weaponising food in the war it started, directly impacting low- and middle-income countries and global food prices, and exacerbating already dire humanitarian crises and food insecurity."

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Saturday accused British specialists of being involved in the alleged attack by drones on Russian ships in Crimea. Britain's Defense Ministry had no immediate comment on the claim.

"In connection with the actions of Ukrainian armed forces, led by British specialists, directed, among other things, against Russian ships that ensure the functioning of the humanitarian corridor in question (which cannot be qualified

otherwise than as a terrorist attack), the Russian side cannot guarantee the safety of civilian dry cargo ships participating in the Black Sea initiative, and suspends its implementation from today for an indefinite period," the Russian statement said.

Ukraine's Ministry of Infrastructure said that Ukraine has never threatened the Black Sea grain corridor which "is exclusively humanitarian in nature," and would continue to try to keep shipments going.

It said since the first ship left Odesa on Aug. 1, more than 9 million tonnes of food have been exported, including more than 5 million tonnes to African and Asian countries.

As part of the U.N. World Food Programme, it said, 190 thousand tons of wheat have been sent to countries where there is hunger.

Russia also requested a meeting Monday of the U.N. Security Council because of the alleged attack on the Black Sea Fleet and the security of the grain corridor, said Dmitry Polyansky, Russia's first deputy representative to the U.N.

Russia's agriculture minister said Moscow stands ready to "fully replace Ukrainian grain and deliver supplies at affordable prices to all interested countries."

In remarks carried by the state Rossiya 24 TV channel, Dmitry Patrushev said Moscow was prepared to "supply up to 500,000 tonnes of grain to the poorest countries free of charge in the next four months," with the help of Turkey.

Earlier Saturday, Ukraine and Russia offered differing versions on the Crimea drone attack in which at least one Russian ship suffered damage in Sevastopol, a key port on the Ukrainian peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014.

UK police say gas bombs thrown at immigration centre, 1 injured

AP ■ LONDON

British police say one person was injured when gasoline bombs were thrown Sunday at an immigration center in the English port town of Dover.

The Kent Police force said "two to three incendiary devices" were thrown at the facility, and "one minor injury has been reported." The Kent Fire and Rescue Service said its crews had put out fires at the site.

A news photographer at the scene said a man drove up and threw three gas bombs at the facility before driving to a nearby gas station and killing himself. Police said only that "the suspect has been identified and located."



Dover is the arrival point for many migrants who cross the English Channel from

France in small boats. The number of people making the hazardous journey across one

of the world's busiest shipping lanes has risen sharply in recent years, with 40,000 reaching the U.K. so far this year, up from 28,000 in all of 2021 and 8,500 in 2020.

Dozens have died, including 27 people in November 2021 when a packed smuggling boat capsized.

Britain and France have wrangled over how to stop the people-smuggling gangs that organize the journeys.

Britain's Conservative government has announced a controversial plan to send people who arrive in small boats on a one-way journey to Rwanda. Critics say the plan is immoral and impractical, and it is being challenged in the courts.

Thousands commemorate Italy's dictator Mussolini at crypt

AP ■ PREDAPPIO, ITALY

Several thousand black-clad fascist sympathisers chanted and sang in praise of Benito Mussolini as they marched to the slain Italian dictator's crypt on Sunday, 100 years after Mussolini entered Rome and completed a bloodless coup that gave rise to two decades of fascist rule.

The crowd of some 2,000 to 4,000 marchers, many sporting fascist symbols and singing hymns from Italy's colonial era, was more numerous than in the recent past, as the fascist nostalgics celebrated the centenary of the March on Rome. On Oct 28, 1922, black-shirted fascists entered the Italian capital, launching a putsch that culminated two days later when Italy's king handed Mussolini the mandate to start a new government.

The crowd in Predappio, Mussolini's birth and final resting place in the northern Emilia-Romagna region, also was apparently emboldened by the fact that a party with neo-fascist



roots is heading an Italian government for the first time since World War II.

Organizers warned participants, who arrived from as far away as Rome, Belgium and the United States, not to flash the Roman salute used by the Fascists, or they would risk prosecution. Still, some couldn't resist as the crowd stopped outside of the cemetery where Mussolini is laid to rest for

prayers and greetings from Mussolini's great-granddaughter, Orsola.

"After 100 years, we are still here to pay homage to the man this state wanted, and who we will never stop admiring," Orsola Mussolini said to cheers.

She listed her great-grandfather's accomplishments, citing an infrastructure boom that built schools, hospitals and public buildings, reclaimed malar-

ia-infested swamps for cities, and the extension of a pension system to nongovernment workers. She was joined by her sister Vittoria, who led the crowd in a prayer.

The crowd gave a final shout of "Duce, Duce, Duce," Mussolini's honorific as Italy's dictator.

Anti-fascist campaigners held a march in Predappio on Friday, to mark the anniversary

of the liberation of the town — and to prevent the fascists marching on the exact anniversary of the March on Rome.

Inside the cemetery on Sunday, admirers of the Duce lined up to enter his crypt tucked in a back corner, a handful at a time. Each was given a memory card signed by his great-granddaughters with a photo of a smiling Mussolini holding his leather-gloved hand high in a Roman salute. "History will prove me right," the card reads.

Italy's failure to fully come to terms with its fascist past has never been more stark than now, as Italy's new Premier Giorgia Meloni seeks to distance her far-right Brothers of Italy part from its neo-fascist roots. This week, she decried fascism's anti-democratic nature and called its racial laws, which sent thousands of Italian Jews to Nazi death camps, "a low point." Historians would also add Mussolini's alliance with Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II and his disastrous colonial campaign in Africa to its

devastating legacies.

Now in power, Meloni is seeking a moderate course for a new center-right government including Matteo Salvini's League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia. But her victory gives far-right activists a sense of vindication even if they see themselves even further to the right.

"I would have voted for Lucifer if he could beat the left," said organizer Mirko Santarelli, who heads the Ravenna chapter of the Arditi, an organization that began as a World War I veterans group and has evolved to include caretaking Mussolini's memory. "I am happy there is a Meloni government, because if there is nothing worse than the Italian left. It is not the government that reflects my ideas, but it is better than nothing."

He said he would like to see the new government do away with the laws that prosecute incitement to hatred and violence motivated by race, ethnicity, religion and nationality. It includes use of emblems and symbols — many of which were present in Sunday's march.

Lebanon Prez leaves with no replacement, crisis deepens



AP ■ BEIRUT

President Michel Aoun left Lebanon's presidential palace on Sunday, marking the end of his six-year term without a replacement, leaving the small nation in a political vacuum that is likely to worsen its historic economic meltdown.

As Aoun's term ends, the country is being run by a caretaker government after Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati failed to form a new Cabinet following May 15 parliamentary elections.

Aoun and his supporters warn that such a government doesn't have full power to run the country, saying that weeks of "constitutional chaos" lay ahead.

In a speech outside the palace, Aoun told thousands of supporters that he has accepted the resignation of Mikati's government. The move is likely to further deprive the caretaker administration of legitimacy and worsen existing political tensions in the country.

Mikati responded shortly afterward with a statement from his office saying that his government will continue to perform its duties in accordance with the constitution.

Many fear that an extended power vacuum could further

delay attempts to finalise a deal with the International Monetary Fund that would provide Lebanon with some USD 3 billion in assistance, widely seen as a key step to help the country climb out of a three-year financial crisis that has left three quarters of the population in poverty. While it's not the first time that Lebanon's parliament has failed to appoint a successor by the end of the president's term, this will be the first time that there will be both no president and a caretaker cabinet with limited powers.

Lebanon's constitution allows the cabinet in regular circumstances to run the government, but is unclear whether that applies to a caretaker government.

Wissam Lahham, a constitutional law professor at St. Joseph University in Beirut told The Associated Press that in his view, the governance issues the country will face are political rather than legal.

Although the constitution "doesn't say explicitly that the caretaker government can act if there is no president, logically, constitutionally, one should accept that because... the state and institutions should continue to function according to the principle of the continuity of public services," he said.

100 killed in Mogadishu car bomb attacks, says Somalia Pres

IAN S ■ MOGADISHU

At least 100 people have been killed over 300 injured in twin car bomb explosions targeting Somalia's Education Ministry building here, Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said on Sunday. The fatalities in Saturday's car bomb attacks are likely to rise, Mohamud told media after visiting the bombing site early Sunday.

Several government offices, hotels and restaurants are situated near the bombing site, Xinhua news agency reported.

An unspecified number of people, including journalists and police officers were among the casualties, Sadiq Dudishe, spokesperson of the Somali Police Force, said earlier.

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab Islamist group, which often targets the capital and controls large parts of the country, claimed responsibility.

Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, while condemning the attack, said such action by al-Shabab won't stop the government's commitment to eradicating terrorism in any



form. The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia in a statement called for sustained military operations against the insurgents, so as to suppress surging terror attacks in the country.

Extending its condolences to the families of the victims, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia tweeted it "wishes a speedy recovery for those injured, and stands resolutely with all Somalis against terrorism."

The blasts came as the Somali president and leaders of the federal member states, including security officials, were meeting to discuss ongoing offensive operations against al-Shabab.

Labour puts pressure on Sunak over Braverman reappointment

IAN S ■ LONDON

Labour is urging the government to publish its assessments of Suella Braverman's security breach following her controversial reappointment as UK home secretary just six days after she was forced out, local media reported.

New Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is under growing pressure over reinstating Braverman as home secretary after a former party chair claimed she had committed "multiple breaches"



of the ministerial code, Sky News reported. He has so far resisted demands to launch an inquiry after she shared a sensitive document with a Tory backbencher from a personal email without permission, Sky News reported.

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats have raised "national security" concerns over the breach, as well as called for a Cabinet Office probe.

Labour will try to push ministers to share risk assessments of this and other alleged leaks, as well as the information given to Sunak before he reinstated her at the Home Office, with a "humble address" motion in Parliament.

Braverman has so far refused to appear before MPs to explain the circumstances sur-

rounding what happened.

Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said: "Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman cannot keep running away from these questions. It is far too serious for that, and raises serious doubts about the prime minister's judgement."

"People need to know they can trust the Home Secretary with highly sensitive information and our national security. Rishi Sunak's decision to reappoint Suella Braverman was deeply irresponsible."

AP source: Pelosi attacker carried zip ties, in Jan 6 echo

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The man accused of attacking House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband carried zip ties with him when he broke into the couple's San Francisco home, according to a person briefed on the investigation, in what is the latest parallel to the Capitol riot of Jan. 6, 2021.

The person was not

authorised to publicly discuss the Pelosi case and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Sunday.

The attack on Democratic leader's 82-year-old husband, Paul Pelosi, less than two weeks before before the Nov. 8 election that will determine control of Congress was a jarring reminder of the nation's toxic political climate.

Police said the suspect,

identified as David DePape, 42, confronted Paul Pelosi in the family's Pacific Heights home early Friday and, the AP has reported, demanded to know, "Where is Nancy?"

The two men struggled over a hammer before officers responding to a 911 call to the home saw DePape strike Paul Pelosi at least once, police said. DePape was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder, elder abuse and burglary.

He is expected to be arraigned early in the coming week.

Eerie echoes of the Jan. 6 riot were apparent in the Paul Pelosi assault.

Rioters who swarmed the Capitol trying to overturn Joe Biden's election victory over Donald Trump roamed the halls and shouted loud calls demanding "Where's Nancy?" Some in the siege were seen inside the Capitol carrying zip ties.

The violent attack on a congressional leader's family comes as threats to lawmakers and other political officials are at all-time highs today.

Nancy Pelosi was in Washington when he husband was attacked. She soon returned to San Francisco, where he husband was hospitalized. He had surgery for a skull fracture, and suffered other injuries to his arms and hands, her office said.

"Our children, our grandchildren and I are heartbroken and traumatized by the life-threatening attack on our Pop," she said in a letter late Saturday to colleagues. "We are grateful for the quick response of law enforcement and emergency services, and for the life-saving medical care he is receiving."

Paul Pelosi remains hospitalised and "continues to improve," she told colleagues.

Biden faces ‘unpredictable’ era with China’s empowered Xi

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden’s administration is taking stock of a newly empowered Xi Jinping as the Chinese president begins a third, norm-breaking five-year term as Communist Party leader.

With US-Chinese relations already fraught, concerns are growing in Washington that more difficult days may be ahead.

Xi has amassed a measure of power over China’s ruling party unseen since Mao Zedong, the leader from 1949 until his death in 1976. Xi’s consolidation of power comes as the United States has updated its defense and national security strategies to reflect that China is now America’s most potent military and economic adversary.

Biden takes pride in having built rapport with Xi since first meeting him more than a decade ago, when they served as their countries’ vice presidents.

But Biden now faces, in Xi, a counterpart buoyed by a greater measure of power and determined to cement China’s superpower status even while navigating strong economic and diplomatic headwinds.

“We’re not back in the Mao era. Xi Jinping is not Mao,” said

Jude Blanchette, chair of China studies at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

“But we are definitely in new territory and unpredictable territory in terms of the stability and predictability of China’s political system.”

Biden and Xi are expected to hold talks on the sidelines of next month’s Group of 20 summit in Indonesia, a long-anticipated meeting that would come after nearly two years of tense relations.

The leaders are dug into winning the upper hand in a competition that both believe will determine which country is the leading global economic and political force driving the next century.

“There’s an awful lot of issues for us to talk to China about,” said National Security Council spokesman John Kirby.

He added that US and Chinese officials have been working to arrange a meeting of the leaders, though one has yet to be confirmed. “Some issues are fairly contentious and some should be collaborative,” Kirby said.

Biden and Xi travelled together in the US and China in 2011 and 2012, and they have held five phone or video calls since Biden became president in



January 2021.

But the US-China relationship has become far more complicated since those getting-to-know-you talks over meals in Washington and on the Tibetan plateau a decade ago.

As president, Biden has repeatedly taken China to task for human rights abuses against the Uyghur people and other ethnic minorities, Beijing’s crack-downs on democracy activists in Hong Kong, coercive trade practices, military provocations against self-ruled Taiwan and differences over Russia’s prosecution of its war against Ukraine.

Xi’s government has criticised the Biden administration’s

posture toward Taiwan — which Beijing looks eventually to unify with the communist mainland — as undermining China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Chinese president also has suggested that Washington wants to stifle Beijing’s growing clout as it tries to overtake the US as the world’s largest economy.

“External attempts to suppress and contain China may escalate at any time,” Xi warned in his address before the Communist Party congress.

“We must therefore be more mindful of potential dangers, be prepared to deal with worst-case scenarios, and be ready to withstand high winds, choppy waters

and even dangerous storms.”

Dali Yang, a political scientist at the University of Chicago who researches Chinese politics, said there are some potentially stabilising developments emerging in the relationship after months of rancour.

Two of China’s best-known diplomats in Washington were elevated at the Communist Party meeting. Foreign Minister Wang Yi was selected for the Communist Party’s Politburo, the policy-making body made up of the 24 most senior officials. China’s ambassador to the US, Qin Gang, is joining its central committee. Their elevation should bring a measure of continuity to the US-China relationship, Yang said.

Yang noted there has also been an effort on the part of the Communist Party leadership to “tone down its warm embrace of Russia.” Last month, after meeting with Xi on the sidelines of a summit in Uzbekistan, Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that Xi had expressed “concern and questions” about the war in Ukraine.

With his third term confirmed, “in some ways, Xi is now freer to act and less encumbered in terms of no longer having to always watch what his rivals are doing,” Yang said.

“I think that actually may affect his approach and may make him more comfortable in dealing with Biden.”

White House officials have played down hopes that Xi’s new five-year hold on the Communist Party could give him breathing room to more fully engage on matters where China has some overlapping interests with the US.

Biden, with a meeting with Defense Department officials on Wednesday, stressed that the US was “not seeking conflict” with China. Hours later, Chinese state television reported Xi told members of the national committee on US-China relations that Beijing should find ways to work with Washington on issues of mutual concern.

The conciliatory moment was short-lived. The following day, US and Chinese officials were trading rhetorical shots about the US move earlier this month to expand export controls on the sale of advanced semiconductor chips to China.

“The US has overstretched the national security concept and suppressed China’s development, and normal business cooperation has been politicised and weaponised,” Wang Hongxia, counselor at the

Chinese Embassy in Washington, told reporters.

Her comments came not long after a top Commerce Department official, Undersecretary Alan Estevez, said at a Washington forum that “if I was a betting person, I would put down money” on the US imposing additional export controls on China.

China’s economy is slowing, with Beijing reporting this month that growth for the first nine months of the year was 3 per cent, putting it on pace to fall well below its official full-year target of 5.5 per cent.

The country’s economy is also dragging from strict “zero” COVID rules, and Beijing is confronting a deceleration in exports and home prices that fell to a seven-year low in September.

It also faces increased competition from a US and European Union that are investing tens of billions of dollars to compete on semiconductors and other technologies. All of this points to the possibility that China might not eclipse US gross domestic product by 2030 as many economists have forecast.

Ruchir Sharma, chairman of Rockefeller International, recently concluded that with its likely growth trajectory China would exceed the US economy by 2060,

if it manages to do so at all.

At the same time, Secretary of State Antony Blinken as well as the US chief naval operations officer, Adm. Mike Gilday, have recently expressed concern that Beijing may try to step up its timeline to seize Taiwan.

Blinken said China had made “a fundamental decision that the status quo was no longer acceptable.”

China has largely refrained from criticising Russia’s war in Ukraine, but also has held off on supplying Moscow with arms.

Still, the conflict has raised concerns in Taiwan that China — which has never controlled the island — might be further emboldened to move on its long-stated plan for unification.

US-China tensions have been further enflamed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s August visit to Taiwan and Biden’s remark in May that the US military would defend Taiwan in case of an attack by China, comments the White House later played down.

“What’s concerning now is that with Xi’s unlimited power and ambition, he may use Taiwan to distract from his internal problems,” said Keith Krach, a former undersecretary of state during the Trump administration.

UK politicians seeks probe into Liz Truss phone hack claim

AP ■ LONDON

The British government insisted on Sunday it has robust cybersecurity for government officials, after a newspaper reported that former Prime Minister Liz Truss’ phone was hacked while she was UK foreign minister.

The Mail on Sunday said that the hack was discovered when Truss was running to become Conservative Party leader and prime minister in the summer.

It said the security breach was kept secret by then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the head of the civil service.

The newspaper, citing unnamed sources, said Russian spies were suspected of the hack. It said the hackers gained access to sensitive information, including discussions about the Ukraine war with foreign officials, as well as private conversations between Truss and a political ally, former Treasury chief Kwasi Kwarteng.



The UK government spokesperson declined to comment on security arrangements, but said it had “robust systems in place to protect against cyber threats,” including regular security briefings for ministers.

Opposition parties demanded an independent

investigation into the hack, and into the leak of the information to a newspaper.

“Was Liz Truss’ phone hacked by Russia, was there a news blackout and if so why?” said Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson Layla Moran.

“If it turns out this information was withheld from the public to protect Liz Truss’ leadership bid, that would be unforgivable.” Labour Party law-and-order spokesperson Yvette Cooper said “the story raises issues around cybersecurity.”

“It’s why cybersecurity has to be taken so seriously by everyone across government, the role of hostile states,” she told Sky News.

“But also the allegations about whether a Cabinet minister has been using a personal phone for serious government business, and serious questions about why this information or this story has been leaked or briefed right now.

Workers leave iPhone factory in Zhengzhou amid Covid curbs

AP ■ HONG KONG

Workers in a manufacturing facility in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou appear to have left to avoid COVID-19 curbs, with many travelling on foot for days after an unknown number of employees were quarantined in the facility after a virus outbreak.

Videos circulating on Chinese social media platforms showed people who are allegedly Foxconn workers climbing over fences and carrying their belongings down the road.

The Foxconn plant in Zhengzhou, Henan province, is one of the largest factories in China that assembles products for Apple Inc., including its latest iPhone 14 devices.

Not all the videos that showed workers purportedly leaving the facility could be verified.

It is unclear if the workers leaving the facility had escaped or if they were allowed to leave.

Foxconn did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Volunteers from nearby



villages put out food and drinks for the Foxconn workers. One such volunteer, who asked to be identified only by his surname Zhang out of privacy concerns, was put in charge of distributing supplies that his village in Xinyang county had prepared.

He said that the people shown in a video he uploaded to the short-video platform Douyin were Foxconn workers because they would have to take that road if they were leaving the facility.

The workers’ exodus comes after reports that Foxconn had placed a number of workers under quarantine following a COVID-19 outbreak in the factory. The Foxconn facility in Zhengzhou can accommodate up to 350,000 factory workers, but it is not clear how many are currently employed by the factory.

It is also unclear how many of them have left, or how many were affected by COVID-19 curbs implemented in the factory prior to their departure.

Earlier this week, media reports said that a “closed-loop” system had been implemented in the factory that largely restricts workers to movements between their residence and the plant.

Local media reports said that Foxconn workers complained of poor food quality and a lack of medical care for those who tested positive amid growing concerns that the infection could be spreading.

The company also denied rumours that 20,000 people in

the plant had been infected with COVID-19.

Cities near Zhengzhou have since urged Foxconn workers to report to local authorities if they have plans to return to their hometowns so they can undergo appropriate isolation measures.

According to posts on the Zhengzhou government’s public WeChat account, Foxconn issued notices on Sunday to workers at its factory, pledging to ensure the safety, legitimate rights and income for those willing to stay.

A day after videos circulated of workers leaving the factory, Foxconn and several local governments have also arranged transportation for employees who choose to return home.

It is not clear how much agency the workers had in deciding to leave the factory.

The departure of Foxconn workers from the Zhengzhou plant highlights the growing discontent in China’s “zero-COVID” strategy, where governments attempt to stamp out outbreaks by implementing strict isolation and lockdown measures where infections are detected.

Brazil’s polarising Bolsonaro-Lula contest goes to voters

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazilians began voting on Sunday morning in a polarising presidential runoff election that pits an incumbent vowing to safeguard conservative Christian values against a former president promising to return the country to a more prosperous past. The runoff shaped up as a close contest between President Jair Bolsonaro and his political nemesis, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Both are well-known, divisive political figures who stir passion as much as loathing.

The vote will determine if the world’s fourth-largest democracy stays the same course of far-right politics or returns a leftist to the top job — and, in the latter case, whether Bolsonaro will accept defeat. More than 120 million Brazilians are expected to cast ballots, and because the vote is conducted electronically, the final result is usually available within hours after voting stations close in late afternoon.

Most opinion polls gave a lead to da Silva, universally known as Lula, though political analysts agreed the race grew increasingly tight in recent weeks. For months, it appeared that da Silva was headed for easy victory as he kindled nostalgia for his 2003-2010 presidency, when Brazil’s economy was booming and welfare helped tens of millions join the middle class.

But in the October 2 first-



round elections, da Silva finished first among the 11 candidates with 48 per cent of the votes, while Bolsonaro was second at 43 per cent, showing opinion polls significantly underestimated the president’s popularity. Many Brazilians support Bolsonaro’s defence of conservative social values and he has shored up support with vast government spending.

Candidates in Brazil who finish ahead in the first round tend to win the runoff. But political scientist Rodrigo Prando said this campaign is so atypical that a Bolsonaro win could not be ruled out. The president secured endorsements from governors of the three most populous states, and allied politicians scored big wins in congressional races.

“Politically, Bolsonaro is stronger than had been imagined,” said Prando, a professor at Mackenzie Presbyterian University in Sao Paulo. “Mathematically, Lula is in front.”

Imran quashes rumours about abandoning long march

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s former prime minister Imran Khan has quashed “rumours” that he is abandoning the long march to hold talks with the government, saying no dialogue will be held until authorities announced a date for snap elections.

The long march dubbed as ‘Haqqeqi Azadi March’ began on Friday.

On its second day on Saturday, the marchers failed to reach their promised destination in Kamoke where Khan was scheduled to address his supporters.

The rumours of Khan abandoning the march spread after he returned to Lahore when the long march reached Kala Shah Kaku.



His Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party’s Secretary General Asad Mair said that their Khan left for Lahore to attend a “very important meeting”.

Khan took to Twitter to quash rumours that a high-level meeting was being held in Lahore between PTI and the government.

“For all those spreading rumours

about my meeting in Lahore, the reason we returned was because Lahore was closer and we had already decided not to move at night. The only demand I have had for six months is a date for early fair and free elections. That will be the only demand if talks are to be held,” Khan, the PTI chief, tweeted on Saturday.

PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry told Bol News channel that the movement of protesters was slow because “thousands of people” were walking alongside Khan’s container.

“No PTI leader is holding any talks with the government as this task has been entrusted to President Arif Alvi. We will cept the consensus or solution Dr Alvi finds out,” he said.

Israel’s Haredi voters drift hard right in leadership vacuum

AP ■ JERUSALEM

One of Israel’s most extremist politicians, known for his inflammatory anti-Arab speeches and stunts, is attracting new supporters from a previously untapped demographic — young ultra-Orthodox Jews, one of the fastest-growing segments of the country’s population.

Itamar Ben-Gvir’s sharp rise in popularity in the last three years has transformed him from a fringe provocateur to a central player in Tuesday’s parliament election.

Polls indicate his Religious Zionism party could emerge as the third-largest and help return former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to power.

His appeal is a reflection of the ongoing rightward shift of the Israeli electorate over the years, with Ben-Gvir and his

party also attracting voters who previously supported other right-wing parties.

This shift is particularly noticeable among Israel’s 1.3 million ultra-Orthodox Jews who make up 13 per cent of the population.

The community, known in Hebrew as Haredim, is growing at a breakneck rate, with an average birth rate more than twice the national average.

Children make up half of their population, and young adults between 18-35 another quarter. Ben-Gvir’s appeal among young Haredim reflects a shift in the political preferences of a community that cleaves to a strict adherence to religious tradition. For decades, the ultra-Orthodox largely voted for two Haredi political parties — United Torah Judaism and Shas.

Those parties promoted the



community’s interests in exchange for supporting coalition governments with a range of ideological flavours — though the Haredim had a preference for centre-right factions that tended to be more culturally conservative. But several prominent rabbis who served as spiritual leaders for these parties have died in recent years.

Analysts say younger and middle-aged Haredim are grow-

ing disillusioned with the old guard.

“The majority of relatively younger ultra-Orthodox — under the age of 50 — have turned right-wing, and some-times staunchly right-wing, something that in the past didn’t exist,” said Moshe Hellinger, a political scientist at Israel’s Bar Ilan University.

The Haredi political leadership lacks a strong, charismatic leader “and this vacuum allows (voters) to go in different directions,” Hellinger said. Into that void steps Ben-Gvir. Voting records from predominantly Haredi communities indicate that since Ben-Gvir entered politics in 2019, support for him in those areas has increased over Israel’s four successive elections — though he still lagged behind the established ultra-Orthodox parties.



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Ro.No.- 794 **Date Extension Notice-1** **Dated- 29.10.2022**

Due to unavoidable reasons, the dates of tender invited for "Supply/Installation and Rectification/Replacement of outstanding works of monitoring instruments and data acquisition system (DAS) at Dam site of Vyasi HEP in district Dehradun (Uttarakhand)" against e-Tender No. 01/EE(Civil-IV)/VP/TN/2022-23 are hereby extended as follows:-
1. Last date/time for submission of bid on the portal: 14-11-2022 upto 17.00 Hrs.
2. Last date & address for submission of original documents: 15-11-2022 upto 17.00 Hrs. in the office of the Executive Engineer (Civil-IV), Vyasi Project, Lakhwar Bhawan, Dakpathar, Dehradun
3. Date and time of opening of bid on website: 16-11-2022 at 12.00 Hrs.
All other terms and conditions of tender shall remain unchanged. Details of subsequent addendum/corrigendum/cancellation etc. may be obtained from the website. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal "<http://uktenders.gov.in>"
Executive Engineer (Civil-IV)
Vyasi Project Dakpathar, Dehradun

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

LICENSE NO. 04 of 2021
DATED 02.03.2021

HARERA REG. NO. 36 of 2021
DATED 16.07.2021

DRAW OF FLATS

General public is hereby informed that e-Draw of flats, under Haryana Affordable Housing Policy 2013 amended from time to time, of the project "Landmark The Homes 81" Sector 81, Gurugram (Project ID - 113), being developed by SRV Automotives Private Limited, shall be conducted on 02/11/2022 at 04:00 PM at Club Florence, Block E, Sushant Lok-II, Sector 56, Gurugram, Haryana -122003.
We have received 22 applications against 74 numbers of units available for draw.
As per MHA guidelines, draw shall be conducted with the maximum strength of 50 persons including draw committee and the staff at site, remaining applicants shall participate in the draw online through below provided link of Youtube live.

YouTube Live link: https://youtu.be/LT_CVA37RWs

M/s SRV Automotives Private Limited, CIN: U70100DL2005PTC134174
Corp. Office: Landmark House, Plot No. 65, Sector 44, Gurgaon, Haryana - 122003 | Please Contact - 0124-4850000

RBI to submit report on its failure to control inflation

PTI ■ MUMBAI

For the first time since the implementation of the monetary policy framework in 2016, the Reserve Bank will submit a report to the Government on its failure to keep the retail inflation rate below six per cent for three consecutive quarters beginning January 2022.

The monetary policy framework, which came into effect about six years ago, mandates the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to maintain retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

In case of failure to maintain the inflation target for three consecutive quarters, the central bank, under section 45ZN of the RBI Act, is required to submit a report to the government explaining the reasons and spelling out the remedial actions it would be taking to check the price rise.

The central bank has called a special meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on November 3, to prepare its report on missing inflation targets to the government. The six-member rate-setting panel is headed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das.

“Under the provisions of Section 45ZN of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act... An additional meeting of the MPC is being scheduled on November 3, 2022,” the central



bank said in a statement on Thursday.

Section 45ZN of the Act deals with failure to maintain the inflation target.

Governor Das had earlier said the central bank will not make the report public. It is not clear if the government too would like to keep the report confidential or make it public for wider discussions and deliberations, he had said.

To tackle price rise, the government in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for a five-year period ending March 31, 2021.

Section 45-ZA of the RBI Act, 1934 requires that the central government shall, in

consultation with the RBI, determine the inflation target in terms of Consumer Price Index (CPI), once in every five years.

As per a notification issued on March 31, 2021, the central government retained the inflation target at 4 per cent (with the upper tolerance level of 6 per cent and the lower tolerance level of 2 per cent) for the 5-year period April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2026.

The MPC held its first meeting in October 2016 and the last meeting, held during September 28-30, 2022, was the 38th meeting of the rate-setting panel.

The retail inflation based on CPI has remained above 6 per cent since January 2022.

Bima Sugam to be a game changer: IRDAI Chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance regulator IRDAI is working on Bima Sugam, which will act as a game changer in the insurance sector by providing a one-stop platform for multiple services including the sale of policy, renewal, and settlement of claims.

This tech-led portal will help in expanding insurance penetration in the country by ensuring a hassle-free experience for customers across the country.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) chairman Debasish Panda in an interview with PTI said Bima Sugam should be a UPI moment for the insurance industry.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has revolutionised digital payment in the country as common people have started using it for making even small payments. The success of UPI in a short span of time has caught global attention and many countries are trying to replicate it. Launched in 2016, Payment through UPI has crossed a milestone of Rs 11 lakh crore in September this year.

“Bima Sugam will be a one-stop shop for buying and selling insurance, for policy servicing, and also for claim settlement. Insurance companies can onboard the platform. It’s going to be plug and play with



API (Application programming interface) interface,” Panda said.

He further said all the insurance intermediaries including individual agents, web aggregators will have access to this portal.

And as far as the policyholder is concerned, he said, he or she will be able to buy the product through assisted mode, or directly. “So maybe many people may prefer the assisted mode and can take the help of one of the intermediaries,” he added. This platform will provide the policyholder and prospective customer various options for a product, company of their choice and method of payment.

“So it’s like a shopping

mall. So you go and shop there. And as far as the KYC is concerned, the moment you enter the portal, type your Aadhaar number, the data will auto populate. The KYC will be done through your Aadhaar number which will be masked for security reasons,” he said.

Underwriting of policy would be done through a few easy steps and in a couple of minutes through the portal, he said.

To ensure easy liability servicing, he said, “we are trying to mandate that all the policies should go to insurance repositories who will store details on a permanent basis. It will help in settlement of claims in a paperless manner on the basis of policy number.”

Adani group to invest \$150 billion in pursuit of \$1 trillion valuation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Richest Asian Gautam Adani’s group will invest over USD 150 billion across businesses ranging from green energy to data centres to airports and healthcare as it chases the dream to join the elite global club of companies with USD 1 trillion valuations.

On October 10, Adani Group Chief Financial Officer Jugeshinder ‘Robbie’ Singh detailed the growth plans of the group, which started off as a trader in 1988 and expanded rapidly into ports, airports, roads, power, renewable energy, power transmission, gas distribution and FMCG and more recently into data centres, airports, petrochemicals, cement and media, at an investor meet organised by Ventura Securities Ltd in New Delhi.

The group plans to invest USD 50-70 billion in green hydrogen business and another USD 23 billion in green energy over the next 5-10 years, he said. It will invest USD 7 billion in electricity transmission, USD 12 billion in transport utility and USD 5 billion in the road sector.

Its foray into data centre business with cloud services would entail an investment of USD 6.5 billion in partnership with Edge ConneX and another



USD 9-10 billion is planned for airports, where it is already the largest private operator. Its foray into the cement sector with the acquisition of ACC and Ambuja cement entailed USD 10 billion investment.

It is foraying into the petrochemical business with plans to set up a 1 million tonnes per annum PVC manufacturing facility at an investment of USD 2 billion and would enter the copper sector with a 0.5 million tonnes a year smelter at an investment of USD 1 billion, he said.

The healthcare sector foray that will include insurance, hospitals and diagnostic and pharma would see an investment of USD 7-10 billion, with some coming from Adani Foundation.

Road transport & highways sector has max number of delayed projects: Govt report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The road transport and highways sector has the maximum number of delayed projects at 262, followed by railways at 115 and the petroleum sector at 89, showed a government report.

In the road transport and highways sector, 262 out of 835 projects are delayed.

In railways, out of 173 projects, 115 are delayed, while for petroleum, 89 out of 140 projects are delayed, as per the latest flash report on infrastructure projects for September 2022.

The Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division (IPMD) is mandated to monitor central sector infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore and above based on the information provided on the Online Computerised Monitoring System (OCMS) by the project implementing agencies.

The IPMD comes under the Ministry of Statistics and

Programme Implementation.

The report showed that the Muneerabad-Mahaboobnagar rail project is the most-delayed project. It is delayed by 276 months.

The second-most delayed project is the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail project which is delayed by 247 months. The third-most delayed project is Belapur-Seawood-Urban Electrified Double Line, which is delayed by 228 months.

About the road transport and highways sector, the report stated that the total original cost of implementation of 835 projects when sanctioned, was ₹4,94,300.45 crore.

This was subsequently anticipated at ₹5,26,481.88 crore, implying a cost overrun of 6.5 per cent.

The expenditure incurred on these projects till September 2022 is ₹3,21,980.33 crore, which is 61.2 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

Exports necessary for steel players expanding their capacities: AMNS India CEO

PTI ■ HAZIRA

To maintain high capacity utilisation, exports are necessary for local steel players expanding their capacities, as demand is not directly proportional to production, according to a top industry executive.

“Since expansion happens... There will be a certain stage where you necessarily will have to export, if we have to be on high capacity utilisation,” Dilip Oommen, CEO of ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel (AMNS) India told PTI.

His comments assume significance as steel players are looking up to the government for relief in the form of roll back of the duties levied on steel exports.

On May 21, the government hiked the duty on exports of iron ore by up to 50 per cent and for a few steel intermediaries to 15 per cent.



In line with the government’s 300 MT steel making capacity target, other steel players like Tata Steel, JSW Steel, SAIL and JSPL are also expanding their capacities to meet the goal.

AMNS India on Friday commenced a ₹60,000-crore expansion project to scale up its Hazira plant capacity to 15 million tonne (MT) from 9 MT at present.

The project will add another 6 MT capacity and suddenly one can not increase its market share proportionally, the CEO said.

‘Key management personnel of Indian auto firms have poor understanding of compliance obligations’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Key management personnel in Indian automobile companies have a poor understanding of compliance obligations that can range from several hundred acts to thousands of rules depending on the size of the business, according to a report by TeamLease Regtech.

A small automobile manufacturing company operating in a single state in India deals with at least 900 one-time and ongoing compliances in a year. As the company grows its geographical footprint, the number of compliances multiply.

In its report ‘Simplifying compliance management for automobile industry’, TeamLease RegTech, a regulatory technology solutions firm, said with applicability of compliances changing based on location of manufacturing units, use of specific equipment and end-products, most organisations in India find it really

challenging to track adherence to the mandatory requirements.

“...It was discovered that the KMPs (key management personnel) in Indian automobile companies have a poor understanding of compliance obligations in over 80 per cent of the instances,” the report said, citing a survey conducted by TeamLease Regtech.

As a result, it said, “They are often unpleasantly surprised in the events of show cause notices, instances of financial fines and penalties, cancelled licenses, revoked permissions and leaked revenue.”

Most executives were found to have very poor handle on the status of key compliances, dates, documentation and residual risk of non-compliance, the report said.

The survey, conducted between April and May 2022, found that 95 per cent agreed to have missed at least one critical compliance during the 12-month period and 92 per cent agreed to pay fines and penal-



ties during the same period.

Another 97 per cent believed that they do not have the required visibility and control in their organisations’ compliance program. The survey had interviewed management people across 34 automobile companies.

The report further said 78 per cent agreed that their compliance needs a serious rethink, while 52 per cent believed that keeping track of regulatory updates is challenging.

According to the report, compliances in India are broadly divided into one-time and ongoing compliances.

“On an average, an automotive company is easily sub-

ject to around 80 odd one-time registrations and approvals across four stages: setting up; pre-commissioning stage; post-commissioning stage and post-production stage.”

These approvals range from incorporation of the entity, to land allotment, project related approvals, construction-related approvals, approvals related to labour, safety and health, tax-related registrations, industry-specific approvals, among others.

In addition to one-time registrations and approvals, automobile companies are frequently saddled with a host of compliances split across the central, state and local/municipal levels, the report said.

“For example, labour laws fall in the concurrent list where both the Union and state are entitled to legislate. This means that at any given point a company would have to ensure compliance with a parent legislation drafted by the Centre and accompanying state legislation and rules,” it said.

UBL plans ₹350 cr capex in 2023 to meet expected volume growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Beer maker United Breweries Ltd, controlled by Dutch multinational brewing company Heineken, plans to infuse around ₹350 crore as capital expenditure in 2023 to meet the expected volume growth in the country, according to a top company official.

The company has “good capex plans” in place for its breweries to meet anticipated volume growth going into 2023, said its Chief Financial Officer Radovan Sikorsky in its latest earnings conference call.

“We remain optimistic on the long-term growth of the industry,” he said adding the evolving consumer trends will



drive premiumisation.

When asked about the Capex plan, the CFO replied: “For the coming January to December the capex spend we are looking at somewhere in the region of ₹350 crore.”

Moreover, the leading beer maker expects inflationary pressure to continue and it would pursue price increases, in combination with cost measures to mitigate these cost

impacts.

“Inflation pressure on the cost of goods sold will most likely continue in the foreseeable future and hence we will continue to pursue with further price increases to strengthen our earning, in combination with cost measures to mitigate these cost impacts,” he said.

However, he also said there seems to be some softening on some of these components, but going forward it is still too early to comment on that.

“... I still think that pressures on margins will remain and it is a little dependent on our ability to increase prices and also manage our cost to try and mitigate any of that,” Sikorsky added.

Will first bring down delinquency in corporate loans before restarting finance: PNB Housing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Going ahead with its stated objective to downsize its corporate loan exposure, city-based PNB Housing Finance wants to bring down the delinquency levels before it starts financing the sector again, its MD and CEO Girish Kousgi said.

The housing finance company, promoted by state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB), has been bringing down its corporate loan exposure over the last few years and has adopted a retail-first strategy to fuel growth.

In the second quarter ended September 2022, the company’s corporate loan book share reduced to 10 per cent with an exposure of ₹5,708



crore. The retail segment loan book stood at ₹52,124 crore, constituting 90 per cent of its overall loan book.

The company’s gross non-performing assets (GNPA) at the end of Q2 FY23 stood at 6.06 per cent. While the retail sector GNPA was at 3.39 per cent, that of the corporate

book stood at 30.37 per cent.

“It is not about bringing down the percentage but to bring down the delinquency in corporate loans. Today the corporate loan book is over ₹5,700 crore, it is less than 10 per cent of the portfolio.

“As of now the focus would be on the retail segment and may be in the next few quarters, once we bring down the delinquency in the corporate book, then we will restart (financing the sector),” Kousgi told PTI in a post-earnings interview.

Kousgi, who took charge as the head of the Delhi-based housing finance company (HFC) last week, said as of now the focus would be on retail loans, with affordable housing as one of the key contributors.

Nine of top 10 firms add ₹90,319 cr in market valuation



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nine of the 10 most valued domestic firms together added ₹90,318.74 crore in market valuation last week amid a positive trend in equities, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest winner.

Last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 652.7 points or 1.10 per cent.

Markets had a special one-hour Muhurat trading session on Monday to mark the beginning of Hindu Samvat year 2079. Stock markets were closed on Wednesday for ‘Diwali Balipratipada’.

Barring Hindustan Unilever, rest nine companies witnessed addition in their market valuation, including

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Infosys and State Bank of India (SBI).

The market valuation of Reliance Industries rallied ₹36,566.82 crore to reach ₹17,08,932.42 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank advanced ₹11,195.61 crore to ₹8,12,378.52 crore.

Bharti Airtel’s market valuation jumped ₹10,792.67 crore to ₹4,54,404.76 crore and that of SBI climbed ₹8,879.98 crore to ₹5,09,372.01 crore. TCS added ₹8,617.06 crore, taking its valuation to ₹11,57,339.65 crore.

The mcap of HDFC surged ₹8,214.27 crore to ₹4,36,240.27 crore and that of Infosys zoomed ₹5,259.92 crore to ₹6,36,476.13 crore.

India, GCC group likely to start free trade pact talks next month

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

member countries are expected to start negotiations for a free trade agreement next month with an aim to boost economic ties between the two regions, an official said.

GCC is a union of six countries in the Gulf region -- Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain.

“Terms of reference for the agreement are being finalised and we expect to launch the negotiations next month,” the official said.

India has already implemented a free trade pact with the UAE in May this year.

According to experts, the GCC region holds huge trade potential and a trade agreement would help in further boosting India’s exports to that market.

Rakesh Mohan Joshi, Director, Indian Institute of Plantation Management, Bangalore, said the GCC market is unexploited by domestic exporters and it holds huge potential. “GCC is a major import dependent region. We can increase our exports of food items, clothing and several other goods. Duty concessions

under a trade agreement will help in tapping that market. It will be a win-win situation for both sides,” Joshi said.

Mumbai-based exporter and founder chairman of Techno-craft Industries India, Sharad Kumar Saraf said the GCC has emerged as a major trading partner for India and there is huge potential for increasing investments between the two regions.

“FTA will have a major benefit for both the sides,” Saraf said. Sharing similar views, Federation of Indian Exports Organisation (FIEO) Vice Chairman Khalid Khan

said sectors like chemicals, textiles, gems and jewellery and leather will get a major impetus by this agreement.

India imports predominantly crude oil and natural gas from the Gulf nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and exports pearls, precious and semi-precious stones; metals; imitation jewellery; electrical machinery; iron and steel; and chemicals to these countries.

India’s exports to the GCC increased by 58.26 per cent to about USD 44 billion in 2021-22 against USD 27.8 billion in 2020-21, according to data of the commerce ministry.



Messi helps PSG fight back to beat Troyes

AP ■ PARIS

Lionel Messi starred with a goal and an assist as all of Paris Saint-Germain's front three scored in a 4-3 victory over Troyes on Saturday which restored their five-point advantage at the top of Ligue 1.

The league leaders responded to second-placed Lens' win over Toulouse on Friday by twice coming from behind to see off a spirited Troyes at the Parc des Princes.

The attacking trio of Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe have scored 43 goals between them already this season.

PSG coach Christophe Galtier can now turn his attention to Wednesday's match at Juventus, which the French club have to win to be sure of finishing top of their Champions League group.

In Paris, Troyes forged ahead with a shock opening goal inside three minutes, as Rony Lopes stabbed the ball back for Mama Balde to lash a fine volley into the net past PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

The hosts hit back midway through the first half, as Neymar's clipped pass found the run of Carlos Soler and the midfielder slotted in to level.

The reigning champions then started to dominate, with Troyes' keeper Gauthier Gallon forced into a good save to keep out a Messi header.

But the visitors stunned the home crowd again early in the second period, with Guinea-Bissau forward Balde netting his second with a low

strike on the turn.

Any thoughts of PSG suffering their first defeat of the season were quickly put to bed in the space of seven Messi-inspired minutes.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner hammered home his 12th goal of the campaign with a wonderful strike from 25 yards out which arrowed into the corner.

PSG took the lead for the first time in the game just after the hour mark, as Messi threaded a perfect pass through the Troyes defence for Neymar to fire past Gallon.

Mbappe should have made it a two-goal advantage, but he shot too close to Gallon after Neymar followed a mazy run through midfield with a remarkable flicked pass.

The France striker did get himself on the scoresheet with 14 minutes left, drilling a penalty high into the net.

Ante Palaversa pulled one back for the away team late on, but PSG held on.

Galtier though warned his team could not show the same sloppiness on Wednesday.

"The team thought much more about attacking, but it can't be like that. There is a balance to respect," he said.

"We have a lot of things to correct. If you concede three goals in the Champions League, you have little chance of winning."

Another team with the Champions League on their mind, Marseille, threw away a two-goal lead at Strasbourg as they allowed the home side to force a point with a thrilling comeback.

ARSENAL BACK ON TOP

AP ■ LONDON

Reiss Nelson was the unlikely hero as Arsenal retook top spot in the Premier League with a 5-0 thrashing of Nottingham Forest on Sunday.

Nelson was introduced for the first time in the Premier League this season after Bukayo Saka was forced off with a concerning injury for England boss Gareth Southgate just weeks ahead of the World Cup.

Saka set up the opening goal for Gabriel Martinelli after just five minutes before being replaced due to an ankle injury.

Nelson struck his first Premier League goal since July 2020 early in the second half to give Arsenal breathing space.

He added a second just three minutes later and then teed up Thomas Partey to curl into the top corner.

Martin Odegaard rounded off a performance that shrugged off doubts over Arsenal's ability to contend for the title by firing high past Dean Henderson 13 minutes from time.

Victory lifts Mikel Arteta's men a point above Manchester City at the top of the table.

The Arsenal players came together to show support to teammate Pablo Mari before kick-off.

Mari, who is on loan at Monza, was stabbed during a knife attack in an Italian supermarket this week that left one person dead.

That incident put Arsenal's bad week on the field into perspective after a 1-1 draw at Southampton last weekend was followed by a 2-0 defeat to PSV Eindhoven in the Europa League.

Any fears that the Gunners were beginning to feel the fatigue of a packed schedule were blown away in a blistering opening.

Martinelli ducked to meet Saka's



inviting cross with his head to open the floodgates.

The Brazilian saw another effort cleared off the line, while Gabriel Jesus, Takehiro Tomiyasu and Odegaard also had chances.

But Saka's departure is a major worry for Arteta ahead of Arsenal's trip to Chelsea next weekend.

Forest had begun to find some form on their return to the top flight for the first time in 23 years in recent weeks, including a famous 1-0 win over Liverpool last weekend.

But only towards the end of the first half did they ever threaten to cause the hosts problems as Tomiyasu threw himself in front of Jesse Lingard's effort.

Leeds beat Liverpool at Anfield

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool were beaten at home in the Premier League in front of a crowd for the first time in over five years as Crysencio Summerville's 89th minute goal gave Leeds a 2-1 win at Anfield.

The visitors began the night second bottom of the table but climbed out of the relegation zone thanks to their first win in nine games.

Liverpool gifted Rodrigo an early opener before Mohamed Salah levelled for the Reds.

Jurgen Klopp's men had not tasted a league defeat in front of their own supporters since losing to Crystal Palace in April 2017, although they did lose six in a row during the 2020/21 season when crowds were banished due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But that proud record came to a shocking end when Summerville wriggled free inside the area and fired into the far corner.

A fourth defeat in their opening 12 league games of the season leaves Liverpool 13 points off the top of the

table and eight adrift of even the top four.

Leeds boss Jesse Marsch had been fighting to save his job after previously failing to win since August.

However, the American could not have wished for a more generous gift from the hosts than for the opener after just four minutes.

Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker stumbled as he tried to reach Joe Gomez's backpass, allowing Rodrigo an easy finish into the unguarded net for the Spaniard's sixth goal of the season.



Lewandowski snatches Barcelona's win

AP ■ VALENCIA

Barcelona, bruised after Champions League elimination in midweek, snatched a late 1-0 victory at Valencia on Saturday in La Liga, with Robert Lewandowski stretching to convert a 93rd minute winner.

The Polish forward managed to divert Raphinha's cross home at the death to pull Barcelona level on 31 points with Real Madrid at the top of the table, before the champions host Girona on Sunday.

It was a hard-fought win -- the Catalans lost centre-backs Jules Kounde and Eric Garcia to injury, and they will be worries for their national teams, France and Spain respectively, ahead of the Qatar World Cup which starts in under three weeks.

Valencia saw Uruguayan Edinson Cavani go off injured with an ankle problem too, with the game billed as a shoot-out between him and fellow veteran marksman Lewandowski, who came out on top with his late goal.

Gennaro Gattuso said he and Barcelona counterpart Xavi Hernandez played almost different sports in their playing days, but their teams were evenly matched at a feisty Mestalla.

The visitors had the upper hand from the start, although Valencia's tricky forward line caused them concern at the back, with Samuel Lino and Justin Kluivert particularly hard to handle.

Valencia thought they had broken the deadlock early in the second half when Lino slid

IN THIS HARD FOUGHT WIN THE CATALANS LOST CENTRE-BACKS JULES KOUNDE AND ERIC GARCIA TO INJURY

isher Lewandowski spared his blushes with a goal when Barcelona needed it most.

Earlier Ruben Sobrino bundled home a dramatic last gasp winner to earn Cadiz a remarkable 3-2 win over Atletico Madrid, piling the misery on the visitors in a harrowing week for Diego Simeone's team.

It looked like Joao Felix had salvaged the Rojiblancos a point from two goals down, with a stunning impact off the bench, forcing an own goal and scoring another effort himself, stemming the bleeding after their Champions League elimination on Wednesday.

Jorge Sampaoli's Sevilla, 17th, fell to a disappointing 1-0 defeat at home against Rayo Vallecano, while Almeria beat Celta Vigo 3-1.

Flamengo win Copa Libertadores

AP ■ GUAYAQUIL

Flamengo won the all-Brazilian Copa Libertadores final on Saturday with a 1-0 victory over Athletico Paranaense in the Estadio Monumental.

Gabriel Barbosa grabbed the decisive goal on the stroke of halftime, slotting home a fine cross from Everton Ribeiro at the back post.

The goal came just minutes after Athletico central defender Pedro Henrique was sent off after picking up a second yellow card for a late challenge on Ayrton Lucas.

Down to ten men for the remainder of the game, Athletico, coached by veteran former Brazil national team coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, struggled to create enough



chances to mount a comeback.

The victory earns Rio club Flamengo their third Libertadores title following their successes in 1981 and 2019 and is the fourth straight year that a Brazilian team has been crowned champions of

South American club football.

For the 73 year old Scolari, who is expected to retire from coaching at the end of the Brazilian domestic season in November, there was to be no fairytale end to his 40 year coaching career.

Verstappen takes Mexico GP pole position

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Two-time world champion Max Verstappen gave Red Bull reason to smile again on Saturday when he secured pole position for Sunday's Mexico City Grand Prix with an authoritative late qualifying lap.

After 24 hours of arguments and derision following the announcement of Red Bull's penalty for breaching Formula One's \$145 million cost cap last year, it was a sweet return to success with his sixth pole this year and the 17th of his career.

The 25-year-old Dutchman clocked a best lap of 1min 17.775sec to finish 0.304 seconds ahead of George Russell and his Mercedes' team-mate, seven-time champion Lewis



Hamilton.

Verstappen took control on his first run in Q3 and then trimmed his time to resist the

threat from the much-improved Mercedes team. He will be hunting a record 14th win in a single season on

Sunday.

"That was a good qualifying," the Dutchman said. "It was a close one, but we made a few adjustments to the car and got into a better rhythm so to be on pole here is, of course, amazing."

"It's a very long run down to Turn One here, so we need a good start, but I think we have a quick car and that's what is most important. The passion of the fans here is really incredible and, in the stadium, it is just amazing to drive there."

His Red Bull team-mate and local hero Sergio Perez was fourth ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and a resurgent Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo.

Verstappen said he was sure Perez "will be there in the fight tomorrow".

Charles Leclerc, who

crashed heavily on Friday, was seventh in the second Ferrari ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris and the Alpines of two-time champion Fernando Alonso and Esteban Ocon.

Russell was disappointed. "Sorry, sorry, sorry," he said on his team radio, after running wide on his final lap. "The team deserved more today. They've produced a really great car this weekend and it felt like our pole to have and I did a terrible lap at the end."

Hamilton, who had harboured hopes of doing better, was philosophical.

"This is the best qualifying we've had all year. It just shows that perseverance and never giving up can pay off. I'm quite happy with that position -- it's a long way to Turn One."

No.1 Swiatek looks to cap big year with WTA Finals crown

AP ■ FORT WORTH

Reigning US Open champion Iga Swiatek of Poland seeks her ninth WTA title of the year and her 12th career crown when the season-ending WTA Finals begin Monday.

The \$5 million indoor hardcourt event will feature the world's eight top-ranked women's singles players and doubles teams with group-stage matches through Saturday setting up semi-finals on November 6 with the title matches on November 7.

An unbeaten run to the singles crown is worth \$1.68 million, but after making her Finals debut last year, top-ranked Swiatek knows it's a unique challenge compared to the usual WTA tournaments.

"It's just going to be a chal-



lenge to play against the top players day-by-day, not have time to have these easier first two rounds," Swiatek said. "So

I'm curious if I'll be able to play my top tennis from A to Z."

Swiatek, the only reigning Grand Slam champion in the

field, has won eight titles this year, two at Grand Slams plus Qatar, Indian Wells, Miami, Stuttgart, Rome and at San

Diego only two weeks ago.

Her three highest-ranked rivals at Fort Worth -- second-ranked Ons Jabeur of Tunisia, third-ranked Jessica Pegula and fourth-ranked US 18-year-old Coco Gauff -- are all making their WTA Finals debut.

"It's a totally different experience, so having qualified before will help a lot," Swiatek said. "I'm curious how physically I will be able to play this tournament after such a long season."

"It will be a test for me. Last year, mentally and physically I felt I didn't have much power. This year we did some things differently to have the energy at the end, so I'm curious to see if it actually worked."

It's also the second WTA Finals singles appearance for Greece's fifth-ranked Maria

Sakkari, France's sixth-ranked Caroline Garcia and seventh-ranked Aryna Sabalenka while eighth-ranked Daria Kasatkina is making her debut.

Gauff is the youngest player in the singles field while Garcia, at 29, is the oldest.

Pegula and Gauff are doing double duty as a doubles pairing and contenders for the singles crown.

Sabalenka, from Belarus, and Kasatkina, from Russia, are not allowed to compete for their homelands due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Czech defending doubles champions Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova, who won three Grand Slam titles this year, return as top seeds, but 2021 singles champion Garbine Muguruza of Spain did not qualify in this year's season points race.

Ledecky sets 1,500 free short course WR in Toronto

AP ■ MONTREAL

American Katie Ledecky set a world short-course record in the 1,500-meter freestyle on Saturday at a FINA World Cup meet in Toronto.

Ledecky, in her first event of the season, won the final in 15mins 8.24secs to break the old mark of 15:18:01 set by Germany's Sarah Wellbrock in 2019 at Berlin.

Brazil's Beatriz Dizotti was second in 15:48.82 with Canada's Laila Oravsky third in 16:16.86.

Ledecky set the long-course world record in the 1,500 free of 15:20.48 in 2018 at Indianapolis.

On Saturday, Ledecky also finished second in the 200 free to Hong Kong's Siobhan Bernadette Haughey, who won



in 1:51.13 with the 25-year-old US star next in 1:52.31.

Ledecky has won seven gold medals at the Olympics and taken 19 world titles in her career, the most for any female swimmer in history.

SURYA SHINES BRIGHT BUT SA 'OUT-BOUNCE' INDIA

PTI ■ PERTH

Suryakumar Yadav played the best knock of his short international career but South Africa exposed India's inadequacies against extreme pace and bounce to win a low-scoring thriller by five wickets in the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

While Surya's 68 off 40 balls will easily qualify as one of the most accomplished knocks in adverse conditions, India's defence of a below-par total of 133 for 9 was always going to be a challenge.

Arshdeep Singh, the lion-hearted left-arm, did bowl another dream first spell but Aiden Markram (52 off 41 balls) and David Miller (59 not out off 46 balls), one of the best T20 finishers in the game, ensured the target was achieved in 19.4 overs.

While South Africa (5 points 3 games) are now on top of group 2, India (4 points from 2 games) with upcoming matches against Bangladesh (Nov 2 in Adelaide) and Zimbabwe (Nov 6 in Melbourne) are well within striking distance of a semi-final berth.

The team that may pay the price for India's defeat is Pakistan, who now have an uphill task at hand.

India made a match of it on tournament's spiciest track in cold conditions but Virat Kohli's costly miss of Markram at deep mid-wicket off Ravichandran Ashwin's bowling along besides some close run-out chances cost India dearly.

But certainly not more than inept show from top-order save Surya, who was once again the saving grace and shining light.

Eerily, former India head coach Ravi Shastri, while watching the



match with scribes in the press box commented that 14th over being bowled by Ashwin will be make-or-break. Markram and Miller hit a six each and 17 came off that over which sealed India's fate.

Ashwin (1/43 in 4 overs) lost his confidence after the dropped catch and it showed in subsequent overs as Miller devoured on his length deliveries.

But if there was one silver lining from the game, it had to be

Surya, whose little gem in terms of pure impact would have been on par with Virat Kohli's brilliance at the MCG.

Perhaps the world's most decorated T20I batter in recent times, Surya's pulled six and a bowler's back-drive boundary off Lungi Ngidi to complete his half-century will be remembered for times to come.

His knock will be in ICC's T20 'Hall Of Fame' and how he looked

like batter from another planet was evident with the second best score being 15.

Those were the only boundaries scored off Ngidi, who enjoyed a wonderful evening with figures of 4 for 29 that laid bare the frailties of the Indian top-order when there is pace off the track and the ball starts rearing up from back of length.

On a track where good technique and steely temperament was

We were not good enough: Rohit

PTI ■ PERTH

Conditions in Perth were very difficult for batting but India captain Rohit Sharma said that cannot be an excuse for the team's five-wicket loss to South Africa in the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

"We expected the pitch to have something in it, with the weather around. We knew there will be help for the seamers. Which is why you saw that 130 was not an easy chase. I thought we fought well till the end but South Africa played well in the end," Rohit said at the presentation ceremony.

"The pitch is such that the wicket can come any time for the seamers. It was a match-winning partnership from Miller and Markram. But we were not good

enough on the field. We have played in such conditions so conditions are not an excuse. We want to be consistent in that department."

On the day, India's fielding also left a lot to be desired with even the normally safe Virat Kohli spilling a fairly simple chance in the boundary off Ravichandran Ashwin's bowling. Markram was the batter on that occasion.

"We could not hold on to our chances, we missed a few run-outs including myself. We were a little poor on the field, we gave so many chances in the field and we weren't clinical. We were just not good enough."

"The last two games, we were pretty good in the field. We need to keep our heads high and take a

learning from this game."

In the 14th over being bowled by Ashwin, Markram and Miller hit a six each and 17 came off that over, which sealed the game's fate. Ashwin (1/43 in 4 overs) lost his confidence after the dropped catch and it showed in the subsequent overs.

Man of the Match Lungi Ngidi, who ended with excellent figures of 4/29, said he will cherish his performance for a long time.

"It was pretty nerve wrecking when games get down that close, as a bowler you can't do much and just have to believe in the boys. This is one of my biggest dreams, to get something like this (award) at the World Cup and help the country win a game, will cherish it for a long time," Ngidi said.

needed, Surya added another component to it – swagger.

At 49 for 5, India looked deep down the barrel as some of the top-order players were failing to get their bats down in time as the ball reached the keeper's gloves.

In a stand of 52, he shielded veteran Dinesh Karthik (6 off 15 balls), who is not exactly known for sound technique on bowler friendly tracks.

On a bouncy track, the key element is to shuffle and come inside the line of deliveries and ride the bounce. The Mumbaikar exactly did that time and again on Sunday night.

He didn't try to counter the

pace but used it to play behind the square mostly. When the lone spinner Keshav Maharaj came into operation, he used the extra bounce to first play the late cut and then a lap sweep over deep fine leg for a maximum.

Rohit Sharma's (15) decision to bat first on a spicy deck looked brave and while all eyes were on Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje, it was reserve pacer Ngidi who did bulk of the damage.

But it all started when an out-of-form KL Rahul (9 off 14 balls) played a maiden over off Wayne Parnell's bowling. The windy and cold conditions helped Parnell to pitch it full and get enough devia-

tions to beat Rahul's bat multiple times.

That increased the pressure on skipper Rohit, who first tried to relieve pressure with a hooked six and flicked boundary off Rabada but Ngidi bowled the 'heavy ball' that was pitched back of length and climbed on him.

His lean run continued as Test match length, shade away movement and extra bounce outside the off-stump became his undoing.

Virat Kohli (12) had first low score in the tournament.

It was Surya who saved India from blushes with a knock that had six fours and three sixes but couldn't save the night.



Pakistan keep semi-final hopes alive

PTI ■ PERTH

Pakistan were once again scrappy with the bat but managed to eke out a six-wicket victory over the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup here on Sunday to keep their slim semifinal hopes alive.

The Dutchmen found Pakistan's world class pace attack too hot to handle on a bowlers' friendly Optus Stadium track, managing only 91 for 9 in their 20 overs.

One of the batters, Bas de Leede (6) retired hurt after being hit below the eye by a snorter from Haris Rauf.

The target of 92 was never going to be an issue for Pakistan but even then it took them 13.5 overs to complete the chase with ICC's No. 1 ranked T20 batter Mohammed Rizwan managing 49 off 39 balls at an unimpressive strike-rate of 125.64.

With Bangladesh also getting the better of Zimbabwe in a thriller, Pakistan's chances of remaining alive in the tournament increased.

The full credit for this win will go to the bowlers,

WE COULD CHASE BETTER THAN THIS, SAYS BABAR

PTI ■ PERTH

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was a relieved man after finally getting a win in the T20 World Cup but said the batters could have done better while chasing a small total against the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

Pakistan bowlers set the tone by dismissing Netherlands for a lowly 91 for 9 but their batting was not as clinical as they lost four wickets to achieve the target in 13.5 overs.

"I am very happy. Team

did well with the ball and bat. I think the length was crucial. They needed to bowl on a good length because there was bounce on the surface. Everyone executed well," Azam said during the post-match presentation.

"In my opinion we could chase better than this. But win always gives you confidence. We are taking the good things forward to the next game."

Despite being blown away by the Pakistan bowlers, Netherlands skipper Scott Edwards justified his decision to bat first.

who hardly put a foot wrong on the day as Shaheen Shah Afridi (1/19 in 4 overs) and Naseem Shah (1/11 in 4 overs) choked the run flow in the Powerplay and the Dutch could never break the shackles.

Mohammed Wasim (2/15 in 3 overs) was very brisk dur-

ing the back end while Shadab Khan reaped the fruits of this relentless pressure by the speed merchants with best figures of 3/10.

For the Dutch, the kind of extreme pace that they faced on the day isn't something that they are accustomed to at the Associate level.

B'desh survive dramatic last over to edge past Zimbabwe

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Bangladesh survived a dramatic final over to pull off a narrow three-run win against Zimbabwe in T20 World Cup, where the officials, in a rare incident, called the players back from dug out to complete the contest after realising that Nurul Hasan's stumping in the final ball was not clean, here Sunday.

Bangladeshi players were celebrating after Zimbabwe's Blessing Muzarabani, who was required to hit a six in the final ball for a famous win, missed the ball and was stumped by Nurul Hasan.

However TV replays showed that Hasan had collected the ball in front of the wicket, which is against the rules, hence Zimbabwe were awarded a free hit and all the players were called back for final



action.

Zimbabwe now needed four runs to win.

The nonplussed players, who had walked off the field after shaking hands, thinking that Bangladesh had won,

assembled again.

Zimbabwe could not cash in on the chance and no further drama followed as Muzarabani again missed the ball again and finally Bangladesh rejoiced the victory.

Extremely weird: Sean on no-ball drama

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Veteran Zimbabwe batter Sean Williams described the last-ball drama as "extremely weird" after Bangladesh pulled off a win in a game of changing fortunes in the T20 World Cup.

"It was extremely weird. Obviously I've never experienced something like that in a cricket match before, but again, it just goes to show in a T20 game, there's always a little bit of hope; anything can happen," Williams said.

Williams added: "The first time I realised that there was a no-ball was actually when we



were walking out to shake the umpire's hands, and they told us to stop and the replay came

on the big screen, and then we all noticed that it was a no-ball. Very interesting times that."

As per the Rule 27.3.1: "The wicket-keeper shall remain wholly behind the wicket at the striker's end from the moment the ball comes into play until a ball delivered by the bowler touches the bat or person of the striker or passes the wicket at the striker's end or the striker attempts a run."

"In the event of the wicket-keeper contravening this Law, the striker's end umpire shall call and signal No ball as soon as applicable after the delivery of the ball," added the Rule 27.3.2.

Weather may force Finch to alter 'bowl first' tactics

AP ■ BRISBANE

Australia won the T20 World Cup a year ago with a "bat second" strategy, but captain Aaron Finch on Sunday said they could change their tactics for their crucial game against a confident Ireland in Brisbane.

Ireland have proved to be no pushover, stunning England in a rain-affected match, and Finch said that with weather playing a big part so far in this year's T20 World Cup he was open to rethinking his strategy.

"Teams generally prefer to chase," Finch told reporters after training under blue skies ahead of Monday's Group 1 clash at Brisbane's famous Gabba ground.

"But I'm definitely not against batting first," he said, knowing that forecasters have predicted a 30 percent chance of rain during Monday's night's match.

"Batting second, you tend to back into your innings. Batting first, you can probably be a little bit more free-wheeling," he said.

"I think what we've seen is that teams, if you can put enough pressure on, if you can put a decent enough total and force teams to go hard against a quality bowling attack with a little bit of movement, it's really difficult."

Ireland have built a reputation as giant-killers, having also beaten two-time champions West Indies in this World Cup, where leg-spinner Gareth Delany starred with 3-16.

"I think we know if we play pretty much near our best that we're going to be able to compete with anybody here,"



Delany told reporters at the Gabba.

"We're not coming into any of these games fearing anybody," added Delany, who noted how well Ireland's top order coped with a fierce England pace attack led by the express Mark Wood.

"Obviously Australia have probably one of the best attacks in world cricket at the moment, so it will be a tough challenge," said Delany of the hosts and defending champions who boast seam-bowling greats Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood in their line-up.

"But I think the guys have shown throughout this tournament that we can mix it with the best. Definitely have confidence in the guys to take it on."

Saurashtra, Punjab, Vidarbha make SMAT quarters

TPI ■ KOLKATA

Punjab, Vidarbha and Saurashtra recorded wins over their respective opponents to seal quarterfinal berths in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament here on Sunday.

Sheldon Jackson top-scored for Saurashtra with a 44-ball 64 (4x4, 4x6) as they overcame a late challenge from Kerala to win by nine runs and set up a quarterfinal clash against Mumbai.

Opening the batting, Indian Test batter Cheteshwar Pujara departed for run a ball 11 (2x4) as Saurashtra lost two wickets in the Power Play before Jackson led the charge to take them to 183 for six.

Kerala too had a jittery start but skipper Sanju Samson and Sachin Baby kept them in the hunt in an entertaining 98-run partnership.

Samson slammed a 38-ball 59 (8x4) but he failed to finish off the chase, falling to Prerak Mankad (2/26) in the 16th over. Baby



remained unbeaten on 64 (47b; 6x4, 2x6) but it was not enough as the Kerala bowlers had their way.

In the first match at Eden Gardens, wicketkeeper-batter Prabhsimran Singh and opener Abhishek Sharma slammed half-centuries as Punjab overcame a shaky

start defeat to Haryana by 49 runs that set up their last-eight clash against Karnataka.

Punjab lost their star Indian batter Shubman Gill (4) in the third over with Mohit Sharma giving Haryana an early breakthrough after they opted to field.

But thereafter Haryana struggled to make further inroads as Sharma in the company of Singh settled in the Power Play and led them to 176 for seven.

Singh smashed five sixes and five fours en route to a 36-ball 64, while Sharma remained unbeaten on a 48-ball 50 (5x4, 1x6) in a 100-run partnership.

In reply, Haryana were restricted to 172/9 as Punjab put up a disciplined bowling effort with medium pacer Baltej Singh leading the way in a fine spell of 4-1-20-3.

Nishant Sindhu waged a lone battle for Haryana in a 25-ball 42 but Siddharth Kaul (2/29) triggered the collapse before Singh wreaked havoc taking two in two balls. Haryana went on to lose five wickets in addition of just four runs to manage just 127/9.

At Jadavpur University second campus ground, veteran pacer Umesh Yadav grabbed 3/27 from his four overs as Vidarbha put up a spirited bowling show defeat Chhattisgarh by

five wickets. Vidarbha will now face Delhi in the quarterfinal.

BRIEF SCORES

At Eden Gardens: Punjab 176/7; 20 overs (Prabhsimran Singh 64, Abhishek Sharma 55 not out; Anshul Kamboj 3/25) b Haryana 127/9; 20 overs (Nishant Sindhu 42; Baltej Singh 3/20, Siddharth Kaul 2/29, Mayank Markande 2/32) by 49 runs. Saurashtra 183/6; 20 overs (Sheldon Jackson 64; KM Asif 3/33) b Kerala 174/4; 20 overs (Sachin Baby 64, Sanju Samson 59; Prerak Mankad 2/26) by nine runs.

At JU Second Campus ground: Chhattisgarh 111/9; 20 overs (Harpreet Singh 27; Umesh Yadav 3/27, Yash Thakur 2/23) lost to Vidarbha 112/5; 18.4 overs (Sanjay Raghunath 63) by five wickets.

QUARTERFINAL LINEUPS

Karnataka v Punjab; Delhi v Vidarbha; HP v Bengal; Mumbai v Saurashtra (all on Tuesday).