

OPINION 6
TRUTH—A MUST FOR
RECONCILIATION

WORLD 9
US, JAPAN, OZ PLAN JOINT
DRILLS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

MONEY 10
MOST GRAFT PLAINTS AGAINST
RLYS, BANK OFFICIALS IN 2022: CVC

NEW DELHI, MONDAY AUGUST 21, 2023; PAGES 12 & 3



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SPAIN WINS
WOMEN'S
WORLD CUP
11 SPORT

Eye on 2024 polls Kharage finally forms new CWC

G23 leaders Tharoor, Sharma in; Pilot, Priyanka included in balancing act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the occasion of the birth anniversary celebrations of one of the Congress' tallest leaders, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Grand Old Party on Sunday announced a revamped working committee which is considered the highest decision-making body of the party.

Nearly six months after being authorised to nominate members to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), at the Raipur plenary session on February 24, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharage reconstituted the CWC, retaining the old guard, giving space to the young and including prominent G23 group leaders like Shashi Tharoor and Anand Sharma — who were critical of the party leadership in the past — in the 84-member top body of the party.

While top-most leaders like Kharage, his predecessors Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi besides former PM Manmohan Singh were there, a surprise entry in the list includes Sachin Pilot and Priyanka Gandhi.

This new CWC has been announced ahead of the year-end polls in five States, i.e. Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana and is looking forward to the General Elections in 2024. Other notable inclusions in the core CWC include



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage with party leader Sonia Gandhi during the 25th Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award on the birth anniversary of former PM Rajiv Gandhi, at Jawahar Bhawan in New Delhi, Sunday. PTI

former Finance Minister P Chidambaram, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan, former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh, former Speaker Meira Kumar, former Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi, former Lok Sabha member Deepa Das Munshi, Lok Sabha member Gaurav Gogoi and Rajya Sabha member Syed Nasser Hussain and former Union Minister and former Delhi Congress chief

Ajay Maken and Abhishek Manu Singhvi — who has been fighting the battle in and out for the Gandhis related to several court cases including the recent reinstatement of Rahul as MP in Lok Sabha.

Deepa Das Munshi, and Syed Nasser Hussain are new entrants to the CWC. Das Munshi is a former MP from West Bengal and the wife of veteran Congress leader and former Union Minister, the late Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

Hussain is a Rajya Sabha member who has earlier served as Congress's national media panelist.

Sachin Pilot, who rebelled against the party's Government in Rajasthan in 2020 and kept waving a flag of rebellion against Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, has been made a regular member. Sources in the party said Pilot will also be handed with other responsibilities which include appointing him incharge of a

major State with an eye to Lok Sabha polls. Also, among the new members, Shashi Tharoor, Anand Sharma and Mukul Wasnik were part of the group of 23 leaders that had raised questions on the party's leadership under Sonia Gandhi which included former party men Kapil Sibal and Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Tharoor, who had also unsuccessfully contested the election for the post of Congress chief against Kharage in the internal polls last year was a surprise inclusion in the CWC.

Younger leaders like Alka Lamba, Supriya Shrinete, Pawan Khara have been made special invitees while Kanhaiya Kumar is in the CWC as incharge of the students' wing and Ajoy Kumar is incharge of Tripura.

Maken, Khara and Lamba are known for venting their anger against contesting the Lok Sabha polls in unison with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as part of the newly-formed Opposition coalition bloc India. The new CWC has been announced nearly six months after Kharage was authorised to nominate members to the CWC at the Raipur plenary session on February 24. While the main CWC has been expanded to 39 from earlier 24, there are 18 permanent, 14 incharges, nine special invitees and heads of frontal organisations like NSUI, Indian Youth Congress, Mahila Congress and Seva Dal.

Tell us your demands: Nadda tells HP Govt

BJP chief visits rain-hit State as Centre releases ₹200 cr more for disaster relief

PTI/PNS ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda on Sunday said the disaster in Himachal Pradesh is not an occasion to score political points and asked the Congress Government to "tell us the problem and place the demand, it would be taken care of".

All efforts should be on relief, restoration and rehabilitation, Nadda told reporters here after visiting the rain-affected areas of Poanta in Sirmour and Shimla town. He said that the Centre is providing all possible help to Himachal.

Meanwhile, the Centre on Sunday approved the release of additional Rs 200 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) as advance assistance to Himachal Pradesh to help the disaster-hit State undertake relief measures for the people affected by heavy rains and consequent floods and landslides. The Centre had earlier approved the advance release of Rs 360.80 crore from the Central share of the State Disaster Response Fund in two instalments on July 10 and 17, the Union Home Ministry said in a statement.

The Central Government also released Rs 189.27 crore of the State's past dues from the NDRF on August 7, the Ministry said. The Central Government is monitoring the situation in Himachal Pradesh



round-the-clock and providing necessary logistics and financial help to the State Government to deal with the situation efficiently.

"I am saddened and concerned over the loss of human lives and properties in the State," the BJP chief said.

Referring to the demand of Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu to declare the tragedy a national disaster, Nadda said adequate financial aid would be given and it does not matter whether the calamity is declared a national disaster. The Centre is concerned over the grave situation in the rain-battered State, said Nadda who along with Union Minister Anurag Thakur, former Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur and State BJP chief Rajiv Bindal was on a tour of the State to take stock of the situation. About 20 teams of the National Disaster Response Force are engaged in the State and three helicopters of the Indian Air Force have rescued over 1,000 people in 70 sorties, he said.

Long-term planning with alternative mechanisms of development is required to check recurrence of such disaster and the experts would

take the call in this regard, Nadda added.

During his visit to flood-hit areas of Paonta Sahib in Sirmour, the BJP chief also met a family which lost five members in flash floods on August 10. "Himachal has suffered huge losses and the Union Government is seriously concerned about the situation. Efforts are afoot by the administration to provide relief and take up restoration and rehabilitation works. Central help would continue to pour in and all the displaced people would be rehabilitated," he told reporters.

Later, Nadda also visited the Shiva temple site in Summer Hill which was damaged following a landslide on August 14. He also visited Krishna Nagar area where several houses had collapsed after a landslide.

On Friday, the Himachal Pradesh Government declared the State a "Natural Calamity Affected Area" in view of the damage caused by heavy rains. Chief Minister Sukhu claimed that the State has suffered losses to the tune of Rs 1000 crore.

The death toll in rain-related incidents in the State has climbed to 78.

WCD official held for raping late friend's minor daughter Wife booked on charges of aiding husband

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has registered a case against a Deputy Director posted at the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the Delhi Government for allegedly raping his deceased friend's 16-year-old daughter over several months and impregnating her. The accused's wife has also been charged in the case for allegedly aiding him in the sexual abuse of the girl.

The incident came to light after the victim was admitted to St Stephen's Hospital to treat an anxiety attack. During counselling at the hospital, the victim revealed that the Deputy Director raped her several times. The hospital informed Burari Police Station and an FIR was registered. The victim is not in a position to submit her statement in front of a mag-



istrate under Section 154. The police have questioned the accused and booked the officer and his wife. According to police, the girl was staying with the accused and his family at their house after her father passed away on October 1, 2020. The accused used this opportunity to allegedly sexually assault her several times, the officer added.

The officer and his wife have been booked under Sections 376 2f (being a guardian, commits rape on woman), 506 (criminal intimidation), 509 (act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), 323 (causing hurt),

313 (causing miscarriage without woman's consent), 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 34 (multiple people commit criminal conduct in pursuit of a common intention) of the Indian Penal Code and sections of POCSO Act. "As his wife also aided him in the act and did not report the matter to the police, we have added Section 120-B (criminal conspiracy) in the FIR against his wife," said police sources.

The girl is a class 12th student in a school situated in the Civil Lines area, who lost her father in 2020. After her father's death, the accused brought her to his home.

In the FIR, the 16-year-old victim accused the Deputy Director's wife of involvement as well. As per the police, the victim's parents were principals in Government schools.

Continued on Page 2

BSF to be deployed in Manipur village where three were killed

PTI ■ IMPHAL

A Border Security Force (BSF) team is likely to be posted in Thawai Kuki village in Manipur's Ukhrul district where three persons were killed by armed men on Friday, sources said. Security forces are combing the jungles of the adjoining hills where the armed men are believed to be hiding, they said. The likely move to deploy a BSF team in the village comes days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh sought reports from Churachandpur Deputy Commissioner and SP about the open display of sophisticated firearms by a group of people during an Independence Day parade.

Sources also added that around 60 companies of the BSF are likely to be deployed in nine districts of the State to assist the administration in



maintaining law and order. BSF (EC) ADG Sonali Mishra along with four senior officers had recently called on Governor Anusuiya Uikhey at Raj Bhavan and briefed her about the prevailing security situation in the northeastern State.

Meanwhile, more than 200 Meiteis who had crossed over to neighbouring Myanmar to escape the ethnic violence,

safely returned to the State after more than three months and were provided food and medicines by the Army and the civil administration.

In another development, the case of a seven-year-old boy of mixed Kuki-Meitei parentage being burnt alive along with his mother and aunt are among the 20 cases handed over by the Manipur Police to the CBI.

Continued on Page 2

Govt raises onion buffer to 5L tonnes

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the buzz that the price of quality onions is likely to nearly double to Rs 60-80 a kg by next month, the Department of Consumer Affairs on Sunday raised the quantum of onion buffer to five lakh tonnes this year after achieving the initial procurement target of three lakh tonnes and use that for retail sale. The department has directed the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India to procure one-lakh-tonne each to achieve the additional procurement target.

The announcement has come a day after the Government imposed a 40 per cent duty on the export of onions to improve local supplies and check its prices.



Besides, the NCCF is already selling tomatoes on behalf of the Central Government at a subsidised rate and it has now been mandated to retail buffer onion at Rs 25 a kg from Monday. For the current 2023-24 fiscal, the target for onion buffer was kept at 3 lakh tonnes, which has already been procured.

Continued on Page 2

Russia out of moon race with India

Luna-25 crashes on lunar surface; ISRO manoeuvre takes Chandrayaan closer

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Russia has bowed out of the race to the moon with India after its robot lander crashed on the lunar surface, setting Chandrayaan-3 on an easier course while ISRO scientists achieved yet another successful manoeuvre to take the spacecraft closer to the moon in its soft-landing attempt on August 23.

ISRO on Sunday said it has successfully reduced the orbit of Chandrayaan-3 mission's Lander Module (LM), and it is now expected to touch down on the surface of the Moon at 6.04 PM on Wednesday.

This came even as Russian lander Luna-25 crashed into the moon after going into uncontrolled orbit. "The apparatus

moved into an unpredictable orbit and ceased to exist as a result of a collision with the surface of the moon," Russian space agency Roscosmos said in a statement.

Roscosmos said it lost contact with the spacecraft on Saturday after it ran into trouble while preparing for its pre-landing orbit after reporting an "abnormal situation" that its specialists were analysing. The Luna-25 was launched from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's Far East on August 10.

Incidentally, the ambitious Chandrayaan-2 had also crashed into the lunar surface four years ago, but its successor has ticked all the orbit-related boxes so far as part of its journey towards the Moon.

Chandrayaan's LM, comprising the lander 'Vikram' and rover 'Pragyan', is expected to touch down on the lunar surface on Wednesday, August 23 at 6.04 PM, added ISRO, which had earlier said the soft landing would take place at 5.47 PM that day.

Having taken off on August 11, Luna-25 was supposed to touch the moon sur-



face on August 21, two days before Vikram's scheduled landing.

ISRO said the second and final deboosting (slowing down) operation has successfully reduced the LM orbit to 25 km x 134 km. The module would undergo internal checks and await the sunrise at the designated landing site. The powered descent is expected to commence on August 23, 2023, around 5.45 PM, ISRO said in a post on 'X', formerly Twitter.

Continued on Page 2

Get character certificate or lose licence, resto-bars told

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Resto-bar owners having licences to serve liquor will have to provide a character certification along with police verification to the Excise Department. The Delhi Government's Excise Department has asked all owners of resto-bars holding licences to serve liquor to provide character certificates along with police verification after noticing several changes to proprietorship, owners, partners and directors without informing the department. Besides, any individual applying for a new licence must also submit a mandatory character certificate along with other documents.

According to officials, those who do not submit the certificate proving that they do not have a criminal background by September 15 will face strict action and their licence may also get cancelled. "...Possesses good moral character and has no criminal background or has not been convicted of any offence punishable under this or other relevant Act: Provided that in case he is selected as licensee, he shall furnish within 30 days of the

grant of licence a certificate issued by the Superintendent of Police of the district or the Commissioner of Police, as the case may be, of which place he is the resident, showing that he possesses good moral character and has no criminal background or criminal record," read the notification issued by the Excise Deputy Commissioner on August 11.

"While considering an application for grant of licence or permit, the licencing authority shall have regard that the applicant possesses good moral character and has no criminal background or has not been convicted of any offence punishable under this or other relevant Act," it said.

The notification further said it has been brought to the knowledge of this department that many licensees are changing the proprietor or owners / partners/ directors of firms without the knowledge/permission of the Excise Department. "Non-compliance of this order will be viewed seriously and stern action including cancellation of licence shall be taken against the defaulter," Jitendra Agarwal, Deputy Commissioner (Excise) said in the notification.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

RAJINIKANTH VISITS RAM LALLA IN AYODHYA

Ayodhya: Filmstar Rajinikanth offered prayers to Ram Lalla on Sunday and saw the construction work of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. He also visited the Hanuman Garhi temple and paid obeisance there. "I wished to come here for a long time. I am fortunate that the wish has been fulfilled. If the Lord wishes, I will come again after the construction of the temple is completed," Rajinikanth told reporters.

SHAH RELEASES MP'S REPORT CARD

Bhopal: Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday released the Madhya Pradesh Government's 'report card' from 2003-2023 and said the BJP Government successfully removed the BIMARU category tag from the State. P2

BJP Govt rid MP of BIMARU tag: Shah

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday released the Madhya Pradesh government's 'report card' from 2003-2023 and said the BJP government in these years successfully removed the BIMARU (laggard) category tag from the state, which, according to him, was a legacy of the Congress regime.

He said the people of the state took a historic decision in 2003 by removing the government of 'Mr Bantadhar', apparently referring to senior Congress leader and former chief minister Digvijaya Singh.

The BJP government laid the foundation of making the state developed and self-reliant in the last 20 years, he said.

Shah released the government's 'report card' of 20 years



at a function in the Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal in the presence of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, MP BJP president VD Sharma and state Home Minister Narottam Mishra. He also asked the opposition Congress to give a report card of its nearly five-decade rule in the state.

The assembly elections in MP are due this year-end.

Shah also expressed confidence that the BJP will win all 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the general elections due next year.

The BIMARU acronym has often been used to refer to Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, to imply that these states lagged in terms of economic growth, health care, education, and other indices.

"Madhya Pradesh came into existence in 1956 and since then, except for five-six years, the Congress ruled the state till 2003, but the state remained BIMARU during their regime," Shah said.

Cash-strapped WB to borrow ₹2,500 cr to sustain projects

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Severely plagued by the flight of capital and Central grants nowhere in sight, a cash-starved Bengal Government has once again decided to borrow Rs 2,500 crore to sustain its ambitious infrastructure projects ahead of the 2024 general elections.



According to sources in the State Finance Department the Government will take a loan of Rs 2,500 crore from the World Bank for building and improving roads apart from training people who are engaged in the logistical sector.

A senior Finance Ministry official said, "the government wants to emphasise on improving exports from the state in the next 10 years, for which it is necessary to develop a quick transit system.

"So, work on this count will start before the forthcoming Bengal Global Business Summit scheduled in November this year."

"The Government is planning economic corridors for the State ... While 630 km of the proposed road network would go to North Bengal the remaining will be given to South Bengal," the official said.

Incidentally, the ruling Trinamool Congress is trying hard to regain its lost ground in the 8 districts of northern Bengal where the BJP established its supremacy in the 2019 general elections.

"The development of these economic corridors will enable the state government to showcase Bengal in a better manner to the potential investors," the official said.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had early this month accused the Centre of not clearing her Government's dues to the tune of about Rs 1.15 lakh crore and said that her government would generate its own funds to construct a road 930 km network.

"They (Centre) are collecting the GST but not releasing the State Government's share which is illegal and goes against the federal system," Banerjee earlier alleged before announcing her infrastructure project.

Pradhan slams Bengal Govt for failing to curb ragging on campuses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday slammed the Bengal Government for failing to manage its university campuses allowing a "ragging raj" to continue in premium institutions like Jadavpur University.

Calling the recent ragging death inside the Main Hostel of the JU — ranked 4th in the country — Pradhan said that the University Grant Commission (UGC) had taken the matter "seriously" and would soon take appropriate measures to prevent ragging-related incidents.

"Jadavpur University has been the country's prestigious institution, but the incident that has come to light is worrisome and unfortunate. UGC has taken this matter seriously," the Minister said. His statement came on a day when the newly appointed provisional Vice



Chancellor took charge of the University. Earlier the University was functioning without a regular Vice Chancellor for several months.

Pradhan's statement came after a State BJP team led by its leader Sankudeb Panda met him. The State BJP team in its letter to Pradhan demanded an intervention by the University Grants Commission (UGC) into the matter of a ragging related death in the University. A 17-year-old first year student had mysteriously fallen from the second floor of the Main Hostel after being severely ragged on the night of August 9. He later succumbed to his injuries.

BSF to be deployed in Manipur village...

From Page 1

The CBI has begun its probe into the ethnic clashes that erupted in the state on May 3, officials said.

The clashes broke out between Kukis and Meiteis after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. More than 160 people have been killed and several hundreds injured in the violence.

by a mob and set ablaze in West Imphal district's Iroisemba on June 4.

His mother and aunt -- Meena Hangsing and Lydia Lourembam -- were taking him to a hospital in the Manipur capital after he suffered a bullet injury in his head during a shootout. While the boy's mother was from the Meitei community, his father was a Kuki.

Officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) have been handed over two FIRs -- one filed by police at the Lamphel station and the other filed by the boy's father -- Joshua Hangsing -- at the Kangpokpi police station.



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Govind Chandra Das S/o Late Sh. Banchhanidhi Das R/o-39th Bn ITBP Lakhnawali, Gautam Budh Nagar, Gr. Noida (UP) PIN-201306, have changed my name to Gobinda Chandra Das.

PD(137)C

I, Surendra Singh S/o Shri Phool Singh R/o-39, ITBP Camp Lakhnawali Surajpur Greater Noida Pin Code 201306, (UP) have changed my name to Surander Singh

PD(138)C

The case at the Lamphel police station has been registered under sections pertaining to murder while the one at Kangpokpi has been registered under attempt to commit culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Tonsing, with his mother and aunt, both Meitei Christians, were in the ambulance along with a driver and a nurse when the mob attacked them, officials said.

The driver and nurse were allowed to escape while police personnel, who had fired in the air, had to retreat.

Members of the mob paid no heed to repeated pleas by the boy's mother and aunt to let them go, and set the ambulance on fire with them inside the vehicle, the officials said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that my client **SH. HARON ALI, S/O Late Muzammil Ali, R/O- FA 35 Abul Fazal Endclave part 1, Jamia Nagar, Okhla New Delhi-110025** have served all his relations with his son namely **MR. MUSTAKEEM** henceforth my client hereby **debar/disown** him from all his movable and immovable properties. In future my client has no relation with his son **MR. MUSTAKEEM** and his legal heirs. Anyone dealing with him shall do at his/her own risk/cost and my client shall not be responsible for his act, deed or dealing done by **MUSTAKEEM. ASIF INAM, Advocate**

Modi condoles loss of lives in Ladakh incident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has condoled the loss of lives in the Ladakh incident, saying their rich service to the nation will always be remembered.



Taking to social media platform 'X', PM Modi posted, "Pained by the mishap near Leh in which we lost personnel of the Indian Army. Their rich service to the nation will always be remembered. Condolences to the bereaved families.

The soldiers have been identified as Naib Subedar Ramesh Lal, Havaldar Mahendra Singh Sikarwar Hav Vijay Kumar, Gunner Tarandeep Singh, Nk N Chandrasekhar, Lance Naik Tejpal Singh, Lance Naik Manmohan Singh, DMT Ankit Kundu, and DMT Vaibhav Bhoite.

President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Thakur, too, condoled the loss of lives in the incident.

J&K Bank dismisses its Chief Manager for being threat to 'State security'

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A day after the Jammu and Kashmir Bank terminated the services of Sajad Ahmad Bazaz, Chief Manager of the Bank, for allegedly being a "threat to the security of the state", Lieutenant Governor Manoj Singh Sunday defended the dismissal of government employees who support terrorism and said the administration would not hesitate in taking appropriate legal action against such persons.

The services of Bazaz, who was due to retire soon, were terminated after an intelligence wing of the Jammu and Kashmir police in its report recommended the same after completing in-depth investigations.

The Union Territory administration had earlier terminated the services of government employees under Article 311 (2) (C) of the Constitution for being an



alleged 'threat to the security of the state'. However, this is the first instance where J&K Bank has terminated the services of a top ranking manager for similar reasons.

An order issued by the office of the Managing Director of the bank late Saturday evening stated: "After considering the facts and circumstances of the case contained in the report received from credible agencies that the activities of Sajad Ahmad Bazaz, posted at Internal Communication and Marketing Department are such as warrant his dismissal from service under Rule/Provision 12.29 in OSM (Officers Service Manual)."

Russia out...

From Page 1

The Russian setback brought back memories of ISRO's Chandrayaan-2 with its lander 'Vikram' along with its rover 'Pragyan' crash landing on September 6, 2019, while attempting a touch down in the south pole of the moon.

Russia's space agency Roscosmos said in accordance with the flight programme of the automation station Luna-25, on August 19, it was planned to issue an impulse to form its pre-landing elliptical orbit.

However, the communication was interrupted and the measures taken to get in touch with Luna-25 did not produce any results.

According to ISRO, India's pursuit of space exploration will reach a remarkable milestone with the Chandrayaan-3 mission poised to achieve a soft landing on the surface of the Moon.

This achievement marks a significant step forward for Indian Science, Engineering, Technology, and Industry, symbolising our nation's progress in space exploration, it said.

Bank of India
Relationship beyond banking

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE of Properties: 25-09-2023
Ghaziabad Zone B-32, Sector 62, Noida-201307
Phone: 0120-2404135

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF MOVABLE / IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

APPENDIX- IV-A Under the provisions of Rule 8(6)
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is given to the Public in general and in particular to the borrower (s) and Guarantors (s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to Bank of India, the constructive/Physical possession (indicated against the property) of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Bank of India, will be sold on "As is where is" "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" on 25.09.2023 (Time 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM). The Last date for submission of EMD/Documents online is 24.09.2023. The Intended buyer shall get their names registered in the portal <https://www.mstccommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/index.jsp> and submit EMD online to the Global EMD Wallet.

Short description of the properties to be sold are given below: Amount to be recovered (secured debt) and particulars of possession are also mentioned in the table below.

Sr. No.	Name of the Branch & Name of Account / borrower	DESCRIPTION & OWNER OF PROPERTY	Outstanding Amount (Secured debt) Date and Type of Possession	Reserve Price		Date and time of e-auction	Name and Mobile No. of Authorized officer / BM to whom bidder may contact
				EMD	Bid Increase Amount		
1	Bank of India- SECTOR-62 Noida Branch Account - Mr. Birendra Prasad Bhagat S/o Jageshwar Bhagat & Mrs. Manti Devi	All the part and parcel of the Residential Property situated at Flat No. D-3, Third Floor, Block-11A, Sector-118, Noida, and Distt Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) in the name of Mr. Birendra Prasad Bhagat S/o Jageshwar Bhagat. Plinth area - 38.48 Sq. mtr. Bounded in the North- Flat No. 5D/Corridor, South-Balcony/Open, East- Flat No. 1D, West- Flat No. 4D	Rs. 18,75,911.67 + Int. W.e.f. date of interest ceased (Less amount if any deposited thereafter) Physical Possession	₹ 16.80 Lacs ₹ 1.68 Lacs ₹ 0.17 Lac	25.09.2023 11 a.m to 5 p.m	Dinesh Singh Mobile no.-9450379245.	
2	Bank of India- BRIA Branch Account - M/s A.S. Industries (Prop: Shri Jarnail Singh s/o Late Shri Amrik Singh)	All Part and parcel of freehold i.e. land and building situated at Part of Khasra No.256, Village - Bhojnia, Patel Marg, Ghaziabad-201001, in the name of Mr. Dilawar Singh s/o Late Shri Amreek Singh (Guarantor-Mortgagor) Area; 292.63 Sqr. Mtr. (349.99 Sq.Yd). Boundary of the property: As per Sale Deed: North: Property of Mrs Nirmala Sharma, South: 20 Ft. Road, East: Property of Ram Kumar and Ram Avtar, West: Property of Mrs. Swam Kaur. As Per the report of Lakhpal: North: Property of Mrs Nirmala Sharma, South: 20 Ft. Road, East: Property of Ram Kumar and Ram Avtar, West: Property of Mrs. Swam Kaur.	Rs. 3,77,06,430.77 + Int. W.e.f. date of interest ceased (Less amount if any deposited thereafter) Physical Possession Note: Litigation over the property is pending in Debt Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow. The boundary of the property is disputed. Criminal matter is under investigation by EOW, Crime branch, Mandir Marg, New Delhi. Sale is being conducted strictly on "As is where is" "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis, without any resources from the bank.	₹ 69.92 Lacs ₹ 7.00 Lacs ₹ 0.70 Lac	25.09.2023 11 a.m to 5 p.m	Dinesh Singh Mobile no. - 9450379245	
3	Bank of India -Ghaziabad Main Branch Account - M/s Tejas Pharma (Prop Mr. Tanush Garg S/o Mr. Alok Garg)	All the part and parcel of the Commercial Property situated at Shop No-7th A & 8, First Floor Balaji Market, Municipal House No. 7(New), Mohalla Ramanuj Dayal, Nai Basti, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201001 in the name of Mrs. Usha Garg W/o Mr. Alok Garg. Plinth area - 22.29 Sqr.mtr bounded in the North- Shop of Yogita urf Yamini, South-25.00 ft wide Road, East-Shop No-6, West- 3.50 ft wide corridor.	Rs. 61,78,427.99 + Int. W.e.f. date of interest ceased (Less amount if any deposited thereafter) Physical Possession	₹ 24.57 Lacs ₹ 2.50 Lacs ₹ 0.25 Lac	25.09.2023 11 a.m to 5 p.m	Dinesh Singh Mobile no. - 9450379245	

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Auction sale/bidding would be only through "Online Bidding process" through the website <https://www.mstccommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/index.jsp>
- Date and time of e-auction is 25.09.2023 (11:00 AM to 05:00 PM) with Auto-Extensions of 10 minutes each. The last date for submission of EMD is 24.09.2023.
- Auction would commence on the Reserve Price plus first incremental value as mentioned in bank's website. Bidders shall improve their offers in multiples/incremental value mentioned in the above table for all the properties simultaneously. The properties shall not be sold below the Reserve Price plus first incremental value.
- The intending bidders shall get their names registered in the portal <https://www.mstccommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/index.jsp> and submit EMD online to the Global EMD Wallet and thereupon they would be allowed to participate in the online auction through the said portal. Buyers shall submit their KYC documents, phone number and email id to the website.
- The property shall be sold with all existing or future encumbrances (if any). The authorized Officer shall not be responsible for any third party rights/claims or dues on the properties.
- To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on the property. The intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding encumbrances/ title of properties, statutory liability /tax liability / arrears of property tax etc. The Properties can be viewed by login to the website <https://ibapi.in>. For Physical Inspection of the property Authorized Officer can be contacted during working hours.
- The successful bidder / purchaser would bear all taxes including TDS @ 1% of sale price payable on purchase of property (if sale price is Rs.50 lacs/- & above) and the taxes payable to service provider for conducting online sale. Also the fees payable for execution of sale certificate such as stamp duty, registration fee, etc. shall be borne by the successful bidder.
- Unsuccessful bidder shall take up with MSTCC on their own for refund of EMD. Authorized officers shall not be responsible for refund of EMD.
- The successful bidder / purchaser shall immediately, i.e. on the same day or not later than next working day, as the case may be, pay a deposit of twenty five per cent of the amount of the sale price, which is inclusive of earnest money deposited, to the authorized officer conducting the sale and in default of such deposit, the property shall be sold again. The balance amount of purchase price payable shall be paid by the purchaser to the authorized officer on or before the fifteenth day of confirmation of sale of the immovable property or such extended period as may be agreed upon in writing between the purchaser and the secured creditor, in any case not exceeding three months.
- In default of payment within the period mentioned vide No.9 above, the deposit shall be forfeited to the secured creditor and the property shall be resold and the defaulting purchaser shall forfeit (to the secured creditor) all claim to the property or to any part of the sum for which it may be subsequently sold.
- The intended bidders who want to get registered with the website and to submit the EMD and require assistance in creating Login ID & Password, uploading data, submitting bid, training on a bidding process etc., may contact the Nodal Bank Allahabad Bank at 18001025026 OR 011-41106131 & Ms MSTC Ltd at 09231890249 OR 09911702233 and for any property related query may contact Authorized Officers at their respective phone numbers OR at Ghaziabad Zonal Office in 0120-2404135. Sale will be done by the Authorized Officers through e-auction platform provided in the website <https://www.mstccommerce.com/auctionhome/ibapi/index.jsp>
- For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in <https://www.bankofindia.co.in>

Date: 19.08.2023, Place, Ghaziabad
Authorised Officer, Bank of India

Get character certificate or lose licence, resto-bars...

From Page 1

With some of the private firms that participated in the auction of zonal and shops licence under the now-withdrawn excise policy of 2021-22 found to be involved in irregularities later, sources said it was important for the Government now to ensure that the liquor business in Delhi was clean. They added that a well-known international liquor firm was denied the excise licence of wholesale vend because of the involvement of its executives in the contentious liquor policy.

Govt raises onion... WCD official held for raping late friend's minor...

From Page 1

Currently, the same buffer stock is being disposed of in the targeted markets in select States to improve the local availability and check price rise.

According to the Department of Consumer Affairs, the all-India average retail price of onion was 19 per cent higher at Rs 29.73 per kg on Sunday compared to Rs 25 per kg a year ago.

In Delhi, retail price of onion has increased to Rs 37 per kg from Rs 28 per kg in the said period. "In an unprecedented move the Government raised the quantum of onion buffer to 5 lakh tonne this year, after achieving the initial procurement target of 3 lakh tonne. As on date, about 1,400 MT of onions from the buffer has been dispatched to the targeted markets and are being continuously released to augment the availability.

Apart from releasing in major markets, onions from the buffer are also being made available to retail consumers at a subsidised rate of Rs 25/- per kg through retail outlets and mobile vans of NCCF from August 21, 2023.

"Retail sale of onions will be suitably enhanced incoming days by involving other agencies and e-commerce platforms," Consumer Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

Onion is a politically-sensitive commodity. The move comes ahead of Assembly elections in key States like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana due at year-end. The Government had always used a minimum export price tool to curb onion exports. The Government has already placed restrictions on the export of wheat and rice. Earlier, the Centre had reduced the import duty on edible oils. There are two main reasons for the possible surge in onion prices. First, low shelf life of onion produced in rabi season, and second, poor sowing in kharif season.

The victim said in her statement that she often visited the Church with her family, where the deputy director used to come as well with his family. As they were from the same State, the families became friends.

It is alleged that the accused raped her several times between 2020 and 2021. When the victim became pregnant, the accused told his wife, who, allegedly asked their son to get medicines and the pregnancy was terminated at home, the minor told the police.

The mother later took her to doctors and specialists who found that the child was abused for months by the officer and his family. She had an anxiety attack in August this year and her mother admitted her to St Stephens' Hospital, where the girl narrated the whole incident during the counselling session, the officer added.

Sources said the girl's mother found out about the rape after almost two years. She then called the police and child welfare authorities.

"We recorded the girl's statement where she detailed multiple incidents of rape and abuse. The wife is also named an accused in the case for aiding the officer and terminating the pregnancy. The girl is undergoing treatment at a hospital. She is also undergoing counselling," said the officer, adding once she is discharged from the hospital, the police will take her to the local magistrate to get her statement recorded.

Responding to the allegation against the official, the Delhi Government said the accused is a deputy director in the State WCD department, adding that "the sternest possible action should be taken against him" in case the official is found guilty.

"He (the accused) is a deputy director in the WCD Department. Since an FIR has been lodged in the alleged matter, law should take its course. Delhi Government is sensitive in regard to such serious matters of women's safety and child abuse. If he has committed any such reprehensible act, then the sternest possible action should be taken against him," the Government said in a statement.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri criticised the Delhi Commission for Women for stoic mission on the issue.

BJP appoints 7 Lok Sabha Prabharis

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP has appointed in-charges for the seven parliamentary constituencies in the national Capital, with responsibilities such as supervising organisational activities and managing political functioning.

The "Lok Sabha Prabharis", appointed "exclusively" for next year's general elections, have been given a headstart to prevent "any last-minute challenges", said one of the seven in-charges.

Praveen Shankar Kapoor, the BJP's media department head in Delhi, said the Lok Sabha in-charges will ensure that the party's macro- and micro-level organisation and political programmes are put in place at least six months before the polls.

"According to directions of the Delhi BJP, the Lok Sabha in-charges will also ensure that door-to-door voter outreach and organisational works such as appointments of booth-level functionaries such as 'panna pramukhs' are completed in time and there are no last-minute challenges," Kapoor said.

According to one of the in-charges, "They will supervise anything and everything related to the party's political and organisational activities in their Lok Sabha seats."

Harsh Malhotra, the BJP's Delhi unit general secretary, will be in charge of the East Delhi seat; Dinesh Pratap Singh, the state unit vice president, for New Delhi; former mayor Jai Prakash for West Delhi and



Kamaljeet Sehrawat for North East Delhi.

Yogendra Chandaulia, the BJP's Delhi general secretary, has been appointed the in-charge for the North West Delhi constituency; Rajiv Babbar for South Delhi and Rajesh Bhatia for the Chandni

Chowk seat. The BJP won all seven seats in the 2014 and 2019 polls.

A senior BJP functionary in Delhi said the in-charges are treated as the party's nominees from their assigned seats and added, "They are expected to prepare for the polls at the

organisational and the political levels as they themselves would do if given a ticket".

The Lok Sabha in-charges attend important organisational meetings and coordinate with district unit chiefs and in-charges on political and organisational activities in the constituency assigned to them, party leaders said.

They also provide feedback to the party leadership formally and informally on a wide range of issues, including the performance and popularity of sitting MPs, as well as suitable probabilities from the seat assigned to them, they added. The BJP will be up against the AAP and the Congress in Delhi. The BJP is banking on the Modi charisma.

Recently, the AAP conven-

er Arvind Kejriwal had announced in the Delhi Assembly that the next election would be fought in the full statehood to Delhi issue. He claimed that BJP would lose all seven seats, unlike 2019 when the saffron party had swept the polls.

While the AAP and the Congress are partners in the INDIA bloc, formed for the 2024 polls, they are till now going to the hustings alone. There were discussions on seat sharing between the two parties ahead of the 2019 elections. When the talks failed, the AAP and the Congress fielded separate candidates.

The BJP, however, polled more votes than the AAP and the Congress candidates combined in all seven seats.

Man shot dead at house over mistaken identity

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a case of mistaken identity, a 26-year-old man was allegedly shot dead at his house in south Delhi's Fatehpur Beri area on Saturday by an assailant who also attacked his family members and friends.

The police said the accused also got injured who was later caught by the victim's family and beaten up. He has been arrested. A PCR call regarding the incident was received at 9.45 pm on Saturday.

The deceased has been identified as Rahul Kishan while the accused is Karan Singh, who also resides in the Fatehpur Beri area. Rahul's brother Vickey, 24, was shot in the shoulder.

Police reached the spot at Harswroop Colony, Fatehpur Beri, and found that an injured Rahul was already taken to a hospital through his private vehicle, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Chandan Chowdhary.

Accused Karan Singh (39), a resident of Harswroop Colony, Fatehpur Beri, too was found in an injured condition at the spot and three live cartridges were recovered from him. He was also sent to the hospital, the DCP added.

According to officer, Karan wanted to attack Rahul's friend Sanjay, who owed him money, but he shot Rahul by mistake and later fought with everyone. The incident took place around 9.45 pm near the Fatehpur Beri temple.

Local residents soon alerted the police that someone had fired bullets in the area and that a group was fighting on the street. Chandan Chowdhary, Deputy Commissioner of Police



(South), said, "We went to the area and found that a man named Rahul was shot at and was taken to a hospital. Meanwhile, the accused was found lying injured at the spot. Three live cartridges were recovered from him. He was later sent to the hospital." Rahul was declared dead by doctors at the AIIMS Trauma Centre, the police found.

During the inquiry, the police said they found that Rahul, Vickey, their elder brother Jai and father Ram were sitting with a group of friends on their balcony.

"Around 9.30 pm, Karan Singh came with a pistol and fired at Rahul and ran away. His family alleged that the accused did not see anyone, and so he killed Rahul.

"His father and brother chased Karan and managed to catch him outside their house," the DCP said. A fight then broke out during which the family managed to overpower Karan and snatch his pistol.

They thrashed him, and took his pistol and bike so he could not escape, the police added. A crime team was sent to the spot and evidence was collected from the house and the streets. Karan was also interrogated and he confessed to the crime.

Transport dept's key policies hit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Key policies and schemes of the Delhi Government's Transport department, including electric vehicles and cab and bus aggregators, have been affected due to the disengagement of experts and consultants, official sources said on Sunday.

A total of 437 specialists, advisors and fellows appointed by the Arvind Kejriwal government in different departments were terminated by the Services department following the lieutenant governor's order.

The appointments were discontinued over alleged non-transparent manner of recruitment and violation of reservation norms. Later, the Finance department of the Delhi government also asked the departments to stop salaries of such appointees.

Officials said around 50 advisors and experts were engaged in the Transport department who were playing crucial role in formulations of various policies and schemes related to electric vehicle, cab aggregators and premium bus service.

"The work on these including electric vehicle policy 2.0, cab aggregator policy and premium bus service has



halted due to removal of the consultants. The highly qualified domain experts were disassociated with these policies and schemes that were still in formulation stage when they were given marching orders," a senior government officer said.

The issue was also raised in the recently concluded session of the Delhi Assembly. The 437 advisors and fellows removed included 116 working in the Delhi Assembly.

The House referred to its privileges committee the issue of disengagement of fellows for action against the officers responsible for doing so.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has challenged in the Supreme Court the termination of consultants and fellows appointed by it. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has assured Delhi people that hurdles like this may slow the speed of works undertaken by his government, but all the schemes and projects will continue.

Police cancel permission for panchayat on Nuh violence at Jantar Mantar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police cancelled permission to further continue a panchayat on Nuh violence organised at Jantar Mantar on Sunday after some individuals allegedly made controversial remarks during their speeches.

The Panchayat was organised by the All India Sanatan Federation to discuss the violence in Haryana's Nuh. A discussion was also scheduled to be held about Bittu Bajrangji who has been accused of inciting the mob during the violence on July 31.

Bajrangji was sent to judicial custody for 14 days by a court on August 17 in connection with communal clashes.



Pinky Chaudhary of Hindu Raksha Dal and Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati also delivered speeches during the Panchayat. While addressing the crowd, Saraswati stated that if the situation does not change, "a non-Hindu could

become the Prime Minister of India by 2029". Senior police officers then intervened, urging the organiser to ensure speeches against other religions were not made.

Despite that, Saraswati further said that "Hindus should

also do Jihad", apart from making a few more controversial remarks to which the Delhi Police objected. Subsequently, the police revoked their permission and dispersed the assembly.

Narsinghanand is no stranger to controversy. For months, he has been accused of making deeply offensive remarks against women and minorities. His videos and words reach millions on social media, spawning an army of right-wing followers.

Prior to his speech, a large number of police personnel were deployed at Jantar Mantar.

The police had initially granted permission to the organisers for the panchayat with only 100 attendees.

MCD aims to build G20 commemorative park

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With less than three weeks to go before the G20 Summit here, civic officials on Sunday said they aim to build a thematic park to commemorate India's presidency of the bloc before the mega event. The G20-themed park will be developed on the premises of an existing one in M Block of

Greater Kailash 2.

"The park will have the logo of the G20 made in an artistic style, besides other artwork. It will also have stone sculptures of elephants and other animals to add to the charm," a top Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) official said.

Asked about the project's timeline, he said the aim is to

"gift" the park to the people as soon as possible.

"Since the G20 Summit begins on September 9, the target is to build it before the event," he said. India assumed the G20 presidency on December 1, following which about 200 meetings have taken place under different tracks. The summit is scheduled for September 9-10.

"We have planned a number of things to spruce up the city and improve civic amenities ahead of the summit. We plan to place more than a lakh flower pots at various prominent locations, extra dustbins will be kept in the streets to control littering at key location and markets," a top MCD official had earlier said.

The redevelopment of

Shaheedi Park was also taken up as part of the civic projects ahead of the summit.

The park in the ITO area is located near Pragati Maidan, which houses a recently-inaugurated state-of-the-art convention complex that will be the venue of the summit.

Shaheedi Park, which has been redeveloped as an open-air museum park with sculp-

tures of freedom fighters and other Indian heroes made from scrap materials, was inaugurated on August 8 and opened to the public a day later.

In Delhi, other civic projects undertaken include beautification work at the Mahipalpur roundabout near the airport and development works at a market near PVR Anupam.

'Regularise service of MCD adhoc, daily wagers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP urged the Arvind Kejriwal Government to announce regularisation of service of all adhoc, daily wage & contractual employees of Municipal Corporation of Delhi during his felicitation programme being forcibly organised in the name of municipal employees by the Mayor Dr. Shelly Oberoi on August 21.

Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has in appeal letter tweeted to the Kejriwal has said that the thousands of teachers, engineers, data operators, other clerical staff, DBC workers, horticulture & sanitation workers have been working for over a decade or two decades either on adhoc basis or as daily wage or as contractual employees.

Most of these employees are backbone of M.C.D. working for quite long and have crossed the age to be eligible to apply for work elsewhere.

Kapoor has said M.C.D. employees are hopeful that the Delhi CM Kejriwal who for last two days has been promising to voters of Madhya Pradesh & Chhatisgarh that once in power AAP will regularise all temporary government employees will take lead to regularise the adhoc, daily wage & contractual temporary employees of MCD to set a quotable example. The BJP leader has said that all day today the office of Mayor of Delhi has been pressurising employees union especially of the temporary employees to make the employees attend the forcibly arranged programme to felicitate the Chief Minister & the Mayor for giving salary on time.

Rajiv a true patriot, says Cong on his birth anniv

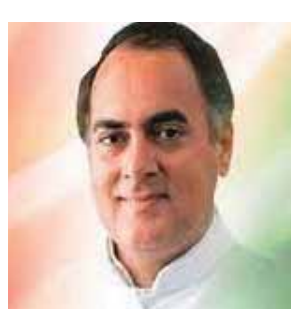
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Sunday remembered former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his birth anniversary, saying he was a "true patriot" and "Messiah for dalit people" who made invaluable contributions in the making of 21st century India.

Delhi Congress vice president and former MLA Jai Kishan paid a heartfelt tribute to Rajiv Gandhi and said the nation continues to benefit from his vision that dreamt of

a strong and progressive India in the 21st century. On this occasion, Jai Kishan, organized a march in the memory of his leader and distributed fruits and medicines to the patients admitted at Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital, Bhagwan Mahaveer Hospital, Maharishi Valmiki Hospital, Babu Jagjivan Ram Hospitals. He also distributed sports material and clothes to poor children living in his constituency.

Jai Kishan said Rajiv



Gandhi was a leader who inspired hope among millions of Indians. Describing him as an architect of Digital India, the

Congress leader said he brought to computer in India.

He said Rajiv Gandhi's "revolutionary thinking and resolve on issues like information revolution, Panchayati Raj system and giving voting rights to the youth made India a developed democracy and a modern nation".

"His life will always be inspirational for all the countrymen," he said.

Delhi Congress president Anil Choudhary along with party workers paid tribute to Rajiv Gandhi at the party office.

Govt launches portal to lodge complaints against damage to trees, wildlife

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Forest Department on Sunday launched a portal to facilitate rapid response to threats and offences concerning trees, forests, and wildlife. Environment Minister Gopal Rai launched the portal — accessible at ghl.Eforest.Delhi.Gov.In — saying it serves as a centralised platform for swift action on complaints received through the Green Helpline (1800-11-8600) and will ensure timely intervention in critical situations.

One of the key features of the portal is that it will have on record all complaints registered on the helpline.

Additionally, it provides a comprehensive view of the actions taken by the Department of Forest and Wildlife in response to these complaints.

This transparency ensures that stakeholders can easily track the status of actions taken, promoting accountability and effective collaboration, Rai said.

Issues that can be reported and addressed through the



portal include damage to trees, attempts to encroach upon forest land, threats to wildlife, wildlife in need of rescue, and other wildlife offences.

The Van Mahotsav program in Rohini was started by Rai by planting saplings.

The minister said, "With the participation of MLAs and councilors of Delhi, a campaign will be started to distribute free medicinal plants in all 70 assembly for Delhiites in the hopes that the people of Delhi will join in on this massive plantation drive alongside the Government.

Along with this, 14 government nurseries in Delhi are also give away free medicinal plants so that individuals can take part in promoting Delhi's green space by planting trees in their homes.

Man fires at cousin's home over property dispute; held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old man was arrested for allegedly firing at the home of his cousin in Tughlakabad Extension over a property dispute, police said on Sunday. The accused has been identified as Kamal Nagar, a resident of Aali village, they said. The complainant Jasbir Singh was at home when he heard the sound of gunshot around 11 pm on August 5. He later found that two people had fired at the gate of his house, the police said.

Singh informed that there was a dispute over a property in the Sadullabad village of Greater Noida between him and his cousins Kamal and Raju, they said. The complainant had also received a threat to his life in this regard from Kamal on August 3. He suspected that Kamal and Raju had fired at his home, the police added.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Rajesh Deo said the police got a tip-off that Kamal, who was wanted in an attempt to murder case at Govindpuri police station, would come near the Aali village around 4 pm on Saturday.

'Bishnoi gang had made 3 attempts to kill Salman'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Gangster Lawrence Bishnoi is reported to have given the contract to kill Bollywood superstar Salman Khan to his brother and fellow gangster, Anmol Bishnoi.

Sources in Delhi Police said that Lawrence Bishnoi had planned three attempts to eliminate Salman Khan, but each attempt failed. These three operations, designed by Bishnoi to kill Salman Khan, were led by gangsters Sampat Nehra, Deepak, and Tinu.

"The trio failed in their mission. Subsequently, Lawrence Bishnoi decided to assign the task of killing



Salman Khan to someone else, opting for his brother Anmol to execute the operation," sources said.

The sources also revealed that Lawrence's gang has started using Germany-made PS 30 pistols instead of the Turkish-made Zigana pistols. These

pistols are procured at prices between Rs 8 and 10 lakh and the gang is receiving these weapons from foreign-based associates.

"Ranjit Dupla, based in the USA, is in contact with members of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. Dupla was previously a Punjab-based gangster who fled to the USA and is now an international arms dealer. In 2017, Dupla was declared a proclaimed offender by the District Court of Faridkot in Punjab, in connection with an arms smuggling case," the official said.

Sources said that Dupla also faces charges of murder, kidnapping, attempted murder, dacoity, and contract

killing. He was last apprehended in 2014, with a significant number of foreign weapons recovered from him, which he used to supply to Punjab-based gangsters.

Currently, agencies are working to repatriate him to India. The sources also mentioned that the Lawrence Bishnoi gang is working to expand its network in Southern states, with Sampat Nehra recruiting young individuals into the gang.

"Kala Jathedi, Naresh Sethi, Rohit Mui, and Kapil Sangwan alias Nandu are openly providing full support to Lawrence Bishnoi. They are part of the Bishnoi syndicate," the source said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A gang which duped people on the pretext of facilitating loans and operated a bogus finance company as well as its call centre has been busted with the arrest of six persons, police said on Sunday.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central Noida) Rajiv Dixit said bank accounts which had in total Rs 14 lakh that was

Loan fraud gang busted, 6 arrested

duped from gullible people have been frozen.

It is suspected that the gang has cheated people of crores of rupees and the investigation into the case is underway, the officer said. "The gang was busted by officials of the Sector 63 police station fol-

lowing information that it was operating a fake call centre in their area and had floated a bogus company named Finance Hub Group," Dixit told reporters.

Explaining the gang's mode of operation, he said, "Once the gang trapped a tar-

get, they would demand money in the name of commission, loan approval fees, file charge and end up extorting Rs 25,000 and Rs 30,000."

"The gang also prepared forged loan approval documents in the name of Finance Hub Group," the officer said.

He said six members of the gang, including its mastermind, have been arrested. Rs 14,64,000 was found in bank accounts linked to the company. These accounts have been frozen, Dixit said.

Those held have been identified as gang leader Vipin

Kumar, Himanshu Sharma, Pankaj Kumar, Avnish Kumar, Puneet Gautam and Abhishek Singh, the police said. According to the police, the gang had changed its location within the Delhi-NCR in the past. Its leader, who worked at a fake call centre in 2014, had

been arrested by the Bihar Police.

The accused have been booked under IPC sections related to cheating, forgery of documents and under provisions of the Information Technology Act, the police added.

Revision of schedule to discuss key criminal law Bills sought

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Some members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs which is set to discuss the three key criminal law Bills have protested against being asked at "short notice" to participate in meetings to discuss the proposed legislations.

At least three members - TMC's Derek O'Brien and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, and Congress leader Digvijay Singh - have written to the committee chairman Brjraj questioning the scheduling of the meetings on August 24, 25 and 26 and demanding that the dates be revised, sources said.

The committee is scheduled to discuss the Bharatiya



Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023 that seek to overhaul the Indian criminal justice system by replacing the Indian Penal Code 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

The committee, according to the original schedule, was to meet on August 24 to adopt a draft report on 'Prison-Condition Infrastructure and Reforms' - a subject on which it has been deliberating for long.

Opposition members had earlier walked out in protest

during the meeting to discuss the prison reforms issue, citing the committee's failure to discuss the Manipur issue.

A fresh notice was issued to the members on August 18 night that on August 24, 25 and 26, Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla will brief the members on the various aspects of the three bills.

In his letter, O'Brien said that with the conclusion of the Monsoon session of Parliament, members of both Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha have commitments in their constituencies.

"This is too short a notice (a few days only) for discussion of a Bill with implications of this magnitude. Please revise the dates and schedule it in the

month of September, considering that many members of the committee are present for these meetings," he said in his letter.

Another member said that the bills were referred to the committee on August 18 and on the same day members received notices on the date of the deliberations.

"On the same day, as the bill was referred to the committee, we receive notices that it has been listed for deliberations.

"This is very surprising, considering, the committee was immune to our requests to discuss the ongoing violence in Manipur. But now, the same committee is in a tearing hurry," the member said.

Rahul speaking like China's propaganda machinery: BJP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday condemned Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's claim that China has grabbed grazing land in Ladakh, alleging he was defaming India by making statements like Beijing's "propaganda machinery".

Senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad dismissed Gandhi's claims as "absolutely wrong" and said China had to withdraw in Galwan due to the bravery and sacrifices of the Indian soldiers.

The BJP's reaction came after Gandhi claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that not an inch of the land in Ladakh has been taken over by China is not true.

The people of Ladakh are



concerned about their grazing land "taken over by the Chinese Army," Gandhi, who is visiting Ladakh, said after paying tributes to his father and former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on his birth anniversary.

Lashing out at Rahul Gandhi for his claims, Prasad said at a press conference, "Whatever you have said about Ladakh is absolutely wrong... I condemn your entire statement on behalf of the party."

"Rahul Gandhi ji, you are raising questions over our soldiers' bravery and sacrifice in

Galwan... Why do you defame India visiting there? Why do you become China's propaganda machinery?" the BJP leader said.

"Rahul Gandhi, whenever you visit border area you say something and you offer propaganda to China against India," he added.

Prasad said that China had to withdraw in Galwan due to the bravery and sacrifice of Indian soldiers.

"Is it the truth or not?" he asked, alleging that it has become the "nature of Rahul Gandhi to make anti-India statements".

The BJP leader questioned Gandhi's understanding of issues related to India's security and appealed to the Congress leader to not weaken the morale of the country with such remarks.

'Nitish dreams of becoming PM but can't handle law & order in Bihar'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday attacked Chief Minister Nitish Kumar over recent incidents of crime in Bihar, saying he is dreaming of becoming Prime Minister of the country while he is not able to handle the law and order situation in his own state.

Taking note of Kumar recently visiting the national capital to pay tributes to late Atal Bihari Vajpayee at his memorial, senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad also wondered if it was an "honest" expression of his love for the former prime minister or he wanted to show "something" to his allies.

"What has happened to you Nitish babu? Few days ago, a police officer was murdered in Bihar. Then, a journalist was



influential people linked to those (allies) with whom you (Nitish Kumar) have formed government in the state," Prasad charged in a reference to JD(U) ally RJD.

On Kumar paying tributes to Vajpayee at his memorial in Delhi on August 6, Prasad said it's good that he visited his 'samadhi sthal' in the national capital.

"We both respect Atal ji... But why are you remembering Atal ji so much," he asked, adding "Whether it's your honest 'Atal premi' (love for late PM) or you are showing something to your allies."

"You (Nitish) continue to respect Atal ji. Entire country respects him. But I will make only one request to you not to play politics in his name. This is my humble suggestion to you," the BJP leader added.

influential people linked to those (allies) with whom you (Nitish Kumar) have formed government in the state," Prasad charged in a reference to JD(U) ally RJD.

On Kumar paying tributes to Vajpayee at his memorial in Delhi on August 6, Prasad said it's good that he visited his 'samadhi sthal' in the national capital.

"We both respect Atal ji... But why are you remembering Atal ji so much," he asked, adding "Whether it's your honest 'Atal premi' (love for late PM) or you are showing something to your allies."

"You (Nitish) continue to respect Atal ji. Entire country respects him. But I will make only one request to you not to play politics in his name. This is my humble suggestion to you," the BJP leader added.

5 yrs' RI to key accused in Bihar fake notes case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday said a key accused in the East Champaran, Bihar, fake currency case was on Saturday sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment (RI), along with fine, on various charges by the NIA Special Court, Patna, Bihar.

The accused, Raisuddin, has been sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment with a fine of Rs 5,000 under section 120-B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), with similar quantum of sentence and fine also awarded respectively under Section 489B of IPC and relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. All the sentences will run concurrently, the NIA said in a statement on Sunday.

A resident of village Mohanpur, Vaishnavnagar police station, Malda, West



Bengal, Raisuddin was convicted on August 18, 2023 in the NIA case, it said.

He is the fifth person to have been convicted and sentenced in the case relating to the East Champaran, Bihar, Fake Indian Currency Notes case.

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Patna, had initially registered a case on September 19, 2015 in the matter following the recovery and seizure of high quality Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) of face value of Rs. 5,94,000 from another accused,

Afroz Ansari. Afroz was carrying this consignment of FICNs to Buxar near the Indo-Nepal border for further delivery in Nepal.

NIA had subsequently taken over the case and re-registered it on December 23,

2015. Thorough investigations by NIA had led to the arrest and chargesheeting of eight accused persons over the last eight years, on July 22, 2016, April 17, 2017, March 19, 2019 and July 5, 2023.

Of these, four accused -- namely Afroz Ansari, Sunny Kumar alias Sunny Shaw, Ashraf Alam alias Ishraf Alam and Alomgir Seikh alias Raju, were convicted by the NIA Special Court on October 11, 2018.

J'khand CPI(M) arms seizure case: NIA files supplementary chargesheet against 16

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a supplementary chargesheet filed in the CPI (Maoist) arms and ammunition seizure case of Jharkhand, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday chargesheeted 16 accused, including a woman, taking the total number of accused named in the final report to 25.

The case relates to the arrest of banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) cadres and the seizure of a huge cache

of arms and ammunition from Peshwar police station, Lohardaga, Jharkhand.

The case, registered initially at the local Police Station on February 21, 2022, was re-registered by NIA on June 14, 2022.

The arrests and the seizures followed a raid in the forest area of Bulbul, where CPI (Maoist) Regional Commander Ravindra Ganju, along with active cadres Balram Oraon, Muneshwar Ganju, Balak Ganju, Dinesh Nagesia,

Aghnu Ganju, Lajim Ansari, Markush Nagesia, Sanjay Nagesia, Sheela Kherwar, Lalita Devi and around 40-60 others, had assembled to conspire and plan violent attacks on the security forces and in the bauxite mines area.

A joint operation was conducted by the local police and the CRPF, during which the CPI (Maoist) cadres had fired indiscriminately on the security forces on the way to Bahabar Jungle, at Harkatta Toli and Bangla Pat in Lohardaga.

4 new genes linked with breast cancer identified

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Current genetic tests for breast cancer only consider a few genes, such as BRCA1, BRCA2, and PALB2, however a team of researchers has now identified at least four more new genes called MAP3K1, LZTR1, SAMHD1 and CDKN2A associated with the disease. These could eventually be included in tests to identify women at increased risk of the disease.

The study based on large international data led by Professor Jacques Simard from Université Laval and Professor Douglas Easton at the University of Cambridge, UK says, "The identification of these new genes will contribute to our understanding of the genetic risk of breast cancer. This new knowledge will help improve risk prediction by better identifying those women at higher risk of the disease. This will better inform



approaches to breast screening, risk reduction and clinical management."

The strength of the study lies in the genetic data that was used for the analysis. Genetic changes in all genes were looked at in 26,000 women with breast cancer and 217,000 women without breast cancer. These included women from eight countries in Europe and Asia.

Talking about the overall breast cancer status in India, Dr (Prof) Meenu Walia Director, Senior Director and HOD, Medical Oncology, Max Hospital said that it is the

most common cancer among women here, accounting for a significant portion of cancer cases. Apart from genes, poor lifestyle, smoking, being overweight, taking hormone replacement therapy, drinking habits can also raise the risk of breast cancer.

"However, late-stage diagnoses are frequent due to factors such as limited access to quality healthcare, inadequate awareness, cultural taboos, and socioeconomic disparities.

The lack of routine screenings and early detection mechanisms further exacerbates the situation," she said and empha-

sized on awareness, improving healthcare accessibility, and advocating for timely screenings. More than 13% of all cancer cases in India start from the breasts, say the doctors.

Agreeing with Dr Walia, Praveen Sikri, CEO of Ikris Pharma Network shared that they are doing their bit in this regard and have planned "Ikris Run" in Noida on October 8. "The 'Ikris Run' aims to create awareness in the society focusing on prevention, early diagnosis and treatment," said Sikri.

In fact, a research from the University of Oxford has stated that women diagnosed with early breast cancer are 66% less likely to die from the disease than they were 20 years ago, and most can expect to become "long-term survivors".

The study reveals that the risk of death within five years of diagnosis was 14.4% for women diagnosed between 1993 and 1999.

Severe Covid-19 may cause alterations to immune system, find researchers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Those who had severe Covid-19 should not lower their guard. Researchers have found that severe Covid-19 may have caused long-lasting alterations to the innate immune system, the first line of defense against pathogens.

"These changes may help explain why the disease can damage so many different organs and why some people with long Covid have high levels of inflammation throughout the body," says a study published in the journal Cell.

Researchers led by Steven Z. Josefowicz, of Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City examined immune cells and molecules in blood samples from 38 people recovering from severe Covid-19 and other severe illnesses, as well as from 19 healthy people. Notably, the researchers established a new technique for collecting, concentrating and



characterizing very rare blood-forming stem cells that circulate in the blood, eliminating the need to extract such cells from bone marrow.

In these rare stem cells—the parents of immune-system cells—taken from people recovering from Covid-19, the scientists identified changes in the instructions for which genes got turned on or off. These changes were passed down to daughter cells, leading them to boost production of immune cells called monocytes. In the monocytes from

people recovering from severe COVID-19, the changes in gene expression led the cells to pump out greater amounts of molecules called inflammatory cytokines than monocytes from people who were healthy or had non-Covid-19 illnesses.

The researchers observed these changes as much as a year after the participants came down with Covid-19. Due to the small number of study participants, the scientists could not establish a direct association between the cellular and molecular changes and

health outcomes. The investigators suspected that an inflammatory cytokine called IL-6 might play a role in establishing the changes in gene-expression instructions. They tested their hypothesis both in mice with Covid-19-like disease and in people with Covid-19. In these experiments, some of the subjects received antibodies at the early stage of illness that prevented IL-6 from binding to cells.

During recovery, these mice and people had lower levels of altered stem cell gene-expression instructions, monocyte production and inflammatory cytokine production than subjects that didn't receive the antibody. These findings suggest that SARS-CoV-2 can cause changes in gene expression that ultimately boost the production of inflammatory cytokines, and one type of those cytokines perpetuates the process by inducing these changes in stem cells even after the illness is over.

Experts stress on planning regulatory framework to reduce tobacco consumption

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a series of conclaves to explore alternative approaches for reducing tobacco consumption, experts have underscored the need for a dynamic regulatory framework accommodating safer alternatives and empowering adult smokers to make informed decisions.

At the interactive seminars held across Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai, over 100 doctors and public health experts proposed a comprehensive framework to generate scientific evidence that supports harm reduction strategies and promotes a healthier India.

Dr Chandrakant S Pandav, a global public health expert, stressed on the challenges of quitting smoking and the importance of seeking assistance. "To achieve India's objective of reducing tobacco users,



there is a need to emphasize cessation efforts. Various nicotine alternatives have shown promise in helping individuals quit smoking. Through consultations and public education campaigns, we can provide accurate information and support individuals in making healthier choices," she said.

Dr Pandav highlighted the importance of understanding India's unique context in developing effective strategies. "Through research, science and collaboration, we can navigate the path towards a healthier India," he said.

On the matter of generating scientific evidence, experts proposed a multi-pronged approach. They said that to create a healthier India, the country must align with global efforts in harm reduction, research and evidence-based tobacco control strategies.

Humbled, grateful to be part of this institution: Tharoor after CWC inclusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor Sunday said he was honoured by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and the central leadership's decision to nominate him to the working committee and asserted that countless Indians who seek a more inclusive India "deserve the best" from the party.

Kharge on Sunday reconstituted the party's top decision-making body, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), with 39 members, 32 permanent invitees and 13 special invitees.

Tharoor, who unsuccessfully ran for the post of Congress chief against Kharge in the internal polls last year, has been included in the committee along with the likes of Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K C Venugopal, P Chidambaram and Sachin



Pilot, among others.

"I am honoured by the decision of the @INCIndia President Shri Mallikarjun @Kharge ji and the Congress central leadership to nominate me to the Working Committee," Tharoor said in a post on X.

"As one who is aware of the historic role played by the CWC in guiding the party over the last 138 years, I am humbled and grateful to be part of this institution, and look forward to the opportunity to serve the party alongside my dedicated colleagues," the MP

from Thiruvananthapuram said in the post as well as a video message.

He said, "None of us can accomplish anything without the lakhs of committed workers who are the lifeblood of the party. Today, above all, I bow to them. It is their work that keeps the Congress going. The countless Indians who seek a more inclusive and accepting India deserve the best from us."

"I will play my part," he added in the video message from Germany's Hamburg, where he is on a visit.

Tharoor had managed 1,072 votes against perceived party establishment favourite Kharge's 7,897 in the presidential election, only the sixth in the party's 137-year-old history.

Tharoor was part of the group of 23 leaders that had raised questions on the Congress' leadership under Sonia Gandhi.

HC to hear plea against inclusion of CAs under money laundering law

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday will hear a petition challenging the inclusion of chartered accountants, company secretaries and cost accountants within the ambit of "reporting entities" under the anti-money laundering law and fastening of criminal liability on them in case of non-compliance of the legal provisions.

The petition by Rajat Mohan, a practising chartered accountant (CA), is listed for hearing before a bench of Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Sanjeev Narula.

The plea said by including CAs and other professionals within the definition of "reporting entities" under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), "onerous obligations" have been put on them with consequences of noncompliance

leading to criminal prosecution, and it virtually makes such professionals engage in "policing" their own clients with whom they interact in fiduciary capacity.

"The Petitioner by way of the present writ petition is challenging the validity of Gazette Notification No. S.O.2036(E) dated 03.05.2023 passed by the Respondents wherein they have read into the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 and expanded the definition of the word 'person' used in Section 2(1)(sa)(vi) as well as the definition of the word 'activity' used in PMLA. Specifically, a class of professionals i.e., Chartered Accountants/Company Secretaries/Cost Accountants have been included within the definition of 'Reporting Entities,' the petition filed through advocates Shweta Kapoor and R K Kapoor said.

Y20 Summit concludes in Kashi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Four-day long Youth-20 Summit under G-20 concluded at Rudraksh International Cooperation and Convention Centre (RICCC) here on Sunday successfully. More than 100 youths from G20 countries, guest countries and international organisations engaged in Discussion on Y20 Draft Communiqué. They were mainly engaged in deliberations and negotiations on five identified themes of Y20 including future of work; peace-building and reconciliation; climate change and disaster risk reduction; shared future and health, wellbeing and sports.



Senior Youth Affairs Ministry officers addressing a press conference on the last day of Y20 in Varanasi on Sunday.

This holy city which is also the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On the last day, Pankaj Kumar Singh, Director, Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports; S Rajalingam, District Magistrate (Varanasi); Prashant Kakkar (IIS), M&CO, PIB; Anmol Sovit, Y20 Chair; Falit Sijariya, Head of Delegation, Y20 India and Lakshit Mittal, Track Chair, Y20 India addressed the media during a press conference on the concluding day of the Y20 Summit.

According to them, under the overall framework of G-20 Presidency, a number of events were organised including the Y20 curtain raiser in New Delhi, inception meeting in Guwahati, Y20 Pre-Summit at Leh, Ladakh, 14 Y20 consulta-

tions at various universities across the country and 50 brainstorming sessions each by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). Y20 under the overall framework of G-20 under the Presidency of India has set new milestones for the world. During the summit, Y20 Communiqué was discussed and negotiated, thereafter, it was signed successfully with global consent.

They informed that the major recommendations included in the Communiqué are empower lifelong learning; prepare the global workforce for challenges; strengthen international research collaboration; promote universal gig worker rights and implement accessible sustainable financing

and mentoring.

At a plenary session held on the last day Sharad Vivek Sagar, Anmol Sovit, Pathikrit Payne, Falit Sijariya and Aditi Narayani Paswan led the session. The Y20 2023 communiqué was released by the trioka countries composed of Chair Y20 India, Indonesia Organising Committee Representative and Brazil Organising Committee Representative. The flag was officially handed over by Y20 India Chair to the Brazilian Head of Delegation.

Outcome of the Summit in the form of the Y20 Communiqué was signed by Heads of Delegation, which marked the conclusion of the various discussions held during the last few months. It is a testament to the collective common vision across the five identified themes of Y20, which will ensure that the voices of young people are heard by the highest-level decision-makers on a global platform.

During the 4-day summit, delegates visited Sarnath, the famous Kashi Vishwanath Temple and the Ganga ghats during a river cruise. India's rich art, culture and heritage left a long-lasting impression on the delegates from across the world. Rich and diverse cultural heritage of the holy city of Varanasi; its spirituality, literature, art, and music also mesmerized the delegates from G20 countries, guest countries and international organisations.

Muslim Boarding House raided, pistols, crude bombs recovered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Colonelganj police raided the premises of Muslim Boarding House (MBH) late on Saturday on reports of a fight among the inmates and recovered two country made pistols and around 30 crude bombs from one of the rooms of the hostel.

According to Inspector Colonelganj, Brijesh Singh, the raid followed a complaint lodged by one of the inmates of the hostel, Asif, who named around a dozen inmates who had threatened and beaten him badly.

After filing the report, we raided the premises of MBH House and found two country-made pistols and around 30 crude bombs from room number 57 of the hostel. The room has been sealed and efforts are on to nab the accused inmates who have fled after the incident," he added.

In another incident, a fight between groups of inmates from SSL Hostel of Allahabad University and KPUC (a trust hostel) was reported on Independence Day. The next day both the groups again clashed. The Colonelganj police registered three FIRs in this incident.

The first FIR has been

lodge by Shivam Yadav, a BA first year student and inmate of KPUC hostel, against Bharat Mishra, Avnish Yadav, Kaushal Yadav, Vidit Shukla, Akash and Upkar Singh at Colonelganj police station. He alleged that on August 15 he was taking a selfie with friends when the accused, who is an inmate of SSL hostel, arrived there and thrashed him with rods.

The second FIR has been lodged by a student named Aditya Shrinet against Saurabh, Deepak, Shivank, Uday, Aryan, Sundaram, Sudhanshu, Ajit and 15 unidentified students. It is alleged that on August 15, accused Saurabh, Deepak, Shivank and others had attacked him.

The third FIR has been registered by the Colonelganj police against 100 unknown students. According to the police, late on August 16 night an information was received that some hostel inmates were pelting stones near Holland Hall gate. When police tried to nab them, they fled to KPUC and SSL hostels. Police are examining the CCTV footage and efforts are on to nab the culprits.

SCHEDULE RELEASED: The Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) has

released the schedule of two major recruitments— Additional Private Secretary (APS) Exam 2023 and Review Officer (RO)/Assistant Review Officer (ARO) Exam 2023.

It is after around 10 years that the post of APS has been advertised by UPPSC. This time, aspirants can submit applications against around 300 posts of APS from the second week of next month. Likewise, the post of RO/ARO has been advertised after 2021. For this, the aspirants can submit their applications from the first week of October against the recruitment of 181 posts of RO/ARO.

The recruitment for APS was delayed due to non-revision of rules. In the revised Private Secretary Service Rules-2023, the dispute of equivalent qualification has been resolved. Considering the post of APS as Group 'B' gazetted, the requirement of triple-C computer certificate from National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT) has been kept. CCC is a programme that teaches the fundamentals of computer and information technology to the common man. The CCC certificate is provided by NIELIT and aims to expand the digital footprint in the country. The UPPSC has

made it clear that OTR (one time registration - single opportunity registration) is mandatory for applying for any post.

Under secretary Dharmendra Kumar Tripathi has advised the candidates to visit the website www.otr.parksh.nic to complete the OTR process. Failure to apply online due to non-receipt of OTR number will be the sole responsibility of the candidate.

Likewise, advertisements for Combined State Agricultural Service Examination 2023 will also be released soon.

Earlier, the recruitment for the same was done in 2020 for 564 posts of agriculture services. Meanwhile, many aspirants have requested the commission to consider the problem of those candidates who have become crossed the age limit due to non-advertisement of APS recruitment for a decade.

These candidates claim that the commission kept getting requisitions from the government every year. Still, for the last 10 years, recruitment was not done on some pretext, because of which hundreds of aspirants have become over-aged. The age limit for APS is 21 to 40 years.

Mayor launches website of Sansad Sanskritik Mahotsav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The website and QR code of 'Kashi Sansad Sanskritik Mahotsav' were formally launched on Sunday by Mayor Ashok Tiwari in the presence of regional Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Dilip Singh Patel, Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Morya, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma and city BJP chief Vidya Sagar Rai.



Mayor Ashok Tiwari and others launching website of Kashi Sansad Sanskritik Mahotsav in Varanasi on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Mayor Ashok Tiwari said that the festival will be a huge platform for such artists who remained unsung by not getting proper platform to explore their talents. Dilip Singh Patel said that the festival will provide a platform to the hidden talents of the city as well as of the villages of the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He suggested that the participating artists should be given certificates.

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam said that in the festival, it is being ensured that not only schoolchildren, but artists from all walks of life should participate and it will such a platform for emerging artists in the fields of various genres, so that such artists will

be able to showcase their talents through the platform. Welcoming the people, Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal said that it will be ensured that the programme is held every year in the district so that artists can get proper platform. The festival will be organised at nyay panchayat rural level from September 1 to 5 and then at block level from September 7 to 12, while in urban areas from zonal level from September 1 to 10 followed by district level from September 17 to 23. The mega event will be held on September 24.

Earlier, to review the preparations of the festival a meeting of officers was held under the chairmanship of DM at Vikas Bhavan. The DM instructed the officers that all the preparations related to the festival should be completed on a war footing. Rajalingam laid special emphasis on maximum registration of the participants in order to organise the festival on a grand and large-scale. "For this, by contacting various organisations, committees, auto rickshaw associations, business units, entrepreneurs' bodies, police, defence force, Civil Defence, Divyangjan, Kinnar Samaj,

ashrams, groups of different provinces residing in the city, different classes etc, the efforts should be made to make the festival a popular," he said, directing the concerned officers to encourage maximum number of people to participate and register by giving wide publicity.

The DM said that for this festival starting from September 1, the places/venues of various cultural competitions to be held at different levels in rural and urban areas should be identified and other necessary arrangements including sound system should be made there in time. He said that all concerned officers and committees should make their preparations at a fast pace according to the responsibilities assigned to them and training givers, judges etc should be selected on time.

He also instructed to invite renowned artists for the mega event to be held at the district level and to take all other necessary actions without delay. He clearly said that any negligence at any level will not be tolerated in connection with the organisation of the festival. Several senior officers including CDO were also present.

Action against Javed Pump, others under Gangster Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The police has taken action against 10 people, including Javed Pump, accused in the Atala violence and arson case in Prayagraj under Gangster Act. Javed Pump was said to be the mastermind of the Atala violence by the police. The police has taken action against 10 people under the Gangster Act. They include Javed Mohammed Pump, Faisal Raza, Arif Ali, Asif Ahmed, Ahmed Ali, Ilyas, Asif, Abdul Rehman, Hamza Ansari and Aamir Khan. After the remarks of BJP leader Nupur Sharma, there was a fierce protest in the whole country. On June 10, 2022, after the Friday prayers, thousands of miscreants had gathered and pelted stones in Atala. The glasses of many vehicles were broken and dozens of jawans and policemen were injured. The glasses of houses were also broken.

For several days the entire Atala area was turned into a cantonment. All the shops and establishments were closed. After the violence the Prayagraj police had named Javed Pump as the mastermind of the violence and two days later, on June 12, his house was razed to the ground by bulldozers. Later Javed's wife had claimed that the house is in her name. When the investigating agencies started probing the literature found in the house of

After the remarks of BJP leader Nupur Sharma, there was a fierce protest in the whole country. On June 10, 2022, after the Friday prayers, thousands of miscreants had gathered and pelted stones in Atala.

Javed Ahmed alias Pump, objectionable material was found in it. After this the literature was translated. However, in the investigation, agencies did not find any concrete evidence. Presently Javed Mohammad alias Javed Pump is lodged in Deoria Jail. He is accused of using children to incite violence. Javed is accused of inciting people and asking them to reach Atala through WhatsApp. After the violence, on June 12, Javed's house was demolished by the PDA. The National Security Act (NSA) was also invoked against him in July. On the report of the police DM Sanjay Khatri had ordered that NSA should be invoked and this order was served on Javed Mohammad in jail.

GHUMANTU GANG: Apart from conducting reece of targets like - jewellery shops - located in rural areas, women members of Ghumantu gang also play a vital role in disposing of booty - through their clients or agents in native

towns. Women members of the gang compile all details of target victims like number of members in family, exact location of house, opening and closing jewellery shops-cum-house, escape route through fields. The women also chalk out plan with their men counterparts as to when and where the dacoity was to be executed and its only their male counterparts to execute the crime. After the arrest of five women members of the gang, who were part of the Tharwai dacoity spilled the beans about gang's modus operandi particularly role and responsibilities being performed by women gang members. A senior police official said, "We have compiled enough details about the Ghumantu gang as women gang members of all age groups play a vital role in gang." He added, "Women members, mostly uneducated, move in groups while conducting reece and identify such locations without CCTVs. Women share all inputs with their women

counterparts and decide to target those targets are close to fields." Interestingly, women gang members have their agents in native villages to dispose of stolen or looted jewellery. They carry it in ordinary bags to evade police action. The gang members prefer to travel in train routes and reach the destination site where the crime to be executed either week or 10 days before the crime. They talk in their code words. Senior police officials probing the Hetapatti dacoity case, wherein a private watchman was killed and three members of a trader's family, was a handiwork of Shahjahanpur-based 'Baddik Marwari Ghumantu' gang. The gang who used to move from one village/block to another along with their families - women and children - and opt a different modus operandi. The women members of the gang often turn into small vendors selling mats and toys while executing reece. They are less interested in selling toys or mats and more in collecting information about their targets. "Women gang members mainly focus on jewellery shops located in rural areas," said commissioner of police Ramiit Sharma adding, "Once identifying the target, these women members also used to find out the entry and escape route particular the lanes where CCTV sets are not installed", he added.

Use force to remove encroachments: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam has directed the department concerned to use force to remove the encroachments on Kutchery-Ashapur-Sandaha route by making coordination with the ADM-City. He also directed to shift the religious places creating hurdles on widening and consolidating the road.



The DM chairing a meeting regarding the construction of under-construction road at Vikas Bhavan.

Chairing a meeting convened at Vikas Bhavan here on Saturday to address the problems being faced by the departments in the construction of under-construction roads and bridges, the DM directed the PWD to use force to evacuate the encroached land creating hurdle in the work of widening and consolidating of the road on Kutchery-Ashapur-Sandaha by coordinating with the ADM-City. On the information that despite being paid the compensation, the owners of some buildings on this route are protesting the demolishing of the buildings, the DM directed the department concerned to coordinate with the ADM-City and take action using the force. The DM directed the power department to speed up the work of pole shifting of this route.

On being informed about a Kali Mata Mandir creating hurdles on the works of widening and consolidating the road on Lahartara-BHU-Ravindrपुरi-Vijaya Cinema, the DM directed the department concerned to identify a place and shift the temple there. The DM directed the department concerned to increase the number of team to cut the trees creating hurdles on the works of widening and consolidating the road from Mohan Sarai to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Nagar, Chakia and asked the executive engineer of PWD to shift religious places

creating obstacles for the same works by coordinating with the ADM-City. On being informed that the amount of shifting in the works of widening and consolidating the road of Parao Ramnagar (Tengara Turn) has been paid to the Halka of Chandauli Section but the despite this the shift work has not been done till now, the DM expressed displeasure over it and directed the power department to speed up the pole shifting work.

The DM directed for constituting a team under the chairmanship of ADM-City and start the demolishing the

encroachment on Kali Mata Mandir-Awas Vikas Colony, Azamgarh Road which are creating hurdles in the work of widening and consolidating of the four lane road from Pandeypur to Ring Road. The DM directed the PWD to shift to the Halka of Chandauli Section but the despite this the work should be speeded up and coordination should be established among the departments concerned to remove the hurdles on the construction work, the DM directed.

The CDO Himanshu Nagpal was also present in the meeting.

Woman's body found hanging

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The body of a married woman was found hanging from the ceiling under Jigna police station. Gudiya (30) wife of Raju Saroj, a resident of Gaura village was sleeping in her room at night when her family members noticed her daughter crying. When they went to the room and saw Gudiya hanging from the ceiling, they brought her down but she had died. On information the police reached on the spot and took possession of the body. The mother of the deceased, Savita, a resident of Tudihar village under Meja police station, Prayagraj, lodged a complaint with the police alleging that her daughter was murdered by her two brothers-in-law. Gudiya was married in the year 2015 and she had four children. Her husband is working in Bengaluru and she was living at the house in Gaura village. Station Officer (SO) Jigna Ravi Kant Mishra said any further action will be taken only after getting the post-mortem report.

ONE RUN OVER BY TRAIN: One person was run over by a train in an area under Chunar police station. According to a report Umesh (34), a resident of Gogipur Kargahar, Rohtas, was crossing the railway track near Dhauha village when he was hit by the train. On getting information, the police reached the spot and took the body into possession. **S A M P O O R N A SAMADHAN DIWAS:** District Magistrate Diya Mittal while addressing the officials on the occasion of Sampoorna Samadhan Diwas organised at tehsil headquarters Madihan on Saturday. She said if any complainant came for the disposal of the same complaint second time it means that it was not disposed of properly and the official concerned deserved punitive action after proper inquiry. An aggrieved, Ramani Devi of Kuhuki village complained that she had been deprived of Divyang pension for the past few months. The DM asked the official concerned to look into the matter and inform her after proper disposal. Sandhya, a resident of Baghauda village, said two years ago a Pradhan Mantri Awas had been sanctioned to her husband Ram Asarey but he died and the first instalment was allegedly withdrawn by the pradhan and still she was waiting for the house. The DM asked the BDO Rajgarh to reg-

ister the case against the said pradhan and inquire into the matter. She directed to ensure registration of cases on the portal concerned. Out of 97 cases six were disposed of on the spot and for the rest the teams were formed to dispose it. On the day the officials, including sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) Yugantar Tripathi, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr CL Verma, chief conservator of Forest, naib tehsildar Bindu Nandan Singh, Social Welfare Officer Girish Dubey and other officials were present. In Chunar tehsil Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue) Shiv Pratap Shukla heard the grievances of the people and out of 68 complaints only two could be disposed of on the spot. In Sadar tehsil ADM (Namami Gange) Devendra Pratap Singh presided over the proceedings and out of 207 complaints only five could be disposed of on the spot. At Lalganj tehsil ADM (Land Revenue) Satya Prakash Singh heard the problems of the people, disposed of cases and formed teams. He directed the SDM Bharat Lal Saroj to issue show-cause notices to officials, including range officer forest Patehra, BDO Lalganj and others found absent with-

out permission. **FUNCTION:** Provincial Chief, Projects, Bharat Vikas Parishad, Sushil Singh, said that the organisation was working on five themes - service, dedication, cooperation, contact and culture. These views were expressed by him at a function organised under cultural week at Mahashakti Inter College Bihar on Saturday. Senior member Maya Mishra said sanitation, health and education is the aim of the organisation so her team selected the school of the area to provide sanitary pads to girl students and iron tablet to all students. She promised to hold a free medical help on the campus and make students aware of their health. Proposing the vote of thanks president Jawahar Singh Yadav emphasised on the importance of natural environment. He decided to plant fruit bearing trees on the college campus to generate interest among the students towards its protection.

Among those who took part in distribution of medicines, sanitary pads and plantation were Vishnu Narain Malviya, Amit Tiwari, Rajendra Agrawal, Nidhi Kesharwani and others.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

No questions, please!

The culture of muzzling voices and disallowing questions is taking roots in academia, too!

In recent times, academic and educational institutions have witnessed a series of unsettling events that have left many questioning the state of affairs. The firing of teachers at prestigious institutions like Ashoka University and Unacademy have raised concerns about the growing trend of silencing dissenting voices and stifling intellectual discourse. These incidents beg the question: Is the cherished tradition of asking questions and fostering critical thinking being eroded by a new culture of conformity? The recent dismissal of a teacher from Ashoka University sent shockwaves through the academic community. The university, known for its emphasis on interdisciplinary studies and open dialogue, found itself in a contentious situation when the decision to terminate an educator allegedly for his political views ignited a nationwide debate. The only fault of the fired individual was that it was unpleasant for the ruling party. His research paper was about how the BJP manipulated its election win. Not saying that he was right or wrong,



but he certainly did not deserve to be fired for it. There are so many researches which are questioned and debunked after they are published. The incident underscored the broader challenges faced by educational institutions in maintaining their commitment to free expression while negotiating pressures from various quarters. Similarly, Unacademy, a prominent online education platform, also faced backlash when it terminated an educator who had been vocal about socio-political issues on social media and asked his students to elect only educated leaders.

Both the Ashoka University and Unacademy incidents reflect a disturbing trend that threatens the bedrock of academia: freedom of expression and open discourse. In an environment where educators fear backlash for expressing their opinions, students are deprived of the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives and learn to think critically. The chilling effect on academic freedom compromises the very essence of education and hampers the growth of analytical and independent minds. The repercussions of suppressing dissenting voices are not limited to the classroom; they reverberate throughout society. A culture of conformity discourages innovation, impedes progress, and limits the potential for social change. Robust democracies thrive on the exchange of ideas, and when educators are muzzled, the entire nation suffers. The firing of teachers sheds light on a concerning shift in our society—a shift away from fostering an environment where questions are encouraged and debates are embraced. The erosion of academic freedom in these incidents raises serious questions about the future of education and the vitality of intellectual discourse. Only by championing open dialogue and thoughtful debate can we hope to navigate the complex challenges that lie ahead. It's time to reaffirm our commitment to asking questions, even when the answers might be uncomfortable, for it is through such inquiry that we forge a path to progress and understanding.

PICTALK



A transwoman carries 'Bonam' during 'pooja' on the occasion of 'Ganga Teppotsavami' in Hyderabad

Truth—a must for reconciliation

A reconciliation commission comprising of experts in archaeology and history should be formed to bring about reconciliation among the concerned communities



PRAFULL GORADIA

For any society or civilization to flourish, long spells of peace are needed, especially internal peace. The visionary Nelson Mandela appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission after apartheid rule was ended in South Africa, to make sure that the bitter memories of apartheid and ill-treatment of the black people by whites, who were essentially invaders and occupiers, are forgotten, as far as possible. India has much to learn from Mandela's example and the country needs permanent internal peace. This is unlikely to be established unless bitter memories etched in concrete by the invading settlers who occupied large parts of the country linger on.

South Africa suffered apartheid for nearly four centuries; India's experience has been twice that, seven or more centuries. The African experience has few concrete reminders except perhaps statues of some white rulers, whereas India has thousands of standing mosques that were originally temples. Some were converted overnight from temples to mosques for those believing in one exclusive god. Many others were demolished to their plinth and rebuilt with the consequential debris. This is not the same as converting a church into a mosque or vice versa, because both are simply prayer halls. A Hindu temple is a residence of the divine.

A Hindu is not forbidden from trying to visualize, see or mingle with the divine; i.e., a spiritual quest, and a temple, a platform for it, is one of the pathways to spirituality. A mosque, church or synagogue is merely a prayer hall, a room for paying obeisance to an unseen and unseeable God. The Third of the Ten Commandments states: "They shall not make any graven image of thy Lord the God"; Hinduism encourages divine idols to enable the worshipper to focus his worship. The Muslims did not understand what cruelty they were inflicting by destroying and desecrating Hindu temples. Generation after generation has come and gone since the Mahmud of Ghazni demolished



the famous Somnath Temple.

Of late, we hear from some quarters that Partition was ill-conceived; black magic was performed by Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah so that he could dwell in the hall of fame. We, humans, cannot say which dushkarma (evil deed) is the cause of which durbhagya (ill fate), but believe that desecration and demolition of Hindu temples have had a great deal to do with the ill fate of the subcontinental Muslims. A humble suggestion is that the sins of the past, especially the destruction of Hindu temples, should be atoned for by the appointment of a commission for truth and reconciliation, as in post-apartheid South Africa.

Such a commission should comprise respected experts in archaeology and history, to bring about reconciliation between the concerned communities. While the number of temples destroyed, desecrated and converted by the Islamic invaders and iconoclasts is in thousands, noted historian and analyst Sitaram Goel had identified 3,000 prominent ones throughout the country, noted for their size, historical and archaeological significance, apart from civilizational and religious importance for Hindus.

It is also important to stress here that the purpose of

such a truth and reconciliation commission is not to seek retribution for the wrongs of the past, but to enable the nation to move on in a spirit of reconciliation. The community that follows the faith the medieval invaders belonged to must be encouraged to admit the grievances and wrongs committed in the name of their faith, and voluntarily relinquish whatever claim they have on old Hindu places of worship. Of the 3,000 and more temples, 100 or 150 of the most important ones can be taken up immediately for being handed over to the Hindu community immediately through a competent agency notified by the commission. While the commission might include a couple of the members from the highest level of the country's judiciary, it is important to lay down that the findings and conclusions of this truth and reconciliation commission should not be justiciable, i.e., open to being challenged in courts, as this would only mean dragging the issue for many years giving one side a false sense of victory while increasing the bitterness of the deprived side. Such a scenario is hardly conclusive to national harmony and the country's future. This has to be full and finally accepted by all communities concerned.

The problem appears to be a continuing phenomenon. At the time of writing this on August 17, 2023, Mathura is experiencing this irritation. The Railways are endeavouring to regain their legally owned land; incidentally, near the Krishna Janmasthan. 135 illegal shanty houses have been demolished leaving families staying there homeless. They claim they were living there for about a hundred years and have currently moved to some ad hoc tents while approaching the Supreme Court for a stay. Another place of brewing contention is in New Delhi at a crossing called Sunehri Bagh, which became an important crossing after the Central Vista and New Parliament House were built. Earlier there was an old grave upon which a small mosque was built, or constructed after the road crossing came into being. Over the last 42 years, as I have seen, it has become large enough to cover the entire crossing island. The New Delhi Municipal Committee has now asked for the crossing to be vacated. Here again, the matter is in the court.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author, and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)



THE PURPOSE OF SUCH A TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IS NOT TO SEEK RETRIBUTION FOR THE WRONGS OF THE PAST, BUT TO ENABLE THE NATION TO MOVE ON IN A SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ROOTS OF INDIA

Sir — The recent discourse by Gulam Nabi Azad regarding India's roots has resonated with thoughtful individuals, igniting a potential for positive transformation. In a nation facing pockets of communal tension, Azad's message holds promise for fostering a harmonious environment. Interestingly, the echoes of this sentiment were previously sounded by a Muslim governor in Kerala, causing ripples of contemplation.

Azad, a former senior leader of the Congress party and the chief of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party, has asserted a historical fact that a significant number of Muslims in India have embraced Islam from Hinduism. Crucially, he emphasizes the need to dissociate religion from political gain. Present instances, such as the religious-based conflict in Nuh, Haryana, and the turmoil in Manipur post a court ruling, underscore the importance of such dialogue. Meanwhile, minority concerns related to the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) also contribute to the discourse.

Despite Azad's well-intentioned stance, there exists dissent. Amid the swirling political discussions, it's imperative to transcend the rhetoric and view his words as part of a broader effort to strengthen social harmony. It's vital to revisit the foundation of this concept. Today's India is a tapestry woven from diverse influences—religious, social, cultural, and ideological—acquired over centuries. Hinduism, predating formal religion, united through cultural bonds. Spanning the vast expanse of "Bharat," pre-modern India was a cultural empire, fostering interactions and absorptions rather than conversions. Hinduism's inclusive nature played a pivotal role in diffusing modern conflicts.

Indonesia stands as a beacon of such inclusive heritage. Despite its predominantly Muslim demographic, Indonesia cherishes Hindu and Buddhist legacies. The Prambanan Temple complex showcases ancient Hinduism, while Borobudur reflects Buddhist influences. Muslim actors respectfully portraying Hindu characters

Empowering Craftsmen



The Modi government's approval of the Rs 13,000 crore PM Vishwakarma scheme is a laudable step towards supporting traditional craftsmen. This scheme is seen as a financial incentive that will uplift 30 lakh artisans and crafts-

men across 18 traditional trades in both rural and urban areas. Artisans, including weavers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and barbers, will benefit from subsidies, enhancing their self-esteem.

With the collaboration of both Central and State Governments, this initiative aims to counter challenges such as rising raw material costs and the shift towards factory-made products. By providing institutional support, the scheme could act as a lifeline for struggling artisan families. It's crucial for governance, administration, and society to spread awareness about this scheme's potential impact.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

in Indonesia's 'Ramayana ballet' exemplify shared heritage's strength.

In contrast, India's colonial history sowed seeds of polarization, paving the way for separatist ideologies rooted in isolationist identities. Partition, Pakistan's birth, and attempts to cleanse Kashmiri Pandits exemplify divisive outcomes. Against this backdrop, voices like Azad's and Bhagwat's echo a plea for unity through shared heritage.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

AMETHI VOTERS SEEK A NEW CHAPTER

Sir — Amethi's residents are determined to rectify what they consider a "mistake" from the 2019 elections by urging Rahul Gandhi to contest the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from their constituency. Once a Congress stronghold, Amethi saw a shift in the 2019 elections when Rahul Gandhi lost to BJP's Smriti Irani. The demand for his return demonstrates his growing influence and the desire for change in the upcoming elections.

Gandhi's participation in the newly formed opposition alliance, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), alongside the Samajwadi Party (SP), indicates a united effort to challenge the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Uttar Pradesh. People in Amethi

feel "cheated and misguided" by the BJP's rule at the state and central levels. With his strengthening presence, Gandhi might even emerge as the face of the INDIA bloc for the Prime Minister position.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

YOGI ADITYANATH'S WELFARE AGENDA

Sir — Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, distinguishes himself with his genuine dedication to public welfare initiatives. Unlike some of his predecessors, he is untarnished by corruption allegations. His recent inspection of a water supply project in Varanasi highlights his concern for fundamental necessities like clean water, which is vital for life itself.

Further commendation goes to Dr. K Niranjan and Dr. Katyani, an eye specialist and dental surgeon duo, for their efforts in Apna Ghar Ashram. Their commitment to providing medical care, shelter, and sustenance to the vulnerable is a testament to their humanitarian values. Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) and District Rifle Club's contributions to their cause also deserve appreciation.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Generative AI will revolutionise healthcare

The healthcare industry faces challenges like rising costs, access disparities, and workforce shortages. AI-based Innovative solutions can come in handy

Generative AI (Gen AI) has gained increasing importance in the healthcare industry. Gen AI is a type of artificial intelligence that can create new content, such as images, text, audio, and even entire scenes. It does this by learning patterns from existing data and then using this knowledge to generate new and unique outputs. Generative AI is capable of producing highly realistic and complex content that mimics human creativity, making it a valuable tool for the healthcare industry.



satisfaction.

Personalized Patient Experience

One of the most exciting prospects of Gen AI in healthcare is its ability to provide a personalized patient experience. By analyzing vast amounts of patient data, including medical history, genetic information, and lifestyle factors, Gen AI can offer tailored medicine recommendations and treatment plans. Additionally, interactive chatbots can remind patients to take medications and perform exercises, leading to better treatment adherence and improved health outcomes. Remote patient monitoring using wearable devices can also allow for real-time data collection, enabling healthcare providers to monitor patient health proactively and intervene when necessary.

Accelerate R&D

The traditional drug discovery process can be time-consuming and expensive. Gen AI can revolutionize pharmaceutical research by predicting how specific compounds interact with different targets in the body, expediting drug discovery and development. By analyzing vast biological datasets, Gen AI can identify potential drug candidates more rapidly, leading to breakthrough treatments for various diseases. Furthermore, it can assist in identifying suitable patient cohorts for clinical trials, optimizing the research process and accelerating the delivery of innovative therapies to patients in need.

Predict Health Conditions and Provide Preventative Guidance

With the integration of wearable devices like Apple iWatch and Aura Ring, Gen AI can monitor patients' vital stats, including heart rate and sleep patterns, in real time. By analyzing this data, Gen AI can predict potential health conditions before they occur, allowing for timely interventions and preventative guidance. Moreover, it can identify anomalies in patient reports, enabling healthcare

providers to take proactive measures and address potential health issues early on. This predictive capability has the potential to significantly improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs associated with preventable diseases.

Speed up IT Operations and Improve Data Insights

The healthcare industry deals with vast amounts of patient data, and deriving valuable insights from this data can be time-consuming. Gen AI can streamline IT operations by generating code for data pipelines and automating data management tasks. It can also enhance data security by detecting and preventing breaches, ensuring patient privacy and compliance with data protection regulations.

By speeding up data processing and analysis, healthcare providers can make more informed decisions, leading to better patient care and improved health outcomes. The journey to a brighter future for healthcare has just begun, and Generative AI is leading the way. (The writer is a data analytics leader at Google Cloud)



SONAKSHI PANDEY



FIRST COLUMN BALANCE SOCIAL MEDIA WITH SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Mindless use of social media can have negative impacts on spiritual well-being



SWAMI ANAND ARUN JI

In the fast-paced digital era we live in, social media has become an integral part of our lives, especially for today's youth. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, such as connectivity, information sharing, and networking, they also present some challenges, particularly when it comes to maintaining a healthy balance between online engagement and nurturing spiritual growth.

Social media platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate, allowing us to connect with friends, family, and like-minded individuals across the globe. The instantaneous nature of these platforms fosters real-time information sharing and keeps us updated on the latest trends, news, and events. However, with such constant connectivity, the boundaries between the digital and real worlds can blur, leading to potential negative impacts on the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of young users. As a result, the emergence of a culture of comparison arises, where individuals compare their lives, achievements, and spiritual journeys with others. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and a sense of spiritual inadequateness. Many social media interactions tend to be superficial and fleeting. Engaging in surface-level discussions may hinder individuals from exploring deeper philosophical and spiritual concepts that are crucial for personal growth.

The first step towards mindful scrolling is developing self-awareness. Understanding how social media affects our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours empowers us to make informed decisions about our usage. Regularly assessing how much time we spend on these platforms and how it influences our mental state is crucial to ensure we maintain a healthy digital lifestyle. Once self-awareness is cultivated, setting boundaries becomes essential. Establishing specific time frames for social media use and designating technology-free zones in our daily lives can help young individuals stay connected to their spiritual journey. By creating a clear distinction between online and offline experiences, one can provide space for reflection, meditation, and personal growth.

The most significant advantage of the digital age to spirituality is the



ease with which seekers can access spiritual teachings and practices from spiritual leaders worldwide. The teachings of Ramana Maharishi, Yogananda, Vivekananda, Buddha, and all spiritual masters through the ages are now easily accessible. It is up to us to avail of these resources. No longer limited by geographical barriers, individuals can now embark on their spiritual journey independently using the wealth of resources available online. Digital platforms have provided a virtual meeting ground for seekers and spiritual leaders, facilitating real-time interactions and guidance, thus bridging the gap between the two. Integrating meditation, yoga, and pranayama into daily life allows individuals to overcome worldly distractions. Meditation, yoga, and pranayama encourage individuals to turn their attention inward. Regular meditation and yoga practice can lead to a sense of detachment from material possessions and desires.

Social media's instant gratification culture can promote the pursuit of quick fixes to complex spiritual questions. However, true spiritual growth requires patience, dedication, and a commitment to steady progress. Through this evolving nature of spirituality provides abundant possibilities for one's personal growth and assessment, embracing imperfection and authenticity in both virtual and real-life interactions can only lead an individual to genuine connections in their meaningful journey of life. Hence, with utmost mindfulness and positive choices, an individual can get the most out of digital platforms for their spiritual growth and can create a better, brighter, and more compassionate world for future generations to come.

(The writer is the founder of Osho Tapoban International Commune)

Promote NbS through G20 presidency

India should push for 'nature based solutions' (NbS) into climate change adaptation and mitigation plans for Net Zero and National Determined Contributions (NDCs)



ARUNDHATI SHARMA



VANDANA MAURYA



As the world is experiencing environmental challenges, India under its G20 Presidency has focussed on building a shared future by developing sustainable practices cutting across industry, sectors, and society through green development, climate finance, and technology. Alongside, there has been a reinvigorated focus to adopt nature-based solutions (NbS) for managing climate change, especially climate mitigation and adaptation, and loss of biodiversity.

As policy-makers of G20 are sharing their perspectives and experiences on NbS, it is imperative to answer certain questions: What is the significance of NbS for addressing environment and climate change-related challenges and promoting sustainability? How are NbS implemented by the international community, particularly G20 members through their national climate strategies? What are the major challenges in the implementation of NbS? What standards for NbS are acceptable for the majority of countries to ensure justice? How an innovative funding mechanism for promoting NbS can be developed? What are the viable nature-based alternatives and practices that India can offer during G20 Presidency?

Nature-based solutions are inclusive innovative practices and actions to help protect, manage, and sustain the environment. They are known as multi-purpose, low-cost, sustainable, and no-regret solutions e.g. managing coastal ecosystems through mangrove conservation that can reduce the impact of increased disasters and sea level rise, conservation of natural wetlands and maintaining the man-made wetlands that can help improve the water quality and water level, and also reduce the risk associated with floods and sea level rise, agroforestry creates carbon sinks, helps in adapting climate change, and poverty alleviation of farmers.

In urban areas, NbS is realised in different forms such as green buildings, facades and roofs, green space connected to grey infrastructure (playgrounds, street trees), parks and urban forests, allotments and community gardens as well as different types of green-blue spaces such as lakes, urban drainage systems, permeable surfaces and wetlands. It can provide a unique set of services, benefits and values for different urban stakeholders, ranging from ecological services such as climate mitigation and water management to social and economic benefits, such as social cohesion and economic development. These examples show how powerful NbS can be and can promote synergies among various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, NbS have the potential to remove as much as 10 gigatons of CO2 per year and can also provide 10-24 per cent of the total mitigation required by 2050 to keep rising temperatures within the limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

Adopting Nature-based solutions globally

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) have come to assume centre stage in the discussion of climate change, biodiversity and land actions. On one hand, several countries in Europe, Africa and Asia have adopted and integrated measures and



WITH G20 REPRESENTING MORE THAN 80 PER OF WORLD GDP AS WELL AS ACCOUNTING FOR 80 PER CENT OF GLOBAL CARBON EMISSIONS, INDIA CAN SEIZE THE G20 PRESIDENCY OPPORTUNITY TO BRIDGE THE INVESTMENT GAP

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programmes into national policies; on the other, multilateral and regional institutions and forums such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), G7 and G20 have also prioritised NbS in their agenda.

Despite the availability of funds for NBS from varied sources (public and private, bilateral and multilateral, and national and international sources), the share of NBS from climate and biodiversity funds is quite minimal. It is estimated that only half of USD 154 billion per year flows into NbS globally which needs to be increased to USD 536 billion per year by 2050. According to the 2022 report on 'State of Finance on Nature in the G20' the current G20 spending on NbS is only USD 120 billion per year, which represents 92% of all global investments in 2020. However, bulk distribution of these G20 investments i.e. 87% or USD 105 billion, was directed internally towards domestic government programs; and the remaining funds are allocated to water management, pollution abatement, general environmental protection, and measures for agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting.

Notwithstanding, there remains a huge gap in terms of finance as well as its distribution, which warrants the involvement of multi-stakeholders, including governments, businesses and citizens. The Report further states that G20 would require NbS investments to the tune of USD 285 billion/year by 2050 to address the intertwined challenges of climate change, biodiversity and land degradation. Additionally, the gap between G20 and non-G20 members is also huge.

Another point of discussion can be finalising the standards to be followed for adopting NbS. The

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) identifies eight criteria for Global Standards on NbS: societal challenges; design at scale; biodiversity net-gain; economic feasibility; inclusive development; adaptive management and; mainstreaming and sustainability. While most countries are working towards achieving their emission targets by adopting various NbS, most still fail to keep up with the standards proposed by IUCN.

Leveraging G20 Presidency for NbS

In pursuit of G20 commitments, which are in sync with SDG Goals, India has already earned global appreciation both for its commitments as well as delivery of action, particularly on climate action, ranging from its domestic commitments to energy transition to 175 GW renewable energy, and global action through International Solar Alliance. Along with taking major shifts in the economy e.g. plan to decarbonize major sectors using hydrogen fuel through hydrogen energy policy, rehauling present infrastructure into a smart and sustainable one, expansion of renewable energy, reducing energy intensity through energy conservation and efficiency mechanisms, overhauling the system to include NbS organically should be focussed i.e. smart cities and communities should include the NbS component in their development. More lessons can be drawn from traditional and local knowledge and best practices in green technologies across G20 and non-G20 members that can go a long way to build 'green infrastructure', which will help to ensure a more inclusive and people-led 'global shared future'.

Next, it is important to emphasise that India should lead the way by integrating NbS into climate

change adaptation and mitigation plans and other targets i.e. Net Zero and National Determined Contributions (NDCs) to achieve the global targets of climate change, biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation and land degradation targets. Estimates state that NbS can provide for 37% of global mitigation until 2030 to achieve the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement.

With G20 representing more than 80 per of world GDP as well as accounting for 80 per cent of global carbon emissions, India can seize the G20 Presidency opportunity to bridge the investment gap, particularly by encouraging the private sectors to integrate NbS into their business strategies as well as capitalise funds. It is to be noted that, as per World Economic Forum, only 11 per cent of the NbS investment is from the private sector. Further, India can utilise the G20 forum to incentivise and support cost-effective NbS between the G20 and non-G20 members. The average cost of land conversion to NbS in G20 countries is USD 2,600/hectare, while the average cost for non-G20 regions is USD 2,100/hectare. There are various opportunities for the funding and financing of NbS, including carbon markets, debt-for-nature swaps, green bonds, insurance, corporate contributions and voluntary certification. To attract private sector funding, it will be important to make NbS workable, reliable and just.

Lastly, along with other solutions, it is high time India should give NbS drawn from traditional knowledge and practices its due importance. NbS, derived by nature in improving environmental health and climate change mitigation and adaptation, have been used by local communities in India for ages using soils, vegetation, and natural processes.

Empowering adolescent girls through community libraries

Community libraries are filling in the resource gap in rural Rajasthan and are immensely popular with schoolgirls

Educational institutions have certainly proven to be the medium for the emancipation of girls and women in remote rural areas of the country. However, the prevalent dysfunctionality or dearth of necessary resources such as well-equipped libraries invariably engender a substantive hindrance. Taking a closer look at the situation, numerous non-profit organizations have taken the initiative to establish community libraries to create knowledge hubs for their communities, particularly focusing on the youth. Likewise, located just 35 kilometres away from Lunkaransar block in Bikaner in Rajasthan, the 'Centre For Future Development of Girls,' a library established by the



BHARTI UTHAR

(The writer is a student from Bikaner, Rajasthan)

Gram Panchayat along with Urmul Trust, a local organization from the village of Binjarwali, is proving to have a life-changing impact on the adolescent girls within the village.

The village of Binjarwali has an approximate population of 2060 residents. The local library in the village serves as a dedicated space for girls' education, where 22 girls are currently engaged in their studies. Among these, 13 girls have filled out application forms for state-level competitive exams, and among them, two have achieved noteworthy success. The library was established with the primary aim of providing girls with an ideal studying environment within the village, coupled with

access to relevant books for their competitive exam preparations.

Expressing immense delight over the presence of the library, Komal, a young girl hailing from the village, said, "Situated a mere 50 meters from my residence, it provides me with a convenient sanctuary for focused studies. This facility has also become a hub for other girls from our village who seek an environment conducive to learning. Even those attending the local village school manage to allocate time for utilizing this library, recognizing the absence of a suitable study space at their homes. For young women pursuing higher education in college or engaged in preparation for employment



examinations, this library stands as an invaluable blessing. Since its establishment, every girl's aspiration has been kindled towards securing a government job, as this library emerges as their paramount aid in examination preparation."

Apart from Binjarwali, the organization has also

established similar libraries in five other villages across two blocks, Poogal and Chhatargarh. These villages include Kalu, Rajasar Bhatiyar, Makassar, and Rambagh, as well as 2 Rm (465 Rd).

Muniram, a resident of the village, emphasized the crucial role of the established village library, particularly for girls. It serves as a valuable resource for girls hailing from disadvantaged families who are unable to attend school due to various obstacles. Furthermore, it offers a vital opportunity for those who have completed their basic education but are constrained by financial limitations from pursuing higher studies outside the village, thus contributing

significantly to shaping a promising future for these individuals. He added "Many girls from the village come here to study. Additionally, numerous girls are benefiting from this library for preparation in various fields. Prominently, competitive exams like the Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers (REET), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), and Staff Selection Commission (SSC) are among them, in which some girls have also achieved success. Any girl can come to this library at any time for study, and for this purpose, the key is kept outside the library." The primary beneficiaries of this library are girls from financially disadvantaged back-

grounds, especially those whose parents work as daily wage labourers and cannot afford their education or expenses for competitive exams.

These village libraries have certainly managed to provide a safe place for girls. Many families who cannot afford to send their daughters outside the village for further studies or exam preparation perceive these libraries as a beacon of hope. Girls from less privileged families from these villages can now access higher education and take part in competitive exams. The Urmul Foundation's efforts have shown that with community support, rural girls' futures can be transformed, setting an example for other regions to follow suit.

WILDFIRES CREATE HAVOC

1 dead, 185 structures destroyed in Washington

AP ■ MEDICAL LAKE

A wind-driven wildfire in eastern Washington state has destroyed at least 185 structures, closed a major highway and left one person dead, authorities said Saturday.

The blaze began shortly after midday on Friday on the west side of Medical Lake, about 15 miles (24 kilometres) west of Spokane, and then expanded, Washington State Department of Natural Resources spokesperson Isabelle Hoygaard said.

It grew to nearly 15 square miles (38 square kilometres) by Saturday morning, with zero containment. The burned structures were a mix of homes and outbuildings.

Evacuations were ordered for the town as winds blew the flames southward, Hoygaard said.

She added that the blaze burned through the south side of the town and then jumped Interstate 90 on Friday night, forcing its closure. The major east-west thoroughfare remained closed in both directions Saturday morning.

"The fire is burning on both sides of the highway," the Washington state Department of Transportation said on its webpage.

There was one confirmed fatality associated with the fire, Hoygaard said. Further details were not immediately released.

Staff, patients and residents at Eastern State Hospital, one of the state's two psychiatric facilities, and those living at the Lakeland Village Residential Habilitation Center, both in Medical Lake, were sheltering in place on Saturday, said Norah West, a spokesman for the Department of Social and Health Services. Evacuees from the town were given shelter at a high school overnight.

Canadian firefighters wage epic battle

AP ■ VANCOUVER

Firefighters battling wildfires in western Canada received help from reinforcements and milder weather on Saturday, after the nation's worst fire season on record destroyed structures, fouled the air with thick smoke and prompted evacuation orders for tens of thousands of residents.

Flames were being held at bay 15 kilometres from Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, and weary firefighters had a reprieve around Kelowna in British Columbia. But the firefighters were nowhere close to declaring victory, especially with drier and windier weather forecast for the coming days.

"We're by no means out of the woods yet," Mike Westwick, wildfire information officer for Yellowknife, told The Associated Press. "We still have a serious situation. It's not safe to return."

The fires near Kelowna, about 90 miles (150 kilometres) north of the US border, are among more than 380 blazes across the province, with 150 burning out of control, according to the Canadian Press. Another 236 fires are burning in the Northwest Territories.

At a Saturday evening news conference, Shane Thompson, the province's minister of environment and climate change, said the fires near Yellowknife had not grown very much in the past few days thanks to breaks in the weather.

"But I want to be clear, a little bit of rain doesn't mean it's safe to come back home," he said. Others warned that incoming hot weather would make the battle more challenging.

Yellowknife Mayor Rebecca Altj encouraged residents to stay away from the town to ensure their safety and help with firefighting efforts. She assured people that patrols were monitoring the streets and homes to protect against looting.



Smoke from wildfires fills the air as motorists travel on a road on the side of a mountain, in Kelowna, BC on Saturday

More villages evacuated in Greece

Thessaloniki (AP): Greek authorities evacuated another four villages near the north-eastern border with Turkey on Sunday where a large summer wildfire that has already destroyed several homes over the weekend drew dangerously close. There were no reports of serious injuries to firefighters or residents from the forest blaze near the town of Alexandroupolis, that forced the evacuation of another eight villages on Saturday.

Strong winds whipped on the flames, and civil protection authorities warned of an "extreme" fire risk Monday in the region around the capital, Athens, and other parts of southern Greece.

Some 200 firefighters, assisted by 16 water-dropping aircraft, volunteers and police, were battling the blaze near Alexandroupolis.

Local authorities said about half a dozen outlying houses and outbuildings were badly damaged in two of the evacuated villages, as well as a church. Sections of a major highway were closed for a

second day as smoke reduced visibility, while Alexandroupolis residents were advised to keep their windows shut. Greece's minister for civil protection, Vassilis Kikiliadis, said Sunday that firefighters, police, army personnel and volunteers were "waging an intense battle" in the Alexandroupolis area, and called for extreme public vigilance throughout the country Monday. "No outdoors work that could trigger a fire will be permitted," he said. "We must all protect our country."

while her partner stayed behind to monitor their property and help create firebreaks and fight fires.

"We knew it was only a matter of time," said Morrith, who had been following media updates and satellite images of the approaching wildfires.

Air tankers dropped water and fire retardant to keep the flames from Yellowknife. A 10-kilometre fire line was dug, and firefighters deployed 20 kilometres of hose and a plethora of pumps.

Canada has seen a record number of wildfires this year that have caused choking smoke in parts of the US.

the escape route out of Yellowknife was safe, for the time being. About 2,600 people remained, including emergency teams, firefighters, utility workers and police officers, along with some residents who refused to leave.

Charlotte Morrith was among those who left Thursday, reaching that decision because of the unbearable smoke that she feared would be unhealthy for her 4-month-old son.

Morrith, a journalist with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, and her son took an evacuation flight some 1,500 kilometres west to safety in Whitehorse, Yukon,

and Imaan to appear before the court again while granting the police one-day physical remand for Imaan and two-day physical remand for Wazir in the case concerning unlawful gathering.

The court ordered the authorities to produce both in the concerned court on Monday for the other FIR.

Imaan will be kept in the women's police station till Monday by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD). Only minutes before her arrest, Imaan had claimed on the social media platform X that "unknown persons" had broken into her home by "jumping over" the main gate and were trying to break her security cameras.

Her mother Shireen Mazari, who quit the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party after spending her time in police custody following the May 9 riots, however, termed the arrest an "abduction" and said plain clothes people "took my daughter away after breaking down our front door".

Hurricane Hilary downgraded again to Category 1

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Cabo San Lucas (AP): Hurricane Hilary roared toward Mexico's Baja California peninsula late Saturday as a downgraded but still dangerous Category 1 hurricane likely to bring "catastrophic" flooding to the region and cross into the southwestern US as a tropical storm.

The National Weather Center in Miami said in the most recent advisory at 9 pm that the maximum sustained wind speed is 90 mph and the storm was about 175 miles (281 kilometres) south of Punta Eugenia, Mexico, and 535 miles (855 kilometres) from San Diego, California.

Meteorologists warned that despite weakening, the storm remained treacherous.

One person drowned Saturday in the Mexican town of Santa Rosalia, on the peninsula's eastern coast, when a vehicle was swept away in an overflowing stream. Rescue workers managed to save four other people, said Edith Aguilar Villavicencio, the mayor of Mulege township. It was not immediately clear whether officials considered the fatality related to the hurricane, but video posted by local officials showed torrents of water coursing through the town's streets.

Forecasters said the storm was still expected to enter the history books as the first tropical storm to hit Southern California in 84 years, bringing flash floods, mudslides, isolated tornadoes, high winds and power outages.

The forecast prompted authorities to issue an evacuation advisory for Santa Catalina Island, urging residents and beachgoers to leave the tourist destination 23 miles (37 kilometres) off the coast. Elizabeth Adams, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service San Diego office, said rain could fall up to 3 inches (7.6 centimetres) an hour across Southern California's mountains and deserts, from late Sunday morning into the afternoon.

The intense rainfall during those hours could cause widespread and life-threatening flash floods.

Alvi denies signing amendment Bills

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a dramatic turn of events, Pakistan's President Arif Alvi denied on Sunday signing Official Secrets (Amendment) Bill, 2023, and the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Bill, 2023, claiming that he was shocked to know that his staff "undermined" his orders and failed to return the unsigned bills within the stipulated time.

In the statement posted on his X account, President Alvi claimed to have instructed his staff to return the bills unsigned within the stipulated time to render them ineffective.

"As God is my witness, I did not sign Official Secrets Amendment Bill, 2023 and Pakistan Army Amendment Bill, 2023 as I disagreed with these laws," said Alvi, who belonged to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party before assuming the post.

"I asked my staff to return the bills unsigned within the stipulated time to make them ineffective. I confirmed from them many times whether they have been returned & was assured that they were."

"However, I have found out today that my staff undermined my will and command. As Allah knows all, He will forgive IA (InshaAllah). But I ask forgiveness..." he added.

His statement comes a day after the local media reported that the president has signed the two bills.

The report of the bill completing the process to become law emerged as former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, also a close aide of Khan, was arrested under the Official Secrets Act in connection with the leakage of a confidential diplomatic cable last year.

There was no statement from the President's House.

However, the Law Ministry in a statement expressed "grave concern" over the president's post, saying that he should "take responsibility for his own actions".

"As per Article 75 of the

Constitution, when a bill is sent for assent, the president has two options: either give assent or refer the matter to the parliament with specific observations", said the ministry.

It said that Article 75 does not provide for any third option and none of the two options were fulfilled and the President "purposely delayed the assent".

"Returning the bills without any observations or assent is not provided for in the Constitution. Such a course of action is against the letter and spirit of the Constitution," it said, adding that the president could have returned the bills with his observations like he did in the recent and distant past.

"He could have also issued a press release to that effect. It is a matter of concern that the president has chosen to discredit his own officials. The president should take responsibility for his own actions," it said.

The two bills were among several laws passed by the outgoing National Assembly and several of them were already returned by the president.

Section 6-A of the secrets act creates a new offence of unauthorised disclosure of the identities of members of intelligence agencies, informants or sources. The offence would be punishable by up to three years in jail and a fine of up to Rs 10 million.

The amended Army Act among other changes provides for the punishment of up to five-year rigorous imprisonment to any person guilty of disclosing any information, acquired in an official capacity that is or may be prejudicial to the security and interest of Pakistan or the armed forces.

The controversy comes as the government launched a case last week against Khan for violating the secret act by using the cipher sent by its embassy in the US for political purposes.

Qureshi, a two-time foreign minister, was arrested in the same case on Saturday night.

Rights activist, politician detained for 'interference in state affairs' in Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari and former lawmaker Ali Wazir were arrested on Sunday and remanded to police custody for what authorities alleged unlawful gathering, resistance and "interference in state affairs".

Their arrests come a day after former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, a close aide of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, was taken into custody under the Official Secrets Act in connection with the leakage of a confidential diplomatic cable.

Imaan, the daughter of former human rights minister Shireen Mazari, and Wazir were arrested in the wee hours of Sunday morning by Islamabad police, two days after they participated in a protest organised by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), which advocates the rights of ethnic Pashtuns.

The authorities wanted both of them as part of an ongoing investigation.

According to the first information report (FIR), the two were arrested for staging a sit-in, resistance and interference in state affairs.

The FIR stated that 700 to 800 people were in attendance and several were armed with sticks and some even with weapons as they attempted to defy the authorities and march on the capital, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

The report claimed the main highway, GT Road, was blocked by the protestors that proceeded to hold a rally in the middle of the road.

It said that when the security personnel tried to stop the participants, they attacked a government vehicle, engaged in altercations with the authorities and even managed to forcefully take an anti-riot kit away from an officer.

Later, the two were presented before Duty Judicial Magistrate Ehtisham Alam Khan where another FIR of sedition and terrorism against them was also presented to the court. The judge directed Wazir

18 killed in road accident in Pakistan's Punjab province

PTI ■ LAHORE

At least 18 passengers, including women and children, were killed and 16 injured in a fatal accident on a motorway in Punjab province of Pakistan on Sunday morning, police said.

The bus en route to Islamabad from Karachi carried about 40 passengers when it collided with a pick up van at Pindi Bhattian section of Faisalabad motorway, some 140 kilometres from Lahore, around 4:30 am, the police said.

"On the Pindi Bhattian section of the motorway, the bus hit a static van which was carrying a fuel tank. The bus hit it from the rear and both vehicles caught fire immediately, killing at least 18 passengers," Inspector General (IG) Motorway Police Sultan Khawaja said.

Another 16 persons with burn injuries were shifted to nearby hospitals.

The death toll may rise further as the condition of some of the injured is said to be critical, the IG said.

11 labourers killed in blast in North Waziristan

PTI ■ LAHORE

At least 11 labourers were killed and two others injured in a terrorist attack in the restive North Waziristan tribal district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, bordering Afghanistan, police said on Sunday.

Terrorists detonated explosives near Gul Mir Kot in Shawal tehsil late on Saturday night and blew up a vehicle carrying 16 labourers, Deputy Commissioner North Waziristan Rehan Gul Khattak said. As many as 11 labourers, who worked in an under-construction government building, were killed on the spot while two were critically

injured, and three went missing, Khattak said.

Officials said the victims belonged to tehsil Makin and Wana of South Waziristan

tribal district. They injured and bodies were shifted to a nearby hospital.

Efforts to identify and locate the missing workers are

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tribal district. They injured and bodies were shifted to a nearby hospital.

Efforts to identify and locate the missing workers are

ongoing, he said. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar condemned the attack which claimed the lives of innocent labourers.

"Heartbreaking to know about the terrorist attack in North Waziristan which claimed the lives of 11 innocent labourers. Strongly condemn this senseless act of violence and stand in solidarity with the families affected," he said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. Meanwhile, earlier on Saturday, four personnel of the Bomb Disposal Squad were seriously injured in the Makin tehsil of Upper South Waziristan after miscreants fired a rocket at their vehicle.

Road accidents which are common across Pakistan claim numerous lives on a daily basis.

Five people, including a woman and two minors, were killed and 20 others injured when a bus overturned in the Fazilpur area of Punjab's Rajanpur district back in July.

Pilot error caused fatal hot air balloon crash in New Mexico

Albuquerque (AP): A mistake made by a hot air balloon pilot who had drugs including cocaine in his system caused a crash in 2021 in New Mexico that killed all five people on board, investigators have determined.

The National Transportation Safety Board said in its final report released this week that pilot Nicholas Meleski did not maintain enough clearance from power lines while trying to land. He hit the power lines and crashed into a busy intersection. The report said investigators found no evidence of mechanical malfunctions or failures.

The amounts of cocaine and marijuana found in his system suggested "recent use" that would have likely had "impairing effects" that contributed to the crash on June 26, 2021, the report said. Meleski's family told Albuquerque station KOB-TV in a statement that their



hearts go out to the families of the passengers: Mary Martinez, her husband Martin, and their friends Susan and John Montoya.

"We cannot express the depth of our grief and sadness for the pain this accident has caused," the statement said.

Witnesses also told investigators that the balloon's envelope separated from the basket after hitting the power lines and floated away. It was found south of the crash site.

Martin Martinez worked as a police officer, first for the city of Albuquerque and later for its public school system. Mary Martinez, a mother of two, is remembered for her love of helping people. Susan Montoya was an assistant school principal and her husband worked with special education students. Federal officials said the balloon crash was the deadliest in New Mexico's history and the second deadliest in the US since 2016.

Egyptian journalist detained following mysterious coverage

Cairo (AP): Egyptian authorities detained a journalist working for a fact-checking platform following its coverage of a plane that was seized in Zambia along with its suspicions cargo after making a stop in Cairo, the outlet said. Security forces arrested Karim Asaad Saturday from his home in al-Shorouk neighborhood in eastern Cairo, the platform, Matsda2sh, or Don't Believe, said in a statement.

The platform accused security forces of assaulting Asaad's wife and threatening their child while detaining the journalist. Asaad's whereabouts remained unknown, it added. There was no immediate comment from the government. The platform said security forces asked Asaad about its extensive coverage of a mysterious plane intercepted in Zambia earlier this month after making a stop in Cairo.

Zambian authorities said they found over USD 5 million in cash and more than 100 kilograms of suspected gold mixed with zinc, copper, and nickel on board the aircraft.

Zambian authorities said six Egyptians were detained along with four from Zambia, Netherlands, Spain and Latvia in relation to the mysterious plane.

Sunak hails England women's football team

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak kicked off the country's celebrations around the historic women's World Cup final clash between England and Spain in Australia on Sunday, saying the team had inspired his daughters to believe football was for them.

As the team were beaten one-nil by the Spanish, he took to social media to reiterate that the squad dubbed Lionesses had secured a win of a different kind.

"You left absolutely nothing out there Lionesses. It wasn't to be, but you've already secured your legacy as game changers. We are all incredibly proud of you," he tweeted.

Earlier, the British Indian leader shared a letter addressed to the team, dubbed the Lionesses, and their Dutch coach Serena Weigman to wish them the best of luck for the tournament. In it, he stressed that whatever the outcome of the game, they had already "brought football home" by creating a lasting legacy for women's football and inspiring

scores of schoolgirls across the country like his daughters, Krishna and Anoushka.

"For my daughters, and for every girl in this country, you have made football something for them; you have made them feel they belong on the pitch. So - in a way - you've already brought football home," reads Sunak's letter.

"All that remains is to bring the trophy home too - and the whole nation is rooting for you... But whatever the result, I want you to know that you have already secured a lasting legacy: that every girl in this country will have equal access to all school sports, including football," he said.

Referring to the team's historic win in the UEFA Women's Euro championship in July last year, Sunak praised their drive to not merely celebrate the "unprecedented achievement" but use it as the beginning of a mission, not the end.

At times, some of you were even stopped from playing. But you faced down outdated attitudes and fashioned your own opportunities to play," he noted.

"So, when you walk out with pride to play for England, you are not just making memories that will stay with you as part of our history, you are playing for a different future. It's extraordinary to reflect on how far women's football has come through your generation alone. But the full measure of your impact will be found in just how far women's football can grow in the generations that follow," he said.

He traced the team's successful run, including beating the Aussies on their home turf by winning a tough penalty shootout, as inspiring the nation with their "skill, teamwork and courage".

The 43-year-old leader, who had been under some UK media pressure to fly out to Sydney for the historic fixture, said he will be watching and cheering alongside millions of others from home.

Zelenskyy vows revenge for Chernihiv attack

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday vowed stern retaliation for a Russian missile strike in the centre of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv that killed seven people and wounded almost 150 others the day before.

"I am sure our soldiers will respond to Russia for this terrorist attack. Respond tangibly," Zelenskyy said in a video address published in the early hours of Sunday at the end of a visit to Sweden, his first foreign trip since attending a NATO summit in Lithuania last month.

He identified a 6-year-old girl named Sofia as among the dead in the attack and confirmed that the wounded included 15 children.

The governor of the Chernihiv region, Vyacheslav Chaus, said Sunday that the total number of people confirmed to have been wounded had risen to 148.

Further east, Russian forces shelled the city of Kupiansk on Sunday morning, seriously wounding a man, according to Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. A man was killed later on Sunday in Russian shelling of Vovchansk, also in the Kharkiv region, according to Ukraine's Internal Affairs Ministry.

Zelenskyy arrived in the Netherlands on Sunday, two days after the country said the



A Ukrainian serviceman of the 53rd brigade fires an RPG-9 towards Russian positions at the frontline close to Donetsk in Ukraine on Saturday

United States had given its approval for Dutch and Danish authorities to deliver F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine's air force.

At a military air base in the southern city of Eindhoven, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told Zelenskyy that the Netherlands and Denmark are committing to deliver F-16 warplanes to Ukraine.

Rutte said the planes would be delivered once unspecified conditions were met.

The announcement came minutes after Rutte and Zelenskyy inspected two gray F-16 jets parked in a hangar at the base.

The US approval on Friday for the Netherlands and Denmark to deliver American-made F-16s to Ukraine was seen as a major boost for Kyiv, even though the fighter jets won't have an impact any time soon on the almost 18-month war.

Meanwhile in Russia on Sunday, the Defense Ministry said Sunday that its air defence systems had prevented an attack by two drones on the neighboring Belgorod region, which also borders Ukraine.

In a separate statement, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said that 12 airborne targets had been shot down while approaching the regional capital, also called Belgorod.

Meanwhile, Russian air defenses jammed a drone flying towards Moscow early Sunday causing it to crash. Russia's Defense Ministry called it "an attempt by the Kyiv regime to carry out a terrorist attack."

Moscow's Vnukovo and Domodedovo airports briefly suspended flights, but no victims or damage were reported.

In the city of Kursk, five people were wounded when a Ukrainian drone hit a train station, regional Gov. Roman Starovoit said. Kursk is the capital of the western region of the same name, which borders Ukraine.

According to Starovoit, the drone crashed into the roof of the railway station building, with a fire subsequently breaking out on the roof.

Later on Sunday, Starovoit reported that a drone attack on an electrical substation on Saturday had left over 5,500 people in two districts without power, which was later restored. Ukrainian authorities, which generally avoid commenting on attacks on Russian soil, didn't say whether it launched the attacks.

Drone strikes on the Russian border regions are a fairly regular occurrence. Attacks deeper inside Russian territory have been on the rise since a drone was destroyed over the Kremlin in early May. Successful strikes have exposed the vulnerabilities of Moscow's air defence systems.

Kishida visits Fukushima plant

AP ■ TOKYO



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at Fukushima plant

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the tsunami-wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant on Sunday and said an impending release of treated radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean cannot be postponed.

He said the move is safe but his government will do its utmost to support fishing communities from the potential impact of damaging rumours during the decades-long project. Kishida made his trip hours after returning from a summit with US and South Korean leaders at the American presidential retreat of Camp David. Before leaving Washington on Friday, Kishida said it is time to make a decision on the treated water's release date, which has not been set due to the controversy surrounding the plan.

Kishida on Sunday saw wastewater filtering and dilution facilities and met with the plant and company executives. He told reporters that he confirmed their commitment to safely carrying out the upcoming water discharge. To make room for new facilities needed for the progress of the decommissioning, the treated water needs to be disposed of and tanks removed to make room.

The treated water discharge "by no means can be postponed for the decommissioning and Fukushima's recovery", Kishida said.

He said he hoped to meet with representatives of fisheries

organisations on Monday before his ministers decide the start date at a meeting next week. It is widely expected to be the end of August.

Kishida said the water release is a long-term project and that he is aware of the importance of recognising the concerns and needs of local fishing groups. "I hope to convey the government position directly to the fisheries representatives," he said.

Since the government announced the release plan two years ago, it has faced strong opposition from Japanese fishing organisations, which worry about further damage to the reputation of their seafood as they struggle to recover from the accident. Groups in South Korea and China have also raised concerns, turning it into a political and diplomatic issue.

The government and the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., or TEPCO, say the water must be removed to make room for the plant's

decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks from the tanks because much of the water is still contaminated and needs further treatment.

Japan has obtained support from the International Atomic Energy Agency to improve transparency and credibility and to ensure the plan by TEPCO meets international safety standards.

The government has also stepped up a campaign promoting the plan's safety at home and through diplomatic channels.

The IAEA, in a final report in July, concluded that the TEPCO plan, if conducted strictly as designed, will cause negligible impact on the environment and human health, encouraging Japan to proceed.

While seeking understanding from the fishing community, the government has also worked to explain the plan to neighbouring countries, especially South Korea, to keep the issue from interfering with their relationship-building.

Gunmen kill at least 23 in an attack in Mali

AP ■ BAMAKO

Armed gunmen killed at least 23 people and wounded 12 in an attack on a village in central Mali, officials said on Sunday. Sidi Mohamed El Bechir, governor of the Bandiagara region where the attack took place, said unidentified men killed dozens of people and set fire to several homes in the village of Yarou on Friday.

"The assailants stayed in the village until 7 pm and burned down part of the village, smashed stores and took away the villagers' cattle," said Amadou Lougué, president of the regional youth organisation, on Sunday. The attack has

not been claimed. Communities across central and northern Mali have been in the grips of protracted armed violence since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in the West African nation's northern cities the following year, with the help of a French-led military operation. But they regrouped in the desert and began launching attacks on the Malian army and its allies.

Friday's attack in the central Mopti region took place on the same day that the Malian army accused armed extremists of aiming a rocket at the western city of Timbuktu, 170 miles (275 kilometres) north of Bandiagara.

Elements of JNIM, a West African

jihadi group linked with al-Qaida, placed a blockade on the ancient trading city nearly two weeks ago in response to an influx of Malian soldiers and foreign mercenaries into the area.

The blockade has caused shipments of food and other goods to halt. Boubacar Sadigh Ould Taled, a legislator in Mali's interim junta-led government, said many residents of the nearby town of Ber have fled due to insecurity following the arrival of Malian troops and those from the Russian mercenary group Wagner in early August.

The recent uptick in insecurity in the area likely stems from the departure of a UN peacekeeping mission from its

base in Ber, which has been under the control of separatist rebels since they signed a peace deal with the Malian government in 2015. A July UN resolution said the peacekeeping mission would be shuttered after a decade of operations.

Since a military junta seized power of the country in 2020, Mali has increasingly renounced intervention by Western nations, opting instead to unofficially partner with the Wagner Group to help regain control from armed groups in the centre and north. Analysts fear the 2015 peace deal, mediated with help from Algeria and the UN mission known as MINUSMA, may fall apart after the peacekeepers leave.

Indian couple, son found dead in US

PTI ■ NEW YORK

An Indian couple and their six-year-old child have been found dead in the US state of Maryland in a suspected case of double suicide-murder, police said.

The three people, from Karnataka, were found dead from gunshot wounds in their Baltimore County home on Friday when police responded to a welfare check around noon, police said on Saturday.

The deceased were identified as Yogesh H. Nagarajappa (37), Prathiba Y. Amarnath (37) and Yash Honnal (6). Police said they are believed to be husband, wife and son.

"Based on the initial investigation, the incident is believed to be a double murder-suicide that Nagarajappa committed," Baltimore

County Police spokesperson Anthony Shelton was quoted as saying by The Baltimore Sun newspaper.

"Each appeared to suffer from an apparent gunshot wound," Shelton added.

The family members were reportedly last seen alive on Tuesday evening, police said, adding that an autopsy would be conducted by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer to determine the manner and cause of death.

"I am heartbroken and deeply saddened for the innocent victims whose lives were cut short by this horrific act. We will do everything possible to assist family and community members following this tragic incident," a statement by Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski read. Police said that there was no threat to the surrounding communities.

Guatemalans head to polls

AP ■ GUATEMALA CITY

After a tumultuous campaign, Guatemalans head to the polls on Sunday to elect a new president, hoping that the country's next leader will provide relief from rising prices and get a handle on crime and corruption.

The two candidates offer starkly different paths forward. Former first lady Sandra Torres became an ally of outgoing, deeply unpopular President Alejandro Giammattei in her third bid for the presidency.

Her opponent, Bernardo Arévalo, with the progressive Seed Movement, rode a wave of popular resentment toward politics to his surprise spot in the runoff.

Central America's most populous country and the region's largest economy continues to struggle with widespread poverty and violence that have driven hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans to emigrate in recent years.

The first round of voting on June 25 went relatively smoothly until results showed Arévalo had landed an unexpected spot in the runoff. The fact that the preliminary results were dragged into Guatemala's co-opted justice system has



raised anxiety among many Guatemalans that voters will not have the final word Sunday.

Guatemala's Attorney General's Office is investigating Arévalo's party for allegedly gathering fraudulent signatures for its registration years earlier. The party has dismissed the accusations as politically motivated and on Friday the Supreme Court of Justice granted the Seed Movement a permanent injunction against a lower court's order suspending its legal status. Prosecutors were expected to appeal.

Torres, in her closing campaign event on Friday in Guatemala City's sprawling central market, suggested she would not accept a result that

didn't go her way. "We're going to defend vote by vote because today democracy is at risk (and) because they want to steal the elections," she said.

Arévalo, a lawmaker and former diplomat, is the son of former President Juan José Arévalo, the first leftist president of Guatemala's democratic era. The elder Arévalo is still revered by many for establishing fundamental elements of Guatemalan society such as social security and labor regulations.

But Torres has painted her opponent as a radical leftist who threatens Guatemalans' conservative values on issues including sexual identity and abortion.

US cancels visas of 100 more Nicaraguan officials

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

The US State Department on Saturday imposed visa restrictions on 100 more Nicaraguan officials for their role in supporting the regime of President Daniel Ortega.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote in his social media accounts that his office "has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on 100 Nicaraguan officials who restrict Nicaraguans' human rights and undermine democracy."

"We call on the regime to unconditionally and immediately release Bishop Álvarez and all those unjustly detained," Blinken wrote.

Bishop Rolando Álvarez, an outspoken critic of the Nicaraguan government, was jailed by the Ortega regime for supposedly helping anti-government protesters.

He was sentenced to 26 years in prison, after he refused to board a plane carrying exiles to the United States in February.

Ortega jailed dozens of opposition figures in order to win a fourth consecutive term in 2021 elections that were

broadly criticized as a farce. He has also outlawed dozens of nongovernmental organisations.

Since then, dozens of opponents have been tried or convicted in brief trials on vague charges equivalent to treason.

The State Department had previously pulled the visas of top Nicaraguan officials, as well as judges who convicted the opposition leaders and legislators who had cooperated in banning NGOs and civic groups.

It previously imposed visa restrictions on 116 individuals linked to the Ortega regime, "including mayors, prosecutors, university administrators, as well as police, prison, and military officials."

This week, the Nicaraguan government confiscated a prestigious Jesuit-run university alleging it was a "centre of terrorism," the latest in a series of actions by authorities against the Catholic Church and opposition figures.

The Treasury Department has frozen the US assets of the defense minister and other officials in the army, telecom and mining sectors.

US, Japan, Australia plan joint drills in South China Sea

AP ■ MANILA

The United States, Japan and Australia are planning a joint navy drill in the South China Sea off the western Philippines this week to underscore their commitment to the rule of law in the region after a recent show of Chinese aggression in the disputed waters, Filipino security officials said on Sunday.

On August 5, Chinese coast guard ships used water cannons against Philippine vessels in the contested waterway where disputes have long been regarded as a potential flash-point and have become a fault line in the rivalry between the US and China in the region.

The drill will include three aircraft and helicopter carriers sailing together in a show of force and undertaking joint drills. Their commanders are set to meet with Filipino counterparts in Manila after the off-shore drills, two Philippine security officials told The Associated Press.

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not allowed to publicly discuss details of the planned drills. The US plans to deploy an

aircraft carrier, the USS America, while Japan would send one of its biggest warships, the helicopter carrier JS Izumo. The Royal Australian Navy would send its HMAS Canberra, which also carries helicopters, one of the two officials said, adding that the joint drill was planned a few months ago.

The Philippines would not be part of this week's drills due to military logistical limitations but is open to becoming a participant in the future, the official said.

The United States, Japan and Australia were among several countries that immediately expressed support for the Philippines and concern over the Chinese action following the tense stand-off earlier this month.

Philippine officials said six Chinese coast guard ships and two militia vessels blocked two Philippine navy-chartered civilian boats taking supplies to the Philippine forces stationed at the Second Thomas Shoal.

One supply boat was hit with a powerful water cannon by the Chinese coast guard while the other managed to deliver food, water, fuel and

other supplies to the Filipino forces guarding the shoal, the Philippine military said.

The Chinese coast guard acknowledged its ships used water cannons against the Philippine vessels, which it said strayed without permission into the shoal, which Beijing calls Ren'ai Jiao.

"In order to avoid direct blocking and collisions when repeated warnings were ineffective, water cannons were used as a warning. The on-site operation was professional and restrained, which is beyond reproach," the Chinese coast guard said. "China will continue to take necessary measures to firmly safeguard its territorial sovereignty."

The Philippine military said on Saturday that it would again attempt to deliver basic supplies to its forces in the Second Thomas Shoal, but didn't provide further details.

The mission "to the shoal is a clear demonstration of our resolve to stand up against threats and coercion and our commitment in upholding the rule of law," the Armed Forces of the Philippines said in a statement.



Hungarian President Katalin Novák, center, attends the flag-raising ceremony to mark St. Stephen's Day, founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, at the Parliament House in central Budapest, Hungary on Sunday

'Regional bloc, junta talks show limited results'

AP ■ NIAMEY

Mutinuous soldiers in Niger are under pressure from regional sanctions as they refuse to reinstate the country's president whom they toppled nearly a month ago while being fearful of attacks from France, an official said.

The official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity after Saturday's meeting between Niger's new military regime and a delegation from the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS.

He said the roughly two-hour discussion aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the country's deepening crisis, yielded little with no clarity on the next steps. It was the first time head of the junta, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, met with the delegation after rebuffing previous attempts.

Saturday's meeting was a

last-ditch diplomacy scramble by the bloc to resolve the crisis peacefully and followed last week's announcement that 11 of its 15 member states had agreed to intervene militarily if democratically-elected President Bazoum was not released from house arrest and reinstated.

The bloc's three other countries under military rule following coups, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso, were not included. The latter two had previously warned they would consider intervention in Niger an act of war. On August 10, ECOWAS ordered the deployment of a "standby force" to go into Niger and restore constitutional rule. It's unclear if and when the troops would intervene.

During the talks, Tchiani pushed for the lifting of economic and travel sanctions imposed by ECOWAS after the coup, saying Niger's population was suffering because of them,

Pope calls for peaceful end to the Niger crisis

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis expressed hope on Sunday for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Niger following the military coup in the West African nation.

The pontiff told the faithful in St Peter's Square that he is following events with concern, joining an appeal "for peace in the country and stability in the Sahel region."

He called on the international community "to find a peaceful solution as soon as possible, for the good of all."

Mutinuous soldiers overthrew Niger's democratically elected president last month, and have quickly entrenched themselves in power, rebuffing most dialogue efforts.



President Mohamed Bazoum, his wife and son have been kept under house arrest in the capital.

Talks this weekend between Niger's new military regime and a delegation from the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, have reportedly yielded little progress.

but he was unwilling to give much in return, said the official. The junta said they were under pressure, at times striking a conciliatory tone and apologising for past disrespect towards the bloc, while also defiantly standing by its decision to overthrow Bazoum and unequivocal about him not returning to power, the official added.

Tchiani also repeatedly expressed concerns that its former colonial ruler France — which has some 1,500 troops in the country and had been providing training and conducting joint operations with Niger's military — was actively planning an attack, said the official.

Niger was seen by many Western countries as the last democratic partner in the region it could work with to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency by militant groups linked with al-Qaida and the Islamic State.

Vegetable prices likely to cool down next month, rising crude a bit of concern: FinMin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government expects vegetable prices to start cooling off from next month with the advent of new crops in the market, but rising crude oil prices is a concern even though it is still within the tolerable zone of USD 90 a barrel, a finance ministry official said. The official further said that reduction in excise duty is not on cards and the government is driving infrastructure investment, and private sector capital investment is yet to gather steam.

He further said that the Centre's capital expenditure which was 28 per cent of Budget estimates at the end of June quarter, will reach 50 per cent by September end. In the 2023-24 budget, the govern-



ment had hiked capital investment outlay by 33 per cent to Rs 10 lakh crore in the current fiscal.

The official further said that a 6 per cent rainfall deficit is unlikely to impact kharif sowing as the agriculture sector is resilient. The government has been taking steps to control

inflation, including releasing wheat and rice stocks from reserves, putting restrictions on exports of rice, sugar, and allowing import of pulses and oilseeds.

"Flexible trade policy has been adopted to keep prices down. We must remember that global food prices are very

high due to the Ukraine war and the supply of food grains has been affected and that is a global factor from which Indian cannot remain isolated. We have taken measures to isolate our population from that inflation and relative to others we are in a much better position," the official told PTI.

He said interventions have been made to cool tomato prices and those steps will bear fruit in the coming months. Tomato is a seasonal crop and we will get another crop shortly and the price pressure will ease.

"This temporarily high inflation is partly driven by vegetables. I expect the vegetable prices will contract quickly, likely by next month," the official added.

The retail inflation touched

a 15-month high of 7.44 per cent in July, a spike from 4.87 per cent in June. However, wholesale price based inflation continued in the negative zone for the fourth straight month at (-)1.36 per cent in July.

In July, the annual retail inflation in the vegetables basket was at 37.44 per cent, spices at 21.63 per cent, pulses and products at 13.27 per cent, and cereals and products at 13 per cent.

To a question on whether the government is concerned about the recent surge in crude oil prices, the official said that budget calculations do not include crude oil prices because the government does not give subsidies to oil marketing companies. So the fluctuation in crude prices does not have any impact on fiscal math.

Crude oil prices currently are hovering around USD 85 per barrel as against USD 70-73 a barrel at the time of budget. "Rising crude oil price is a concern but they are still within a tolerable zone from the point of view of oil marketing companies. It doesn't necessitate any policy adjustment right now. The budget calculations are on track. I think we are quite ok with oil at about USD 80-85, up to USD 90 we shouldn't be worried. Beyond USD 90 it has an impact on inflation and other things," the official said.

The official also ruled out any cut in excise duty on petrol and diesel, saying it is not under consideration as of now. "We are not expecting any excise duty cut in petrol, diesel," he added.

Finance Commission expected to be constituted by Nov end: Finance Secy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is expected to constitute the 16th Finance Commission by end of November, finance secretary T V Somanathan said.

Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on Centre-state financial relations.

It suggests, among other things, the ratio in which tax is to be divided between the Centre and states for five years, beginning April 1, 2026.

"The Finance Commission is expected to be constituted by end of November because that's the statutory requirement," he told PTI in an interview.

Terms of Reference (ToR) for the commission is being finalised, he said.

The previous Finance Commission submitted its report on November 9, 2020, for the five fiscals -- 2021-22 to 2025-26 -- to the President.

The 15th Commission under N K Singh had kept the tax devolution ratio at 42 per cent -- at the same level suggested by the 14th Commission.

The central government accepted the report of the commission, and accordingly, the states are being given 42 per cent of the divisible tax pool of the Centre during the period 2021-22 to 2025-26.

The 15th finance commission's recommendations include the fiscal deficit, debt path for the Union and states, and additional borrowing room to states based on performance in power sector reforms.

As per the glide path for fiscal consolidation, the government aims to bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the 2025-26 fiscal.

For the current fiscal, the deficit is projected at 5.9 per cent of GDP, lower than 6.4



per cent in the last fiscal ended March 31, 2023.

He also said the government will stick to the fiscal deficit target of 5.9 per cent of the GDP as robust tax, non-tax collections will help meet the spending requirement and make up for any shortfall in disinvestment proceeds.

Although there would be a shortfall with respect to disinvestment, he said, this shortfall would be met by non-tax revenue mobilisation.

"Disinvestment target is unlikely to be met. However, I would say in aggregate the collective amount between disinvestment and non-tax revenue is likely to be very close to the budget," he said.

The total of disinvestment receipts, plus non-tax receipts are likely to be very close to the Budget Estimates, he said.

"We expect to adhere to our fiscal deficit target this year...None of the events so far have caused anything for us to deviate from it," he said.

The government has already got a higher dividend from the Reserve Bank of India and expects higher dividends from public sector banks and other PSUs than estimated in the Budget.

The Reserve Bank of India in May approved a Rs 87,416-crore dividend payout to the central government for 2022-23, nearly triple of what it paid in the preceding year. The government was expecting Rs 48,000 crore from the RBI, public sector banks and financial institutions in the current fiscal.

As many as 388 infrastructure projects show cost overruns of ₹4.65 lakh crore in July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 388 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than Rs 4.65 lakh crore in July 2023, an official report said.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,646 projects, 388 reported cost overruns and as many as 809 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,646 projects was Rs 23,92,837.89 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 28,58,394.39 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,65,556.50 crore (19.46 per cent of original cost)," the

ministry's latest report for July 2023 said.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till July 2023 was Rs 15,21,550.38 crore, which was 53.23 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreases to 602 if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion.

Further, it stated that for 345 projects neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported.

Out of the 809 delayed projects, 177 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 192 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 318 projects for 25-60 months and 122 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

FTA talks: Investment treaty to figure prominently during UK's high-level team visit to India this week

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Issues pertaining to the proposed bilateral investment treaty being negotiated between India and the UK along with a free trade agreement will figure prominently during the visit of a high-level team from Britain here, an official said.

UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch and Director General for Trade Negotiations at the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) Amanda Brooks are visiting India this week.

Besides participating in the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting in Jaipur on August 24-25, the UK minister will hold bilateral talks with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on August 26 here and review the progress of talks on the free trade agreement.

The UK minister is also



expected to meet Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on various issues, including the bilateral investment treaty.

Brooks would also meet senior officials of the department of economic affairs in the finance ministry, which is leading the negotiations on the investment treaty.

These meetings assume significance as negotiations for the free trade agreement have reached a final stage.

Investment treaty is being negotiated as a separate agreement between India and the UK and the two countries are looking at signing both the agreements simultaneously.

Though talks for most of the chapters have been closed, both sides have intensified negotiations to iron out differences on issues including rules of origin, intellectual property rights and the investment pact.

Sources said that at present

the investment treaty is a hurdle in the conclusion of both the agreements simultaneously, however, negotiations are going on to bridge the differences.

These investment treaties help in promoting and protecting investments in each other's countries. The main point of contention involved in this pact is about the mechanism for the settlement of disputes.

India has proposed to first utilise all local judicial remedies for settlement of disputes before initiating an international arbitration.

India has earlier lost two international arbitration cases against British telecom giant Vodafone and Cairn Energy plc of the UK over the retrospective levy of taxes.

On automobiles and whiskey, an important demand of the UK, India has agreed to give duty concessions to British industry.

Most corruption complaints against Home Ministry, Rlys, bank officials in 2022: CVC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The highest number of corruption complaints last year were against employees of the Union home ministry, followed by those working for the railways and in banks, according to the Central Vigilance Commission's latest annual report. In total, 1,15,203 such complaints were received for all categories of officers and employees across central government departments and organisations in 2022, it stated. Of these, according to the report, 85,437 were disposed of and 29,766 were pending -- 22,034 for more than three months.

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has prescribed a time-limit of three months for chief vigilance officers, who act as a distant arm



of the probity watchdog, to examine complaints, an official said. While the home ministry received 46,643 complaints against its employees last year, 10,580 were received by the railways and 8,129 by banks, according to the report.

Out of the total complaints against home ministry employees, 23,919 were disposed of and 22,724 were pending disposal -- 19,198 pending for more than three months, it said.

The railways had disposed of 9,663 complaints, while 917 were pending disposal -- nine for more than three months,

the report, which was made public recently, stated. Banks had disposed 7,762 corruption complaints and 367 were pending -- 78 for more than three months. There were 7,370 complaints against employees of Govt of National Capital Territory Delhi, it stated. Of these, 6,804 were disposed of and 566 were pending -- 18 for more than three months.

The report stated that 4,710 complaints were against employees of the housing and urban affairs ministry (including the Central Public Works Department), the Delhi Development authority, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, the Delhi Urban art Commission, the Hindustan Prefab Ltd, the Housing and Urban Dev Corporation Limited, the NBCC and the NCR Planning Board.

FMCG in June Qtr

Volume & margins grow as inflation moderates, small players make comeback

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The FMCG industry witnessed growth in volume and expansion in gross margins in the June quarter aided by moderation in inflation which also boosted small players in select categories.

Several small players, which had earlier vacated some of the market segments during the peak of inflation, returned back and intensified the competition at the local level, forcing several big FMCG players to go for price corrections.

Most of the listed FMCG entities reported volume-based growth in home care, personal care, beauty and foods products business, except the ice cream and beverages portfolio which was impacted by unseasonal rains in April and early

May during the quarter.

As material inflation reduced from high single digits to low single digits, there has been an uptick in volumes in both urban and rural markets, indicating promising signs of recovery in demand and makers including HUL, ITC, Godrej Consumer, Dabur, Marico and Tata Consumer are increasing spends on advertising and promotions.

Moreover, FMCG players are now passing on the benefits of lower input costs to consumers, there is a sequential reduction in price growth. In anticipation of lower prices, FMCG companies are also now seeing trade reducing the stock levels by 1 to 3 days only, said one of the leading makers in its earning calls.

Dabur India CEO Mohit



Malhotra said: "During Q1/FY24, most of the economies witnessed a moderation in inflation. In India too, inflation showed signs of easing, as witnessed in both CPI and WPI data. With this moderation in inflation, there has been an uptick in volumes in both urban and rural markets,

indicating promising signs of recovery in demand."

He further said, "Now inflation is kind of abated in our portfolio" and will be "investing money back into advertising for surging demand". Dabur reported an increase of 5 per cent in net profit to Rs 464 crore in the June quarter and total income rose to Rs 3,240 crore.

Bakery food company Britannia Industries reported a 35.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 455.45 crore and net sales were up 8.64 per cent to Rs 3,969.84 crore.

However, Britannia Executive Vice Chairman & Managing Director Varun Berry also said: "In this quarter, commodity prices marginally softened & hence, the local competition intensified."

Indian plastic market expected to reach ₹10 L Cr by fiscal 2027-28, says AIPMA

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India has the potential to emerge as a global plastic supplier and the domestic plastic market is expected to more than triple to reach Rs 10 lakh crore by 2027-28, officials said on Sunday.

According to the All India Plastics Manufacturers' Association, the market size of plastics in India was Rs 3.5 lakh crore.

Besides the growth of plastics in the domestic market, the shipment of the products overseas was also expected to reach Rs 1 lakh crore from the current Rs 40,000 crore.

The Indian plastics industry has proven capabilities. AIPMA has identified 553 plastic products for import substitution, totalling Rs 37,500 crore worth of imports, the association's President Mayur D Shah said.

"India also has the potential to emerge as a global plastics supplier. The government and the industry are working together to further encourage growth and create a sustainable environment for the Indian plastics industry to become the global sourcing hub," Shah said.

AIPMA Governing Council Chairman Arvind Mehta said: "The Indian plastic industry is poised for rapid growth. The size of the plastic industry is projected to grow from Rs 3.50 lakh crore in 2022-23 to Rs 10 lakh crore in 2027-28."

At least 59 land deals totalling 2,018 acres closed so far this year: Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least 59 land deals have been struck involving 2,018 acres so far this year according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock noted that the number of land deals has gone up post Covid pandemic as real estate developers look to expand their business to tap a rise in demand for residential and commercial properties.

Land parcels have also been purchased for setting up manufacturing units and hospitals. "Our latest research indicates that as many as 59 separate land deals for over 2,018 acres have been closed across the country between January to August 2023," Anuj Puri, Chairman of Anarock, said. In the corresponding period last year, he said about 50 land deals for 1,438-plus acres were closed across various cities.

GQG raises stake in Adani Ports to over 5%; investment now in Adani firms ₹38,700 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

US-based boutique investment firm GQG Partners has raised its stake in Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) to over 5 per cent as it continues to bet on billionaire Gautam Adani's group shuffling off market concerns.

The Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based GQG increased its stake in APSEZ from 4.93 per cent to 5.03 per cent by way of bulk deal, stock exchange filings showed.

GQG now has a stake in five of the 10 Adani Group firms. It on August 16 bought 7.73 per cent stake in Adani Power Ltd. Promoter group firms Worldwide Emerging Market Holding and Afro ASIA Trade And Investments sold 8.09 per cent stake in Adani Power through block deals on August 16.

Of this, GQG bought 7.73 per cent, filings showed. After the stake sale, promoter hold-



ing in Adani Power declined to 66.88 per cent from 74.97 per cent.

The investment comes days after Deloitte quit as auditor of APSEZ, renewing investor concerns even as the group slowly recovers from the effects of a report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research.

The Hindenburg report released January 24 alleged accounting fraud, stock price manipulation and improper use of tax havens, triggering a stock market rout that had erased about USD 150 billion in the market value at its lowest point.

Hotel industry's contribution to India's GDP to hit \$1 trillion by 2047: HAI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The direct contribution of Indian hotel industry to the country's GDP is estimated to touch USD 1 trillion by 2047 driven by a significant jump in domestic tourist visits and international arrivals, according to a report.

As per 'Vision 2047: Indian Hotel Industry' report by the Hotel Association of India (HAI) and Benori Knowledge, the direct contribution of the hotel industry to GDP was USD 40 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach USD 68 billion by 2027. By 2047, it will reach around USD 1 trillion, it added. The hospitality industry body also pointed out that for the sector to achieve its target, the accommodation growth will have to go beyond the metros to two and three-tier cities and also to the rural areas.

GST reward scheme on anvil; customers can soon upload invoice, participate in lucky draw

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Individuals may soon get rewarded for uploading GST invoice on a mobile app as the government is likely to launch the long awaited 'Mera Bill Mera Adhikar' scheme soon.

Under the invoice incentivisation scheme, cash prize of Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore monthly/quarterly could be given to individuals who upload invoice received from retailer or wholesaler on the app, two officials told PTI.

The 'Mera Bill Mera Adhikar' mobile app will be available on both IOS and android platforms. The invoice uploaded on the app should have the GSTIN of the seller, invoice number, amount paid and tax amount. An individual would be able to upload a maximum of 25 genuine invoices in a month on the app and the invoice

should have a minimum purchase value of Rs 200, an official said. Over 500 computerised lucky draws would be conducted every months where prize money could run into lakhs of rupees. Two lucky draws will be done in a quarter where the prize amount could be Rs 1 crore, officials said. The scheme is in the process of being finalised, they said, adding it could be launched as early as this month.

At the meeting, a broad level of consensus emerged among the concerned stakeholders on the proposed policy. "Now no draft policy will come. That exercise is over now. We are just getting a final sign off," the official, who did not wish to be named, said, adding there will be a present-

National e-commerce policy in final stages; to be presented before top-level: official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The proposed national e-commerce policy being formulated by the commerce and industry ministry is in the final stages and no new draft policy will be issued now for seeking views of stakeholders, a senior government official said. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on August 2 held a detailed discussion with representatives of e-commerce firms and a domestic traders' body on the pro-

posed policy.

In that meeting, a broad level of consensus emerged among the concerned stakeholders on the proposed policy. "Now no draft policy will come. That exercise is over now. We are just getting a final sign off," the official, who did not wish to be named, said, adding there will be a present-

ation of the proposed policy at the top level of the government. On data localisation, the official said that the e-commerce companies would have to follow the law of the land. Earlier the ministry had issued two draft national e-commerce policies. The 2019 draft proposed to address six broad areas of the e-commerce

ecosystem - data, infrastructure development, e-commerce marketplaces, regulatory issues, stimulating domestic digital economy and export promotion through e-commerce. The draft had talked about a framework for restrictions on cross-border data flow; collection or processing of sensitive data locally and storing it abroad.

SPAIN WINS WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

AFP ■ SYDNEY

Spain won the Women's World Cup for the first time in their history with skipper Olga Carmona sweeping in the only goal for a deserved 1-0 victory over England in Sunday's final.

In front of a crowd of nearly 76,000 at Stadium Australia in Sydney, Spain were the more accomplished side and had more chances, including missing a second-half penalty.

Spain's triumph is vindication for Jorge Vilda and the Spanish football federation, who stuck with the coach even after 15 players last year said they no longer wanted to represent their country under him.

England coach Sarina Wiegman, who has now suffered back-to-back defeats in the final, and her European champions can have few complaints.

Spain are the fifth team to lift the World Cup since the tournament began in 1991, joining outgoing champions the United States, Germany, Norway and Japan.

In front of Spain's Queen Letizia, defender Carmona rampaged from left-back to thrash home the winner low and hard on 29 minutes.

"It was a really tough game, we knew it would be tricky, England have a great team, but I think it was our game," Carmona told Spanish national broadcasters La 1.

"We had the feeling we were going to do it."

An emotional Millie Bright, skipper of the Lionesses, said her side had not been at their best as their dreams of a first World Cup melted away.

"Really proud of the team to come this far and to play in a World Cup final, not many players do that," she said.

"This is not it from us, we will bounce back I'm sure, but for now, it's hard to take."

Carmona sweeps in

Wiegman resisted the temptation to recall Chelsea attacker Lauren James after her two-match ban and kept faith with the team that beat co-



hosts Australia 3-1 in the semi-finals.

England had the first sniff of a chance but Lauren Hemp shot weakly at goalkeeper Cata Coll.

There was little to choose between them in the opening exchanges before both teams had golden opportunities on the quarter-hour mark.

Manchester City forward Hemp struck the bar with a curler that had Coll well beaten.

Spain went up the other end and should have scored but for Salma Parulluelo -- in for Alexandra Puteellas -- missed the ball in the six-yard box.

Alba Redondo then hit a first-time strike straight at goalkeeper Mary Earps with the England goal gaping.

Wiegman admits Spain the better side in WC final

AFP N SYDNEY



England coach Sarina Wiegman said the Lionesses were beaten by the better side after Spain won the Women's World Cup with a 1-0 victory in the final on Sunday.

Olga Carmona scored the only goal as Spain kept the European champions at bay and could have won by a bigger margin had England goalkeeper Mary Earps not saved Jennifer Hermoso's second-half penalty.

"Overall, I think Spain were just a little better than we were today. They had a great

tournament, so congrats to Spain," said Wiegman, who also lost a World Cup final when in charge of the Netherlands four years ago.

"I think everyone has seen an incredible game, a very open game. Two teams that want to play football."

Wiegman was forced to reshuffle before the tournament when captain Leah Williamson and Beth Mead were both ruled out by cruciate knee ligament injuries.

She then lost Lauren James for two games after the attacker received a red card in the last-16 against Nigeria.

Wiegman praised her players for adapting to so many setbacks, but said it did not dull the pain of falling at the final hurdle.

"Of course it feels really bad now. You go to the final, you want to give everything to win the final, then you lose it," she added.

"That happens in sport. What we have done, how we have shown ourselves as a team, how we want to play, overcoming so many challenges, I feel we can be very proud of ourselves. Even though it doesn't feel that way at the moment."

England captain Millie Bright said the Lionesses were left heartbroken after bouncing back from a slow start to the tournament to reach the final for the first time.

"We're heartbroken. We gave everything, unfortunately we just weren't there today," said the Chelsea defender.



Heartache but pride for Eng fans

AFP ■ LONDON

England fans watched the World Cup final against Spain on giant screens in parks with picnics, in packed local football clubhouses, and with early morning tea and coffee in pubs and bars.

There were stetson hats and blaring vuvuzelas, a sea of replica tops and red and white facepaint, and even a knight in a full suit of armour at one venue.

England's unofficial anthem "It's Coming Home" was belted out with good-natured gusto. "God Save the King" -- the national anthem -- got the full-throated treatment.

But their hopes of a first World Cup victory since the men's side in 1966 were not to be, even after goalkeeper Mary Earps' second-half penalty save -- and 13 minutes of stoppage time -- raised hopes of a comeback.

Spain's 1-0 victory was met with silence, tears and also sporting applause.

"It's upsetting," admitted administrator Yvonne Roswell, 43, watching with her 11-year-old daughter, Zara. "But next time," she told AFP. "They did really well."

Record-breaking The huge national interest in the Lionesses is a measure of how far the women's game has come, particularly since Sarina Wiegman's side won the European Championship last year.

The final was shown live on both the publicly funded BBC and its commercial rival ITV, with viewing figures tipped to hit record levels.

The 1-0 defeat to Spain means England has not won a World Cup since the men's team in 1966 © HENRY NICHOLLS / AFP

A peak of 11.5 million people tuned in to watch England beat Australia in the semi-final midweek.

Rain put a dampener on retail sales in July, with stubbornly high interest rates maintaining a squeeze on the stuttering UK economy.

But supermarkets and pubs have been expecting a much-needed boost from the match from sales of alcohol, soft drinks and barbecue food.

In sporting terms, England reaching the final has been seen as going some way to levelling the playing field between the men's and women's game, with the players now household names and icons.

Fernandes demands apology for Man Utd penalty call at Spurs



AFP ■ LONDON

Manchester United captain Bruno Fernandes said his side deserve an apology after not being awarded a penalty early on in Saturday's 2-0 defeat at Tottenham.

The score was level at 0-0 when no action was taken for a handball by Cristian Romero that turned Alejandro Garnacho's shot behind for a corner.

United benefitted from a controversial call in their favour

to beat Wolves 1-0 in their opening game of the season.

Goalkeeper Andre Onana punched Sasa Kalajdzic as he flapped at a cross deep into stoppage time at Old Trafford.

Wolves boss Gary O'Neill said after the game that referees' chief Jon Moss had contacted him to apologise for VAR not intervening to award a penalty.

Both the on-field and VAR referees were then demoted from Premier League duty this weekend.

"Last week they made a big thing on United not having a penalty against them," said Fernandes.

"I want to see what's going to happen this week if it's going to happen the same show they did last week.

"I want to see if Jon Moss also comes to apologise to our dressing room like they said he did to the manager of Wolves."

However, Fernandes did take some responsibility for the result at Spurs after missing a glorious headed chance to put the visitors in front.

"I have to score in one (or) another way. I have to find a way to score that header," said the Portuguese international.

"We didn't and after we conceded a goal in the early moment on the second-half and after it was difficult to come back."

Villa crush woeful Everton to secure first win this season

AFP ■ BIRMINGHAM (UNITED KINGDOM)

Aston Villa won for the first time this season as they routed Everton 4-0 on Sunday to erase the bitter taste of last weekend's thrashing at Newcastle.

Tipped to improve on last season's strong finish, Villa were hammered 5-1 on Tyneside in a shockingly bad start to their Premier League campaign.

But Unai Emery's side got back on track in the Villa Park sunshine as goals from John McGinn, Douglas Luiz, Leon Bailey and Jhon Duran brushed aside woeful Everton.

Emery will hope Villa's biggest victory of his reign kick-starts a season in which they will compete in Europe for the first time in 13 years after qualifying for the Europa Conference League.

Everton have less lofty ambitions after narrowly avoiding relegation last season and Sean Dyche's men already look destined for another grim fight for survival.

Beaten 1-0 at home by Fulham last weekend, Everton have lost their opening two games in tame fashion. It is only the third time Everton have been beaten in their first two league matches without scoring a goal and the first since 1956.

As if that wasn't bad enough, Dyche also had to contend with the sight of Dominic Calvert-Lewin



and Alex Iwobi both coming off injured.

The injury-plagued Calvert-Lewin was fit to start in place of Neal Maupay, but the striker's return was short-lived.

Hampered fitness and form issues, Calvert-Lewin had managed only four goals since August 2021 and scored just two last season.

Incredibly, his injury woes resurfaced when he needed lengthy treatment on a facial cut following a collision with Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez early in the first half.

Clinical Villa Calvert-Lewin was able to continue but Everton fell behind in the 18th minute.

Bailey sprinted onto Moussa Diaby's pass and cut the ball back to Scotland midfielder McGinn, who emphatically volleyed home from close-range.

Villa doubled their lead six minutes later from the penalty spot after Everton keeper Jordan Pickford caught Ollie Watkins with his out-stretched arm as he tried to

punch clear. Luiz stepped up to slot the spot-kick past Pickford, who was booked for trying to delay the penalty in an unsuccessful bid to distract the Brazilian.

Pickford saved from Diaby's low strike and then produced an even better stop to turn the Villa winger's volley against the woodwork as Emery's men laid siege to the Everton goal.

Looking tentative whenever the ball came near him, Calvert-Lewin finally came off before half-time with blood still scarring his cheek wound.

Iwobi limped off to add to Everton's problems and Villa added insult to injury with a third goal in the 51st minute.

Dismal defending by Michael Keane allowed Bailey space to plant a powerful drive past Pickford from 12 yards.

Many of Everton's travelling fans had seen enough as they streamed towards the exits from Bailey's goal.

It proved a wise move as Duran scored 47 seconds after coming on to complete the demolition in the 75th minute.

Keane was guilty of more sloppy defending, missing his kick to allow Duran to slot home.

On an otherwise perfect day, the only frustration for Villa was a late injury to Brazilian playmaker Philippe Coutinho.

Behrens hat-trick fires stellar Union past Mainz

AFP ■ BERLIN

A hat-trick from journeyman striker Kevin Behrens propelled Union Berlin to a 4-1 home win over Mainz on Sunday as Ludovic Ajorque missed two penalties for the visitors.

Behrens headed Union into the lead after just 52 seconds, the team's earliest goal in Bundesliga history, and added another just minutes later past a shellshocked Mainz defence. Union goalkeeper Frederik

Ronnow saved two Ajorque spot-kicks penalties in the second half, snuffing out any chance of a Mainz fightback despite a goal from Anthony Caci.

Behrens headed in again for the home side midway through the second half, with Milos Pantovic adding a fourth late in injury time to seal the victory.

The glamour arrivals of Germany internationals Kevin Volland and Robin Gosens, the latter shattering the club's transfer



record, dominated the lead-up but it was a typical Union signing in Behrens who struck early.

Plucked from Sandhausen in 2021, Germany's smallest professional football club, Behrens played his first top-division football at Union at the age of 30.

Behrens headed in a Jerome Roussillon cross from the left and then did the same to Aissa Laidouni on the right to double up after just nine minutes.

Union continued to look likely

to score and it was not until the second half when Mainz found their fluidity, winning a penalty 61 minutes in.

Ajorque stepped up but Ronnow dove left, saving the effort. The visitors got on the score-sheet just moments after thanks to a sweet volley from Caci, but Union hit back almost immediately after, again through Behrens and again from a header.

Mainz had a chance of an unlikely comeback when VAR inter-

vened to award a penalty for a handball with one minute remaining, but Ronnow again guessed correctly to save Ajorque's attempt.

Behrens was subbed off for Volland in the dying stages and the former Monaco man set up the final goal, curling in a cross for Pantovic to seal the victory for the home side.

Later on Sunday, Eintracht Frankfurt take on promoted derby rivals Darmstadt in the final match of the opening round.

YOUNG GUNS TAKE INDIA TO 185-5

PNS ■ MALAHIDE

Ruturaj Gaikwad, Sanju Samson and Rinku Singh played impressive knocks to take India to a healthy 185 for 5 in the second T20I against Ireland here on Sunday.

Fine hands by Gaikwad (58, 43 balls, 6x4, 1x6), Sanju Samson (40, 26 balls, 5x4 1x6) and Rinku Singh (38, 21 balls, 2x4, 3x6) placed India in a position to wrap this series with a match to go.

India had won the rain-marred first T20I by two runs under the DLS method.

India started their innings in a brisk fashion through opener Yashvini Jaiswal who made an 18 off 11 balls with a couple of fours and a six off pacer Josh Little.

But the innings failed to build on the promise as Jaiswal's attempt to pull Craig Young ended in the hands of Curtis Campher at deep.

Tilak Varma failed to make an impression in the second straight game, as this time a mistimed pull off Barry McCarthy was snaffled by George Dockrell close to the ropes.

At 35 for 2, India needed some solidity and momentum at the same time. The visitors gained that through Samson and Gaikwad for the third wicket.

Samson and Gaikwad milked 71 runs between them



to carry India past the 100-run mark in the 12th over.

Samson, who has triggered selection discussions ahead of India's squad announcement for Asia Cup 2023 on Monday, played a nice, little innings of

40 off 26 balls that contained five fours and a six.

Gaikwad was keen to give strike to his in-flow partner, and the Kerala player did not waste the chance either. Samson tore into Josh Little in

the 11th over, hammering him for 18 runs.

An inside-out loft and a slap over covers and a guide through the cordon brought him three fours in a row. He garnished that train of

aggression with a swivel pull that fetched him a maximum over the fine leg.

However, a moment of misfortune ended his stay. Samson wanted to play leg-spinner White over the covers off a wide ball on the off-stump, but he could only manage to drag the delivery back on to his stumps.

At 105 for 3 in the 13th over, India had a good launchpad to get to a sizable total.

Gaikwad kept his end going with a steady innings. It was an anti-thesis to usual T20 innings as he looked to build the innings around him.

The right-hander reached his fifty, second in T20Is, with a nice pull off White. In a rare moment of aggression on this day, Gaikwad lifted White for a six right over the head of the bowler for a six.

However, McCarthy's slow ball drew curtains on Gaikwad's innings, a hoist ended in the hands of a running-in Harry Tector at mid-off. India were 129 for 4 then.

But India had a couple of big hitters in their ranks in Rinku Singh and Shivam Dube, and they showed their power-hitting prowess in the 19th and 20th over.

The penultimate over by McCarthy went for 22 runs with Rinku carting him for two sixes and a four, and Mark Adair's final over produced 20 runs as India motored on.

India need Hardik Pandya as an all-rounder not as a batter: Manjrekar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With two big tournaments coming up i.e. Asia Cup 2023 and ICC ODI World Cup 2023, former Indian cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar believes that all-rounder Hardik Pandya has to contribute a lot more with both bat and ball to increase the Men In Blue's chance of lifting the 2023 World Cup trophy later this year.

The former Indian cricketer was seen in a bit of concern about Hardik's form as the stand-in skipper in the West Indies tour didn't perform well with both bat and ball. Apart from batting Hardik Pandya was very poor with the ball in the recently concluded five-match T20I series against the Windies side which concerned Sanjay Manjrekar.

In the Asia Cup 2023 and ICC Men's ODI World Cup 2023, the Indian all-rounder might play as a third seamer in the spin-friendly conditions and also might need to do the bulk of the finishing at the backend of the Men In Blue Innings.

In a recent interaction on Star Sports Sanjay Manjrekar expressed his thoughts on Hardik Pandya's form. He said that "Hardik Pandya's form is a bit of a concern. He has to do a lot of heavy work at the World Cup. You need him as an all-rounder and not just as a batter. So you need at least



6-7 overs per game. When India won the 2011 World Cup, it was because of people like Yuvraj Singh and Suresh Raina being the batters who could bowl."

According to the cricketer-turned-commentator, with Ravindra Jadeja likely to be a bowler who will look after containing runs, he wants Yuzvendra Chahal to get back among the wickets alongside Kuldeep Yadav.

"Chahal needs to rise to the occasion in the 50-overs

format to pick wickets along with Kuldeep Yadav because Jadeja will be the containment bowler. I think seam will be a gamble for most teams with the size and dimensions of grounds in India," Sanjay Manjrekar said.

The Indian national cricket team is all set to announce their Asia Cup 2023 squad on 21 August, Monday. It will be interesting to see if KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer will make it into the Men In Blue squad or not.



It is a big achievement, shows impact of franchise cricket: Ashwin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Sunday hailed United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s stunning win over New Zealand in a T20I, saying it underlines the impact of franchise cricket and gives hopes to next generation of cricketers from non-Test playing nations.

UAE on Saturday registered their maiden win over New Zealand, humbling the Kiwis by seven wickets in the second T20I in Dubai.

"UAE beating New Zealand is a big achievement and it's also showing us what franchisee cricket has succeeded in doing," Ashwin wrote in a post in social media platform 'X', formerly twitter.

"There is hope for the next generation cricketer coming from countries that aren't mainstream test nations and that's good news for the game."

Opting to bowl, UAE restricted New Zealand to 142-8 and then overhauled the target, scoring 144 for 3 in 15.4

overs with skipper Muhammad Waseem (55) and Asif Khan (48) steering the chase.

Giving Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan's example, Ashwin hoped more players will join IPL and bring change in their respective teams.

"When @rashidkhan_19 broke into the IPL, Afghans weren't a feared cricketing nation at world cups but now no one can refuse that fact," he said.

"The future may well see other nations having representations at the IPL and turning the fortunes of the game in their respective countries. Well done UAE #UAEvsNZ."

The emergence of Afghan players, led by Rashid, has been one of the highlights of world cricket in the last decade.

The 24-year-old has claimed 556 wickets at an average of 18.30 and an excellent economy rate of 6.45 in 410 T20 games so far in his career. He has played 89 ODIs and 82 T20Is, claiming 167 and 130 wickets respectively. He also has 34 wickets from 5 Tests.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hosting two World Cup games in as many days is not ideal for organisational as well as security reasons, said a Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) official on Sunday but BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla was clear that any further tweak in schedule is "unlikely".

After a much-delayed schedule announcement in June, the BCCI and ICC rescheduled as many as nine games earlier this month, including the marquee clash between India and Pakistan.

With the Indo-Pak fixture in Ahmedabad advanced by a day on October 15, Pakistan's game against Sri Lanka in Hyderabad was moved to October 10 from October 12. The HCA is also hosting New Zealand versus Netherlands on October 9.

Back-to-back games not ideal but Shukla says 'change unlikely'

Now, with Hyderabad police expressing its reservations on providing security for back-to-back games, the HCA had sought another change in schedule, wanting a gap of at least a day between the two games.

"I can't say it would be changed for sure but back to back games are not ideal. I mean if they (BCCI) are reconsidering that will be well and good. We will have to work with security agencies."

"Anyone would want a day in between two World Cup games. We are still engaging with security agencies to see if it is possible or not. At the same



time we are also keeping BCCI in the loop. The BCCI is completely aware of what we are trying to do," said an HCA official

on condition of anonymity. However, Shukla said in an official statement that no further changes are likely as it requires involvement of multiple stakeholders.

"I am in charge of Hyderabad venue for WC. If there will be any issue or anything, will try to get it resolved. It is not easy to change the World Cup schedule and it's unlikely to happen. Only BCCI can't change schedule, teams, ICC, all involved," said Shukla, who is also a Congress Rajya Sabha member.

For an international game, the Hyderabad Police deploys

between 2000-2500 personnel. "Deployment also depends on nature of the game and how many people turn up. Police makes those assessments and deploys accordingly," the HCA source added.

Considering Pakistan's involvement in one of those games, the security is expected to be heightened.

Pakistan, who will play in India for the first time since the T20 World Cup in 2016, will have a lengthy stay in Hyderabad as they play two warm-up games before featuring in as many tournament proper matches at the venue.

Theekshana discloses what Dhoni told him

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sri Lanka (SL) and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) off-spinner Maheesh Theekshana has revealed what Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni cheekily said after the final of the Indian Premier League 2023 (IPL). MS Dhoni told Theekshana that he won't get any bowling practice next time.

The 23-year-old off-spinner played a crucial part in CSK's IPL 2023 triumph after they defeated Gujarat Titans (GT) in the final earlier this year. While the Sri Lanka off-spinner had a good outing with the ball in the IPL 2023 as Theekshana picked up 11 wickets in 13 matches at a strike rate of 26.73. However, Maheesh



Theekshana was poor in the fielding department, dropping a few catches during the IPL season.

In a recent interview on Revsportz show Backstage with Boria, the Sri Lankan cricketer opened up on his cheeky interaction with the CSK skipper Dhoni as he headed home after the IPL 2023 season.

He wants to enjoy every time. Even when we go out in the middle, he's a quiet guy who just wants to enjoy the moment. You can go and talk to him for hours if you want. You can have a chat with him, you can eat with him. He's a very honest man also. If he wants to say something on your face, he will say it to you. He's a very humble guy and blessed to play with him and share the dressing room," the bowler said.

"When he is sitting at the back of the seat, I am the one next to him. When we travel in the bus, people want to wave at him. It's very special. Staying with him is like a proud moment for each and every player in their career," Theekshana added.

"He's a simple man. He wants everything to be sim-

No regret over her Dhaka outburst: Harmanpreet

PTI ■ LONDON

Indian women's cricket team captain Harmanpreet Kaur said on Sunday that she has no regret over her temperamental outburst during the third ODI against Bangladesh last month in Dhaka.

Harmanpreet was banned for two matches after she smashed the stumps over the umpire's decision to give her out.

Later in the post-match presentation, she had also termed the umpiring "pathetic" during the bilateral series.

Following the ban, Harmanpreet will miss India's first two T20I matches at the Hangzhou Asian Games in September-October.

"I will not say that I regret anything because at the end of the day

as a player you want to see that fair things are happening. As a player, you always have the right to express yourself and what you're feeling," she was quoted as saying by The Cricket

Paper during the Women's Hundred.

Harmanpreet is playing for Trent Rockets in the tournament.

"I don't think I said anything wrong to any player or any person. I just said what happened on the field. I don't regret anything," she repeated.

Apart from the ban, Harmanpreet was also slapped with three demerit points for "showing dissent at an umpiring decision" and one more for "public criticism" of match officials.

It could be Shardul vs Prasidh for extra pacer's slot

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shardul Thakur's better batting ability compared to speedster Prasidh Krishna could prove to be decisive while selecting the extra pacer for World Cup but both are likely to be auditioned if India pick a 17-member squad for the Asia Cup, which is set to be named on Monday.

However, the biggest bone of contention will be whether senior batters KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer, desperate to prove their full fitness from thigh and back injuries respectively, are green-lighted for selection by NCA's sports science unit headed by Dr Nitin Patel.

Even if one of the two is

available, head coach Rahul Dravid and captain Rohit Sharma will feel a bit less pressured about the fragile middle-order, the hot talking point at present.

Chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar will announce the squad here on Monday afternoon and there remains a possibility that a 15-member provisional squad for the World Cup could also be decided on the same day.

With the deadline for provisional squad being September 5, the BCCI might wait to announce its squad at a later date.

While there remains a school of thought that India should name the likely 15 to feature in the World Cup, the



provision to select 17-member squads (as Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan did) gives them a chance to check-out all options before pruning it down to 15.

While Shardul, with 58 wickets, a half-century and a batting strike-rate of 106-plus from 38 ODIs, is expected to get the nod for his happy knack of picking crucial wickets, a fit-again Prasidh will remain in team management's scheme of things.

It must be noted that Dravid had earmarked the lanky Bengaluru speedster back in 2021-22 as one who was supposed to regularly play 50-over cricket for India.

A lower back stress fracture did peg him back for close to a year but he did look fit and

hungry during the first T20I against Ireland on Friday.

Spinners' Conundrum

There will be five spinners in contention for the World Cup berth --- wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal along with three finger spinners --- left-arm orthodox Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

While Ashwin for his experience in Indian conditions should have been seriously considered, not being kept back for the West Indies ODIs does make one think if he actually can make it to the white ball squad.

Recently, Ashwin was playing red ball cricket in the TNCA league.

Kuldeep, on form and in terms of skill sets, is India's No. 1 ODI spinner at the moment and an automatic choice.

So is Jadeja, who walks into any format because of his multi-dimensional skills.

With none of the top-order batters rolling their arm over, if Tilak Varma is not picked, then India won't have a part-time spinner.

Thus instead of picking three specialist spinners and a part-timer, Indian selectors might have to go for four specialist spinners.

Axar has been carried in the ODI set-up for a while and it is unlikely that he would be dropped. At this point, he is ahead in pecking order compared to Yuzvendra Chahal.