

**WORLD 5**  
UKRAINIAN DRONES HIT  
CRIMEA OIL DEPOT

**MONEY 6**  
'INTRODUCE AUTOMATED  
GST SCRUTINY SYSTEM'

**SPORT 8**  
MUMBAI TO FACE  
ROYALS IN IPL TODAY

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## PM lists Cong abuses: 91 & counting

Cong used bad words even for stalwarts like Ambedkar; the more mud it slings at us, the more lotus will bloom: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Campaigning in Karnataka to ensure the BJP retains power there, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday trained guns on the Congress over its President Mallikarjun Kharge's "poisonous snake" barb at him, saying "Congress people understand, as much mud you sling at us, the lotus will bloom."

Modi, who addressed public meetings at Humnabad in Bidar district, Vijayapura, Kudachi and Bengaluru North, and a roadshow in Bengaluru, said that the Congress and its leaders have hurled at him dif-

ferent types of abuses 91 times. "Someone has made a list of such abuses against me and it has been sent to me. Till now Congress people have abused me 91 times with different types. Had Congress people put efforts in good governance and boosting the morale of its workers, instead of wasting time on this dictionary of abuses, the Congress would not have been in such a pathetic plight," said Modi in Bidar.

Making the Congress "abuses" as the focus of his addresses, Modi alleged the Congress has abused not only him but stalwarts of the country, including Babasaheb



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a public meeting ahead of Karnataka Assembly elections, in Humnabad on Saturday PTI

Ambedkar and Veer Savarkar. "Babasaheb Ambedkar himself had once said in detail that Congress abused him repeatedly. Congress had called Babasaheb Ambedkar

'Rakshas', 'Rashtra Drohi', 'Dagabaz Dost..you will be shocked to hear. Even today we see how Congress abuses Veer Savarkar. Congress has abused stalwarts of this country,' said

the Prime Minister. Modi said, "Congress hates everyone who speaks about the common man, who brings out their corruption, who attacks their politics of selfishness. Congress's hate against such people will become permanent. In this election too, the Congress once again has started abusing me."

"Looking at this I feel that Congress respects me like they did to Babasaheb Ambedkar, Veer Savarkar, as Congress is abusing me in a similar way. I feel it as a gift to me. Let the Congress abuse me, I will continue to work for the country and its people. With people's blessings all their abuses will get mixed in mud," he added.

"I'm not the only one who has been attacked like this. Last election they ran a campaign 'Chowkidar chor hai,' then they

said 'Modi Chor', then they said 'OBC community are chor,' and now just the election season has started in Karnataka they showed the guts of calling my Lingayat brothers and sisters chor."

Making a pitch for the victory of the BJP in a tough and evenly poised electoral contest with the Congress, the Prime Minister said "double-engine government is 'vocal for local'." "BJP's double engine government is vocal for the local and that is why we keep on encouraging our weavers and handicraftsmen. BJP's double engine government is a government that gives strength to aspirations, a government that makes dreams come true... Double engine government is a government of youth," Modi said.

Continued on Page 2

## Mukhtar Ansari gets 10-year jail, Afzal four years



**Afzal set to lose membership to Lok Sabha**

PNS ■ GHAZIPIUR

Gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari and his BSP MP brother Afzal Ansari were on Saturday sentenced to imprisonment for 10 years and four years, respectively, in a 2007 Gangsters Act case. While Afzal, the BSP MP from Ghazipur, was produced in the court of Additional Sessions Judge, Mukhtar attended the court proceedings via video conferencing.

"The court of Additional Sessions Judge/First MP-MLA Court Durgesh also imposed a fine of ₹5 lakh on Mukhtar and ₹1 lakh on Afzal," ADGC Criminal Neeraj Srivastava said.

The verdict could lead to

Afzal losing his Lok Sabha membership. According to the Representation of the People Act, any member will be disqualified if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more.

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi (from Wayanad in Kerala) and UP legislators, including Azam Khan (Rampur), his son Abdullah Azam (Suar) and BJP's Vikram Saini (Khatauli-Muzaffarnagar), had recently lost their memberships under the provisions of the same Act.

On November 22, 2007, a case was filed under the Gangsters Act against the Ansari brothers at the Muhammadabad Kotwali police station. On September 22, 2022, prima facie charges were framed against the two.

After hearing the arguments of both the sides, the court reserved its decision which was pronounced Saturday.

## Galwan martyr's wife joins Army; in a first, 5 women inducted in artillery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The widow of Naik Deepak Singh who died fighting the Chinese in the Galwan valley brawl in Eastern Ladakh in June 2020 has been commissioned in the Army. The martyr was awarded Vir Chakra, the third highest gallantry medal in war after Paramvir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra.

Incidentally, his wife, Lieutenant Rekha Singh, 29, is now posted in Eastern Ladakh in the Army Ordnance Corps after she completed her training at the Chennai-based Officers Training Academy (OTA).

Meanwhile, the Army for the first time inducted five women officers into the artillery regiment on Saturday. According to Naik Deepak's Vir Chakra citation, he played a pivotal role in rendering treatment and saving the lives of more than 30 Indian soldiers.

"Naik Deepak Singh dis-



Cadets celebrate during the Passing Out Parade and Pipping Ceremony at Officers Training Academy (OTA), in Chennai on Saturday PTI

played unmatched professionalism in hostile conditions, unflinching devotion and made supreme sacrifice for the nation," it said.

Giving details of the induction of women officers into the artillery regiment, sources said here on Saturday the officers were inducted after successful completion of their one-year training at the Officers Training Academy (OTA) in Chennai on Saturday.

The five women officers who joined the artillery regiment are Lieutenant (Lt) Mehak Saini, Lt Sakshi Dubey, Lt Aditi Yadav, Lt Pious Mudgil and Lt Akansha.

Out of the five women officers, three are posted to units deployed along the borders with China and the other two in "challenging locations" near the frontier with Pakistan, sources said.

Continued on Page 2

## China ties abnormal, Pak strained: EAM

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/SANTO DOMINGO (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that ties with China at present are "abnormal" and relations with Pakistan strained as it continues to stoke cross-border terrorism into India. These strong remarks came days before foreign ministers of China and Pakistan arrive in India to take part in the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) foreign ministers' meet on May 4-

5 in Goa.

India wants to ensure that its relations with all countries advance without seeking exclusivity, Jaishankar said as he underlined that China falls into a somewhat different category because of the currently "abnormal" nature of ties which is an outcome of a violation of border management agreements by Beijing.

Jaishankar, who arrived in Santo Domingo on his first

official visit to the Dominican Republic, also said India has seen a dramatic expansion in connectivity, contacts, and cooperation across the region.

Pakistan, however, remains an exception to this in view of cross-border terrorism, he said while addressing the diplomatic corps and young minds of the Dominican Republic.

Continued on Page 2

## Kejriwal's house facelift: L-G seeks expenditure record

New Delhi: Amid a row over crores of rupees spent on renovating Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence, Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Saturday ordered officials to secure the records of expenditure and sought a report on the matter within 15 days.

## CAPSULE

### 43 CANDIDATES BAG 100 SCORE IN JEE-MAIN: NTA

New Delhi: Forty-three candidates have bagged the perfect 100 score in the engineering entrance exam JEE-Main with maximum of them being from Telangana, the National Testing Agency announced on Saturday. P4

### UNVACCINATED SUDAN EVACUEES QUARANTINED

New Delhi: Of the total 1,191 Indian passengers who arrived so far from strife-torn Sudan under operation Kaveri, 117 passengers have been quarantined as they were not vaccinated against Yellow Fever. All passengers will be released after 7 days if they remain asymptomatic, said a statement from the Union Health Ministry.

## Ready for probe, but won't resign: WFI chief Bhushan

PTI ■ GONDA

Facing allegations of sexual harassment by seven women wrestlers, WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh on Saturday said he is ready for "any kind of investigation" but won't resign from his post as it would mean he has accepted the charges against him.

"I am completely innocent and have full faith in Supreme Court and Delhi Police. I am ready to face any kind of investigation," Singh told reporters at his residence in Bishnoharpur, about 40 km from Gonda city. "Resigning as president of Wrestling Federation of India is not a big deal for me, but I will not resign as a criminal."

Taking a strong exception to Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's meeting with the wrestlers on Saturday morning, Singh said,



Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh during an interaction with the media at his residence in Bishnoharpur village, in Gonda on Saturday PTI

"Today it has been seen who is behind this controversy. I have been saying from the beginning that an industrialist and the Congress have a hand in this. They are upset with me."

Continued on Page 2

## Mann Ki Baat encourages sustainable development: Gates Foundation Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann-Ki-Baat radio programme has transformed into an "inspirational platform" encouraging sustainable progress on priority themes that are core to India's efforts towards achieving the sustainable development goals, according to a study supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Since its inception in 2014, the monthly radio broadcast has become "a key pillar" of the government's citizen-outreach program, the study titled "Mann Ki Baat-A Decade of Reflection" added.

The objective of the study, the report said, was to perform a quantitative and qualitative textual analysis of 99 tran-



scripts of the Mann Ki Baat episodes published from 2014-2023 using text-mining tools as well as to identify the most prominently discussed thematic areas in the programme.

The Institute for Competitiveness (IFC) is the research partner in the study, while Axis My India is its knowledge partner.

The Mann Ki Baat's efforts to raise awareness of global and local problems, celebrate grassroots solutions, and encourage citizen activism have contributed to India's progress towards the SDGs with the programme focussing on five thematic areas — cleanliness and sanitation, health, wellness, water conservation, and sustainability — the report said.

"By sharing examples of efforts of common citizens, and by highlighting stories of progress and change, Mann Ki Baat has transformed into an inspirational platform that is encouraging sustainable progress on priority themes that are core to India's efforts towards achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs)," the report said.

The programme highlights

government and citizen action in these priority areas and in turn encourages listeners to establish or participate in change making initiatives in their own communities with the aim to have a lasting and sustainable impact on lives of people and for the country, it said.

"Mann Ki Baat has catalysed collective action towards achieving SDGs. It has encouraged listeners to participate in societal change making and citizen engagement at the heart of the programme," the report added.

The report said celebrating the spirit of India's change makers and people's action by speaking directly to ordinary people is at the core of Modi's Mann Ki Baat.

Continued on Page 2

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# HP saw highest increase in mean temp: Report

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Pune-based Climate Research and Services (CRS) division of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) released the long term data on state-wise climate report which shows that Himachal Pradesh recorded the highest increase in mean temperature trend with values at 1.50 degree Celsius per 100 years.

Goa recorded 1.440 degree Celsius increase followed by Kerala at 1.050 degree Celsius over the 100 years period. On the other hand, Bihar showed the lowest increasing trend of 0.02 degree Celsius per 100 years followed by Haryana at 0.060 degree Celsius of increase and Uttar Pradesh at 0.130 degree Celsius. "The warmest annual mean temperature in terms of anomaly with respect

to long term mean was observed over Uttarakhand (1.170C), followed by Himachal Pradesh (1.160 C) and Punjab (1.050 C) while the lowest annual mean temperature anomaly was observed over Telangana (-0.110C) followed by Andhra Pradesh (-0.030C) and Karnataka (-0.010C)," the report said.

In its report titled State-wise Annual Climate Statement for the Year 2022, the IMD not just highlighted not only mean surface temperature but death numbers. According to the report, nearly every state in the country has experienced a rise in temperature from its normal value since pre-industrial times.

The report shows the highest annual rainfall anomaly was observed for the year 2022 was over Karnataka state (138 percent of Long Period Average (LPA)) followed by Rajasthan

(136 percent of LPA) and Telangana (135 percent of LPA). The highest rainfall deficiency was observed over Mizoram (74 percent of LPA) followed by Manipur (75 percent of LPA) and Bihar (77 percent of LPA).

In terms of long-term time series, Goa showed the highest increasing trend of annual rainfall (21.0 mm/ 100 years), followed by Gujarat (15.1mm / 100 years) and Tripura (10.3 mm / 100 years). At the same period, the highest decreasing trend was seen over Arunachal Pradesh (83 mm / 100 years), Nagaland (62 mm / 100 years) and Manipur (22 mm / 100 years).

According to the report, there was about 2770 loss of human lives was reported for the country as a whole due to various extreme weather events.

# Valley top brass discuss steps to thwart vehicle-borne IEDs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SRINAGAR

Top brass of the security grid in Kashmir valley on Saturday deliberated on taking countermeasures to thwart emerging threat of Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIEDs) along the national highway.

The district police chiefs were directed to focus on anti-terrorist operations, busting of terror modules by apprehending terrorist associates in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the sector commanders of the Indian army were also directed to do extensive area domination at night too. Chairing a high-level meeting on national highway security in the South Kashmir district of Anantnag on Saturday, Additional Director General of Police Kashmir, Vijay Kumar deliberated on the potential threats from terrorists

on National Highway and countermeasures needed to prevent the same. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of convoy movement was also discussed and accordingly upgraded.

The meeting was attended by Army's General Officer Commanding Victor Force Maj Gen Prashant Srivastava, Inspector General CRPF Kashmir (Ops) Sector M S Bhatia, IG BSF Ashok Yadav, Joint Director IB, Army's sector commanders in South Kashmir, DIGs of police, CRPF, SSB, ITBP & CID and SSPs of Anantnag, Pulwama, Kulgam and Awantipora.

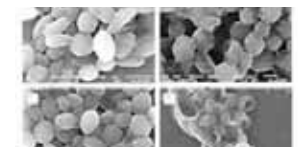
All field officers gave their assessment during the meeting, a police spokesman said. "During the meeting potential threats from terrorists on NHW were discussed in detail and more counter measures were decided," a police spokesman said.

# Rare yeast pathogen begins to target infants, warn researchers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lodderomyces elongisporus, a dangerous and rare yeast pathogen which typically infects immunocompromised adult patients or intravenous drug users has now begun to strike premature infants, researchers have warned. They attributed two outbreaks among infants in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in Delhi from September 2021 to February 2022 to the pathogens which have been also found to be highly resistant to disinfectants.

The findings titled, 'Genomic Analyses of a Fungemia Outbreak Caused by Lodderomyces elongisporus in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Delhi, India' are published in the journal mBio. The study highlighted the cases of 2021-22 when 10



children were infected over six months. One of the infected children died while nine survived after treatment. The researchers from Hindu Rao Hospital, Delhi and PGIMER Chandigarh among others found that while infected patients can be treated with antifungal medications, the yeast is remarkably resistant to the strong disinfectant bleach commonly used to sanitize hospital rooms.

Scientists report said that it is evolving quickly and sexually reproducing at a much higher rate than related pathogens such as Candida auris, a drug-resistant fungus that can cause persistent and severe infections and widespread outbreaks.

# 117 evacuees from Sudan quarantined

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Of the total 1,191 Indian passengers who arrived so far from strife-torn Sudan under operation Kaveri, 117 passengers have been quarantined against Yellow Fever. All passengers will be released after 7 days if they remain asymptomatic, said a statement from the Union Health Ministry.

"These passengers are provided rent-free accommodation with free food facility in quarantine centers managed by Airport Health Officers (APHOs), and the Ministry at various hospitals across states holding a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as well as central government hospitals in Delhi such as Safdarjung Hospital.

## IN BRIEF

**SCIENCE CONCLAVE ON VEDA HELD**  
New Delhi : All India Science conclave on Veda , organised on Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati's 200th Birth Anniversary, was inaugurated here on Saturday by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. The conference is being organized under the joint auspices of Vishwaveda Parishad, Parmarth Niketan, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Patanjali University. Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar, among others, attended the conference. BJP MP Dr. Satyapal Singh said that "each and every word of Veda is full of science."

**MCD SEALS OVER 10 ILLEGAL DAIRIES**  
New Delhi: The MCD sealed over 10 illegal dairies and impounded 245 stray cattle around the national capital during the week. The action was carried out to ensure the safety of both the cattle and the general public, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) said in a statement. "As part of the operation, 11 illegal dairies were also sealed in Sangam Vihar, Seelampur, Hastaal and Aya Nagar. These dairies were operating without the necessary permits and in violation of the law," the statement said. The joint operation was led by the Veterinary department in Keshopur, Khyazala, Barwala, Sangam Vihar, Dakshinipuri, Chhatarpur, Manglauri, Aya Nagar, Vasant Vihar, Alaknanda, Roop Nagar, New Chandrawal, Malika Ganj, Vasant Kunj, Shyam Colony, Budh Vihar and Rohini Sectors 3, 5, 7 and 8.

**HEALTH MIN MEETS KIN OF CORONA WARRIOR**  
New Delhi: Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj on Saturday met the family members of Corona Warrior Late Satinder Hans, who lost her life in the line of duty during the Covid pandemic. Bhardwaj handed over a cheque of Rs. 1 crore to the family of the late Corona Warrior on behalf of the Kejriwal Government.

**1 CR CHEQUE GIVEN TO KIN OF COVID WARRIOR**  
New Delhi: Delhi Education Minister Atishi Saturday handed over a cheque of Rs 1 crore to the family of Covid warrior Madan Lal who lost his life during the pandemic. The compensation was provided under a scheme launched by the city government for Covid warriors who died while on duty during the pandemic.

**ATISHI SEEKS REPORT ON KID'S HOME**  
New Delhi: Women and Child Development Minister Atishi has ordered immediate inspection of all government-run children's homes in Delhi and sought a detailed report on each by May 15. The orders come in light of the minister's recent surprise visits to two children's homes in Lajpat Nagar where the facilities were found in a state of disrepair. Atishi has pulled up the officials concerned and sought a comprehensive report on each of the 25 children's homes run by the government by May 15 for review.

## PM lists ...

**From Page 1**  
He expressed confidence that the BJP will retain power in Karnataka with clear majority. "I have full faith in people of Karnataka that on May 10th you will vote for BJP. You should go to every house and every voter

and spread awareness about the development of BJP," said Modi. The Prime Minister took a dig at Congress leader Siddaramaiah saying that party is seeking votes in name of retirement. "This is my last election. Give me a chance. What a pathetic state they have reached!" Modi said

## 'Mann Ki Baat'...

**From Page 1**

"Themes such as environmental sensitivity, developmental challenges, water conservation and sustainability help to raise public awareness about these subjects and energise people to experiment with new, innovative, and long-term solutions, for India and the world," it said.

The radio programme emphasises the role of start-ups and small businesses in achieving a self-reliant India; encourages people of all ages to take action to promote the social and environmental causes that matter most to them; and spreads the word about government policies, programmes, and initiatives aimed at economic, social, and sustainable development, the report underlined.

"Just as Mann Ki Baat speaks directly to ordinary people, it celebrates their achievements within—and beyond—their communities," it added.

The report said the programme also connects people to their culture and traditional values.

"Through Mann ki Baat, our traditional practices such as Yoga, Ayurveda and constant learning are reinforced – and these conversations connect us back to our roots," the report said.

While the people of India are modern, contemporary, and global in their outlook, the prime minister's regular interaction with them ensures that they "never lose touch with the core rich cultural heritage and values," it added.

"Over 100 crore people have connected to Mann Ki Baat at least once," the report said, adding that the conversational, personal tone and practical subject matter make the prime minister's radio broadcast feel more relevant, contextual and accessible to its audience.

# Pilot asks Gehlot to solve Mali quota demand

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Amid the ongoing stir by the Mali community for a separate 12 per cent reservation, former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot Saturday urged the Rajasthan government to find a satisfactory solution to the matter in accordance with constitutional provisions.

Members of the have blocked Jaipur-Agra national highway in Bharatpur to press for their demand for quota in government jobs and educational institutions. The agitation, during which a man hanged himself to a tree, continued for the ninth consecutive day on Saturday.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot also belongs to the Mali community. On Saturday, Pilot, in a tweet, said Saini, Mali, Kushwaha, Shakya and

Maurya communities have been struggling with their demand for reservation for the last few days. "I urge the state government to find a satisfactory solution to this matter as soon as possible in accordance with the constitutional provisions keeping in view their economic interest and social development," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

Saini, Mali, Kushwaha, Shakya and Maurya belong to the Mali community. They are under the OBC category at present but are demanding a separate 12 per cent reservation.

A delegation of the community recently met Chief Minister Gehlot in Jaipur where he assured them of getting a survey conducted by the OBC commission. The agitators said they will end the agitation when the survey begins.

Meanwhile, the body of Mohan Singh who committed suicide on Tuesday by hanging himself from a tree near the protest site, has not been handed over to the family members. Post-mortem was conducted on Friday.

Sources said officials want to ensure the body is not taken to the site of the agitation and therefore a meeting was held with the family members. Till Saturday evening, the family members were waiting for the body.

Gehlot and Pilot have been at loggerheads publicly for more than two years. In 2020, Pilot had led a rebellion in the party for a change of leadership in the state. However, Gehlot managed to survive and Pilot and some of his loyalists were later ousted from the state cabinet.

# Mission 'Arikomban' successful, rogue elephant being shifted to Periyar Tiger Reserve

**Idukki (Kerala):** A rogue elephant, notorious for breaking into ration shops to steal rice and causing damage to human settlements in Chinnakkal and Santhanpara areas of this hill district, was tranquillised on Saturday after months of uncertainty and confusion.

Mission Arikomban, named after the tusker, started at 4 am on Saturday and went on till 6 pm. The elephant was being to the Periyar tiger reserve and will be let loose 20 km deep inside the forest.

State Forest Minister A K Saseendran said the radio collar attached to the elephant will alert officials of its movement and allow them to take necessary precautions in case it ventures into human habitat again. He, however, did not disclose the exact location where the elephant would be released. The High Court had earlier

directed the Kerala Forest Department not to reveal the location. "Forest officials have made all necessary arrangements (for translocation of the elephant)," the minister told PTI.

Saseendran said the government had proposed various locations before the high court and this particular reserve was selected as its climatic conditions are similar to those of Chinnakkal.

Saddled in the southern region of the Western Ghats, the Periyar Tiger Reserve is spread across 777 sq km of area and is home to a luxuriant collection of different species of flora and fauna.

Earlier, the task force had a tough day, braving heavy rain and fog, as they tried to tranquillise the elephant and shift it to a truck with the help of four Kumki elephants. PTI

# Ready for probe, but won't resign: WFI chief Bhushan

**From Page 1**  
He, however, did not elaborate. Priyanka Gandhi visited the wrestlers at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi and expressed solidarity with them, accusing the government of "protecting the WFI chief."

Several wrestlers have resumed their agitation and sat on a dharna since April 23, demanding that an FIR be filed against the "Gonda strongman". They also demand that Singh be removed from all posts he holds. The Congress has said that he should be arrested immediately.

On Friday night, Delhi Police registered two FIRs against Singh. While the first FIR pertained to allegations of

a minor wrestler and was registered under the POCSO Act, the second was related to outraging modesty. "I'm not a criminal. Resigning means I have accepted their allegations," Singh, the BJP MP from Kaiserganj in Uttar Pradesh, said. He claimed all the demands of women wrestlers have been accepted.

"An FIR has been lodged against me, yet they are sitting on dharna. Why?" he asked.

Singh, a sixth-term lawmaker, said his tenure as the WFI chief is complete and he will automatically resign with the election of the new president. He is only playing the role of a "caretaker" till the election.

Singh has completed 12 years as WFI chief and is ineligible to contest for another term. He asked why are the wrestlers still sitting on dharna now when an FIR has been registered against him. "Why are they constantly speaking against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Sports Ministry?"

Singh said the ongoing dharna by the wrestlers is not a protest of sportspersons but a protest of the "conspirators". "They did not wait for the investigation report to be made public and went to the Supreme Court and there raised a new allegation."

They are saying that the sport has to be saved but they are not saving the game (by doing this). They have caused a huge loss in the last four

months," he said. He also asked if he had been sexually abusing players for 12 years, why they never took a complaint to the police station, federation or the government till date. "They went straight to Jantar Mantar," he said.

Singh said he has submitted an audio clip to the probe committee, in which a man is heard speaking about arranging a girl to implicate him.

Stressing that he fully respects the decision of the Supreme Court and the government, Singh alleged the protestors are coming up with new demands everyday.

"First they demanded an FIR and now that the FIR has been lodged, they are demanding to put me in jail. I am a

member of Lok Sabha. It has not been by the grace of Vinesh Phogat (one of the wrestlers protesting at Jantar Mantar) but the people of my area have made me an MP," Singh said.

Claiming that the entire Haryana and UP "akhadas" are with him, the MP said it is only "one family's akhada" which is against him.

"I have full faith in the law of the land. I will definitely be proved innocent. It has been troubling me for a long time. I and my family are being abused."

Our supporters are also being targeted but my supporters and family have full faith that I am innocent. Soon, the country will also come to know about it," he added.

**UPSIDA** कार्यालय बरिष्ठ प्रबन्धक मेगा फूड पार्क, बहेडी उ.प्र. राज्य औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण, ए - 1/4 लखनपुर, कानपुर

ई-निविदा सूचना

एचए द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण के विभिन्न जनपदों में स्थित औद्योगिक क्षेत्रों में विद्युत अग्रस्था एवं स्व-स्वायत्त कार्य हेतु सरकारी विभागों/सावजनिक उपकरणों/निगमों/प्राधिकरणों/परिष्कार/संगठनों/संस्थानों में पंजीकृत एवं आई एच ए/शेरी में विद्युत लाईसेन्सी फर्मों/उद्योगों से ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है जो दिनांक 01.05.2023 को पूर्वानु 11.00 बजे से दिनांक 19.05.2023 को अपरानु 5.00 बजे तक अपलॉड की जा सकती है। निविदाओं को दिनांक 20.05.2023 को पूर्वानु 11.00 बजे खोला जायेगा। निविदानामात्रों द्वारा प्रथम चर्चा को मध्य दिनांक 23.05.2023 को सां 5.00 बजे तक प्रथम चर्चा में प्रया की जा सकती है। ई-निविदा के माध्यम से आमंत्रित की जाने वाली निविदा सम्बन्धी विवरण निम्नवत् है :-

क्रमांक	कार्य का नाम	कार्य की अनुमानित लागत (रु. लाख में)
1	Upgradation of Electrical System and Street Light under Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission at I.A. G.C. Shahjahanpur.	40.82

नोट:- 1. निविदादाता अपनी निविदाओं में सम्मिलित एवं सूची प्रकी एवं ए.टी.सी. सर्विसेस परे ऑफिश को अलग से कोड कर देय नहीं होगा। 2. विद्युत कार्य हेतु निविदादाताओं को निविदा अपलोड करते समय "विद्युत सुरक्षा विभाग" उ.प्र. शासन, लखनपुर में शेरी 'क' अनुमोदित लाईसेन्स अपलोड करना अनिवार्य होगा, अन्यथा निविदा को Consider नहीं किया जायेगा। निविदा सम्बन्धी विवरण जानकारों प्राधिकरण की website: [www.onlineupsida.com](http://www.onlineupsida.com) पर स्थित है-ई-लिंक एवं यूएनएलसी की website: <http://e tender.up.nic.in> पर देखी जा सकती है।

बरिष्ठ प्रबन्धक मेगा फूड पार्क, बहेडी उ.प्र.रा.औ.वि.प्रा., कानपुर

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**I, Ramfool S/o Late Shri Ram Kishor R/o Argoopur Kalan Jaunpur Uttar Pradesh- 222101 do hereby Declare that I have changed my name from Foolchand to Ramfool for all future purpose.**

**Public Notice** This is to inform General Public that Mr. Ashok Arora acquired the Third Floor (With Roof Rights) 'Said Floor' Built on Residential Property Bearing No. 2009-P, and area measuring 210 Sq. Yds. Situated at Urban Estate, Sector-16, 'West & Dist. Faridabad, Haryana vide Sale Deed dated 14.08.2019. (Doc. no. 6322). Now, Mr. Ashok Arora intends to sell the above said property to Mr. Ashish Gera and further Mr. Ashish Gera agreed to create mortgage in respect of the said property in favour of our client IDFC FIRST Bank Limited. Further, (any person, body, individual, institution having any claim, title, interest and/or objection in respect of or against or relating to or touching upon said property or part of the property by way of sale, exchange, lease, mortgage, charge, encumbrance, gift, trust, agreement, maintenance, inheritance, testamentary disposition or otherwise or having in their custody any title, documents pertaining to the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at below mentioned address within 14 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim, of such person shall not be binding upon the said property or my Client & in case anyone has any objection on the same may be raised within 14 days of this publication to Mr. Manuwan Chhawan Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocate), Law Offices North, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, CD-ITL Tower, (3-08), NISHTHA Square, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9967701729/9818228536 (M).

# China ties abnormal, Pak strained: EAM

**From Page 1**

"Whether it is the US, Europe, Russia, or Japan, we are trying to ensure that all these ties advance without seeking exclusivity. China falls in a somewhat different category because of the boundary dispute and the currently abnormal nature of our ties. That is an outcome of a violation of agreements regarding border management by them," Jaishankar said.

He said the rise of China and India in a parallel time-frame is also not without its competitive aspects. "When in other regions bid for Africa, the Pacific or Latin America, much of what is happening can be explained as the emergence of India's potential global footprint. In many cases, it is the result of autonomous forces such as business or mobility," the minister said.

Earlier this week, India firmly told China that its violation of the border pacts has "eroded" the entire basis of "bilateral ties and that all issues

relating to the frontier must be resolved in accordance with the existing agreements.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area. The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

In his address, Jaishankar went on to explain how India approaches the world and engages Latin America and what should today's India and tomorrow's India mean.

"India's most pressing priorities are obviously in its neighbourhood. Given its size and economic strength, it is very much for the collective benefit that India takes a generous and non-reciprocal approach to cooperation with smaller neighbours. And that's exactly what we have done in the last decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi..." he said.

"It has seen a dramatic expansion in connectivity, contacts, and cooperation across the region. The exception to this of course, is Pakistan in view of cross-border terrorism.

But whether it is the COVID challenge or more recent debt pressures, India has always stepped up for its neighbours," he said, citing the case of Sri Lanka where India extended more than USD 4 billion of economic support during the island nation's worst economic crisis in decades.

Jaishankar said India is developing the concept of extended neighbourhoods in all directions. With ASEAN, this has taken the form of what New Delhi calls 'the Act East Policy' that has opened up a pathway to a deeper engagement with the Indo-Pacific that is being pursued, amongst others through a mechanism called the Quad – comprising India, Japan, the US and Australia.

He pointed out that towards the West, I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, and USA) group-

ing. To the South, the outlook that shapes India's thinking goes by the acronym of Sagar - an Indian word for Oceans and to the North, India has been pursuing a strategy of connecting to Central Asia more effectively.

"For the first time in 2015, Prime Minister Modi articulated a comprehensive view that spanned the entirety of the Indian Ocean and its islands. This subsequently became the building block for the Indo-Pacific vision that emerged thereafter," he said.

"We are also practising the approach of engaging all major centres of power. Such multi-alignment reflects the reality of multipolarity. Obviously, each engagement has its own particular weight and focus," the minister added.

On India's engagement with Latin America, Jaishankar said in the last decade, there had been a conscious deepening of this process. "Our trade with Latin America is today approaching a volume of USD 50 billion."

# Galwan martyr's wife joins Army; in a first, 5 women inducted in artillery

**From Page 1**

In January, Army Chief General Manoj Pande announced the commissioning of women officers into the Regiment of Artillery is a testament to the ongoing transformation in the Indian Army, a source said.

In January, Army Chief General Manoj Pande announced the decision of commissioning women officers into artillery units. The proposal was later approved by the government.

Naik Deepak Singh was from the Army Medical Corps, and he was later attached to the 16th Battalion of Bihar Regiment. Naik Singh was posthumously awarded Vir

Chakra in 2021 for showing indomitable courage in rendering medical support to the injured soldiers during the clashes.

"Woman Cadet Rekha Singh, wife of Late Naik (Nursing Assistant) Deepak Singh, #VirChakra (Posthumous) got commissioned into #IndianArmy after completing her training from #OTA #Chennai," the Army tweeted.

Twenty Indian Army personnel laid down their lives in the fierce hand-to-hand combat in eastern Ladakh's Galwan Valley clash on June 15, 2020, an incident that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

# Kejriwal's house facelift: L-G seeks expenditure record

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Revelations that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal spent a whopping Rs 44.78 crore on renovation of his official home at 6, Flagstaff Road, Civil Lines by the PWD, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday directed Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to immediately take custody of all records related to alleged "gross irregularities" committed.

He also asked the chief secretary to examine the matter and submit a report within 15 days. The revelation on over crores of rupees spent on renovating Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence has triggered a political row, with the opposition parties demanding his resignation. The Lt Governor's Principal Secretary issued an order citing reports on alleged "gross irregularities" in the renovation of the residence by the PWD. The order was issued on April 27.

"This has reference to various media reports on alleged

gross irregularities committed while carrying out the renovation of No.6 Flag Staff House, Civil Lines by PWD. Lt Governor, while taking note of these media reports and keeping in view the sensitivity of the issue, has desired that all relevant records in this matter be immediately secured and taken into protective custody. Subsequently, after the records are examined, a factual report in the matter be submitted within 15 days for perusal of the lieutenant governor," said the order issued to the chief secretary of the Delhi government.

Responding to L-G's order, the AAP in a statement said, "LG's only job is to stop the development of Delhi. Modi ji has sent him here for this purpose only. We won't let the development of Delhi stop".

Meanwhile, a PWD official confirmed that the details of the expenditure have been sought from them. He said that earlier in some cases, including excise policy matters, a few files went missing and the evidence

was allegedly wiped out. "Based on the files, the Chief Secretary will look into the roles of different officers in the PWD department and even the roles of ministers," he said. The official further added that it will be investigated to determine if any financial regulations were also altered to make it easier to obtain permissions for renovations. BJP leaders Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Ramesh Bidhuri, Manoj Tiwari and Harsh Khurana welcomed the decision saying the order given by the Lieutenant Governor has once again proved that India still has a constitution and the law is active. "Kejriwal has broken all standards of insensitivity and at the same time has crossed all limits of corruption," they said at a joint presser.

The opposition BJP and Congress have been attacking Kejriwal and AAP, claiming Rs 45 crore was spent on the renovation of the chief minister's residence 6, Flagstaff Road during 2020-22.

BJP leader Ramvir Singh

Bidhuri and others have demanded resignation from Kejriwal. Congress leader Ajay Maken claimed that Kejriwal's bungalow included extravagant items like Dior polish, Vietnam marble, expensive curtains, and high-end carpets. AAP leaders, including Jai Prakash Singh and Raghav Chadha, have defended Kejriwal citing expenses on the residences of the prime minister and the chief ministers of BJP-ruled states.

They further claimed that the BJP was trying to divert attention from real issues by raising this matter. AAP leaders Chadha that the Delhi chief minister's residence was constructed 75-80 years ago in 1942. The Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD), after an audit, had recommended its renovation.

Documents provided by sources showed that Rs 44.78 crore against a sanctioned amount of Rs 43.70 crore was spent on "addition/alternation" of the Delhi chief minister's official residence.

# Priyanka, Kejriwal show solidarity with protesting wrestlers in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Saturday expressed solidarity with protesting wrestlers after meeting them at Jantar Mantar and accused the government of "protecting" WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is facing allegations of sexual harassment levelled by women grapplers.

While the Congress general secretary also called for the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief's ouster from the post so that he is unable to "exert pressure" on the wrestlers and hamper their careers, Kejriwal asked people to take time off from work to show solidarity for the aggrieved wrestlers and join them in their protest.

Priyanka Gandhi heard out ace women wrestlers such as Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat. Speaking with reporters at Jantar Priyanka demanded that the copy of FIRs filed on Friday must be shared with the wrestlers as they do not know what sections of the Indian



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi with wrestlers Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik during their protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Saturday



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and Sangita Phogat during protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Saturday

Penal Code have been applied. Congress leaders such as Bhopinder Hooda, Deepender Hooda and Udit Raj had also joined the protesting wrestlers at Jantar Mantar earlier this week to express solidarity with them.

With the chorus of support for the protesting wrestlers growing, the Delhi Police on Friday filed two FIRs against WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh on allegations of sexual harassment levelled by seven women wrestlers. "When these girls get medals, everyone

tweets, say they are our country's pride but now when they are sitting on the road and seeking to be heard, saying they have been wronged, no one is ready to listen to them. If FIRs have been filed, their copy should be shared with them," she said.

Calling for the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief's ouster from the post, Priyanka Gandhi said, "See, there are serious allegations against this person, he should first resign and be removed from the post. Till he is in that post, he will continue to exert

pressure and keep destroying people's careers. "If that person is there on a post through which he can destroy the careers of wrestlers, harass them and exert pressure, then what is the meaning of FIRs and investigation," she said. They should remove him from the post and take away his powers, the Congress leader asserted. "I don't have any expectations from prime minister, because if he had been concerned about these wrestlers, then he would have at least called them and spoken with them.

# BJP can't stop Kejriwal, says Sisodia

Court extends judicial custody of Delhi ex-Dy CM in excise case till May 8

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not be able to stop the work being done by Arvind Kejriwal. A city court on Saturday extended till May 8 the judicial custody of AAP leader Manish Sisodia in a money laundering case related to alleged excise scam.

Sisodia, who was produced before the court on the expiry of his judicial custody, said before the media that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not be able to stop Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's work in Delhi.

"Modi ji may try as much as he wants, but he won't be able to stop the work of Kejriwal ji in Delhi. Modi ji may conspire as much as he wants," Sisodia said while he was being brought out of the



courtroom after the judge pronounced the order.

The court has on Friday dismissed the bail plea of Sisodia, saying "the case of economic offences has serious repercussions upon the general public and society at large as the evidence collected during investigation speaks volumes of his involvement in the commission of the said offence". He is currently in judicial custody in both cases.

# Sisodia urges Saurabh to address water issues in his constituency

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Deputy Chief Minister and senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia, who is in jail, sent a message to his party colleague and water minister Saurabh Bharadwaj to look into water issues in his constituency Patparganj. Upon receiving the message from Sisodia, Bharadwaj held a meeting with the residents of the Patparganj assembly constituency and heard the problems of the constituents related to drinking water and took measures to address them.

Additionally, to solve the water problem in the area as soon as possible, the Delhi Jal

Board officials were instructed to change the pump motor of the old UGR and start the Mandawali Ammonia plant soon.

According to a statement issued by the AAP government, over the past few days, numerous residents of the Patparganj constituency had been reaching out to the office of the former Deputy Chief Minister with complaints about water supply.

"Consequently, the former Deputy Chief Minister managed to send a message from jail, urging Water Minister to address the issue of drinking water. As a result, Water Minister organised a meeting on Saturday to take stock of the

concerns of the residents in the area. The meeting was attended by Member Water, Chief Water Works, Additional Chief Engineer Maintenance, and other officials of the Jal Board related to the assembly as well as dozens of residents," reads the statement.

Bhardwaj further explained the situation and said, "The Patparganj receives water supply from two sources - Mandawali UGR No-1 and Mandawali No-2 UGR. However, the water level in these sources has decreased significantly in the past couple of months, dropping from the required 14 feet to a mere 10-11 feet.

# Walkar's father to go on hunger strike if case is not fast-tracked

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi: Vikas Walkar, the father of Shraddha Walkar who was allegedly killed by her live-in partner Aaftab Amin Poonawala last year, on Saturday demanded that the case be fast-tracked so that he can perform her last rites.

Speaking to reporters after a court adjourned its order on framing of charges against Aftab Poonawala till May 9, Vikas said he would go on a hunger strike if the case is not fast-tracked within a month.

The court also adjourned till May 9 the hearing on an application by Vikas urging the judge that his daughter's remains be handed over to the family for the last rites as required by tradition and culture. "I do not think the case is going to conclude soon. We are seeking fast-tracking of proceedings in the case. I have not been able to perform my daughter's last rites yet. PTI

# Akshaya Patra Foundation resumed food supply to night shelters in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to thousands of homeless and poor people staying in night shelters run by the Delhi government, the Akshaya Patra Foundation has resumed food supply to them.

Meanwhile, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday directed Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to examine the matter and payments due to Akshaya Patra Foundation and other vendors be made as per rules at the earliest so that cooked food at night shelters could be resumed as per extant provisions.

The foundation had discontinued food supply to the shelter homes on April 26 citing a shortage of funds. On Friday, the Delhi government said in a statement that Delhi High Court ordered for con-

tinuation of its free meal scheme, observing it was the responsibility of the State to ensure every person had access to food. Following an interim order of the high court, the foundation resumed the night shelter feeding initiative undertaken in association with the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board in Delhi, the NGO said in a statement.

However, it added, only breakfast and lunch will be served at over 1800 night shelter homes for 15,000-17,000 inmates for the next three days, starting Saturday, due to significant logistics and procurement issues. The foundation will resume normal food supply by serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the inmates from May 2, said Bharatashabha Dasa, national president and trustee of the foundation, in the statement.

## NCR PULSE

**TEACHER MOLESTS MINOR GIRL IN YAMUNA VIHAR**  
New Delhi: An 11-year-old girl was allegedly molested by a teacher in a private school in northeast Delhi's Yamuna Vihar area, police said on Saturday. Rajeev (37), who works as a lab assistant in the school, has been arrested, they said. According to police, the class 6 student on Friday reported that the accused had molested her in the school, a senior police officer said. Following this, the accused, a resident of Ghaziabad's Loni was arrested the same day, police said.

**2 MORE ARRESTED IN MULTICRORE HEIST**  
Gurugram: The Haryana Police Special Task Force (STF) on Saturday said it has arrested two brothers in connection with a multi-crore heist in 2021 and recovered ₹1.84 crore from their possession. The arrested accused were identified as Sonu Dabas and Monu Dabas, residents of Sector 2, Rohtak. They carried a reward of ₹10,000 each on their heads, an STF spokesperson said. "The two accused were arrested from Jaipur on April 21 and we had taken them on seven-day police remand. ₹1.84 crore was recovered from them," said Jaiveer Rathie, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), STF Gurugram.

**MAN HELD FOR KILLING LIVE-IN PARTNER**  
New Delhi: A 26-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing his live-in partner with help of his brother and sister in Delhi's Telivara area, police said on Saturday. The accused has been identified as Vineet Panwar, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Bagpat, they said. On April 12, police received information that an unidentified woman's body was found lying near Krishna Public School in Karawal Nagar, they said. Later, the body was identified to be that of Rohina Naaz alias Mahi (25), a resident of Mirajpur in Uttarakhand, police said.

**4 ARRESTED FOR DUPING OVER 500 PEOPLE**  
New Delhi: Four men were arrested for allegedly duping about 500 people on the pretext of securing them jobs in Gulf countries at handsome salaries, police said on Saturday. The mastermind of the operation was identified as Rohit Sinha, 36, a science graduate and a resident of west Delhi's Mangolpuri, police said. The other three were — Brendra Singh, 39, Rajman Kushwaha, 33, and Ravindra Singh, 39, all residents of Deoria district in Uttar Pradesh, they said.

**LOVE ANGLE: YOUTH STABBED TO DEATH**  
New Delhi: A youth was allegedly stabbed to death and his four friends injured following a quarrel over a girl in southeast Delhi's Zakir Nagar area. The police received information regarding the alleged quarrel between two groups of youths at Zakir Nagar on Friday. On reaching the spot, it was found that the injured youths had been admitted to a hospital, they said. Some of the injured, who suffered stab injuries, were admitted to Holy Family Hospital, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Rajesh Deo said.

**HC TO MCD: TAKE ACTION AGAINST ILLEGAL DAIRIES**  
New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has directed coordination committees of MCD and police to take action against unauthorised dairies operating in national capital within 48 hours of receiving complaints in matter. The Delhi High Court in its April 25 order which was passed on two contempt pleas that claimed unauthorised dairies were operating in Kotla Mubarakpur and Panchsheel Enclave in contravention to a 2019 judicial order directing authorities, including MCD and city police, to take action against illegal dairies. The petitioners, represented by senior advocate Vivek Sibal, said there is a vicious cycle where MCD takes steps to rescue cattle in illegal dairies.

# DU to distribute newly developed Panchang to Indian academia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University will distribute 10,000 copies of its newly launched Panchang — an ancient Indian knowledge system-based almanac — to the academic community across the country, the varsity officials said on Saturday.

The university on Friday launched its Panchang, also known as the Hindu calendar, and distributed more than 1,000 copies of it. A university official said the Panchang is the annual compilation of planetary movements.

"More than 1,000 Panchang were distributed on Friday, and 9,000 more will be distributed across the society and academic community in the country, all free of cost, in coming days," a university official said.

# NDMC to audit its network amid rising cyberattacks

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi: The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has decided to audit all its applications and the network of its data centre to assess security vulnerabilities amid rising cyberattack incidents. Top sources said that the Council will hire a cybersecurity consulting agency on a three-year term and has already floated a tender for it.

"We know hackers are becoming smarter day by day. In recent months, we have seen (such) incidents. Though we regularly ensure that our system remains robust, we are now expanding and the risk is always there. So we have decided to understand how strong our system is," sources said. The NDMC felt the need to hire a consulting firm as it aims to obtain ISO 27001:2013 certification within 12 months. "For

certification, we need to show that our system is robust," the official said. The consulting firm will file an initial report within six months of work order on audit it conducts, the official added.

"Then we will decide what corrective measures should be taken. The objectives of engaging cybersecurity consulting agency are to deploy experienced consultants to carry out various preparatory activities related to certification, perform technical risk assessment, including vulnerability assessment and penetration testing, to help NDMC obtain ISO 27001:2013 certification," the official informed. The consulting agency will also develop procedures for security incident logging and monitoring and develop procedures for security incident management, the official said. SR



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

# Metcalfe House road stretch to get facelift

The stretch of road between Metcalfe House (Chandagi Ram Akhaada) and Purana Qila, encompassing areas like ISBT Kashmere Gate, Nigam Bodh Ghat, Salimgarh Fort, Samadhi Complex, area behind Daryaganj, Samta sthal, JLN Marg, Dilli Gate, ITO and Mathura Road are all set for a thorough and unprecedented revamp and make over.

After, the Lt Governor, Vinai Kumar Saxena recently visited the entire stretch — mostly on foot, specific directions were issued for various tasks to be undertaken and completed within a fixed time frame. A detailed plan of action with concrete achievable and timeline, that addresses all issues was issued after the visit last

week and works have already started on same. The stretch, largely corresponding to the Ring Road- Mahatma Gandhi Marg, apart from catering to lakhs of daily local travellers, houses many an iconic sites in Capital and serves as one of the main arterials connecting North Delhi to Central and South Delhi.

It also serves as the main approach road in the Capital for travellers from Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Himachal and J&K, apart from those boarding and alighting at ISBT.

Apart from aesthetic upgradation, sanitation, cleanliness, upgraded traffic management plan and augmented lighting, the plans for the stretch include, at least 6 public conveniences (Toilets and Water ATMs on both sides of the road at ISBT, seamless and

# Govt approves draft policy on labour laws

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Female employees doing night shifts in the city may see some improvement in their working conditions with the Delhi government approving a draft policy to lay down some labour laws.

The draft Delhi Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Rules, 2023, was vetted and approved by the labour department on Friday and will soon be up on its website for people's suggestions.

Labour Minister Raaj Kumar Anand held a high-level meeting on Friday where he discussed the draft policy which seeks to allow women to work night shifts and stipulates rules for their safety during the

shift, an official government statement said. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had earlier chaired a meeting with the labour department, directing it to take necessary steps towards increasing women's participation in the workforce, which led the department to draft the current proposal.

As per the draft rules, women, if they choose to, can now work from 7 in the night to 6 in the morning. For such women, employers will have to arrange for their transport from home to work and vice versa, it said. They are also required to make proper arrangements for toilets and drinking water, it added. For

the safety of women, employers will be required to set up a contact number, mentioning it at the workplace as well as on the vehicle, for female workers to use in case of emergency. They are also required to set up a proper grievance redressal mechanism as per the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

The draft will be shared on the portal of the labour department, where the general public, institutions, and employers can submit their feedback to the government within 30 days, the statement said. The labour department will then review

suggestions and objections and incorporate them into draft before sending it to law department for legal scrutiny. The draft also speaks about employees working overtime. According to it, working more than eight hours a day or more than 48 hours a week is considered overtime, and if an employee works overtime, he or she is liable to receive up to double the hourly rate based on minimum wages.

Employees cannot work for more than 12 hours a day or 60 hours a week and no employee can work overtime for seven consecutive days, the statement said. The draft proposal also makes it mandatory for employers to provide some holidays to their employees every year. During his Friday

meeting, the Labour Minister said that it will now be mandatory to give joining and experience letters to the employees working in any field. Employers will also have to ensure that they keep records of all employees and provide them with salary slips.

The draft proposal says wherever migrant workers are employed, employers will have to pay them a travelling allowance once a year. The travelling allowance should be such that it suffices to and fro cost of travel by bus or rail.

In order to ensure the safety of employees working in factories dealing with hazardous chemicals and materials in Delhi, it has been mandated that they undergo medical examinations every year.

# Winding up hectic day, Modi takes out mega roadshow in Bengaluru

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Ending a busy day of electioneering for the BJP in poll-bound Karnataka after back-to-back rallies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took part in a mega roadshow in north Bengaluru on Saturday drawing an enormous response from a huge crowd.

Modi, who flew into the city from Kudachi in Belagavi district in northern Karnataka around 5 pm after addressing his third public meeting in the state, rode in a specially designed vehicle.

Sporting a saffron cap, Modi was flanked by Bangalore North MP D V Sadananda Gowda and BJP MLC C Narayanaswamy.

A large number of people thronged both sides of the road to catch a glimpse of the Prime Minister and showered flowers on him.

At the end of the roadshow, Modi walked on the road for a brief period waving at people and then boarded his bullet-proof car. Seeing the Prime Minister from a close



proximity, people started chanting 'Modi-Modi'.

The BJP flags, festoons and posters dotted the road and a group of artists performed 'Dollu Kunita', a popular drum dance, enroute to

the roadshow.

The 5.3-kilometre long roadshow passed through various locations in north Bengaluru including Magadi Road, Nice Road Junction to Sumanahalli.

Traffic snarls were witnessed due to the roadshow. Police had issued traffic advisory to people asking them to avoid certain roads from where the Prime Minister's convoy would pass through.

Elaborate security arrangements were made throughout the route that Modi roadshow's traversed in the city.

For his first election campaign in Karnataka since poll dates were announced, Modi flew in from Delhi and reached Bidar in the morning. He addressed three consecutive public meetings in Humnabad in Bidar, district headquarters town in Vijayapura and Kudachi in Belagavi district.

The Prime Minister will stay overnight in Bengaluru and head out from Raj Bhavan on Sunday morning to hold back-to-back public meetings in the district headquarters town of Kolar, Channarayana in Ramanagara district and Belur in Hassan district.

He will also hold a roadshow in Mysuru on Sunday before heading back to Delhi.

The BJP is attempting to return to power in Karnataka with the ruling party pitted against its principal rival Congress.

The state goes to the polls on May 10 and the results will be declared on May 13.

# PM raising 'tired themes' in Karnataka, people will vote for Cong's guarantees: Ramesh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was playing the "victim card" and pleading for a "discredited" double-engine government in Karnataka but the people of the state have made up their mind to oust the BJP.

Launching his poll campaign from Humnabad in Bidar district, Modi trained his guns on the Congress over its president Mallikarjun Kharge's "venomous snake" barb at him, saying till now the opposition party and its leaders have hurled at him different abuses 91 times.

Reacting to it, AICC general secretary Communications Jairam Ramesh said on Twitter, "Predictably PM Modi has begun his much-delayed Karnataka campaign by playing



the victim card, pleading for a completely discredited so-called 'double engine' sarkar and abusing Congress."

"These will be his tired themes no doubt as he leaves Yogi to polarise," he also alleged, targeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Hitting out at the Congress, Modi, who was his first visit to the state for campaigning after elections were declared on March 29, accused the party of abusing the dominant Lingayat

community, Babasaheb Ambedkar and freedom fighter Veer Savarkar.

The people will respond to its abuses with votes, and as much mud they sling at BJP, the lotus will bloom, he said.

"The Congress hates everyone who speaks about the common man, who brings out their corruption, who attacks their politics of selfishness. The Congress hate against such people will become permanent. In this election too, the Congress once again has started abusing me," Modi said.

Earlier, Ramesh put out a tweet saying, "5 years ago in his Karnataka election campaign PM Modi did what comes naturally to him - lie".

"Today he will do so again. But the people of Karnataka know better. They will vote for Congress guarantees, not for BJP threats," he also said.

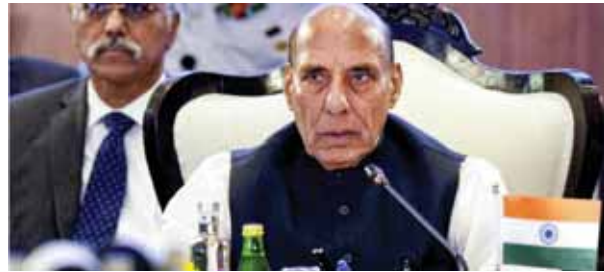
# Rajnath to review bilateral ties with Maldives on 3-day visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Maldives will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties and discuss ways to further strengthen them during Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's three-day visit to the island nation commencing Monday.

During his trip to the Maldives, Rajnath is likely to meet Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid and Defence Minister Mariya Didi among others. The focus of the visit will be further expand bilateral defence cooperation, it was learnt. IAF chief V R Chaudhari is likely to visit Sri Lanka on Monday.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean



Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security have been on an upward trajectory in the last few years.

In August last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Solih kick-started the India-funded Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), billed as the largest infrastructure initiative in the island nation.

Under the GMCP project, a 6.74-km-long bridge and causeway link will be built to connect the capital city Male

with adjoining islands of Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi.

The Maldives is also one of the biggest beneficiaries of India's Neighbourhood First policy. Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane visited Maldives last month during which he held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Major General Abdulla Shamaal.

Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari is likely to visit Sri Lanka on Monday. Both the countries share strong defence ties.

# India keeps very close watch on IOR to protect national interest: Navy Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With China making forays into the strategically important Indian Ocean region (IOR), Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said here on Saturday there is a "large presence" of Chinese vessels there and India keeps a "very close watch" on the developments to protect and preserve its national interests. At any given point of time three to six Chinese ships are in the region, he added.

The Navy chief also said the Indian Navy is seized of the docking of various PLA Navy ships at ports in Pakistan, and it is "keeping a watch on it".

Asked about the threat aspects during a conclave here, the Navy chief spoke of both conventional and non-conventional threats, besides those emerging from what he described as "silent and inclusive paradigm" resulting in a "web of threats" that are emerging.

On a question on PLA Navy ships docking at ports in



Pakistan, he said, these ships are docking at ports in various countries, and not just in Pakistan. As far as their visit to ports in Pakistan are concerned, "we are seized of it, and keep a watch on it", he said.

Admiral Kumar said the Pakistan Navy is modernising itself at a good pace and seeks to become a 50-platform force in 10-15 years, and they are adding new corvettes and frigates to their fleet.

As far as China is concerned, in the last 10 years, a

large number of ships and submarines have been commissioned by it in the last 10 years, the third aircraft carrier is under construction, and much larger destroyers they are working on, he said, adding, "we feel this will plateau at some time".

"We are keeping a very close watch in the Indian Ocean Region... And effort is to know whose presence is there and what are they up to, monitoring it 24x7 and we deploy aircraft, UAVs, ships, submarines, etc.," the Navy chief said.

"There is a large presence of Chinese vessels. At any point of time, there are 3-6 Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean Region," he said, adding some are close to the Gulf of Oman, and some in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean Region, among other places.

Chinese research vessels are ever present, numbering from two to four and Chinese fishing vessels as well. So, there is a large presence of Chinese

vessels in the Indian Ocean Region, and India Navy keeps track of it, the Navy chief said. "So, we refine our plans, actions that are required to be taken, and this also feeds into our capability development," the Navy chief said.

In response to a query on Chinese research vessels, he said these vessels have the ability to track and collect electronic signals.

"When they operate, close to 'our areas of national interest', the Indian Navy keeps an eye, and it has its ships which 'monitor them very, very closely'." On a question on whether modernisation and capability development has any link with threat assessment, the Navy chief said, modernisation is part of the process and not threat-driven.

And, a Navy has to be a "well-balanced force", so, it's not about nuclear submarine vis-a-vis aircraft carrier, as each of the two bring their own capabilities and they are "not either/or", the Chief said.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Mr. Umashankar s/o Jodha Lal, Mr. Veerbanth s/o Umashankar, Mr. Virendra Kumar s/o Umashankar, Mrs. Kritika alias Nandani co Vishwanath Pratap Singh and Mrs. Seema w/o Mahender Singh all R/o Uttar Pradesh-Have Lost Original Sale deeds vide Document No. 4120, dated 04/08/2005, Document No. 174, dated 17/01/2011 and Document No. 1669, dated 21/03/2006 and FIR for has been Done vide FIR No. 392821/2023, dated 29/04/2023. If anybody found above mentioned deed kindly contact on - 9599183726 (Advocate Lalit Kumar Kaushik) within 7 days.  
R.K. LAW CONSULTANTS

**CORRIGENDUM**  
In the Audited Financial Results of INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGIES LTD. which was published on 29.04.2023 in this newspaper, name of the signing person should be read as - **Saurabh Goyal, Managing Director, DIN : 01094455** instead of "(Rajeev Bahl), Managing Director, DIN : 00772978"  
Sorry for the inconvenience.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given to the general public on behalf of our Client i.e. HDBK Bank Ltd. that Mrs. Mina Aggarwal is the owner of Entire Third floor with roof rights (said floor) built on Property No. 108, measuring 228.75 sq. mtrs., in block A-1, Situated at Paschim Vihar, New Delhi "the said property" by virtue of Registration Deed A-1 dated 28.03.2023, Registration No. 2044 executed by Mr. Jitender Aggarwal, Mr. Rajeev Aggarwal, Mr. Ashish Aggarwal, after demise of Late Mr. Ram Deo Aggarwal. All persons including other legal heirs if any are hereby informed that above mentioned owner want to take loan facility against the said floor from our client by mortgaging the said floor. If anybody has any objection/s upon the ownership of Mrs. Mina Aggarwal in respect of the said floor, its sale, mortgage, litigation, and any kind of collection kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 10 days of the present.  
Kumar & Associates (Advocates & Consultants) 200, 1st Floor, 23, Shivaji Marg, Moti Nagar, N. Delhi-15 Ph. 011-41122726 - 9999183726

# Rijju exhorts big firms to support Divyangs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijju on Saturday urges big companies to come forward to support people with special disabilities for the betterment of humanity. He was speaking as Chief Guest on the 35th Pranay Milan Sammelan in New Delhi organised by All India Foundation of Deaf Women in association with Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women. Rijju said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision that people challenged by natural phenomena should be given utmost equality in the society.

Congratulating the newly wed couples, Rijju said that this women-led initiative and the transformation changes it was making are commendable.

Emphasising on the concept of equality, Rijju said nature does not make everyone equal but it gives everyone some special powers to com-



pensate for it. He said the Government was taking initiatives with respect to Divyangs Special Recognition in order to bring social justice and empowerment.

Minister of State for Law and Justice Prof. S.P. Baghel congratulated the Foundation for completing its golden jubilee and for organising more than 2000 marriages so far. He said Divyang people should be seen as equals. He cited the example of one senior advocate as well as one advocate-on-record of the Supreme Court who are completely blind.

President of the Delhi

# ED searches office, residential premises of BYJU's CEO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday said it has searched the Bengaluru-located office and two residential premises of Edtech major BYJU's and its CEO and co-founder Raveendran Byju, and seized "incriminating" documents and digital data as part of a foreign exchange violation investigation.

"Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has conducted searches and seizure action at 3 premises (2 Business and 1 residential) in Bengaluru in the case of Raveendran Byju and his company 'Think & Learn Private Limited' under the provisions of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA)," the ED said in a statement.

The company (Think & Learn Private Limited) runs popular online education portal under the brand name Byju's.

During the search and seizure action, various incrim-



inating documents and digital data were seized, the agency said.

"FEMA searches also revealed that the company has received foreign direct investment to the tune of Rs.28,000 Crore (approx.) during the period from 2011 to 2023. Further, the company has also remitted Rs 9,754 crore (approx.) to various foreign jurisdictions during the same period in the name of overseas direct investment," it said.

The ED further said that the company has booked around Rs 944 crore in the name of Advertisement and Marketing expenses including the amount remitted to foreign jurisdiction.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Be it known to all that our client **Mr. Mohammed Saleem S/o. Mohammed Yaseen R/o. B-29, 2nd floor, thoker No.7 Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025**, hereby disown his son **Mr. Firuz Khan** from all his movable and immovable properties, he severed all his relations from them, henceforth. Our client and his other family members shall not be responsible for any act or conduct is done by them or their misdeeds. This is applied from after dated-16/09/2016.  
Ismail (Advocate) Mobile No. 8587021142

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Axis Bank Ltd that Mrs. Indu Sharma intends to purchase & mortgage the Flat No. 219, on Ground Floor, in Block-C-2C, & Pocket-2, situated at Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi, with our client against the financial assistance. Whereas Mr. Naresh Kumar Mittal is the owners of above said property by way of Conveyance Deed dt. 18.08.2021, regd. on 26.08.2021 and after his death his legal heirs Mr. Sanjay Mittal, Mr. Sumit Kumar Mittal and Mr. Sushil Kumar Mittal (as per SMC) becomes the joint owners of said property. Now, Mr. Sanjay Mittal, Mr. Sumit Kumar Mittal and Mr. Sushil Kumar Mittal intends to sell the same to Mrs. Indu Sharma. If any person(s) having objection with regard to ownership/mortgage of the said property is/are requested to intimate in writing to undersigned within 40 days from the date of issue of this notice at below mentioned address. In the event no information is received within 10 days from date hereof, our Client i.e. Axis Bank Ltd will proceed with the mortgage process.  
DEEPLYOT SINGH, ADVOCATE A-13, LGF, South Extn-II, New Delhi-110049 # 011-40587824, 26262610, 11, 12

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform public in general that Kotak Mahindra bank Ltd has organized an auction in below mention respect of Vehicles. **VEHICLES FOR SALE**  
1) TATA LPT709FB REG. NO. DL1LAC6109-YOM-2019 MINIMUM RESERVE PRICE 331682  
UNDER HYPOTHECATION WITH M/S KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK IS UNDER SALE IN ITS "AS IS WHERE IS CONDITION" INTERESTED PARTIES CAN GIVE THEIR QUOTATIONS (ONLINE/OFFLINE) WITHIN 15 DAYS FROM THIS PAPER PUBLICATION I.E. ON OR BEFORE 15.05.2023 (PLEASE NOTE THAT CLOSING AUCTION DATE WOULD NOT BE A WEEKLY OFF/HOLIDAY).  
BRANCH ADDRESS: KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LTD., PLOT NO.7 INSTITUTIONAL AREA, SECTOR-125 NOIDA NEAR DELL CAMPUS NOIDA (U.P) UP-201313 OR CONTACT : RAJESH ANTIL KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LTD. CONTACT / 09711173320 EMAIL-rajesh.antil@kotak.com

# 43 score perfect 100 in JEE-Main: NTA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Forty-three candidates have bagged the perfect 100 score in the second edition of the engineering entrance exam JEE-Main, according to the National Testing Agency.

With the NTA decided for 90 percentile cut off for making it eligible for aspirants to the JEE Advanced to secure a seat in the IITs. With the present score, the best of the two JEE Mains to be taken into account will pave way for successful candidates to study in other government institutions like IITs, NITs.

"The National Testing Agency (NTA) scores of 15 candidates have been with-

held as they are under scrutiny," a senior NTA official said.

NTA score is not the same as percentage of marks obtained but normalised scores. The second edition of the crucial examination was held earlier this month.

The JEE Main Session 2 was conducted at 330 centres across the country. The exam was held in 25 shifts to test around 9.5 lakh candidates.

The engineering entrance exam was held on April 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15, 2023. The JEE Mains 2023 was conducted in 13 languages. They were English, Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu language.

# Endoscopic procedure to help diabetics stop taking insulin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An hour-long endoscopic procedure that uses controlled electrical pulses to modify the lining of the first part of the small intestine may help patients with Type 2 diabetes stop taking insulin and still maintain glycemic control, a new study has said. The study which will be presented at the Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2023 in the US soon comes as a ray of hope for several diabetic patients in the world as in India in India which is home to estimated 77 million people above the age of 18 years with diabetes (type 2)



and nearly 25 million are pre-diabetics (at a higher risk of developing diabetes in near future).

Type 2 diabetes most often develops in people over 45 years of age, but more and more children, teens and young adults are also developing it. Also, glucose-lowering med-

ication can be expensive, and the insulin injection has several side-effects, including the risk of low blood sugar and weight gain.

"The potential for controlling diabetes with a single endoscopic treatment is spectacular," said Celine Busch, the study's lead researcher and PhD candidate at Amsterdam University Medical Center.

"One of the biggest advantages of this treatment is that a single outpatient endoscopic procedure provides glycemic control, a potential improvement over drug treatment, which depends on patients taking their medication day in, day out," she added.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
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.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset / Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Amit Kumar, Sumit Kumar, A 43 Om Sai Sant Pura, Govind Puri, Modi Nagar, Ghaziabad, A/c No: LBMRT00003699042	Plot No. A 44, Khasra No. 805/5, Om Sai Santpura, Bisokhar Modinagar Jalalabad Ghaziabad 201204	22/02/2023 Rs. 16,58,848/-	30/04/2022
2.	Manish Kumar, Kalawati, Suryamani Lalchand, House No.21277 Vivek Khand-2, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, A/c No: LBLUC00005642753	House No. B-1, Sector B, Gandhi Nagar, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh	24/02/2023 Rs. 37,39,463/-	05/12/2022
3.	Moti Lal Agarwal, Mamta Agrawal, 268/641/52, Tiliak Nagar, Avasthi, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, A/c No: LBLUC00002002267	Flat No.1803 18 Th Floor, Tower Gd1 22, Garden Isles, Wishtown Noida, Sector 133, Jaypee Greens, Noida Uttar Pradesh	24/02/2023 Rs. 14,99,972/-	21/12/2022

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.  
Date : April 29, 2023  
Place : Delhi/NCR (Ghaziabad, Noida)  
Authorized Officer  
ICICI Bank Limited

# Ukrainian drones hit Crimea oil depot

AP ■ KYIV

A massive fire erupted at an oil depot in Crimea after it was hit by two of Ukraine's drones, a Russia-appointed official there reported on Saturday, the latest in a series of attacks on the annexed peninsula as Russia braces for an expected Ukrainian counter-offensive.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Moscow-installed governor of Sevastopol, a port city in Crimea, posted videos and photos of the blaze on his Telegram channel.

Razvozhayev said the fire at the city's harbor was assigned the highest ranking in terms of how complicated it will be to extinguish. However, he reported that the open blaze had been contained.

Razvozhayev said the oil depot was attacked by "two enemy drones," and four oil tanks burned down. A third drone was shot down from the sky over Crimea, and one more was deactivated through radio-electronic means, according to Crimea's Moscow-appointed governor, Sergei Aksyonov.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world considered illegal.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview this week that his country will seek to reclaim the peninsula in the upcoming counter-offensive.

The incident comes a day after Russia fired more than 20



A firefighter speaks on the walkie talkie as smoke and flame rise from a burning fuel tank in Sevastopol, Crimea AP

cruise missiles and two drones at Ukraine, killing at least 23 people.

Most of all the victims died when two missiles slammed into an apartment building in the city of Uman, located in central Ukraine.

Five children were among the dead, Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said Saturday, adding 22 out of 23 bodies have been identified. One woman remained missing, Klymenko said.

Russian forces launched more drones at Ukraine overnight. Ukraine's Air Force Command said two Iranian-made self-exploding Shahed drones were intercepted, and a reconnaissance drone was shot

down on Saturday morning.

Razvozhayev said the oil depot fire did not cause any casualties and would not hinder fuel supplies in Sevastopol. The city has been subject to regular attack attempts with drones, especially in recent weeks.

Earlier this week, Razvozhayev reported that the Russian military destroyed a Ukrainian sea drone that attempted to attack the harbour and another one blew up, shattering windows in several apartment buildings, but not inflicting any other damage.

Ukraine's military intelligence spokesperson, Andriy Yusov, told the RBC Ukraine news site on Saturday that the

oil depot fire was "God's punishment" for "the murdered civilians in Uman, including five children."

He said that more than 10 tanks containing oil products for Russia's Black Sea Fleet were destroyed in Sevastopol, but stopped short of acknowledging Ukraine's responsibility for a drone attack. The difference between the number of tanks Yusov and Razvozhayev gave could not be immediately reconciled.

After previous attacks on Crimea, Kyiv also wouldn't openly claim responsibility, emphasizing, however, that the country had the right to strike any target in response to Russian aggression.

## Kyiv welcomes EU deal on farm exports

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Ukraine on Saturday welcomed the European Union's hard-fought deal to keep farm exports flowing into and through the bloc to world markets, saying that the Middle East and Africa would specifically stand to benefit from it.

Late Friday, the 27-nation EU ended a damaging internal standoff over a destabilising glut of Ukraine farm imports by granting five eastern member countries the right to temporarily ban the most problematic produce while allowing all farm products to transit onward.

Resolving the issue allows the EU to maintain a unified stance in the face of Russia's invasion of its neighbour. "We welcome that we resolved this issue," Ukrainian Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko said at a meeting of EU finance ministers in Stockholm. Under the deal, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania can keep four farm products that make up the overwhelming mass of exports from Ukraine out of their local markets but must guarantee unfettered access to the rest of the bloc.

# Peace efforts not a sign of weakness: Pak Army chief

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir said on Saturday that the armed forces were fully capable of defending the country, and its "efforts for peace should never be taken as a sign of weakness."

Munir was addressing the passing out parade of cadets at Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Kakul, in the Abbottabad district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Asserting that Pakistan wants peace in the region and with its neighbours, the Army chief warned that "our efforts for peace should never be taken as a sign of weakness."

"We have the will, capability and capacity to protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we are well aware of the ways and means to do it," the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) said.

He added that the Armed Forces would never shy away from any sacrifice to stabilise, secure and safeguard the future of the next generations.

"I assure the people of Pakistan that we will never hesitate in rendering any and every sacrifice necessary for the defence of our sacred motherland," Munir said.

His remarks came after senior journalist Hamid Mir claimed recently in a TV show that former Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, in a meeting with 20-25 journal-

## Ex-CM booked on terror charge

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan police on Saturday booked former Chief Minister of Punjab province and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi on terrorism charges and arrested 25 others for resisting his arrest.

An operation was launched by the Lahore police at Friday midnight, in which around 500 policemen and anti-corruption personnel raided Elahi's Lahore residence to arrest him in a corruption case. The operation ended early on Saturday after continuing for over five hours as police failed to arrest Elahi, who fled the house before the force's arrival.

"The police registered a case against Elahi and 50 others under terrorism charges for allegedly attacking them

with stones and petrol," Anti-Corruption Establishment spokesperson, Shahida Kamal, told PTI.

"Of them, 25 have been arrested and presented before a court which sent them on physical remand.

The raiding team used an armoured vehicle to break open the main gate of the PTI Punjab provincial president's Gulberg area residence and arrested 25 people, mostly his employees, from the house.

According to Kamal, raids are underway to arrest Elahi in a corruption case. Elahi's legal team said police raided his house despite them showing his protective bail till May 6 in the case.

The ousted prime minister and PTI chief Imran Khan strongly condemned the attack on his party's president's house.

ists in 2021, stated that "the Pakistan Army was not capable of combat".

Mir said that Bajwa in the meeting stated that Pakistan was not in a condition to fight a war with India, Geo News reported.

Gen Munir made a veiled

reference to the numerical equation with India and quoted from the Quran that numbers were not enough for victory. He added that "brave soldiers of the Armed Forces of Pakistan don't get fascinated with the numbers or resources of their adversaries."

# Research collaborations in spotlight during Jitendra's UK visit

PTI ■ LONDON

Research collaborations between India and the UK in the field of carbon capture and space technologies were among the areas in the spotlight during a visit to Imperial College London by Union Minister for Science Dr Jitendra Singh, who is on a tour of the UK this week.

The minister was given insights into the ongoing projects on which scientists and researchers from both countries were focussed and also interacted with the significant Indian student cohort at the leading research university.

The ministerial delegation, including the Principal Scientific Advisor to the government of India Professor Ajay Kumar Sood, toured the Imperial College labs for a

first-hand account of the tie-ups.

"The advantage we share is that the two nations share a very comfortable bonding over the centuries so it makes things easier for collaborations in different areas," Dr Singh said during the visit on Friday.

"What is remarkable is that all institutions like Imperial College London have a very sizeable number of boys and girls from India and also the faculty here is looking up to them with a huge amount of esteem and expectation... The vaccine success story in the aftermath of COVID is something which has vindicated India's immense potential, which was waiting to happen," he said.

The minister toured Imperial's Carbon Capture Pilot Plant to see how the stu-

dents are training to become the next generation of chemical engineers.

He also saw a demonstration of the latest imaging from the Mars Rover at the Data Science Institute by Indian-origin scientist Professor Sanjeev Gupta before his interaction with students.

Professor Mary Ryan, Vice Provost (Research and Enterprise) at Imperial College London who joined the minister on the tour, said: "It is excellent to see India driving the science agenda for sustainable development and leading an impressive series of engagement through the Science20 group. We look forward to learning more about the outcomes and to working with our partners in India on the priority areas.

"Here at Imperial, we're

incredibly proud of our long-standing connections with India. We are privileged to host just over 800 talented and highly entrepreneurial students from India, some of whom I am delighted to see here today."

During the visit, Imperial College London announced that it would be launching the 'Future Leaders Scholarship' programme for Indian Masters students, which will support 30 students over the next three years.

The scholarships will be for students in MSc programmes across Engineering, Natural Sciences, Business School and Medicine and half of the scholarships will be reserved for female scholars.

Professor Peter Haynes, Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) at Imperial, said: "It is a real pri-

ority for Imperial to continue to facilitate and support two-way mobility between India and the UK.

"I hope that we are able to welcome even more students from India in the future and I am very pleased to share today that Imperial is investing just over GBP 400,000 in scholarships for the future STEM-B leaders of India," Haynes said. "The investment will see the launch of 30 merit-based scholarships over the next three years, with the first application round opening next academic year," he said.

During his five-day UK visit, the Science Minister kicked off with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with his British counterpart, George Freeman, at the India-UK Science and Innovation Council meeting.

## 'Mann Ki Baat' 100th episode to air live at UN HQ

PTI ■ NEW YORK

In a "historic moment", the 100th episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' will be broadcast live at the United Nations headquarters here.

"Get ready for a historic moment as the 100th episode of PM Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' is set to go live on April 30th in the Trusteeship Council Chamber at UN HQ!" the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said in a tweet.

The 100th episode of Modi's monthly radio address will air at 11 am IST on April 30, which will be 1:30 am Sunday in New York.

The live broadcast of the programme in the early hours of Sunday in the UN headquarters will be historic and unprecedented.

It will be aired in the UN's Trusteeship Council Chamber.

"#MannKiBaat has become a monthly national tradition, inspiring millions to participate in India's developmental journey," the Permanent Mission said.

"As #MannKiBaat goes global with a live broadcast at UN Headquarters, let's take a moment to appreciate the impact it has had in promoting inclusivity and public participation," the Mission said in another tweet, accompanied by a special video on the radio programme.

# 210 migrant bodies wash up on Tunisia coast

Tunis (AP): Tunisia's coast guard says it has recovered around 210 bodies of migrants under two weeks that have washed up on the North African country's central coastline amid an ongoing increase in migration.

Preliminary examinations of the bodies indicated that the migrants were from sub-Saharan Africa, according to the National Guard's Houssemeddine Jebabli.

The number of bodies recovered was announced on Friday. Of the 210 dead migrants found over 10 days starting on April 18, about 70 of those were recovered from the beaches of eastern Sfax, the neighbouring Kerkennah islands and Mahdia, according to pros-

ecutor Faouzi Masmoudi, who oversees migration issues.

These three areas are starting points for most attempts to migrate to the Italian coast, including onward to the remote island of Lampedusa, he added.

The increasing number of dead migrants has overwhelmed the Habib Bourguiba hospital morgue in Sfax, the capacity of which is 30 to 40 bodies.

To ease the pressure on hospitals, local authorities are working to speed up the burial of the victims after carrying out DNA tests and possible identification by relatives, Masmoudi said.

Romdhane Ben Amor, spokesperson for the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES),

with Tunisian Foreign Minister Nabil Ammar, Interior Minister Kamel Feki and Social Affairs Minister Malek Ezzahi. Migration to Europe has been on an upward climb, peaking in 2022 to 189,620, according to the International Organisation for Migration. That's the most since 2016, when close to 400,000 left their homelands, and one year after more than 1 million people, mostly Syrians fleeing war, sought refuge in 2015.

For many sub-Saharan Africans, who don't need a visa to travel to Tunisia, the North African country serves as a stepping stone to Europe, while others come from Libya, which shares a border with Tunisia.

Following a visit earlier this week by European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, the Tunisian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday that Tunisia and the European Union agreed to promote the voluntary return of sub-Saharan migrants to their countries of origin.

During her stay, the EU official met

a nongovernmental organisation specialising in migration issues, said that local authorities had last year committed themselves to setting up a special cemetery for migrants, "on the grounds that they are not Muslims".

But Amor said that this is still not ready, leading to the difficulties in finding burial places.

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## Sudan: Civilian death toll jumps to 400

AP ■ KHARTOUM

Gunfire and heavy artillery persisted on Saturday in parts of Sudan's capital Khartoum, residents said, despite the extension of a ceasefire between the country's two top generals, whose battle for power has killed hundreds and sent thousands fleeing for their lives.

The civilian death toll jumped Saturday to 411 people, according to the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate, which monitors casualties.

The fighting has wounded another 2,023 civilians so far, the group added. In the city of Genena, the provincial capital of war-ravaged West Darfur, intensified violence has killed 89 people.

Fighters have moved into homes and taken over stores and hospitals as they battle in the streets, the syndicate said. Khartoum, a city of some 5 million people, has been transformed into a front line in the grinding conflict between Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, the commander of Sudan's military, and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, who leads the power-

ful paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces, which has dashed once-euphoric hopes of Sudan's democratic transition.

Foreign countries continued to evacuate diplomatic staff and nationals while thousands of Sudanese fled across borders into Chad and Egypt.

Up to 20,000 refugees — mostly women and children — have crossed over the western border to Chad, the United Nations said, a country that has struggled for stability in the aftermath of its own coup two years ago.

Those who escape the fighting in Khartoum face more obstacles on their way to safety. The overland journey to Port Sudan, where ships then evacuate people via the Red Sea, has proven long and risky. Hatim el-Madani, a former journalist, said that paramilitary fighters were stopping refugees at roadblocks out of the capital, demanding they hand over their phones and valuables.

"There's an outlaw, bandit-like nature to the RSF militia," he said, referring to the Rapid Support Forces.

## Pope visits refugees in Hungary

Budapest (AP): Pope Francis thanked Hungarians on Saturday for welcoming Ukrainian refugees and urged them to help anyone in need, as he begged for a culture of charity in a country where the prime minister has justified firm anti-immigration policies with fears that migration threatens Europe's Christian culture.

On the second day of a visit to Hungary, Francis met with refugees and poor people at St. Elizabeth's church, which was named for a Hungarian princess who renounced her wealth to dedicate herself to the poor as a follower of the pope's namesake, St. Francis of Assisi.

Speaking in the white-brick church in Budapest, Francis recalled that the Gospel instructs Christians to show love and compassion to all, especially those experiencing poverty and pain and "even those who are not believers."

Hungary's nationalist government has implemented firm anti-immigration policies and refused to accept many asylum-seekers trying to enter the country, leading to prolonged legal disputes with the EU.

## Kim's sister slams Biden VOWS TO STAGE MORE DISPLAYS OF MILITARY MIGHT

AP ■ SEOUL

The powerful sister of North Korea's leader says her country would stage more provocative displays of its military might in response to a new US-South Korean agreement to intensify nuclear deterrence to counter the North's nuclear threat, which she insists shows their "extreme" hostility toward Pyongyang.

Kim Yo Jong also lobbed personal insults toward US President Joe Biden, who after a summit with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday stated that any North Korean nuclear attack on the US or its allies would "result in the end of whatever regime" took such action.

Biden's meeting with Yoon in Washington came amid heightened tensions in the Korean Peninsula as the pace of both the North Korean nuclear weapons demonstrations and the combined US-South Korean military exercises have increased in a cycle of tit-for-tat.

Since the start of 2022,

North Korea has test-fired around 100 missiles, including multiple demonstrations of intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the US mainland and a slew of short-range launches the North described as simulated nuclear strikes on South Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is widely expected to up the ante in the coming weeks or months as he continues to accelerate a campaign aimed at cementing the North's status as a nuclear power and eventually negotiating US economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

During their summit, Biden and Yoon announced new nuclear deterrence efforts that call for periodically docking US nuclear-armed submarines in South Korea for the first time in decades and bolstering training between the two countries.

They also committed to plans for bilateral presidential consultations in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack, the establishment of a nuclear consultative group, and improved sharing of information on nuclear and strategic weapons operation plans.

## US ex-adviser advocates closer Taiwan ties

AP ■ TAIPEI

A former US national security adviser called for deeper interaction between his country and Taiwan during a visit Saturday to the self-ruled island, which has seen increasing military threats from China. John Bolton, a potential Republican presidential candidate in 2024, said at a pro-Taiwan independence event in Taipei that national security teams from both sides must develop contingency plans on how to respond to actions Beijing might take, warning it would be too late once an attack occurs. "And we have to tell China and Russia what the consequences are if they take actions against Taiwan. Not just in the immediate response, but over the longer term, to basically excommunicate China from the international economic system if it did take military actions against Taiwan or attempt to throw a blockade around it," Bolton said.

Bolton, former President Donald Trump's hawkish national security adviser, started his week-long trip to Taiwan on Wednesday.

## Prachanda acknowledges China's assistance

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Saturday voiced his appreciation to China for its assistance and cooperation in the upgradation of the country's health sector.

Addressing the handing over ceremony of the completion of the upgradation and reconstruction of the China-aided Civil Service Hospital at New Baneshwor in Kathmandu, Prachanda expressed hope that with expanded and upgraded infrastructures and facilities, the hospital will be able to cater for patients who are in need of better treatment and services.

"I would like to thank the Government of the People's Republic of China for supporting this hospital and this particular project of upgradation and reconstruction," he said.

"I see much potential for this hospital as well as other hospitals too to develop them as the centre of excellence to provide world-class medical treatment with the support of our friendly countries like

China," Prachanda said.

Pointing out the friendly relations between the two countries, Prachanda said, "Nepal and China cherish a long history of friendly, cordial, and cooperative relations. The history of economic, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges between Nepal and China dates back to time immemorial."

Friendship, mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of each other's legitimate interests, concerns and sensitivities underpin our good neighbourly relations, added the Prime Minister.

"Continued support of China for Nepal's development endeavours has been the hallmark of our friendly and good neighbourly relations. Indeed, this support has been quite helpful and essential to creating development infrastructures, enhancing connectivity, providing our people with health facilities, developing our human resources, and supporting people's livelihoods among others."

He also acknowledged China's support in building the Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur.

# Every village to have 4G by 2024: Minister

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

All uncovered villages will be covered with 4G network by 2024, minister of state for telecom Devusinh Chauhan said on Saturday.

Speaking to PTI, Chauhan said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi continuously motivates everyone to do more and his 'Mann Ki Baat' episodes further inspires to take government projects and services to people at the last mile.

"If we talk about 4G saturation project, about 38,000-40,000 villages don't have signal. Prime Minister says that you have done good work but reach out to every home. We have kept target to complete 4G saturation by 2024," Chauhan said.

He was speaking to mark the celebration of 100th episode of 'Mann Ki Baat' scheduled for broadcast on Sunday.

The minister said that 4G network in all uncovered villages will lead to socio-economic transformation and bridge digital divides.

"It will bring a lot of socio-economic transformation in villages where 4G signals will reach. Citizen standing at last mile will be able to check

accountability of government once he is digitally connected. Connecting villages digitally in a way means connecting people with democratic values," Chauhan said.

The Union Cabinet had approved a project for saturation of 4G mobile services in uncovered villages across the country at a total cost of Rs 26,316 crore in July 2022.

The project will provide 4G mobile services in 24,680 uncovered villages in remote and difficult areas. The project has a provision to include 20 per cent additional villages on account of rehabilitation, new-

settlements, withdrawal of services by existing operators etc.

In addition, 6,279 villages having only 2G and 3G connectivity shall be upgraded to 4G.

The project will be executed by BSNL using indigenously developed 4G technology stack and will be funded through Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).

The project cost of Rs 26,316 crore includes capex (capital expenditure) and 5-year opex (operational expenditure).

Besides covering villages to under 4G saturation project, the government has been running a drive to connect unconnected villages through private firms as well as state-owned telecom firm BSNL by providing financial support under USOF schemes.

The minister said that about 2.5 lakh villages have been connected with optical fibre and 4 lakh villages will be connected with high-speed broadband network soon.

"In Mann ki Baat, Prime Minister has talked about digitalisation and Digital India. We are working based on inspiration received from him," Chauhan said.

# PM's Gati Shakti boosts India's goods exports: Sonowal

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday said that the PM Gati Shakti programme has helped the country to register a year-on-year incremental growth of Rs 2 lakh crore in goods export in the previous fiscal.

Delivering his speech at an event hosted by Indian Merchants Chamber here, Sonowal, who is the Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, also said the central government has been working hard towards improving and modernising India's ports and connected infrastructure.

As a result of transformational initiatives, "in 2022-23 financial year India's Goods exports touched USD 447 billion, up from USD 422-billion a year earlier, which translates into a huge increase of more than Rs 2 lakh crore in a year," Sonowal was quoted as saying in a statement.

According to the minister, India has become a USD 3.5 trillion economy in less than nine years.

"This blistering speed of the growth is historic and the result of Gati Shakti," he stated.

The multi-modal connectivity provides integrated and seamless connectivity for the movement of people, goods



and services from one mode of transport to another.

It facilitates last-mile connectivity of infrastructure and also reduces travel time for people, he added.

Under PM Gati Shakti NMP, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways has identified 101 projects worth Rs 62,227 crores for implementation by 2025, as per the minister.

Out of these 101 projects, 26 projects worth Rs 8,897 crore have been completed, 42 projects amounting to Rs 15,343 crore are under development, while 33 projects worth Rs 36,638 crore are under implementation, he informed.

Out of the projects under implementation, 14 projects worth Rs 20,537 crore are expected to be completed by December this year, the minister said.

Of the 101 MoPSW Gati Shakti projects, 57 are from the major ports, and 44 projects are from states, he said, adding these projects have supported faster and more efficient movement of cargo, leading to an overall reduction in logistics cost.

According to Sonowal, his ministry has also identified five high-impact projects (HIP), which demonstrate the concept and spirit of the Gati Shakti programme.

He also said that the tonnage of Indian ships has increased to 13.7-million gross tonnage compared to only 10.3 Million Gross Tonnage in 2014.

# Introduce automated GST scrutiny system, Sitharaman to CBIC

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday asked the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) to increase the taxpayer base and introduce an automated GST return scrutiny system by next week.

The total Indirect Tax collections for the 2022-23 fiscal stood at Rs 1.51 lakh crore, up from Rs 12.89 Lakh crore in 2021-22.

The average gross monthly GST collection for 2022-23 stood at Rs 1.51 lakh crore and monthly GST revenue collections exceeded Rs 1.4 lakh crore for 12 months in a row.

In a review meeting with the CBIC, Sitharaman desired that the indirect tax body may undertake a comprehensive root cause analysis of fake billing and input tax credit claims by studying the typology of cases already booked and come up with recommendations on technology-based solutions to address the menace and prevent its occurrence.

"The Finance Minister directed CBIC to introduce its automated GST return scrutiny by next week and to implement an action plan to increase the taxpayer base through enhanced use of technology," a finance ministry statement said.

The Finance Minister emphasised the need for continuously improving taxpayer services. For grievance redres-



sal, Sitharaman desired that in each Zone interaction be organised with members of trade and industry who are part of the GST ecosystem to know their issues and suggestions to systematically identify matters for working out redress for them. She also directed to put in place a system to take feedback on grievances redressed to improve the quality of redressal, the ministry said.

The comprehensive review covered a variety of work areas, including trade facilitation, taxpayer services, grievance redressal of the trade; finalisation of disciplinary cases and infrastructure projects, and progress of the upcoming Palasamudram campus of the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes & Narcotics (NACIN).

The review meeting was attended by the Revenue Secretary; CBIC Chairman and board members.

# Nexus Select Trust to hit capital market on May 9

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Global investment firm Blackstone-sponsored Nexus Select Trust will hit the capital market on May 9 to raise up to Rs 3,200 crore through its retail REIT initial public offering (IPO).

This will be India's first REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust) IPO backed by rent yielding retail real estate assets. At present, there are three listed REITs on stock exchanges but all backed by office assets.

Nexus Select Trust has filed its offer document with market regulator SEBI for its IPO.

According to the offer document, the total size of the public issue is Rs 3,200 crore, which includes fresh issue of units worth up to Rs 1,400 crore and offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 1,800 crore.

Earlier, the company had planned to raise up to Rs 4,000 crore from its proposed REIT public issue.

In November last year, Nexus Select Trust filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with SEBI to launch its retail REIT public issue.

Nexus Select Trust has a portfolio of 17 operational shopping malls across 14 major cities, covering a 9.8 million square feet area.

This will be the third REIT sponsored by Blackstone.

It launched India's first REIT Embassy Office Parks and then Mindspace Business Parks REIT.

REIT, a popular instrument globally, was introduced in India a few years ago to attract investment in the real estate sector by monetising rent-yielding assets. It helps unlock the massive value of real estate assets and enables the participation of retail investors.

At present, there are three listed REITs -- Embassy Office Parks REIT, Mindspace Business Parks REIT and Brookfield India Real Estate

Trust -- on Indian stock exchanges, but all of these are leased office assets.

In its portfolio of 9.8 million square feet of retail real estate, Nexus Select Trust has also included Select Citywalk Mall in south Delhi.

There are around 3,000 stores across 17 shopping malls while the number of brands is nearly 1,100.

On the proposed retail REIT, Gagan Randev, Executive Director, India Sotheby's International Realty, noted that the retail sector in India has shown remarkable resilience and steady growth, post the COVID pandemic.

"By investing in a retail REIT, individual and institutional investors can benefit from the stability and long-term potential of the retail sector," he said. At the same time, Randev said the investors will be able to spread their risk across a diversified portfolio of real estate.

# Animstok.com to provide animal products, services

**NEW DELHI:** Buying milk, paneer and other dairy products, livestock, poultry, and fisheries is expected to become much more convenient as Animstok.com, an online marketplace in the entire animal science economy is all set to start full-fledged commercial operation over the next fortnight.

The soon to be operational platform will offer services in all the segments - B2B, B2C, and C2C.

The online platform, registered under the government's ambitious Start-up India program, serves in total of 15 categories including livestock, dairy, feed, poultry, meat, fish-

ery, pets, veterinary, equine, leather, animal infrastructure, animal art, animal sports and fairs.

Providing details about the plan, Karishma Dagar, Co-founder of the company said, "Animpet Ecomm was incorporated in April 2021 and few months later we registered it as a 360-degree start-up. As we intend to provide 360-degree animal focused offerings, it required a lot of homework. But now we are geared up to launch our services. Our pilot has been successfully completed and the response has been very encouraging."

Animstok is a B2B (business to business), B2C (business to consumer) and C2C (consumer to consumer) e-commerce platform and aims to integrate the entire value chain of the livestock economy, for instance, live animals, row and ready products as well as feed for their cattle.

"There is huge market to be tapped. As per 2021-22 data, the global animal economy size is \$3.7 trillion while in India it's \$400 billion," she said.

India tops the world in terms of milk production with 24% share, is at second place in fish production with 7.6% global share, number third in egg production and comes at eighth place in meat produc-

tion.

"This is an 'open for all' platform where anybody, from an established brand to a local vendor, can register and sell their services and products with the advantage of a zero joining fee," she added.

As the requirements of B2B, B2C, and C2C segments vary, the company plans to deploy technology in a big way to overcome the challenges.

"Results of the trial run (pilot) were highly encouraging as enquiries and lead generation from interested stakeholders both in India and abroad were beyond our expectation. Since the expansion of the concept and the platform will require substantial financial support, it will be our next stage focus," said Dagar.

Animstok.com has already on board nearly 25,000 vendors who offer several thousand products and services. Once the commercial operation starts, the company plans to build a team of 12,000 by end of the current fiscal depending on the growth.

After the commercial launch, Animstok.com will target to take on board 10 million products (one product by two companies to be counted as two products) in the first year itself along with a listing of one million vendors.

# Govt appoints Rajneesh Karnatak as BoI MD, Chand to head BoB

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The government on Saturday appointed Rajneesh Karnatak as managing director of Bank of India (BoI) while Debaddatta Chand as head of Bank of Baroda (BoB).

The central government appoints Rajneesh Karnatak, Executive Director, Union Bank of India, as managing director and CEO of Bank of India for three year with effect from date of assumption of office, Department of Financial Services said in a notification.

Karnatak replaces Atanu Kumar Das who completed his three-year term in January this year.

In a separate notification, DFS said Chand, currently ED of BoB, has been appointed as managing director of the same bank for a period of three years.

However, Chand would assume charge on July 1 after incumbent Sanjiv Chadha superannuates on June 30.

The notifications for the two appointments came after the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB), the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, in January had selected their names and recommended it to DFS for seeking necessary approval.

# BRIEFS

**IDFC FIRST BANK REPORTS 134 PER CENT JUM IN PAT**

**MUMBAI:** Private sector lender IDFC First Bank on Saturday reported a 134 per cent jump in profit after tax (PAT) to Rs 803 crore for the March 2023 quarter, driven by strong growth in core operating income. The bank's net profit was Rs 343 crore in the year-ago period.

"Net Profit for the year stood at Rs 2,437 crore compared to Rs 145 crore in FY22," the lender said in a statement. The bank's core operating profit grew by 61 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,342 crore. The bank has registered its highest-ever quarterly profit in Q4 FY23 and highest-ever yearly profit in 2022-23. Net Interest Income (NII) for the year grew 30 per cent to Rs 12,635 crore in FY23 from Rs 9,706 crore in FY22. On a quarterly basis, NII grew 35 per cent to Rs 3,597 crore in the January-March period of 2022-23 from Rs 2,669 crore in the fourth quarter of FY22. Gross non-performing advances improved to 2.51 per cent in the fourth quarter from 3.7 per cent in the year-ago period, as per the bank's filing on BSE. Similarly, net NPAs came down to 0.86 per cent compared to 1.53 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2021-22. IDFC First Bank CEO and MD V Vaidyanathan said the bank's asset quality remains high.

**KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK Q4 NET PROFIT GROWS 14.29 PC**

**MUMBAI:** Kotak Mahindra Bank on Saturday posted a 14.29 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit at Rs 4,566 crore for the March 2023 quarter. The private sector lender's stand-alone net profit grew to Rs 3,496 crore for the January-March 2023 period against Rs 2,767 crore in the year-ago period. For FY23, the bank's consolidated net profit rose 23 per cent to Rs 14,925 crore. Its core net interest income came at Rs 6,103 crore compared to Rs 4,521 crore, helped largely by an expansion in the net interest margin to an impressive 5.75 per cent. It showed an improvement in the asset quality, with the gross non-performing assets ratio improving to 1.78 per cent from 2.34 per cent in the year-ago period and 1.90 per cent in the preceding quarter.

**RBL BANK Q4 NET PROFIT RISES 37 PC**

**MUMBAI:** Private sector lender RBL Bank on Saturday reported a 37 per cent growth in the March 2023 quarter net profit to Rs 271 crore on lower provisions. For the entire FY23, the bank posted a net profit of Rs 883 crore against a loss of Rs 75 crore in the year-ago period, which also witnessed a management change at the firm after regulatory actions. In the reporting quarter ended March 31, its core net interest income grew 7 per cent to Rs 1,211 crore on the back of a 17 per cent rise in advances and a marginal widening in the net interest margin at 5.04 per cent. Its managing director and chief executive R Subramaniakumar explained that the NII growth has been limited because, in the year-ago period, it had to recognise a Rs 72 crore due on restructured loans in the interest income line on the recommendation of the auditors, which increased the base. Excluding this item, the NII growth would have come at 12 per cent, he said.

**RAMKRISHNA FORGINGS Q4 PROFIT FALLS 23 PC**

**NEW DELHI:** Ramkrishna Forgings on Saturday reported a profit after tax of Rs 68.45 crore during the March 2023 quarter, on account of higher expenses. At Rs 68.45 crore, the profit after tax (PAT) was 23 per cent lower from Rs 83.93 crore in January-March period of the preceding 2021-22 fiscal, Ramkrishna Forgings said in a statement. For the whole financial year (FY) 2022-23, the company's PAT rose to Rs 248.10 crore from Rs 198.02 crore during FY22. Its total income, however, increased to Rs 893.43 crore from Rs 718.72 crore in the year-ago quarter. During January-March 2023, the company's expenses also rose to Rs 786.98 crore from Rs 643.69 crore in the corresponding quarter of the preceding fiscal. According to the statement, the company's board has approved an interim dividend of Re 0.50 per equity share of Rs 2 each for financial year 2022-23. Naresh Jalan, Managing Director, Ramkrishna Forgings Limited, said: "Our strategy to expand our product offering in conjunction with the high customer demand has led to a 31 per cent year-on-year increase in revenues for this fiscal year. As of March 31, 2023, we reduced gross debt by 21 per cent and it currently stands at Rs 1,24,100 lakh."

**HIMADRI SPECIALITY Q4 PAT GROWS TO RS 77 CR**

**NEW DELHI:** Himadri Speciality Chemical Limited (HSCL) on Saturday reported over three-fold jump in profit after tax to Rs 77 crore for the March 2023 quarter on account of higher revenue. It had posted Rs 21 crore profit after tax (PAT) for the same period in 2021-22, HSCL said in a statement. For the full 2022-23, the company's PAT rose to Rs 208 crore from Rs 65 crore in FY22, registering over three-fold growth. Its total income from revenues also increased to Rs 1,029 crore from Rs 834 crore in the year-ago quarter, the company said. In FY23, revenue surged to Rs 4,172 crore from Rs 2,798 crore in FY22. Anurag Choudhary, CMD of Himadri Speciality Chemical Ltd, said, "Strong focus on core businesses and commitment to provide value-added products, coupled with investment in R&D, innovation, and improved business model, have consistently led us to achieve sustainable results and grow our profitability". Kolkata-based Himadri Speciality Chemical Limited is into manufacturing and supply of green energy, anode material for Li-ion batteries, carbon black, special types of oils and various other materials for industrial usage.

# Property registration in Mumbai falls 10 pc

**New Delhi (PTI):** Registration of properties in the Mumbai municipal region fell 10 per cent this month to 10,514 units on higher base effect, according to Knight Frank India.

In April 2022, 11,743 properties were registered in Mumbai city, which is an area under the jurisdiction of Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC).

"Mumbai city (area under BMC jurisdiction) saw property sales registration of 10,514 units in April 2023, adding over Rs 900 crore to the state exchequer, registering its highest ever revenue collection for the month of April in the last 10 years," Knight Frank said in a statement.

The growth in revenues was on account of an increased stamp duty rate and surge in higher-value property transactions, the consultant said.

Of the total properties registered, 83 per cent were residential while 17 per cent were non-residential properties.

"The decline was largely led by two reasons, firstly a base effect as April 2022 observed a spillover of registrations from the previous months, with 17 per cent of properties registered in April 2022 were filled in March 2022. Secondly, a seasonality impact as in the last 8 out of 10 years, the month of April

witnessed a dip in registrations against the March of that year," Knight Frank India said.

In March 2023, 13,151 properties were registered in Mumbai city, the data showed.

Shishir Bajjal, Chairman & Managing Director, Knight Frank India, said: "Mumbai's home buying appetite has remained strong despite a rise in stamp duty, consecutive rise in interest rates and a steady rise in prices in the market."

"In the last 10 years since April 2013, Mumbai has registered an estimated sales of 800,000 properties. 40 per cent of this, which is an estimated 3,18,000 units, has been registered since September 2020 from the time the stamp duty stimulant was introduced," he added.

The state exchequer has benefited from the market vibrancy that now marks its best April month in revenue collections, Bajjal said.

"While the YoY (year-on-year) registration momentum in April 2023 is lower due to the base effect, and financial year closing in March playing its role in lower MoM (month-on-month) numbers, the month saw a big cheer in the form of a pause in policy interest rate hikes. This provides a breather to homebuyers, keeping their affordability intact, crucial to fulfilling their desire to own a home," he said.

# Jos Alukkas all set to launch 100 stores

**SINGLE BIGGEST EXPANSION PLANS IN GOLD RETAILING**

**CHENNAI:** Jos Alukkas, leading jewellery retail chain in South India has announced their massive global expansion plan to launch 100 new showrooms at an investment of Rs. 5500 crores.

This is the single largest investment and expansion plan by a jewellery retail brand in the country. The jewellery group eyes a pan-global level growth. Jos Alukkas is one of the pioneers in the jewellery industry having established his jewellery house nearly 60 years ago, in Thrissur, the gold capital of Kerala.

In the era where ornaments were bought from goldsmiths who made jewellery against orders, one man thought differently, and revolutionised gold retailing in India. His name, Jos Alukka. He opened showrooms that offered ready to wear jewellery in thousands of designs in hundreds of kilograms of gold. So vast were his choices that the Jos Alukkas showrooms came to be known as Gold Supermarkets.

The revolutionary in Jos Alukka was always there. When Jos Alukka opened shop in UAE, the first from Kerala to do so, he discovered certified 916 stamped gold. The consumer benefit of it impressed him so much that he became perhaps the first Indian jeweller to offer gold jewellery certified

with the 916 stamp, thereby raising standards to international levels in South India.

He campaigned for the Govt when it made BIS 916 mandatory and now has gladly embraced the HUID certification. Today designs in gold, diamonds, platinum and silver are enhanced by DG Gold, a digital gold buying platform.

This gave customers immense courage to invest heavily in gold as they were confident that their Jos Alukka's jewellery was worth its weight in gold.

The Jos Alukkas group continues its march towards dynamic growth. Unique and innovative ornaments, created by master craftsmen in state of the art factories, fair price, undiluted commitment to purity, customer centric schemes won Jos Alukkas customers who continue to be loyal, over generations. The success graph has always been on the rise, with revenues crossing 9000 crores from just 50 showrooms - something jewellers with more outlets just manage to reach.

The showrooms are backed by research on the latest trends and popular designs to make Jos Alukka a leading player in the industry.

Now in 2024, with 60 years of success achieved through skill, innovation and price benefits arising from their debt free management, Jos Alukkas is eyeing a new brighter future.

The launch of 100 stores with an investment of 5500 crores - the biggest retail expansion in India. The group has chalked out a well calibrated trajectory, for a smooth and fast paced expansion.

First, more stores in more towns of south India, followed by a detailed move into key markets in the rest of India. Then, Jos Alukkas has set its sights on GCC / Europe and the US.

"The focus will be on being a designer brand outside India. Therefore, an international design lab will be set up. The new product range will be launched soon in collaboration with one of India's leading designers. Collaborating with Global Designers is also part of the expansion plan. The Global Expansion will not concentrate just where the Indian Diaspora is located, but go to every important city in the world," says Jos Alukka, Chairman of Jos Alukkas.

Many have contributed to the success of Jos Alukkas. The Group says it owes its popularity to its management team and prized employees. Today the Group's media face is an actor par excellence, loved by people across India, a philanthropist and activist, R Madhavan to be Jos Alukkas' global brand ambassador.

"Jos Alukkas's six-decade-long legacy in the jewellery sector obviously gives it a legendary place in the gold retail industry in the country says Madhavan. He expressed great happiness to be a part of Jos Alukkas's mission to take their artistry, ethical business model and sustainable global growth to more people, with utmost responsibility," says R Madhavan. (Agencies)

# DORTMUND HAND TITLE ADVANTAGE TO BAYERN



AP ■ BERLIN

Borussia Dortmund handed the advantage in the Bundesliga title race back to Bayern Munich on Friday after being held to a 1-1 draw at lowly Bochum.

Bochum, who sit one spot and just two points above the relegation zone, scored after just five minutes, Anthony Losilla unleashing a screamer from outside the box.

Dortmund hit back immediately, Germany forward Karim Adeyemi tapping in after a length-of-the-field team move to make it 1-1.

With the match winding down, Adeyemi looked to have won a penalty for the visiting side when brought down in the box by Danilo Soares, but the referee waved the incident away.

Dortmund were camped in the Bochum penalty area in the final minutes and had the ball in the net through Mats Hummels, but the linesman's flag went up immediately, with the defender standing half a metre offside.

Bayern can go one point clear in their bid for an 11th straight title by winning at home against last-placed Hertha Berlin on Sunday.

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic lamented the "extremely bitter" result as his side had a "rare chance to be so close to the championship."

## Leverkusen dents Union's titles hopes

AP ■ BERLIN

Union Berlin's slim hopes of a remarkable Bundesliga title were dented by a 0-0 draw at home against Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday.

Unbeaten at home in the league this season, Union's best chance came midway through the second half when Sheraldo Becker hit a Jerome Roussillon cross wide of the post.

A win would have taken Union three points behind first-placed Borussia Dortmund in just their fourth season of top division football.

Despite the draw, Union remain third and on course for a maiden Champions League placing with four matchdays remaining.

The stalemate also hurt Leverkusen's narrow chances of qualifying for the Champions League, with the Xabi Alonso-coached side now eight points outside the top four.

Elsewhere, Freiburg solidified their chances of following Union to a first-ever Champions League qualification, a second-half Ritsu Doan tap-in taking them to a 1-0 win away at Cologne.

Leipzig beat Hoffenheim thanks to Christopher Nkunku's first league goal since November.

Nkunku, handed his first start since returning from injury, collected a pass from Emil Forsberg and sent a left-footed finish into the right corner of the goal, chalking up his 13th goal in 21 league matches this season.

Leipzig, who have made the top four in five of their six seasons in the top division, are fifth, six points ahead of Leverkusen.

Stuttgart leapfrogged Bochum out of the relegation places with a 2-1 home win over Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Speaking with German tabloid Bild on Saturday, Stegemann said he was "really annoyed" and "feels crappy", admitting he made a mistake on watching the footage.

"If I had doubts about my decision, then that would have been an option. But I didn't have that chance," Stegemann said, explaining that the VAR did not tell him to consult the screen and review the play.

"In retrospect, I have to say that I would have been happy (to award a penalty) if I had watched it again."

Terzic said the referee's failure to check the Adeyemi penalty incident was "a key scene" in the draw, revealing to broadcaster DAZN "I begged him to look at it."

His Bochum counterpart Thomas Letsch toasted "the style and manner the team fought" saying "that's what we need in a relegation battle."

Disappointed Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel said his side "had the title in our own hands, but couldn't make the most of it."

"We need to look forward, keep fighting and win our next game."

**'ADMIT CRUCIAL ERROR'**

Both the German FA (DFB) and the referee in question on Saturday admitted a mistake in not awarding a penalty to Borussia Dortmund as they dropped potentially crucial points in a 1-1 draw at Bochum.

Dortmund forward Karim Adeyemi was brought down in the box by Bochum defender Danilo Soares midway through the second half on Friday, with the scores locked.



## Sheikh Jassim and Ratcliffe make final bids for Man Utd

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe made their third and final offers to buy Manchester United on Friday.

Sheikh Jassim is in a bidding war with Ratcliffe after the pair emerged as the main contenders to buy the Premier League club from the Glazer family.

While Sheikh Jassim's latest offer is reported to be over £5 billion (\$6.2 billion), the size of Ratcliffe's improved bid was yet to be made public when Friday's deadline for the third round of bidding passed at 2100 GMT.

Sources said Sheikh Jassim's bid for 100 percent control of the club comes with the promise of significant additional funding for transfers and infrastructure.

The spending would include either redeveloping United's out-dated Old Trafford stadium or build a new ground, along with overhauling the club's training facilities.

Sheikh Jassim's bid also promises to erase United's \$620 million debt.

INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan who failed in his attempt to buy Chelsea last year, reportedly wants to purchase a con-

trolling stake in United of more than 50 per cent.

That would allow United's executive co-chairmen Joel and Avram Glazer to remain as shareholders with a 20 percent stake, which has raised concerns among a fanbase tired of the Americans' controversial reign.

The Glazers reportedly want a world record £6 billion fee for a sports club before they agree to sell the Old Trafford outfit, raising the possibility they might not accept either Sheikh Jassim's offer or Ratcliffe's approach.

Deeply unpopular with supporters since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they first invited external investment in November.

However, Elliot Investment Management and The Carlyle Group are among the private equity firms in the market for a minority stake that could allow the Glazers to retain control and provide the funding for investment in the club's infrastructure.

Avram and Joel Glazer are reportedly keen to hold on to their stakes in United, while siblings Kevin, Bryan and Edward Glazer and Darcie Glazer Kaszewitz are open to offloading their shares.

# Palace set to survive after thriller against West Ham

AP ■ LONDON

Crystal Palace effectively sealed their Premier League survival with a thrilling 4-3 win against West Ham that left their London rivals still in danger of relegation on Saturday.

Roy Hodgson's side moved 11 points clear of the bottom three thanks to goals from Jordan Ayew, Wilfried Zaha, Jeff Schlupp and Eberechi Eze at Selhurst Park.

Palace have won four of their six matches since Hodgson returned for a second spell at the club in place of the sacked Patrick Vieira.

Tomas Soucek, Michail Antonio and Nayef Aguerd were on the scoresheet for

West Ham.

But a second successive defeat leaves David Moyes' men five points above the relegation zone with daunting fixtures against Manchester City and Manchester United looming next week.

West Ham were in front after just nine minutes when Michael Olise headed his attempted clearance of Jarrod Bowen's corner straight to Soucek and the midfielder fired home from close-range.

Olise made amends for his blunder as Palace equalised six minutes later.

Cheick Doucoure found Olise and the forward's superb pass picked out Ghana forward Ayew, whose first-time finish beat Lukasz Fabianski at the



near post.

Zaha was back in the Palace starting line-up for the first time in four games since Hodgson's return as manager at the start of April.

The Ivory Coast forward rewarded Hodgson's decision as he netted Palace's second goal in the 20th minute with a composed strike from another dangerous Olise cross.

West Ham's porous defence was breached again after half an hour, with Soucek carelessly losing possession on the edge of the area to Schlupp, who accepted the gift with a simple finish under the exposed Fabianski.

There was no end to the first half goal spree as Antonio reduced the deficit with a

close-range header after Soucek flicked on a corner in the 36th minute.

Eze restored Palace's two-goal advantage in the 66th minute, converting a controversial penalty awarded for Aguerd's tug on his arm.

Aguerd got one back for the Hammers in the 73rd minute, helping Soucek's header into the net from virtually on the line, but it was too late to rescue a point.

Later on Saturday, fourth bottom Nottingham Forest will look to climb further away from the relegation zone when they travel to Brentford.

Brighton can improve their prospects of qualifying for Europe next season if they beat Wolves at the Amex Stadium.

# Napoli ready to secure title for fans: Spalletti

AP ■ NAPLES

Luciano Spalletti said Saturday that Napoli are ready to claim their first Serie A title in more than three decades as fans wonder whether this weekend will finally end a long Scudetto drought.

Napoli need closest challengers Lazio not to win at Inter Milan in Sunday's early kick-off and then a win over Salernitana in a rearranged fixture to secure the league crown last won in 1990 with a record-breaking six games to spare.

Last weekend's thrilling win at Juventus brought Napoli to the brink of glory and Spalletti is convinced the weight of expectation won't get to his team.

"We need to keep doing what we've done up to now. There are things above us that we can't control, and we'll adapt to them," Spalletti told reporters.

"But we'll be ready to play the match tomorrow as we would have been to play today, with everything little bit of strength we have, and even that which we don't have."

"We just want to go out there and play the match."

Napoli will take to the Stadio Maradona field on Sunday afternoon after the fixture was pushed back a day following a request from security authorities in Naples.

Wild partying is expected among fans in Naples over May Day weekend, which extends into Monday, should Napoli seal the deal and emulate icon Diego Maradona, the talisman behind their previous two titles in 1987 and 1990.



about... Let's think about them because they've had the joy of watching a group of committed players who give everything for them," added Spalletti.

"They have shown a lot for us, and have been really important in us having such an exciting end of season."

The decision to move the match upset Salernitana owner Danilo Iervolino who was livid that his club wasn't consulted and that his team has one day less to prepare for Wednesday night's fixture at Fiorentina, with their Serie A safety not yet secured.

"We haven't left our season in the hands of the Naples prefect or fate... our desire is to make people happy. They waited for us for hours at the airport and for the team bus," said Spalletti.

"We haven't done anything as a team, and the fixture change meant we had to change our plans during the week. We have to accept it because it's come from a desire to maintain public order."

"Our team doesn't need to change anything, I'm sure, looking at the desire shown in training, that we will play our game. Whether that will be enough I'm not sure because we have a good team in front of us."

# Satwik-Chirag pair in Badminton Asia Championships final

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's top men's doubles pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty became the first Indian duo since Dinesh Khanna in singles in 1965 to enter the final of the Badminton Asia Championships here on Saturday.

The Indian duo sealed a spot in the summit clash after their opponents, the Tokyo Olympic champions Chinese Taipei's Lee Yang and Wang Chi-lin, retired midway

through the second game of their semifinal clash.

The 22-year-old Satwiksairaj Rankireddy from Amalapuram in Andhra Pradesh and the 25-year-old Mumbai-born Chirag Shetty had won the first game 21-18 and were going neck-and-neck with their Chinese Taipei opponents at 13-14 when Lee Yang and Wang Chi-lin withdrew, giving them a walkover.

The Indian duo had themselves assured a medal after 52 years in the men's doubles cat-



egory when they got the better of Indonesia's experienced duo Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan in straight games 21-11, 21-12 in the quarterfinals.

Chirag and Satwik are the lone Indians remaining in the fray in the Asian Championships after the other top players P.V. Sindhu, H.S. Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth lost in earlier stages in their respective sections.

India have thus far won only one gold in the Asian

Championships since it was initiated in 1962 -- the gold won by Dinesh Khanna in men's singles in 1965.

Satwik and Chirag will be hoping to bag the second gold for India in this mega event. Apart from the gold won by Dinesh Khanna, India have won 17 bronze medals in various categories in the Badminton Asia Championships since 1962.

Whatever medal they win on Sunday will be the biggest medal in their career.

# PEREZ WINS BAKU SPRINT

AP ■ BAKU

Sergio Perez won Saturday's Sprint race in Baku to maintain Red Bull's perfect start to the season, but teammate Max Verstappen was in no mood to celebrate.

Red Bull's double world champion was seething over a first lap incident when he was muscled out of third place by the Mercedes of George Russell.

Perez won from pole-sitter Charles Leclerc of Ferrari with Verstappen, whose car picked up some damage, eventually getting his third place back off Russell.

The British driver apologised to Verstappen, saying his car had no grip but the Dutch driver snapped back: "Mate, we all have no grip, we all need to leave space!"

Verstappen added later: "I just don't understand why you need to take so much risk in lap 1, understeer in my side pod and create a hole, we all have cold tyres, it's always easy to lock up."

"But in this beautiful way of explaining mate, locked up, or look at the onboard, it doesn't make sense. We still got into P3, got some good points, but it is what it is."

Russell stood his corner,



remarking: "I was surprised why he was so angry to be honest, he still finished the race in P3."

"I was still quite surprised he was trying to hold it round the outside, you know we're on a street circuit, he's got a lot more to lose than I have. None of the contact was intentional."

That mini storm on the banks of the Caspian Sea took some of the gloss off Perez's

win.

The Mexican was adding this first of six sprint races in 2023 to his win in the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, with Verstappen taking the season-opener in Bahrain and last time out in Melbourne.

Leclerc is on pole again on Sunday for the fourth round of the season but judged on this display he will have his work cut

out again to clip the Red Bulls' wings.

In the drivers' championship Verstappen leads on 75 points from Perez on 62 with Leclerc picking up seven points - more than he's earned in the three races run so far.

Leclerc fended off Perez in the short run to the first corner as Russell overtook Verstappen at turns two and three.

# Alcaraz survives scare in Madrid opener



AP ■ MADRID

Carlos Alcaraz clenched "Vamos! Vamos! Vamos!" at the packed stands of the Madrid Open.

His war cry of "Let's go!" in Spanish draws motivation for Alcaraz when he faces difficulty, and revs up his fans. This time it worked.

The defending champion survived a tougher-than-expected test by 41st-ranked Emil Ruusuvuori in his opening match on Friday.

Alcaraz was on the brink of an early upset before he dug down for a 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory over his Finnish opponent.

The Spanish teenager, who turns 20 next week, saved five break points in what turned out to be a critical game to remain level at 3-3 in the second set. In the next game, Alcaraz secured his first break to turn the second-round match in his favor.

Alcaraz jokingly apologised to the partisan crowd for the close call.

Alcaraz will next face Grigor Dimitrov after he beat Gregoire Barrere 6-0 5-7 6-3.

On the women's side, No. 1 Iga Swiatek eased past Julia Grabher of Austria 6-3, 6-2 after the three-time Grand Slam winner converted three of five break chances.

Third-seeded Jessica Pegula, who was a finalist in Madrid last year, got past Polish qualifier Magdalena Frech 7-6(5), 6-3.

# Gujarat Titans inch closer to playoffs

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**

Defending champions Gujarat Titans once again came up with a clinical display to prevail over Kolkata Knight Riders by seven wickets and climb to the top of the table in the IPL, here on Saturday.

It was sweet revenge for Titans, who lost their home game due to Rinku Singh's heroics.

First it was, the Titans pace duo of Mohammad Shami (3/33) and Josh Little (2/25) picked five wickets between them, while left-arm spinner Noor Ahmad (2/21) continued his fine run to restrict KKR to a below-par 179/7 after Hardik Pandya opted to bowl.

On a batting-friendly strip, Rahmanullah Gurbaz's scintillating 39-ball 81 set the tempo, but KKR managed just 45 runs and lost three wickets in the final five overs to miss the psychological 200-run mark.

In reply, GT raced to the target in 17.5 overs with Vijay Shankar remaining unbeaten on 51 off 24 balls (2x4, 5x6).

Defending the paltry total, the home side had their moments when they dismissed a flawless Shubman Gill one run shy of fifty and almost had David Miller on 26.

But they made a harakiri of sorts as Miller's skier, which would have been a straightforward catch by their wicketkeep-

er, was attempted by Suyash Sharma from third man and he ended up grassing it.

GT at that time still needed 51 runs from 29 balls but it turned out to be a game-changing moment as Shankar and Miller (32 not out; 18b, 2x4, 2x6) sealed the issue in an unbroken 87-run unbroken partnership that came off 39 balls.

The win took GT to top spot in the table with 12 points from eight matches as they need to win two more matches to seal the playoff berth for a second time on the trot.

KKR on the other hand staring at early elimination after enduring their sixth defeat from nine matches as they now face must win all their remaining five matches.

Gill (49; 35b) gave GT a perfect start after losing Wriddhiman Saha (10) early as he along with skipper Hardik Pandya laid the foundation in a 50-run partnership.

Having conceded 18 runs from his first two overs, Sunil Narine returned in the 12th over to end his five-match wicketless drought when he dismissed Gill.

At 102/3 after 13 overs, KKR still had the edge when Suyash bowled a four-run over with three dot balls as the required run-rate for GT shot past 11.

But the South African batter broke the shackles with a



**THE WIN TOOK GT TO TOP SPOT IN THE TABLE WITH 12 POINTS FROM EIGHT MATCHES AS THEY NEED TO WIN TWO MORE MATCHES TO SEAL THE PLAYOFF BERTH FOR A SECOND TIME ON THE TROT**

boundary off Chakravarthy, before taking Suyash to cleaners, in a 18-run over.

Miller smashed the rookie legspinner for two sixes in a row, before Shankar also chipped in with a boundary as there was no looking back for GT from there on.

Returning to the side after Jason Roy pulled out because of a back spasm, the Afghanistan opener struck his second fifty of the season as he smashed seven sixes and five fours en route to his 39-ball knock.

But once rookie Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmed (4-0-21-2) dismissed his teammate with compatriot Rashid Khan completing a well-judged catch, KKR didn't make good use of the final few overs as Mohammed Shami (3/33 in 4 overs) and Irishman Josh Little (2/25 in 4 overs) did

play their part to perfection.

At 135/5, KKR had the firepower of Andre Russell and Rinku Singh with 28 balls to go.

But Rinku became Noor's second victim, while 'birthday boy' Russell could not express himself fully with GT bowlers doing well to restrict him for a 19-ball 34 not out (2x4, 3x6).

The match began after a 45-minute rain interruption and KKR lost two wickets in the powerplay to Shami.

The India pacer dismissed Narayan Jagadeesan (19 off 15 balls) and comeback-man Shardul Thakur who capped a four-ball duck before being caught by superb backward running catch by Mohit Sharma.

But that did not drag back KKR as Gurbaz showed the way with some clean powerhitting, racing to a 27-ball fifty with four fours and four sixes.

Making his intent clear, Gurbaz teed off smashing GT skipper Pandya for two sixes in three balls.

He then took the attack on Shami with disdain.

The Indian pace spearhead angled a delivery onto him but Gurbaz was in full flow as he backed away and smashed it straight over the bowler's head to race to 26 off 10 balls.

Rashid (0/54 in 4 overs) was brought in but he also failed to stem the flow of runs with a relentless Gurbaz striking in full force.

## Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Delhi by nine runs

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Mitchell Marsh dished out one of his finest all-round performances but it wasn't enough as Sunrisers Hyderabad returned to winning ways with a comprehensive nine-run win over Delhi Capitals in the IPL here on Saturday.

The hard-hitting Australian all-rounder first snapped four wickets and then blasted six maximums in his 39-ball 63-run knock to conjure up hopes of a successful chase but once he was out, things went downhill for the hosts on the sluggish Kotla track.

Batting first, Abhishek Sharma slammed a 36-ball 67 to set the stage for Heinrich Klaasen, who provided the final flourish with an unbeaten 53 as SRH posted an impressive 197 for 6.

In reply, Delhi lost skipper David Warner for a second-ball duck but Philip Salt (59) and Marsh took the attack to the opposition with a 112-run partnership off just 66 balls to lay a solid ground to their run chase.

With the duo in full flow, 57 runs came in the powerplay as left-arm spinner Akeal Hosen conceded 30 in his three overs.

ened the screws to limit DC to 188 for six in 20 overs with Axar Patel scoring 29 off 14 balls.

With the win, SRH snapped their three-match losing streak to remain alive in the competition. They are bow in the eighth spot with six points, while DC stayed at the bottom.

Earlier, back at the top, Abhishek seemed to be batting on a different track, slamming 12 fours and a six, even as the others struggled on the two-paced wicket.

While the southpaw looked in good rhythm, the rest of the top and middle order continued to disappoint, scoring in single digits.

But Klaasen's 27-ball-knock ensured that momentum is not lost with as many as 62 runs coming off last five overs.

The South African added 53 of 33 balls with Abdul Samad (28 off 21 balls) and 35 off 18 balls with Akeal Hosen (16 off 10 balls) as SRH posted the highest score at the Kotla this season.

For DC, Mitchell Marsh was the best bowler in display, returning with figures of 4-1-27-4, while Axar Patel (1/29) picked up a solitary wicket. Ishant Sharma also got one but he was



expensive in his three overs.

The stylish Abhishek was particularly harsh on Ishant Sharma, picking up back-to-back boundaries before pulling him for another four in the mid-wicket region.

Mayank Agarwal, however, didn't look comfortable and his misery was ended by Ishant with a well-directed bouncer. Rahul Tripathi sent one from Mukesh Kumar over the keeper for a six before falling to Mitchell Marsh.

Ishant was again on the firing line of Abhishek, who smashed him for four boundaries more in the sixth over as 16 runs came off it, helping SRH to end the powerplay at 62 for 2.

Kuldeep Yadav could have dismissed Abhishek but Anrich Nortje spilled a regulation catch at the boundary and the opener rubbed salt on the bowler's wound with a slogsweep for a maximum to bring up his fifty. Abhishek took 25 balls to reach the milestone.

Marsh was rewarded for bowling his cutters and back of length scrambled seam deliveries as he dismissed Markram and Harry Brook in a double wicket maiden over. Sunrisers reached 83 for 4 in 10 overs.

Marsh clobbered Umran Malik for two maximums and Salt produced two good hits to amass 22 runs off the over, while Abhishek was punished for bowling wrong length with Marsh slamming a four and six.

An incredible caught and bowled effort from Mayank Markande finally broke the partnership with Salt back in the pavilion. Soon, Abhishek got rid of Manish Pandey and when Marsh holed out to Markram off Hosen, it left DC at 125 for 4 in the 14th over.

Needing 69 off 36 balls, SRH tight-



## Chennai face Punjab in battle of Kings

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**

Chennai Super Kings will head into the IPL match against Punjab Kings as favourites with spin bowlers expected to play a huge role in the home side's scheme of things, here on Sunday.

Both teams head into the game on the back of defeats in their previous matches. While CSK fell short by 32 runs against Rajasthan Royals, PBKS lost to Lucknow Super Giants by 56 runs.

CSK, however, will be happy to return to home comforts, where spin is king and their shrewd captain M S Dhoni will look to strangle the PBKS batters.

A high-flying CSK was ambushed in Jaipur as the batters came up short, chasing 203 for victory against the Royals.

The CSK batting unit, which has been performing, couldn't quite get going against RR. Opener Devon Conway, who has been in top form, faltered.

Apart from Conway, opener Ruturaj Gaikwad and Ajinkya Rahane have been the key batters for CSK, while Shivam Dube has shown he is capable of scoring quick runs.

Ravindra Jadeja's lack of runs would be a worry for the CSK think-tank but the all-rounder more than makes up for it with his splendid bowling and fielding.

All eyes will be on Dhoni, who is seemingly on a farewell run and the crowd would be delighted if the talismanic skipper faces even a few deliveries.

Dhoni turned to his spinners when the Royals were on rampage and Maheesh Theekshana and Ravindra Jadeja were immediately able to stem the flow of runs.

Come Sunday, the skipper will once again rely on his

spinners to turn the ball and bamboozle the opposition. CSK is likely continue with its three-pronged spin attack of Jadeja, Theekshana and Moeen Ali.

In the pace department, Tushar Deshpande with 14 wickets, albeit at an economy rate of 12.57, has put his hand up in the absence of an injured Deepak Chahar and will look to put his best forward while young Aksah Singh and Matheesha Pathirana will look for an improved show.

CSK is not a team which makes too many changes and it is likely that England's Test captain Ben Stokes, who has recovered from injury which has kept him out for some games, would be benched again.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, have struggled for consistency and the return of skipper Shikhar Dhawan did not help the team's cause on Friday.

Up against a daunting target, the PBKS batters scored at a decent pace and did their best to reach 200 but couldn't take the side over the line. They will have their task cut out against the spin-heavy CSK.

The top-order comprising Dhawan, Prabhsimran Singh and Atharva Taide needs to get going while Liam Livingstone is yet to come into his own and get a big score.

Sam Curran led the way against Mumbai Indians and his contribution with both bat and ball holds the key for the team.

Pacers Arshdeep Singh and Kagiso Rabada, who were taken to the cleaners by LSG batters, will have to regroup quickly.

Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar's spell in the middle overs would also be crucial on a Chennai track which is usually slow and low.

## In Rohit's absence, Kohli should lead India in major games like WTC Final: Shastri



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Former head coach Ravi Shastri feels India should look "in the direction" of Virat Kohli to lead the side in a major game, like the WTC final, if skipper Rohit Sharma is unavailable due to "unforeseen circumstances".

Shastri added that the Indian team management should have asked Kohli to lead the side in the postponed final Test of the England tour last year once Rohit was ruled out of the fixture.

"If it's for a major game like that, I want Rohit to be fit, he is the captain. But god forbid something happens under

probably could have got the best out of the team," he said.

Kohli was the India's Test captain during the tour of England in 2021. Under his captaincy, India had taken a 2-1 lead before the final Test was postponed by a year due to COVID-19 outbreak in the visitors' camp.

By the time of the final Test, Kohli had stepped down from captaincy with Rohit taking over.

However, when Rohit was ruled out of the fixture, India handed a captaincy debut to pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah.

Kohli, who has also given up Royal Challengers Bangalore's captaincy, is currently leading the IPL side as regular skipper Faf du Plessis nurses a rib injury that has limited him to an "Impact Player".

"He's in a very good space, enjoying his cricket. That's the feeling I got as opposed to last year when we were sitting and discussing does he need a break, does he not need a break. He seemed to have the burden of the whole world on his shoulders," Shastri said.

"Now it's refreshing. The enthusiasm, passionate energy and enjoyment have come back, which for me was the best thing to see. Runs you might or might not get but when you see someone, and the passion, enjoyment and drive is back again, it's good," he added.

foreseen circumstances, definitely I'll look in that direction," Shastri told ESPNcricinfo when asked if Kohli should lead the team at the WTC final if Rohit is unavailable.

Shastri said he would have recommended the talismanic batter's name to the board for captaincy for the postponed fifth Test against England.

"Once Rohit was injured, I thought Virat would captain. If I was still there - I'm sure Rahul (Dravid) might have done the same thing. I have not spoken to him - I would've recommended to the board that it's only fair he leads because he was captain of the team that was leading 2-1 in the series and

## Royals test for Mumbai

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Misfiring Mumbai Indians will have to bring their 'A-game' to the show in order to stop Rajasthan Royals' juggernaut when the two teams meet in an IPL match here on Sunday.

RR are currently at second in the table with some incredible performances -- for example their one-sided routing of Chennai Super Kings.

Despite losing two of their last three matches, the Sanju Samson-led side is in prime form and has been delivering in all departments of the game.

On the other hand, there are serious concerns for MI, especially their death bowling, which was responsible for their last two defeats in high-scoring games.

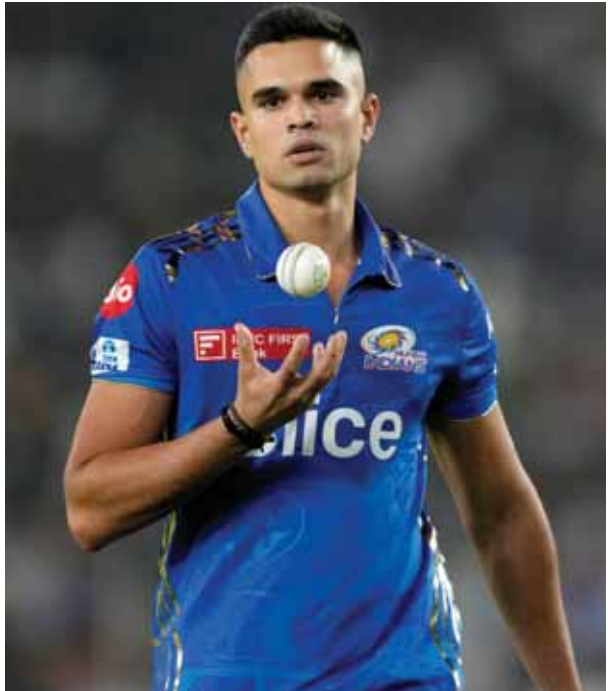
MI bowlers gave away a whopping 96 runs in the last 30 balls to allow Punjab Kings to run away with the match here at the Wankhede Stadium last weekend.

If that was not enough, MI conceded 70 runs off the last 24 balls against defending champions Gujarat Titans.

MI will need more from their top-order but the task on Sunday night will be to put a unified front, given that RR's batting has been consistent enough.

In particular, Rohit Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav will have to fire to help MI resurrect their campaign.

The Mumbai side is languishing at the bottom and are currently placed eighth in the points table after the first half of the tournament.



a total around 200 at the batting-friendly surface here.

RR have an assured pairing of Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal at the top, and in the middle they have the likes of Sanju Samson, Devdutt Padikkal, Shimron Hetmyer followed by Dhruv Jurel.

RR's biggest strength in the bowling unit is undoubtedly the spin duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin, who have so far taken collective 23 wickets in eight matches.

Left-arm fast bowler Trent Boult has looked impressive at the start of the innings and with nine wickets in six games, the Kiwi has turned out to be RR's one of the best weapons.

In the bowling department, it remains to be seen if Jofra Archer shows up for the contest against his former side Rajasthan.

The English pacer, far from being 100 per cent fit, has spent more time recovering from his elbow troubles this season and illness, due to which he missed the contest against Gujarat Titans.

The likes of Jason Behrendorff, Riley Meredith and Arjun Tendulkar have been expensive.

On the other hand, RR will look to make the most of the frailties of MI.

RR have the firepower in their batting line-up to pile up



# the pioneer agenda

I somehow see what's beautiful in things that are ephemeral, I'm my only friend of mine and love is just a peace of time in the world  
— Zoëy Deschanel



## MODI'S TOUCH

# KERALA BRIMMING WITH CONFIDENCE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2-day tour of Kerala has sown the seeds of a paradigm shift in the political landscape in the God's Own Country as the Church leadership and the Christian community have grown weary of the appeasement politics of both the Congress and Communist governments and they are yearning for a positive change, writes KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

He came, he saw and he conquered: That's one way of describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's whirlwind tour of Kerala on Monday and Tuesday. Though he had visited the State as the chief minister of Gujarat and as the Prime Minister in the past, those tours did not cause this much excitement among the Kerala population.

From the moment he landed at Indian Navy's airport at Kochi on Monday evening, till he boarded the special aircraft from Thiruvananthapuram, the regional TV news channels were overexcited as if Modi was coming to Kerala for the first time. News channels in Malayalam, dominated by card holding members and propagandists of CPI(M) and Jamaat-e-Islami had specialised in toning down news about the Prime Minister. It was a different approach this time.

Modi's public meeting on Monday was held at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, set up in 1944 by the Catholic Church. This was a signal that politics in Kerala is in for a change. His roadshow from the airport to the venue literally caught the CPI(M) and the Congress leadership off guard. People in the State have seen Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan speeding through the roads accompanied by a cavalcade of at least 50 SUVs and sirens blowing police vehicles and ambulances since 2016. But at no point of time, Vijayan has interacted with the people anywhere in Kerala. The police insist that people should not wear black shirts or saris in areas visited by Vijayan. Even black coloured masks are forbidden in the State. There were many instances in the recent past when people wearing black shirts or costumes or masks were kept away from venues hosting Chief Minister Vijayan. It is against this backdrop that Modi walked 1.5 km without any unusual security cover and that too despite threat letters issued by various extremist organisations that he would be targeted.

Modi met heads of various factions of the Church after his interaction with

the youth. It is not known what transpired in the meeting, though one of the bishops told the media that the price of rubber came up for discussion. While addressing the Kerala Catholic Farmers, Metropolitan Archbishop Joseph Pamplani of Thalasseri Archdiocese had declared that the Christian community in the State would vote for the BJP if the Centre hikes the price of rubber to Rs 300 per kg. This literally shocked the Congress and the CPI(M) leadership. While MV Govindan, the boss of the CPI(M) lambasted the Archbishop in the harshest of words, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly VD Sathesh scoffed at the spiritual leader for crossing the Lakshman Rekha in politics.

Pamplani's statement was in continuation of a statement made by Mar Joseph Kallarangattu of Pala Diocese in April 2022 that extremists were administering narcotics among Hindu and Christian girls in the State. The CPI(M)-led Kerala Government filed a FIR against the Bishop on charges of creating religious animosity among different communities in the State. But the BJP, which was waiting for a chance to build a bridge between the party and the Christian vote bank, saw the potential in the Bishop's statement and declared their support to him.

A probe took The Pioneer to the heart of the matter. The Church runs nearly hundred de-addiction centres across Kerala and details of those getting admitted to these centres speak the truth. Majority of the girls were from Hindu families while there has been an alarming increase in the number of Christian girls falling prey to drugs. "It is by making the victims addicts to drugs, these jihadi get them converted to Islam and take them to ISIS-dominated areas," said Kevin Peter, convenor, Christian Alliance and Association for Social Action (CAASA), an umbrella organisation formed to safeguard the interests of various Christian sects in the country.

The Church in Kerala never had any kind of ties with the Sangh Parivar

MODI'S PUBLIC MEETING ON MONDAY WAS HELD AT SACRED HEART COLLEGE, THEVARA, SET UP IN 1944 BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. THIS WAS A SIGNAL THAT POLITICS IN KERALA IS IN FOR A CHANGE. HIS ROADSHOW FROM THE AIRPORT TO THE VENUE LITERALLY CAUGHT THE CPI(M) AND THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP OFF GUARD. PEOPLE IN THE STATE HAVE SEEN CHIEF MINISTER PINARAYI VIJAYAN SPEEDING THROUGH THE ROADS ACCOMPANIED BY A CAVALCADE OF AT LEAST 50 SUVs AND SIRENS BLOWING POLICE VEHICLES AND AMBULANCES SINCE 2016. BUT AT NO POINT OF TIME, VIJAYAN HAS INTERACTED WITH THE PEOPLE ANYWHERE IN KERALA



as the latter is against religious conversions undertaken by the priests and evangelists in the State. During the tenure of K Sudarshan as RSS chief, a channel of communication was opened between the Sangh and the Church. Leaders of RSS held many rounds of meetings with a section of the Church leaders led by Joseph Pulikkunnel, a theologian and editor of Hosana monthly. But there was no progress in these discussions.

While the CPI(M), the Congress and the Muslim League took strong objections to the comments by some of the bishops over love jihad featuring Christian girls, the BJP stood behind the spiritual leaders and shared their apprehension over the elopement of Christian girls with Muslim boys. When activists of the banned outfit Popular Front of India (PFI) chopped the hand of Prof TJ Joseph, for his alleged comments against Prophet Muhammad, the Sangh Parivar was the lone organisation that extended its hands to the victim as the Left intelligentsia maintained silence over the gruesome incident.

The refusal of the CPI(M) and the Congress-led governments to provide reservation to Christians while the Muslim community walked away with the entire benefits antagonised the Church. The ban on SIMI and PFI resulted in the activists of these outfits joining the CPI(M) and later redesigning of the rules of the Special Marriages Act in the State to help the Islamists perform the marriage in secret. "KT Jaleel, former minister of higher education, was the undisputed leader of SIMI and had campaigned across the State with the slogan India's Liberation is only through Islam. His social media posts strengthen the charge that his loyalty is still with the extremists," said Kevin Peter.

Though the Centre has banned PFI, the Pinarayi Vijayan Government has not taken any action against the outfit. Prof Stanly Sebastian, an educationist, says the campuses in Kerala have been taken over by the PFI and the SDPI (political wing

of PFI) and they operate through the SFI, the student wing of the CPI(M). "Green Light, a WhatsApp collective in Kerala Police, is full of jihadi and Islamic terrorists. Kerala has become a safe haven for the terrorists and this was proved by the arson in Alappuzha-Kannur Janasadabdi Express resulting in the death of three persons. Though the jihadi was held by Maharashtra Police and handed over to the Kerala Police, the latter is yet to make any breakthrough in the probe," said Prof Sebastian.

It is an undisputed fact that there is a thaw in the ties between the Church and the BJP. "The BJP has accommodated as many Christians as possible in its organisational structure as well as in tributary organisations. This is a welcome signal and we need not doubt about their intentions," said Jaison Mazhuvancherry, a devout Christian and BJP activist in Pulluvazhi, the CPI(M) stronghold.

KT Paily, a former Indian Railway official and community leader, says there is a discernible change among the Christians towards the BJP. "But I may not guarantee that this would lead to the transfer of votes to the party. During Sunday congregations and social functions, community members express their satisfaction over the track record of the Modi Government," said Paily.

But the State leadership of the BJP is handicapped by the absence of a charismatic person to lead the party. "The present leadership has to go and Kerala should get someone like K Annamalai of Tamil Nadu. The BJP in Kerala is a house divided with each leader operating as a separate party," said a national executive member.

While the State leadership failed to build bridges with potential allies, CP Radhakrishnan, former prabhari of the State, (present Governor of Jharkhand) went out of his way and communicated with the leaders of the Church. Radhakrishnan's style was distinct. He pointed out to the community leaders about the contributions made by veteran IAS and defence services personnel to the nation and

asked them to be part of the Hindutva party. This has yielded some results as a former director general of police, Dr Jacob Thomas, campaigned openly for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and 2021 Assembly polls.

Yet another pat on the back of the BJP came from Cardinal George Alencherry, the 78-year old "shepherd" of the community, who said in an interaction with a Kerala-based daily that Christians do not feel insecure in India. While agreeing with reports that the community members were being attacked by Hindu zealots in north India, he said most of such reports were exaggerated ones. But that does not smoothen the ties between the BJP and the Church. Evangelisation is the identity of Christianity and the Church is unlikely to compromise with the demand of Hindus that there should be a law banning conversion by persuasion and pecuniary benefits.

Prof E Balakrishnan, author of History of Communist Movement in Kerala, says that the time has come for cooperation between the Hindus and Christians in India. "The Christians are facing an identity crisis as the community's population has gone down while the Muslim population in India is always on the rise. The day is not far off when they will overtake the Hindu population. The Hindus and Christians are dependent on each other. This is not to portray the Muslims in poor light. Globally, they evoke a sense of fear and their intolerance to other religions is the biggest threat to secularism," said Prof Balakrishnan.

It is easier said than done as there are burning issues which remain between Mandir and Church. The RSS does not accept the theory of St Thomas, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ who had come to Kerala. Then, there is the process of evangelisation, the raison d'être of Christianity. Mohammed himself has gone to meet the Mountain sans anyone from Kerala. One has to wait till 2024 to know whether the Mountain budged to facilitate the pilgrim's progress.

# MYOPIA GENERATION

By 2050, half of the world will be nearsighted. More common among children, myopia can have serious consequences, including vision impairment and other eye ailments, thanks to more screens and less time outdoors. Awareness among parents and the target children is the need of the hour, eye experts tell ARCHANA JYOTI

**SCENE 1:** Five-year-old Bunty is hooked on a video game on a mobile phone while his mother Rekha feeds him porridge. "He's so finicky when it comes to eating. At least, he eats when cellphone is in his hand," she says.

**SCENE 2:** Sharmila, an MNC executive who works from home has given her 8-year-old Sonia an android phone to keep her busy till she completes her official assignments. Her husband, Rohan agrees as he too is busy with office work and have almost no time to take Sonia for outdoor activities.

In both cases, doctors warned that chances are high that the kids will soon be the part of the 'Myopia Generation' whose number, in fact is on increase. Myopia occurs when the cornea of the eye is too curved, or the eyeball is too large. The light rays entering the eye are not able to focus on the retina, which results in a blurry vision.

Dr Digvijay Singh, Head of Ophthalmology department, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, Delhi presented a disturbing yet familiar picture as he said, a visit to any school in the country today will show you a large number of children wearing spectacles in every class with the numbers increasing from junior school to high school at an alarming rate.

He knows better. "As a Pediatric ophthalmologist, I see a large number of children on a daily basis who have just been diagnosed with myopia or weak eyesight and many of them are aged less than 5 years also. There has been a spike of cases of myopia after the pandemic when these young children have been exposed to screens and prolonged near activity and deprived of outdoor play."

In most young adults, myopia will eventually stabilize — but the initial progression of myopia, where the eyes stretch and grow too much, can lead to bigger eye problems later in life, such as a myopic macular degeneration, retinal detachment, glaucoma, and cataracts. "The higher the myopia, the greater the risk," Singh flags concerns. "Since myopia progresses the fastest in children under age 10, the most



important opportunity to slow eye growth is when children are young."

A study conducted at AIIMS, Delhi a few years ago has revealed that one in eight children in Delhi schools were wearing glasses and this number was almost one in three in some studies from South India and North East India

Ophthalmologists said that children spending more time in doors, being exposed to less natural light, and looking at nearby objects such as screens will leave them shortsightedness or myopia. Research has suggested that the percentage of people affected by myopia worldwide could surge from 27 percent in 2010 to 52 percent by 2050. Add to this are minor

## PREVENTION/MANAGEMENT OF MYOPIA

- Using eyewear to minimize risks to children's eyes
- Protect little eyes from intense sunlight: In fact, when children are outdoors, they should wear sunglasses or wide-brimmed hats to decrease the risks of ultraviolet radiation damage, which can contribute to eye problems in older age, Clark says.
- Regular eye checks to detect problems early
- Last but not the least: "Follow the 20-20-20+2 rule: for every 20 minutes of screen time, take a 20-second break, look at something 20 feet away or more, and spend at least 2 hours outside each day, throughout the day."
- The WHO recommends no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day for children ages 5 to 17 years, and a limit of 1 hour per day for preschool-aged children.

factors related to height, improper lighting and sleep habits, Dr Digvijay pointed out.

And as the heat waves become a frequent feature, summer may mean children

spending more hours on digital devices, video games and televisions — and less time outdoors.

But what is worrying is that just half of parents recognize that screen time has a major

impact on their child's eye health, according to a study following the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at University of Michigan Health. "Many parents may not be aware of

both the short and long-term health issues linked to excessive screen time, including its effect on children's eyes," said Mott Poll co-director Sarah Clark.

"Our findings suggest that some parents may have inaccurate perceptions of activities that affect their child's eye health and vision and how to minimize risks."

"Parents should encourage at least one to two hours of outdoor time per day because exposure to natural light benefits eye development," Clark said.

He added, "Parents should enforce family rules to ensure children have a sustained period of non-screen time during the day. This is especially important during summer

months when they're off from school and may have less structured downtime."

Dr Mahipal S Sachdeva, Chairman and Managing Director, Centre for Sight, a chain of Eye Hospitals suggested that glasses or contact lenses usually correct myopia. Refractive surgery such as Lasik or Smile can reshape the cornea of the eye and fix myopia, which allows the patients to see clearly again without using any aids for their vision.

There are also some methods that have been suggested to stop the progression of nearsightedness in children like low-dose Atropine eye drops or fitting them with bifocals, gas permeable contact lenses, or

progressive lenses.

However, the results of these methods have been mixed, at best, he said.

Various studies say, that Atropine is the most effective medication that has been demonstrated to be consistently effective in slowing myopia progression (40). Atropine is a natural alkaloid occurring in plants of the Solanaceae family and is mostly extracted from *Atropa belladonna*.

Dr Digvijaya said that myopia is manageable through regular use of glasses, certain special types of glass lenses to prevent progression, use of special diluted atropine eye-drops (which reduce progression of myopia) and special contact lenses which can prevent and even improve myopia.

The most important thing is to catch it early and on time to enable timely treatment so I always recommend to parents to get their child's vision screened at least once at the age of 4-5 years and even earlier if there is a strong family history of myopia.

However, top eye experts from Dr Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, Delhi have called for more researches in the context of India which is seeing uptick in myopia cases but is not being given due importance due to a paucity of scientific literature in Indian set ups.

"Prospective cohort-based studies are necessary to understand the natural history, progression, genetic influences, regional differences, and various effects of interventional measures.

In addition, standardized methodology including case definition, sampling strategy and measurement protocols are to be followed to prevent potential bias," they said in their review article published last year in journal Clinical Ophthalmology.

The authors included leading ophthalmologists Dr Amar Pujari, Dr Sujeth Modaboyina, Dr Divya Agarwal, Dr Gunjan Saluja, Dr Rajeswari Thangavel, Dr Vaishali Rakheja, Dr Rohit Saxena, Dr Namrata Sharma, Dr Jeewan S Titiyal, and Dr Atul Kumar.

## HEALTH BRIEFS

### TIME TO REVISIT GENETIC BLOOD DISORDER GUIDELINES, 2016: STAKEHOLDERS

As new therapies beyond blood transfusion and iron chelation emerge for the management and treatment of thalassemia, stakeholders in the sector have called for the revisit of the seven-year-old national guidelines with an aim to improve outcomes and overall quality of life of the persons with the genetic blood disorder.

Talking to The Pioneer, Shobha Tuli from Thalassemics India, said that "we are now faced with an urgent need to launch a national-level thalassemia programme on the lines of sickle cell disease but with a stricter timeline. In this regard, 2016 guidelines on hemoglobinopathies may need a revision to include novel technologies and unique methods of awareness."

She explained that since the framing of the guidelines, various initiatives and changes have taken place. "There are some curative options available now. Then there is a new drug Luspatercept which was launched last month and has shown good results.

"The novel screening technologies are also available and a large number of new point-of-care facilities across the country. At these PoCs, new technologies, medicines should be made available to ensure quality life of the patients," she said on the sidelines of the roundtable on the prevention of Hemoglobinopathies - Sickle Cell Disease and Thalassemia hosted by the Thalassemia Patients Advocacy Group (TPAG), in association with The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) held recently.

It is estimated that about 10000 kids are born every year in India while there are about 100,000 thalassemia patients and approximately 30-45 million carriers of thalassemia.

A lot of emphasis should also be given to pre-marital counselling of prospective couples so that they are encouraged to test themselves if they

are carriers of thalassemia. If that may not seem practical, testing of carrier status of parents with each pregnancy (antenatal) must be made mandatory, Tuli further continued.

At the event, Dr Anil Kumar, Additional Deputy Director General, Directorate General of Health Service, Union Health Ministry noted that, "Hemoglobinopathies continue to pose a significant burden on our healthcare system, with limited resources available to address the challenges they present. While our office is working on a national level thalassemia control programme, we are equally focused on the management of thalassemia and commit to blood safety through Nucleic Acid Testing (NAT), voluntary blood donation, etc in a phased manner.

"We aim to release a manual on blood transfusion services and voluntary blood donation guidelines by 14th June which is World Blood Donor Day," he said.

At the panel discussion on the current practices, challenges, and the need of the hour for the screening of Hemoglobinopathies in public and private settings, doctors and healthcare experts like Dr Ritika Sud, Prof of Medicine, LHMC and SSK Hospital, Delhi, Dr K Madan Gopal, Senior Consultant, Niti Aayog, Dr Hrishikesh D Pai, President, FOGSI, Dr Anil Handoo, Lab Director, BLK Hospital, Delhi, among others, shared their thoughts.

Anubha Taneja-Mukherjee, Member Secretary, Thalassemia Patients Advocacy Group, said, "We must recognize the significant burden of haemoglobin disorders, including, Hemophilia, Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Disease, and work towards finding innovative solutions to combat them."

At the event, Dr Pai promised that all gynecologists members of the FOGSI will work to create awareness about the genetic blood disorders to the would-be-mothers so that such births can be prevented.

## Cancer & NCDs: India's growing healthcare concern

For successful implementation of cancer control programmes, there is a need to create awareness among the general public and train healthcare professionals in diagnosing and referrals of cancer suspects at an early stage to reduce secondary complications.

DR SUDARSAN MANDAL



Cancer is one of the emerging major public health issues that affect millions of people around the world, including India. In recent years, the incidence of cancer has been alarmingly rising in India.

As per the ICMR "National Cancer Registry Programme" data, approximately 3.65 million people are affected with cancer, 1.5 million new cases are diagnosed annually and nearly 0.8 million deaths reported due to cancer.

Tobacco consumption - either chewing or smoking tobacco -- accounts for 50 per cent of the cancer in men, whereas poor dietary practices and reproductive and sexual practices account for 20-30 per cent of cancers.

More than 4 million people across the globe die prematurely due to illness attributable to household air pollution from cooking with solid fuels, while 6 per cent of these deaths are

caused by lung cancer.

Indoor air pollution from coal fires doubles the risk of lung cancer, particularly among non-smoking women. Exposure to smoke from industry and vehicles, pesticides and insecticide sprays are the major contributors to the ever rising cancer burden in India.

Cancer needs a network of specialized infrastructures and human resources for its care. The Government of India has recently launched the Ayushman Bharat Yojana (ABY), which has two major components i.e. focus on strengthening primary healthcare through 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs); and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) to provide secondary and tertiary levels of treatment. The HWCs focus on community-based screening for some common cancers, which could be a good opportunity to integrate cancer prevention and control into primary healthcare services in the country.

Cancer control in India has made considerable progress in the last four decades since the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) launched the National Cancer Registry (NCR) Programme in 1982.

The shift from treatment to broader prevention and control was emphasised when the Government



of India launched the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS) in 2010 which proposed the preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative care to cancer patients at all levels of the healthcare system.

India is experiencing a rapid health transition with rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) which is one of the major challenges to public health in India in the 21st

century. More than 60 lakh Indians are dying every year due to cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and other NCDs. Burden of NCDs and resultant mortality is likely to witness an upward rise unless efforts are made to prevent and control them and their risk factors. There is an urgent need to focus on health promotion and preventive measures to reduce the exposure to risk factors.

Population-based screening for adults above 30 years of age has been

established to screen for cervical, oral, and breast cancer every 5 years by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs). The program envisages control of tobacco-related cancers; early diagnosis and treatment of oral, breast & cervical cancer; and distribution of therapy services, pain relief, and palliative care through augmentation of health infrastructure.

The need for a community component in cancer

prevention was felt when it was realized that the key challenges in early diagnosis and treatment of cancer are related to the patients receiving wrong information, having poor knowledge, no trust in public health services, and a weak cancer health infrastructure. One of the commonly missing parts of health program implementation in India is missing community or people's participation, which essentially starts with community mobilization and awareness generation among citizens. The method of early detection of cancers in symptomatic individuals is a more practical approach. However, for its successful implementation, there is a need to create awareness among the general public and train healthcare professionals in diagnosing and referrals of cancer suspects at an early stage to reduce secondary complications. Appropriate changes in lifestyle and maintaining healthy dietary practices can reduce the mortality and morbidity from cancer.

So, let's join hands to protect ourselves and our loved ones from the dreaded cancer and make India a healthy and prosperous nation!

(The author is the Deputy Director General (NPCDCS), Dte.GHS, Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.)

# Sudan sliding into an abyss of despair

Fighting in Sudan is fast turning bloodier. First it started in the capital city of Khartoum and then spread to different corners of the country. It is all about a fierce power struggle between two generals. The current fiasco is very much connected to Omar Hassan al-Bashir, former strongman of Sudan. He was deposed after three decades in power and was overthrown in a popular uprising in 2019. He is wanted by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity during the Darfur crisis in the 2000s.

Moreover, under the national laws of Sudan, Bashir is facing serious charges related to the 1989 coup that finally put him in power. And for these cases, he faces death sentence or life in prison. Till recently, Bashir and his former colleagues were kept in the famous Kober prison for the last four years. But this week, the rumour mills are agog with several stories that he is shifted out of the prison or made to hide in safe places. And some other media reports are alleging that he has been released from prison. But so far, the post-Bashir transitional military government has refused to hand him over to the ICJ for prosecution.

How did the current chaos in Sudan start? Who is actually responsible for it? Sudan is located in North-East Africa. It is one of the largest countries of the African continent. This resource-rich African nation stretches over nearly 1.9 million square kilometres bordering Chad Republic to the west, Egypt to the north, Red Sea and South Sudan to the south, Eritrea to the north-east, Central African Republic to the south-west, Ethiopia to the south-east, and Libya to the north-west. Unfortunately, this is one of the poorest nations in the world with 46 million people living on an average annual income of just \$750 per head. Since the bloody separation of South Sudan from the mainland in 2011, it has been facing numerous challenges both within and outside the country for its survival. And clearly, the fall of Bashir in 2019 has pushed Sudan to a new quagmire.

The current clashes erupted in mid-April between the regular Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid



Support Forces (RSF), a strong paramilitary. In fact, it is a vicious power struggle within the country's top military leadership. At the moment, the political parties are not involved in the fight. Since the 2021 coup, Sudan has been under the control of a Council of Generals led by two strong military generals. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is the head of the country's armed forces and his deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, is the leader of the RSF. General Dagalo is popularly known as Hemedti.

The bone of contention between the two strongmen is their differences over the direction the country is heading to over the method on bringing back civilian rule to Sudan. Another sticking point is that nearly 100,000 strong RSF soldiers were supposed to merge in the regular army of Sudan. And then, it will make General

Dagalo more powerful than General Burhan. At the same time, the Sudanese Armed Forces are largely loyal to General Burhan, the de facto ruler of the country. The RSF is actually a collection of militias.

Now, who is finally responsible for the current mess in Sudan? The present fighting has its roots in the years before when Bashir was uprooted by civilian protest in 2019. He had gathered massive security forces that in the post-Bashir era started fighting against each other. When all efforts to install a civilian government failed, many political pundits had predicted a future fight between the powerful generals.

The common Sudanese are bearing the brunt of the armed conflicts between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF at the moment. By now more than 500 people have died and thousands are fleeing to safe

places leaving their homes and offices. This crisis has forced hundreds of thousands of people to cross into the neighbouring Chad and South Sudan.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, has estimated that about 270,000 people could flee to neighbouring nations, escalating the refugee crisis already engulfing the continent because of civil war, local strife and terror attacks all across Africa. The agency is scaling up its efforts to assist people seeking safety in all neighbouring nations of Sudan. So far people are fleeing to South Sudan, Chad and Egypt. And unfortunately, the South Sudanese refugees who are already camping in Sudan are again returning to their homeland fearing violence from rival factions of the SAF and the RSF. There are more than 800,000 South Sudanese refugees in Sudan and a quarter of whom are liv-

ing in Khartoum; they all are directly affected by the intense fighting between the two rival military groups.

At this moment, South Sudan, the youngest member of the UN, is reeling under major economic crisis. It is facing an escalating humanitarian crisis for quite some time wherein international aid agencies and major countries are trying to help that nation to come out of the chaos. On record, this country has more than 2.3 million internally displaced people, about three quarters of its people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and almost 2.2 million of South Sudanese are living the lives of refugees in all its neighbouring countries. Therefore, the UNHCR is of the view that a large and sudden influx of refugees coming into South Sudan would aggravate the already existing crisis of the poor nation.

Meanwhile, the efforts to bring back peace to the African nation are on from various international actors, including the US. The beginning of this week a US-brokered peace deal stopped incessant fighting in Sudan for 72 hours, and now it is heard that the SAF is interested to extend the truce for more time for giving peace a chance.

Upheaval is very common to ordinary Sudanese people. They are no stranger to it. Even today many feel that seismic movements that overthrew the Bashir regime have left the remnants for a future conflict in this impoverished African nation. Clearly, Bashir was managing the mess that gradually set in after the Western Darfur crisis and the break-away of the southern part of the country. People still remember how soaring bread prices led to the common uprising against Bashir and finally he had to

surrender to civilian power. This is the ultimate power of the general people's will in Sudan in particular. But the crooked and power-hungry Generals have forced people to accept chaos. This was the biggest mistake of the leaders of the civilian uprising. They should have not accepted the Army rule then in the year 2019.

Around the same time, international aid agencies and national governments are working their way out to evacuate their citizens from conflict-ridden Sudan. The "Operation Kaveri" launched by the Government of India to rescue its citizens from war-torn Sudan is laudable. External Affairs Minister Jaishankar is in touch with his Saudi Arabian counterpart so as to help bring back Indians in Sudan safely home.

Whereas big powers like the US are still debating about the evacuation of their citizens from Sudan. The stranded US citizens and their family members are openly blaming the State Department for its callous response. Though there is a travel advisory to all US citizens in Sudan since June 2021, there were no recent security alerts specifically advising its citizens to leave the country.

Sudan is ripped apart by political violence. It's all about the remnants of the hate and fighting spree left behind by the former dictator and military man Bashir after more than three decades of rule.

The road ahead is murky. It seems the hope for civilian rule is in tatters. The humanitarian impact of the current crisis would be heavier on both Sudan and South Sudan. Sudan, which is already hosting more than 1 million refugees from neighbouring nations and 3.7 million IDPs, would face harsh realities in the days to come if peace negotiations fail. The global assistance programmes that are in place now would be overstretched.

The Generals — Burhan and Dagalo — must listen to the message of peace. Else their own people are going to be exposed to harsh realities. It is time to lay down arms and give peace a chance.

(Dr Makhan Saikia is currently the Head of the School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Geeta University, Panipat).

**General Burhan and General Dagalo must listen to the message of peace. Else their own people are going to be exposed to harsh realities. It is time to lay down arms and give peace a chance**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# Sluggish evacuation of Americans from Sudan

**In contrast with the situation in Afghanistan, the US was not involved militarily in the Sudan conflict and had no military presence on the ground apart from the small number of Marine guards at the Khartoum embassy**

Warring factions trying to seize control of the east African nation of Sudan have plunged the country into chaos, and thousands are fleeing the capital of Khartoum and nearby battle zones. Some countries, including the US, have shuttered their embassies and many are coordinating daring evacuations of their staffs and other residents in an array of convoys, flights and frantic getaway drives. But over the past week there have been dramatically different responses by various governments as they try to get their citizens and embassy personnel to safety. The US has come under scrutiny for evacuating roughly 70 embassy staff in a helicopter mission by elite SEAL commandos over the weekend, while warning thousands of private American citizens in Sudan there would be no similar evacuation for them.

The State Department, which has advised US citizens for years not to travel to Sudan, continues to advise Americans to shelter in place. Most of the

estimated 16,000 Americans believed to be in Sudan right now are dual US-Sudanese nationals and only a fraction of them have expressed a desire to leave.

But at least some of those who want to leave have managed to get to Port Sudan where they can take a ferry to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or have gotten seats on flights operated by other countries.

As security conditions worsened late last week, including damage to the civilian airport and an attack on a US diplomatic convoy in Khartoum, the State Department concluded that "the only way we could do this safely for all of our diplomatic personnel was to rely on the capabilities of our military colleagues," said Ambassador John Bass, State Department under-secretary for management.

On Saturday, the US Embassy in Khartoum suspended its operations and ordered staff to leave the country.

The Department of

Defense had begun moving resources to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti to prepare for a possible evacuation. On Saturday, three MH-47 Chinook helicopters carrying elite SEAL commandos took off from Djibouti enroute to Ethiopia, where they refueled and then made the three-hour flight to Khartoum.

"The operation was fast and clean, with service members spending less than an hour on the ground in Khartoum," said Lt Gen DA Sims, director of operations at the Joint Staff. The helicopters flew in and out of Khartoum without taking any fire.

While embassy staff was airlifted out, there were no plans to provide similar evacuations for potentially thousands of Americans still in Sudan. In a security alert on Tuesday, the State Department reiterated that "due to the uncertain security situation in Khartoum and closure of the airport, it is not currently safe to undertake a U.S. government-coordinated evacuation

of private US citizens."

Instead, it provided details on border crossings that are available and the requirements needed at each location. It cautioned that fighting continues and that many routes are dangerous and unpredictable.

American citizens who get to Port Sudan overland and can take a ferry to Jeddah will be assisted by the US consulate there. Right now, the US assistance for Americans is largely limited to phone and virtual help.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday that while the US is helping other countries coordinate aerial rescue efforts, the administration believes the best and safest way for people to get out is overland. "We are working to establish a process that would enable people to move overland to a place where they can more easily exit the country, in all likelihood Port Sudan," Blinken told reporters in Washington. "That's under very active development."

The US could send Navy

vessels to Port Sudan to ferry Americans to Jeddah or another location where they could get transportation back to the United States. However, officials say this would depend on the security situation and whether it is safe for ships to dock. The US has developed other options, such as opening a temporary consulate in Port Sudan, beefing up its consulate in Jeddah to assist Americans as they arrive, or using a nearby airfield that other European countries have used to fly citizens out.

US officials believe the security situation in Port Sudan is better than in the capital, but remain concerned about the potential for an escalation of violence.

While the US says it's too dangerous to get its citizens out, other countries are proceeding with evacuations of their nationals.

France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Holland, Turkey, Japan, South Korea, Jordan, South Africa, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are

among the countries that have evacuated their citizens and those of other countries.

Germany's defense ministry said in a tweet Tuesday it had ended its evacuation flights after flying more than 700 people out of Sudan including 200 Germans and hundreds more from more than 20 other nations. France said it had evacuated more than 500 people from 41 countries, and would keep a Navy frigate at Sudan's main Red Sea port to continue assisting rescue operations for foreigners. The United Kingdom was continuing its military evacuations of civilians from an airport outside Khartoum.

Brigadier Dan Reeve told reporters Wednesday the situation was "calm" and that Sudan's armed forces were maintaining good security around the airport.

Saudi Arabia's state run news service said Tuesday it had evacuated about 2,150 people by ship from Sudan, including 114 Saudi citizens and more than 2,000 evacuees

from 62 other nations. And Egypt, which had evacuated more than 1,500 of its citizens, said its diplomatic mission won't leave Sudan until it ensures the evacuation of all those who want to leave. An administrator with the Egyptian embassy in Khartoum was shot dead Monday, the Foreign Ministry said.

**Is the US response unusual**

While many Americans may recall the dramatic 2021 evacuation of diplomats and private citizens alike from Afghanistan, those circumstances were far different. In most cases, the US does not evacuate private citizens when it closes an embassy.

The situation in Afghanistan was different because the US was ending a 20-year military presence in the country. It was trying to extricate the residual American presence there, much of which was directly tied to Washington's role in propping up the Afghan government. No

such situation existed or exists in Sudan.

More typical has been the practice in places like Yemen, Syria and Venezuela, where the US suspended diplomatic operations and removed personnel because of turmoil, but did not evacuate private citizens.

The US also briefly shuttered the embassy in Kyiv because of the Russia invasion, but there was no military evacuation for either diplomats or private citizens, and the embassy has since re-opened.

In contrast with the situation in Afghanistan, the US was not involved militarily in the Sudan conflict and had no military presence on the ground apart from the small number of Marine guards at the Khartoum embassy. Also, the US has warned Americans for several years not to travel to Sudan and told them that consular assistance at the embassy was extremely limited.

(Ellen Knickmeyer, Jill Lawless, and Sam Magdy of the AP contributed to this article)

**YOUR  
WEEK  
AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week you need to be careful while exercising as you might be prone to some injuries or sprain. At work, you will be very professional and will follow the company policy to the letter. Travel due to business commitments is on the cards. On this trip you are likely to make new friends and admirers. You will have a lot of work on your plate that you must accept. Dedication towards a task is important but oversteering yourself may prove counterproductive. Do not hesitate to ask for help, if needed. On your personal front, the week indicates love, harmony, and friendship. This is a good time to relax and have fun with loved ones. Your loving and friendly mood will make you popular. This is an excellent time for dating because your charm and beauty will attract genuine, honest love.

**Lucky number 10**  
**Lucky colour** Camel brown  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week your health will be satisfactory. Continue with your daily exercise or yoga routine, if you have not yet started then start fresh now. You will feel driven to succeed at something with your strong sense of purpose and initiative. With the immense amount of courage and fighting spirit you face all the challenges without any frown. This week you can finish a lot of work in a short amount of time. It is a favourable time for business matters and negotiations. Financial situations are not good, so avoid lavish spending. You will be more emotional and sensitive than usual. This is a great time to talk about relationship issues because you will be in touch with your true feelings. You will know how people are feeling and will be more sympathetic and nurturing than normal.

**Lucky number 13**  
**Lucky colour** Turquoise  
**Lucky day** Friday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

Your emotional wellbeing will decide the state of your health. Therefore, you need to assess how you are feeling about things and others. Channelize your energy in the right track and you will find yourself in the pink of health. In your professional life, you are clear what your goals are and what you must do to achieve those goals. A stimulating time with heaps of opportunities puts your determination and ambition at a higher notch. Business dealings and negotiations are favoured, especially for long-term investments and real estate. This is the right time to make long term strategies. The card indicates a sharp focus in your intimate relationship. Be sensitive and passionate towards your partner. A short trip will prove beneficial because you will meet a new admirer, who shares the same mind-set.

**Lucky number 30**  
**Lucky colour** Green  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week health is satisfactory. Those who are going through some health problems, you must check the root cause as it needs to be treated from the scratch. Talk about your health conditions with others, you may find some solution to it. It is an incredibly positive new beginning, generally related to your work. If you had a tough time till the recent past, then know that things are likely to get better very soon. The new possibilities in this week will escalate your chance of making new discoveries and making new admirers. Some of you can expect the good news of promotion. In the field of romance, you will want to nurture and protect your partner. Most of all you will want to cuddle and kiss them, to give them kindness, love, and affection. Someone will call you unexpectedly or you will plan a reunion with a lover or an admirer.

**Lucky number 12**  
**Lucky colour** White  
**Lucky day** Monday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

Your health is in good condition. This week you are more in a psychic and intuitive phase than usual, so it will be important for you to trust your instincts. At work, your mind is likely to be highly active so communicate your thoughts to others. Fine tune your goals and make clear plans and strategy to reach your objectives. This is a suitable time to discuss these plans with others because you will get valuable feedback and support. There will be times when you may become a victim of confusion that will lead to insecurity, but the tough time shall pass. Expect a slight delay in your travel plans. Romance is blooming this week. You are likely to take your relationship to the next level. Those who are single may have to wait for some more time.

**Lucky number 11**  
**Lucky colour** Pink  
**Lucky day** Monday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, even though you will enjoy good health, you still need to be very vigilant. If you are suffering from health problems, then it is likely that you will find a way to recover. Keep a positive mind-set and things will surely come easily to you. In professional life, your talent will help you distance yourself from difficulties and you will feel more optimistic than usual. Work wise, you will obtain the confidence of which you have always dreamt. New opportunities in terms of a new venture or projects are indicated on the card. Some of you will decide to leave a job that is no longer working for your betterment. It is a wonderful time for socializing because of your increased popularity and charisma. You are likely to have an open and honest communication with your partner. The discussions you have now will be of a serious nature.

**Lucky number 14**  
**Lucky colour** Brown  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week brings you a big relief in terms of positive health. You will be able to revive the inner child like energy and will be active the entire week. Things are looking good on your professional front. You will be able to fulfil your long-term ambition this week. Whatever you put your mind to, should lead to lasting results and achievements. Therefore, people around are looking up to you for sound advice. With all these, you need to have a profound vision and a vigilant analysis of all the plans and strategies which will enable you to move towards success. Socializing and your love life will benefit from extra charisma and intellectual attractiveness. You may find yourself taking care of family matters such as insurances and wills. You can be confident about making commitments.

**Lucky number 22**  
**Lucky colour** Grey  
**Lucky day** Friday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week the health looks good. If you are dealing with any health issues, then you are likely to recover from it. This week brings quick thinking, decisiveness, and an influential communication style. Therefore, it is an apt time for debating, asking for favours and public speaking. You can expect positive reactions and valuable assistance. The forceful nature of your communication makes it a perfect time to defend yourself and your loved ones. Those in academics, this is a good time for studying and sitting for exams. Good concentration and attention to detail means you will not make mistakes. This is also a suitable time for making important decisions, negotiations, and business dealings. Your romance seems to be a little disturbed this week. Try to keep a two-way communication with your partner to avoid any misunderstandings.

**Lucky number 10**  
**Lucky colour** Silver  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week your health will be at its best. Despite your busy schedule, you will take time out to relax and rejuvenate. If you are suffering from health problems, then it is likely that you will find a way to recover. The card indicates that the people around you will appreciate you and your efforts and notice the quality of your work. Keep doing what you are doing as you are on the right track. You will have lots of luck in investments. Property dealings are likely to be resolved. This week will bring peace and harmony to your life. This is a great time to relax with loved ones or party with friends. Your loving mood will make you more attractive than usual. Studies and exams should go well, especially in technical areas like the sciences, and computers.

**Lucky number 28**  
**Lucky colour** Orange  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week your health will be good. Try not to get into ego conflicts and retreat to a safe place where you can develop your creative, spiritual, and generous nature. You will be smart and optimistic at work and will accomplish all your incomplete tasks. You can expect some exciting opportunities coming later this week. Waiting for some news on the domestic front will make you feel frustrated. Love life looks satisfying. You will maintain a better harmony in your relationships and will have a greater ability to express your love and affection towards your partner. Travelling to a far-off destination to meet someone is on the cards. Those thinking about investments, think and discuss with your close people before taking any actions.

**Lucky number 31**  
**Lucky colour** Red  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

You will enjoy good health this week. Continue with your meditation and yoga routine, as it will keep your mind fresh and connected to your inner soul. Those who are dealing with health issues, need to take things seriously and take proper treatment. Your ability of quick thinking and determination will make this week an apt time to prepare a long-term plan on the work front. Networking with some promising contacts will allow you to make a change. You will have a better mental energy and concentration, and this will help you to succeed in studies or research. Do not worry about taking risks as this week luck will be in your favour. You can expect some exciting news in your love life. You are likely to postpone your travel plans to another day.

**Lucky number 20**  
**Lucky colour** Sky Blue  
**Lucky day** Friday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

This week you are likely to face health issues, therefore, you need to be careful. Those who are facing ailments, then take a deep breath as things will get a lot better. On the work front, your innovative spirit will help you expand your horizons and reach new goals. Later this week, you can expect exciting news and stimulating conversations which will lead to a wise business deal. Some of you are expected to face competitions at work, you should try to keep a close eye as someone will try to frame you at work for something serious. This is a good time to be with your partner, friends, and family. You should also have a most enjoyable time going to parties, places of relaxation, entertainment, and amusement. New friends can be made, or a significant new romance may begin. Your improved charm will fetch you popularity, so your dating should be successful.

**Lucky number 21**  
**Lucky colour** Peach  
**Lucky day** Tuesday

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**ASTROTURF**  
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

# Unity underlying all minds



Picking up threads from the previous issue, it is important to note that even modern physics confirms interconnect of all existences. According to "The Theory of non-location" energy particles emerging from the same source are in immediate and intimate connect with each other. Fact remains that all existences are manifestation of nature driven energies primarily sourced to a 'Singularity'. It implies unity underlying all existences and unitary minds. It is a different matter that we may not be aware how to communicate with each other. It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon us to explore each unitary mind's strengths and vulnerabilities and make necessary amends if any needed. Also, explore the realities of life in holistic terms. Becoming aware thus, one would remain conscious about remaining true to the callings of the collective existence even while pursuing individual aspirational urges. However, given the sense of freedom to make choices, desire driven ignorant minds often get tempted to ignore their collective obligations to make it to their dream destination. Evidently then, one

becomes a victim of one's own making, the consequences of which may stretch on far and wide. Mind, as we are aware, holds the key to all human functionalities, with related bearing far beyond the individual self. All happenings out in open, before coming into play, originate in mind by way of arousal of desire and thereby related thoughts, ideation, articulation, and the will to act upon. Mind, one should know, gains luminosity from the subtle light extended by the fundamental element of consciousness, which grants it with the "the power of knowing". With that one gains cognitive, perceptive, comprehensive, and discriminatory abilities. In pursuit of which, mind animates and engages the sensory organs of perception as its tools for working from the front. Mind again, animates the sensory organs of action and employing them as agents, translates its functional mandate into action. It reacts and responds to external stimuli. It attends to all emotional stimuli, arising from within or beyond. Also, it holds the key to integrated working of all functional organs of the gross body

as are mandated to perform. To sum up, mind, assigned with multitasking functionalities defines and drives functional mandate of a being. Here again, mind does also enjoy

the privilege to self-reflect upon itself and improve one's thought process, with the help of fresh educative inputs. It is again through the working of mind that one could raise even one's

level of awareness, and progressively evolve to a stage, when one would be fully tuned with cosmic mind. And with full exposure to the wholesome light principle intrinsic to the consciousness element, the best in a being comes out. One would thereafter know no limits. Also, one becomes qualified enough to become conversant with the realities of life in holistic terms. Following which, one would realise the necessity of being in accord with the world around as is mandated by nature. It is again important to note that the building block of mind and matter remain the same as they are both primarily rooted to nature driven resources. The two are, therefore, inter-alia interactive and responsive to each other. As explained by Swami Vivekanand, Mind is a finer body within the gross body. The physical body is, as it were in applied sense, only the outer crust of mind. In fact, in one sense even mind is termed as matter. If one stops eating food, and tries to survive only on water, say for about a fortnight, the mind then fails to recall in-store memories. As one resumes consuming food, mind regains strength,

and one's memory revives. It is, therefore, the food, which is nothing but matter that nourishes the mind, but for which it would not be doing its round. It is in this sense it is said that mind is nothing but matter. So goes our native saying: "Anna se buddhi, jala se prana", meaning that "food nourishes the mind and water sustains life." Here again, though matter has a visible solid form-presence, but at subtle level however, it is nothing but energy-formation. Mind again is nothing but pure energy platform. Of course, the energy signature marked with the two would vary. So, both mind and matter being energy-platforms, rooted to the same source, remain interconnected, and therefore, carry the scope to react and respond to each other. No wonder, mind gets affected if something goes wrong with our health. Again, if mind gets anyway disturbed and stressed, it has related bearing on our health status. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-981803723/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com