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PAPER WITH PASSION

Relief for Rahul

Rahul Gandhi's SC reprieve on the eve of no-confidence motion will be a boost for the Opposition

After being convicted in a defamation case by a lower court in Gujarat and receiving no relief from the Gujarat High Court, Rahul Gandhi has finally found relief from the Supreme Court, which stayed his conviction even though the case continues. Rahul had sarcastically quipped, "Why do all thieves have the Modi surname?" For this remark, he was taken to court by a BJP leader who felt hurt by his jibe as he shared the surname 'Modi'. Interestingly, both the High Court and the lower court did not provide a reason for imposing the maximum imprisonment of two years, which cost Rahul Gandhi his Lok Sabha membership. Even before it was legally established that the speech was delivered by Rahul Gandhi, the court was in a hurry to pronounce him guilty and sentenced him to a maximum sentence of two years. However, the Supreme Court has granted relief to Rahul Gandhi, allowing him to re-enter the hallowed halls of Parliament on the eve of a crucial no-confidence motion. This development carries significant implications for both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Opposition. This case ostensibly had two aspects: political and legal. Someone seemingly wanted him out of Parliament as the government became uncomfortable following the Adanigate scandal, and Rahul had been posing tough questions. Within 24 hours of the conviction, he was expelled from Parliament and instructed to vacate his residence. This unprecedented turn of events harmed democracy, as it was seen as stifling the voice of the opposition through backdoor means. It also cast the BJP in a negative light, as it celebrated Rahul Gandhi's departure from Parliament and labeled him a "habitual offender."



The implications of Rahul Gandhi's return to the political arena are manifold. Firstly, it rejuvenates the Opposition, injecting new energy and morale into its ranks. Rahul Gandhi's presence and proven ability to connect with the masses might galvanize a more unified Opposition front, capable of challenging the ruling government's policies and decisions more effectively. This unity could potentially reshape Parliament debate and bolster confidence in facing Prime Minister Modi in the forthcoming general elections. This marks a major political setback, making him appear nervous and weak both inside and outside Parliament. The BJP will need to strategize meticulously to counter the charisma and political prowess that Gandhi brings to the table. Additionally, his presence in Parliament during the no-confidence motion lends weight to the Opposition's arguments and lends credibility to their criticism of the government's policies. Indeed, the effectiveness of his presence in Parliament will depend on his ability to lead the Congress party effectively. The path ahead will be defined by his actions, as well as the response of the BJP. As the nation watches this unfolding drama, it is imperative that political actors on both sides adhere to the principles of democracy, healthy debate, and the welfare of the citizens they represent.

PICTALK



A shopkeeper arranges tricoloured kites at his shop ahead of the Independence Day, in Jammu

Why farmers commit suicide?

The need of the hour is to constitute a Farmers Commission. Farmers must be involved in the decision making on issues concerning them

The news received from Marathwada division of Maharashtra has created panic. A report prepared by former Marathwada divisional commissioner Sunil Kendrekar warns that nearly 1 lakh farmers in Marathwada alone are contemplating suicide due to crop loss and other financial issues. The report is based on a survey conducted on 10 lakh farmers. This comes after the drought-prone region where on an average at least one farmer ends his life every day. More than 1 lakh farmers among those surveyed admitted that they are depressed and have lost crops due to debt, drought and unseasonal rains, thinking of ending their lives due to failure of agriculture, reduction in minimum support price of crops and not having money to run a household or marry off their daughters.

The survey also revealed that the period from 2012 to 2022, 8719 farmers have committed suicide in Aurangabad alone during 2014-15. Survey of family members claimed that 923 farmers in this list committed suicide due to failure of their crop, 1494 farmers committed suicide due to being in debt and unable to repay it. 4371 farmers committed suicide due to loan as well as failure of their crop while 1929 farmers ended their lives as they were unable to repay the loan. The dismal socio-economic conditions of the plight of Indian villages in the 1930s in Munshi Premchand's epic novel Godan still exist today. Hori, eligible for Godan, had three bighas of uncultivated land and worked on it with his entire family, including his wife Dhanu and son Gobar and two daughters Sona and Roopa. Throughout his life he struggled to keep hold of his farm and was forced to work as a laborer from time to time. At one point the family ceases to work as laborers on its own farm when it sells its oxen to the moneylender and is left with no seed to sow and lets another farmer or a person with money grow their land, allows farming. Munshi Prem Chand described Hori's land as three bighe fort which is a symbol of his identity and his pride and existence.



There is a need to investigate the epidemic incidence of farmer suicides in almost all agricultural major states of India, diagnose the continuity of agrarian crisis and determine innovative economic and management solutions beyond the current production-centric agricultural science and technology policy. An indication of the nature of the problem can be traced to the adoption of a liberalized market-based economy with globalization and corporatization. The uncountable series of suicides starts after 1995.

Why is the nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and industrialists failing to see that the country's working class has migrated en masse? The proportion of the farming population to the total population is rapidly declining and 40% of those who are still holding their plows' to defend their agricultural strongholds are waiting to be deserted at the first opportunity. The agriculturist to total population ratio has come down from 23% in 1951 to just 17% by 1991 and to a much lower level by 2015-16. Although statisticians may argue that the ratio of agriculturists to the rural population gives a more comparable picture and elements Meets the homogeneity condition but what they forget is that farmers feed not only the rural population but the



THE COUNTRY HAS SEEN THE FARMER'S MOVEMENT GOING ON FOR YEARS IN THE PAST, MORE THAN 750 FARMERS DIED IN THIS MOVEMENT

entire population.

The resurgence of suicidal tendencies among farmers since 2014-15 has not only disproved the common belief that the farmer is on the way out of the crisis as announced in government releases. A recent study by the Agricultural Economic Unit, Agricultural Development and Rural Change, Society for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru, has revealed that main form in crisis covers small and marginal farmers. The size of agricultural holdings among farmers who died by suicide showed that small and marginal farmers were the most affected in all major states.

An important feature of the size of land holdings and the incidence of farmer suicides is that the states that have predominantly small and marginal farmers, ranging from 48.3% (Chhattisgarh) to 90% (Telangana), also have the highest incidence of suicides among small and marginal farmers without exception. The number of small farmers holding 1-2 hectares of land has also increased by 4.5%. Its percentage was 20.4 in 2003 and now it has increased to 24.9%, similarly the percentage of medium farmers has decreased to 14.7.

More than half of the country's farmers are in debt. More than 90% farmers of Andhra and Telangana are

indebted. On an average, every farmer has a loan of Rs 2.45 lakh. More than 60% of the farmers of Rajasthan are indebted, while every farmer of Jharkhand has the lowest debt of Rs.8500. The farmers of Punjab and Haryana have a debt of about Rs 2 lakh each. Agriculture is continuously proving to be a loss-making deal. According to a report of the National Sample Survey, the average monthly income of farmer families from crops is just Rs.3798, out of which he has already spent Rs.2959 on the crop, that is, he gets only Rs.839 on an average in a month. The country has seen the farmer's movement going on for years in the past, more than 750 farmers died in this movement. A committee was formed by the Prime Minister by repealing all the three agricultural laws, although the organizations protecting the interests of the farmers were absent. The need of the hour is to set aside all prejudices and constitute a Farmers Commission. The participation of farmer experts should be increased in undertakings like the Agricultural Price Commission of MSP. There should be a scientific nature of evaluation and on the lines of other market products, a statutory warning should be issued not to sell the farmer's produce at less than the fixed price. (The writer is a former MP, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SATPAL MALIK ATTACKS BJP AGAIN

Sir — According to reports, former Jammu and Kashmir governor Satyapal Malik, who often faces criticism from the ruling BJP party for his government critiques, has once again launched a scathing attack on the BJP and the Haryana government regarding the Nuh violence. Malik revealed that the riots in Haryana's Nuh were orchestrated by cow vigilantes, and the top brass of the Haryana BJP were aware of it. He alleged that cow vigilantes had planned the route of the Brij Mandal Yatra and incited the 'other side' during the Shobha Yatra procession. He stated that they were operating as a gang under the guise of cow protection and evading consequences due to protection from leaders and the government. Some of these cow vigilantes even displayed sophisticated weapons openly on social media. The source of these advanced weapons needs investigation by the NIA, Malik said.

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot accused the Khattar government of not cooperating with the Rajasthan police. Malik, who previously accused the Central government of complicity in the Pulwama terror attack, claimed that the Nuh violence was planned to gain political advantages in neighboring Rajasthan, where assembly elections are scheduled at the end of this year. However, their plan failed as Jats refused to support Hindutva elements against Muslims. With this, Malik seems determined to expose BJP wrongdoing as the 2024 Lok Sabha elections draw near. **Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai**

PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE REPORT ON DRUGS

Sir — According to a parliamentary panel report on drug abuse among young individuals and its problems and solutions, Punjab alone has over 66.70 drug users, and 6.97 children aged 10-17 are ensnared by drugs. Among them, 18,100 are consuming cocaine, approximately 3.43 lakh children are taking opioid drugs including heroin, and about 72,000 children are

94th birth anniversary of Kishore Kumar



Kishore Kumar, a reluctant actor who initially sought to avoid acting by feigning madness, only aspired to be a singer and admired KL Saigal. His elder brother Ashok Kumar, a superstar at the time, compelled him to act. Kishore Kumar attempted to undermine his acting career by delivering a superb performance in his debut film Shikari (1946). However, his plan backfired, and he became a popular actor excelling in comedy, romance,

and tragedy with equal ease. He starred in numerous hit films, including Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi, Half Ticket, Jhumroo, Padosan, Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein, and more. He also directed films and composed music for them. He won eight Filmfare Awards for Best Male Playback Singer and received the Padma Shri in 1977.

Kishore Kumar was a complex and contradictory figure. He was a talented singer and actor, but he was also known for his eccentric behavior. A perfectionist who constantly strived to refine his craft, he was also impulsive and unpredictable. He was a loving husband and father. Despite his imperfections, Kishore Kumar remains a true legend of Indian cinema. A versatile artist who could make people laugh, cry, and sing along, his songs and films continue to be cherished by millions worldwide. **Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh**

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

TESLA IN INDIA

Sir — Tesla is not yet officially available in India, but the company has plans to enter the Indian market soon. If it does, India will gain access to Tesla's advanced technology, potentially boosting economic growth and creating job opportunities. However, Tesla is facing entry barriers such as high import duties and a lack of charging infrastructure. To address these challenges, Tesla could collaborate with the Indian government to reduce import duties. Additionally, Tesla could invest in building more charging infrastructure across India. On the other hand, the entry of Tata Motors and Mahindra into the EV market has intensified competition, which bodes well for the environment. **Anmol Porwal | Ujjain**

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Damocles sword hangs over forests

The Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 is bound to affect the status of forest cover in the country

Do we need forests or do we need development? It's a question that has always perplexed the human mind. From time immemorial humans have been destroying forests for their vested interests. All great civilizations that we study in our textbooks, flourished by utilizing natural resources. Different civilizations have had different impacts on their surrounding forests, depending on their technological advancements, cultural practices, and population size.



these traditions that helped us to protect whatever remnants of forests that we see around us. But with the advancements in science and technology, the societal perception towards traditions has changed.

From the perspective of the human species (Homo sapiens), the dominating species that controls the whole biosphere, the priority was always development. We need good infrastructure, but none of us is concerned at what cost these developments have come. In our civilization, forests have been considered sacred and are often preserved in the name of God or deities. This preservation of forests is deeply rooted in the religious and cultural beliefs of people, which have evolved over thousands of years. We offer divinity to many species of plants and animals. It is

After independence within 30 years, we destroyed more than 4.2 million hectares of forests till 1980. It is at that juncture the government introduced Forest Conservation Act (FCA) in 1980. After the introduction of FCA only 1.5 million hectares have been lost. As per the latest forest survey in 2021, the total forest and tree cover in India is 80.9 million hectares, which is 24.62% of the geographical area of the country. As compared to the assessment of 2019, there is an increase of 2,261 sq km in the total forest and tree cover of the country. Out of this, the increase in the forest cover has

been observed as 1,540 sq km and that in tree cover is 721 sq km.

This increase was only because of stringent regulations in the act. The Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 passed by parliament though addresses the concerns and challenges faced by today's citizens, is bound to affect the status of forest cover in our country. The act will facilitate the decisions making process on the proposals involving non-forestry use of forest land by the authorities for national security and infrastructure projects. Non-forest purposes include the use of land for cultivating horticultural crops or for any purpose other than reafforestation. The blanket exemption for projects like zoos, eco-tourism facilities, and reconnaissance studies emphasised in the bill could hurt forest land and wildlife.

All these exemptions will bring more destruction to forest cover. Already in regions of Western Ghats people are doing non-forestry activities like the cultivation of exotic plantations and cash crops that have destroyed our biodiversity.



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

For the past several years we have seen environmental havoc due to natural calamities in different parts of the country. Forests are nature's conservatories, if we take care of them there is no need for botanical and zoological gardens in the country. The mature forest ecosystem that we see today is the result of 200 to 1000 years of formation. It would be difficult to restore a lost ecosystem within our generation's timeline even with the best available compensatory mechanisms. Humans have destroyed all the natural resources available on this planet and we can't expect more destruction during our lifetime. Instead of making forests open for developmental activities, the government should declare all forests in our country as a National heritage and prevent their further destruction. Let's keep developmental activities away from forest covers for the survival of the human species. There is no meaning in development if there are no human species available on this planet.

(The writer is a science communicator & columnist)



FIRST COLUMN

STRONG WOMEN DO NOT HAVE ATTITUDES

They have standards and boundaries. And they have grace and elan too



SAKSHI SETHI

In today's scenario, any person who shines with vibrant health commands respect as it is a sign of commitment, discipline and dedication. Self-respect is not selfish, it's admirable. Living a life from a strong position of mindset denotes that one should hold their standards high. It definitely takes a shift in the mindset and habits, but it's a trait that can be completely developed by anyone at any stage of life. Talking on similar grounds, there comes a time in every woman's life, when she has to choose from two options vis a vis accepting the scrap from men or deciding upon that she deserves more than that. It's quite obvious that any woman who was made to be self-independent will definitely choose second option in comparison to the first.

Strong women do not have attitudes... they have standards and boundaries unyielding in their worth and unstoppable in their grace. As a woman, one should be unapologetically SHE herself. She should be proud of her strength, stand tall with her standards and make her ambitions shine high. As its said "The closed mouth doesn't get fed", the same way a woman who will never expand her idea of what's possible will always get less than what she deserves. There is no denying the fact that the greatest things come from humble beginnings. However, one should have the audacity to ask for what they want, to ask for more than what people expect to be okay with. Above all the woman of today demands self-respect as it's the self-respect that protects an individual from all manner of crappy people and circumstances.



The successful women of today such as our honourable President of India Ms. Droupadi Murmu, Ms. Mary Kom, Ms. Indra Nooyi, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, Ms. Sudha Murthy, Dr. Kiran Bedi, Ms. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Late Kalpana Chawla and personalities such as Malala Yousafzai, Oprah Winfrey, Taylor Swift or Ellen DeGeneres and the list goes endless show that whatever they have achieved it in their lives is only because they are the ones who dared to ask for it and also the ones who dared to believe that they were worthy for it. In today's stereotype world, many men don't even know how to handle a woman with her boundaries, her schedule and the busy life. They still are into their old school belief, that a woman has to be ready for every beck and call of them. Remember, the woman who decides she is worthy of the dreams she has, no matter what her circumstances look like is on her way to lead a life of power. One should never be bullied into accepting the crumbs of fulfilment, sophistication and satisfaction is the ultimate goal in life. Fulfilment doesn't come from another individual. It comes only when the person understands that they were made singularly for the intent of love.

On the similar grounds, no healthy, wealthy and quality man will ever respect or fall for a woman who does not have self-respect. They will always want to have a woman whose personality and energy brings out the most capable and confident version of them rather than the one standing by his side and propping up emotionally, financially or otherwise. A confident woman knows her worth and will attract a man that will value her throughout as a top tier. Nobody can respect, if an individual doesn't respect himself/herself.

(The writer is an educator)

NPAs down but pain points still remain

Low recovery despite government efforts is because of judicial overreach that has rendered Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) process dysfunctional



UTTAM GUPTA



As per the information given by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) in Parliament, during the last nine years, scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) have undertaken an aggregate recovery of Rs 10,16,617 crore of loans that had gone bad or non-performing assets (NPAs) as these are called in banking parlance. In reply to a question given in the lower house, Minister of state for finance Bhagwat Karad informed that "Comprehensive measures have been taken by the Government and RBI to recover and to reduce NPAs, including those pertaining to corporate companies". These include the 2016 Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and the establishment of the National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL), among other measures.

At banks' level, the efforts involve early recognition and reporting of stress assets; prompt adoption of resolution plan (RP); creation of stressed asset management verticals for stringent recovery and extensive use of credit data available in the Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CIBIL) database. Willful defaulters (refers to borrowers who can pay back yet decide not to) are not sanctioned any additional facilities by banks or financial institutions, and their unit is debarred from floating new ventures for five years. Additionally, they and companies which have them as promoters/directors are debarred from accessing capital markets to raise funds. Furthermore, under IBC, such promoters can't remain in control of the entity.

Looking at the quantum of reduction in NPAs, one gets a sense that the achievement is commendable; all the more when we consider the fact that the quantum of recovery at Rs 10,16,617 crore was almost close to the amount of bad loans written off by the bank's worth over Rs 10,57,000 crore in the last five years (as per the information shared by RBI in reply to RTI question). But, there is a catch. During 2016 - 2021, the Central government gave around Rs 300,000 crore as budgetary support to shore up the capi-



WILLFUL DEFAULTERS (BORROWERS WHO CAN PAY BACK YET DECIDE NOT TO) ARE NOT SANCTIONED ANY ADDITIONAL FACILITIES BY BANKS OR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, AND THEIR UNIT IS DEBARRED FROM FLOATING NEW VENTURES FOR FIVE YEARS

(The writer is a policy analyst)

tal of public sector banks (PSBs). Furthermore, in the budget for 2021-22, it committed another Rs 200,000 crore by way of 'sovereign guarantee for the security receipts (SRs) to be issued by NARCL where the majority shareholding is vested in PSBs. Surely, this Rs 500,000 crore would have gone towards reducing NPAs. Adjusting for this amount, recovery from defaulters would be only Rs 516,617 crore.

According to a joint report by ASSOCHAM and Crisil Ratings, gross NPAs of banks were around 5 percent as on March 31, 2023. Taking overall outstanding loans of Rs 143,00,000 crore across all SCBs on this date, the value of gross NPAs works out to Rs 715,000 crore. But, for Rs 500,000 crore PSBs got by way of budget support and sovereign guarantee for the SRs of NARCL, the NPAs would have been Rs 1215,000 crore. This would be even higher than the NPAs of Rs 1036,000 crore as of March 31, 2018.

Clearly, the recovery of bad loans has been dented. Look at it from another angle. According to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), of the total 5,636 cases under IBC, 3,637 have been closed. Of the closed cases, nearly half i.e. 1,703 have ended in liquidation. Besides, the recovery by financial creditors was a record low of 13.4 percent of the admitted claims during October-December 2021 (during January-March 2022, this was even lower at 10.2 percent). Moreover, in 363 major cases, banks took a haircut of 80 percent on an average (for some such as Videocon, it was even higher at 95 percent).

Even in respect of bad loans transferred by banks to the NARCL, the haircut is expected to be steep. To get a sense of this, let us look at the broad contours of the

action plan put in place by the finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on September 16, 2021 following announcement on NARCL in the 2021-22 budget. Under it, the NARCL will purchase NPAs worth Rs 200,000 crore (Rs 90,000 crore of fully provisioned stuff in phase I and remaining Rs 110,000 crore in phase II) from the banks under the so called 15:85 structure.

It involves the NARCL paying 15 percent of the agreed/discounted value of the loans in cash and issue Security Receipts (SRs) for the rest. The Union Government will provide sovereign guarantee - valid for a period of 5 years - for the SRs issued by NARCL. The guarantee would be invoked to cover the loss being the difference between the realized value (resolution/liquidation) and face value of SRs. A provision of Rs 30,600 crore has been made for this purpose. This budget provision tells the entire story.

It implies that the entire banks' bad loan book of Rs 200,000 crore would be available to the NARCL for a mere 18 percent of the face value or Rs 36,000 crore. Of this, the latter pays 15 percent or Rs 5400 crore upfront in cash to the former and for the balance Rs 30,600 crore, it will issue SRs. To redeem these SRs, NARCL must realize at least Rs 30,600 crore from selling the NPAs to investors. Even if it doesn't realize, the entire amount will be paid by the Centre.

Just as for major cases under IBC, the haircut to be taken by banks while taking NARCL route is a steep 82 percent. A paramount reason for woefully low recovery in spite of credible steps taken by Modi - government has to do with judicial overreach that has rendered IBC process dysfunctional. How did it happen?

As per a circular issued by RBI on February 12, 2018, for accounts with aggregate exposure greater than Rs 2,000 crore, as soon as there was a default in the account with any lender, all lenders - singly or jointly - shall initiate steps to cure the default by preparing and implementing a resolution plan (RP). This needed to be done within 180 days from the date of default. In case of failure to meet this deadline, the lenders were required to refer the account to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for resolution under the IBC. The NCLT would get 180 days to complete the process. Following petition by defaulting borrowers, the Supreme Court (SC) declared the February 12, 2018 circular unconstitutional.

This forced RBI come up with a revised circular dated June 7, 2019. It gives banks 180 days to come up with RP. If the banks don't meet this deadline, they have to make an additional provision of 20 per cent. If they don't finalize within a year, an additional 15 percent has to be made taking the total to 35 percent. Add to this, normal ageing provision of 40 percent (applicable in case the loan default extends upto 15 months), the total provisioning will be a steep 75 percent. Having provided for such a huge amount, there won't be any incentive left for the bank to recover the money under IBC.

This has led to a scenario where the banks are neither under any compulsion nor have any interest in referring the NPA for resolution under IBC. The soul of IBC process lies in inviting bids for the entity as a 'going concern'. This way alone, it is possible to maximize value thereby trimming the haircut. By striking down the February 12, 2018, RBI circular, the SC has struck at the soul.

Welfare of the weaver community must be paramount

On the weaver's day spare a thought for the weaver community in the country, one of the most skilled but least privileged class of workers

The handloom sector is a symbol of our country's rich and varied cultural heritage, and is an important source of livelihood in rural and semi-rural parts of our country. It is also a sector that directly addresses women's empowerment with over 70% of all weavers and allied workers being female. Rooted in nature, it has eco-friendly production processes with minimal requirement of capital and power, and provides flexibility to innovate to meet changes in fashion trends and fast-changing customer preferences.

The Swadeshi Movement which was launched on 7th August, 1905 had encouraged indigenous industries and in particular handloom weavers.



SUNIL GOEL



DIMPLE KHOKHAR

(Sumil Goyal is an Eminent Social Scientist, Columnist, and Dean and Chairman - Board of Studies at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences and Dimple Khokhar is a Research Scholar)

In 2015, the Government of India decided to designate the 7th August every year, as the National Handloom Day. The first National Handloom Day was inaugurated on 7 August 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Chennai.

On this day, we honour our handloom-weaving community and highlight the contribution of this sector in the socio-economic development of our country. We reaffirm our resolve to protect our handloom heritage and to empower the handloom weavers and workers financially and instilling pride in their exquisite craftsmanship.

According to the Fourth All India Handloom Census, the total number of households in India engaged in handloom activities (weaving

and allied activities) is 31.45 lakhs. This is an increase over the Third census where the count was 27.83 lakhs. The principal reason behind this increase may be attributed to the success of various initiatives undertaken by the Government of India, as well as several levels of due diligence that have been built into the census design, involving various oversight measures by multiple stakeholders from the Government machinery.

As far as weaver's households are concerned, four States of India account for 18 lakhs of all weaver households in the country. These States are Assam (10.9 lakhs) households, West Bengal (3.4 lakhs), Manipur (2.1 lakhs) and Tamil Nadu (1.7 lakhs).

22.5 lakhs (or 88.7%) weaver households are located in rural areas while 2.8 lakhs (or 11.3%) are in urban areas, with nearly 72% of handloom weavers being female. Across both urban and rural areas, the share of weavers aged 14 - 18 years is 2.4% only.

Nearly one in four weavers have not received any formal education while a further 14% have not completed primary level. As per the Fourth All India Handloom Census, among the 26.73 lakh weavers enumerated, the average number of person days of engagement in weaving activity is 208 days in the past one year. Engagement opportunities are more for workers residing in urban areas (262 days) as against those in rural areas (201

days). In comparison, the average number of person days of engagement was 183 days during the third handloom census.

The top five States with highest average number of person days of work are Maharashtra (310), Andhra Pradesh (302), Delhi (292), Chhattisgarh (290) and Puducherry (286). Majority (66.3%) of the weaver households earn less than Rs.5,000/- per month. 36.1% of weaver households from urban India earn more than Rs.5,000 a month as compared to only 25.1% living in rural areas. According to the Third Handloom Census, it was estimated that 99% of all weaver households earned less than Rs.5,000 per month. This proportion has come

down to 66.3% in the Fourth Handloom Census, while proportion earning between Rs.5000 to Rs.10,000 a month has gone up to 26.3%. There are 3 States where 60% or more of the weaver households have earned in excess of Rs.5000 per month. These are Goa (95.5%), Uttarakhand (69.8%), and Maharashtra (60.3%).

The increase in earnings may be attributed to the several initiatives taken up by Government of India for the welfare of the weaver community, including providing financial assistance under flagship schemes such as National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme

(CHCDS), Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HWCWS) and Yarn Supply Scheme (YSS). In addition, setting up of CFCs at block/ municipal level, concessional credit under Weaver's MUDRA scheme and introduction of the India Handloom Brand to enhance market demand have also been impactful interventions in the sector by the Government. The research analysis of the available data reveals that majority of the weaver household members are not aware of various schemes available to enable them in the weaver activities of handlooms. Response on lack of awareness on the existing schemes, trainings and other enablers is more than 65% and beyond.

USE OF WATER CANNON ON BOAT IN DISPUTED SEA

Philippine military flays Chinese coast guard

AP ■ MANILA

The Philippine military on Sunday condemned a Chinese coast guard ship's "excessive and offensive" use of a water cannon to block a Filipino supply boat from delivering new troops, food, water and fuel to a Philippine-occupied shoal in the disputed South China Sea.

The tense confrontation on Saturday at the Second Thomas Shoal was the latest flare-up in the long-seething territorial conflicts involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei.

The disputes in the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest sea lanes, have long been regarded as an Asian flashpoint and a delicate fault line in the rivalry between the United States and China in the region.

China claims ownership over virtually the entire strategic waterway despite international rulings that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims, such as that of 2016 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, an international body based in The Hague; China rejects that ruling.

Philippine navy personnel on board two chartered supply boats were cruising toward Second Thomas, escorted by Philippine coast guard ships, when a Chinese coast guard ship approached and used a powerful water cannon to block the Filipinos from the shoal that China also claims, according to Philippine military and coast guard officials.

The Chinese ship's action was "in wanton disregard of the safety of the people on board" the Philippine navy-chartered boat and violated international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, said the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which did not say if any of its sailors were



injured. The "excessive and offensive actions against Philippine vessels" near the shoal prevented one of the two Filipino boats from unloading supplies needed by Filipino troops guarding the shoal onboard a long-marooned Philippine navy ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, the Philippine military said in a statement.

It called on the Chinese coast guard and China's central military commission "to act with prudence and be responsible in their actions to prevent miscalculations and accidents that will endanger people's lives."

Several countries expressed concern over the actions of the Chinese ship.

The United States immediately expressed support to the Philippines and renewed a warning that it's obliged to defend its longtime treaty ally when Filipino public vessels and forces come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

The US State Department said in a statement that "firing water cannons and employing unsafe blocking maneuvers, PRC ships interfered with the Philippines' lawful exercise of high seas freedom of navigation and jeopardised the safety of

the Philippine vessels and crew." It used the acronym for the People's Republic of China. It added that such actions are the latest by the PRC in the South China Sea and are a direct threat to "regional peace and stability."

Australia expressed its concern, describing the actions of the Chinese coast guard ship as "dangerous and destabilising." Japan said it supported the Philippines, adding that "the harassment and action, which infringe on lawful activities of the sea and endanger navigational safety," were "totally unacceptable."

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila did not immediately issue any reaction but has filed a large number of diplomatic protests over increasingly hostile actions by China in recent years. Chinese government officials did not immediately comment on the incident.

China has long demanded that the Philippines withdraw its small contingent of naval forces and tow away the actively commissioned but crumbling BRP Sierra Madre.

The navy ship was deliberately marooned on the shoal in 1999 and now serves as a fragile symbol of Manila's territorial claim to the atoll.

Kim vows to boost war readiness

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un toured the country's key weapons factories, including those producing artillery systems and launch vehicles for nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, and pledged to speed up efforts to advance his military's arms and war readiness, state media said Sunday.

Kim's three-day inspections through Saturday came as the United States and South Korea prepared for their next round of combined military exercises planned for later this month to cope with the growing North Korean threat.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest level in years as the pace of North Korea's missile tests and the joint U.S.-South Korea military drills, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, have both intensified in a tit-for-tat cycle. Some experts say Kim's tour of the weapons factories could also be related to possible military cooperation with Moscow that may involve North Korean supplies of artillery and other ammunition as Russian President Vladimir Putin reaches out to other countries for support in the war

in Ukraine. During Kim's visit to an unspecified factory producing large-caliber artillery systems, he stressed the factory's "important responsibilities and tasks in perfecting (the North's) war readiness," North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim praised the factory's efforts to employ "scientific and technological measures" to improve the quality of shells, reduce processing times for propellant tubes and increase manufacturing speed, but also called for the need to develop and produce new types of shells, KCNA said.

At another factory manufacturing launcher trucks designed to transport and fire ballistic missiles, Kim said increasing the supply of the vehicles is a top priority for the military and complimented workers for establishing a "solid foundation" for production.

At a factory producing engines for cruise missiles and drones, Kim called for "rapidly expanding" production, KCNA said. Kim's stops also included a small arms factory, where he stressed the need to modernize the weapons carried by soldiers. Photos published by state media showed Kim firing at least two different scoped



rifles from a table. In the face of deepening confrontations with Washington and Seoul, Kim has been trying to boost the visibility of his partnerships with Moscow and Beijing as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and insert himself into a united front against the United States.

His tour of the weapons factories comes after a giant military parade last month in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, where Kim was joined by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and a Chinese ruling party official

while rolling out his most powerful missiles designed to target South Korea and the United States.

Shoigu's presence at the July 27 parade, which came after Kim took him on a tour of a domestic arms exhibition, demonstrated North Korea's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and added to suspicions the North was willing to supply arms to Russia to support its war efforts.

Cheong Seong Chang, an analyst at South Korea's Sejong Institute, said Kim's visits to the factories likely had a dual goal

of encouraging the modernization of domestically produced weapons and examining artillery and other supplies that can possibly be exported to Russia.

Kim's comments at the artillery factory about improving the quality of shells and the need to develop new types of ammunition, which he described as key to the country's "defense economic projects," clearly communicate an intent for exports to Russia, Cheong said.

North Korea has been aligning with Russia over the war in Ukraine, insisting that the "hegemonic policy" of the U.S.-led West forced Moscow to take military action to protect its security interests. But Pyongyang has denied U.S. accusations that it has been providing arms to Russia to aid its fighting in Ukraine.

Cheong said Kim's comments at the factory about making missile-launch trucks could indicate that the North is seeing some progress in increasing the production of those vehicles, which would possibly improve the operational range of its ballistic weapons designed to target neighbouring rivals and the US mainland.

3 killed in US shooting China releases TV docu showcasing army's ability to attack Taiwan

Washington (AP): A shooting on a street in the nation's capital left three people dead and two others hospitalised Saturday night, police said.

Officers responded to the sounds of gunshots around 8 p.m. in the 1600 block of Good Hope Road Southeast and found five victims who had been shot. Two men and a woman were pronounced dead at the scene and two men were transported to area hospitals, Washington, DC, Metropolitan Police Department Acting Chief Pamela Smith said during a news conference at the scene. The conditions of the hospitalised victims were not immediately known.

"This kind of gun violence is not acceptable in the District of Columbia. This is not a war

zone. We want our residents to feel safe," Smith said. Smith asked for help from the public in collecting information about what she called a disturbing fatal shooting.

"We realise that there may be others who may have been injured tonight. We are asking you to come forward," Smith said, adding that the community needs to be involved in stopping the city's violence. "It can't rest upon the metropolitan police department to determine what works and what doesn't work." Washington experienced another mass shooting last month when nine people were wounded while celebrating Independence Day in a neighbourhood about a 20-minute drive east of the White House.

Taipei (AP): China has released a new documentary about the army's preparation to attack Taiwan and showcasing soldiers pledging to give up their lives if needed as Beijing continues to ramp up its rhetoric against the self-ruled island. "Chasing Dreams," an eight-part docuseries aired by state broadcaster CCTV earlier this week to mark the People Liberation Army's 96th anniversary, features military drills and testimonials by dozens of soldiers, of which several express their willingness to die in a potential attack against Taiwan.

China claims Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy, as its

own territory, to be conquered by force if necessary.

State media and the PLA frequently release propaganda materials promoting the army's modernisation as well as sleek videos of military drills.

The materials serve to fan rising Chinese nationalism and display military confidence against Taiwan and, implicitly, its ties with the United States. While the US doesn't recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country, it has pledged to help the island defend itself in case of an invasion. Last month, the White House announced a \$345 million military aid package for

Taiwan. The move, which experts said drew on lessons from the US military assistance to Ukraine, was criticised by Beijing. The "Chasing Dreams" documentary showcased, among other things, the PLA's "Joint Sword" drills, which simulated precision strikes against Taiwan. The exercises were undertaken around the self-governed island in April after a visit by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen to the US.

Among the more dramatic parts of the programme are pledges by PLA soldiers from various divisions to relinquish life in a potential attack on Taiwan.

Russia mounts a massive missile and drone attack against Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

Moscow unleashed a massive missile and drone barrage on western Ukraine Sunday, following through on its promise to retaliate for a Ukrainian attack on a Russian tanker. Russian and Ukrainian shelling across the country overnight killed in at least six people, officials said.

Separately, Moscow's second-largest airport briefly suspended flights early Sunday following a foiled drone attack near the Russian capital.

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 70 attack drones and missiles, including cruise missiles from aircraft over the Caspian Sea and Iranian-made, Shahed-136/131 strike UAVs. Serhiy Tyurin, deputy head of Ukraine's Khmelnytsky region military administration, said three waves of missiles hit the Starokostiantyniv area, damaging several buildings and igniting a fire at a warehouse. The strike may have been intended

for the city's airfield, officials said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the facilities of aircraft engine manufacturer Motor Sich in the Zaporizhzhia region had also come under attack. The Russian barrage came after a Ukrainian drone attack on a Russian tanker in the Black Sea near Crimea late Friday. Ukraine also struck a major Russian port with drones earlier the same day.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova condemned what she called a Ukrainian "terrorist attack" on a civilian vessel in the Kerch Strait. "There can be no justification for such barbaric actions, they will not go unanswered and their authors and perpetrators will inevitably be punished," Zakharova posted on the Telegram messaging app. An official with Ukraine's Security Service confirmed to The Associated Press that a Ukrainian drone packed with 450 kg (992 pounds) of explosive the service struck the tanker

that as transporting fuel for Russian forces. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak publicly.

Russia's Federal Agency for Marine and River Transport posted on Telegram that although the drone blasted a hole in the tanker's engine room, there were no casualties among the 11 crew members.

Two of the six fatalities overnight Sunday occurred during a Russian air strike in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, according to the head of the local regional military administration, Oleh Syniehubov. Another four people were injured. Zelenskyy said that a guided bomb had hit a blood transfusion centre in the area's Kupyan district late on August 5. "This war crime alone says everything about Russian aggression," Zelenskyy wrote on social media. "Defeating terrorists is a matter of honour for everyone who values life."

Heavy shelling continued along the frontline in Eastern

Ukraine as Kyiv continues to push forward with its ongoing counteroffensive. Elsewhere in the Kharkiv region, a 58-year-old woman was killed and a 66-year-old man was hospitalized after Russian shelling of the village of Podoly, an official said.

In Ukraine's eastern Kupyan region, Russian missiles injured a 55-year-old man and ignited a forest fire, officials said on social media. Russian attacks in the Donetsk region villages of Torske and Niu-York killed two people, local governor Pavlo Kyrylenko posted on social media. Ukrainian shelling in Russian-held Donetsk killed a woman in her eighties, the city's Moscow-appointed mayor Alexei Kulezmin said Sunday. The shelling also set the main building of a university on fire, according to the Moscow-installed head of the illegally annexed Donetsk People's Republic, Denis Pushilin. Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry said that the blaze caused the building's roof to collapse, but that there were no casualties.

Hiroshima mayor calls N-deterrence 'folly' on atomic bombing anniv

AP ■ TOKYO

Hiroshima officials criticised growing support for nuclear weapons as a deterrent resulting from uneasiness over Russia's war in Ukraine and tensions in the Koreas, commenting Sunday as the city remembered the atomic bombing of 78 years ago. The observance came two months after Hiroshima hosted a summit of the Group of 7 major industrial nations, at which G7 leaders visited the city's peace park and a museum dedicated to those who died in the world's first atomic attack.

The leaders issued a joint statement calling for the continued non-use of nuclear weapons, but they also justified having such arms to "serve defensive purposes, deter aggression and prevent war and coercion."

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui rejected that position in his peace address at the commemoration. "Leaders around the world must confront the reality that nuclear threats now being voiced by certain

policymakers reveal the folly of nuclear deterrence theory," he said. "They must immediately take concrete steps to lead us from the dangerous present toward our ideal world."

Hiroshima Gov. Hidehiko Yuzai questioned the growing calls for reinforced nuclear deterrence around the world, including in Japan, since Russia invaded Ukraine and warned of possible nuclear weapons use, while North Korea advances its missile and nuclear development.

"Believers of proactive nuclear deterrence, who say nuclear weapons are indispensable to maintain peace, are only delaying the progress toward nuclear disarmament," Yuzai said. The atomic bomb dropped by the United States on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, destroyed the city, killing 140,000 people, and a second bomb dropped three days later on Nagasaki killed an additional 70,000. Japan surrendered on August 15, ending World War II and Japan's nearly half century of aggression in Asia.

Quake jolts parts of eastern China

Beijing (PTI): A 5.5 magnitude earthquake jolted parts of eastern China on Sunday, injuring 21 people and collapsing over 100 buildings. The quake that jolted Pingyuan County in Shandong Province at 2:33 am was also felt in several areas in northern China, including Beijing and Tianjin and the provinces of Henan and Hebei, according to the local media reports. Pingyuan is about 345km south of Beijing.

So far, a total of 21 people have been injured and 126 buildings in the earthquake zone collapsed, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

According to videos posted online, the quake shook furniture in homes and sent residents seeking refuge outside. More than 20 trains scheduled to depart from Beijing, Tianjin, and Cangzhou were halted. Some 30 trains by way of Shijiazhuang-Jinan High-speed Railway were also halted, according to China Railway Beijing Group Co, Ltd.

Local authorities have launched an emergency response to organise rescue and assess possible risks.

Social media influencer charged with inciting riot in NYC

AP ■ NEW YORK

Social media influencer Kai Cenat is facing charges of inciting a riot and promoting an unlawful gathering in New York City, after the online streamer drew thousands of his followers, many of them teenagers, with promises of giving away electronics, including a new PlayStation.

The event produced chaos, with dozens of people arrested — some jumping atop vehicles, hurling bottles and throwing punches.

Cenat was released early on Saturday from police custody after being issued a desk appearance ticket, which police issue to require a suspect to appear in court to answer charges. A police spokesperson said he is to appear in court on August 18. The mayhem in New York City's Union Square on Friday afternoon put further focus on the hold social media

influencers have on the people who follow and fawn over them.

"Our children cannot be raised by social media," Mayor Eric Adams said on Saturday during a press briefing on an unrelated crime. Police said they arrested 65 people, including 30 juveniles. Several people were injured, including some with bloodied faces. At least four people were taken away in ambulances. "I do not think people realise the level of discipline that we showed to take a very dangerous, volatile situation and to be able to bring it to a level of resolve without any loss of life or any substantial damage to property and without young people harming themselves," Adams said.

Cenat, 21, is a video creator with 6.5 million (65 lakh) followers on the platform Twitch, where he regularly livestreams. He also boasts four million (40 lakh) subscribers on YouTube,



where he posts daily life and comedy vlogs ranging from "Fake Hibachi Chef Prank!" to his most recent video, "I Rented Us Girlfriends In Japan!"

His 299 YouTube videos have amassed more than 276 million (27.6 crore) views among them. In December, he was crowned the streamer of the year at the 12th annual

Streamy Awards.

Media representatives for AMP, which represents Cenat and a small group of other influencers, said in an email on Saturday that the Union Square event was intended to show appreciation to fans.

"We have hosted fan meet ups and video shoots in the past, but we have never experienced anything at the scale of what took place yesterday," AMP said.

"We recognise that our audience and influence is growing, and with that comes greater responsibility," the statement continued. "We are deeply disheartened by the outbreak of disorderly conduct that affected innocent people and businesses, and do not condone that behaviour."

In its apology, the company said it was cooperating with authorities. Livestreaming on Twitch from a vehicle as the event gathered steam, Cenat displayed gift cards he planned to give away. Noting the crowd and police presence, he urged, "Everybody who is out there, make sure you all (are) safe.... We are not going to do nothing until it is safe."

Eventually, he and an entourage got out of the vehicle and hustled through a crowd, crossed a street and

went into the park, where Cenat was surrounded by a cheering, shouting mob.

Chief Jeffrey Maddrey of the New York Police Department said Cenat at some point in the afternoon was removed "for his safety" and police were in contact with him. Videos posted on social media and taken from news helicopters showed Cenat being lifted over a fence and out of the crowd and then placed in a police vehicle.

Aerial TV news footage showed a surging, tightly packed crowd running through the streets, scaling structures in the park and snarling traffic. Shouting teenagers swung objects at car windows, threw paint cans and set off fire extinguishers. Some people climbed on a moving vehicle, falling off as it sped away. Others pounded on or climbed atop city buses.

Lanka to launch climate justice forum for vulnerable countries

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka will launch a climate justice forum for vulnerable and developing countries, a senior minister said here on Sunday. "Sri Lanka has proposed the establishment of a Climate Justice Forum (CJF) with the aim of accelerating the financing of losses and damages and providing an alternative and non-traditional approach," Environment Minister Naseer Ahamed said. The country will launch the CJF for the vulnerable and developing countries at the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) at the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference.

The conference will be held from November 30 to December 12 in Dubai. Sri Lanka, Ahamed said, is also "of the opinion that it is appropriate to include debt justice as an essential component of the overall solution proposal to be given to the climate-vulnerable and developing countries for their mitigation and adaptation interventions, taking into account the debt crises faced by those countries."

The minister said Sri Lanka in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme will host the fifth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific. It will be held from October 3-6 in Colombo. The Forum will provide a platform for governments, intergovernmental organisations and other stakeholders to discuss and prioritise environmental issues in the Asia Pacific region, he said. Ahamed said in addition to the Gazette notification that was issued on March 31, 2021 for banning some single-use plastic items, plastic garlands, single-use spoons, forks, yogurt/ice cream spoons, plastic straws, stirrers, spoons and plastic string hopper trays will be banned within the next couple of weeks.

RBI may continue to hold rate amid concern over inflation, say experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank is likely to continue with the pause on the key interest rate at its upcoming monetary policy review, as concerns on the inflation front and keeping the borrowing cost stable to maintain the economic growth momentum persist, said experts.

The RBI Governor-headed six-member Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) meeting is scheduled on August 8-10. The policy decision will be announced on August 10 by Governor Shaktikanta Das.

The borrowing cost, which started rising in May last year, has stabilised with the RBI keeping the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent since February when it was raised from 6.25 per cent. Later, in the two bi-monthly policy reviews in April and June, the benchmark rate was retained.

Punjab & Sind Bank Managing Director Swarup Kumar Saha said the RBI factors in many things, including global developments. So, it will also take into account interest rate hikes effected by many central banks like the US Fed



recently. Due to interest rate increases, yields in the domestic markets have gone.

"Looking at the overall situation, my guess is that the RBI would retain the repo rate at the present level. The interest rate is likely to be stable for the next 2-3 quarters if the global situation remains stable," Saha said.

LIC Housing Finance Managing Director Tribhuvan Adhikari too said the central bank is unlikely to tinker with interest rates and maintain the

domestic flare-up in vegetable prices led by tomato, there is likely to be no consideration from the MPC to make any alterations - both to the rate and stance.

The decision would also be based on the continued firmness in the macro data flows from the advanced economies that are likely leading to uncertainties on the rate hiking cycle in the AEs, especially the US, Pan said.

"India and US rate differential has fallen to historic low levels and may soon have its implications for flows. We would expect the RBI to sound a bit cautious and therefore hawkish in its communication. Expectations are for the RBI to move higher its own inflation projections for the remainder of the FY while keeping the growth estimates unchanged," Pan said.

India's retail inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose to a three-month high of 4.81 per cent in June, mainly on account of hardening prices of food. The inflation, however, remains within the RBI's comfort level of below 6 per cent. The inflation data for July will be released on August 14.

On expectations from the MPC, Pankaj Pathak, Fund Manager- Fixed Income, Quantum AMC, said that since the last RBI policy, inflationary pressures have increased.

Sharp jumps in vegetable prices have pushed expected inflation for the next 2-3 months above 6 per cent. Cereal and pulse prices have also moved up.

"We expect the RBI to remain on hold and maintain its policy stance as a withdrawal of accommodation. They might raise their CPI inflation forecast for FY24 by 20-30 basis points to around 5.3 per cent-5.4 per cent. A hawkish pause is widely expected and is already a part of the market psyche," Pathak said.

The last MPC meeting was held during June 6-8.

The MPC consists of three external members and three officials of the RBI. The external members of the panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal and Jayanth R Varma. Besides Governor Das, the other RBI officials in MPC are Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor).

CBIC mulling organisational restructuring to make it more effective, do away with overlapping

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC is mulling a comprehensive restructuring of the organisation, set up 6 decades ago, to make it more effective and remove overlapping, if any, as many of its functions have undergone transformation following introduction of new technologies, abolition of service tax and roll-out of GST which has subsumed several levies.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs or CBIC (formerly known as Central Board of Excise and Customs) was set up in 1964.

Last in 2014, a cadre restructuring and reorganisation of field formation was undertaken under which 23 central excise zones, 4 service tax zones, 11 customs zones, 60 appeal commissionerates, 45 audit commissionerates, 8 large taxpayer units and 20 directorate generals/directorates were approved to be set up.

Extensive use of big data analytics, introduction of faceless assessment in Customs and electronic filing of various documents, claims and payment of taxes have



made this organisational restructuring a necessity, an official said.

"A holistic restructuring of the organisation is needed to make it more lean and adaptive to changing times and taxpayer needs," the official told PTI.

An email sent to CBIC seeking comments on the story did not elicit a response.

The official further said the organisation restructuring that is being thought about will be different than the cadre restructuring which takes place at regular intervals.

"The CBIC has started taking inputs from field formations on making the ecosystem more taxpayer friendly and synchronizing with the policy decisions of the government," the official added.

The CBIC presently has over a dozen attached and subordinate offices, including Directorates of Revenue Intelligence, GST Intelligence, Valuation, Logistics, International Customs, Anti Profiteering, Audit, and performance management.

The CBIC, the then CBEC, was set up under the Central Boards of Revenue Act 1963 and dealt mainly with the formulation and implementation of policy concerning the levy and collection of duties including Customs, central excise and Goods and Services Tax; prevention of smuggling, administration of matters relating to indirect taxes and narcotics.

The CBIC is headed by a chairman and has six members in the board. The board is assisted by principal chief commissioners/chief commissioners and principal director generals/director generals.

No sugar mill in Maharashtra should be without ethanol distillery, says Amit Shah

PTI ■ PUNE

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said there should not be a single sugar mill in Maharashtra that is not producing ethanol.

He was speaking at an event after launching the digital portal of the Central Registrar of Cooperative Societies (CRCS) office in Pune.

"Huge funding is available under various schemes for cooperative societies which can be utilised for setting up distilleries. Sugar mills in the state should avail of the loan facility. There should not be a single sugar mill in Maharashtra that is not making ethanol. It is an emerging market and rates are also good for the same," Shah said.

On the digital portal of the CRCS office launched by him, the Union minister said, "The digital portal is aimed at increasing the efficiency and trans-



parency. The cooperative sector cannot move forward without modernisation, transparency and accountability."

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who joined the Eknath Shinde-BJP government last month, was present on the occasion.

Shah said, "This is my first public programme with Ajit Pawar. I want to tell him that he is now sitting at the right place after a long time. This was always the right place for you, but you came to sit here very late."

State Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis were also present at the event.

British demands on data related issues, duty concessions on dairy out of India-UK FTA: Sources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Protecting the interest of domestic players, India has kept demands of Britain on data related issues and giving any kind of duty concessions on dairy sector out of the ambit of the proposed free trade agreement being negotiated between the two countries, sources said.

However, India is looking at providing duty concessions on auto, and certain confectionery items, they said.

The negotiation for the agreement has reached a critical stage and in all likelihood it could be concluded by October end or November.

The talks received a great impetus due to the recent visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal to London in July, where both held a series of meetings with different stakeholders including senior

British officials.

The negotiation would get a further fillip during the meetings of trade ministers of India and the UK at the sidelines of G20 trade ministers meeting this month in Jaipur.

"The visit of the Indian minister and secretary was very positive for the negotiations. Most of the issues are sorted out between the two countries," one of the sources said.

To provide duty concessions in the automobile sector, several rounds of consultations have been held with the domestic players.

In the dairy sector, India would not touch any product because of the sensitivities of the domestic players, they added.

As both India and UK are strong players in the services sectors, the two sides are negotiating hard for easing of norms in a number of sectors such as IT, healthcare, accounting,



education, medical practices, banking, insurance, legal, and telecommunications.

The UK has shown keen interest in areas like banking, insurance, legal, and telecommunications.

The UK firms have raised concerns over data localisation norms in India.

Another official said that India and the UK are very close to concluding negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement as both sides are work-

ing to iron out differences on issues including investment treaty, intellectual property rights (IPRs) and rules of origin.

Out of the total 26 chapters in the FTA, 19 have been closed. In the rules of origin chapters, both countries are talking about product specific rules, value addition, and certification.

The 'rules of origin' provision prescribes minimal processing that should happen in an FTA country so that the final manufactured product may be called originating goods in that country.

Under this provision, a country that has inked an FTA with India cannot dump goods from some third country in the Indian market by just putting a label on it. It has to undertake a prescribed value addition in that product to export to India. Rules of origin norms help contain dumping of goods.

Bank credit growth to MSMEs decelerates in Q1: RBI data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bank credit growth to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) has decelerated on a year-on-year basis in the first three months of the current fiscal, according to Reserve Bank data.

Players in the MSME sector, the backbone of domestic industry and largest employer, said risk averseness makes banks reluctant to provide loans to small units, leading to a deceleration in bank credit growth.

As per the latest Reserve Bank data, the credit to medium industries in June grew by 13.2 per cent (47.8 per cent last year) and micro and small industries by 13 per cent (29.2 per cent a year ago).

In absolute terms, the gross bank credit outstanding to medium industries at June-end was Rs 2,63,440 crore compared to Rs 2,32,776 crore in June last year.

In the case of micro and

small industries, the credit outstanding in June was Rs 6,25,625 crore against Rs 5,53,675 crore in the corresponding month of 2022.

In May, the credit to medium industries grew by 18.9 per cent (42.9 per cent last year) and micro and small industries by 9.5 per cent (32.7 per cent a year ago).

According to another set of RBI data for April, loan growth of medium industries was 19.1 per cent against 53.7 per cent last year. The growth in the case of micro and small industries was 9.7 per cent in April 2023 compared to 29.8 per cent in the year-ago month.

FISME Secretary General Anil Bhardwaj said while the RBI data showed double-digit growth in bank credit to MSMEs, which might indicate a free flow of institutional finance to MSMEs, the fact remains that getting bank loans is an uphill task for individual MSMEs.

Mutual fund houses go slow on NFOs; file draft papers for 59 schemes in Apr-Jul

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With a wide array of existing mutual fund schemes, asset management companies are going slow on launching new ones in a highly competitive landscape as they filed draft documents for 59 new fund offerings (NFOs) in the first seven months of the year.

In comparison, draft papers for 70 NFOs were filed in the year-ago period. In 2022, a total of 228 new schemes were floated against 140 in 2021, industry data showed.

Moreover, the remaining months of 2023 are not expected to see NFO numbers anywhere close to those of 2022 or 2021, SAS Online founder and CEO Shrey Jain said.

The reasons behind the decline in NFOs could be a combination of the factors as the mutual fund industry's dynamics are influenced by various internal and external factors.

"AMCs may be concentrating on managing and promoting their existing schemes, rather than launching new ones. This strategy allows them to maximise the returns for existing investors and maintain stable assets under management," Jain said.

Also, the current market reaching an all-time high could be another reason for AMCs showing caution in launching NFOs. During such periods of elevated market levels, AMCs might anticipate the possibility of a market correction or downturn, he added.

Biz optimistic on demand, climatic factors a concern for food prices: Britannia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Businesses in India are optimistic on demand conditions despite apprehensions about global recession though challenges from a shortfall in monsoon due to 'El Nino' conditions still persist, said leading bakery and food company Britannia Industries.

The trajectory of inflation during FY24 would depend on a host of domestic and global factors, said Britannia Industries in its latest annual report.

"The outlook for the food prices and rural growth would depend significantly on climatic factors and adequacy of monsoon rainfall," it said.

Any shortfall in monsoon due to the 'El Nino' conditions as forecasted, would also have a higher impact on rural consumption and the Indian economy as a whole.

"Availability and prices of input materials like wheat, sugar, milk and edible oil could be affected, thereby posing severe risks to the business growth," it said.

According to Britannia Industries, makers of popular brands such as Good Day, Tiger, NutriChoice, Milk Bikis, and Marie Gold, milk prices are expected to remain high on account of high input costs and good demand.

"Prices of other essential inputs like wheat, sugar, edible oil and fuel continue to be subject to high uncertainty. However, it is expected that a good crop would help keep prices in check and strengthen rural demand," it said.

Besides, the government's thrust on capital expenditure and private sector manufacturing and service activity should also support income generation and bolster economic activities.

After retail and telecom, Ambani casts eye on financial services, new energy business

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After creating India's largest retailers and telecom operator in the shortest span of time, billionaire Mukesh Ambani has now set his sight on propelling newly-carved financial services business unit into country's largest non-banking lender while transitioning the conglomerate to net carbon zero by 2035.

The recently demerged Jio Financial Services Ltd will leverage the prowess of digital and retail businesses. Ambani said in the latest annual report of Reliance Industries Ltd. The unit, which "will leverage the technological capabilities of Reliance and digitally deliver financial services, democratising access to financial services offering for Indian citizens", is expected to be listed soon, he said.

"The demerger of the financial services business into JFS



and planned listing on the stock exchanges promises to unlock value."

JFS's digital-first approach will help deliver distinctively simple, affordable, innovative and intuitive financial services products to all Indians, the annual report said without saying when the recently demerged firm would be listed.

A guidance may be provided in the annual shareholders' meeting of Reliance on August 28. The new firm, which has little revenue as of now but owns 6.1 per cent stake in Reliance, last month announced partnership with BlackRock to set up a mutual funds business.

HDFC Bank's Jagdishan highest paid bank CEO in FY23 with ₹10.55 cr pay

PTI ■ MUMBAI

HDFC Bank's Sashidhar Jagdishan has emerged as the highest-paid bank chief executive in FY23, grossing over Rs 10.55 crore in overall pay.

Jagdishan's colleague Kaizad Bharucha, the deputy managing director of the largest private sector lender, drew Rs 10 crore for the fiscal year and may be the second-highest grossing banker in the country, according to disclosures made in annual reports.

Among the bank CEOs, Axis Bank's Amitabh Chaudhry's Rs 9.75 crore pay-out was the second biggest and he was closely followed by Sandeep Bakhshi of bigger rival ICICI Bank, who drew Rs 9.60 crore for the fiscal year.

Uday Kotak, who holds

over 26 per cent of Kotak Mahindra Bank, continued with his decision to take a token Re 1 as remuneration started in the pandemic, even in FY23.

At a time when the banking sector is grappling with the attrition problem, Kotak Mahindra Bank stood out on the compensation front, reporting a 16.97 per cent increase in the average remuneration to its staffers excluding the managerial talent.

Staffers at ICICI Bank were given an 11 per cent hike, while those at Axis Bank enjoyed an inflation-beating 7.6 per cent average increase. HDFC Bank reported an average pay hike of 2.51 per cent. Interestingly, south-based Federal Bank, which has among the lowest attrition rates in the industry, reported an average pay hike of only 2.67 per cent.



Profit of PSU banks more than doubles to ₹34,774 cr in Q1

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector banks (PSBs) have once again posted stellar performance by registering more than double profit of Rs 34,774 crore for the first quarter ended June 2023.

During the April-June period of the previous fiscal, all 12 state-owned banks had recorded a total profit of Rs 15,306 crore, according to quarterly numbers published by public sector lenders.

The high-interest regime helped banks to earn a good net interest margin (NIM) during the quarter. Most banks had recorded NIM of over 3 per cent.

Pune-based Bank of Maharashtra posted the highest NIM of 3.86 per cent, followed by Central Bank at 3.62 per cent and Indian Bank at 3.61 per cent during the quarter.

During the first quarter, four lenders logged a profit of over 100 per cent. The highest percentage growth was recorded by Punjab National Bank, which earned a profit of Rs 1,255 crore against Rs 308 crore in the same quarter of the previous year, a growth of 307 per cent.

It was followed by the State Bank of India (SBI), which recorded a 178 per cent bottom line growth at Rs 16,884 crore and the Bank of India with a 176 per cent surge, earned Rs 1,551 crore profit.

ONGC plans oil-to-chemical plants in pivot towards energy transition

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top oil and gas producer ONGC is planning to set up two oil-to-chemical plants in India to convert crude oil directly into high-value chemical products as it prepares for energy transition that is shaking up the industry worldwide, chairman Arun Kumar Singh said.

Crude oil, which companies like ONGC pump out from below seabed and from underground reservoirs, is a primary

source of energy. It is processed in oil refineries to produce petrol, diesel and jet fuel. With the world looking to transition away from fossil fuel, companies around the globe are looking at new avenues to use crude oil.

Petrochemicals are chemical products derived from crude oil and are used in the manufacturing of detergents, fibres (polyester, nylon, acrylic etc.), polythene and other man-made plastics. "The demand for petrochemicals is expected to remain

strong and will continue to be a key driver of oil and gas demand in the future," Singh said in the firm's latest annual report. "With this objective, ONGC is collaborating with other entities to explore opportunities in the oil to chemical (O2C), refining, and petrochemicals. We are also planning to set up two greenfield O2C plants in India."

He, however, did not give details. The firm already has two subsidiaries, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited and

ONGC Petro-Additions Limited that run petrochemical units at Mangalore in Karnataka and Dahej in Gujarat, respectively.

"MRPL and OPAI are strongly engaged in the diversification plan from oil to the petro-chemical sector," Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) said in the 2022-23 annual report. "ONGC is also partnering with players to explore opportunities in the Oil to Chemical (O2C) and Oil to Petrochemicals (O2P)."

SWEDES KNOCK US OUT OF WC



AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Sweden stunned the United States 5-4 in a sudden-death penalty shootout Sunday to consign the defending champions to their earliest-ever Women's World Cup exit on Sunday.

Sweden set up a quarter-final against Japan and ended the Americans' dreams of an unprecedented third World Cup title in a row in the most painful and dramatic fashion.

The title-holders dominated the 90 minutes of normal time but a breakthrough proved elusive with Swedish goalkeeper Zecira Musovic making some startling saves to keep her side alive.

With the 0-0 deadlock remaining after extra-time it went to penalties in Melbourne -- and the tension went up another notch.

Sweden's Nathalie Bjorn was the first to miss, skying high, only for Megan Rapinoe to do the same.

Both teams missed again, but when Kelley O'Hara hit the post, it was all down to Sweden's Lina Hurtig. She hit the winner -- but only after VAR ruled her kick had crossed the line by the most slender of margins.

It was an inglorious end for the US and especially Rapinoe, the Golden Boot winner at the 2019 tournament. She will retire at the end of the season.

"This is like a sick joke. For me personally, I'm just like, this is dark comedy. I missed a penalty," the 38-year-old told Fox Sports.

Netherlands set up Spain clash

AFP ■ SYDNEY

The Netherlands set up a heavyweight Women's World Cup quarter-final clash with Spain after ending South Africa's historic run with a 2-0 victory on Sunday.

But the 2019 runners-up suffered some anxious moments in front of 40,000 in Sydney and had goalkeeper Daphne van Domselaar to thank for keeping the African champions at bay in the first half.

Jill Roord scored after nine minutes to put the Dutch on their way against a team ranked 45 places below them and featuring in the knockout rounds for the first time.

South Africa goalkeeper Kaylin Swart then made a mess of an innocuous Lineth Beerensteyn shot midway through the second half to give the Dutch a second.

The Netherlands will meet Spain on Friday in the last eight but Van Domselaar was called into action numerous times.

"It wasn't our best game but happy to play my part in the clean sheet," said the stopper, who plays for Aston Villa and was named player of the match.

"I don't know if it was my best (game) but I will be looking back with pride." Netherlands coach



Andries Jonker was relieved afterwards that his side avoided becoming the latest to be on the end of a World Cup shock.

He said his team can beat anyone, but was scathing of their first-half performance.

"We lost the ball too often in the first half and gave a few chances away," he said.

"Daphne saved us a few times and I was happy to lead 1-0 at half-time.

"We did much better in the second half and had much more control of the game. We deserved to score again and in the end deserved to win."

On six minutes the striker fired straight at Van Domselaar -- it was to become a theme.

The Dutch took the lead three minutes later, midfielder Roord nodding in from close range following a corner for her fourth goal of the tournament.

Kgatlana, who scored the winner over Italy that gave South Africa their first win ever at the World Cup, was a constant threat with her pace.

Four more times in the first half the US-based Kgatlana could have scored.

South Africa coach Desiree Ellis was proud but felt her side should have won.

Nigeria target 'transformational' win over England at World Cup

AFP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

Nigeria coach Randy Waldrum believes knocking European champions England out of the Women's World Cup would be "transformational" for the sport in the country as the sides prepare to meet in the last 16 on Monday.

The Super Falcons have appeared at every Women's World Cup going back to the inaugural edition in 1991 but their build-up to this year's tournament was overshadowed by a row with their national federation over bonuses.

They had even threatened to boycott their opening game but put that behind them to draw with Olympic champions Canada and then beat co-hosts Australia.

A draw with the Republic of Ireland then ensured that they qualified for the last 16 at the expense of Canada and set up a clash with strongly-fancied England in Brisbane.

"It would be a huge win, obviously," Waldrum said Sunday when asked about what knocking out England would signify.

"Already with what we have accomplished Nigeria is buzzing again, from what I understand.

"I don't think people expected us to get out of the group and to get the results we have got, so I think it has already been a big success."



"But obviously if you can not only beat the Olympic gold medalists but turn around and beat the European champions then it would be something extremely special back home for all the people in Nigeria, and more importantly for this squad, for what they have worked so hard to do."

'SO MANY WEAPONS' It is the third time that Nigeria have made it out of their group at the World Cup but they have never won a knockout tie.

Waldrum confirmed that star striker Asisat Oshoala is "fit and healthy" and said fellow forward Desire Oparanozie could feature for the first time since picking up an injury before the tournament.

He also said he was preparing his team to face an England side with, or without, Keira Walsh after the star midfielder missed the Lionesses' last group game with a knee injury.

Walsh trained with the squad on Sunday for the first time since being stretchered off in England's 1-0 win over Denmark in their second group game.

But England coach Sarina Wiegman could opt to stick with the three-woman defence which helped them outclass China 6-1 without Walsh, or revert to a back four.

SA coach issues call for more help after WC run

AFP ■ SYDNEY

South Africa coach Desiree Ellis appealed Sunday to the government and sponsors to step up if women's football in the country is to push on after the team's historic World Cup run.

The African champions won a World Cup game for the first time in stunning Italy 3-2 to seal a landmark place in the last 16 in Australia and New Zealand.

Their run came to an end in a 2-0 defeat to the Netherlands in Sydney, but they gave the 2019 finalists numerous scares, especially in the first half.

"To the sponsors: I don't know how you can ignore something special like this," said Ellis, who felt her team had enough chances in the opening 45 minutes to have been out of sight.

"I don't know how you can't assist in getting us to climb up the ladder and assist in getting us better."

Ellis said there were players in her squad who still had full-time jobs outside football and called for South Africa to establish a professional league.

"What this team has achieved, I think the corporate world needs to stand up and really take notice and be counted," she said.

"Otherwise we will come back in four years' time and go through the same thing... we could have gone further."

"When I looked at how the World Cup was going (with surprise results), the possibility of us winning it was there."

"So we urge the corporates to assist here. We urge the government even to step in and assist and push the corporates to come on board."

"It's not just our senior team, it's our youth teams as well -- there's no sponsors."

South Africa, who were squeezed out 2-1 by Sweden and drew 2-2 with Argentina in the group stage, had half a dozen chances in the first half against the Dutch.

But together with some wasteful finishing, they found goalkeeper Daphne van Domselaar in unbeatable form.

"We spoke about underdogs yesterday. I don't think there's underdogs in this World Cup," said Ellis, whose players were given a warm reception by the Sydney Football Stadium crowd on a lap of honour at the end.

Americans Pegula and Fritz fall in semi defeats in Washington

AFP ■ WASHINGTON

American top seeds Jessica Pegula and Taylor Fritz suffered semifinal defeats at the Washington Open on Saturday but Coco Gauff kept the star spangled banner flying by earning a place in Sunday's final.

Greek fourth seed Maria Sakkari upset top seed Pegula to capture her third victory in 26 hours and she will face another home favorite in the final after Gauff defeated Russian Liudmila Samsonova, the defending champion, in straight sets.

Fritz fell to Tallon Griekspoor 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 and the Dutchman will play for the title against Britain's Dan Evans, who beat Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 7-6 (7-4).

Ninth-ranked Sakkari, forced to play twice Friday due to rain on Thursday at the WTA and ATP hard court event, reached her first final since losing to Pegula last October at Guadalajara.

"It would have been ideal if I could be off the court an hour earlier," Sakkari said. "But at the end I got the win which is what I wanted the most."

Sakkari, who reached her seventh career final, won her only WTA title in 2019 at Rabat.

Pegula, the 2019 Washington champion, was denied her fifth career final but will match her career high of third in the world rankings next week.

Sakkari improved to 5-3 in her career rivalry with Pegula, who won their most recent



prior meeting in February's Doha semifinals.

Sakkari dominated the first set and went up 4-1 in the second but Pegula broke Sakkari in the seventh game and held to pull level at 4-4.

A double fault handed Pegula a break chance in the ninth game and Sakkari swatted a forehand wide for a 5-4 edge. The American then held to force a third set.

"Things were tricky in the second set," Sakkari said. "In the third, I just tried to stay in the present. I tried to overcome myself and take it as a new challenge."

Sakkari broke early in the third set and again in the final game on a backhand winner to advance after two hours and three minutes.

Third-seeded Gauff was in dominant form as she won the opening set against Samsonova without facing a break point.

She then took a 2-1 lead in the second set, winning her fifth break point of a marathon game with a volley winner before completing a 6-3, 6-3 win to reach her second final of the year.

"She's a server and she has an amazing forehand so I wanted to see how I would do upon that battle and I think I did pretty well," said Gauff.

Gauff has lost four of her five meetings with Sakkari but says she has learned from those losses.

"She's an incredible player. She has been the top of the game for a long time and it's going to be a difficult match," she said.

World Cup was going (with surprise results), the possibility of us winning it was there."

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Tsitsipas defeats de Minaur to capture ATP Los Cabos title

AFP ■ LOS CABOS (MEXICO)

Greek top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Australian fifth seed Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-4 on Saturday to capture the ATP Mexico Open for his first title in 14 months.

Tsitsipas, this year's Australian Open runner-up, claimed his first ATP outdoor hardcourt crown in his third final of the year, having fallen

to Novak Djokovic at Melbourne and top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz at Barcelona in April.

The 24-year-old Greek star captured his 10th career title and first since June of last year at Mallorca to snap a five-final win drought.

World number five Tsitsipas improved to 10-0 all-time against 19th-ranked de Minaur, who was hoping for a Mexico double after winning



the title at Acapulco in February.

"It was a great match," Tsitsipas said. "I'm really happy we were able to deliver a great quality in the final match."

The 24-year-old from Sydney was denied an eighth career ATP crown in his third final of the year. He also lost to Alcaraz in June's trophy match at Queen's.

After Tsitsipas dominated

the first set, de Minaur surrendered a break on a double fault to open the second set but broke back at love in the sixth game to pull level.

Tsitsipas, who won 23 of his 28 first-serve points, responded with a break in the ninth game, seizing a 5-4 edge with a blistering forehand winner, then held serve to finish off the Australian after 86 minutes when de Minaur sent a forehand long.

Celtic mark Rodgers' return with flying start, Rangers rocked

AFP ■ GLASGOW

Champions Celtic marked Brendan Rodgers' return as manager with a 4-2 victory over Ross County, while Rangers crashed to a shock 1-0 defeat at Kilmarnock in the opening weekend of the Scottish Premiership season on Saturday.

Rodgers is back in charge of the Glasgow club after Ange Postecoglou's departure for Tottenham in the close season. After leaving Leicester by mutual consent prior to their re-

legation from the Premier League last term, Rodgers has opted to return to Scotland's dominant force rather than stay south of the border in England.

The former Liverpool boss, confirmed as Celtic manager in June, won two Scottish titles, two Scottish Cups and three Scottish League Cups in his first spell at Parkhead between 2016 and 2019.

With Postecoglou having led Celtic to the domestic treble last season, Rodgers will be expected to maintain the Hoops' dominance, while also looking

to progress in the Champions League.

On the evidence of their comfortable start to the new season against Ross County, Rodgers' side should be capable of emulating last season's success under his predecessor.

Rodgers preferred David Turnbull to Reo Hatate in his first competitive match since returning and the midfielder vindicated his faith with two first-half goals.

The 24-year-old had not started a league game since November 12 last year.

Kyogo Furuhashi was also on the scoresheet for Celtic, with Matt O'Riley completing the hosts' goal spree.

"I spoke to him in pre-season and told him it would be a shame if you don't achieve what you can do at a club like this," Rodgers said of man of the match Turnbull.

"You have the talent, but you have to be a working talent, and you have to be able to run and be aggressive in your game. If you can do that, then your qualities will come through."

WRETCHED RANGERS

County's players and manager Malky Mackay gave Celtic a guard of honour as they entered the field before Hoops substitute James Forrest raised the league flag to cheers from the sell-out crowd.

While Celtic lived up to their billing as title favourites, Rangers endured a worrying start to their bid to dethrone their Old Firm rivals.

Michael Beale's lacklustre side had laboured in the first half at Rugby Park and there was no

improvement after the break before they were stunned by Brad Lyons' goal after 65 minutes.

The 26-year-old Northern Irishman pounced inside the box to fire home and Rangers were unable to respond.

It was a huge setback for Beale, who has signed nine new players in an attempt to close the gap on Celtic.

Beale knows the margin for error is already slim in the title race and now he must lift his players for the first leg of their Champions League qualifier

against Servette at Ibrox on Wednesday.

"It's a very poor opening day for us. We need to move forward very quickly," Beale said. "The excitement over the summer is going to be tempered. We have to show the fans and excite them and they have to get behind us, it works both ways.

WI BEAT INDIA BY 2 WICKETS



Ravi Bishnoi replaces injured Kuldeep

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Star spinner Kuldeep Yadav is missing the second T20I between Hardik Pandya-led Indian cricket team and Rovman Powell's West Indies at the Providence Stadium in Georgetown, Guyana, on Sunday.

Kuldeep injured himself in the nets yesterday while batting. However, as per the Indian captain Pandya, the injury is not serious and he has been rested as a precautionary measure. Ravi Bishnoi has replaced him in the playing 11.

Hardik Pandya informs About Kuldeep Yadav's Injury Hardik won the toss and elected to bat first. He informed about the change and Kuldeep's injury after the toss. "We will bat first, surface looks good. We will put good score on the board. I don't think we did much wrong in the last game, we spoke about it and the focus is to learn and keep going ahead. When we

have these totals (chasing 9 or 10 an over), you gotta keep wickets in hand and that's what happened in the last game where we lost a couple of wickets during crunch moments," said Pandya after the toss.

"We have a forced change. Kuldeep got a hit on the hand yesterday in the nets, it is not serious and just a precautionary measure. Ravi Bishnoi comes in place of him," he added.

"Looks a pretty good surface and hopefully gets better as the day goes along. We didn't lose wickets in clusters in the last game which was good to see. We have grown as players and it is about continuing to do the right things and keep improving as a batting unit. We are going with the same team," said Powell after losing the toss.

Team India will be looking to level the series 1-1. The weather forecast did predict rain but the sky looks clear as for now.

West Indies in the second match here on Sunday.

The fearless Varma continued his good run in the shortest format as the 20-year-old scooped, swept and heaved the ball all around the ground to score 51 off 41 balls, becoming the youngest Indian to score a fifty in T20 Internationals.

Coming out to bat with India in a spot of bother at 18/2, Varma put up a crucial 42-run partnership with Ishan Kishan (27) before joining forces with skipper Hardik Pandya to stitch a 38-run stand.

Hardik (24) tried to inflate India's total by hitting two sixes but Alzarri Joseph (2/28) produced a cracking yorker to get rid of the Indian skipper.

Opting to bat, the script didn't go as per plan for the visitors as they lost wickets at regular intervals. West Indies skipper Rovman Powell kept shuffling his bowlers, a move that paid dividends. Kishan (27) played a few shots in his 23-ball stay including a six off Akeal Hosein (2/29) over deep square leg but couldn't convert his start into a meaningful innings as he was bowled by Romario Shepherd.

Shubman Gill's (7) stay in the middle was once again a brief one. With pressure building on him after successive dot balls, he showed his class by sending the ball for a maximum in the third over.



PTI ■ PROVIDENCE (GUYANA)

West Indies beat India by two wickets in the second T20 International to take a 2-0 lead in the five-match series here on Sunday. Opting to bat first, India scored 152 for seven. West Indies completed the chase of 153 with seven balls to spare, as Nicholas Pooran blazed his way to a match-winning 67 off 40 balls. Earlier, playing in only his second match, Tilak Varma top-scored for the visitors with a 41-ball 51, which is also his maiden half-century at this level.

Star spinner Kuldeep Yadav is missing the second T20I between Hardik Pandya-led Indian cricket team and Rovman Powell's West Indies at the Providence Stadium in Georgetown, Guyana, on Sunday. There were two wickets apiece for Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph and Romario Shepherd for the home team at the Providence Stadium.

Skipper Hardik Pandya made 24 off 18 balls, while opener Ishan Kishan was dismissed after a 23-ball 27.

India lost the series opener by four runs at Tarouba, Trinidad. Negotiating disciplined bowlers, Tilak Varma produced a well-calculated half-century, his first in T20Is, to take India to 152 for seven against



Kuldeep is bowling well and that's why team is backing him: Chahal

PTI ■ PROVIDENCE

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal understands why Kuldeep Yadav is playing ahead of him in the ODI format and is not losing sleep over his place in the Asia Cup and World Cup squad.

Chahal did not make the playing eleven in the three ODIs against the West Indies. Featuring in his first game since the IPL, Chahal made his presence felt with a twin strike in his opening over but India lost the game by four runs.

"Team combination is our priority and it is not something new. At 7 we generally play Ravindra Jadeja or Axar Patel. Three spinners can only play if the wickets are spin-friendly," said Chahal ahead of the second T20.

"Kuldeep is bowling really well, he is in a great rhythm and that's why team is backing him. I keep working on nets so that whenever I get the chance I will grab it," the leg-spinner added.

The focus is on ODIs ahead of the World Cup at home in October-November but Chahal has not been able to get a game since January.

However, the 33-year-old is happy as long he gets to be part of the squad.

"We are professional cricketers. I was playing after two

We did not ask India to send 'little kids': Mohammad Haris

PTI ■ KARACHI

Mohammad Haris has expressed dissatisfaction over the reception of his team Pakistan Shaheens' win against India A in the final of the ACC Men's Emerging Cup, saying they did not ask the Indian board to send "little kids" to the tournament.

Pakistan defeated India by a huge margin of 128 runs in the summit clash to win the trophy, but there was some criticism for the winners since they had plenty of players with international experience compared to a young Indian side.

Wicketkeeper-batter Haris has so far played five ODIs and nine T20Is while the team also featured Mohammad Wasim Jr, who has played two Tests, 14 ODIs and 17 T20Is for Pakistan. Wasim Jr took 2/26 and scored 17 not out in the final.

Haris, who was among eight international players in the Pakistan Shaheens' squad, questioned the Indian cricket board.

"Did we ask the Indian board to send little kids to the tournament?" Haris said in a podcast.

Haris said he was upset because of people saying that the Pakistan team won since it had more senior and experienced players compared to the Indian outfit.

"We had players who have hardly played a few games for the senior team, but if you look at their side, most of their players have appeared in around 200 IPL matches," he claimed.

"They say that we had



international experience in our team. How many international matches have we played? Saim has played 5, I have played 6. Those guys (India players) have played 260 IPL matches," Haris said.

The Pakistan squad featured opening batter Saim Ayub who has played eight T20Is, Tayyab Tahir (three T20Is), Shah Nawaz Dahani (two ODIs and 11 T20Is), 27-year-old Aamir Jamal (two T20Is) and Arshad Iqbal (one T20I).

The Indian team, captained by Yash Dhull, had no player with international experience while it had those who have featured in the Indian Premier League such as B Sai Sudharsan, Abhishek Sharma, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel, Harshit Rana and Rajvardhan Hangargekar.

Pakistan gets government clearance for WC participation

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan government on Sunday gave clearance to the country's senior men's team to travel to India for the 2023 World Cup, ending months of uncertainty over their participation in the showpiece.

A press release from the foreign ministry informed that Pakistan has consistently maintained that sports should not be mixed with politics. It has, therefore, decided to send its team to India to compete in the upcoming World Cup.

"Pakistan believes that the state of bilateral relations with India should not stand in the way of fulfilling its international sports-related obligations," the release said.

The ministry said that

We expect that the full safety and security of the Pakistan cricket team will be ensured during its visit to India

Pakistan, however, has deep concerns about the security of its team and it would convey them to the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the Indian authorities.

"We expect that the full safety and security of the Pakistan cricket team will be ensured during its visit to India," the release said.

It also said that Pakistan's decision shows its "constructive and responsible approach".

Salman Butt wants India to consider Dhawan, Rahane for WC



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Pakistan captain Salman Butt wants the Indian cricket team to consider out-of-favour batters Shikhar Dhawan and Ajinkya Rahane for the World Cup 2023. Butt feels India should rely on experience rather than backing the youngsters for the mega event.

Butt suggested that Shikhar Dhawan could open for India alongside Rohit Sharma or Shubman Gill. "They will need Shikhar Dhawan on top. I don't see any of the top-order batters, among right-handers, who can open as good as him. Either Shikhar and Shubman (Gill) can open and Rohit (Sharma) comes one down, or Rohit can open with Shikhar," said Butt on his YouTube channel.

The former cricketer also said that India should play Ajinkya Rahane or KL Rahul at number 6. "They will need experience in World Cup. They also need a guy in at

number 6, either it's KL Rahul or (Ajinkya) Rahane. When there's pressure, the youngsters stutter. You need experience," said Butt.

Shikhar Dhawan's Return To Indian Team Unlikely

Shikhar Dhawan has been out of the Indian team for a while and does not seem to be in contention for the World Cup spot, especially after being ignored for the ODI series against West Indies.

KL Rahul has also been out of the team owing to injury but is on his way to recovery and is likely to find a spot in the World Cup squad. Rahane showed good form in IPL 2023 but that will not be enough to earn him a place in the World Cup squad.

The World Cup is set to get underway on October 5, with England taking on New Zealand. India vs Pakistan will take place on October 14 in Ahmedabad. The match was rescheduled due to Navratri.

Afghanistan announce squad for ODI series against Pak

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Afghanistan have announced the squad for the three-match ODI series against Pakistan. Ace spinner Noor Ahmed has been added to the squad following his consistent run in T20 matches.

Left-arm spinner Zia Ur Rahman Akbar, who recently made his ODI debut against Bangladesh, has been dropped from the team. Fast bowlers Mohammad Saleem Safi and



Selector Asadullah Khan said. "This three-match ODI series against Pakistan provides us with a wonderful opportunity to prepare the team for the forthcoming two events."

"The preparations for the Pakistan series are progressing well. The players have recently performed well in the Kabul Camp, which has been supervised by ACB's HPC staff. The team will also undergo a week-long conditioning camp prior to the Pakistan series."

Afghanistan squad From ODI Series Against Pakistan

Hashmatullah Shahidi (C), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ikram Alkhalil, Ibrahim Zadran, Riaz Hassan, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Azmatullah Omarzai, Rashid Khan, Noor Ahmad, Mujeeb Ur Rehman, Fazal Haq Farooqi, Abdul Rahman, Mohammad Saleem Safi and Wafadar Momand.

Reserves: Farid Ahmad Malik and Shahidullah Kamal.