

Evading arrest in Raj lynching case Monu leading face of cow vigilantism in Haryana

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Mohit Yadav alias Monu Manesar, who is evading arrest in the murder case of two men in Rajasthan, became a prominent face of cow vigilantism in Haryana during the last five years - helped by his presence on social media.

A member of the Bajrang Dal, 30-year-old Monu in a video message denied his involvement in the case and claimed he was at a hotel at the time of the incident. He also shared CCTV footage from the hotel on social media.

He joined the Bajrang Dal as a co-coordinator in his home district Manesar in 2011 and was a member of the district cow protection task force formed by authorities after Haryana's cow protection law came into force in December 2015. He is now the district president of Bajrang Dal and frequently courts controversy over the actions of his own cow protection group and shares videos of vigilantes chasing, confronting and nabbing alleged cow smugglers.

The videos, mostly live streams, have thousands of views and comments.

He has 83,000 followers on Facebook and more than 2 lakh subscribers on YouTube. He received a silver play button from YouTube in October last year as the number of subscribers crossed one lakh.

Under the Gauvansh Sanrakshan and Gausamvardhan Act that was implemented in 2015, cow slaughter in Haryana attracted rigorous imprisonment ranging from three years to 10 years. After this law, a number of cow protection groups, including those already present, became



visibly active.

There have been allegations that cow protection groups have been targeting a particular community and indulging in high-handedness. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi has alleged that the BJP government was shielding such vigilantes. Monu has, however, claimed that he has been receiving death threats from suspected smugglers. The Haryana police last month filed two FIRs on his complaints.

Just days prior to that, the family of 22-year-old Varis had accused cow vigilantes, including Monu, of thrashing him to death after branding him a cow smuggler in Nuh district of Haryana, though police had said he died in a road accident.

The police said a Santro car with Varis and two others, Shokeen and Nafis, had rammed into a tempo near Khori Kalan village on Tauru-Bhiwadi road on Saturday.

Monu had claimed that they had rescued a cow from the car and taken the injured to hospital. "I went live on Facebook and also asked the name of one of the injured, but we did not hurt any of them," he had said.

He is now among the five accused in the case in which the charred bodies of two Muslim men from Rajasthan were found

in a car in Haryana's Bhiwani after they were allegedly abducted by cow vigilantes.

Nasir (25) and Junaid alias Juna (35), both residents of Ghatmeeka village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, were allegedly abducted on Wednesday and their bodies were found inside a burnt car in Loharu in Bhiwani in Haryana on Thursday morning. However, Monu Manesar had claimed his innocence in this case. "My colleagues and I have no role but Rajasthan Police registered a case against me and my group members. I don't even know the deceased," he had said in his video message. Rajasthan police has launched a manhunt for him.

The Gurugram police in Haryana also conducted raids to nab him in a case of murder attempt which was registered against him on February 7 at Pataudi police station, said officials.

According to police, a brawl broke out between two groups in Pataudi's Baba Shah Mohalla when Monu Manesar was there along with his team.

A complaint was filed by Mubin Khan, a resident of the same locality, who said that his son Mohin was shot at during firing in two groups and received a bullet injury.

Following the complaint of Mubin Khan, an FIR was registered under Section 307 (attempt to murder) against Monu and others at the Pataudi police station.

"In the case of murder attempt, Monu Manesar is wanted and we are also conducting raids to nab him", said Manbir Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Manesar. After completing class 12, Monu had joined a polytechnic.

Ex-AN Chief Secy misused position to destroy proof in gangrape case: Chargesheet

PTI ■ PORT BLAIR

The chargesheet filed by the Special Investigation Team against former chief secretary of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Jitendra Narain in connection with gangrape of a 21-year-old woman has revealed that he misused his position to destroy evidence of her presence at his official residence last year.

During the interrogation of B Sony, the personal assistant to the former CS, it was found that the "accused Jitendra Narain had sent some voice notes to Sony through WhatsApp, which were found to be crucial evidence in this case regarding destruction of evidence, particularly Digital Video Recorder (DVR) at Narain's official residence".

The chargesheet also mentions about the removal of "Network Video Recorder", which was installed at Narain's plush government bungalow in Port Blair and also of the dispatch of "4TB Hard Disk Drive" of the NVR to "Delhi" through a private airline on July 25, 2022. Sony's mobile phone was seized and sent to the Central Forensic Science

Laboratory (CFSL) for examination and date extraction. Later, it came to be known (based on Narain and Sony's chats) that he had dispatched the "4TB Hard Disk Drive" to Delhi through the private airline.

Texts of the chats between Narain and Sony accessed by PTI reads: "GM Sir today 8 boxes by AI 486." Narain replied: "Ok cost." Responding to Narain, Sony said: "Rs 4757, 135 KG I.E. Per kg Rs 35.24." After this conversation, there was a missed voice call. Then, Sony texted again: "Sir gadgets cannot go in cargo."

Narain responded: "Wires." Subsequently, Narain sent five voice notes to Sony on WhatsApp and then texted: "Plchk. (please check)" Sony replied: "Sir will check and revert."

The final note sent by Sony to Narain was a PDF file which read: "Sent - Cargo Bill AI 486 PB DEL 25.07.22." Speaking to PTI, the woman's lawyer, Phatick Chandra Das, said, "In respect of the case of ex-chief secretary Jitendra Narain, the police has submitted the chargesheet before the

honourable court, which I have perused as an advocate on behalf of the victim, and I have seen the detailed report of the SIT.

"It is based on proper evidence on records, and valuable material on these are available in the chargesheet. I appreciate the effort of the police. The matter is now fixed before High Court Circuit Bench in Port Blair of bail plea of Jitendra Narain on February 20. I will be appearing on behalf of the victim for opposing the bail plea."

A copy of the chargesheet available with PTI also revealed that before leaving for Delhi (upon receiving his transfer letter) on July 27, 2020, Narain called the CCTV technician Sawab Hussain at his residence, and told him to delete/erase the data in the hard disk.

"Hussain told him that it will take considerable time to delete the data, following which Narain asked him to remove the hard disk from the installed NVR, and he removed the two 4TB hard disks and handed those over to Narain on July 23, 2022," the chargesheet said. "Jitendra

Narain carried out this incident intending to destroy the evidence related to his wrongdoings, including the exploitation of innocent victim (which was corroborated with the documents obtained by APWD and Webstep Technologies Pvt Ltd) and statement of witnesses," it said.

According to the chargesheet, investigation also revealed that whenever any lady "guests", including the woman (who was allegedly sexually exploited on March 27 and April 27 last year by Narain) came to his bungalow in Port Blair, the cooks were confined to the kitchen and asked not to come out till they were told to, and the other staff and watchmen were directed to go to the electric room behind the house.

"Not the least, he also instructed the security guards not to make record entry of guests' vehicles, and the guards were asked to keep the gates open prior to entry of 'certain guest'."

Also, the staff were terrified with him due to his highly aggressive and abusive behaviour," a witness report in the chargesheet showed.

"In March 2022, one day ex-CS Jitendra Narain directed R L Rishi (suspended Labour Commissioner and one of the accused in the case) over VoIP call through WhatsApp 'to bring one girl' to his bungalow, and it was then Rishi approached Sandeep Singh alias Rinku (Port Blair-based businessman, also an accused) to convince the victim to fulfil Narain's direction," the document said.

The chargesheet, which was filed earlier this month, was based on the statements of nearly 90 witnesses, forensic science reports and electronic evidence, police had said.

The SIT is probing allegations that the 21-year-old woman was lured to the former chief secretary's residence with the promise of a government job, and then allegedly raped by multiple people, including Narain.

Narain was arrested on November 10 last year, and the FIR registered on October 1 when he was posted as chairman and managing director of the Delhi Financial Corporation. At present, all the three accused are in judicial custody.

Country has already gone bankrupt: Pak Def Min

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Meanwhile, the Opposition also asked the Government to take some bold decisions and implement austerity measures to cut its expenditures in order to steer the country out of the economic crisis.

Opposition leader Shahzad Waseem said that the rulers had closed corruption cases involving Rs 1,100 billion and the Pakistani people were bearing the brunt of it. He also expressed fear that the new budgetary measures would stoke inflation, The Express Tribune reported.

'Centre using its slave EC...

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H added, "I will not rest till I bury these thieves and also the owner of the "Chor Bazar" in the elections". "The thieves who have stolen the Shiv Sena's name and its symbol do not know that they have hit a stone on a beehive. So far they have enjoyed honey generated by bees. They have not experienced the bee sting yet. They will do so now," Uddhav said.

Slamming the Shinde-led Shiv Sena for "misusing" the name of his father and late Sena chief Bal Thackeray, Uddhav said: "These people want the face of late Balasaheb Thackeray, but they do not want the family of late Thackeray. When we used to

be accused of seeking votes in the name of Modi, we were part of the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance.

These people used to attend meetings with the mask of Modi. Now time has come for Modi to come to Maharashtra with the mask of late Balasaheb Thackeray. That's the strength of late Balasaheb Thackeray. These people cannot get votes in the name of Modi today. That's why they are using the name of late Thackeray."

Daring the Shinde-led Shiv Sena to contest the elections against his party, Uddhav said: "You come to the elections with the stolen 'Bow and arrow', I will fight against your party with my new symbol

'flaming torch'. Let's see what happens in the election. I will not rest till I finish you in the elections," he said.

Reposing the faith in his supporter, Uddhav said: "I have not fallen yet nor I would ever fall. You are my strength. As long as I enjoy your support, I can defeat and bury as many thieves and the owner of Chor bazar."

Uddhav said that in the coming days he would reveal what all his party had told the ECI during the hearings over the dispute on the Sena's name and its symbol.

"Nothing of this sort has happened in the country during the last 75 years. In the past there were similar disputes in the Congress,

Samajwadi Party and the AIADMK, but never was the original party name or symbol given to the breakaway faction, but this is for the time that the ECI has given name-symbol of the parent to those thieves," Uddhav said.

Uddhav stood in an open jeep to address his supporters - a sight which was akin to the manner in which late Balasaheb Thackeray had done way back on October 30, 1968. After seeing this, his supporters drew comparisons between Uddhav and his late Shiv Sena Sena chief-father.

Earlier, Uddhav met the Sena (UBT) top leaders, including MPs, MLAs, MLCs to chalk out the strategy to challenge the ECI's order.

GST Council adopts GoM...

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She also informed that the Council has authorised the chairperson to take the final view and incorporate it in the Finance Bill, since there is not much time for the Council to meet again.

Meanwhile, the Council did not take up the GoM report on online gaming as the

Chairman of the panel was occupied with Meghalaya Assembly elections. The panel is headed by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma. Headed by Union Finance Minister, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council comprises Finance Ministers of States and UTs (with Legislature).

Sahil...

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Accordingly, Sahil executed plan and murdered her and informed the other co-accused persons about it on the same day ie February 10 and then all of them went ahead with marriage ceremony," the officer said. Several other charges, including those of criminal conspiracy, destruction of evidence, and harbouring a crim-

inal have been added to the FIR, police said. The incident had come to light on February 14, Valentine's Day, four days after the fact, when Sahil under police custody confessed to the crime and led police to the fridge in his eatery where he had been hiding the body.

A metropolitan court on Saturday has allowed three-day custodial interrogation of five people, including the father, two relatives and two friends of main accused Sahil.

Investigators on Friday revealed that Sahil did not

murder his live-in partner to marry another woman on February 10, but strangled his first wife and some of his relatives, including his father and cousin, were aware of the murder.

The Crime Branch sources earlier revealed that Sahil had "deleted all the data from Nikki's phone". "The accused knew that his and Nikki's chat was big evidence for the police, so he deleted all the data as earlier many times they had quarrels through WhatsApp chat," sources said.

Dangerous, opinionated...

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The Adani Group has been under severe pressure since the US short-seller Hindenburg Research on January 24 accused it of accounting fraud and stock manipulation, allegations that the conglomerate has denied as "malicious", "baseless", and a "calculated attack on India."

LOSS OF ID CARD
Public Notice

This is to bring to the notice of the general public that one ID Card of Gudiya issued by ICICI Bank Ltd. having ID card no. 2314810 has been found missing and/or lost on 16/02/2023. Anyone, who finds the said ID card, is requested to return the said ID card to the Manager Debt Services & Management Group, ICICI Bank Limited, SD Tower, Sector 8, Rohini, Delhi - 110085

Therefore, all the customers of ICICI Bank Limited are hereby notified not to make any payment to any unauthorised person holding the said ID card no 2314810

Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ID card shall do so at his/her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payment.

Date: 19/02/2023
Place: Delhi

For:-
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CBI summons...

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Suddenly, in the mid-March 2021, C Arvind was called by Sisodia to Kejriwal's residence (where Jain was also present) and Sisodia handed over a document to C Arvind which was a draft GoM report proposing that wholesale should go to private entities and asked him to prepare the draft GoM report based on the said document.

He said it was the first time that he saw this proposal as the same was never discussed in any GoM meetings, the ED charge sheet says. Recently, the CBI arrested Butchibabu Gorantla, a former Chartered Accountant of K Kavitha, a BRS MLC in Telangana and a

daughter of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.

It is alleged that Babu had met several accused named in the FIR in Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai and was one of the prime negotiators from the South Lobby, which wanted to swing the now scrapped excise policy for 2021-22 in its favour.

The CBI had also questioned Kavitha in connection with the case in December last year. During its probe, the CBI had found evidence that Babu acted on behalf of the South Lobby comprising the Telangana MLC, YSRCP MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, and Aurobindo Pharma's P Sarat Chandra Reddy.

Centre, DWB...

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The Abdul Nabi Mosque, Mathura Road, Babar Shah Mosque & Takia, near Tilak Bridge, Babar Road Mosque near Railway Line and School, Nizam Gali House Mosque inside Nizam Palace, Abdul Haq Mosque opposite Vidya Bhavan, Curzon Road, Mosque and Dargah Sayed, Qabristan Quad in South Indraprastha, Mathura Road, Ghosian Mosque alias Jheel ki Piao, opposite Link House, Mathura Road, Tomb of Shah Sardulla Gulshan near Plaza Cinema, 'H' Block and Masjid and Graveyard Fazal Mohd. Ramlila Ground, Turkman Gate are among the 123 Waqf properties located on prime

land of the national Capital. The LDO said the two-member committee headed by Justice (Retired) SP Garg on the issue of denotified Waqf properties in its report submitted that no representation or objection was received by it from the DWB. The letter said the committee was formed by the Government of India on the order of the Delhi High Court.

The LDO said the Delhi Waqf Board was the main stakeholder/affected party to whom the opportunity was given by the committee.

However, it did not appear before the committee or filed any representation or objection regarding 123 properties. "It is evident from the above facts that Delhi Waqf Board does not have any stake in the listed

properties, neither have they shown any interest in the properties nor filed any objections or claims. It is, therefore, decided to absolve Delhi Waqf Board from all matters pertaining to '123 Waqf Properties,'" said the LDO's letter.

"We have already raised our voice in the court on 123 Waqf properties, our Writ Petition No.1961/2022 is pending in the High Court. Some people are spreading lies about it, the proof of this is in front of all of you. We will not allow anyone to occupy the properties of the Waqf Board," Khan in a tweet in Hindi.

Khan said these 123 properties are used by the Muslim community. The day-to-day management of these 123 properties was done by Mutawallis or the management committee

appointed by the DWB.

The DWB has a statutory right under Section 32 of the Waqf Act, 1995, to exercise the powers of general supervision, administration and control over these properties. According to the Waqf Act, all the Waqf properties vest in the concerned Waqf Board, which in the present case, is DWB, Khan said. Khan is an accused in a case concerning alleged irregularities in the DWB.

He is currently out on bail. In 2016, the Modi government constituted a one-member committee to decide on the issue. One-member committee submitted its report in 2017. On February 10, 2023, the Delhi High Court observed that the Qabristan Qadeem was undisputedly handed over to the ITBP in 2017.

CM accuses LG of constitutional overreach

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the AAP that members nominated by the Lieutenant Governor cannot vote in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi mayoral election, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has accused L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena of constitutional overreach.

The AAP supremo accused Saxena of interfering in the administration of justice and being in contempt of court by trying to "forcibly prevent" the government from presenting its views before the Supreme Court by directing the urban development department to appoint solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, who happened to be the L-G's counsel, to argue the government's case.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal alleged that the LG tried to "interfere in the administration of justice" and committed "contempt of court". No reaction was immediately available from the LG's office to the claims and allegations made by the AAP leader. Kejriwal said the petitioner in the case, the AAP's mayoral candidate Shelly Oberoi, had added the LG and the Delhi government as separate parties to her petition in the apex court.

He said the AAP government and the LG had "contrary viewpoints on all the issues

related to the case". The AAP had vociferously opposed the nomination of 10 aldermen by the LG to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the decision of the civic body's presiding officer to give them the right to vote to elect the mayor, the deputy mayor and the standing committee members.

"The Delhi government had asked the urban development secretary to hire Gautam Narayan in the case. But the LG, on February 9, directed the official to appoint Solicitor General Tushar Mehta as the government's lawyer to defend the case," Kejriwal said. The chief minister added that he has written to the LG, conveying it to him that his actions did not behave the constitutional post he held. "LG forced Delhi government to appoint Tushar Mehta in MCD Mayor case in SC. So, Tushar Mehta represented both opposing parties - Delhi government and LG. Isn't this interference in administration of justice? Isn't this a criminal act?" Kejriwal asked in a tweet. In his letter to Saxena, the chief minister said in the interest of justice and to enable the Supreme Court to arrive at a proper conclusion, it was important that all viewpoints were presented before it.

"However, there was an attempt by the LG to prevent the Delhi government from



presenting its views before the Supreme Court," he said, citing the directions issued by the LG's office on February 9. The AAP leader claimed that Saxena wanted to decide the submissions to be made before the top court for himself as well as for the Delhi government.

"Most actions taken by the LG regarding MCD mayor election were brazenly illegal and unconstitutional. Was that the reason why the LG wanted to prevent the truth being stated before the Supreme Court?" he asked.

The chief minister also alleged that officers were threatened to do the bidding for the LG, saying it was a "crime" and "conspiracy" on the part of Saxena to hide the truth. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia also lashed out at the LG in a tweet in Hindi, saying he

thinks of himself as a "Bollywood villain" who is above courts, law and justice.

Kejriwal said the Supreme Court foiled the "conspiracy" hatched by the BJP and the LG to influence the mayoral poll, and asserted that the AAP candidate will win the election since the party has the majority in the MCD House.

The AAP ended the BJP's 15-year rule in the MCD by winning 134 of the 250 wards. The saffron party won 104 wards in the civic body polls held in December. Three previous attempts to hold the first meeting of the MCD House to elect the mayor, the deputy mayor and the standing committee members failed due to adjournments over various issues, including the appointment of aldermen and the voting right accorded to them.

AAP seeks Saxena's resignation for supporting 'BJP's hooliganism', delaying mayoral polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP staged a protest on Saturday outside the Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena's residence demanding his resignation for allegedly supporting "BJP's hooliganism" and delaying the mayoral polls. The AAP leaders said that the top court has given a tight slap on the face of the L-G and the BJP and no one is above law and constitution in the country.

Several AAP leaders including MLA Atishi and Durgesh Pathak gathered at Raj Niwas Marg with banners and raised slogans demanding LG's resignation. "The order of Supreme Court on the Delhi mayoral poll is a tight slap on the face of the BJP. What the LG has done so far in Delhi is unconstitutional and after what has been said in the court order, the LG should step down," Pathak said at the protest.

AAP leader Atishi said that Supreme Court has proved that BJP-LG were constitutionally and illegally controlling MCD. "LG has no right to stay on his position anymore. The



Supreme Court has given a tight slap on the face of BJP & LG, and told them that no one is above law and constitution in the country. Despite being on a constitutional post, the LG disregarded the constitution and the law and took one wrong decision after another," she said.

The Supreme Court had ruled that nominated members of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) cannot vote in the mayoral election. Pathak alleged that several decisions were taken by the LG "uncon-

stitutionally" and that he also supported "BJP's hooliganism". "First, the aldermen were appointed by the LG, bypassing the Delhi government. Then, they tried to get the aldermen to vote in the MCD house. After all this, shouldn't the LG of Delhi resign? This is the country of Gandhi, Nehru and Shastri. Such unconstitutional things cannot happen here," he said.

After the newly elected Delhi civic body failed thrice to elect a new mayor, the Supreme Court on Friday ordered

issuance of a notice within 24 hours for convening the first meeting of the MCD to fix the date of Mayoral and deputy Mayor elections. The top court's order came on a plea moved by the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) mayoral candidate, Shelly Oberoi, seeking early conduct of the election.

The apex court on February 8 had sought the responses of the Lieutenant Governor's (LG) office, MCD's pro-tem presiding officer Satya Sharma and others on Oberoi's plea.

No liquor scam, says Kejriwal as CBI summons Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has asserted that there is no "liquor scam" in Delhi and that the case over his government's excise policy was created as a result of "political vendetta and conspiracy" ahead of his deputy Manish Sisodia's questioning by the CBI slated for Sunday.

Reacting to Kejriwal's assertion, Delhi BJP chief Vinendra Sachdeva wondered why did the AAP government scrap the excise policy if there was no scam in it.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also lashed out at the Kejriwal saying that Sisodia and Kejriwal should be arrested in the excise policy scam. "Sisodia should tell what is his relation with many names like Arun Pillai, Sameer Mahendru and whether he was in regular con-



tact with them on mobile or not? Why did the Kejriwal government give permission to open liquor vends in unauthorized colonies and residential areas?, Bidhuri questioned.

The Excise Policy 2021-22 was withdrawn by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government last year after a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe was recommended by Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) VK Saxena into "violation of norms and lapses".

Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, Kejriwal



said his government will fully cooperate with the CBI's investigation into the alleged irregularities in the implementation of the now-scrapped Excise Policy 2021-22. "First of all, there is no such thing as a liquor scam. We formulated the best and most transparent policy in the country," he said when asked about the CBI summoning Sisodia.

The same policy implemented in Punjab has led to a 48-per cent rise in revenues, the chief minister said. "In Delhi, they have framed the case as a result of political vendetta and



conspiracy. Manish will go there and we will fully cooperate. Finally, the truth will prevail," he said.

At another press conference, Sachdeva posed questions to Kejriwal, asking why a court denied bail to one of the accused in the case on four different occasions and whether Sisodia had any contact with the other accused.

The BJP leader also wondered why did the deputy chief minister frequently change his mobile phones. Leader of Opposition in the Delhi

Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that the liquor "scam" involved an amount of Rs 6,000 crore and asserted that the truth will come out after the CBI probe.

BJP MP Parvesh Verma said the "liquor scam" of the AAP government has been "exposed" before people and Kejriwal is now defending Sisodia. The CBI has called Sisodia for questioning in connection with the excise policy case nearly three months after filing the chargesheet.

Sisodia has not been named as an accused in the chargesheet as the probe against him and other suspects is still going on, officials said.

The deputy chief minister, who also held the charge of the excise department, was first questioned by the federal agency on October 17 last year and his house as well as bank lockers were also searched in connection with the case.

G-20 preparations hit due to frequent transfers of PWD officers, alleges Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government alleged on Saturday that the work on several of its infrastructure projects, including some related to G20 summit preparations, were affected due to "frequent" transfers of officers heading its public works department (PWD).

In a statement, the Arvind Kejriwal government claimed that since September 2020, PWD had five different secretaries. "The Delhi government has been working tirelessly to develop the infrastructure of Delhi but frequent change of PWD secretaries by the LG has obstructed our progress. It is a deliberate attempt to abuse the powers of his office and derail the vision of CM Arvind Kejriwal to transform Delhi



into a world-class city," Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who holds the PWD portfolio, alleged.

Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena and the Arvind Kejriwal government have been at loggerheads over various issues. Sisodia alleged that the lieutenant governor shuffled PWD secretary every six months to leave the department "headless" and stall infrastructure works of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

Such "brazen" attempt by the lieutenant governor to "abuse" his hold on the Services department have "stalled" key infrastructure projects such as Ashram flyover and redevelopment of major roads, he charged.

"These frequent changes have impacted several important infrastructure projects of the national capital, many of which were being planned in view of the forthcoming G20 Summit," Sisodia charged.

As head of the department, the PWD secretary presides over a team of over 3,000 engineers and officials, provides administrative and financial approvals, and plays a critical role in coordinating the execution of infrastructure projects, according to the statement.

Deshbhakti curriculum helping students develop right perspective: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday that the Deshbhakti curriculum is helping students develop the right perspective towards events around them and aiming to teach them to raise their voices against any injustice with people. Holding a review meeting with the core team of the government's flagship programme, Sisodia said they aim to inculcate the spirit of patriotism among students.

"Deshbhakti curriculum also aims to teach children to raise their voices against any wrong and injustice with peo-



ple in their surroundings. Students should have the feeling that being an Indian it is their responsibility to respond to needs of the society," he said. The education department has planned to include a new teachers' manual from class 6 to class 12 for the curriculum, train the teachers associated with it and hold orientation of school heads.

Metro service on yellow line to be curtailed due to maintenance

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro operations between Kashmere Gate and Vishwavidyalaya stations on Yellow Line will be partially curtailed for a few hours on Sunday due to maintenance work.

In another update, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) informed that gate no. 5 of the Central Secretariat metro station on Violet Line will remain closed from February 19 for renovation work.

"To undertake the scheduled track maintenance work between Kashmere Gate and Vishwavidyalaya section of the Yellow Line (i.e. HUDA City Centre to Samaypur Badli), train services will not be avail-



able on two stations i.e. Civil Lines and Vidhan Sabha falling in this section till 06.30 AM from start of revenue services on 19.02.2023," DMRC said in a statement. Civil Lines and Vidhan Sabha Metro stations will remain closed from the start of revenue services till 6.30 am, it said. "Connectivity between Kashmere Gate Metro station and Vishwavidyalaya metro stations will be provid-

ed through free feeder bus service during this period," it added. Passengers are advised to plan their journey accordingly, officials said.

DMRC further updated that entry and exit from gate no. 5 at Central Secretariat Metro Station will remain closed from February 19 for civil renovation work. "Passengers can use Gate No 1 & 2 for entry/exit," it added.

Desi signalling tech launched for operations on Red Line

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a first for a mass rapid transit system in India, an indigenously developed signalling technology was launched on Saturday for operations on the Red Line of the Delhi Metro.

According to Delhi Metro, India's first-ever Indigenous Automatic Train Supervision System (i-ATS) has been developed by a joint team of DMRC and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), under the government of India's 'Make in India' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives for metro rail transit systems.



The i-ATS system was formally launched on the Red Line from the Operations Control Centre (OCC) in Shastri Park by Manoj Joshi, the Secretary of Union Ministry of Housing and

Urban Affairs, who is also Chairman of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation. Vikas Kumar, Managing Director, DMRC and Bhanu Prakash Srivastava, Chairman & Managing Director, BEL, were also present during the inauguration.

Progress of works at Airport Drain project inspected

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday inspected the progress of works on the ongoing Airport Drain project, which aims at providing a big relief from flooding and waterlogging in and around the IGI Airport and the adjacent Dwarka sectors during the Monsoons.

Travellers bound to the IGI Airport and the residents of the Dwarka sub-city can expect relief from flooding and waterlogging during the monsoon. The project is also ensure hassle-free movement of delegates and dignitaries visiting the national Capital during the monsoon months for the G-20 Summit this year.

This major drainage project that would channelize the rain and storm water discharge from the IGI Airport to Najafgarh Drain, is being executed by Delhi Development

Authority (DDA) under the guidance of the LG, who has ensured seamless inter-agency coordination. This has resulted in fast-pacing of tasks as a result of which the project is expected to be completed by June 2023. This major project had been stuck for the last two years due to pending permissions for tree cutting/translocation from the Delhi Government. It was only after the LG's intervention that permission for tree translocation was given and the work on the airport drain commenced on November 20, 2022.

The LG, who has already undertaken five visits to the Airport Drain in the last three months, inspected the construction site of the culvert beneath the railway track and the site at Dwarka Sector - 8 on Saturday and directed the officials to enhance the manpower and other resources to complete the drainage work at the earliest.

According to officials, the existing 02 drains at the IGI Airport have proven insufficient for discharging the huge amount of rain water from the airport which has often resulted in severe waterlogging in and around the IGI Airport during heavy rains and thus causing disruption and cancellation of flights for several days major inconvenience to the passengers. Heavy waterlogging even forced closure of the IGI Airport on several occasions. This also caused flooding in the adjoining Dwarka Sector 8, which houses several prominent Government organizations. During the LG's visits to Dwarka, the residents had also complained of crippling waterlogging in several areas.

DDA, at the same time, is also creating 05 water bodies in the Dwarka region that will be used for storing the overflowing rain water during the monsoons. Once completed these



water bodies will have the total storage capacity of 1.22 lakh CuM of water that will prevent the rain water from flooding onto the streets.

Saxena said construction of the airport drain along with the creation of water bodies will be a big relief for the air travellers and the local residents of Dwarka. He said during the monsoon, the overflowing water from the airport as well as from the streets of Dwarka could be channelized to these water bodies.

The airport drain will be capable of discharging 70 CuM of water per second during the peak rains. The drain would start from inside the IGI Airport premises, pass beneath the Railway tracks though a broadened culvert adjoining the airport boundary in Dwarka Sector-8 and would connect to DDA's Trunk Drain - 2 (TD-2) that would further channelize the rain water to Najafgarh Drain. The airport drain will be 20 meter wide and will have a depth of 2 meter.

DDA to get ISRO's help to check encroachment on its vacant plots

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will help the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to check the encroachment on 3000 vacant plots.

"For encroachment detection and control on DDA Land, about 3000 vacant land parcels of DDA have been digitised and handed over to ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization) for mapping," the authority said on Saturday. With the help of this, real time information of the plot will be available.

Encroachment on its land has been a major problem for the DDA. A few years ago, the agency started a system to upload pictures of vacant land on a monthly basis to check on encroachments. While work on the project started in 2018,



DDA officials said the pace of work was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Officials said that Land Information Management System (LIMS) software has been developed to make land records of about 240 villages online. It has other facilities including online damage collection, online demolition program management.

The layout plan has been digitized under Geo-Maps-Geoportal to depict the allotted plot realistically on the ground. Apart from this, to help the people, DDA has also started a new website. With

this, the public will be able to get affordable housing and other necessary information. About six lakh files have been digitized and a computerized record room has been set up to facilitate easy access to records and easy search of files.

"Some of the recent initiatives introduced are various applications like, AWAAS for housing (applicants can do all the formalities for application, payment and possession online), BHOOMI for land disposal (design, development and implementation of online services in Land Disposal Department), Provakil for court case management (to track court proceedings and compliances), DDA-311 for grievances monitoring and STF for complaints management. These are implemented fully online in a seamless manner," DDA said in a statement.

SC seeks Centre's response on failure to assess bearing capacity of fragile Himalayan region

PIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the recent land cracking and sinking issues in Joshimath, a plea has been filed in the Supreme Court raising the failure of Centre and state governments in assessing the "carrying capacity or bearing capacity" of the ecological fragile Indian Himalayan region.

The plea claimed this region, which is spread across 13 states/Union Territories (UTs), is facing issues of unsustainable and hydrologically disastrous constructions - home stays, hotels, and commercial accommodations -- hydropower projects and unregulated tourism, which has allegedly collapsed the drainage and waste management system.

The plea filed by Ashok Kumar Raghav, which was argued by advocate Akash Vashishtha before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, said the governments -- in the

Indian Himalayan Region, spread across 13 states/UTs -- have failed in preparing and implementing the master plans/tourism plans/layout/area development/zonal plans, and also failed to the "carrying capacity or bearing capacity of ecologically fragile areas," which is home to nearly 50 million people.

The region includes: Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

The plea said, "Carrying or bearing capacity of the ecologically fragile areas, hill stations, and highly visited areas in hills is necessary as the same would inter alia determine how much can a given place bear the load of human population or human intervention and the extent of infrastructure projects could be permitted, given its geological/tectonic/seismic position,

water resources available, food, habitat, air quality and other resources."

It further added that due to non-existent carrying/bearing capacity studies, grave geological hazards in the form of landslides, land subsidence, land cracking and sinking issues such as that in Joshimath and previously as flash floods/glacial bursts in Kedarnath (2013) and Chamoli (2021), are being witnessed and serious ecological and environmental depredation is taking place in the hills.

The plea added, "That the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2018, of the Department of Tourism, State of Uttarakhand, had itself recognised identification of the permissible carrying capacities as a major challenge of the Uttarakhand Tourism. The objectives of the said policy are, inter alia, to resolve the carrying capacity issues of the prominent tourism destinations in the state."

On Friday, the Supreme



Court asked the petitioner to approach the National Green Tribunal. However, Vashishtha insisted that there is a bar under Section 14 of the NGT Act as there has to be a specific case of environmental violation. After Vashishtha pressed that this is an important issue, the Supreme Court issued notice to the Centre, Ministry of Jal Shakti, and others.

The plea added that 56,37,102 tourists visited Himachal Pradesh in 2021, which was 75.43 per cent over

that recorded in 2020. The places which witnessed the most number of visitors include but not limited to Shimla, Manali, Lahaul & Spiti, Sirmour, Bilaspur and Chamba.

"In 2020, 32,13,379 persons toured Himachal Pradesh, which was 81.33 per cent above that recorded in 2019. In 2019, 1,72,12,107 visitors arrived in the state, according to the tourist statistics of the Department of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh," it added.

Centre announces specialised B Tech, diploma courses in engineering

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major decision to meet the acute demand and supply of semi conductors in the country, the Centre on Saturday announced for a specialised four year degree B.Tech and Diploma courses in the engineering eco system of the country.

So far study of semi conductors also known as "chips" in common parlance, has been merely and introductory part of BTech in Electronics at institutions but with the massive demand for automation in future industries like white goods, cars and automobiles, IoT etc.

Railway and IT Minister Ashwani Vaishnav informed that AICTE, which falls under the purview of Ministry of Education, has launched the curriculum designed for BTech Electronics VLSI Design & Technology and Diploma in IC manufacturing.

"This course will provide



variety of employment roles featuring outstanding salary incentives for Indian students in global companies as well as indian companies. VLSI sector is a high-paying industry and immune to automation. It will create an environment for Semiconductor ecosystem for setting and scaling up," Vaishnav told The Pioneer.

The decision comes at the backdrop of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks recently that semi-conductors are playing a critical role in the world in more ways than we can imagine and thus it is our collective aim to establish India as one of the key partners in global semiconductor supply chains".

AICTE, the statutory

body for technical education has launched the curriculum designed for (i) BTech Electronics Engineering (VLSI Design & Technology) and (ii) Diploma in IC manufacturing.

This course will provide variety of employment roles featuring outstanding salary incentives for Indian students in global companies as well as indian companies.

The Semicon India program with a total outlay of Rs 76,000 crore is aimed at the development of semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem in India.

An integrated circuit (also called IC, a chip, or a microchip) is a set of electronic circuits on one small flat piece (or chip). An IC is the fundamental building block of all modern electronic devices.

Very large-scale integration (VLSI) is the process of creating an integrated circuit (IC) by combining many metal oxide silicon transistors onto a single chip.

Jawan to face court martial for passing secrets to ISI



PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An Army jawan will face court martial for allegedly passing on secret information regarding the China border to an ISI agent posted here in the Pakistan High Commission. The soldier also reportedly was paid Rs 15,000 for giving information.

Giving details here, sources said here on Saturday the Army is going to start court martial in the next few

days against Signalman (washerman) Alim Khan. He was posted in a unit close to the border with China in the field area and was allegedly nabbed supplying secret information to the Pakistani spy posted in their embassy in New Delhi.

The soldier was caught by the security agencies supplying secret information to Pakistani spy- Abid Husain alias Naik Abid- a Pakistani national working in the High Commission.

India & Australia will have to work together: Jaishankar

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/SYDNEY

India and Australia will have to work together to build robust economic ties and resilient supply chains, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

He also underlined it is necessary for the two countries to work together more closely to shape the direction in which the world is going at an event in Sydney. His visit comes days ahead of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on March 8. Next day, the visiting dignitary will travel to Ahmedabad to watch the cricket test match between India and Australia.

Jaishankar met the Australian Prime Minister in Sydney where both of them reviewed ties between the two countries. Albanese later said "Minister, can I welcome you,

very much, back to Australia. You're a regular visitor here. And I, of course, am looking forward to being in India in just a few weeks' time now for the bilateral visit. And I thank Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi for the invitation."

Albanese is set to arrive in India this March to lock the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) deal and upgrade the relationship between the two countries.

The two sides will carry out discussions on a variety of issues like clean energy, technology, digital trade and procurements.

Speaking about the Quad Leaders meeting which will be hosted in the first half of this year, Albanese said, "And then, of course, I will welcome the Quad Leaders meeting, including Prime Minister Modi, that we will be hosting here in just a short period of time in the first half of the year." The Australian Prime Minister also

talked about another visit for the G20 in the second half of this year.

"And then, of course, there will be another visit for the G20 in the year's second half. And I know that my Treasurer is there, I think, next week for a series of meetings that will be hosted in India for the G20. It will be an important period," said Albanese.

He also reiterated that the Australia-India relationship "goes from strength to strength" and highlighted that "economic relationship is important."

Delivering the keynote address at Raisina @ Sydney' Business Breakfast, Jaishankar said the state of the world creates a very compelling case for India and Australia to do more with each other.

"One of the big goals would really be how do you de-risk the global economy, one by building more reliable and resilient supply chains, which is exactly one of the initiatives that India and Australia and

Japan have embarked on to," said the minister who is in Australia.

India and Australia are "on-track" in further strengthening their bilateral ties and the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) will "turbocharge" the relationship.

Signed on April 2, 2022, the India-Australia ECTA came into force on December 29 last year. The agreement will help boost the bilateral trade in goods and services to cross USD 70 billion in the next five years, according to economic think tank GTRI.

"The state of the world creates a very compelling case for India and Australia to do more with each other... I think we can see the direction the world is going (in) and it's in transition and it's necessary for countries like India and Australia to work more closely to shape the direction in which the world is going," Jaishankar said.



He said India is targeting 7 per cent economic growth this year.

"But we do expect it to improve in the next five years. And definitely, we think we would stay in that 7 to 9 per cent range at least for a decade, decade-and-a-half," he said.

A bullish economic scenario in India today and a positive investment climate are results of decisions taken during difficult times, Jaishankar said. "Economic confidence is being seen in our ability to create, collaborate and manufac-

ture," he said.

The minister noted that there has been a very substantial movement of Indian talent to Australia. "How do we expand in the ability to impart skills and education? We would very much welcome Australian universities in India to do that," he said.

"And for us, it's not just about Indian students coming to Australia, it's about India and Australia working together in India to produce more skilled, more competent talent," he said.

NIA seizes vehicles as proceeds of crime from J&K DSP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday said it has seized vehicles as 'proceeds of terror' in the case regarding recovery and seizure of arms and ammunition from Deputy Superintendent of Police, Jammu and Kashmir Police, Devender Singh.

The agency seized the vehicles relevant Sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the case. These vehicles were used by accused persons for the furtherance of terror activities in Kashmir Valley, the NIA said in a statement.

"The seized vehicles are a Hyundai i20 Car bearing registration number JK-03H-1738, Maruti 800 car bearing registration number. JK-13B-0814 and one Hyundai i20 Sportz car bearing registration number JK-01AK-8878," it said.



The case relates to the arrest of four accused persons, including two active terrorists of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), who were going out of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in order to commit terrorist acts, in a Hyundai i20 Car bearing Registration No. JK-03H-1738.

Based on information, this car was intercepted at Al-Stop naka on Srinagar-Jammu Highway, near Mir Bazar Police Post, Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on January 11, 2020.

During the search opera-

tion, one AK-47 Rifle, three pistols, one hand grenade, ammunition and other incriminating materials were recovered and seized.

The case was initially registered in Qazigund police station, Kulgam district of the Valley on January 11, 2020 and re-registered by NIA on January 17, 2020.

"Investigations have revealed that the Hyundai i20 owned and used by accused Irfan Shafi Mir, Maruti 800 registered in the name of Mushtaq Ahmad Shah and used by his son accused Syed Naveed Mushtaq Ahmad Shah, and Hyundai i20 Sportz registered and used by Tanveer Ahmad Wani, son of Ghulam Ahmad Wani and resident of Humhama, Srinagar (J&K), were used for terror activities in Kashmir Valley," it said, adding, further investigations in the case are in progress.

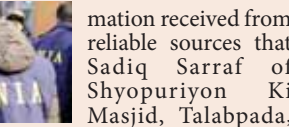
NIA conducts searches at Raj as part of PFI conspiracy case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday conducted searches at multiple locations in Rajasthan in the Popular Front of India (PFI) conspiracy case.

The agency conducted searches at seven locations in Rajasthan in the districts of Kota (3 locations), Sawai Madhopur (1 location), Bhilwara (1), Bundi (1) and Jaipur (1) in connection with the investigation of the case, the agency said in a statement.

These locations are residential and commercial premises of suspects in the case. The case is related to infor-



mation received from reliable sources that Sadiq Sarraf of Shyopuriyon Ki Masjid, Talabpada, Kotwali police station, district Baran, Rajasthan and Mohammed Asif of Retipada, Sangod, district Kota of Popular Front of India (PFI) along with officer bearers, members and cadres of PFI are indulging in unlawful activities. The case was initially registered suo-moto by the NIA on September 19, 2022, it said.

During searches digital devices, air-gun, sharp weapons and incriminating documents were seized. Further investigations in the case are in progress, it added.

‘EC settles disputes in parties with test of majority’

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) has settled internal disputes in several political parties with the test of majority in their legislative and organisational wings, according to EC sources. After it recognised the group led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as the real Shiv Sena, the commission is now expected to deliver its final order on the internal dispute in the Lok Janshakti Party.

The LJP split in 2021, months after the demise of its founder Ram Vilas Paswan. Its two factions are now led by the founder's son Chirag Paswan and brother Pashupati Kumar Paras.

In an interim order on



October 2, 2021, the EC had barred the two factions from using the Lok Janshakti Party name or its symbol "bungalow" till the dispute was settled by it.

The interim order of the poll watchdog remains in force.

According to EC sources, the two factions have been seeking more time before the physical hearing in the dispute commences in the court of the Commission.

On Friday, the Election Commission allotted the name Shiv Sena and its poll symbol "bow and arrow" to the group

led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, in a big blow to Uddhav Thackeray.

Article 324 of the Constitution and the Symbols Order of 1968 empower the Election Commission to adjudicate internal party feuds.

While settling such disputes, the EC functions as a quasi-judicial body and the aggrieved parties are free to approach the high court or the Supreme Court challenging its order.

Since 1969, when the Congress witnessed its first split, the EC has applied the test of majority in the legislative and organisational wings of parties to settle various disputes.

The EC's orders have been upheld by courts when challenged.

Mobile health intervention can prevent secondary stroke: Study

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Mobile health intervention like SMS text messages, health education videos and prevention workbooks for patients can help ensure improved lifestyle-related behaviours that can prevent secondary stroke, according to a first-of-its-kind study conducted in India. The findings are published in the Lancet Global Health journal.

Mobile health (mHealth) refers to the use of mobile and wireless devices to improve health and deliver care. India has a high burden of stroke, attributable to its large population and epidemiological shift and also to a high prevalence of risk factors.

The trial conducted in 31 stroke centres across the country by SPRINT-India (Secondary Prevention by Structured Semi-Interactive



Stroke Prevention Package) under ICMR's Indian Stroke Clinical Trial Network (INSTRICT), one of its kind in developing countries and the fourth government-supported network around the world.

"The SPRINT study is the first trial in India (and perhaps globally) to try to assess the role of an mHealth intervention in secondary prevention of stroke at such a large scale," said Dr Meenakshi Sharma Scientist-G, Noncommunicable Diseases Division, ICMR.

It was a multicentre, randomised-controlled trial of a semi-interactive mHealth intervention among stroke patients,

the ICMR said in a statement.

The messages given on mobile phones focused on control of blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol, improving physical activity, eating a healthy diet and not missing taking medicines to prevent stroke. The awareness material was systematically developed in 12 different regional languages.

The patients in the control group received standard care whereas those in the intervention arm received awareness material at weekly intervals to promote healthy living and adherence to medicines, the statement said.

A total of 4,298 patients were randomly allocated to the intervention arm (2148) and control arm (2150). Besides, 1502 patients in the intervention arm and 1536 patients in the control arm completed a one-year follow-up.

Question of who says ‘I love you’ first: Cong on Nitish's unity advice

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

In its first reaction to the Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar desiring to know the Congress course of action sooner the better towards Lok Sabha 2024, the Congress express even they desire the same. Congress said "the Bihar model serves as a viable alternative to the Gujarat model" an obvious reference to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi who served as Gujarat CM before his incumbent tenure.

"It is a question of who utters I love you first," summed up senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid with reference to his party's intent to forge opposition unity and take on the BJP juggernaut in Lok Sabha polls next year. Nitish JDU along with RJD is in a coalition government with Congress in Bihar and ever since Nitish dumped BJP there has been clamour that the Bihar CM be projected as



Prime Ministerial candidate in General Elections.

The former Union minister drew the analogy of romance at a symposium he attended, besides Nitish Kumar and Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav.

"Honorable chief minister, you made many points, some bluntly and others indirectly", Khurshid said about the speech of Kumar, the JD(U) boss, who had exhorted the grand old party to take the lead in forging opposition unity.

"As far as my understanding of my own party goes, I can assure you that your sentiments are shared by us. But the

situation is akin to lovers taking their time to decide who should say I love you first," said the senior Congress leader evoking peals of laughter.

Showering encomiums on the Bihar CM and his deputy for giving up their old political hostility, the former Union minister said "the Bihar model serves as a viable alternative to the Gujarat model (of Prime Minister Narendra Modi)".

He also lavished praise on the CPI(ML) Liberation, which had organized the event and supports 'Mahagathbandhan' government in Bihar from outside, for adapting to changed political realities.

Chidambaram wonders if Soros' remarks can topple Modi Govt

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister Senior P Chidambaram on Saturday said labelling remarks by George Soros as an attempt to topple the democratically elected government in India' was a puerile statement. He wondered if the Modi government was "so feeble" that it can be toppled by a stray statement of a 92-year-old rich foreign national.

Chidambaram's statement came after the BJP reacted angrily to remarks made by Soros on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Munich Security conference, alleging that Soros was targeting the Indian democratic system so that people "hand-picked" by him get to run the government

here.

"The people of India will determine who will be in and who will be out of the government of India. I did not know that the Modi government was so feeble that it can be toppled by the stray statement of a 92-year-old rich foreign national," Chidambaram said in a series of tweets.

He also alleged that the Modi government's policies have created oligopolies instead of ushering in competition. "I did not agree with most of what George Soros had said in the past and I do not agree with most of what he says now. But to label his remarks as an 'attempt to topple the democratically elected government in India' is a puerile statement," Chidambaram noted.

Russia has done crimes against humanity in Ukraine: America

AP ■ MUNICH

US Vice President Kamala Harris said Saturday Washington has determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine, and insisted that "justice must be served" to the perpetrators.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Harris said that the international community has both a moral and a strategic interest in pursuing those crimes, pointing to a danger of other authoritarian governments taking advantage if international rules are undermined.

"Russian forces have pursued a widespread and systemic attack against a civilian population - gruesome acts of murder, torture, rape, and deportation," Harris said. She also cited "execution-style killings, beatings, and electrocution."

"Russian authorities have forcibly deported hundreds of thousands of people, from Ukraine to Russia, including children," she added. "They have cruelly separated children from their families."

The Biden administration formally determined last March that Russian troops had committed war crimes in Ukraine and said it would



Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris speaks at the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023. The 59th Munich Security Conference (MSC) is taking place from Feb. 17 to Feb. 19, 2023 at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich. AP Photo

work with others to prosecute offenders. A determination of crimes against humanity goes a step further, indicating that attacks against civilians are being carried out in a widespread and systematic manner.

Harris said that, as a former prosecutor and former head of California's Department of Justice, she knows "the importance of gathering facts and holding them up against the law." "In the case of Russia's actions in Ukraine,

we have examined the evidence, we know the legal standards, and there is no doubt," she said.

"These are crimes against humanity," Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who also was attending the Munich conference, said in a statement issued as Harris spoke that "we reserve crimes against humanity determinations for the most egregious crimes."

The new determination underlines the "staggering

extent" of suffering inflicted on Ukrainian civilians and "also reflects the deep commitment of the United States to holding members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials accountable for their atrocities," he said.

Harris told the annual gathering of security and defense officials from around the world: "Let us all agree - on behalf of all the victims, both known and unknown, justice must be served."

"Such is our moral interest," she said. "We also have a significant strategic interest." "No nation is safe in a world where one country can violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another, where crimes against humanity are committed with impunity, where a country with imperialist ambitions can go unchecked," Harris added.

If Russian President Vladimir Putin succeeds in attacking international rules and norms, "other nations could feel emboldened to follow his violent example," she said. "Other authoritarian powers could seek to bend the world to their will, through coercion, disinformation and even brute force." Harris' audience Saturday didn't include any Russian officials.

North Korea fires missile as US, S Korea prepare for drills

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Saturday fired a long-range missile from its capital into the sea off Japan, according to its neighbours, a day after it threatened to take strong measures against South Korea and the U.S. Over their joint military exercises.

According to the South Korean and Japanese militaries, the missile was fired on a high angle, apparently to avoid reaching the neighbours' territories, and travelled about 900 kilometers (560 miles) at a maximum altitude of 5,700 kilometers (3,500 miles) during an hourlong flight.

The details were similar to North Korea's Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile test flight in November, which experts said demonstrated potential to reach the U.S. Mainland if fired on a normal trajectory. Japanese gov-



ernment spokesperson Hirokazu Matsuno said no damage has been reported from the missile, which landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Oshima island. Oshima lies off the western coast of the northernmost main island of Hokkaido.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry on Friday threatened with "unprecedentedly" strong action against its rivals, after South Korea

announced a series of planned military exercises with the United States aimed at sharpening their response to the North's growing threats. The office of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said his national security director, Kim Sung-han, presided over an emergency security meeting where members described the launch as a "serious" provocation that violates U.N. Security Council resolutions and escalates regional tensions.

Post attack, Pak law enforcement agencies to conduct 'security audit'

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan's law-enforcement agencies and the Sindh government will conduct a "security audit" into the serious security lapses that led to an audacious attack on the office of the Karachi Police chief by heavily-armed Pakistani Taliban terrorists, a media report said on Saturday.

The incident took place at 7.10 pm local time on Friday, during which Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists stormed the five-storey Karachi Police Office (KPO) building situated in the country's most populous city.

In the hours-long operation between the Pakistan police commandos and paramilitary soldiers, three TTP terrorists were killed and four others, including three security personnel, also lost their lives.

Kremlin's UN Envoy claims West out to destroy Russia

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

A week before the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin's UN ambassador claimed that the West is driven by its determination to destroy Russia and declared: "We had no choice other than to defend our country — defend it from you, to defend our identity and our future."

Western ambassadors shot back, accusing Russia of using a Security Council meeting it called on lessons learned from the failure to resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists that began in 2014 to justify what France's U.N. Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere called "the unjustifiable" - Russia's invasion of its smaller neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022.

Friday's meeting in the council — the only international venue where Russia regularly faces Ukraine and its Western supporters — put a spotlight on the deep chasm between the warring parties as the conflict moves into its second year with no end in sight, tens of thousands of casualties on both sides, and new military offensives expected.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused Western nations including



France and Germany of "holding back" on implementing the Minsk agreements brokered by the two countries to end the conflict between Ukraine and the separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk in the country's mostly Russian-speaking industrial east that rearm in April 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

"You knew very well that the Minsk process for you is just a smoke screen, so as to rearm the Kyiv regime and to prepare it for war against Russia in the name of your geopolitical interest," Nebenzia said. U.S. Deputy ambassador Richard Mills accused Russia of failing to implement "a single commitment it made" in the Minsk agreements while the other signatories — France,

Germany, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — "sought to implement them in good faith."

France's De Riviere said his country and Germany have worked "tirelessly" since 2015 to promote dialogue between parties. "The difficulties encountered in implementing these agreements can never serve as justification or mitigating circumstances for Russia's choice to end the dialogue with violence," he stressed. De Riviere recalled that exactly a year ago, on Feb. 17, 2022, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin reaffirmed to the council that the Minsk agreements were "the only international legal basis" to resolve the conflict in

Ukraine, and that rumors of Russian military intervention were unfounded and stemmed from Western paranoia. Four days later, Russia recognized the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk, and on Feb. 24 it invaded Ukraine.

"The one and only lesson to be learned here is that Russia, by attacking Ukraine, has chosen alone, to put an end to dialogue and negotiation," De Riviere said.

"It took the decision alone to shatter the Minsk agreements, whose main objective, let us remember, was the reintegration of some regions of Donetsk and Luhansk under full Ukrainian sovereignty, in exchange for broad decentralization."

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Barbara Woodward also cited Vershinin's statement to the council that allegations of a Russian attack were baseless a week before President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion, and said the United Kingdom had learned some lessons.

"Russia lied when we warned of its intention to attack Ukraine," she said. "Russia was planning for war while we called for diplomacy and de-escalation, and Russia continues to choose death and destruction while the world calls for a just peace."

India-US relation 'defining partnership' for this century, says Richard Verma

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The relationship between India and the US is the "defining partnership" for the 21st century, America's former Ambassador to the country Richard Verma has told lawmakers and urged the Senate to confirm the next envoy to New Delhi at the earliest.

A strong advocate of deepening Indo-US ties, Verma played a key role in the Congressional passage of the civil nuclear deal. He was sworn in as the US Ambassador to India in 2014, becoming the first ever Indian-American to hold the post. He served as the US Ambassador to India from 2014 to 2017.

"I continue to believe this is the defining partnership for this century. The relationship is so consequential in so many ways, and having a senior offi-



cial on the ground that represents the president makes a big difference," Verma told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearing for Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

Verma was responding to a confirmation of the next US Ambassador to India, a post that has been laying vacant for more than two years now. "I think everyone hopefully



Death toll from IS attack in Syria at 53 now

AP ■ BEIRUT

The death toll from an attack by the Islamic State group against an army checkpoint and people collecting truffles in central Syria has risen to at least 53, most of them civilians, state media and an opposition war monitor reported Saturday.

The attack near the central town of Sukhna on Friday was the deadliest by the extremist group since so far this year, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor said.

The Observatory said the attack targeted a Syrian army checkpoint and people collecting wild truffles nearby, killing 68 people, including 61 civilians. It said IS fighters reached the area on motorcycles. On Friday, it reported that the attack killed 46.

The Observatory, which tracks Syria's conflict, said the IS gunmen took advantage of the Feb. 6 earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria killing tens of thousands of people to carry out their deadly attack.

The attention in Syria has been mostly focused on the earthquake over the past two weeks. Syria's state news agency, SANA, quoted the head of the general hospital in the central town of Palmyra as saying that they have received the bodies of 46 civilians and seven soldiers.

Despite their defeat in Syria in March 2019, Islamic State sleeper cells still conduct attacks around Syria and Iraq, where they once declared a "caliphate." On Friday, the U.S. Military said a helicopter raid led by its forces in northeast Syria left a senior leader with the Islamic State group dead and four American service members wounded.

27 feedback loops, or global warming accelerators, add urgency to respond to climate crisis: Study

Washington: Scientists have identified 27 global warming accelerators known as amplifying feedback loops, including some that the researchers said may not be fully accounted for in climate models.

Scientists said that the findings added urgency to the need to respond to the climate crisis. In climate science, amplifying feedback loops are situations where a climate-caused alteration can trigger a process that causes even more warming, which in turn intensifies the alteration.

An example would be warming in the Arctic, leading to melting sea ice, which results in further warming because sea water absorbs rather than reflects solar radiation.

The international collaboration, led by Oregon State University (OSU), US, researchers, also provided a roadmap for policymakers aiming to avert the most severe consequences of a warming planet, they said.

The findings have been reported in the journal One Earth. The study in all looked at 41 climate change feedbacks.

"Many of the feedback loops we examined significantly increase warming because of their connection to greenhouse gas emissions," OSU College of Forestry post-doctoral scholar and one of the lead researchers Christopher Wolf said. "To the best of our knowledge, this is the most extensive list available of climate feedback loops, and not all of them are fully considered in climate models. PTI

Defence Minister: Finland could join NATO ahead of Sweden

AP ■ MUNICH

Finland's defence minister said Saturday that his country will join NATO without waiting for Sweden if its Nordic neighbour's accession is held up by the Turkish government.

Mikko Savola told The Associated Press on Saturday that Finland would prefer that the two countries join the alliance together, but it wouldn't hold up the process if Turkey decides to approve Finland, but not Sweden, as it has warned.

"No, no. Then we will join," Savola said in an interview on the sidelines of a security conference in Munich.

Since they broke with decades of non-alignment in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, Finland and Sweden have insisted they want to join NATO together. But Turkey's reluctance to accept Sweden unless it steps up pressure on Kurdish exile groups has made it more likely the two will have to join the alliance at different speeds.

"Sweden is our closest partner," Savola said. "Almost every week our defence forces are practising together and so on. It's a very deep cooperation and we also trust each other fully. But it's in Türkiye's hands now."

Speaking later Saturday at a panel in Munich, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin struck a similar note. "Of course, we cannot influence how some countries would ratify, but our message is that we are willing to join and would prefer to join together."



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Speaking later Saturday at a panel in Munich, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin struck a similar note. "Of course, we cannot influence how some countries would ratify, but our message is that we are willing to join and would prefer to join together."

er," she said. All NATO countries except Turkey and Hungary have already given both countries the green light to join the alliance.

Hungary has said it will do so soon, but Turkey says Sweden hasn't done enough to meet Turkish national security concerns, causing a rift in NATO at a time when the U.S. And other allies are seeking to project a united front against Russia.

In recent weeks, NATO officials have played down the significance of the two nations joining simultaneously.

"The main issue is not whether Finland and Sweden are joining at the same time. The main issue is that Finland and Sweden join as soon as possible, and it is of course a Turkish decision whether to ratify both protocols or only one protocol," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in Munich on Friday.

Savola said he hopes Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometre (830-mile) border

with Russia, will become a member of the alliance before a NATO summit in July.

Until then, Savola said, Finland isn't worried about the security situation, noting Finland has a conscription army with a wartime strength of 280,000 soldiers, 95% of them reservists, and plans to buy F-35 fighter jets from the U.S., while also investing in its naval and land forces.

"We are strong and our willingness to defend the country is also strong," Savola said.

Finland has supported Ukraine with weapons from the start of the war. Savola said the military support amounts to 600 million euros so far. The country has said it will participate in a joint effort by European countries to deliver Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, but hasn't specified whether it will hand over any of its own tanks.

"There are many ways to join. There are those tanks, of course, training, spare parts and logistics," he said.

Antarctic sea-ice cover hits record low for second year

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Antarctic sea ice extent has been reported to have broken its last year record low, and has also recorded it sooner than when it did last year, according to a statement by the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC).

On February 13, 2023, Antarctic sea ice extent fell to 1.91 million square kilometers, it said. This set a new record low, dropping below the previ-



ous record of 1.92 million square kilometers set on

February 25, 2022, it said. This year represents only the second year that Antarctic extent has fallen below 2 million square kilometers, the statement said.

In past years, the annual minimum occurred between February 18 and March 3, so, further decline this year is expected, it said. With a couple more weeks likely left in the melt season, the extent is expected to drop further before reaching its annual minimum, it said. Much of the Antarctic

coast is ice free, exposing the ice shelves that fringe the ice sheet to wave action and warmer conditions, the statement said.

The NSIDC is a US information and referral centre in support of polar and cryospheric research. NSIDC is part of the University of Colorado Boulder Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES), and is affiliated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information through a cooperative agreement.

The sea ice extent has tracked well below last year's melt season levels since mid-December, according to the statement by NSIDC. A positive Southern Annular Mode has led to stronger-than-average westerly winds. Along with a strong Amundsen Sea Low, the weather conditions have

brought warm air to the region on both sides of the Antarctic Peninsula, the statement said.

This has largely cleared out the ice cover in the Amundsen and Bellingshausen Seas, and reduced the sea ice extent in the northwestern Weddell Sea, NSIDC said.

Sea ice is patchy and nearly absent over a long stretch of the Pacific-facing coastline of Antarctica, NSIDC said. Earlier studies have linked low sea ice cover with wave-induced

stresses on the floating ice shelves that hem the continent, leading to break up of weaker areas, the statement said.

Antarctic sea ice extent has been highly variable over the last several years. While 2022 and 2023 have had record low minimum extent, four out of the five highest minimums have occurred since 2008, NSIDC said. Overall, the trend in Antarctic minimum extent over 1979 to 2023 is near zero, NSIDC said.

₹17 k cr GST compensation cess to States to be cleared, says FM

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday that the entire GST compensation cess for June 2022 totalling Rs 16,982 crore will be cleared. She said this while addressing a press conference soon after the 49th meeting of the GST Council ended. She also informed that Rs 16,524 crore to six states which have submitted the accountant general's (AG) certificate will also be released.

Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Telangana are among the six states which have submitted AG certificates.

Though submission of AG certificate is a requirement for the states to seek GST compensation, Sitharaman said that it wasn't a strict pre-requisite, as 90 per cent of funds are anyway released to the states, while the remaining amount is given after the AG certificate is submitted.

The GST Council meeting, which was held at Vigyan Bhavan here, discussed matters pertaining to setting up of appellate tribunals and curbing tax evasion in pan masala and gutkha businesses.

The group of ministers' (GoM) report on taxation for pan masala was accepted by the council.



At the meeting, the GST Council decided to reduce GST on pencil sharpeners and certain tracking devices. Exemption on coal rejects supplied by and to the washeries was also approved by the Council. Also, GST on a type of liquid jaggery has been reduced to nil from 18 per cent if sold loose. If its pre-packaged and labelled, the tax rate on it would be 5 per cent.

The GST Council also recommended rationalisation of late fee for delayed filing of annual returns.

However, no decision could be arrived at by the fitment committee for SUVs and MUVs.

Sitharaman said that the GST Council decided to tax services supplied by courts and tribunals under the reverse charge

mechanism.

She also informed that the decision on the GST Appellate Tribunal has been accepted with change in language and the modification in draft will be circulated within a week.

Sitharaman said that she expects to finalise the GoM report on GST tribunals with slight modifications so that it is ready by March 1 and can be included in the Finance Bill.

The GoM's report on online gaming could not be taken up at the meeting as the Chairman of the GoM, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, could not attend the meeting due to the upcoming Assembly elections in the state, the Finance Minister said.

TN CM unveils Real Estate Vision 2030, affirms steps on to meet changing needs

PTI ■ CHENNAI

With nearly 49 per cent of Tamil Nadu's population living in urban areas, and ever increasing need for housing for families and commercial space, the state government is taking steps to meet the changing requirements, Chief Minister M K Stalin said here on Saturday.

The government is committed to providing speedy approvals for projects and is also planning to establish new satellite cities, he said.

Unveiling the Tamil Nadu Real Estate Vision 2030 at the real estate exhibition Fairpro 2023 being held under the aegis of the Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI), Chennai, the Chief Minister said: "I believe that there will be huge opportunities in the real estate sector due to the increasing population in Chennai, and coming up of new industries, and increasing demand for housing and offices for companies."

He urged CREDAI to take the major responsibility of build-



ing and providing houses and commercial spaces.

"The urban population in Tamil Nadu, which was 1.90 crore in 1991 increased to 3.49 crore in 2011. It is expected to increase further to 5.34 crore in 2031. As per the 2011 Census, the State has 832 cities and towns. Nearly 49 per cent of the population live in urban areas. Tamil Nadu is the leading state in the country in urbanisation," the Chief Minister said in an address to the gathering at the Chennai Trade Centre here.

Metropolises emerge due to rapid growth, especially increase in population and migration. Keeping this in mind, the State Housing and Urban Development Department, has formulated and implemented various housing projects, he said. "The government is taking all steps to meet the changing needs and is committed to providing speedy approvals to projects. We are also planning to build new satellite cities besides developing outer ring roads," Stalin added.

Aiming for the overall deve-

lopment of the state, the government has been focusing on all sectors like education, agriculture, medical, small business, women development, and environment.

"At this juncture, I am obliged to remind you that it was Kalaingar (as late chief minister M Karunanidhi was called) who created the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (now TN Urban Habitat Development Board), to provide housing for slum dwellers for the first time in India 50 years ago," he said.

UAE-India Business Council launched to boost bilateral trade

FIANS ■ DUBAI

Marking the first anniversary of India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the top business houses of India and UAE came together to open the UAE India Business Council - UAE Chapter (UIBC-UC), to bolster economic ties and facilitate shared goal of enhancing bilateral trade and investment.

The UIBC-UC was launched by UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, in the presence of Ambassador of India to the UAE Sunjay Sudhir, Consul General of India in Dubai Aman Puri and founding members of the UIBC-UC.

The founding members of the UIBC-UC from the Indian side, large conglomerates such as TATA, Reliance, and Adani are represented, as well as tech innovators like Ola, Zerodha, Udaan, and EaseMyTrip, along with prominent Indian entrepreneur-led corporations based in the UAE such as KEF Holdings, Buimerc Corporation, Apparel Group, EFS and Lulu Financial. From the UAE side are: Mubadala — Sovereign Wealth Fund of the UAE, Wizz Financial, DP World, EMAAR,



Emirates Airlines, Emirates NBD Bank.

The two nations aim to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion and attract \$75 billion in investment from the UAE to India. The UIBC-UC is poised to play a crucial role in supporting both governments in achieving these objectives and maximising the potential of the UAE-India relationship. By leveraging the strong bond between the two nations, the council brings together key partners and stakeholders from both nations and will serve as a valuable source of policy guidance, fostering innovative collaboration between Emirati and Indian businesses.

Speaking on the occasion, Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi

highlighted that the establishment of the UAE Chapter of the UAE India Business Council marks a significant moment in the deepening of the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and India. He also mentioned that the Council will play a critical role in supporting the two governments in their joint mission to boost bilateral trade and investment.

Indian Ambassador to the UAE, Sunjay Sudhir, said, "The launch today marks a significant milestone in the strengthening of the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and India. I extend my sincere congratulations to all the founding members of the UAE India Business Council and look forward to seeing the Council's initiatives drive greater prosperity for both nations."

The UIBC-UC will serve as the counterpart organisation to the UIBC India Chapter, which was established in New Delhi on September 3, 2015, by UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and then Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, during the 11th Session of the India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting.

Fair, unfettered choice for digital citizens must; Digital space can't be dominated by few large cos: MoS IT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will not allow domination of digital space by 1-2 big players and boundary conditions of openness and fair choice to users will have to be followed, IT Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Saturday as he outlined how the country is racing full steam ahead towards its trillion dollar digital economy goal.

Addressing the Economic Times Global Business Summit 2023, the Minister agreed that time has come for clear standards to be defined for new-age technologies such as AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ML (Machine Learning), and asserted that innovation cannot be a reason to escape scrutiny and accountability.

The upcoming Digital India Act, which is set to replace the 22 year old IT Act (currently regulating the internet), will address this area, he said.

As many as 80 crore Indians are now online, and by 2025 that number will rise to 120 crore (1.2 billion), making India the largest connected country in the world and the largest presence on the global internet.

India will be among pack of nations, which will shape the future of technology, products, devices and platforms, the Minister said. He added that the country's digital ambitions are being fueled by a powerful combination of IT/ITES, start ups, semiconductors, new age computing, enabling policies and key legislations.

To a question on whether standards to be defined for AI, the Minister said: "Certainly, I think one of the big things that governments around the world have learnt is to start having clear definitions about these things because I think we will all agree that big tech platforms, escaped regulation for many years by constantly talking about innovation and that innovation should not be regulated," Chandrasekhar said.

He added: "So we certain-

ly will not want to go down that road again and say as long as people use AI and algorithms, that somehow that is an escape from scrutiny or accountability or regulation".

In the architecture of the forthcoming Digital India Act, this aspect has been kept in mind.

"You will find that there will be accountability, and certain sense of scrutiny about everything including references to AI...So we believe user harm is at the heart of Digital India Act, and openness, safety and trust are at the heart of the DIA...These are areas we will certainly address," the Minister assured.

India has assumed the Chair of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, an international initiative to support responsible and human-centric development and use of AI.

"There is not just the use of AI from the point of view of escaping scrutiny and accountability, but there is also an overreach of AI. There is the whole issue of harm and misuse of AI. So those are all the boundaries that we want to build without really coming in the way of innovation, but certainly not allowing innovation to be a reason to escape scrutiny and accountability," he said.

To a question put in the context of ONDC on whether Government's intent is to control key businesses in the digital economy, the Minister made it clear that India will not allow domination by a few companies, in any space.

"In no space do we want domination by a few companies, and there are many segments of the digital economy and digital space that are uncomfortable, dominated by 1-2-3 big companies whom we...Refer to...As big tech. Our government's views is very clearly that we don't want to discourage anybody from being in India, we want all the companies to come to India, but we certainly don't want the digital economy to be throttled or to be controlled," he said.



GOVERNMENT OF UTTARAKHAND

Office of Superintending Engineer 10th NH Circle, P.W.D., Dehradun.
(Email:senh10@rediffmail.com/senh10pwd@gmail.com)



Letter No.770/13 Yata- NH-10/2023

Date17/2/2023

Short Term Tender Notice

National Competitive Bidding (E-procurement)

The Superintending Engineer, 10th NH Circle, PWD Dehradun on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites Tender for following work in Two bid system. Tender related information will be available on Web-site <https://uktenders.gov.in> from 20.02.2023.

Sl No	Name of work	Tender Cost (in Rs.)	Earnest Money (Rs. in Lakh)	Validity of Tender	Period of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	Improvement by bituminous concrete of road surface at NH-58 Chainage 228.500 to 229.700, Chainage 229.700 to 231.725, Chainage 232.350 to 234.400, Chainage 234.450 to 234.775, Chainage 235.725 to 235.900 under G-20 Summit 2023	5000.00 +18% GST	5.82	45 days	01 Month	Category "A" for Road work in any state Central Govt/State Govt or CentralGovt. undertaking



Be it known to all that my client Ananta Buildcon through its proprietor Mr. Tushar Arora intend to purchase the above captioned property from its owner NMP Technologies Pvt. Ltd. through its Directors Ms. Bina Gupta and Ms. Mita Bhan, having office at 62, Godavari, Alaknanda, Delhi-110019. original title deeds/ documents being conveyance deed dt. 08.08.2006, duly registered in the office of the sub registrar, New Delhi as document no.17661 in addl. Book No.1 Vol.No. 2176 on pages 182 to 193 on dated 14.08.2006. Any person/Bank/FI/Authority having any right, title, interest, claim or demand of any nature whatsoever in respect of the above captioned property, or has any sort of dispute/litigation and/or otherwise any objection for its sale to my clients, he/she/they should contact and notify such objection (with valid documentary proof) to the undersigned within 7 days from the date of publication hereof, failing which it will be presumed that the above captioned property is free from all sorts of encumbrances and my clients complete the said sale transaction.

RADHIKA ARORA (Advocate)

Chamber No. 564 Saket Court Complex, New Delhi -110017

Email: radhikaar03@gmail.com

FCI to offer 11.72 lakh tonnes wheat stock to bulk consumers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) will offer 11.72 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk consumers like flour millers during the third e-auction to be held next week, the food ministry said on Saturday.

FCI plans to sell 25 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk consumers under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) till March-end as part of the government's measure to check rise in domestic prices.

In the last two weekly e-auctions, about 12.98 lakh tonnes wheat was sold, out of which 8.96 lakh tonnes has already been lifted by the bidders which has resulted in cooling down of retail prices of wheat and atta.

In a statement, the food ministry said FCI will offer 11.72 lakh tonnes of wheat from 620 depots across the country during the third e-auction to be held at 11 am on February 22. Bidders, who have regis-

tered themselves on the e-port of M-Junction by 10 pm on February 17, will be allowed to participate in the e-auction on February 22, it said.

The last date for deposit and uploading of earnest money is February 21 till 2:30 pm.

On Friday, the government further reduced the reserve price for sale of wheat through OMSS scheme to bring down the price of wheat and atta.

The reserve price of fair and average (FAQ) quality wheat has been reduced to Rs 2,150 per quintal, while for Under Relaxed Specifications (URS) wheat to Rs

2,125 per quintal.

These new reserve prices are applicable from the third sale of wheat through e-auction.

"The announcement of revision in uniform reserve price across the country by the GOI would benefit the consumer across the country and would further bring down the prices of wheat and atta," the ministry said.

In order to address the rising price of wheat and Atta in the country, as per the recommendation made by the Group of Ministers, FCI is releasing a total 30 lakh tonnes wheat stock from the Central pool stock to the market through various routes under the OMSS.

Out of 30 lakh tonnes, FCI will sell 25 lakh tonnes to bulk consumers like flour millers through e-auction, 2 lakh tonnes will be given to states/union territories and 3 lakh tonnes to institutions and state-PSUs at concessional rates for converting wheat into wheat flour.

Future Enterprises defaults on ₹12.75 crore interest payment on NCDs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden Future Enterprises Ltd (FEL) has defaulted on the payment of interest of Rs 12.75 crore on two non-convertible debentures (NCDs).

The due date for payment was February 16, 2023, FEL said in a regulatory filing.

"The company is unable to service its obligations in respect of the interest on Non-Convertible Debentures was due on February 16, 2023," it said.

The debentures have a cou-

pon rate of 9.60 per cent for both series. The Gross Principal amount on which the default has occurred is Rs 265 crore, which is Rs 106 crore for Series XVI - A and Rs 159 crore for Series XVI - B fund.

FEL had recently defaulted on payment of interest on several non-convertible debentures.

The debt-ridden Future group has been facing three petitions filed by its operational creditors before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to initiate insolvency proceedings against the company.

Lenders of FEL have also appointed an auditor for conducting a forensic audit of the firm. It is engaged in the business of manufacturing, trading, leasing of assets and logistics services. It used to develop, own and lease the retail infrastructure for the Future Group.

Rolls-Royce Marine North America inks pact with Kalyani Strategic Service

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rolls-Royce Marine North America has inked an initial pact with Pune-based Bharat Forge subsidiary KKSLS for naval marine propulsors, the company said on Saturday.

The pact may include, but is not limited to, design and development, licensed manufacturing, pre-sales and sales support; installation, commissioning, testing and aftermarket services and support, Rolls-Royce said in a statement.

Kalyani Strategic Service Limited (KSSLS) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Pune-based Bharat Forge.

Rolls-Royce's propulsion systems are designed to be used in all modern warships and the company is one of the key suppliers to the US Navy, according to the statement.

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two firms is to explore the opportunity for Kalyani Strategic Service to become an in-country provider for propulsor sales within the Indian market, it said.

The new pact is expected to enable the creation of a local supply chain ecosystem in India for controllable pitch propellers and shafting, Rolls-Royce said.

The partnership with Kalyani Strategic Service Ltd and Bharat Forge will further strengthen the company's defence ecosystem in India, said Kishore Jayaraman, President for India and South Asia at Rolls-Royce.

Ola to invest ₹7,614 cr in TN to produce EVs, lithium cells

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Electric vehicles firm Ola Electric on Saturday committed investments to the tune of Rs 7,614 crore in Tamil Nadu to roll out electric light motor vehicles days after the state government unveiled its electric vehicle policy to boost the industry.

The investments include setting up of lithium-cell manufacturing facilities with capacity of 20 GW while the overall investments by Ola Electric would generate 3,111 new jobs in the state, the Tamil Nadu government said.

Recently, the Tamil Nadu government unveiled its electric vehicle policy 2023 which aims to garner investments to the tune of Rs 50,000 crore and generate

1.50 lakh jobs, in a boost to the EV industry.

Ola Electric Mobility Pvt Ltd signed a memorandum of understanding committing investments worth Rs 7,614 crore with the Government of Tamil Nadu in the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin, an official release here said.

Napoli increase massive Serie A lead

Ghana footballer Atsu found dead in Turkey

AP ■ NAPLES

Napoli took another step towards their first Serie A title since 1990 on Friday as stars Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Victor Osimhen shot the leaders to a 2-0 win at Sassuolo and 18 points clear.

It looks only a matter of time before Luciano Spalletti's rampant side secure a Scudetto dreamed of by Napoli fans since the days of Diego Maradona.

And on Spalletti's 1,000th match as a manager his team made no mistake at a Mapei Stadium which with the away section closed saw an invasion of Napoli fans in the home supporters' stands.

A seventh league win on the bounce leaves their rivals trailing way off in the distance, a whopping 62 points collected in 23 matches underlining their dominance of Italy's top flight.

The best second-placed Inter Milan can do this weekend is maintain the pre-match gap of 15 points by beating off-form Udinese on Saturday night.

"The only thing we can do is keep doing the things we do well," said Spalletti to DAZN.

"Sassuolo are a team that know how to play football, you can't dominate for 90 minutes, but in the second half we did a lot of things really well."

Napoli's attentions now turn to their Champions League trip to Eintracht Frankfurt on Tuesday, a run in Europe's top club competition surely a possibility given the superb form of their attacking jewels Kvaratskhelia and Osimhen.

"Eintracht are a really good team, they have a lot of pace... they attack spaces really quickly and have technically gifted



players," added Spalletti.

"They've got more experience than us of playing knock-out football, last season they had a run in the Europa League... that's what we trying to do."

KVARATSKHELIA, OSIMHEN ON TARGET

Kvaratskhelia got the ball rolling in the 11th minute in Reggio Emilia with his 10th goal of an incredible debut Serie A season, a beautiful run and low finish which highlighted why Europe's biggest clubs are

already eyeing the Georgian wing wizard.

Osimhen, who had already hit the post, then doubled the hosts' lead in the 33rd minute when he collected Amir Rahmani's pass, spun Martin Erlic and rifled home from an improbable angle past Andrea Consigli.

The pair have now scored 28 of Napoli's 56 league goals, Osimhen netting nine times in eight league matches since the turn of the year.

Sassuolo couldn't repeat

their heroics of recent weeks against ailing champions AC Milan and Atalanta but put up a decent fight on Friday night despite having to play without injured star Domenico Berardi. Alessio Dionisi's side, who are seven points above the relegation zone in 15th, caused Napoli problems and struck the post through Armand Lauriente just after Kvaratskhelia's opener.

The match might have taken on a different look had Lauriente's close-range finish not been ruled out for Gregoire

Defrel interfering with play from an offside position. Napoli fans were worried about Osimhen's condition when he was subbed with six minutes to go, but Spalletti said after the match that there "no particular issue" with the Nigeria forward.

That left the only low note on an otherwise perfect night being super-sub Giovanni Simeone having a late goal chalked off for Hirving Lozano being offside before swinging in his perfect cross for the Argentine forward.



AP ■ HATAY

Former Ghana international Christian Atsu was found dead on Saturday under the rubble of his home almost two weeks after a devastating earthquake in Turkey.

Atsu, 31, was caught up in a 7.8-magnitude quake that rocked Turkey and Syria on February 6, killing more than 43,000 people in both countries.

There were initial reports the former Chelsea and Newcastle player had been rescued a day after the quake, but these turned out to be false.

His manager in Turkey, Murat Uzunmehmet, told DHA news agency on Saturday that his body had been found under the rubble of luxury flats that crum-

bled in the Turkish southern province of Hatay.

"We have reached his lifeless body. His belongings are still being removed. His phone was also found," Uzunmehmet told DHA.

"It's with a heavy heart that I have to announce to everyone the body of Christian Atsu was found this morning," his Ghana agent Nana Sechere tweeted.

Ghana's ministry of foreign affairs said it had "received the unfortunate news".

"The elder brother and twin sister of Christian Atsu and an officer of the (Ghanaian) embassy were present at the site when the body was recovered," the ministry said in a statement.

Midfielder Atsu scored the last of his 33 career goals for

Hatayspor in Turkey's Super Lig on February 5, hours before the quake struck.

"There are no words to describe our sadness," tweeted his Turkish top-flight club.

"We will not forget you, Atsu. Peace be upon you, beautiful person."

Earlier in his career he spent four seasons at Chelsea, mostly out on loan, before a permanent transfer to Newcastle in 2017.

Chelsea issued a statement declaring: "It is with enormous sadness that Chelsea Football Club receives the news that Christian Atsu is confirmed as one of the many victims of the dreadful earthquake in Turkey and Syria."

Newcastle also paid homage to "a talented player and a special person".

The club added: "He will always be fondly remembered by our players, staff and supporters."

Initially joining on loan, he played a key role in the Magpies squad that secured the Championship title in 2017 before making a permanent move to help us establish our place back in the Premier League."

On the international stage Atsu earned the first of his 65 senior caps with Ghana in 2012.

At the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations he scored a hat-trick in a 3-0 win over Guinea in the quarter-finals. The Black Stars reached the final, losing on penalties to the Ivory Coast with Atsu picking up both the Player and the Goal of the tournament awards.

He was also part of the Ghana squad at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

FC Barcelona facing more questions over refereeing chief payments

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona are facing further questions about payments of millions of euros made to a former refereeing chief's company following revelations that the amount in question was four times bigger than the one originally declared.

According to the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, Barcelona paid over 6.6 million euros between 2001 and 2018 to Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira, the former refereeing technical committee vice-president, for providing the club with verbal advice on topics relating to referees.

This is far greater than the 1.4 million euros being spoken about in the media on Thursday when La Liga president Javier Tebas said that no sporting sanctions could be taken because it happened more than three years ago. El Mundo also alleges that after Barca decided to stop payments, Negreira, dismissed from his position in the federation, sent a fax to the club on February 5, 2019 to threaten them with revealing a "scandal".

The online investigative site El Confidencial also revealed on Friday that two other companies are being investigated in connection with the affair. Soccercam SL belongs to Negreira's son while Tresep 2014 SL, which was owned by Josep Contreras Arjona, a former Barca director who died in December, was allegedly used to funnel payments to the former referee.

"We will wait for the bodies responsible for the good governance of the Spanish championship to shed light on this situation, which we have learned about through the media," said Spanish prime minister Pedro Sanchez on Friday during his

trip to Slovenia.

Barcelona top La Liga at present but in the wake of the revelations were held to a 2-2 draw by Manchester United in the Europa League on Thursday.

"If I saw that we were winning by cheating, I would go home," said Barcelona coach Xavi in the press conference after the match.

'LOT OF HARM'

Tebas said ethically no services should have been provided by Negreira to Barcelona, and no payments should have been made by the club.

He said that no sporting sanctions could be taken but that punishment under "criminal jurisdiction is another issue".

"Now the prosecutor's office is investigating the events that occurred and whether there may be a possible crime of corruption between individuals," he said.

The Spanish football federation have requested information from Barcelona and the refereeing technical committee (CTA) regarding the payments.

The investigation began after Spain's tax authorities identified irregularities in tax payments made between 2016 and 2018 by the company Dasnil 95 — owned by Negreira, vice-president of the CTA between 1994-2018. Dasnil 95 reportedly received payments from Barcelona between those years.

The last invoice, according to Cadena Ser radio, was issued in June 2018. After that the CTA was restructured and Enriquez Negreira left the organisation.

Josep Maria Bartomeu, then-president of Barca, told reporters the club had decided to dispense with these services in order to cut costs.

Arsenal regain top spot in Premier League

AP ■ BIRMINGHAM

Arsenal moved back to the top of the Premier League in dramatic fashion as an own goal from Aston Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez in stoppage-time handed the Gunners a crucial 4-2 victory on Saturday.

With just minutes left at Villa Park, Mikel Arteta's side were in danger of stumbling again in their bid to win the title for the first time since 2004.

Arsenal had twice trailed to goals from Ollie Watkins and Philippe Coutinho, only for Bukayo Saka and then Oleksandr Zinchenko to haul them level.

A draw would have taken Arsenal above Manchester City but hardly enhanced their hopes of holding off the champions in a thrilling title race.

But they received a helping hand from their former keeper as Martinez inadvertently deflected Jorginho's shot into his own net after it hit the bar in stoppage-time.

Gabriel Martinelli capped Arsenal's remarkable escape with a goal in the final seconds to lift the north Londoners three points clear of second placed City.

Pep Guardiola's men would go back above Arsenal on goal difference if they win at Nottingham Forest later on Saturday.

For the first time since August 20, the Gunners were not starting a round of fixtures on top of the Premier League table after losing 3-1 to City on Wednesday.

Arsenal were without a win in their previous three top-flight games and last four in all competitions, but this spirited victory will give them renewed belief they can pip City to the title.

Tom Hanks, a self-confessed Villa fan, was watching from the stands and Arsenal scripted a Hollywood ending in front of the superstar actor.

Arteta had bemoaned the "very difficult" fixture schedule that saw Arsenal back in action just 63 hours after the final whistle in their defeat against City on Wednesday.

And Arteta's fears about Arsenal struggling to cope with the quick turnaround came true after just five minutes.

Caught with too many players pushed upfield, Arsenal were exposed by Matt Cash's superb lofted pass towards Watkins,



who showed nimble footwork to skip past William Saliba before drilling a fine finish into the bottom corner.

Arsenal hit back with a 16th minute equaliser when Mings could only clear Ben

White's cross as far as Saka and the England forward smashed a ferocious strike past Martinez from 12 yards.

Coutinho restored Villa's lead in the 31st minute.

Alex Moreno got behind

White down the right flank and crossed towards Emiliano Buendia, whose clever dummy wrong-footed the Arsenal defence as Coutinho applied the finishing touch with a clinical strike from just inside the area.

Arteta's men had to dig deep after Coutinho's first goal this season and they were up to the task.

Zinchenko put Arsenal back on level terms in the 61st minute, drilling a blistering strike past Martinez from the edge of the area for his first Gunners goal since signing from Manchester City.

Leon Bailey almost won it for Villa in the closing stages when his stinging strike was pushed onto the bar by Aaron Ramsdale.

But Arsenal held their nerve and snatched the points in an astonishing finish.

In stoppage-time, Jorginho's first-time effort from the edge of the area hit the bar, bounced down and struck Martinez on the head before rebounding into the net.

Martinez was crestfallen and the Argentine World Cup winner was involved again when the Gunners wrapped up the points with virtually the last kick.

Martinez went up for a Villa corner but when Arsenal cleared Martinelli was able to run half the length of the pitch before slotting into the empty net as Arteta and his staff celebrated wildly on the touchline.

Swiatek beats Kudermetova to reach Doha Open final

AP ■ DOHA

World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek breezed past Veronika Kudermetova for the loss of just one game in a 56-minute Doha Open semi-final demolition on Friday. The French and US Open champion triumphed 6-0, 6-1 and will face world number four Jessica Pegula of the United States for the title.

Second seed Pegula reached the final by seeing off Greek fifth seed Maria Sakkari 6-2, 4-6, 6-

1 in just under two hours.

Poland's Swiatek, the top seed, coped with blustery conditions the better of the two in the Qatari capital, hitting 14 winners to five unforced errors and breaking serve five times.

"I was pretty worried about how I was going to compete with the conditions today, so I'm glad that I could play the smart way," Swiatek told watennis.com.

"I'm pretty happy that I was so solid." Swiatek has lost just two games in two completed matches in Doha this week.



She beat Danielle Collins for the loss of one game and then was given a walkover into the semi-final by Belinda Bencic.

Pegula will be playing in her first final of 2023 on Saturday, but sixth of her career. She had been heading for a straight sets win on Friday when leading 6-2, 4-2 but Sakkari dug deep to level the contest. "That was probably the hardest conditions I've ever had to play in, wind-wise. I'm glad I didn't get too frustrated. I think I played very smart," said the American.

Alcaraz into Argentina Open semi-finals

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Top seed Carlos Alcaraz shrugged off damp, cold conditions to sweep into the semi-finals of the Argentina Open with a straight sets victory over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic on Friday.

The Spanish world number two, who is making his return to tennis at this week's event in Buenos Aires after a four-month injury layoff, eased into the last four with a 6-4, 6-2 victory in 1hr 33min.

Friday's quarter-finals took place in chilly conditions after a week of wild weather swings in Buenos Aires which saw temperatures go from 38.1 C (100.6 degrees Fahrenheit) last Sunday to 7.9C (46.2F) on Thursday.

"Everything was very different from what we have been used to — there was rain and it was cold," Alcaraz said of the conditions.

"But the tennis player's day-to-day job is to adapt to the conditions, and I think a great match came out. I have competed very well, I have played at a great level, but I want to continue improving in the semi-finals."

Alcaraz will face either Argentinian fifth seed Francisco Cerundolo or Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in the last four.

Scotland cricketers refuse to shake hands with rape-accused Lamichhane

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Scotland's cricketers refused to shake hands with rape-accused Nepal star Sandeep Lamichhane following a match between the two nations in Kirtipur on Friday.

Lamichhane is accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in a Kathmandu hotel room last August.

He was suspended as national captain and arrested, but was freed on bail at the end of last month, with Nepal's cricket association announcing a day later his ban had been lifted.

Lamichhane returned to the side in the opening game of the ODI World Cup League 2 tri-series against Namibia in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

As has become traditional at the end of most cricket internationals, Nepal and Scotland lined up to shake hands with each other at the end of Friday's game but video footage confirmed the Scots made a point of refusing to do with Lamichhane.

Cricket Scotland made no public comment about the gesture which came at the end of a one-day match the Scots lost by three wickets.

But AFP understands it came after a unanimous vote by Scotland players and support staff, with both the Cricket Association of Nepal and the player himself made aware of the protest in advance.

Lamichhane, who has denied the allegations against him in a Facebook post, is likely to receive similar treat-



ment when the teams next meet on February 21.

The 22-year-old took 3-27 on Friday as Nepal recovered from 77-5 and 177-6 to chase down 275 with three overs to spare.

In Tuesday's opening game against Namibia, Lamichhane took 3-66 in a two-wicket win.

Before the tri-series started, Cricket Scotland issued a statement, saying it was "aware of the reports regarding the legal status of Nepal's Sandeep Lamichhane, ahead of the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 Qualifiers".

It added: "As a governing body, and as a squad, Cricket Scotland stands firmly against all forms of abuse, which have no place in mod-

ern society.

"The player's availability for these games is a matter for the Cricket Association of Nepal and the ICC (International Cricket Council) to consider."

The ICC, however, have yet to comment publicly comment on Lamichhane's selection.

Lamichhane had been a poster boy for the rise of cricket in Nepal, which gained one-day international status in 2018.

His big break came when he was snapped up by the Delhi Capitals for the big-money Indian Premier League that year, and he has since been Nepal's most sought-after cricketer.

Nepal's next match of the tri-series is against Namibia on Saturday.

AXAR, ASHWIN LEAD INDIA FIGHTBACK

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin added another significant chapter to India's lower-order fightbacks as their priceless 114-run eighth-wicket partnership put the hosts on an even keel against Australia on an engrossing second day of the second Test here on Saturday.

Thanks to Axar's invaluable 74 off 115 balls and Ashwin's 37 off 71 balls, India, who were in complete mess at 139/7, recovered well to end their first innings at 262 in 83.3 overs, just one run behind Australia's 263.

At stumps, Australia were 61/1 in their second innings, taking a handy 62-run lead.

Had the two all-rounders not bailed the hosts out, Australia would have been far more happy than they actually were at stumps on Saturday. Travis Head (39 batting), opening for a concussed David Warner, and Marnus Labuschagne (16 batting) attacked the Indian spinners, knowing that defending wasn't an option. They picked up a handful of boundaries in the process.

As has been the script over the past few years, batter No.6 (Jadeja), No.8 (Ashwin) and No.9 (Axar) were at the forefront of the recovery act after specialist batters were caught in two minds on whether to attack or defend against the Australian spinners led by Nathan Lyon (5/67 in 29 overs), who grabbed his 22nd five-wicket haul.

There were no demons in the track but a few cracks on

the good- and short-of-good-length spots on both sides of the strip led the ball to keep low.

Most top-order India batters were adjudged leg-before on the front-foot, barring skipper Rohit Sharma, who was bowled playing across the line. The worrying trend was India batters playing the Australian spinners with their pads as the first line of defence.

However, Axar and Ashwin applied the strategy to consistently counter-attack the bowlers despite the fall of seven wickets. Instead of plonking the front-foot forward, they used the pace of the deliveries from Todd Murphy (2/53 in 18 overs) and debutant left-arm spinner Matt Kuhnemann (2/72 in 21.3 overs), to score runs.

Axar got his third fifty — and a second consecutive one in the series — with a six over cow corner off Kuhnemann and another over extra cover off Murphy. He also hit a six off Lyon, but his standout shot was a back-foot punch through the covers off Pat Cummins. Ashwin too was determined at the other end and did not let go of the scoring opportunities as Australia lost the initiative after dominating the better part of the first one-and-a-half sessions on Saturday.

India lost wickets in a heap in the morning session before Virat Kohli (44 off 84 balls) and Ravindra Jadeja (26 off 74 balls) steadied the innings in the post-lunch session by adding 59 runs for the fifth wicket.

But once Murphy, playing his second Test, and debutant



Kuhnemann dismissed the duo in quick succession, things went downhill quickly for the hosts.

The difference one saw between the Australian spin

attack in Nagpur and Delhi could be due to the pace of the Kotla track. Credit must be given to stalwart Lyon and the two young spinners for keeping up the pressure despite losing

three referrals in the first hour of day two.

Kohli, who played with a lot of composure and was looked good for a big score, would consider himself

unlucky that he had to head back due to an umpire's call.

Kuhnemann's arm ball seemed to be brushing the leg-bail and India's No. 1 batter looked distraught as there

was no conclusive evidence on whether the ball hit the pad first or the bat.

Before that, a Murphy slider caught India's most consistent Test batter Jadeja plumb in front. In the morning session, KL Rahul's bad patch continued while Cheteshwar Pujara had a forgettable first innings outing in his 100th Test.

Only Rohit Sharma (32) looked in good touch as a vintage Lyon was in his element, troubling the top-order repeatedly. Rahul (17), who survived two DRS appeals, was trapped leg-before as Lyon tossed one from round the wicket and got it to deviate enough and find his pads.

Rahul's run of failures will again spur the debate about whether young Shubman Gill should have been given the

opportunity to play in the ongoing Test.

Rohit seemed to carry from where he had left in the first Test and was also playing the sweep shot to good effect. However, he played across the line to a straighter one from Lyon and was castled in the process.

Rarely has Pujara walked in to bat amid such fanfare — the 20,000-plus Kotla crowd kept chanting his name — but his milestone match turned out to be an anti-climax as he failed to bother the scorers.

It was another flighted delivery from Lyon which turned back enough and the orthodox Rajkot man tried to play a half-forward defensive stroke only to be caught plumb in front. He would like to forge the innings in a hurry.



Warner out of 2nd Test due to concussion, hairline fracture

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Australia opener David Warner will miss the remainder of the second Test against India after suffering a concussion with Matthew Renshaw coming on as his substitute.

The 36-year-old could also be a doubtful starter for the third Test, which begins in Indore on March 1, after it emerged that he has also sustained a hairline fracture on his elbow.

"Warner will now follow the graduated return to sport protocols ahead of the third Test in Indore in line with Cricket Australia guidelines," a Cricket Australia statement said on Saturday.

In the 10th over of the Australian innings on Friday, Warner was struck on the head by a Mohammed Siraj delivery. The southpaw had received on-field medical attention.

However, he did not undergo a concussion test.

Earlier, while navigating through a barrage of short balls from Siraj, Warner had suffered a knock to his left elbow.

The Australian had continued batting despite the twin blows, eventually perishing for 15, but he did not come out to field when India batted on day one.

After the end of play on the opening day fellow opener Usman Khawaja had said Warner was "a little bit weary".

"A knock to the arm and then to the head has made him a little bit weary at the moment," Khawaja had said.

Warner's concussion means a return to the side for Renshaw, who had been dropped from the playing XI after an underwhelming first Test, where he scored 0 and 2.

However, Renshaw, a part-time off-spinner, will not be able to bowl as according to the ICC rules, a concussion substitute must be a like-for-like replacement and Warner rarely rolls his arm over.



Axar & Ashwin can bat in top-six in any Test team: Lyon

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Had Nathan Lyon been an India skipper, he would have issued a quick rebuttal if someone had dared to call Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin as lower-order batters.

On an interesting second day, Ashwin (37) and Axar (74) added 114 runs for the eighth wicket after India had slumped to 139/7, with Lyon taking his 22nd five-wicket haul in Test cricket.

The Australian spinner complimented the two India players for their gritty batting display, saying the duo could easily bat at No.6 for any Test-playing team.

"They are not lower-order (batters). Let's get that clear. Axar and Ash could easily bat in the top-six in a few teams in Test cricket around the world in my eyes. They (India) have a very long top order, let's just say that," said Lyon.

Thanks to the efforts of Axar and Ashwin, India kept Australia's first-innings lead down to just one run.

Australia have started aggressively in their second innings scoring 61/1, but Lyon said he will not get into any target setting at the moment.

"I'm not going to give you a number. Whatever we get we have to make sure it's enough. That's the mentality we need to do (go with); we need to come

here tomorrow and be really brave."

Travis Head has come out all guns blazing scoring 39 in quick time and Lyon said he trusts his team-mate's aggressive methods.

"We need to trust the guys' methods when they have the support of the whole change room to go out there and play the way they want to play and the way they think they can combat the quality bowling India have. Whatever we set, we have just got to make sure it's enough."

Lyon said the more bounce he could extract from the Ferozeshah Kotla track had helped him immensely.

"There is (a) lot more bounce in Delhi compared to Nagpur, which I obviously like to exploit."

Lyon got all his five wickets — his second five-for in Delhi after the 2013-14 series — from the Old Pavilion End, as the cracks created at the Ambedkar Stadium End helped in generating uneven bounce.

"Bowling around the wicket in this game, I'm still trying to target off stump. That's my goal. If you understand cricket, you will understand what I am trying to do and trying to get them defending because we know how good the Indian batters are. If I can make them defend, hopefully, I'll create a few chances here and there."

PTI ■ GQEBERHA

Medium pacer Renuka Singh's fifer and vice-captain Smriti Mandhana's fine half-century went in vain as India lost to England by 11 runs to suffer their first defeat in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup here on Saturday. Renuka Singh registered her best bowling figures (5/15) to help India restrict England to 151 for seven after Harmanpreet Kaur opted to bowl.

Renuka did the early damage, picking up the first three wickets to peg England back and then returned to take two more towards the fag end of the innings.

In the chase, vice-captain Smriti Mandhana led the charge with a 41-ball 52, which was studded with seven boundaries



and a six, while Richa Ghosh remained unbeaten on 47 off 34 balls as India fell short by 11 runs, managing 140 for 5 in their 20 overs.

India did not have the best of starts, losing Shafali Verma in

the fourth over. Jemimah Rodrigues and Harmanpreet too departed in quick succession as India slumped to 62 for 3 in 10.2 overs.

But Mandhana and Ghosh shared a 43-run fourth-wicket

stand to keep India in the hunt.

But England skipper Heather Knight made some brilliant bowling changes towards the end to stifle India's run flow.

Needing 34 runs off the final two overs, Sophie Ecclestone bowled a brilliant penultimate over, giving away just three runs and also accounted for the wicket of Deepti Sharma.

In the final over, the asking became too steep, but Ghosh found the boundary twice and also hit a six off Katherine Sciver-Brunt, but it was not enough.

With India needing 59 off 30 balls, Mandhana tried to up the ante and stepped out to hit Sarah Glenn for a maximum to bring up a well-deserved half-century.

Conversations with Ponting, change in mindset behind Axar's rapid rise as a batter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Axar Patel has attributed his rapid growth as a batter over the last 12 months to a change in mindset besides crediting Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting for the transformation.

Axar has come of age as a batter, coming up with crucial performances across formats in the last three months.

On Saturday, he scored a potentially match-changing 74 while batting alongside Ravichandran Ashwin (37). The duo shared a 114-run stand for the eighth wickets to help India reach 262, just one run short of Australia's first innings total.

His 84 in the first Test in Nagpur helped India get to 400 as the hosts effectively batted Australia out of the game.

"At Delhi Capitals, I talked a lot with Ricky on how I can get better with my batting. Even in the Indian team, I was talking to the batters. I felt I was not realising my potential with 30s and

40s. I was not able finish the game. "So, it was a lot about the mindset.

Sometimes you can relax as an all-rounder if you have taken wickets, you could get casual. So I thought I could improve on that and convert my 30s and 40s into match-winning scores.

"That is how I think now and that has made a big difference," said Axar after stumps on day two of the second Test.

Axar and Ashwin also got high praise from Australian spinner Nathan Lyon who feels the Indian spin duo is good enough to bat in the top-six of any international side.

"When I am bowling, we think how the batter is making things difficult for us. I use the same technique while batting. If the bowler is landing all the balls in the same area, the batters keep defending confidently. While batting, we also try to defend confidently and force him to change his tactics. Having a bowler's mindset helps in batting as well."



With India reeling at 139 for seven, Axar and Ashwin were feeling the heat.

The left-arm spinner said they had the confidence of stitching a big partnership with the pitch getting easier to bat on.

"There was pressure as we were behind in the game. So, it was important to get as close to the Australian target as possible. When Ashwin and I got set, we thought the wicket was getting easier to bat on and felt we could forge a long partnership. Eventually we ended just one run behind Australia. So felt good about that.

"Coming from white-ball cricket, I was in good touch in Nagpur as well. I am just carrying that confidence and trying to be consistent," said Axar, who is playing ahead of Kuldeep Yadav in the team because of his superior batting abilities.

With Australia racing to 61 for one in 12 overs in their second innings, the Indians will have to rework their plans on day three.

Axar said his team would be comfortable chasing anything in the range of 250.

"The sooner we bowl them out the better. If we can stop them between 220-250, we can defend that while batting on day four. For that, we will have to bowl well because the wicket is getting slower with the game progressing.

"We will have to work really hard to get wickets, it won't be easy for sure. We will have to vary our pace to test the batters.

"Towards the end of play, they (Australia) were aggressive and we noticed that. At stumps, we were thinking about how to do things differently and try to stop them."

On missing out on a deserving hundred, he added: "The ball was new so I thought I could take my chances with Shami and Siraj bhai left. I wanted to take my chances. Last time I got out on 84 while batting (in Nagpur) so wanted to take my chances (to get to hundred)."

Saurashtra take firm grip as Unadkat, Sakariya grab two wickets each

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Saurashtra look poised to lift their second Ranji Trophy after skipper Jaydev Unadkat and Chetan Sakariya grabbed two wickets each to leave hosts Bengal struggling at 169 for four in their second innings on day three of the final at the Eden Gardens on Saturday.

While Bengal skipper Manoj Tiwary remained unbeaten on 57, the hosts are still 61 runs short of Saurashtra's first-innings total of 404, and with both Saurashtra left-arm pace bowlers breathing fire, Unadkat's side could well wrap up the game on Sunday. Bengal's pace-heavy attack looked ineffective in the morning as Saurashtra,

continuing from where they had left on Friday evening — 317/5 — added 87 more runs to take their score past 400.

Though overnight batters Arpit Vasavada (81) and Chirag Jani (60) perished quickly, tail-enders Prerak Mankad (33) and Dharmendrasinh Jadeja (29) gave Saurashtra the winning edge. To add to Bengal's woes, they gave away 35 extras.

Coming in to bat in the second innings, Bengal had a harrowing start with the pace duo of Sakariya (2/50) and Unadkat (2/47) rattling the top-order to reduce them to 47/3 in the post-lunch session.

Still trailing by 183 runs, an innings defeat loomed large when the veteran duo of Anustup Majumdar (61) and Tiwary

came together and gave the 1,000-odd fans some hope with their 99-run partnership.

At close, Shahbaz Ahmed (13 batting) was giving Tiwary company at the crease.

Bengal can only hope for a magical turnaround in quest of their maiden Ranji Trophy title in 32 years.

The onus is on Tiwary and Shahbaz, the last recognised batting pair for Bengal, to make an improbable turnaround.

Earlier pace bowler Mukesh Kumar emerged the most successful Bengal bowler on Saturday, finishing with figures of 4/111 and getting rid of both well-set overnight batters Vasavada and Jani.



Having managed just three wickets on Friday, the much-vaunted Bengal attack wrapped up Saurashtra's last five wickets in two hours and six minutes in the first session on Saturday. But it seemed too little, too late as the host bowlers had allowed Saurashtra to take their score past 400.

Vasavada failed to add to his overnight total of 81 and nicked an away-going delivery. Jani was dismissed when Mukesh got the ball to swing away after pitching. The ball made a feather-touch contact with Jani's bat and sailed to the wicket-keeper.

Akash Deep hit the deck hard to bounce out Prerak Mankad with a ball that sharply

cut back in and clipped the batter's gloves.

He got his third wicket, dismissing Unadkat (4) cheaply. But from 369/9, Saurashtra raced to 404 with their last pair of Parth Bhut (14 not out) and Dharmendrasinh Jadeja (29) frustrating the Bengal bowlers.

Pressed into the opener's role, Bengal debutant Sumanta Gupta showed he still has a lot of work to do, as he poked at a Sakariya delivery to be caught in the slip cordon.

Bengal's biggest letdown was India A regular Abhimanyu Easwaran (12) whose horror show with the bat continued, done in by a length delivery that swung away.

Bengal's crisis man Anustup

Majumdar looked in control and soaked up the pressure. But Unadkat dismissed the veteran cricketer when he chased an away-going delivery to be caught at gully.

Tiwary and Shahbaz then survived some anxious moments to keep the faint hopes alive.

Saurashtra had won their maiden Ranji Trophy title beating Bengal three years ago at Rajkot. Brief scores:

Bengal 174 and 169/4; 52.5 overs (Anustup Majumdar 61, Manoj Tiwary 57 batting). Saurashtra 404; 110 overs (Arpit Vasavada 81, Chirag Jani 60, Sheldon Jackson 59, Harvik Desai 50; Mukesh Kumar 4/111, Akash Deep 3/111, Ishan Porel 3/86). Bengal trail by 61 runs.

“A woman has to be intelligent, have charm, a sense of humor, and be kind. It's the same qualities I require from a man”
—Catherine Deneuve



THAW IN THE VALLEY

Winds of change are sweeping across Jammu and Kashmir as tourists flock to experience the beauty of the Valley, writes MOHIT KANDHARI from Jammu

As the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir gradually sheds its image of being a troubled ‘hotspot’, a large number of tourists from different parts of the country are flocking to Kashmir, reaping rich dividends of peace in the aftermath of abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A.

A record number of 1.88 crore tourists visited the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in 2022, the highest number so far in the last one decade. Recently, the UT administration also hosted the third edition of Khelo India National Winter Games in the world-famous ski resort of Gulmarg.

The successful conduct of the sporting event not only ensured good business for everyone in the hotel and adventure sports industry but also brought back smiles on everyone’s faces.

Next in line is the Tulip Festival. It commences with the arrival of the spring season in the Valley. This year the festival will be celebrated from April 1 to 20. The 20-day celebration attracts nature lovers and floriculture enthusiasts to welcome the season of spring and to witness the blooming tulips spread across the sprawling 30 acres of land which gives a breathtaking view of the Dal Lake and snow-capped mountains in the backdrop.

Out of 1.88 crore tourists, around 26 lakh, including 3.65 lakh Amarnath pilgrims, visited the Kashmir Valley in 2022.

On the other hand, the pilgrim traffic at the cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi, nestled in Trikuta hills near the Katra township also registered a record jump and touched over 91 lakh footfalls during the same period. The footfall of foreign tourists is also witnessing an upward trend in the Valley in the wake of the prevailing peaceful situation.

During 2022, around 20,000 foreign tourists relished the hospitality and soaked themselves in the cool climes while taking a Shikara ride in the famous Dal Lake and participated in the adventure sport activities, including skiing on the icy slopes of Gulmarg.

Before the repeal of Article 370 only 8.5 lakh tourists visited Kashmir in 2018 and 11 lakh in 2017. However, two years of travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic broke the backbone of the tourism industry.

SKYROCKETING HOPES

With every single footfall, the hopes of common Kashmiris are skyrocketing as it is not only bringing them economic benefits but also making their lives more productive and peaceful.

Saleem Ahmad, who runs a food joint in the Dal Lake area, said, “I launched my cafe in 2019 during the

summer season. Before I could establish myself, the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked and Article 370 was abrogated. The city witnessed complete shutdown and instead of earning profits, I ended up making losses only.”

Ahmad said, “Since last year, as the tourists’ rush witnessed an upward trend, I managed to break even and now I am hoping to earn profits in the coming spring season.”

Ahmad also talked about his close friends who have launched ‘home stays’ and liaison with his friends in the metro cities to attract tourists in the Kashmir Valley.

The young entrepreneurs working in the hospitality industry have launched many startups and generated employment opportunities for fellow Kashmiris with little help from the government agencies. They have developed ‘home stays’ at different locations and also provide different logistics to aid trekking clubs and enthusiasts flocking to participate in the adventure sport activities. Several Vloggers and Youtubers are also producing good content and making big through their social media pages and earning hefty money by way of showcasing the rich cultural heritage and tourist destinations of the Kashmir Valley.

SPOTLIGHT ON G-20 MEETING

In the coming months, global spotlight will also be on Jammu and Kashmir as one of the G-20 group meetings will be hosted in the Valley. It is expected, the Narendra Modi government would go all out, showcasing the changing face of Jammu and Kashmir in front of the global leaders during the summit.

The incidents of terrorist-related violence, cross-border infiltration and terror attacks are also witnessing a declining trend. The security forces are in full control of the situation on ground zero and the leadership of different terrorist outfits, active in the Kashmir Valley, has been completely wiped out.

The terrorist commanders have been forced to rely on ‘hybrid’ terrorists and indulge in killing of soft targets to register their presence.

The shelf life of these young terrorists, mostly local youths, radicalised by their handlers from across the line of control in Pakistan, is less than three months. In many cases, these terrorists have been eliminated within days of picking up the gun.

The random ‘hartal calls’ and enforced shutdowns have also become a thing of the past following crackdown on terror financiers and their sympathisers. The common Kashmiris



“THE YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS WORKING IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY HAVE LAUNCHED MANY STARTUPS AND GENERATED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FELLOW KASHMIRIS WITH LITTLE HELP FROM THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES”

are heaving a sigh of relief as they are able to transact their businesses and lead a peaceful life without facing abrupt disruptions and forced bandh calls.

As winds of change are sweeping across the Valley, the Central government has also started hosting regular conferences, workshops and seminars in Kashmir Valley to showcase the changes on ground zero.

The iconic Clock Tower near Lal Chowk, the busiest city centre in Srinagar, has also become a hot spot and is attracting tourists’ attention. Visitors from different parts of India can be seen patiently waiting for their turn to click selfies and family photographs before posting the same on their social media pages. In the past, the Lal Chowk remained out of bounds as visitors were prevented from coming closer to the Clock Tower and every time enthusiasts indulged in some dramatics they were whisked away by the security personnel deployed there.

The street vendors, mostly non-locals, are a happy lot as they offer tasty snacks and serve fellow Indians from different parts of the country.

Rakesh Kumar, a street vendor from Bihar selling tasty snacks in the Valley for over a decade, said he catered to local customers and sometimes security personnel. “Very few tourists used to spend time in the evening in this area due to security concerns. Now it is not the case. The markets remain open and there is no fear. Tourists from nearby hotels prefer eating out. The taxi operators are also a happy lot in the Kashmir Valley. Due to opening up of new tourist hotspots in Tangmarg, Sonmarg, Gulmarg and Pahalgam, the taxi operators are getting good rates and first time tourists are opting out for these destinations.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in a recent interview, has said Kashmir has become a tourist destination rather than a place for protests, stone pelting, and revolution. To revive the tourism industry, considered the backbone of the local economy in Jammu and Kashmir, the UT administration has focused on it.

The benefits of the recent boom in the sector have benefited the ordinary man. Strikes, stone pelting and broad daylight encounters have almost ended, allowing the local tourists to venture out with their families too. During the winter season last year, popular tourist spots like Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonmarg had their resorts and guesthouses running with 100 per cent occupancy.

A senior official of the Tourism department in Kashmir told ‘Sunday Pioneer’, “Tourists from all parts of the world have been visiting J&K. We had a very good winter season and now we are fully geared up to welcome the fresh footfalls in the coming summer season.”

“Our initiatives for boosting tourism have borne fruit. The local traders, houseboat owners, taxi and shikara operators, dry fruit sellers, restaurant owners, businessmen who

IGLOO CAFE: MAJOR ATTRACTION

- An igloo cafe, originally a brainchild of Syed Wasim Shah, has attracted a huge rush of tourists in the ski-resort of Gulmarg ever since it was launched this winter season.
- Shah claimed the igloo cafe designed by him this season is turning out to be the world’s largest cafe and is set to create many more records in the coming weeks.
- The ice cafe is 37.5 feet high and has a diameter of 44.5 feet. A total of 10 tables have been placed inside the cafe and they can accommodate 40 guests at one time.
- Such igloo cafes are a major hit in the snow clad mountains of Switzerland. Shah revealed he too was inspired to design his own cafe while he came across the one in Switzerland.

depend on tourism, and Kashmir’s economy will get a big boost,” the official added.

Due to the increasing number of flights and better road and rail transport facilities, different categories of tourists are opting for different routes to reach the Kashmir Valley and enjoy the pristine beauty of nature.

OPENING ROUTES OF NEW TOURIST HOTSPOTS

On one hand, steps have been taken by the government to provide better facilities to the old tourist spots, the Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor’s administration has, for the first time, introduced about 100 very beautiful places which were overlooked by the previous governments. These places have been brought on the tourist map. Bringing these places on the tourist map will generate employment for the locals.

On its part, the Tourism department is roping in local staff of private hotels and imparting them training as part of the capacity building exercise. Doodhpathri has been the best offbeat tourist destination and is expected to attract maximum tourists followed by Kokernag, Pahalgam and Sonmarg.

A local hotelier in Gulmarg, Syed Niaz Ahmad Shah, told ‘Sunday Pioneer’, “We had a good winter season last year and now we are looking forward to a hectic spring

and summer season ahead.”

He appealed to the government to come to the aid of local stakeholders by providing them incentives and supporting them in order to provide quality services to the tourists. To promote tourism during the peak season, Syed Niaz Ahmad Shah also suggested that airlines should offer lucrative packages for group tourists and urged the government to regulate the tariff as ticket prices skyrocket during the peak season. He observed that the government must increase the total bed capacity to cater to the rush of tourists in the ski resort of Gulmarg and other emerging hotspots.

“The Tourism department should also rope in hoteliers, travel agents, logistic teams and others before designing the packages,” Niaz Shah added.

The Government of India is also making a significant thrust to ensure better infrastructural facilities for the region’s people and entice visitors. This has resulted in a fortuitous surge in tourist activities with better law and order, promising security system, and maintenance of peace in addition to infrastructural and connectivity improvements.

The J&K administration is also focused on exploring the full potential of pilgrimage tourism by developing various religious tourist circuits across the Union Territory. Keeping in view the increasing number of devotees coming to visit Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, facilities and infrastructure is being strengthened.

As per the official data, the construction work of Mantalai Wellness Centre has been completed at a cost of Rs 80 crore and the design of Katra multi modal station has been finalised. Similarly, work on Tawi Riverfront is going on in full swing while Mansar and Surinsar have made their presence on the tourism map of the country. The government is working tirelessly to open Sanasar Tulip Garden for local people and tourists this year.

Similarly, work on conservation and renovation of 18 historical-cultural heritage sites in Jammu, Kathua, Ramban, Reasi, Samba and Udhampur will commence shortly. In April this year, Jambu Zoo shall be thrown open to the people. The Home-stay Scheme has been launched with a view to foster employment generation and economic prosperity in rural areas.

Remarkably, with the launch of the new J&K Film Policy in 2021, Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as the favourite shooting destination for film industry and permission has been granted for shooting of more than 150 films and web series in less than two years.

CHILDHOOD CANCERS ARE CURABLE

February 15 was marked as International Childhood Cancer Day. Contrary to the popular belief, pediatric cancer or childhood cancer is very much prevalent in India. The World Health Organisation says, India is home to at least 20% of the global childhood cancer burden, with nearly 75,000 kids getting cancer every year. Though India has made significant progress in ensuring childhood cancer services in the last few years with financial aid being doled out through Ayushman Bharat scheme, the outcome still remains unimpressive as compared to global standards. This is mainly due to delay in recognition, diagnosis and cure, say doctors. ARCHANA JYOTI reports.

Various reports assert that the available data shows lower incidence of childhood cancer especially in leukaemia and CNS tumours which may suggest poor awareness of caregivers and delayed diagnosis with many "missed cases". Dr Sameer Bakhshi, from Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital India, AIIMS, Delhi attributes this to significant barriers in early diagnosis, inability to accurately diagnose, poor access to health care facilities, and inability to initiate treatment promptly.

In a study 'Childhood Cancer in India', published in ScienceDirect, he expressed concern that incidence data are also skewed towards male preponderance which suggests gender bias in seeking healthcare. "The childhood cancer services in India are predominantly restricted to a few tertiary care centres in major cities. The outcome in major groups of cancer is complicated by delayed and more advanced stages of presentation and poor supportive care during intensive treatment. Treatment refusal and abandonment due to stigma attached to the disease remains major barriers," he says.

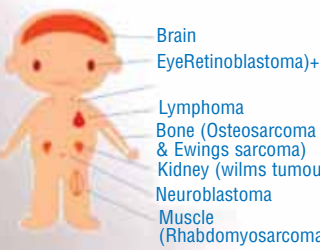
The health expert notes that the situation can be improved by ensuring there is an enhanced awareness about the problem and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all.

"Another major problem is that childhood cancer care services are currently available only at tertiary health centres in major cities, forcing a majority of India to depend on these few centres."

Treatment for such cancers would include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or a combination depending on the nature of malignancy and its stage of presentation. Doctors say focus should be on improving awareness about childhood cancers and its symptoms among parents and healthcare providers and improving healthcare access to remote areas. India needs to have a policy framework specifically to address childhood cancer care, according to the health experts.



Most common childhood cancers



Dr Shuvadeep Ganguly, Department of Medical Oncology, ICRH, AIIMS, Delhi who is co-author of the study along with Dr

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of childhood cancers generally include unexplained weight loss, persistent pain in bone, joints or legs, lumps/mass in the abdomen, chest, neck or pelvis, excessive bruising or bleeding, prolonged fatigue, whitish appearance of the pupil etc.

Bakhshi calls for a more intensive protocol that may result in decreasing relapse rate but the increased incidence of toxicity, which is more common in presence of malnutrition and absence of proper support structure, may offset survival advantage. "Hence, a pragmatic balance is nec-

essary in adopting uniform treatment protocols along with strengthening of supportive care logistics. It is also important to focus on proper pre-treatment counselling allaying anxiety and undue fear regarding diagnosis of cancer so that drop-outs are reduced, and effective telephonic tracking mechanism to ensure that each child receives complete care," he says as per the study.

Since, the cost of cancer care is often financially prohibitive due to significant out of pocket expenditure, the introduction of the National Health Protection Scheme under Ayushman Bharat Program by the Government is likely to ensure healthcare access for the financially needy. "The availability of anti-neoplastic drugs for child-

ICMR SURVEY ON CHILDHOOD CANCER 2022

Results of a survey published by the Indian Council of Medical Research in September 2022 shows that childhood cancers comprise four per cent of all reported cancers in the national cancer registry programme.

These cancer patients face delayed diagnosis resulting in delayed treatment, incomplete treatment and therefore, low survival rate. As national health programmes and policies are focused on cancers in adults, the ICMR report suggested that specialised policy is developed to address childhood cancer.

The survey showed that the country has just half of the healthcare facilities needed to treat and take care of these children. For example, while only 41.6 per cent of the sampled tertiary level public hospitals in the country had a dedicated pediatric oncology department, 48.8% of private hospitals had these facilities.

The maximum (64%) were available in charitable hospitals. Less than 50% of the tertiary hospitals provided hospice care, play therapy and parental support groups and less than 35% had provision for diagnostics such as Positron Emission Tomography-Computerised Tomography, bone scan and MIBG scan.

There is very little understanding on what causes cancer in children. Some chronic infections, such as HIV, Epstein-Barr virus and malaria, are risk factors for childhood cancer. While some 10% of all children with cancer have a predis-

THE SURVEY SHOWED THAT THE COUNTRY HAS JUST HALF OF THE HEALTHCARE FACILITIES NEEDED TO TREAT AND TAKE CARE OF THESE CHILDREN. WHILE ONLY 41.6 % OF THE SAMPLED TERTIARY LEVEL PUBLIC HOSPITALS HAD A DEDICATED PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY DEPT, 48.8% OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS HAD THESE FACILITIES.

position because of genetic factors, more research is needed to identify the triggers for the remaining.

Most children with cancer suffer from leukemia (approximately 33 per cent) followed by brain tumors (around 20 per cent) and lymphomas (some 11 per cent).

Fewer children in India survive cancer compared to developed countries. While less than 30% of cancer patients in India and other developing countries survive, the mortality is just around 20 per cent in developed countries.

Delhi has the highest rate of childhood cancers among boys in the age group of 0-14 years in Asia, recently published data from the National Cancer Registry has shown.

Out of every one million boys aged upto 14 years living in Delhi, 203.1 suffer cancer, the data report, that took into account the cancer landscape in India's select places from 2012-2016, showed.

In the age group of 0-19 years,

Delhi trails behind China's Jiangmen — the highest cancer incidence city among boys in Asia — only by a difference of six cases per million population.

The report includes figures from 28 population-based cancer registries (PBCR) and 58 hospital-based cancer registries (HBCR) in India.

Boys aged upto 14 years contributed 4.7% of all cancer cases in Delhi. The corresponding figure for the 0-19 years age group is 6.3 per cent.

Delhi, thus, topped the list of 28 PBCRs in terms of how many childhood cancers were registered among all cancers. The national capital was followed by the districts of Aurangabad (Maharashtra), Hyderabad (Telangana) and Wardha (Maharashtra) as well as the entire state of Manipur.

Among girls, the trend was not much different. Delhi was followed by Barshi Rural and Aurangabad in Maharashtra and the states of Manipur and Mizoram.

Delhi's incidence rate of childhood cancers among boys in the 0-14 age group was 203.1 per million population; again, the highest among all the PBCRs.

It was followed by Chennai, Aizawl, Thiruvananthapuram, Patiala, Kollam districts and Bengaluru. The order of PBCRs in this category is not different in the last cancer registry figures. However, the incidence has come down a bit in all these cities except for a couple of outliers.

hood cancer is still low in both public and private healthcare pharmacies and also remains unaffordable; streamlining medicine procurement and promotion of health insurance is being done by the government to address the same," notes the study.

The authors also point out that self-reported confidence of undergraduate students in suspecting and referring to childhood cancer

cases is lacking even after their paediatric clinical training which suggests a need for more focus on childhood cancer in training curricula. "The regular training of paediatricians through National Training Project in Practical Paediatric Oncology under IAP PHO Chapter is an important initiative which will promote early recognition and referral of childhood cancer cases"

Also, the development of train-

ing programs for pediatric oncology nursing as well as other paramedical disciplines is additionally required for dissemination of such services, they say.

If all these are realized then the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer which was launched in September 2018 setting a target of achieving at least 60 per cent survival for all children by 2030 will be a reality for India too.

HEALTH BRIEFS

HIGH-TECH HEMODIALYSIS UNIT FOR KIDNEY PATIENTS AT SAFDARJUNG HOSPITAL, DELHI

NEW DELHI: The central government-run Safdarjung Hospital can now boast of having a State-of-the-art Hemodialysis unit (to purify the blood of kidney patients) which was unveiled by its Medical Superintendent Dr BL Sherwal recently. Due to the increase in cases of people suffering from kidney ailments and the consequent demand for dialysis, the upgradation of technology is expected to help the patients with better outcomes.

Dr Himanshu Verma, HOD Department of Nephrology, Safdarjung Hospital said that "his unit



is the first central government hospital in Delhi to be equipped with online Hemodiafiltration (HDF) Machines. This hemodialysis Unit will also provide a hemodialysis Facility to CGHS patients. will be helpful to provide quality hemodialysis facilities to the kidney patients and

will expedite kidney transplant programs in the hospital."

Dr Sherwal added that the OPD timings have been increased to 8 pm for the services to be available 24x7. The inauguration was attended by Prof Geetika Khanna, Principal VMHC among others.

BOLLYWOOD STAR AYUSHMANN KHURRANA UNICEF INDIA NATIONAL AMBASSADOR



NEW DELHI: UNICEF India has appointed Indian film star Ayushmann Khurrana its National Ambassador to take up the cause of "ensuring rights of every child to survive, thrive, be protected as well as promoting their voice and agency in decisions that concern them".

Khurrana (38) who has also been previously associated with several social causes, said, "In this new role with UNICEF, I will keep up a strong voice for children's rights, especially for the most vulnerable supporting solutions for issues that impact them the most."

TWO MORE PVT HOSPITALS GET 'BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY' TAG

Two private hospitals--Rainbow Children's Hospital, Bangalore and Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Mother and Child Hospital, Chhattisgarh and a government hospital, Mother and Children Hospital, Kamareddy in Telangana have got accreditation as "Breastfeeding Friendly" hospitals. To promote breastfeeding among the mothers and ensure good health of child and mother during delivery, maternity hospitals are being certified as "Breastfeeding Friendly" based on WHO's Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.

It is for a maternity hospital to highlight the best standard of care for breastfeeding mothers, said Dr. Arun Gupta, Pediatrician and coordinator of the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) who

developed this initiative aiming to boost early breastfeeding rates among mothers within an hour of birth of the baby. He said that this inexpensive but effective strategy can be a game changer if more hospitals come forward to notch the tag.

In total 7 hospitals are now accredited as Breastfeeding Friendly and have received certificates valid for 3 years.

COMPLEX LIVER SURGERY CONDUCTED AT SIR GANGA RAM HOSPITAL, DELHI

A 29-year-old Bihar man, suffering from liver cirrhosis, received a new lease of life after undergoing a transplant surgery at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here for liver donated by his wife. The 12-hour-long surgery was challenging as their blood groups didn't match, said the doctors conducting the transplant.

The challenge was that the blood group of the recipient Shiv is 'B', and it was not matching with any of his siblings. Although his wife, 21-year-old Parvati, was willing to donate her liver, her blood group is 'A', they said.

The challenge for us was that the blood group of the recipient and the donor were not matching, Dr. Naimish Mehta, Chief Liver transplant Surgeon at Sir Ganga Ram who led the investigation said adding that "therefore, the family was then counselled about 'blood group incompatible' liver transplantation (ABOi) which can be performed with adequate pre-operative preparation."

Mehta said in such cases, blood antibody level, against blood group 'B' needs to be reduced to an optimum level with use of multiple sittings of plasmapheresis so that Shiv's

body would not reject Parvati's partial liver. Once optimum levels of antibody titres were achieved, a liver transplantation procedure was scheduled, where a team of 21 personnel were involved, including doctors and technicians, he said.

Dr Jayashree Sood, Chairman, department of anaesthesia at the SGRH, said maintaining adequate organ perfusion during the liver transplant procedure is very critical as any error giving a mismatched blood transfusion can lead to "a catastrophic event".

Mehta said there are "potential risks" involved with blood group incompatible liver transplant, especially in adults, as children have high resilience in accepting a different blood group organ. Successful results can be achieved with adequate preparations and in experienced centres.

IMA PUSH FOR BAN ON KILLER GLASS COATED 'MANJHA'

NEW DELHI: Despite ban, as manjha or sharp kite strings including those imported from China and cotton kite strings reinforced with glass powder continue to be sold in the market, posing threat to lives, the Indian Medical Association on Friday called for a stringent nationwide policy prohibiting sale and manufacture of all forms of such strings.

"As doctors, we can attest that cotton threads coated with glass, metal or any other sharp material are dangerous and can cause injury or death to humans as well as birds," Dr Sharad Kumar Agarwal, national president of the IMA, said in the letter sent on February 14 to Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav.

Alcohol Bad for Brain Cells

Even modest amounts of alcohol can trigger brain atrophy--the loss of brain cells--and increase the number of amyloid plaques, which are the accumulation of toxic proteins in Alzheimer's disease. THE HEALTH PIONEER shares details of the study published in Neurobiology of Disease.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, accounting for 60% to 80% of dementia cases, according to the Alzheimer's Association. While current research suggests alcohol use disorder is a risk factor in Alzheimer's disease, the impact alcohol use disorder has on Alzheimer's disease pathology is an area of continued research.

"These findings suggest alcohol might accelerate the pathological cascade of Alzheimer's disease in its early stages," said Shannon Macauley, associate professor of physiology and pharmacology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

The study was a collaboration led by Macauley and Jeffrey Weiner, professor of physiology and pharmacology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, through the medical school's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center and Translational Alcohol Research Center.

Using mouse models of Alzheimer's disease-related pathology, researchers used a 10-week chronic drinking approach where mice were given the choice to drink water or alcohol, mimicking human behavior regarding alcohol consumption. They then explored how voluntary, moderate consumption of alcohol altered healthy brain function and behavior and whether it altered the pathology associated with the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers found that alcohol increased brain atrophy and caused an increased num-



ber of amyloid plaques including a greater number of smaller plaques, potentially setting the stage for increased plaque proliferation in later life.

Interestingly, researchers also noted that acute withdrawal of alcohol increased the levels of amyloid-beta, which is a key component of amyloid plaques that accumulate in Alzheimer's disease.

Further analysis showed that chronic alcohol exposure poorly regulated brain and peripheral metabolism--another way to accelerate Alzheimer's disease pathology. Macauley previously showed that elevated blood sugar increases amyloid-beta and amyloid plaques. In the current study, researchers found that even moderate drinking caused elevations in blood sugar and markers of insulin resistance, which increases the risk not only for Alzheimer's disease but also for other diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

The study also found that moderate alcohol use altered anxiety and dementia-related behaviors. "These preclinical findings suggest that even moderate consumption of alcohol

can result in brain injury," Macauley said. "Alcohol consumption may be a modifiable risk factor for Alzheimer's disease and dementia."

The study holds importance for India too where so far, there is no national policy on liquor like rum, whiskey, or vodka. India's per capita consumption of hard liquor was 13.5 litres, the highest in the world, compared to 6.6 litres in Brazil, 4.8 litres in the US, or 3.2 litres in Germany. However, India's per capita alcohol from beer was 1.1 litres, compared with 6.4 litres in the US or 5.3 litres in Australia, as per the report released by the consumer group.

(The writer is a former Director of UGC-Human Resource Development Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi)

