

Shah conspiring to topple Bengal Govt, says Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Two days after Home Minister Amit Shah presaged Trinamool Congress Government's downfall in Bengal well ahead of completing its full term in 2026, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday demanded his resignation accusing him of conspiring to bring down her Government.



Mamata Banerjee

Shah had told in a BJP rally at Birbhum that the saffron party would win 35-out-of-42 parliamentary seats from the State and that after losing in the Lok Sabha elections the TMC Government would not last its full term.

is conspiring to bring down our Government and so we are demanding his resignation as the Union Home Minister.

Wondering as to how a Home Minister could propose toppling of a democratically elected government Banerjee said "Can he say this as the Union Home Minister who has taken the oath to protect the Indian Constitution? This clearly means that as the Home Minister of the country he is using his clout and conspiring to bring down an elected State Government. It is clear that he

Apparently linking the two issues of Centre sending teams to Bengal to inspect the proper implementation of central projects and the death of several CAPF personnel in 2019 Pulwama attack, Banerjee said, "did a single central investigation team went to Pulwama after that incident," adding how New Delhi was regularly sending central teams to Bengal to inspect the proper implementation of schemes. "They are sending central inspection teams in Bengal as a part of a strategy to stop the funds required for developmental projects," she said. "There was a plan being

JOB-SCAM CASE - Abhishek gets CBI summons, calls it 'contempt of SC'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI hand-delivered a summons to TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee for questioning in connection with the teachers' recruitment scam case on Monday, few hours after the Supreme Court stayed a High Court order for his interrogation. Terming the action of the agency "contempt of court", Banerjee tweeted, "SC stayed the Calcutta HC's order in the morning that granted permission to the central agencies to summon me. Yet, the 'SUMMON' was HAND-DELIVERED today at 1:45 pm. Grave State of affairs!"



Monday, a bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala stayed the direction of Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay of the Calcutta High Court that TMC leaders Banerjee and Kuntal Ghosh, an accused in the case, can be questioned by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the CBI, and such "interrogation should be made soon". The stay was granted at around 11:15 am.

A Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) official said the notice was prepared on Sunday and delivered on Monday. He said the concerned branch was "not aware" of the court order. Earlier on

Senior advocate AM Singhvi, appearing for the TMC leaders, had sought an urgent hearing on the plea challenging the High Court order in the case.

Called no meeting, says Ajit on media 'switching-side' theory

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid intense speculation about the possibility of a near-repeat of the "political earthquake" of November 2019 which saw him team up with BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis and form an eight-hour-long government in Maharashtra, senior NCP leader and current leader of the Opposition Ajit Pawar on Monday said that he had not called a legislators' party meeting on Tuesday as was being reported in a section of the media.

is absolutely no truth in the reports. Please note that I have not called a meeting of either party MLAs or party office bearers," Ajitdada said in one of the three tweets he put out on Monday.

"Till the early hours of Monday, I was at the MGM Hospital at Kharghar in Navi Mumbai where I had gone to meet the family members of those who died to heatwave conditions while attending the Maharashtra Bhashan function," the NCP leader said. "Today, I have no scheduled programme. I am in Mumbai. On Tuesday (April 18) I will be at my office at Vidhan Bhavan, attending my regular work," Ajitdada added.

Scotching speculation in a section of media that he and "15 to 20" NCP MLAs switch sides and join hands with the ruling BJP, Ajitdada - as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles - asserted that he had not called either a meeting of party MLAs or office bearers on Tuesday as was being speculated in the media. "There have been reports in a section of the media that I have called a meeting of party MLAs on Tuesday. There

The speculation involving the four-time deputy chief minister had arisen after Ajit had all of a sudden become inaccessible for a day last week. Though he spoke to the media the following day, there were speculative reports in the media about his possible political moves.

Maha Bhushan awardee expresses grief over 11 sunstroke deaths

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after 11 of his disciples died of heatstroke and dehydration after they attended a function organised by the Maharashtra Government at Kharghar in Navi Mumbai to honour him, reformer and Maharashtra Bhushan awardee Narayan Dattatreya Narayan Dharmadhikari on Tuesday expressed pain over the tragedy.

Dharna over relocation of rice thief tusker to Parambikulam forest

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Members of Muthalamada And Nemmara panchayats in Palakkad district staged a dawn to dusk sit-in on Monday demanding the Kerala Government not to translocate the wild tusker Ari Komban to Parambikulam forests.



Tusker Ari Komban

After a brief lull of four days, Ari Komban is back in action as he was seen moving around Chinnakanal settlement in Idukki reserve forests in search of food. This time he was accompanied by his comrades from reserve forests but did not trespass into the residential areas. He was intelligent enough not to fall into the traps of fake ration shops set up by the local residents and forest officials. Ration shops stocked with rice were his weakness and he used to walk away with bags.

Monday's sit-in was mainly by the members of the Opposition parties as the CPI-M members made a tacit retreat from the protest following the directives from AKG Centre, the party's Kerala head quarters. "This is not an issue which could be solved by a hartal. The State administration is chalking out a solution taking aspects into consideration," said R Alairaj, vice-president of Muthalamada Panchayath, a leader of the CPI-M. The Supreme Court on Monday chose not to interfere in the issue when the appeal by Kerala Government against the translocation of the elephant came up for consideration.

Gadkari holds State, UT level meet, reviews road traffic regulation policy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday chaired a meeting of transport ministers from all States and Union Territories (UTs) to discuss various concurrent policy matters, including review of road traffic regulations, setting up vehicle fitness stations and streamlining the issuance of driving licenses.

Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has taken several measures with a view to develop future-ready road transport in India, with safety and sustainability being the key driver of all such measures, said the official statement said. "Road Transport plays a significant role in the development of our country, by ensuring smooth movement of goods & people, efficient functioning of economic activities, cohesion of populations and propelling Country's overall development," a MoRTH official said. In the meeting technological advancements in traffic and roads system were discussed.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) IN THE COURT OF MS. KIRANDEEP KAUR, CIVIL JUDGE - 05, CENTRAL DELHI CS SCJ/2968/2021 Next Date of Hearing 02.05.2023 at 10 am ICICI BANK LIMITED VS MOHD. IRSHADUL HAQUE TO MOHD. IRSHADUL HAQUE S/O MOHD. ANZULUL HAQUE R/O: 786-B, LANE-07, ZAKIR NAGAR OKHLA, DELHI- 110025 THE DEFENDANT ABOVE NAMED WHEREAS you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 02.05.2023 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte. Given under my hand and the seal of the court, this 10.04.2023. Civil Judge (Central) Delhi

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) IN THE COURT OF MS. KIRANDEEP KAUR CIVIL JUDGE-05, CENTRAL DELHI CS SCJ/ 1444/22 NEXT DATE OF HEARING 02.05.2023 at 10 am J.(Civil)-12 ICICI BANK LTD. ...Plaintiff V/S PRIYA GROVER ...Defendant TO, PRIYA GROVER S/O. SH. KRISHAN GOPAL GROVER, AT: C-13 / 132, GF, ARDEE CITY, SEC-52, GURGAON, HARYANA-122002 ALSO AT: M/S ORAVEL STAYS PRIVATE LTD., SPAZA PLAZO, SEC-69, GURGAON, HARYANA-122001, PHASE-1, DELHI- 110020 THE DEFENDANT ABOVE NAMED WHEREAS you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 02.05.2023 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte. Given under my hand and the seal of the court, this 10.04.2023. Civil Judge (Central) Delhi

PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

PUBLIC NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Missionaries take advantage when people lose faith in society: Bhagwat on religious conversion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pointing to the neglect of the weaker sections in the society, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has said missionaries take advantage of the situations wherein people feel the society is not with them. "We don't see our own people. We don't go to them and ask them. But some missionary from thousands of miles away comes and lives there, eats their food, speaks their language and then converts them," news agency PTI quoted Bhagwat as saying.

He was addressing an event on Sunday in Madhya Pradesh's Burhanpur district, where he dedicated to the people the samadhi of Govindnath Maharaj. Over the course of 100 years, people came to India to change everything, he said. They have been working here for centuries, but failed to gain anything as our roots remained strong thanks to the efforts of our ancestors, Bhagwat said. "Efforts are made there to uproot them. So, the society should understand that. We have to strengthen the faith," he said.



Against the grain

The Congress's demand on caste census is fraught with danger—for the country as well as for itself

The Congress seems to be playing a dangerous game—that of caste politics. Addressing an election rally in Karnataka's Kolar, Rahul Gandhi has demanded the release of the results of caste census. "UPA in 2011 did the caste-based census. It has the data of all the castes. Mr Prime Minister, you talk of OBCs. Make that data public. Let the nation know how many OBCs, Dalits and tribals are there in the country," he said, adding that there are only 7 per cent other backward classes (OBCs), Dalits and tribals as secretaries in the Central Government. He is also against any cap on reservations. The Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was carried out during 2011-12 under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime. Evidently, this is not a one-off remark to impress upon some sections of society in a constituency or a state; party president Mallikarjun



Kharge also made the same demand on the same day. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he wrote that the census data could not be published "even though Congress and other MPs demanded its release after your government came to power in May 2014." In the absence of an updated caste census, social justice and empowerment programmes would be incomplete, he added. While the grand old party's stance on caste census is fraught with danger, its arguments for the release of the data are deeply flawed.

For one, the Congress is a national, all-inclusive party that can ill-afford to be sensitive to the interests of only one section of society. This is the reason that the GOP was never very enthusiastic about the Mandal Commission recommendations, the social justice rhetoric, etc. For almost a decade, the governments under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi let the Mandal report gather dust. Even when former prime minister VP Singh did announce its implementation, Rajiv Gandhi was among the very few mainstream politicians to have slammed the report. He rightly denounced Singh for his obstinacy: "Let us not have one man's obstinacy holding India hostage... Let that man's obstinacy not lead to caste war." Unfortunately, his son seems to be ignoring his wise words; in a bid to appease his allies in Bihar, Rahul is simply echoing the views of the ideological and political progeny of Mandal and Singh. The Congress' demand is flawed because it is predicated upon the erroneous doctrine that welfare measures cannot be implemented without knowing the caste details of demography. This has been repudiated in recent years by the various schemes launched and executed by the Modi Government. Owing to the heavy reliance on technology (and of course the political resolve to directly reach the beneficiary), the Government was able to implement them with remarkable success. This also got reflected in several election results. The GOP would be well-advised to not go against the grain.

PICTALK



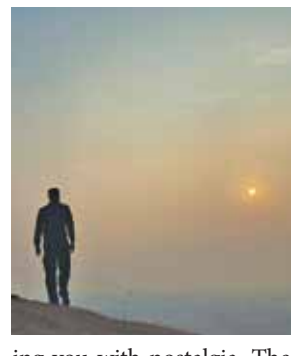
Tourists use umbrellas to shield themselves from the sun during their visit to the Taj Mahal, in Agra

Savour nature's splendour to feel alive

Nature bestows us with its many gifts but we don't take the time to even witness it. Sunset is one such occurrence that always rejuvenates

Most of us endeavour to find those moments in which we actually 'live' our life and cherish them forever. We subsist in a fast-paced world where it seems that survival depends on breakneck speed. Most of the time, we postpone the savouring of our simple-looking indulgences to tomorrow or next week, with which we rarely catch up. Sunrise and sunset are such occasions, which are nature's most spectacular gifts to humankind. We generally take these moments for granted and rarely take out time to reveal them.

Be on a rooftop, hilltop or balcony of your house at dawn, and watch the horizon. The sky changes its colours with every passing moment—from grey to hues of pink and slowly to lighter shades of orange. Notice the little things that accompany the sunrise—the chirping of birds, flocks of birds flying in perfect unison and a rooster crowing in a far-off hamlet. The vegetation looks fresh with leaves covered in tiny bright dewdrops, which are slowly dripping, and the petrichor so produced is intoxicatingly engulf-



ing you with nostalgia. The flowers are slowly opening up like an indolent little child lazily stretching and arising from a peaceful, dream-filled slumber. The sunrise lasts for not more than a few moments, but the positive impact remains for the day. You will be more active and efficient in your workplace and with positive vibes all around you. At sunset, everything goes in reverse order. As the sun approaches the horizon, the 'golden hour' of dusk starts unravelling its magic. The skies slowly turn into bright shades of orange and pink, with every fleeting moment displaying varied hues. The occasional streak of clouds in the western skies flirt with the hues of gold and produce a

spellbinding dance, full of life and colours. The sun finally disappears behind the horizon, slowly turning firmament into shades of grey and finally into the darkness of the night. Having witnessed some of the most memorable sunsets sitting atop mountains, away from the crowds, are some of the most memorable moments I have lived. One commonly notices a farmer returning home with his bullock after the day's hard work, eagerly looking forward to the comforts of his abode. Flowers slowly closed down for the night and the green leaves, covered with dust, waited eagerly for the drops of dew. Late into the night, with the dropping mercury, the dewdrops silently appear on the leaves and entangle them in a tight, lover's embrace to freshen up their existence and to give a new life to their being. The hamlets slowly come alive with smoke lazily emanating out of kitchen chimneys and forming ever-changing figurines, trying to touch the greying skies. One can hear the occasional shout of a concerned mother, reminding her chil-

India moves away from the dollar

India has taken its first step towards liberating itself from dependence on the US dollar by buying oil from Russia in Indian rupees



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

We have seen the continuous rise of the dollar since the First World War. After World War I, in exchange for supplies, the Allies began paying in gold to the United States, due to which America became the world's largest gold reserve. After the end of the war, various countries linked their currencies with the dollar and with this, the 'Gold Standard' ended in the world and thus the dollar became the world's most preferred currency. All countries started keeping more and more of their foreign exchange reserves in the form of dollars. By 1999, up to 70 per cent of the total foreign exchange reserves of the countries of the world, were kept in dollars.



The European common currency 'Euro' emerged in 1999, and in most European countries, Euro replaced their currencies. This also affected the dollar too; and in place of some European currencies, the euro was now preferred for foreign exchange reserves and by the beginning of the year 2021, the dollar's share in foreign exchange reserves was reduced to only 59 per cent. But this share is further reduced to nearly 55 per cent by the third quarter of the year 2022. Despite reduced attraction towards the US dollar, interestingly, the dollar has still not weakened in value; rather it has been getting stronger and stronger year after year, compared to almost all other currencies in the world, barring a few. Due to the attraction of countries around the world towards the dollar throughout history, the dollar has become increasingly strong against other currencies of the world, especially the currencies of developing countries. Where in 1964 one dollar was only equal to rupees 4.66 and now it has reached nearly rupees 82. Compared to the currencies of many other countries, it has become even more strong. Perhaps that's why all the countries of the world have been interested in keeping the dollar as a reserve currency and making all their international payments in dollars only. Due to this increasing demand for the dollar, the dollar has become stronger year after

year. But for some time, the demand for the dollar as a reserve currency has started declining. Those in the know are calling this trend 'de-dollarization'. In the past, the whole world was dollarized, but now de-dollarization is happening around the world. There is a need to understand why the US dollar as the reserve currency of the world is waning even when the US dollar is at its strongest position in history. One important reason is the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war since February 2022. It is believed that due to the dominance of the US and European countries in the payment system, Russia is barred from withdrawing its own foreign exchange reserves in dollars. That is, the payment system is being weaponised by the US and European countries to weaken Russia economically. Naturally, Russia and its friendly countries are no longer interested in keeping their foreign exchange reserves in dollars under any circumstances. Due to the sanctions of the USA and European countries, pressure is also being put on the countries of the world not to buy crude oil from Russia. In such a situation, India has started buying more and more



INDIA HAS STARTED BUYING MORE AND MORE OIL FROM RUSSIA, DEFYING THE SANCTIONS OF THE WESTERN WORLD

oil from Russia, defying the sanctions of the Western world. Where the share of Russian oil was only 1 per cent in India's oil imports, it has now increased to 35 per cent. Russia has even said that it is ready to make a settlement of its oil exports in rupees. Not only this but due to the sanctions imposed on Russia, now other countries are barred from using the shipping and insurance services of the US and European countries. In such a situation, India and many other countries have now started using the services of Russian and other non-US and non-European shipping and insurance companies. That is, due to the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the US and Europe, now western countries are themselves suffering huge losses due to their bullying of economic sanctions. The role of Indian banks is also increasing in international payments. **Rupee now allowed for payment by 19 countries** While there is a decline in the dominance of the US dollar at the international level, India has also started making efforts to reduce its dependence on the dollar. Significantly, after the US and European countries used the payment system as a weapon, during the post-Russia-Ukraine war, India started moving towards paying in rupees for oil imports from Russia. In July last year, the Reserve Bank of India through a circular allowed international payment settlements for imports and exports to be made in rupees. This is believed to be the first step towards making the Indian rupee an international currency. Due to the efforts of the Government of India, so far banks of 19 countries including the UK, New Zealand, Germany, Malaysia, Israel, Russia and the United Arab Emirates have been permitted to make settlements in rupees by opening 'Special Vostro Rupee Accounts' (SVRAs). Significantly, there are 19 countries in this list of 19 countries with which India has significant trade relations. If the payment settlements are now made in rupees, with these countries, then the demand for dollars in the country will definitely go down. This effort of India towards de-dollarization in the world may be small, but can surely prove to be a milestone for India, showing the path to other countries as well. (Writer is professor, PGDAV college, university of Delhi, New Delhi)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FAILURE OF UP GOVT

Sir — The incident of the killing of Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf by three men in a shooting that took place amidst a posse of policemen and media persons is really shocking. The incident was a clear failure in the presence of a large number of police personnel as they remained mute spectators. Even the real cause for concern is that the current security and vigilance dispensation does not appear to have any information about the assailants.

This proves beyond any iota of truth that there has been a total failure of the state police, political dispensation and more so intelligence agencies and clearly intelligence analysis has very low priority across the state. Modern gadgetry and the portrayal of intelligence agencies are possibly contributory causes for this incident even when Atik had already declared publicly that he will be eliminated in the encounter. From all accounts, it is very clear that crime has reached its peak in UP and the morale of the criminal is very high and the UP government has virtually failed to maintain law and order. To constitute an enquiry committee is altogether an eye-wash.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

NEED TO MODERNISE COURTS

Sir — Modernise Indian Judicial courts urgently on the lines of Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Courts must act as friendly, happy development managers and constructive joyful solutions givers. In the aforementioned nations, people sit across the table and discuss everything. India cannot just remain obsolete, and archaic ... such: as blame games, mistakes or fault finding, prolonged cases for years giving mental trauma and various losses to individuals and their families for decades. For this, the fraternity of the judiciary must involve Various fields/domains - experts to understand the various problems of the people involved in a case. Also, everything should be considered organisational teamwork. Not find easy scapegoats. We

Entry denied in Golden Temple



As per report the woman with the Indian flag painted on her face was denied entry inside the Golden Temple. A video clip of the incident has gone viral on Twitter. In the viral video, a guard can be seen saying "It's Punjab" when confronted by a man accompanying the woman who asks "Is this not India". In this clip, they repeatedly ask the guard if this was not India and he can be seen disagreeing. When the guard was

asked why the woman was not allowed to enter the holy shrine, he points out the flag painted on the woman's face. The guard can be heard saying in this clip, "This is Punjab, not India". Upon hearing this, the woman entered into the argument and said he is talking rubbish as if the Golden Temple was not in India. The guard then tried to stop the woman and the man accompanying her from capturing this incident on their phone. Businessman Harsh Keshri shared the 40-second-long video on Twitter and wrote, "Woman denied entry to Golden Temple because she had an India flag painted on her face! The man who denied her entry into Golden Temple said this is Punjab, not India. Later, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee General Secretary Gurcharan Singh Grewal apologized for the incident and said that the flag on the woman's face was not a Tricolour. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

request CJI to urgently create many (online) virtual courts ... for delivering speedy justice, Madhu Nivriti PS | Secunderabad

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK Sir — The pre-draft version of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education released recently gives all stakeholders an opportunity to express their views on the shaping of education for the future. Textbooks are designed in accordance with the proposals of the NCF. Changes in teaching-learning and examination systems are also proposed by it. School education should be imparted in such a way that students gain an equal understanding of Indian culture and the contemporary world. The proposal to include Vedas and Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism and Vedic and Confucian philosophies and Yoga and Ayurveda in the curriculum is the right move. On the other hand, these ideas must be based on rationality. Cultural and religious ideas are likely to lead to the creation

of misinformation. The NCF has also proposed a modular board examination instead of a single examination at the end of the year. Considering that a single board examination puts a great deal of pressure on students, this is a student-friendly idea. Another notable proposal is the semester system for class 12. The NCF has stressed the importance of multidisciplinary education. It gives an opportunity for students to choose subjects for examination. However, the paradigm shift in school education calls for changes in educational institutions. They need to be restructured in such a way that they are well-equipped to deal with the changes. Another challenge is managing the burden of the course structure. Undue burden on students must be avoided. Let us hope that after the consultative process, a practicable approach will emerge. Venu GS | Kollam

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



AMIT KANWAR

(The writer pens down stories of human interest and his travels. He also likes to click portraits)



FIRST COLUMN

RBI MUST CONTROL INFLATION

The primary job of RBI is to maintain price stability



S KALYANASUNDARAM

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) voted to leave the repo rate unchanged at 6.5% during its latest bi-monthly meeting on 6th April 2023. Financial media reports that the decision was in line with market expectations, as the central bank aims to balance growth and inflation concerns. Such reporting also shows how the RBI cares more for the borrowers than being responsible for its assigned primary role of maintaining price stability.

RBI's primary role: RBI website proudly declares its preamble as "to regulate the issue of Bank notes and keeping of reserves with a view to securing monetary stability in India and generally to operate the currency and credit system of the country to its advantage; to have a modern monetary policy framework to meet the challenge of an increasingly complex economy, to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth."

RBI failed to act in time: As it is accepted the world over, central banks use the interest rate as a weapon to tame inflation and for this timely intervention from the central bank is required. In the past, when the inflation rate was rising, it is on record that the RBI has not acted in time which made the inflation go out of control and there was course correction by RBI subsequently. For the first time since the implementation of the monetary policy framework in 2016, the RBI had to 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 said explanation is not in the public domain but chances are there that RBI could have taken shelter under the Covid situation prevailing at that time.

The following will amply demonstrate how the RBI has missed the bus.



During the year 2020, month-wise inflation figures were on the following lines: 7.6, 6.6, 5.8, 7.2, 6.3, 6.2, 6.7, 6.7, 7.3, 7.6, 6.9 and 4.6 percentages. In 2021, month-wise inflation figures were as follows: 4.1, 5.0, 5.5, 4.2, 6.3, 6.3, 5.6, 5.3, 4.3, 4.5, 4.9 and 5.7 percentages. But what RBI was doing during this period? The RBI was going to reduce the Repo rate from 2018 for nearly two years. Only on 4th May 2022, it reversed the trend by increasing the repo rate just by 0.40 per cent.

Now let us see the inflation rate during the last 14 months to know whether the RBI has got a grip on inflation. The inflation rates are as follows from Jan 2022 to Feb 2023: 6.00, 6.10, 7.00, 7.80, 7.00, 7.00, 6.70, 7.00, 7.40, 6.80, 5.90, 5.70, 6.70, 6.50 and 6.40 percentages.

RBI has been mandated to maintain an inflation rate of 4 per cent with a plus or minus 2 per cent variation. The cushion of two per cent variation has been provided as sometimes with various sudden inflows and outflows, the RBI may need time to act and bring the inflation within limits. During 2022, for nine months the upper boundary of inflation was breached and even the annual inflation rate was more than the upper boundary level. One fails to understand the logic of RBI's not raising the repo rate to contain inflation. Other factors ignored.

Since the last Repo revision bank depositors have started receiving some positive interest after adjusting for inflation as the banks have revised deposit rates upward. The present decision to hold the rates will definitely increase inflation and once again the depositors will be penalized.

OPEC and its allies, including Russia, agreed recently to widen crude oil production cuts to 3.66 million barrels per day (bpd) or 3.7% of global demand. This is going to increase the price of crude oil. Our import bill will go up. There will be pressure on the Rupee against the dollar. The news that the Indian rupee declined against the U.S. dollar after the RBI unexpectedly kept the repo rate unchanged confirms this view. The rupee declined to an intraday low of 82.06 per U.S. dollar versus 81.88 before the RBI policy announcement. All these will contribute to added inflation.

The banking system in India is robust and there is no need to make a pause in repo increase to tame inflation. It is felt that the RBI is giving more importance to growth. It seems that the RBI has not learnt its lesson from its failure to contain inflation in the earlier years.

(The writer is a retired banker)

Don't apologise for PSH subsidy at WTO



UTTAM GUPTA

Indian rebuttal to the claim of developed countries on food security is logical as India's public stockholding (PSH) has helped food security around the world



Last month, in a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – it oversees the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) – developed countries including the USA and Canada challenged India's public stockholding (PSH) programme saying "it is highly subsidized, especially for rice, and that this is affecting the food security of other countries". India countered their claim by saying that far from any adverse effect, its PSH program was helping other countries ensure their food security. This is how its argument goes.

In 2021, India distributed 58 million tons of rice to 800 million beneficiaries. It was able to feed such a mammoth number because the government maintained sufficient stock under the PSH program. But, for this, we would have been depending on the rest of the world to meet our requirements. The global exports of rice in that year were only 56 million tons, this would have led to skyrocketing prices of rice thereby affecting the food security of smaller countries. The Least developed countries (LDCs) – would have been in grave danger. Thus, by ensuring our food security, we have rather ensured the food security of other countries.

Indian rebuttal to the claim of developed countries on food security is logical and convincing. But, what about their other charge that our PSH program is highly subsidized which is what they have been trumpeting for several years now at the WTO and the government hasn't been able to counter it successfully? To understand the reason and how it can go about for better results, let us see how the PSH program works and what is its connection with the AoA.

Under the PSH program, government agencies like the Food Corporation of India (FCI) buy agri-produce such as wheat, rice/paddy, and coarse cereals from farmers at the minimum support price (MSP) and distribute it at a subsidised price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg respectively to meet the needs of India's poor and vulnerable population under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

The excess of MSP plus handling, stor-

age and distribution cost over the realisation from the sale (that is, Rs 2/3/1 per kg) is paid as a subsidy from the Union Budget. This includes (a) subsidy to the farmer, being the excess of MSP of, say, rice over its international price also known as External Reference Price (ERP) in WTO parlance and (b) subsidy to the food consumer, being the excess of ERP over the price paid (Rs 3 per kg rice).

The WTO is concerned with (a) branded as "product-specific" subsidies. It is also concerned with subsidies on agricultural inputs like fertilizers, seeds, irrigation, power, etc., referred to as "non-product specific" subsidies. Under the AoA, the total of product and non-product-specific subsidies or aggregate measurement support (AMS) is capped at 10 per cent of the value of agricultural production for a developing country. If a member country gives AMS over 10 per cent, it is a violation.

The AoA came into force in 1995. For India, until 2005, MSP was less than ERP. Thereafter, MSP has been higher than ERP and, in the last decade, this gap widened. During 2018-19, in the case of rice, for instance, AMS was at 11 per cent, exceeding the 10 per cent cap. During 2019-20, it was even higher at 13.7 per cent.

For over a decade or so, India along with other developing countries has been making efforts at WTO to wriggle out of the situation. In the 9th Ministerial Conference (MC) held in Bali (2013), it secured sanction for a "peace clause". It said, "If a developing country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, no member will challenge this until 2017 when the WTO would look for a permanent solution."

In the General Council (GC) held in December 2014, this sanction was modified to say "The peace clause will stay till a permanent solution was found." However,

the peace clause comes with several riders, such as the submission of data on food procurement, stockholding, distribution and subsidies. These also include establishing that subsidies are not "trade distorting".

India has invoked the 'peace clause' several times at the WTO for breaching the 10 per cent ceiling in case of subsidy on rice. But, developed countries have objected to such invocation and insisted on 'safeguards' and 'transparency' obligations.

Put simply, they want India to put its entire data under the PSH program under scanner at the WTO. We can't ignore it as it is a requirement for availing of the immunity from challenge. The dicey rider is that the member country exceeding the subsidy ceiling (read: India) will have to demonstrate these are not "trade-distorting".

When, can a situation of trade distortion arise?

It could arise if the quantities lying with the government agencies which are meant solely for supplying to beneficiaries under the NFSA instead find their way to the international market. The way the PSH scheme operates, this possibility is not ruled out. This is because often the agencies conduct an auction to dispose of excess stock under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) in which private players, traders etc also participate. Having acquired foodgrains from such auctions, the private traders are free to sell it in the manner they like which includes export. An argument on these lines resonates during deliberations in the CoA of the WTO. The developed countries argue that India has created large stocks and is exporting the surplus. India's stance that under OMSS all the bidders are compulsorily asked to give an undertaking that they won't export it may not cut ice. Meanwhile, India is spearhead-

ing a proposal by G-33, the African Group, and the ACP (Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific) asking WTO for 'total exemption for support to PSH for food security'. Posited as a "permanent solution" as decided in the MC-9 (2013) and GC (December 2014), this coalition of developing countries and LDCs wanted the MC-12 held in Geneva (June 12-17, 2022) to take it up for consideration. But, the issue was not even put on the table.

The G-33 proposal could expose vulnerabilities in the way India runs its PSH program all the more when we consider that currently, the government is running an open-ended procurement scheme, particularly for wheat and rice whereby its agencies buy the highest possible quantities from the farmers at ever-increasing MSP (courtesy, compulsions of vote bank politics). These purchases being unrelated to the requirement under NFSA, surplus stocks and some of it entering the global market is unavoidable.

Instead of seeking blanket exemption which it will never get, India should address the root cause. This has to do with the flaws in the formula for the computation of AMS under the AoA (these were allowed to creep in at the time agreement was signed in 1995). The flaws include (i) taking ERP for the year 1986-88; (ii) not excluding subsidies given to the resource-poor farmers; (iii) using the entire output instead of quantity procured for PSH.

These flaws "artificially" inflate the AMS thereby pushing the Indian subsidy beyond the 10 per cent threshold. India should aggressively push for the removal of these flaws. Concomitantly, in our interest, the government should rein in open-ended purchases from the farmers and bring about agri-market reforms to help them realize a good price for their produce obviating the need for state support.



INDIA HAS INVOKED THE 'PEACE CLAUSE' SEVERAL TIMES AT THE WTO FOR BREACHING THE 10 PER CENT CEILING IN CASE OF SUBSIDY ON RICE BUT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES HAVE OBJECTED TO SUCH INVOCATION

(The author is a policy analyst)

Rampant negligence at Baramulla government hospital

Lack of maintenance and care makes Baramulla government hospital a breeding ground for infections and potential health risk for patients

Better facilities, systematic healthcare, and preventive action—all of the promises made when the Associate Hospital at the Government Medical College in north Kashmir's Baramulla district was established have not been met. The hospital was established to improve the local healthcare system, with a special focus on addressing the health issues of the district's rural populace. However, rampant negligence and disorganisation have come to the fore, and while the patient load is increasing every day, the number of complaints on various grounds is also on a rise.

The government's claims of having developed the healthcare system in Kashmir lack action, and a significant space in which the apathy is



MASRAT NABI

visible is in the washrooms of the hospital. Sanitation and hygiene are fundamental components of a healthcare system. Filthy washrooms, exposing the already vulnerable citizens, are a health concern not only for those seeking treatment but for the workers of the hospital as well. Patients shared how they were exposed to a greater risk of infection, long-term health problems, and serious illnesses due to a lack of hygiene in the hospital.

"The concerned officials are not taking any action as they are too busy blaming each other for the poor conditions. The hospital is meant to provide us with a safe environment for treatment and give us the facilities not accessible elsewhere," Muneera Hassan, a patient at the hospital, said.



Family members of admitted patients have also raised concerns about the pathetic condition of the washrooms. "The washrooms stink, there is urine on the floor, and the water faucets are broken," another patient, Safeena, shared.

During specific campaigns

like those orchestrated as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, volunteers come together and clean such public healthcare facilities. These efforts, though, don't last beyond the designated event. "The doctors join in the efforts to clean the hospital on one day and then forget about it the next day. This is

not enough. A systematic plan is required to ensure the efficacy of the overall healthcare facilities," said 24-year-old Zainab Tariq, another patient at the hospital. Dr Parvez Ahmad Masoodi, the Superintendent of GMC, while talking about the situation, shared that the hospital

receives 7,000 patients per day. "We have put people to work to ensure proper sanitation facilities. But with such a huge inflow of patients, it becomes difficult to manage. We also have limited washrooms. However, the health of our patients and staff is a priority. We have implemented strict cleaning protocols to ensure that every washroom is cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day. We will expand the infrastructure and build more washrooms," he assured.

However, Dr Masoodi's claims of cleanliness seem to defy the reality at GMC. Suraya Malik, who visited the hospital for a routine check-up, was taken aback by the situation in the washrooms. She claimed that the stinky toilets,

which lacked running water and soap, were unfit for human use and violated her basic right to hygiene, making her nauseous. "As I opened the door, I had to take a step back due to the filthy conditions and musty, unpleasant odour. The toilet smelled of urine and excrement. I could barely make out the shape of the commode as it was covered in mould and mildew. A thick layer of grime had accumulated on the walls and floor. There had been no attempt to clean it," she shared.

It is torturous to use such unhygienic toilets that are a breeding ground for bacteria. "The hospital serves thousands of patients every day, and yet no initiative has been taken to keep the washrooms clean," she added.

(The writer is an independent writer from Baramulla, Jammu and Kashmir. Courtesy Charkha Features)

Airbus, Air France absolved of manslaughter charges

AP ■ PARIS
A French court on Monday acquitted Airbus and Air France of manslaughter charges over the 2009 crash of Flight 447 from Rio to Paris, which killed 228 people and led to lasting changes in aircraft safety measures.

that the proceedings didn't produce enough proof of criminal wrongdoing by the companies. Prosecutors laid the responsibility primarily with the pilots, who died in the crash. Airbus lawyers also blamed pilot error, and Air France said the full reasons for the crash will never be known. Airbus and Air France had faced potential fines of up to 225,000 euros (USD 219,000) each if convicted. That would have been just a fraction of their annual revenues, but a conviction for the aviation heavyweights could have reverberated through the industry. While the court didn't find the companies guilty of criminal wrongdoing, the judges said that Airbus and Air France held civil responsibility for the crash, and ordered them to compensate families of victims. It didn't provide an overall amount, but scheduled hearings in September to work that out. Air France has already compensated families of those killed,

who came from 33 countries. Families from around the world are among the plaintiffs, including many in Brazil. The A330-200 plane disappeared from radar in a storm over the Atlantic Ocean on June 1, 2009, with 216 passengers and 12 crew members aboard. It took two years to find the plane and its black box recorders on the ocean floor, at depths of more than 13,000 feet (around 4,000 metres). An Associated Press investigation at the time found that Airbus had known since at least 2002 about problems with the type of pitot tubes used on the jet that crashed, but failed to replace them until after the crash. Air France was accused of not having implemented training in the event of icing of the pitot probes despite the risks. Airbus was accused of not doing enough to urgently inform airlines and their crews about faults with the pitots or to ensure training to mitigate the risk.

French Prez seeks to calm pension storm

Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron is aiming to calm public anger that threatens the ambitions of his remaining four years in power with a first televised address to the nation on Monday since he enacted protest-igniting pension reforms. The evening address kicks off a likely arduous battle for the second-term president to repair the damage done to his public image and legislative plans by forcing through an increase in France's retirement age from 62 to 64. Opponents of the unpopular reform called for people to bang pots and pans outside government offices during the address, with the rallying cry: "Macron won't listen to us? We won't listen to him!" Weakened in parliament, where his camp lost its absolute majority in legislative elections last year, Macron's government needs to reconstruct alliances of lawmakers to push ahead with his legislative programme. That's likely to be an uphill task in the uproarious climate of protest sparked by his retire-



ment changes that pick at France's cherished social safety net. Labour unions that have been at the forefront of protests, mobilising millions of marchers in 12 days of nationwide demonstrations and strikes since January, are vowing to fight on. They called for another mass protest on May 1, which is International Workers' Day. The pension changes were enacted into law on Saturday, after months of upheaval, the day after the country's constitutional body rejected some parts of the legislation but approved the higher minimum retirement age. AP

US, allies conduct more drills in face of N Korean threat

Seoul (AP): The United States, South Korea and Japan conducted a joint missile defence exercise Monday in waters near the Korean Peninsula as they expand military training to counter the growing threats of North Korea's nuclear-capable missiles. Last week, North Korea conducted one of its most provocative weapons demonstrations in years by flight-testing for the first time an intercontinental ballistic missile powered by solid propellants, as it pursues a weapon that's more responsive, harder to detect and could directly target the continental United States. North Korea's unprecedented run of weapons tests has so far involved more than 100 missiles of various ranges fired into the sea since the start of 2022 as the country attempts to build a viable nuclear arsenal that could threaten its rival neighbours and the United States. The South Korea-US-



Japan training could trigger a belligerent response from North Korea, which condemns the United States' military drills with its Asian allies as invasion rehearsals. The North has used those drills as a pretext to accelerate its own weapons development, creating a cycle of tit-for-tat that has raised tensions in recent months. South Korea's navy said Monday's three-way naval drills took place in international waters off the country's eastern coast and focused on mastering the procedures for detecting, tracking and sharing information on incoming North Korean ballistic missiles. The one-day naval exercise involved an Aegis destroyer from each country. "The drills' goal is to improve our response capabilities against ballistic missiles and strengthen our ability to conduct joint operations as North Korea's nuclear and missile threats continue to escalate," Jang Do-young, a spokesperson of South Korea's navy, said in a news briefing. The United States and South Korea also launched drills Monday involving some 110 warplanes, including advanced F-35 fighter jets, that will continue through April 28.

Sunak sets up review to change UK's 'anti-maths mindset'

PTI ■ LONDON
Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday announced a new experts-led review into how to ensure all pupils in England study some form of mathematics up to the age of 18 as part of his strategy to change an "anti-maths mindset" that is holding the country back. Delivering a speech at the London Screen Academy, Sunak lamented that it was socially acceptable to make jokes about not being able to do maths. He pointed out that for his plan to grow the UK economy in the long term, the UK simply cannot allow poor numeracy to cost the economy "tens of billions a year". "We say things like: 'Oh, maths, I can't do that, it's not for me' - and everyone laughs. But we'd never make a joke like that about not being able to read. So we've got to change this anti-maths mindset," said Sunak. "We've got to start prizing numeracy for what it is - a key skill every bit as essential as reading. So my campaign to transform our national approach to maths is not nice to have. It's about changing how we value maths in this country. And changing the way our education system works to deliver it so that all our children get these vital skills for life," he said. Under his plans, a new expert group made up of mathematicians, educationists and business representatives will identify the core maths content needed by 16 to 18-year-olds

and explore the possibility of a new specific qualification to support that. The British Indian leader stressed that it would not involve a compulsory A-Level maths module for schools but be designed more broadly. "We're going to need to recruit and train the maths teachers. We're going to work out how to harness the technology that we need to support them. And we'll need to make sure this maths is additional to their subjects - not instead of them," said Sunak, who admitted he likes maths. The Oxford and Stanford University alumnus pointed out that Britain was one of the few developed countries where young people don't routinely study some form of maths up to the age of 18, unlike in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Finland, Japan, Norway and America. The UK is among the "least numerate countries in the developed world", with more than 8 million adults with numeracy skills below those expected of a nine-year-old. "So I won't sit back and allow this cultural sense that it's ok to be bad at maths to put our children at a disadvantage. We've got to change this. We've got to value maths, and what it can do for our children's futures," said Sunak. "Put simply, without a solid foundation in maths, our children risk being left behind, shut out of the careers they aspire to, and the lives they want to lead," he added.

UK PM faces probe over wife's biz interest

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is facing a watchdog inquiry under his parliamentary declaration of interest obligations related to a Budget policy that could benefit his wife, Akshata Murty, through her business interest in a childcare firm, it emerged on Monday. The inquiry has been opened by the UK's Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, an independent officer of the House of Commons in charge of looking at evidence if individual British members of Parliament are feared to have broken a rule under the 'Code of Conduct'. The active inquiries on the watchdog's list include one opened on Sunak, 42, last Thursday under Paragraph 6 of the rules of conduct, as Downing Street said ministerial interests were "transparently declared". "Members must always be open and frank in declaring any relevant interest in any proceeding of the House or its Committees, and in any communications with Ministers, Members, public officials or public office holders," states Paragraph 6. According to the BBC, the inquiry relates to the British Indian leader's wife's interest in Koru Kids Ltd, which is likely to benefit from a new pilot scheme announced in the Spring Budget last month to incentivise people to become childminders. The parliamentary watchdog's investigation will decide if there has been any breach of the code, which can then be put before MPs sitting on the Committee on Standards.

G-7 diplomats reject Chinese, N Korean, Russian aggression

AP ■ KARUIZAWA (JAPAN)
Top diplomats from the Group of Seven wealthy democracies vowed a tough stance on China's increasing threats to Taiwan and on North Korea's unchecked tests of long-range missiles, while building momentum on ways to boost support for Ukraine and punish Russia for its invasion. Russia's war in Ukraine consumed much of the agenda Monday for the envoys gathered in this Japanese hot spring resort town for talks meant to pave the way for action by G-7 leaders when they meet next month in Hiroshima. The world is at "turning point" on the fighting in Ukraine and must "firmly reject unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, and Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its threats of the use of nuclear weapons", Japanese Foreign Minister

Yoshimasa Hayashi told his colleagues, according to a Japanese summary. For the American delegation, the meeting comes at a crucial moment in the world's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and efforts to deal with China, two issues that G-7 ministers from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and the European Union regard as potent challenges to the post-World War II rules-based international order. A senior US official travelling with Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters that the Biden administration's goal for the talks is to shore up support for Ukraine, including a major initiative on Ukraine's energy infrastructure launched at last year's G-7 gatherings in Germany, as well as to ensure the continued provision of military assistance to Kyiv. Ramping up punishment against Russia, particularly



through economic and financial sanctions that were first threatened by the G-7 in December 2021, before the invasion, will also be a priority, the official said. Ukraine faces an important moment in coming weeks with Russia's current offensive largely stalled and Ukraine preparing a counteroffensive. The US official, who spoke

on condition of anonymity to discuss Blinken's priorities at the closed-door meetings, said there would be discussion about ways to deepen support for Ukraine's long-term defence and deterrence capabilities. That might also improve Kyiv's position for potential negotiations that could end the conflict on its terms. The role of Japan — the only Asian member of the G-7 — as chairman of this year's talks provides an opportunity to discuss coordinated action on China. Leaders and foreign ministers of G-7 countries, most recently France and Germany, have recently concluded visits to China, and the diplomats in Karuizawa are expected to discuss their impressions of where the Chinese stand on numerous issues, including the war in Ukraine, North Korea, and Taiwan, which is a particular sore point in US-China relations. At a private working dinner on Sunday night that was the diplomats' first formal meeting, Hayashi urged continued dialogue with China on the many global challenges where participation from Beijing is seen as crucial. Among the Chinese interests that are intertwined with those of wealthy democracies are global trade, finance and climate efforts.

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
Email : sepwdp@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 2112(1) / 58 C-03 (Yata 'B')/2023 Dated : 15/04/2023

National Competitive E-Bidding (RFP)

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tender for Consultancy Services with Quality and cost based selection system (QCBS) for the following works. The RFP document will be available from date 24-04-2023 at 5.00 Pm onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (in Rs.)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Preparation of DPR of upgradation of Class B to Class-A loading bridge in Almora Bering Askote motor road (SH-03) bridge at km. 93 in Ramganga River District Pithoragarh Constituency Didihat under state sector.	0.45	1500.00 + 18% GST	60	06	Registered in Central/ any state/PSU with experience in Consultancy for bridges.
2	Preparation of DPR of upgradation of Class B to Class-A loading bridge in Thal-Munaryi motor road (SH-11) bridge at km. 154, 159, 164 and km. 173 in District Pithoragarh Constituency Dharchula under state sector.	0.80	2500.00 + 18% GST	60	06	-do-
3	Preparation of DPR of upgradation of Class B to Class-A loading bridge in Dangoli-Kotmanya-Pankhu-Satsiling motor road (SH-60) at km. 118 and km 127 District Pithoragarh Constituency Gangolihat under state sector.	0.31	1500.00 + 18% GST	60	06	-do-
4	Preparation of DPR of upgradation of Class B to Class-A loading bridge in Khutani- Reetha-Sahib- Dhunaghat-Manch- Tamil motor road (SH-64) at km. 136, km. 137(Ch. 136.00), km. 175, Km.178-193 and km. 218 at District Champawat Constituency Champawat under state sector.	0.74	2500.00 + 18% GST	60	06	-do-
5	Preparation of DPR of upgradation of Class B to Class-A loading bridge in Lohaghat-Barakote-Simalkhet-Kaflikhan- Bhanoli motor road (SH-57) at District Champawat Constituency Lohaghat under state sector.	0.65	2000.00 + 18% GST	60	06	-do-

Australian charged with helping suspected Chinese spies

Sydney (AP): Two suspected Chinese spies gave a Sydney businessman envelopes of cash for information about subjects including a government deal with the United States and Britain to build a fleet of Australian nuclear-powered submarines, prosecutors told a court on Monday. The businessman, Alexander Csergo, was refused bail when he appeared by video link from prison in Sydney's Downing Centre Local Court charged with one count of reckless foreign interference. The charge, included in laws against covert foreign interference and espionage that angered China when they were legislated in 2018, carries a maximum 15-year prison sentence. He is accused of accepting money from two suspected Chinese spies he knew by the names Ken and Evelyn in exchange for handwritten reports on Australian defence, economic and national security arrangements since 2021 while he worked in Shanghai, where he owns a communications and technology infrastructure consultancy business. The subjects included the AUKUS partnership among Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States to create

an Australian submarine fleet powered by US nuclear technology that was announced in September 2021, prosecutor Connor McCraith said. The deal details said that Australia would buy second-hand Virginia-class submarines from the US and build a new AUKUS class of submarines with Britain. The suspected spies also requested details about Australia's partnership with the United States, Japan and India known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, as well as information about lithium and iron ore mining in Australia, the prosecutors alleged. Csergo has been in custody since Friday, when he was arrested at his home in the Sydney beachside suburb of Bondi. He had been questioned for weeks by police and agents of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the nation's main domestic spy agency. McCraith said Csergo admitted early in the questioning that he suspected Ken and Evelyn were spies soon after meeting them but remained in contact with them for two years. "He clearly has links to the Chinese state and two people he

clearly thinks work for the MSS (Ministry of State Security)," McCraith told the court. "He also travelled back to Australia with a shopping list" of requested information, he said. McCraith said a reasonable person would have alerted Australian authorities immediately after being approached. Instead, Csergo continued to communicate with the male suspected spy, including inviting him to visit Australia, McCraith said. Csergo's lawyer, Bernard Collaery, said there was nothing sinister about his client's behaviour and that he was an experienced, successful businessman who was lauded for developing working relationships in China. "Businesspeople such as our client know all roads lead to the state, whether it be the state economic intelligence agency" or the Ministry of State Security, Collaery said. "Cash payments for consulting reports might have a colour to it in Australia but might be the way it's done in China — it's not necessarily sinister," Collaery added. Collaery said the reports were from publicly sourced documents, plus Csergo's own creative efforts, and were nothing close to espionage.

US chopper raid in Syria targets ISIS leader

Beirut (AP): A helicopter raid by US forces in northern Syria early on Monday resulted in the "probable death" of a senior leader of the militant Islamic State group, the US military said. The US Central Command said in a statement that the IS leader, who was not named, was "responsible for planning terror attacks in the Middle East and Europe." Two other "armed individuals" were killed along with the target of the raid, CENTCOM said. The statement said no civilians or US troops were hurt in the operation. Syria's White Helmets, a civil defense group operating in opposition-held areas of northern Syria, said it transported two people wounded during the raid to a local hospital, which later said they had died. A third person was killed when the US forces landed for the raid, the White Helmets said. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which partners with the US in anti-IS operations in northeast Syria, said that the operation was launched from a base near the town of Kobani and targeted a military site belonging to a Turkish-backed armed opposition group, Suqour al-Shamayla, in the village of village of Suwayda in the region of Jarabulus, near the Turkish border.

LA LIGA ROUNDUP: BARCA SHUT OUT AGAIN, GRIEZMANN STARS FOR ATLETICO

AFP ■ FRANCE

Asubdued Barcelona could not break down Getafe in a 0-0 draw on Sunday, dropping more points but still sitting 11 clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Third-place Atletico Madrid beat Almeria 2-1 at home, with Antoine Griezmann netting a brace as he continued his sparkling form. Valencia sunk deeper into the relegation mire with a 2-0 home defeat by Sevilla, who host Manchester United in the Europa League on Thursday. Champions Madrid beat Cadiz on Saturday to cut back Barcelona's lead, and with nine games remaining, it seems highly unlikely they will catch Barcelona, but Xavi Hernandez's side is limping over the line. Barcelona drew 0-0 at home against Girona on Monday and followed that up with a second consecutive stalemate, the team still wallowing after its Copa del Rey semifinal thrashing by Madrid earlier in April. The one positive for Barca was a 22nd clean sheet of the season in the top flight, with Getafe, 15th, not creating much danger.

"Here you suffer, because the grass is high, the usual tricks, so it's hard, the clear chances you have, you have to put them away," Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen told DAZN. "It's a dry pitch, so it's difficult. We did things differently to normal, it's a point which isn't good, but it's a point we're adding obviously." Xavi echoed Ter Stegen's complaint that the low quality of the pitch played a part in the result but said Barca could not hide behind it. "It's not an excuse, we weren't accurate, we made chances but we could not finish



them," said Xavi. "But yes, the grass did hurt us. The ball didn't run." The coach said he was not worried about Barca not finding the net in three consecutive games across all competitions. "That can happen, and it's also been a while since we let in goals," added Xavi. "It's a very tough place to go. Getafe have a lot at stake. When they sit deep, it's very hard. They are organized at the back."

NO WAY THROUGH
After a slow start, the Catalans created the first clear

chance at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez when Raphinha raced onto a long ball and fired against the post. The rebound fell to Balde, but with the goal gaping, his mishit effort struck the same upright. Sergi Roberto pulled up injured, seemingly with a hamstring issue, adding to Barcelona's long list of absentees. The league leaders have badly missed explosive winger Ousmane Dembele and creative midfielder Pedri in recent weeks. David Soria saved well to

keep out a Robert Lewandowski header just before the break. Lewandowski nodded narrowly wide from an Alba cross before Soria made another solid stop from a rasping Raphinha effort. Getafe were content with the point, sitting back as Barcelona probed for a breakthrough, although Borja Mayoral almost snatched a winner for the hosts on the break. Barcelona are still firm favourites to lift the title for the first time since 2019, but should they stumble at home against

Atletico next weekend, doubts could creep in. Getafe are four points above the drop zone, after Valencia, 18th, lost at Mestalla. Sevilla, who welcome Manchester United for their Europa League quarterfinal second-leg clash next week, earned a hard-fought win over the frustrated hosts, for whom Ilaix Moriba was sent off late on. Defender Loic Bade sent Sevilla ahead at Mestalla early in the second half, with Suso doubling the visitors' lead. Valencia's anger grew when they were not awarded a penal-

Barcelona have not cheated, insists chief Laporta

AFP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona president Joan Laporta insisted Monday his club never tried to cheat amid investigations into payments made to a former refereeing chief. In a two-hour news conference, he said there was a smear campaign against Barcelona and the head of La Liga for backing the case against the Catalan club, who are top of the league. "Obviously referees were not bought and there was no attempt to influence their decisions," he told reporters gathered at the club's Camp Nou stadium. "Barcelona has never done anything with the aim or intention of adulterating the competition in order to gain a sporting advantage." Last month Spanish prosecutors charged the Catalan club with corruption after payments of more than 7.3 million euros (\$7.8 million) to a company owned by a former refereeing chief were uncovered earlier this year. Barcelona say they paid Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira, the former referee and ex-vice president of the refereeing committee of the Spanish football federation (CTA) between



1994 and 2018, for reports and advice related to refereeing. Barcelona ceased its payments in 2018 due to Negreira's departure from the CTA, according to Spanish prosecutors. Laporta said the payments were for "sports advisory services" such as advice on recruiting "which are common in professional sport". "There was no crime of corruption," he added in his first press conference since Barcelona was charged. "Some services were provided. They were documented. There were invoices, payments registered in the accounting books."

which should have been more comfortable than it proved to be. Griezmann headed Atletico ahead in the fifth minute when Angel Correa nodded on a corner to the back post. Fans at the Metropolitan gave Correa an ovation in the 10th minute in his first appearance after the death of his mother last week. Diego Simeone's side was dominant throughout, but Almeria pulled level when Leo Baptistao's shot deflected in off Jose Gimenez. Griezmann sent the Rojiblancos ahead again before

the break, finishing clinically from Yannick Carrasco's pass at the end of a fine team move for his 11th league goal. Carrasco and Griezmann both hit the post in the second half as Atletico looked to kill the game. They could not find the third and Almeria gave Atletico a few scares in the final stages, appealing for a penalty when Gimenez handled, but VAR showed there was an offside. Girona, ninth, beat bottom-of-the-table Elche 2-0, leaving the stragglers 17 points from safety.

Osimhen, Maignan head-to-head as Napoli and Milan chase UCL glory

AFP ■ FRANCE

Victor Osimhen and Mike Maignan will face off for a place in the Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday when AC Milan travel south to Naples for the decisive second leg of the all-Italian quarter-final. Nigerian striking sensation Osimhen and France's new first-choice goalkeeper Maignan arrived at two of Italy's most storied clubs via Ligue 1 outfit Lille, where they played together for a season before both eventually made their way south of the Alps. Osimhen hadn't played for Napoli since the last international break before making a substitute's appearance in Saturday's goalless draw with Verona which cut his side's imposing Serie A lead to 14 points. The 24-year-old only played the final 17 minutes of that frustrating stalemate but the match came alive once he was on the pitch. He caused havoc in the Verona defence and came close to snatching the points when he smashed a first-time rocket off the underside of the bar with eight minutes remaining. Osimhen's devastating efficiency in front of goal was sorely missed in last week's single-goal defeat which gave Milan a slender advantage to take into



Tuesday's showdown at the Stadio Maradona. "Osimhen has such a physical presence and speed you can chuck the ball at him and he'll hold onto it, use his head or unleash a change of pace. He has so many different options when he has the ball," Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti said on Saturday. Napoli wasted a host of

chances to get something from the game at a packed and soaking wet San Siro in which Maignan produced the sort of display which has made him a natural successor to Hugo Lloris as Les Bleus' goalkeeper. The 27-year-old's return between the sticks in late February following five months out injured has given Milan

more security at the back, with five clean sheets in their last nine matches in all competitions. And knowing he is ready to pull off at times astonishing saves when gaps appear at the back has allowed Milan to slowly return to the more swash-buckling style with which they won their first Serie A title last season.

HEAD-TO-HEAD
His superb stop in the dying seconds on Wednesday denied Giovanni Di Lorenzo from giving Napoli, at that point down to 10 men following the harsh sending off of Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, what would have been a deserved draw. Former Milan manager Fabio Capello said Maignan

was Milan's best player in the first leg and the seven-time European champions will need him in similar form on Tuesday if they are to have a chance of winning number eight. Maignan and Osimhen only played together for one season at Lille — the 2019-20 campaign — but it was enough to leave an impression on Serie A's top scorer. Asked while still at Lille whether it was easy to score penalties against Maignan, Osimhen said: "No! Nearly everyone misses against him. He's too good!" Luckily for Napoli, it is Osimhen's partner in goalscoring crime Khvicha Kvaratskhelia who takes spot-kicks. While 25-goal Osimhen will be back in Naples, Spalletti will have to do without Anguissa and South Korean defensive revelation Kim Min-jae, who is suspended. What Napoli lose on the pitch they will gain off it however, as hardcore supporters agreed a truce in their feud with owner Aurelio De Laurentiis which had made the atmosphere at Napoli's recent home matches toxic. Supporters made a colossal racket on Saturday and will no doubt make the Stadio Maradona a seething cauldron for possibly the biggest match in Napoli's history.



Arsenal can handle title stress as Man City close in, vows Arteta

AFP ■ FRANCE

Arsenal's bid to win the Premier League for the first time since 2004 is in danger of imploding, but Mikel Arteta remains adamant the leaders can cope with the pressure of the title race. Arteta's side blew a two-goal lead for a second successive game as West Ham hit back to snatch a 2-2 draw at the London Stadium on Sunday. After squandering the same advantage in last weekend's 2-2 draw at Liverpool, the Gunners once again paid the price for taking their foot off the gas. Although Arsenal are four points clear of second placed Manchester City, it is the champions who have all the momentum heading into the final weeks of a gripping title battle. With a home game against Arsenal looming on April 26, City know they will be crowned champions if they win their last eight games. Ominously for Arsenal, Pep Guardiola's men have already beaten them twice this season, winning 3-1 at the Emirates Stadium in the league in February, just weeks after knocking the Gunners out of the FA Cup with a 1-0 victory in Manchester. For Arsenal to no longer be in control of their own destiny is a bitter pill for Arteta to swallow after the north Londoners' long spell at the top this term. Arteta concedes Arsenal's untimely collapses against West Ham and Liverpool were self-inflicted wounds, with the Spaniard especially frustrated by the way his players took their strong position for granted on Sunday. But he refuses to accept it was the tension of being chased so relentlessly by City that provoked the calamitous results.

moment," he said. "It was very different to Liverpool in terms of the pattern of play. But that is the next stage, you have to play with the same purpose when it is 2-0. "You have to have more composure to finish the game. When you drop your level so quickly the game is there for the opponent." Before the summit meeting with City, Arsenal host Southampton on Friday. A victory over the bottom of the table Saints would move Arsenal seven points clear of City, who don't play in the league next weekend due to their FA Cup semi-final against Sheffield United on Saturday. Fuelled by Erling Haaland's record-breaking goal-spree City — winners of their last 10 games in all competitions — have the edge in the remaining matches after the Arsenal showdown. Their toughest tests could come on trips to Fulham and Brentford, although their progress in the Champions League might also pose a distraction. Arsenal's trickiest fixtures could be a daunting visit to Newcastle and a home game against in-form Brighton, while a London derby against struggling Chelsea can't be taken for granted. Arteta doesn't believe Arsenal's young squad are running out of steam towards the end of their unexpected title bid. But he will spend the days leading up to the Southampton game searching for answers to the blip that threatens to ruin their dream season. "Fatigue? No. The best way to put it is to convince the team they can do it. We have to dig very deep and find the solution," he said. "We stopped playing with the purpose to score a third and fourth one. It looked too easy. We gave them hope and credit to West Ham, they took it. "We need that ruthless mindset to go kill a team and we haven't done it."

Jayasuriya bags five-for as Sri Lanka devastate Ireland

AFP ■ GALLE (SRI LANKA)

Sadeera Samarawickrama and Dinesh Chandimal hit unbeaten centuries before Prabath Jayasuriya claimed a five-for as Sri Lanka put visitors Ireland to the sword on the second day of the first Test in Galle on Monday. Sri Lanka declared their first innings on a mammoth 591-6 before reducing Ireland to 117-7, still needing another 274 to avoid the follow-on. Lorcan Tucker was batting on 21 at the close, with Andy McBrine alongside him on five. Playing only their fifth-ever Test, and seeking their first win since attaining the status in 2017, Ireland could only demonstrate their weakness against a team ranked seventh in the world in the five-day format. Left-arm seamer Vishwa Fernando — playing his first Test in 10 months — dismissed Murray Commins for a golden duck and captain Andy Balbirnie in just the second over of the Ireland innings. Harry Tector (34) and James McCollum (35) put together a 70-run partnership before left-arm orthodox spinner Jayasuriya



wreaked havoc with a double wicket maiden, claiming the scalps of Tector and Curtis Campher. In his next over, Jayasuriya cleaned up top scorer McCollum with a peach of a delivery that pitched on middle stump, spun

past the bat and clipped the top of off-stump. Jayasuriya next had Peter Moor caught behind and completed his fifth five-wicket haul by trapping George Dockrell leg before wicket. "Jayasuriya bowled really

well and it was a tough task playing him," admitted a chastened Tector. "We have to hang in there, show character and fight it out." Earlier, wicketkeeper-batsman Samarawickrama celebrated his return to Test cricket with

a maiden hundred after last featuring in a Test in 2017. His 104 not out was the first time a Sri Lankan wicketkeeper has made a century in Test-match cricket in seven years, the previous being Kusal Perera in 2016.

"I have waited for six years to make my comeback into the Test team," he told reporters. "It feels good to score my maiden Test hundred. "There were periods we had to be watchful," he added. "There was a lot of mentoring from Chandimal as well and I'm pleased to make it count on my comeback." Chandimal was unbeaten alongside him on 102 at the declaration, posting his 14th Test ton against tired Irish bowlers who toiled in hot conditions. The pair added an unbroken 183 runs for the seventh wicket, after skipper Dimuth Karunaratne (179) and Kusal Mendis (140) posted centuries earlier in the innings. Chandimal, 18 overnight, was the first to reach three figures with an elegant punch for four through extra cover. The 27-year-old Samarawickrama joined him in the next over, his 104 the highest score by a Sri Lankan number eight. The match is the first-ever Test between Sri Lanka and Ireland, who have lost all four of their previous Tests, including against Bangladesh this month.

CHENNAI ARE SUPER KINGS

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Brilliant half-centuries by Glenn Maxwell and Faf du Plessis went in vain as Chennai Super Kings chipped in with timely wickets to prevail over Royal Challengers Bangalore in Match 24 of IPL 2023 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Monday.

Maxwell struck a 36-ball 76, smashing three fours and eight sixes while and Du Plessis hammered a 33-ball 62 as they came together for a sensational counter-attacking 126-run partnership for the third wicket that helped Royal Challengers Bangalore recover from 15/2 in the second over to keep on course for a massive chase.

RCB were up against it chasing the highest target of 227 and thanks to the brilliant batsmanship of Maxwell and Du Plessis came close to the target before being restricted to 218/8 in 20 overs, losing by eight runs.

The bats dominated the ball in this Southern Derby as 444 aggregate runs were scored in the match in which Tushar Deshpande of Chennai Super Kings emerged as the best bowler with 3-45 off four overs. In all 33 sixes were hit in two innings combined as the two teams put up a splendid display of big hitting. Though CSK won the match, they were lucky as they dropped around half a



dozen catches. However, Ajanjaya Rahane saved eight runs at the boundary and that ended up as the difference between the two teams. Chasing a massive target of 227, the highest this season so far, Royal Challengers Bangalore

POINTS TABLE						
		P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1	RR	5	4	1	1.354	8
2	LSG	5	3	2	0.761	6
3	CKS	5	3	2	0.265	6
4	GT	5	3	2	0.192	6
5	PBKS	5	3	2	-0.109	6
6	KKR	5	2	3	0.320	4
7	RCB	5	2	3	-0.318	4
8	MI	4	2	2	-0.389	4
9	SRH	4	2	2	-0.822	4
10	DC	5	0	5	-1.488	0

(RCB) got off to a poor start as Virat Kohli fell cheaply, dragging on an under edge onto his body and then the stump as he moved away to hit Akash Singh, who came in for Ambati Rayudu as Impact Player, out of the ground. Kohli was out for 6 (4 balls, 1x4). Maheesh Theekshana dropped a sitter, running back from mid-off of the last ball of the first over as Mahipal Lomror survived a chance. But he was out without troubling the scorer, offering a dolly to Rituraj Gaikwad at cover-point off Tushar Deshpande. Skipper Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell set on the repair job with brilliant counter-attacking half-centuries as RCB maintained their chances for a successful chase.

Maxwell smashed two sixes off Akash Singh in the third over, flicked Theekshana for a six over the backward square and bashed a four and six off successive deliveries by fellow Sri Lankan Matheesha Pathirana in the eighth over. He smacked Ravindra Jadeja for a boundary and then smashed back-to-back fours off Pathirana to complete his fifty in 20 balls. Du Plessis kept up the scoring rate from the other end as he capitalised on an early drop off a difficult chance by Dhoni for a boundary to smash two fours and a six off Deshpande in the fourth over and smacked Akash Singh to a six and four off successive deliveries, whipping, cutting and driving with relish.

Samson should get consistent opportunities in Team India: Harbhajan

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh was full of praise for Sanju Samson's splendid show with the bat against Gujarat Giants and opined that the Rajasthan Royals skipper should get a consistent chance in team India.

Chasing 178, the Royals were reeling 66/4 in 12 overs. From there, Samson took 20 runs off Rashid Khan in the 13th over to eventually make 60 off 32 while Shimron Hetmyer smashed a whirlwind unbeaten 56 off just 26 balls to give Rajasthan an improbable three-wicket win over Gujarat Giants on Sunday.

Samson and Hetmyer added a crucial stand of 59 runs off 27 balls, followed by the latter adding 47 runs off 20 deliveries with Dhruv Jurel to complete the chase with four balls to spare. "Huge, a captain's knock. Such players have more courage than other players. He is a special player. He had an even bigger impact than Hetmyer because he made the game and Shimron Hetmyer finished it," Harbhajan said in a post-match show



on Star Sports. "If you have confidence in your ability, you can take the match deep. MS Dhoni used to take the game deep because he didn't have any doubt over his ability. He knew that if he stays till the end, he will finish the match," he added. While praising Shimron Hetmyer for his blitzkrieg, the former cricketer said it was Samson who took the game to the end. "Hetmyer also did that. He stayed till the end and finished the match but who took the match till the end — Sanju Samson. This player has so much ability, he should play for India." Harbhajan further said that Samson should get regular opportunities on the national side as the batter has the ability to win big matches. "We talk about him (Samson) again and again, that he plays the spinners and fast bowlers extremely well. He should get consistent opportunities in Team India as well. I am his fan, not from today, but for many years, because of the sort of player he is, he has the ability to win big matches," he said.

We can win 9/9 games: Ganguly to DC players

IANS ■ BENGALURU

Sourav Ganguly, Director of Cricket at Delhi Capitals, feels the David Warner-led side can still win their remaining nine matches in IPL 2023 and make a late turnaround after losing five games on the trot.

On Saturday, Delhi suffered its fifth consecutive defeat in the tournament, with a 23-run loss to Royal Challengers Bangalore at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium and are still languishing at the bottom of the ten-team points table. "We need to put this behind. Back the captain, back each other together and we'll come back fresh next game. We can't get worse than this; we can only get better. Still nine games to go and we can win 9 out of 9."

"It doesn't matter if we qualify or don't qualify, it doesn't matter so much for us at this



stage. But let's look inside, play for ourselves, play for our pride, and see if we can get there," said Ganguly to the players in a video posted by the franchise. Ganguly also urged the side that they are a better outfit than what their results show. "We are a much better side than what is happening on the field at the moment. It just takes one game to turn around and we'll do that." "Let's stick to David (Warner), he's the captain, and he's the most important man in the team. He's got the hardest job; we'll stick together and

come back better." Head coach Ricky Ponting urged the team to be better in their fielding whenever they take the field in the tournament. "Whenever we take the field next time, I want to take the fielding from being good to great. I want you to go about your own preparations, look at your own vision, work on your own game plan and play it your way." "One thing I said about the game, I know you keep on working hard. Keep doing all the right things, then eventually it's going to change. That's the only way we will be able to go forward boys - simple, altogether, as a group, work hard together for each other to turn things around." Delhi's next match in IPL 2023 will be against two-time winners Kolkata Knight Riders at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on April 20.

Wanted Arjun to have freedom to express himself: Sachin



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sachin Tendulkar sat in the dressing room instead of team dug-out as he

didn't want son Arjun to deviate from his plans on his IPL debut for Mumbai Indians against Kolkata Knight Riders. The 23-year-old left-arm seamer had figures of 0 for 17 in 2 overs with six dot balls after stand-in skipper Suryakumar Yadav handed him the new ball on Sunday.

"It was a great moment. A special one to play for the team that I supported since 2008 and it was nice to get the cap from captain of MI and Indian team," Arjun, who plays first-class cricket for Goa, told IPLT20.com. For the legendary father, it was the first time that he watched his son play a competitive game. "This was a new experience for me because till now I have not actually gone and watched him play. I wanted him to have the freedom to go out and express himself, and do whatever he wanted to," Tendulkar said after Mumbai Indians' seven-wicket win against Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday. However during the initial part of KKR's innings, Tendulkar didn't sit in the dug-out outside the boundary line as it could have made Arjun conscious. "Today, also I sat in dressing room as I didn't want him (Arjun) to move away from his plans and start looking at mega screen and suddenly realise that I am watching him, so I was inside." For the father, it was an emotional journey as he recollected his 16-year association with the franchise — six years as player and last 10 as a Mentor. "Different feeling because 2008 was first season for me and 16 years down the line, he plays for the same team, not bad," he concluded.

LSG-CSK game likely to be played on May 3

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants' IPL home game against Chennai Super Kings is set to be played on May 3 instead of May 4 due to the Municipal elections in the city. While there is no official communication on the postponement of the game, the BCCI has informally told the teams that the match could be held a day in advance. "There could be issues with regards to security deployment as Lucknow Municipality goes to polls on Thursday, May 4. "LSG's game against CSK is a mid-week afternoon game at 3:30 pm. Now the game could be played a day earlier, Wednesday, May 3 at the same time," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

He could definitely play next year: Moeen on MSD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

England's seasoned all-rounder Moeen Ali feels Mahendra Singh Dhoni "could definitely" feature in the IPL next year, playing down the widespread supposition that the ongoing season will be the Chennai Super Kings captain's last appearance in the T20 league. At 41, the World Cup-winning former India skipper continues to attract massive following across the length and breadth of the country, and last week came close to lifting CSK to a win over Rajasthan Royals, with batting that reminded everyone of his best years.

"He could definitely play again next year," Moeen was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "The way he's playing, I don't think it'll be his batting that stops him from playing, even if it's in two, three years' time. "I wasn't surprised at how he played (against Rajasthan). I've been watching him in the nets, and he's been batting unbelievably well. "It's just amazing to see from somebody at that age. It's not easy when you come in so late - people forget that a lot of the time, but that's what makes him so good at his role." Moeen also drew a parallel between Dhoni and his former England white-ball skipper Eoin Morgan, under whom the team won its first 50-over World Cup, in 2019. "They're very similar in how clear and calm they are, but also very different. Their interests and all that are very different. "The biggest difference? MS does most of his captaincy on gut feel, on the day. It could be a bit like that with Morgs too, but he was also very data-driven. But



they're both so calm. In terms of mannerisms, they are very, very, very similar. "The best way I could describe MS is that he's a very normal person. Obviously he has a massive following but there's no big-headedness or anything like that. He's very humble. You can talk to him about anything... he's just as you see him on TV: approachable, calm." The 35-year-old spin bowling all-rounder, who had retired from Test cricket, is using the IPL to work on his bowling and "getting myself ready" for the World Cup, which India is hosting later this year. He said it is likely to be his last ODI World Cup. "It's going to be really important that I do bowl, and that I get my bowling up to the best place it can be," Moeen said. "It's more than likely going to be my last 50-over World Cup, so I want to make sure it's a good one - both for myself and for the team. We want to defend the title, and spin could play a massive role in the World Cup."

JADEJA FULL OF PRAISE FOR CSK OWNERS

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Equal respect for all and being empathetic to players during their lowest phase has been the hallmark of Chennai Super Kings management, which has resulted in four IPL trophies, feels senior all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja. Jadeja, who was the captain for the first phase during last year, didn't get desired respect and was replaced by the peerless Mahendra Singh Dhoni, whose every word is believed to be holy graal in the CSK corridors. It was learnt was Jadeja was a bit upset after giving up captaincy and there were rumours that he wanted to leave the franchise but

all the differences were ironed out much before the current season begun. "CSK management and the owners (N Srinivasan) never put any pressure on any players. Even now after 11 years with CSK, they have the same attitude and the approach. They'll never make you feel low even when you aren't performing well," Jadeja told Star Sports. The southpaw said that there is no hierarchy in the team set-up and he has never felt that there is any bias for any particular player. "There is no senior and junior kind of thing there. Even any youngster from U-19 will get the same respect and treatment like



other senior players. No pressure at all. No biasness among any players, whether they are playing or not." For Jadeja, the connect with fans, the 'Whistle Podu' brigade, is deeply emotional at one level. He spoke on how the CSK franchise has been instrumental in building a deeper connection with the fans, especially when they had to play their home games in Pune in the 2018 edition of the tournament. "In Pune, CSK Franchise made complete arrangement for 2k-3k fans to stay in Pune and watch all those seven matches which were scheduled to be played in Pune. Their stay and food arrangements, everything was

done by CSK franchise. Also they were given CSK jerseys." CSK are back at home ground and Jadeja says he can feel the buzz even during training sessions. "This time at home ground there will be a lot of excitement because sometimes when we practice it feels like we are here to play a match because 15-20k fans comes to watch us practice. "Complete one stand gets filled and cheer for us till the time we practice. It will be lot more exciting this time because we haven't played at our home ground since few years and Mahi Bhai is back this season, so it'll be a big occasion for fans to see him in Chennai."