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Ajit splits NCP vertically; joins Shinde-BJP camp as Dy CM

Eight senior NCP leaders sworn-in as Mins in Maha Govt

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the third major political earthquake that rocked Maharashtra in three-and-a-half years, senior NCP leader and leader of the Opposition in Maharashtra Ajit Pawar on Sunday rebelled against his uncle and his party chief Sharad Pawar, walked out of the party with a sizeable number of supporters and took oath as Deputy Chief Minister in the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena-BJP alliance Government.

Sunday's development — which saw eight senior NCP leaders who had joined Ajit Pawar in his rebellion, being sworn in as Ministers in the Shinde-led Government — stunned not just Sharad Pawar but the entire Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) that suffered a similar body blow when Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde revolted against his party president Uddhav Thackeray and teamed up with senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnis to topple the MVA Government and form a new Government in June last year.

Sworn-in along with Ajit dada — as Ajit Pawar is known



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde congratulates the newly sworn-in Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, during a ceremony at Raj Bhavan, in Mumbai on Sunday. PTI

in the State political circles — were senior party leaders and MLAs Chhagan Bhujbal, Dilip Walse-Patil, Hasan Mushrif, Dhananjay Munde, Dharmarao Baba Atram, Aditi Sunil Tatkar, Sanjay Bansode and Anil Patil.

Ironically enough, Bhujbal and Walse-Patil have been staunch supporters of Pawar for

more than three decades. Interestingly enough, several of the former NCP Ministers and leaders who have gone with Ajit dada and their immediate relatives have been under the scanner of either Enforce Directorate (ED) or the CBI or both because of their business transactions. **Continued on Page 2**

Senior Pawar thanks BJP for taking in his 'tainted' leaders



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After his nephew and senior leader Ajit Pawar and his supporters rebelled against him and joined hands with the BJP to become part of the Government in Maharashtra, NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday attributed the developments to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and also to the recent charges of corruption made against his party by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Talking to media persons in Pune after Ajit Pawar was sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister in the Shinde Sena-BJP alliance Government, Sharad Pawar said: "Some of

We are one party, says Praful Patel

Mumbai: "We are one party and Sharad Pawar is our leader. Nobody has defected or broken away from the party. Sometimes there are differences within the party and it gets resolved. You wait for some more days and you'll see what I mean," NCP working president Praful Patel told a media house on Sunday.

my party leaders were uneasy about the investigations being carried out by the agencies like the ED. After the PM's accusations they got more uneasy, which might have prompted them to take a decision they have taken today.

"Many of those who have gone out are in touch with me. Some have also told me how their signatures were taken. They have also said that they would make their stand clear in the next two to three days."

Known for his sarcasm, Pawar "thanked" Modi for taking away his party leaders and MLAs against whom the latter had made allegations of corruption recently. **Continued on Page 2**

Major Cabinet rejig likely soon; PM to hold meeting today

Dharmendra Pradhan, Bhupendra Yadav may be moved for BJP's organisational reboot before 2024



DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

The expected rejig in the Narendra Modi Cabinet may see the Prime Minister move some of the bigwigs like Dharmendra Pradhan and Bhupendra Yadav to the party organisation to do the nuts and bolt strategy in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

The Council of Ministers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at its head is to meet on Monday. The impending reshuffle this week may include members from the current allies as also those "re-joining" the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which, incidentally, is completing 25-years of its existence. The NDA was formed in 1998. The Prime Minister is also holding meetings with the State leaders as the rejig in the Cabinet may include members from the States going to polls later this year like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana.

States like Bihar, Maharashtra, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu could be on the Prime Minister's radar

while he makes changes in the Cabinet and includes new faces, sources indicated.

Union Ministers Pradhan who was election-in-charge of Karnataka and Yadav, may be joining the party organisation to 'strengthen' the hands of Union Home Minister Amit Shah who is overall "strategising and micro-managing" for the party in the Lok Sabha polls.

Lok Jan Shakti party leader Chirag Paswan may be included in the Council of Ministers to consolidate the BJP's Dalit turf in Bihar where it is facing a stiff challenge from the mahagathabandhan of the Rashtriya-Janata Dal (United), Congress and the left parties. Shah is also working towards a patch-up between Chirag and his uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras, they said. The reshuffle in the Modi Cabinet, happening after two years, could witness dropping of some of the Ministers who would "not be contesting Lok Sabha polls" or not be given party tickets, sources said.

Sources did not rule out a bigger role for Jyotiraditya Scindia in Madhya Pradesh.

CAPSULE

CONG WON'T JOIN OPP BLOC WITH BRS: RAHUL KHAMMAM: Launching a scathing attack on Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said his remote control was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and described the State's ruling party BRS (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) as "BJP's B-Team" and its new nomenclature, BRS, as 'BJP Rishtedar Samithi'.

WORKER ELECTROCUTED IN LNJP HOSPITAL: New Delhi: In yet another case of electrocution, a labourer was electrocuted while working at an under-construction building on the premises of the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital on Sunday morning. After the victim got the electric shock, his co-worker took him to the emergency ward of the LNJP hospital around 9 AM where he was declared brought dead, a senior police officer said.

RUSSIA LAUNCHES DRONE STRIKE ON KYIV: Kyiv: After a relative lull, Russia launched a drone attack early on Sunday on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, officials said. It was the first such attack of the war in 12 days. All of the Iranian-made Shahed exploding drones were detected and shot down, according to Serhiy Popko, the head of the Kyiv city administration. In addition to the city itself, the surrounding Kyiv region was targeted. Kyiv regional Gov. Ruslan Kravchenko reported that one person was wounded by falling debris from a destroyed drone.

BIHAR ASKS GSI TO LOOK FOR GOLD IN JAMUI: Patna: Bihar's Department of Mines and Geology has asked the Geological Survey of India to carry out a detailed exploration to trace gold reserves in Sono area of Jamui district, days after the state government decided to allow auction of nine mineral blocks, officials said.

Fresh wave of violence hits Manipur

3 village volunteers killed, 5 hurt in attack by militants

PNS ■ IMPHAL

At least three "village volunteers" were killed, and five others sustained injuries in a fresh wave of violence in Manipur. The region has been experiencing ongoing turmoil for the past two months due to ethnic clashes between the Meitei community, predominantly residing in the valley, and the Kuki tribe, which predominantly inhabits the hills. The latest incident occurred around 4 AM in the tribal villages of Langza and Chinglangmei in Churachandpur, located approximately 70 km southeast of Imphal. According to sources, the "village volunteers" were stationed in a makeshift bunker, diligently protecting the area.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh, who had offered his resignation earlier this week before retracting it, visited the affected area and shared images



depicting the situation.

Security forces are present at the scene and have initiated a combing operation to apprehend the militants responsible for the violence.

Expressing their condem-

nation, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) denounced the attack on the tribal villages and revealed that five villagers had been abducted. In a statement, the tribal group emphasised the pressing

need for immediate action to ensure the safety and security of the tribal communities in Outer Manipur. They called for the imposition of President's Rule in the State. **Continued on Page 2**

Mass cremation of 24 Maha bus fire victims done

PNS ■ BULDHANA



earlier in the day.

A mass cremation was held on Sunday of 24 out of the 25 victims charred to death after a private bus caught fire in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, a senior official said.

The body of one of the victims will be handed over to the family for burial, an official said. **Continued on Page 2**

Will recover ₹55 lakh spent on Ansari in jail from Captain: Mann

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH



Ansari was brought to Punjab on a transit remand from UP in connection with an FIR accusing him of seeking a ransom of Rs 10 crore from a builder in Mohali's Sector 70. However, the challan regarding the same was never presented in the court.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday declared that the State Government will not pay Rs 55 lakh spent on the "cozy stay" of Uttar Pradesh-based drealed criminal Mukhtar Ansari in the State's jails and the amount will be recovered from former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh and former Deputy Chief Minister and Jails Minister Sukhjinder Randhawa.

At the same time, the Chief Minister also made it clear that in case, the two failed to pay the amount, "their pensions and other benefits will be stopped to recover this money".

In an statement, Mann said this was a serious crime against the State and its people and those involved in it will have to pay for it.

"For reasons best known to them, both Captain and Randhawa extended largesse to notorious gangster for his comfortable stay in jails of Punjab. Why should the State waste taxpayer's money in this way just because those in power at that time had a strong bond with Ansari," he said.

Notably, during Capt Amarinder's regime, Ansari was lodged at Ropar jail in connection with an extortion case from January 2019 to April 2021. At that time, senior Congress leader Randhawa was heading the Jails Department.

This is brazen loot of the public money which cannot be tolerated. For reasons best known to the previous regimes, this notorious criminal was kept in Ropar Jail with full comforts. Apart from ensuring comfortable stay, the State Government ensured that this hardcore criminal does not face any sort of difficulty within the jail and escapes the legal action against him," said Chief Minister Mann.

The Chief Minister said surprisingly, the then Government spent Rs 55 lakh of tax-payers' money to safeguard the interests of this criminal lodged in Ropar Jail. "This atrocious loot of the public money is totally unwarranted and undesirable... This open plundering of the common man's money cannot be tolerated at any cost," he declared.

"Captain and Randhawa will have to pay this money from their own pocket else their pensions and other benefits will be stopped to recover this money," he said, adding that everyone involved in this heinous crime will be made accountable for their sins.

Unplanned dev sank Joshimath, people's livelihood: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unplanned infrastructure development, inadequate drainage and excavation of roads through unstable debris slopes accelerated the instability and land subsidence in the historical Himalayan town of Joshimath in Uttarakhand. These are the findings in the study 'Unstable slopes and threatened livelihoods of the historical Joshimath town, Uttarakhand Himalaya, India', published in the latest edition of Current Science journal.

The study was conducted by Indian geologists and scientists between August 2022 and January 2023 when the region reported land subsidence resulting in the evacuation of the locals from their houses. SP Sati, a senior geologist and head of department of basic and social science, College of Forestry, Ranichauri said, "As an im-

mediate measure, there should not be any excavation activities, particularly of the precariously balanced crystalline boulders. The landslide deposits contain moderately fine grains (pebbly sand), which act as the filling material between the boulders.

"It has been observed that there are cavities (mimicking potholes) on the surface which we speculate are caused due to the selective removal of fine sediments by unregulated domestic wastewater drainage. In recent times, these cavities are posing a serious threat to the stability of the built-up structures in Joshimath town."

Authors Maria Asim and Shubhra Sharma from Department of Geography, Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University were of the views that since the roads at various zones in the region were undergoing subsidence at mul-



multiple places, special engineering skills is required while excavating the slopes for road construction, which are currently lacking. "Consequently, our response to maintaining the roads in such areas is reactive (repair following subsidence) and not proactive (providing long-term slope stability)."

One of the ways to circum-

vent this chronic problem of continuous creeping and subsidence is by making elevated corridors with pillars deeply anchored on hard rock substratum, as done for the ropeway in Joshimath town, they said.

The other authors of the study include, YP Sundriyal from Department of Geology, HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, Naresh Rana from the Department of Geology, Centre

for Advance Studies, University of Delhi and Vijay Bahuguna who works with Department of History, VSKC, Govt PG College in Dehradun. Shubhra Sharma is currently in the Geosciences Division, Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad.

The fragile town, in the last few decades witnessed significant surge in population resulting into huge infrastructure development. Thus causing immense pressure on the finite resources and limited accommodation space on precariously balanced vulnerable slopes.

For example, multi-storied houses in the Yamuna and Bhagirathi valleys are hundreds of years old and have withstood several earthquakes, including the 1991 Uttarkashi and 1999 Chamoli events, said the study.

Similarly, the traditional irrigation system in the hills is based on small canal networks

which are diverted from small to moderate streams without obstructing them. This type of irrigation is still in practice.

However, in the last few decades, Uttarakhand Himalaya has witnessed large-scale infrastructural developmental activities, particularly the proliferation of urban towns driven by the increase in urban population up to 20 times between 1901 and 2011. Such a rapid rate of urbanization, if executed in an unplanned manner, is likely to create an additional burden on existing resources and infrastructure, adversely impacting the mountain ecology and terrain instability.

Therefore, it is important to assess the emerging risks and vulnerabilities associated with growth of infrastructure on precariously stabilised slopes, particularly in the Higher Himalaya, said the authors.

SEC may use CAPF for route march, not booths

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal opposition parties have once again slammed the newly-appointed State Election Commissioner Rajiva Sinha questioning his solemnity to conduct the upcoming panchayat elections in a free and fair manner after the SEC on Saturday came out with a notice indicating that the central forces would be used for general patrolling, manning the State borders, conducting Naka checkings etc — but keeping mysteriously silent about the forces being used to man the polling booths, a demand so vehemently being made by the State Opposition parties.



the people of the State would revolt vehemently if there is any misadventure on the part of the Commissioner.

CPI(M), central committee member and former MP Sujay Chakrabarty said that "all the security network is for the aunt and the nephew (read Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abishek Banerjee) while the voters will be thrown in front of the TMC goondas to be killed at will ... the Commission from the day one has been acting as a stooge of the Chief Minister which is why it has been dilly-dallying not only on bringing the central forces but also about their posting and deployment"

and enjoy Bengal's monsoon," Congress State president Adhir Chowdhury said adding BJP State president Sukanta

Commissioner will be held responsible for anything unpleasant thing that may follow.

The opposition parties have been asking for deployment of at least half section (numbering four) CAPF in polling booths, demand which have been endorsed not only by the Calcutta High Court but also the Supreme Court.

The Calcutta High Court earlier directed the Commission to deploy more CAPF than was deployed in 2013 panchayat elections leading the Commission to seek 825 companies of central forces. However, sources in the Union Home Ministry wonder whether it would be possible for the Centre to deploy as many security forces without breaking the single-phase election process to multiple phases a la 2013.

"We are not closing our options ... and will take up the issue at an appropriate hour not allowing the Commission and the Government to get away with their ploy of helping the Trinamool Congress goons to loot votes at their will," Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari said.

UCC: Congress will protect interest of countrymen, says Pramod Tiwari

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Pramod Tiwari, on Sunday, said the Congress would fully protect the interest of 140 crore Indians in the monsoon session of Parliament by opposing implementation of uniform civil code (UCC).

"Congress will not allow any attempt of the Central government to succeed at any cost to play with the sentiments of all the communities of the country, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, for electoral gains," Tiwari asserted here on Sunday. "The interest of the country has always been paramount for the Congress and on the contrary, the Bharatiya Janata Party has always been trying to weaken the country through the politics of polarisation for electoral gains," Tiwari said.

He said that before the government brought out the draft of the proposed uniform civil code in the monsoon session, the viewpoint of the Congress and the opposition parties over the issue should come to the fore.

Clarifying the agenda of the Congress and the opposition in the monsoon session of Parliament, Tiwari said the issue as to how Manipur was



burning today due to the irresponsible attitude of the BJP at the Centre and the state government would be prominent.

He also said that the Congress would also raise questions in Parliament on the political dishonesty of the BJP government to influence the visit of party leader Rahul Gandhi to Manipur. "Along with this, the Congress will prominently raise in Parliament how the Modi government has insulted the Scheduled Caste woman president of the country at the inauguration of the new Parliament House.

Mayawati: BSP supports UCC but is against 'politicising' it

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday said her party was not against implementing uniform civil code (UCC), which she believed would "lead to communal harmony" but slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party for "politicising" the issue.

Mayawati's remarks came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a recent programme in Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh pitched for a uniform civil code in the country. "Our party (the BSP) is not against the implementation of



UCC. But we do not support the way BJP is trying to implement uniform civil code in the country. It is not right to politicise this issue and forcefully implement UCC in the country," 67-year-old Mayawati, a former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, told reporters here on Sunday.

According to the BSP national president, the implementation of UCC will strengthen the country and unite Indians. "It will also develop a sense of brotherhood among people. However, the forceful implementation of UCC is not right. Politicising this issue will create problems," she said.

"The uniform civil code is already mentioned in the Constitution. But the Constitution does not support imposing it. The BJP should have considered all the dimensions related to UCC," the BSP chief said.

BJP-Apna Dal(S) alliance has rid UP of divisive SP, BSP: Shah

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday made a strong pitch for consolidation of backward class voters in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, saying the state had got completely rid of the "divisive forces" of Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party after Bharatiya Janata Party and Apna Dal (Sonelal) joined hands to win four elections in the state.



working for the poor, SC and OBCs.

"Sonelal Patel made efforts to usher in happiness in the lives of the poor people from different sections by uniting them. He went to jail and even faced torture, but he did not leave the path of struggle undertaken for the backward people," he said.

Listing the measures taken by the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the last nine years since 2014, Shah said, "For the first time since independence, 27 ministers in the Union Council of Ministers are from SC and OBC communities."

He said the Bharatiya Janata Party/National Democratic Alliance had the maximum number of MPs from SC, ST, OBCs and poor communities.

"The SP and BSP were part of several governments at the Centre in the past but they never cared for the representation of the disadvantaged social groups in the Union government," Shah pointed out.

He said the SP and the BSP never cared for the National OBCs Commission, and it was the Narendra Modi government which ensured constitutional status for the National OBCs Commission. Moreover, Shah said the Narendra Modi government had also ensured 27 percent reservation for the OBCs in NET.

He said financial assistance was directly provided through DBT (direct benefit transfer) to pre-matric and post-matric students of the OBC community.

Shah said besides working for the SC and OBCs, the Modi government consistently worked for the poor and brought positive changes in the life of 60 crore poor people.

Shah said the Yogi Adityanath government had established a state university in Azamgarh named after Raja Suheldev and Dr Sonelal Medical College in Pratapgarh district. He said under the Vishwakarma scheme, over Rs 100 crore had been provided to 68,000 artisans and a maximum number of government jobs to the OBCs in UP had been provided by the Yogi Adityanath government.

Govt earns ₹2K cr in excise duty in 1st qtr of 2023-24

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's Excise department has earned nearly Rs 1,700 crore in excise duty and value added tax in the first quarter of 2023-24, official data showed.



In the 2022-23 fiscal, the department had raked in Rs 6,821 crore by selling over 62 crore bottles of liquor. The amount included Rs 5,548.48 crore as excise duty and Rs 1,272.52 crore as value added tax. The Excise department expects the revenues to increase in the next few months with the opening of more liquor shops.

Beer sale has dropped in May by 52% in May this year as compared with 2022 due to the weather, less variety and brand push, non-availability of chilled options at shops, less stock in stores and companies diverting the product to states where the margins are higher. "Beer is preferred during the summer months by customers. It has a lower excise duty, which is why the revenue collection in the first half is always

relatively lower as compared to the second half of the financial year when whisky sells more," said an official.

Delhi sold 83 lakh liters of beer in May this year as opposed to 173 lakh litres during the same month last year. The first five months of 2023 saw beer sales of 311 lakh litres, almost 43% down from the same period last year.

Beer sales have witnessed a sharp fall of over 40% this year in comparison to 2022 as well as pre-Covid days. In 2019, before the pandemic struck, the month registered sales of 126 lakh litres.

The city government's Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation, Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation, Delhi State Civil Supplies Corporation and Delhi Consumers' Cooperative Wholesale Stores operate 574 liquor shops in the national capital while more than 930 hotels, clubs and restaurants serve liquor in the city.

The Delhi government, in its budget for 2023-24, has estimated a total excise collection of Rs 7,365 crore -- nearly 14 per cent of its Rs 53,565 crore tax revenue.

Fresh wave of violence hits...

From Page 1

The clashes between the Kuki ethnic group, predominantly residing in the hills, and the Meiteis, the dominant community in the lowlands, initially erupted on May 3 due to grievances regarding economic benefits and reserved quotas in Government jobs and education for hill-dwelling individuals. Tragically, the violence has claimed the lives of over 100 people, with both communities levying accusations of atrocities against each other. As a result, internet services in the State have been suspended since May 3.

Meanwhile, two militant outfits of Manipur, under Suspensions of Operation, on Sunday said they have lifted the two-month long blockade in Kangpokpi district along the crucial National Highway-2. Issuing a joint statement, the United Peoples' Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO) said the blockade has been lifted with immediate effect following "deep concern to restore peace and harmony" by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

However, Kuki civil society group Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU), which had announced a roadblock on NH-2 two months ago, has not officially withdrawn the agitation yet.

Manipur has two national highways -- NH-2 (Imphal-

Dimapur) and NH-37 (Imphal-Jiribam).

The NH-2 has been under blockade by Kuki organisations since the violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, and was temporarily opened following Shah's visit in late May. The decision to lift the blockade comes following a recent meeting of the UPF, KNO and other Kuki groups with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Guwahati, sources close to the development said.

"The decision was taken after wide-ranging consultations with civil society organisations, village chiefs and women leaders on several occasions," the joint statement said.

Mass cremation of 24 Maha bus fire...

From Page 1

The DNA testing is a lengthy procedure which may take days to ascertain the identity of the deceased, as per sources.

The mass cremation of 24 bodies was held at Vaikunth Dham Hindu Smashan Bhoomi in Buldhana on Sunday.

Relatives of the deceased and Maharashtra Minister Girish Mahajan were present during the cremation and paid homage to the deceased.

The 25 passengers were charred to death as the private bus they were travelling in caught fire after hitting a divider on the Nagpur-Mumbai 'Samruddhi Expressway' in eastern Maharashtra's Buldhana district at around 1.30 AM on Saturday, police earlier said.

The deceased included 11 male and 14

female passengers. Ten of the victims were from Wardha, seven from Pune, four from Nagpur and two each from Yavatmal and Washim.

The family members of the 25 deceased have reached Buldhana, according to local administration.

Eight people, including the driver and 'cleaner' (driver's assistant), survived the horrific accident.

A case for negligent driving was registered against the bus driver on Saturday with police believing that, prima facie, he dozed off and lost control of the vehicle.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has ordered a probe into the accident and announced an ex-gratia assistance of Rs five lakh for the families of each deceased.

Ajit splits NCP...

From Page 1

Senior Pawar, who had succeeded in quelling the rebellion by his nephew Ajit Pawar when the latter had joined hands with Fadnavis and become a Deputy Chief Minister in the BJP-led Government weeks after the Maharashtra Assembly polls in November 2019, swiftly distanced himself from the revolt by his nephew and appointed his close aide and party's national secretary Jitendra Awhad as the Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and also the new Chief Whip.

In what looked like a premeditated political plot, 63-year-old Ajitdada met a sizeable number of NCP MLAs supporting him, before heading to Raj Bhavan where chief minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy Fadnavis joined him.

Minutes later, Ajitdada was sworn in as the deputy chief minister by Governor Ramesh Bais, while eight senior leaders were administered oath as the ministers.

Though there was no confirmation as to exactly how many NCP MLAs are with him, the Ajitdada camp has claimed that he has the support of more than 40 party MLAs.

This was the third time Ajitdada was sworn in as the deputy chief minister since November 2019 when he took oath as the deputy C,M in the Fadnavis-headed BJP government. The experiment lasted for just 80 hours before he returned to the parent party leading to the collapse of that government. Later on he became the deputy chief minister in the Uddhav Thackeray MVA government, a regime that ended on June 30 last year when Shinde and Fadnavis teamed up to form a government in the state.

Curiously enough, Sharad Pawar's close aide and former union minister Praful Patel was present at Ajit Pawar's swearing-in ceremony on Sunday.

Though his Sr Pawar has not taken kindly to Ajitdada's decision to switch sides, the pres-

ence of Praful Patel has raised eyebrows in the state political circles.

On a day when Sr Pawar reached out to many of the MLAs who had gone out of the party with his nephew, Pawar vowed to fight back.

Much to the chagrin of senior Pawar, Ajitdada -- along the lines of what Eknath Shinde had done after walking of the Shiv Sena in June last year -- has staked claim over the party by saying that he would contest the 2024 Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha polls with the NCP's 'watch' election symbol by forging a pre-poll alliance with BJP and its partners.

Ajitdada, who had expressed his intent to quit his post as the leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly after he sidelined by Sr Pawar when the latter appointed party's senior leader Praful Patel and his daughter-MP Supriya Sule as the party's working president on June 21, 2023, heaped praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, immediately after he was sworn in as the deputy chief minister.

Talking to media persons, Ajitdada said: "Modi is taking India forward. We have been seeing his leadership over the last nine months. He is also popular in other countries and you can make out from the reception and welcome that he gets.. Everyone appreciates his leadership. We will fight the upcoming Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections with the BJP and that is why we have taken this decision".

Queried as to how many NCP MLAs he had with him, Ajitdada claimed that he had joined hands with the BJP as a party. "We have joined as a party. All MLAs are with us. We have the blessings of our leaders. You will wait and see. We are the NCP. We will fight elections with the NCP symbol. There is no reason to worry... we will run the NCP efficiently, strengthen it further". Ajitdada, however, refused to spell out the numbers he had with him, saying: "There is no point in talking about numbers at this stage," he said.

Senior Pawar thanks BJP for taking...

From Page 1

"Today, the Modi-led BJP has joined hands and sworn-in as Ministers and some people from the NCP party against whom Modi had pointed fingers recently. This means that Modi's allegations were baseless and we are now 'absolved' of all the charges. I am thankful to him for this... I am happy for those facing enquiries who have taken oath today," Pawar said sarcastically.

Taking serious cognisance of the presence of his close aide and former Union Minister Praful Patel, whom he had appointed as the party's working president last month and another senior party leader Sunil Tatkare at Ajit Pawar's swearing-in ceremony, Sr Pawar said: "Both have failed in fulfilling the responsibilities vested with them. We will take necessary action against them"

Responding to queries from journalists, the NCP chief said that there was "nothing new" in Sunday's developments "In 1986, many leaders had deserted me and I was left with just 5 persons with whom I

rebuild the entire party. "We will rebuild the party once again. There is no second level now. You will soon see new leaders who are concerned about the state and country coming to the fore in the party," Sr Pawar said.

Sr Pawar said that unlike the Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, he would not initiate a legal challenge to the 'split', "I will rather go to the peoples' court and present their stand," the NCP chief said.

The NCP chief said that he had received calls from political leaders from across the country and the callers included Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and All India Trinamool Congress President and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who expressed their concern over Sunday's developments.

Blaming Ajit Pawar for breaking his party, Sr Pawar admitted that he was not 'aware' of Ajit pawar's resignation as the leader of Opposition in the State Assembly on June 30.

Meanwhile, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP has convened a meeting in Mumbai on July 6 to discuss the impact of the exit of Ajit Pawar on the party and decide on a plan of action to rebuild the party.

Earlier in the day, Ajit Pawar spoke about the circumstances leading to his decision to join hands with the BJP. "We had been negotiating with the BJP for many days. I quit as the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly.. After discussion with my colleagues, I decided to join hands with the BJP. We have joined the government as 'NCP'. We will fight all the future polls -- civic, assembly and parliament elections under the same name and symbol," asserted Pawar.

Queried if he enjoyed the support of NCP President Sharad Pawar, Ajit Pawar said: "We have the blessings of all the seniors in the party, all the MLAs, MPs and leaders are with us". He complimented Shinde by saying: " he is working well as the CM".

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Satinder Kumar S/o Sudhir Kumar R/o House No.311, Gali No F-1, Tigri, Delhi-110062 have changed my name from Satinder Kumar to Satinder Gupta for all future purposes. PD(085)A

CMO: Civil services body reduced to farce

'Bureaucrats overturning CM's decisions'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO) on Sunday said the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA) set up by the Centre through an ordinance to control transfer of officers working under the Delhi Government has been reduced to a "complete farce", allowing bureaucrats to overturn decisions taken by an elected Chief Minister and dictating their own will.

The statement came two days after the second meeting of the NCCSA during which two member-bureaucrats "did not oppose" Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's stand but later on cancelled his decisions.

The three-member NCCSA was set up by the Centre through the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, promulgated on May 19 to create an authority for transfer and posting of Group-A officers in Delhi.

It comprises the chief minister as chairperson, with the chief secretary and principal



secretary (home) as members. It was bestowed with powers to take decisions by a simple majority.

"However, this simple majority has enabled the bureaucrats to override the CM's decisions, effectively granting them unchecked power over the authority's operations. Consequently, the Chief Minister's voice, representing the will of the elected government and the people of Delhi, finds itself in the minority within the NCCSA," the CMO said in the statement.

During the June 29 meeting, Kejriwal expressed concerns over pending transfer-posting proposals and issued directives for request transfers of women officers. He also recorded objections to the removal of "competent officers" from the Education Department, the statement said.

Eleven women officers had requested for transfers on sympathetic grounds, it said, adding the chief minister supported it, noting that working women handle both office and home, and therefore their pleas must be considered favourably.

The statement claimed the two bureaucrats did not oppose the CM's stand during meeting. "However, regrettably, when finalizing the minutes of the meeting, the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary (Home) callously overturned all of the Chief Minister's decisions, proceeding with their own agenda instead."

As a result, the 11 women officers have been denied transfers despite compelling reasons, and competent officers are being removed from the Education Department, jeopardising the progress made thus far, the statement noted.

"The National Capital Civil Service Authority has been reduced to a complete farce with bureaucrats dictating their own will and overturning CM's decisions," the statement said, alleging a "carefully orchestrated" plan to undermine Delhi's education revolution and impede the elected government's achievements. It is functioning under the stated chair-

personship of the chief minister even though none of the decisions made by it align with the CM's endorsement, the statement said.

"In the same meeting, the Chief Minister proposed that the posting requests made by Ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj and Raaj Kumar Anand be recommended by the Authority. However, the bureaucrats again took advantage of their majority and refused to entertain the matter in the meeting," it said.

The first meeting of the NCCSA was held on June 20. Addressing a press conference following the first meeting of the NCCSA, Kejriwal had termed the delay in approving of minutes a "farce" and a "conspiracy to not let the elected government do any work in Delhi."

He claimed that through the NCCSA, the Centre wants to make it look like the body takes important decisions for Delhi mutually. But in reality, that is not the case, he had claimed.

The Centre's National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance came a week after the Supreme Court handed over the control of services in Delhi — excluding police, public order and land — to the city's elected government.

LG's Secretariat refutes CMO charges on NCCSA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor's secretariat refuted the Chief Minister's Office's (CMO) allegations that the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA) has been reduced to a "complete farce", allowing bureaucrats to overturn decisions taken by an elected chief minister and dictating their own will.

In a statement, Lt Governor's secretariat said a narrative is being projected that officers are not listening and needs absolute control and a lie is being spread that NCCSA is transferring officers from the education department. This is not correct.

"No officer who is physically working in the education department was proposed for transfer. The statement that officers are transferring education department officers is nothing but lies."

The press release formally/informally is not giving a true picture of developments taking place in the NCCSA meeting. The NCCSA will release the draft minutes to the press to verify the truth in public domain," Lt Governor's secretariat said.

Sources in the services department said the chief minister has neither approved the minutes nor suggested any changes in the draft minutes proposed by the Member Secretary of the Authority, which were put up on the basis of discussions held during the meeting of the Authority till now.

"The objective is to show



through the media that the Authority cannot function therefore the whole power of transfer / posting shall be vested in him, and not in the Authority. This is being done to give an impression that the Authority is not working. In case, the other two members of the Authority moves further with such minutes, then CM says that he is being over-ruled by the officers," sources said.

The agenda of the NCCSA meeting which was held on June 29, include transfer/posting of Officers in Grade-1 (DASS); transfer/posting of Forest Service Officials (IFS) and setting up of a High Powered Committee for capacity building. The second agenda regarding transfer of IFS officers, the Chief Minister kept the file for recording his views.

The Third Agenda regarding capacity building of officers was not discussed.

According to the official, regarding the first agenda, the chief minister suggested that no good officer should be transferred out from the Education Department, GNCTD without any substitute. However, there is no proposal to transfer any officer from the education department, GNCTD.

As only those officers who are not working in the education department, but merely drawing salary without their physical presence in the education department are proposed for transfer so as to facilitate for drawl of salary from proper salary head.

Regarding two Officers who are proposed for transfer from the election department, The Chief Minister also suggested that these Officers who are not clear from Vigilance angle should not be posted in the education department, which is accordingly amended. "The request of women officers for transfer from Sub Registrar (SR) was not part of the agenda and it was agreed in principle that it will be brought in the next agenda. In the current agenda one woman SR was proposed for change as the agenda contains the name of only one woman officer who has been adjusted against one existing SR."

The CM wanted two officers to be posted in minister's office and one of them is having a penalty from vigilance angle.

The CM office informed (verbally) that this detail should not be mentioned in the minutes," reads the statement.

Reacting on the latest flash point, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva has said that the problem with Kejriwal is that he wants the entire administrative system should run as per his dictate. "He has no respect constitutional or administrative norms. He wants to run administration on his whims," said Sachdeva.

DDA approves amalgamation of 2 flats under new housing scheme



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To give applicants flexibility to increase their flat size, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Sunday said amalgamation of two adjacent flats offered under the recently launched new scheme has been allowed.

The DDA on Friday launched on a first-come, first-serve (FCFS) basis a housing scheme that will include 5,500 flats across all categories at various locations in Delhi.

The scheme is receiving "good response" from the general public and around 4,000 registrations have been made so far, officials said.

The DDA has allowed the amalgamation of two flats offered under the ongoing scheme, to give applicants flexibility to increase the size of their flats, a senior official said.

This is applicable to all localities and all types of flats. If one applicant happens to buy an adjacent flat to a flat which he already owns from earlier scheme, principles of amalgamation will also be applicable.

If an applicant happens to buy two adjacent flats on offer in this scheme of FCFS phase-IV, he or she shall have the liberty of amalgamating the two units, by "opening a common door through a common wall between them, subject to necessary structural approvals", the DDA said in a statement. This applies to all localities and all types of flats, it said.

If one applicant happens to buy an adjacent flat to a flat that he already owns from an earlier scheme, principles of amalgamation will also be applicable, the DDA said.

Under the scheme, 1-BHK flats are being offered in Narela, Siraspur, Rohini, and Loknayak Puram; 2-BHK flats in Narela and Dwarka; and 3-BHK flats in Jasola.

Temple, mazaar demolished to make way for flyover

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Hanuman temple and a Dargah were removed amid heavy police deployment on Wazirabad road in northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura chowk Sunday morning to pave the way for the construction of a flyover.

According to police, the decision to remove the two structures was taken at a "religious committee" meeting a few days ago to widen the Wazirabad Road for Saharanpur Highway and a proper dialogue was held with the residents and local leaders. A large number of police and CRPF personnel were deployed during the demolition drive to prevent any untoward incident.

The Hanuman temple and Dargah existed on roads near Bhajanpura bus stand on the main road. The demolition operation was carried out early in the morning.

"Everything happened very



peacefully," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northeast) Joy Tirkey said after the structures were removed by the Public Works Department (PWD) amid heavy deployment of police.

Tirkey said there was a Hanuman temple and a mazaar on the opposite sides of the road at Bhajanpura Chowk.

The construction of a double-decker flyover by the PWD is currently underway in this area. The design involves the construction of a metro route on

the upper level and a road on the lower level. However, the presence of a dargah in the middle of the road and a Hanuman temple on the side has resulted in persistent traffic congestion. There has been a long-standing demand for the removal of these structures to alleviate the traffic jam situation.

According to police, prayers were offered at the Hanuman temple before razing the building to the ground. Prior to the demolition of the Hanuman temple, Additional DCP Subodh



Goswami participated in a prayer ritual within the temple premises. Following the prayers, the idols were respectfully removed, and only then did the demolition drive commence.

"A few days ago, a decision was taken at "religious committee" that both the structures would have to be removed to widen the road for the Saharanpur flyover. This was planned a few days ago. But the local leaders here had asked the civil administration for some time to prepare and make some

necessary arrangements. Today (Sunday), we spoke to all of them and after having a proper dialogue with them, both the religious structures were removed from here with everyone's cooperation. Even the devotees came here and performed their puja before the removal of the religious structure. The temple was removed by the priest himself," Tirkey said.

Police said adequate security force has been deployed in the area to ensure the PWD is provided all the necessary assistance.

According to Seelampur sub divisional magistrate Sharat Kumar the decision was approved by the religious committee and following the orders of lieutenant governor VK Saxena, the demolition drive was carried out. "It was done peacefully and there was no problem", Kumar said.

Northeast Delhi is considered a communally sensitive area. It witnessed riots in 2020 in which over 50 people lost their lives and more than 250 were injured.

PWD minister Atishi took to Twitter and requested LG VK Saxena to stop the demolition of religious places saying "people's faith is attached to the sites."

"LG: I had written a letter to you a few days back requesting you to take back your decision to demolish temples and other religious places in Delhi. But today again on your orders a temple has been demolished in Bhajanpura. I request you again that temples

and other religious places should not be demolished in Delhi. People's faith is attached to these," the AAP leader said in a tweet in Hindi. She also shared a letter on his social media handle.

In the letter, the minister wrote, "I have received information from the PWD department that you have ordered the demolition of 14 religious places in Delhi. It includes 11 temples and 3 tombs."

"I was told by the officers of the department that when the proposal to demolish these religious places came to the then Home Minister Manish Sisodia through the Religious Committee in February 2023, he registered his protest and said that instead of demolishing the temple, we should change the design of the project."

Atishi alleged that the L-G rejected Sisodia's proposal and ordered the demolition of these temples and other religious places. "I request you again that temples

777 para-medical workers, 476 teachers' contract extended

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved extension of services of 777 contractual para-medical employees in the Health and Family Welfare department and 476 part-time vocational teachers in government schools. Saxena also approved the extension of 44 contracts of Disaster Management Personnel and re-engagement of 24 contractual welfare officers.

In a statement, Raj Niwas official said the Lt Governor has approved proposals to this effect, duly submitted by the health, education, revenue and social welfare departments with instructions that the permanent posts be filled as per regular processes within a fixed time frame.

According to the order, the extensions must not exceed a year and the existing contractual employees must be given a one-time relaxation to become permanent through open recruitment, the official said.

On the proposals received from the Health & Family Welfare Department, Saxena has also approved the grant of promotion to 08 Medical Officers (Homeopathic) to Senior Medical Officers, 01 Senior Medical Officer (Homeopathic) to Chief

Medical Officer (Homeopathic) and 23 Chief Medical Officer (NFSG) to Chief Medical Officer (SAG) (Homeopathic) with effect from date mentioned against each, under Delhi Health Services General Duty Medical Officers (Homoeopathy) Rules, 2016.

The Lt Governor accorded his approval to extend the contractual tenure of 777 para-medical technical staff for one year from July 1 or till they avail the one-time opportunity to apply for open recruitment through DSSSB without any age bar. He has also instructed that the vacant posts against which these contractual employees are hired, be notified and tests be conducted for regular appointments within a specific time frame.

The health department was asked to provide an 'Action Taken Report' in the matter within the next three months.

The proposal of the education department seeking continuation of 476 (458 Qualified and 18 Non-Qualified) Part-Time Vocational Teachers (PTVTs) in Delhi government-run schools for the year 2023-24 was also approved by Saxena. He approved the extension or continuation of 44 temporary/contractual posts of disaster management personnel in the revenue department of GNCT of Delhi for a year.

Labourer electrocuted at under-construction site at LNJP hosp

Act against officers responsible for death of man, Atishi tells LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another case of electrocution, a labourer was electrocuted while working at an under-construction building on the premises of the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital on Sunday morning.

After the victim got the electric shock, his co-worker took him to the emergency ward of the LNJP hospital around 9 am where he was declared brought dead, a senior

police officer said. The incident site was inspected by forensic experts and a crime team of the Delhi Police, the officer said, adding that necessary legal action will be initiated.

The deceased has been identified as Sujeet Kumar, a resident of Samastipur in Bihar, the police said.

According to a senior doctor of the LNJP Hospital, the labourer got electrocuted at the construction site of a 22-storeyed building that is being built between the GB Pant and LNJP hospitals.

The site is owned by the Public Works Department and once the building is ready, it

will serve as the mother and child block of LNJP hospital, the doctor added.

Taking a dig at the Arvind Kejriwal government, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said the electrocution incident shows "the callousness of Delhi Government in running its hospitals like the LNJP and GB Pant".

He pointed out that a man died of electrocution on the premises of the LNJP Hospital, while an alleged rape and assault case was reported from GB Pant Hospital in May where the woman succumbed to injuries.

Meanwhile, Delhi Public Works Department (PWD)



Minister Atishi on Sunday urged Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to take action against officers whose negligence led to the death of the labourer on the premises of the LNJP Hospital. In a letter to LG, PWD minister said services in Delhi have been in the hands of the Lieutenant

Governor of Delhi for the last 8 years. "But no action has been taken against any officer for wrongdoing or negligence. Years of inaction by the LG against negligent and corrupt officers is why today such incidents are happening."

"Till the time you have the power of services, you will have to take immediate action against these negligent officers," Atishi said.

The minister further said due to their negligence, two lives have been lost, you must break your silence and take immediate action, otherwise the people of Delhi will continue to suffer like this. "Lack of accountability of LG is the

reason why control over officers needs to be with the elected Government," Atishi added.

Ajit Sharma, 51, was returning home after dropping a passenger in east Delhi's Bhajanpura on Friday when his auto-rickshaw got stuck in a ditch filled with rainwater near Wazirabad. When he got out to push the vehicle, he fell in the ditch and drowned.

"Despite these incidents, you are sitting silently. It has been two days since an autorickshaw driver lost his life due to the negligence of officers, but you have neither taken any action nor have had the courage to say anything on this matter," she said.

Chandni Chowk traders using tech to check robberies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Traders in old Delhi's Chandni Chowk are turning to technology to guard themselves against rising robbery incidents by installing GPS devices on their cash bags and jewellery boxes in order to track the stolen items. They believe such a device will keep an effective check on the snatching incidents.

A delivery agent was allegedly robbed of Rs 4 lakh by unidentified men inside the Pragati Maidan tunnel here last week. In another incident, a businessman was looted of Rs 4.5 lakh and his scooter in north Delhi's Kashmere Gate recently,



police said. At Chandni Chowk, jewellery shops dot both sides of the main alley at Sarafa Bazaar. Called the "jewellers' street", this market sees daily transactions of lakhs of rupees, making it prone to robberies.

Yogesh Singhal, president, Bullion and Jewellers Association, said, "You can fit this (GPS) device to your bag,

put it in the middle of bundles of notes, or keep it in a jewellery box." It will keep telling the location on your phone in case of a robbery. With the help of this device, police can easily reach the location and arrest the accused along with finding the stolen goods," he said.

Elaborating further, Singhal said the Global Positioning System (GPS) devices have real time tracking and pin-points high accuracy.

"Monitoring of the device is done through satellites. The location of the device can be seen all over India. You can see the records up to six months," he said. Traders say they feel more secure and are keen on using the device.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lodged in Mandoli jail for multiple cases of cheating and fraud, fraudster Suresh Chandrashekar has made one more damning allegation against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. In his recent letter bomb, Suresh claimed Kejriwal had purchased three luxury flats in Dubai's Jumeirah Palms area from the alleged commission received from Pharma Contractor of Hyderabad in 2020, for the amount of 65 million Dirhams (AED). Since you won't speak the truth, I will release the three-page WhatsApp chat between me and Satyender Jain, which shows the transaction of the purchase of these three apartments in Dubai. I will also send a copy to the ED (Enforcement Directorate) and Anti-Corruption Vigilance within



the next seven days," read his letter. "Kejriwal you should tell the people of Delhi how you purchased these 3 super luxury apartments and why you are selling them very urgently now for almost half the price, why the so-called Khattar Imandar Party AAP leaders have such super luxury apartments in Dubai?" Suresh stated in his letter. Suresh stated in the letter that Kejriwal and his associates, who often raise questions about the law and order situation in Delhi, were the same people sending threats to him and his family. Suresh alleged that a close aide of Kejriwal threatened his mother.

Opp raps BJP for Maha NCP split

Modi Govt habitual offender in horse trading, intimidating non-BJP leaders, claims Opp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

The Maharashtra political development on Sunday led the Opposition parties upping the ante against BJP for resorting to "divisive and polarising" politics to divert the attention from the failures of its Government.

Leaders of parties including those from Shiv Sena (Uddhav), Samajwadi Party, TMC, DMK, RJD, PDP, AAP and others condemned the Modi government for becoming a habitual offender in horse trading and intimidating non-BJP leaders.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, and Shiv Sena (Uddhav) leader Sanjay Raut spoke to NCP supremo Sharad

Pawar over the crisis in the party as well as the MVA and extended support to him.

The Congress is part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance comprising itself, Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray) and the NCP.

"The oath-taking ceremony in Maharashtra was part of Operation Lotus and it has no official support of NCP. Those who took oath, it is their personal decision and not that of the NCP," NCP spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said.

While Congress said the BJP's "washing machine" has resumed its operations as a number of these leaders had been facing serious corruption charges and have now got a "clean chit", Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav said that the BJP has now become a habitual offender in horse trading and intimidating non-



NCP president Sharad Pawar with party MLA Rohit Pawar speaks during a Press conference at his residence, in Pune, on Sunday (PTI photo)

BJP leaders.

"BJP does this from time to time, first they did this in Madhya Pradesh, and then in Maharashtra, but people are watching this," said Akhilesh adding that Maharashtra has emerged as a "bigger laboratory" for the BJP after Madhya Pradesh and the saffron party will do other "new experiments" in the run-up to 2024 general elections to stay in

power.

Janata Dal (U) in Bihar, which is making effort for the unity of opposition to take on Narendra Modi in 2024 Lok Sabha, said the NCP split may affect Maharashtra politics, but will not impact opposition unity at national level.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut NCP said supreme Sharad Pawar is undeterred by the split in his party and can

start afresh. "I just spoke with NCP Sharad Pawar. He said he is firm and people's support is behind us. We can make a fresh start with Uddhav Thackeray."

Raut said the induction of Ajit Pawar as deputy chief minister in the Maharashtra government was the beginning of the process of Eknath Shinde losing his chief minister's post.

"This is the start of Eknath

Shinde losing his chief minister's post. His MLAs will be disqualified as members of the House. In order to continue being in power even after it, Ajit Pawar and the NCP MLAs have joined the government," Raut said.

He also said the NCP joining the government and the rebellion in the party was not a political earthquake. "This development should not be seen as (shaping up of a) triple engine (government)...One of the two engines is going to fail," he said.

When asked whether NCP chief Sharad Pawar was aware of this development, Raut said, "He had all the information about it." "But you should ask BJP leaders who used to criticise NCP leaders everyday over corruption charge".

Raut said people of Maharashtra will not tolerate such a "circus".

Another party leader Priyanka Chaturvedi tweeted, "Principles be damned, BJP should be the last party in the country talking about ideological alliances. They are just political opportunists wanting power at any cost. With the latest development in

Maharashtra, those MLAs who were corrupt and were jailed are now being sworn in as ministers!"

Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the prime minister only diverts and distracts. "PM works overtime to raise divisive and polarising issues. He never tries to bring a consensus. He never addresses the real day-to-day concerns of people," Ramesh said at AICC press briefing.

"While Manipur is burning, China is sitting on Indian territory, people are struggling with rising prices and unemployment, the prime minister is on a different note," Ramesh said.

Calling the BJP "hypocrite", former Union Minister in Modi government Babul Supriyo, now a minister in the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal, said tainted leaders under the scanner of ED for corruption have been put into a "washing machine" manufactured by the BJP to remove their stains and blemishes.

While AAP leader Atishi said that BJP has declared openly now that all the corrupt should come to its fold and get "cleaned off their sins in its

washing machine", PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said no words are enough to condemn the manner in which the BJP has repeatedly undermined the popular mandate in Maharashtra.

RJD leader Mritunjay Tiwari also said the BJP has engineered the defection to save its government in Maharashtra. "After the opposition parties' meeting in Patna, they (BJP) are afraid, and that's why they want to break opposition parties," said DMK leader TTK Elangovan.

Congress leader Rashid Alvi said, "The BJP and PM Modi have violated the Constitution. It (Ajit Pawar joining the Maharashtra government) is the biggest joke on democracy. Rajiv Gandhi brought anti-defection law while Atal Bihari Vajpayee increased the number of MLAs (to change the party) to 2/3rd, so this is an insult to Vajpayee as well."

Former Congressman and now a Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying probably this is "the mother of democracy" that Modi talked about in his address in US.



Bullet train project: 3 river bridges built in 1 month in Guj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AHEMDABAD

Making a significant progress, the National High-Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL) has constructed three river bridges in a period of one month for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR), also known as the bullet train project.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the NHSRCL said that all these bridges are in Gujarat and are located between Bilimora and Surat stations of the bullet train.

The first river bridge was completed on Purna river in Navsari district. The 360-m-long bridge consists of nine full span girders. Continuous monitoring of high and low tides from Arabian Sea was done during the construction. The foundation work was challenging as water level in the river would rise 5-6 m during high tides, it added.

The second river bridge was completed on Mindhola river, also in Navsari district. It is 240-m-long and has six full span girders.

The third river bridge was completed on Ambika river, again in Navsari district.

This 200-m-long bridge has five full span girders. The construction of the third bridge was a challenging task as there was a steep slope of the river bank and underground rocky strata during piling, the NHSRCL said.

In total, there will be 24 river bridges on the MAHSR corridor in Gujarat and Maharashtra, of which 20 are in Gujarat and four are in

Maharashtra. So far, four river bridges have been completed for the MAHSR corridor in the past six months.

The longest river bridge (2.28km) will be constructed on Vaitarna river in Maharashtra, another 1.2-km-long bridge is being constructed on Narmada river, Gujarat.

In the statement, Rajendra Prasad, Managing Director, NHSRCL said that construction of bridges over the rivers is very challenging and meticulous planning is required.

During the construction of bridges over Mindhola and Purna rivers, the tides from the Arabian sea were closely monitored.

"Our engineers worked at a height of 26 m for the construction of the bridge over Ambika river," he said.

High-speed trains on Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Corridor will operate at a speed of 320 km/hour covering a distance of 508 km and 12 stations.

There will be 35 trains per day in one direction, with a frequency of 20 minutes in peak hours and 30 minutes in non-peak hours.

The total length of the bullet train corridor is divided into three states/UTs - 156 km in Maharashtra, 4 km in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and 384 km in Gujarat.

The work on the country's first bullet train started in September 2017 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Japanese Prime Minister late Shinzo Abe jointly laid the foundation stone for the project.

Southwest monsoon covers entire country six days early

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The southwest monsoon on Sunday covered the entire country six days before the normal date, as it advanced in the remaining parts of Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana. Of the 717 districts, 379 have received deficient rainfall so far.

As many as 16 states and Union territories received deficient rainfall in June, with Bihar and Kerala reporting large deficits at 69 per cent and 60 per cent below normal, respectively. India received 136.7 mm rainfall as against the normal of 157.5 mm till July 29.

Initially, it was rains brought by cyclone Biparjoy over Gujarat and Rajasthan that helped in

improving the situation a bit, and in the last one week, rains over most of northwest India has resulted in bridging the deficit.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Sunday the monsoon covered the entire country on Sunday, against the normal date of July 8. The long period average (LPA) of rainfall over the country during July based on the data of 1971-2020 is about 280.4 mm.

The IMD data showed some other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana also received less rainfall than what is normal for June, the first month of the southwest monsoon season.



The south peninsula received 45 per cent less rainfall; Central India received 12 per cent less rainfall and east and northeast India's rain deficient is 20 percent in June.

"The monthly rainfall averaged over the country as a whole during July 2023 is most likely to be normal (94 to 106 per cent of LPA) and most probably within the positive side of the normal," IMD Director

General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra had said on Friday.

The phenomenon of warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean, called the El Nino conditions, are expected to develop in July. El Nino is known to suppress monsoon rainfall.

Mohapatra said during most of the recent El Nino years, June rainfall has been within the normal range.

"In 16 of the 25 years when June rainfall has been reported normal," he had said.

He said 377 weather stations across the country reported heavy rainfall events - 115.6 mm-204.5 mm per day - in June, while 62 stations reported extremely heavy rains, amounting to more than 204.5

mm. Mohapatra had said the March-to-June summer season saw heatwave conditions across 281 meteorological sub-division days (MSD), the third highest after 578 MSDs in 2010 and 455 MSDs in 2022. If one meteorological sub-division reports heat wave conditions, it is considered as one MSD.

The weather office said during July, normal to above normal maximum temperatures were likely over most parts of the country except some areas of northwest and peninsular India.

It said normal to above normal minimum temperatures were likely over most parts of the country except some areas of northwest India.

NIA raids multiple places in 3 States in 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday conducted raids at multiple locations across three States in connection with 'Ghazwa-e-Hind', a radicalised module, being run by Pakistan-based suspects.

A total of five locations, one in Darbhanga and two in Patna, both in Bihar, one each in Surat (Gujarat), and Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), were raided by the NIA in the case at the premises of the suspects, the NIA said.

The NIA said incriminating materials, including digital devices (mobile phones, memory cards), SIM cards and documents were seized during the searches.

The case came to light after the arrest of Marghoob Ahmad Danish alias Tahir of Phulwarisharif area of Patna district by the Bihar Police, which registered it as FIR number 840/2022 on July 14, 2022.

The NIA took over the case and re-registered it on July 22, 2022. Marghoob was chargesheeted on January 6, 2023 under various Sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

"The accused was found to be

a member of the Ghazwa-e-Hind module, which was operated by Pakistan-based operatives, with the objective of radicalizing impressionable youth for the establishment of Ghazwa-e-Hind over the Indian territory," the NIA said in a statement.

Investigations revealed that Marghoob was the administrator of a WhatsApp Group 'Ghazwa-e-Hind', created by a Pakistani national Zain. He had added many Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Yemeni nationals to the Group with the aim of establishing sleeper cells in the country for carrying out terrorist activities, the agency said.

The accused had created various social media groups of the 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' on WhatsApp, Telegram and BiP Messenger. He had also created another WhatsApp group in the name of 'BDGhazwa E HindBD' and had added Bangladeshi nationals to it, it said.

Further investigations revealed that various suspects involved in the case were in contact with Pakistan-based handlers and were engaged in propagating the idea of Ghazwa-e-Hind. Further NIA investigations in the case are in progress, it added.

Maha BJP chief, Fadnavis welcome Ajit Pawar for joining Shinde Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekar Bawankule and Deputy-Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis welcomed NCP leader Ajit Pawar joining the Shinde-Government in Maharashtra.

Bawankule said, "All those joining us are welcome. This will give a boost to PM Narendra Modi and the state government's development work in the state."

Fadnavis also "welcomed" Ajit Pawar and his supporters.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale welcomed the move say-

ing that Pawar wanted NCP to ally with BJP for quite some time but Sharad Pawar was against it.

"Ajit Pawar was miffed since sometime, because he wanted NCP to ally with BJP but Sharad Pawar disagreed to it. I welcome the decision of Ajit Pawar... this is a big change and a big setback for NCP and MVA," Athawale said.

"This is a very good development, I welcome that development in Maharashtra... I am happy about the decision and the people of Maharashtra are also happy..." said former Karnataka Chief Minister and senior leader BS Yeddyurappa.

'Demand discussion on Manipur in Parliament'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi has written to fellow legislators cutting across party lines in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, urging them to demand a discussion in Parliament on the ensuing crisis in Manipur and pursue legislative interventions seeking accountability from the Centre and the state government.

Bordoloi, who is a Lok Sabha MP from Assam's Nowgong, said with the Monsoon Session of Parliament scheduled to begin on July 20, he has written to all his colleagues in the Lok

Sabha and the Rajya Sabha across state and party lines, urging them to lend their voice to the demand for a discussion on the crisis in Manipur.

"I am writing to you in the wake of devastating and escalating ethnic violence ensuing in the state of Manipur. Violence has gripped the Northeastern state since the 3rd of May 2023, and the situation in Manipur has deteriorated significantly over the past three months, with reports of widespread violence, human rights abuses, and loss of innocent lives," Bordoloi said in his letter dated July 1.

KCR's party is 'BJP's B-Team', claims Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI

Launching a scathing attack on Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said his remote control was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and described the state's ruling party as "BJP's B-Team" and its new nomenclature, BRS, as "BJP Rishiedar Samiti".

Rahul alleged that the corruption charges against Rao and his party's leaders have made them subservient to the BJP, and asserted that he told all other opposition leaders that the Congress would not join any bloc where the BRS was involved.

Addressing a public meeting at Khammam, Rahul said, "BRS is like BJP Rishiedar Samiti. KCR thinks he is a king and Telangana is his kingdom."

"The Congress has always stood against the BJP in Parliament, but Rao's party has been 'BJP's B-team', he said.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi carries the remote control of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao," the former Congress chief said.

He further said the Congress party recently fought the election in Karnataka against "a corrupt and anti-poor government and we defeated them with the support of the poor, OBCs, minorities and oppressed in the state".

"Something similar is going to happen in Telangana. On one side there would be rich and powerful of the state and one the other side, there would be poor, tribals, minorities, farmers and small shopkeepers with us. What has happened in Karnataka, would be repeated in Telangana," he said.

Weight gain during pregnancy can increase risks of diabetes: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Weight gain during pregnancy is a normal process but the old adage that expectant mums are 'eating for two' and don't need to worry about weight gain, can in fact, have harmful health consequences on mum and baby, a study has cautioned.

The authors of the study published in JAMA Network said that excessive gestational weight gain can increase the risks of development of diabetes and other complications.

The conclusion followed after meta-analysis of almost 100 stud-

ies involving almost 35,000 expectant mums and it was found that interventions from allied health professionals was most effective for controlling prenatal weight gain.

"Pregnant women may be better supported by trained dietitians to control weight gain during pregnancy," said the research team including maternal health expert Professor Shakila Thangaratnam from the University of Birmingham.

Spanning 30 years of international evidence, the researchers found that between 6 and 20 sessions on a one-to-one basis were most effective. Those sessions



need to consider practical elements of pregnancy including

nausea which may affect food and vegetable consumption, as

well as cravings and fatigue.

The team also found less evidence for the exercise component of weight management during pregnancy and plans to manage weight gain that include exercise need to be carried out over a longer period of time over 20 weeks.

Professor Shakila Thangaratnam, Dame Hilda Lloyd Chair of Maternal and Perinatal Health at the University of Birmingham and co-author of the paper said: "We know that excessive gestational weight gain increases the risks of the development of diabetes and other complications.

"This study set about to encapsulate 30 years of evidence on what works well and not, and we found that experts in their fields such as dietitians were most effective at supporting healthy weight gain.

Other interventions were also found to have some success but need to be started soon into the journey of pregnancy."

The other team researchers included Cheryce L Harrison, BBNsc, senior research fellow and co-lead of the Healthy Lifestyle Stream at the Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation at the School of Public Health and Preventive

Medicine, Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and colleagues.

They said, "In a secondary analysis of our 2022 systematic review reporting on the association of lifestyle interventions with efficacy in optimising gestational weight gain, this meta-analysis aims to elucidate and describe components of antenatal lifestyle interventions."

These are associated with optimized gestational weight gain within published randomized clinical trials, providing critical and pragmatic information for implementations of trials in antenatal care settings, they added.

PS (Home) for proper arrangements for kanwariyas during Shrawan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Principal Secretary (Home and Information) Sanjay Prasad directed the officers to provide high-level arrangements to the kanwariyas coming in the auspicious month of Shrawan, which will have an extra month this year, falling between July 4 to August 31 in which there will be eight Mondays when a large number of devotees are expected to visit Kashi Vishwanath temple. Expressing satisfaction over the preparations made so far, he directed the officers of Varanasi, Vindhyachal (Mirzapur) and Prayagraj divisions to ensure the best arrangements for the kanwariyas.



PS (Home) Sanjay Prasad, DGP Vijay Kumar reviewing arrangements for Shrawan in Varanasi on Saturday.

Presiding over a review meeting also attended by Director General of Police (DGP) Vijay Kumar and others at the Circuit House here on Saturday, Prasad asked the surrounding districts to prepare their plans according to Varanasi, and directed these districts to ensure intensive patrolling where there are high-ways. "There should be no negligence," said the PS Home, directing the District Magistrate (DM) Sonbhadra to control the limit of vehicles carrying mining materials so that the kanwariyas do not face any kind of trouble.

Directing the DM Ballia, he said that special attention should be paid to check the overcrowding of the people at river ghats as well as on the boats. He directed all the officers to ensure complete compliance of all the instructions given by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. "There should be

proper arrangements for emergency medical services and sufficient number of health camps on all the routes," he said, adding that in view of cleanliness, the Municipal Corporations and Panchayat Raj department should take effective steps and ropes should be used along the rivers apart from deployment of divers to check the drowning incidents.

In the meeting, the DGP Vijay Kumar directed the Police department to issue traffic diversion plans wherever necessary and the same should be informed to the media apart from sharing the same with other adjoining districts as well. He also asked the police officers to create a network for taking live visuals of CCTV cameras and keep one route of NH-2 from Prayagraj to Banaras completely closed for

kanwariyas. He said that traffic advisories should be issued well in advance, so that people can get to know about the same in order to avoid casualties under any circumstance.

The local police officers gave the detailed information regarding security preparations and traffic management to maintain peace in Kashi Vishwanath temple areas. They said that entry of heavy vehicles will be restricted in the city from Sunday night till Tuesday morning. Apart from proper security at sensitive places and Ganga ghats, as many as nine jetties have been installed in the river Ganga apart from making some major routes including Maidagin to Chowk, Godowlia to Rampura, Godowlia to Pandey Haveli and Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham Marg as no vehicle zones. Besides diversion

of traffic from 11 points, barriers will be made at 11 places including Maidagin crossing, Kashipur, Dalmandi, Gurubagh, Lahurabir and Assi crossing. Divisional Commissioner (DC) Kaushal Raj Sharma said that in view of cleanliness, old Kashi areas have been declared as free plastic zone and the electricity department has been directed to take necessary action on the routes of kanwariyas, The DC Vindhyachal and ADG Zone assured the PS Home and DGP to make complete arrangement for successful Kavayatra. DM Varanasi S Rajalingam said that the entire route has been rehearsed in collaboration with the police and arrangements have also been made to cover the transformers at various places so that current does not enter the poles.

Yogi to review preparations for proposed visit by PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is likely to arrive in the city here on Monday in view of the proposed visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who may arrive in his parliamentary constituency on a two-day visit from July 7. It will be the fourth visit of the CM in this holy city within the last few weeks and during the stay, Yogi will visit the site in Wajidpur where Modi will address a public meeting. Besides, the CM will also

inspect all the places where Modi is expected to visit during his stay here.

The proposed visit of Modi to Purvanchal (eastern UP) as he will also go to Gorakhpur to attend the centenary celebrations of Gita Press is being considered as important politically to set a tone for forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Since the news about the arrival of Modi came here, both the district administration and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have intensified their preparations. The BJP has planned that about 50,000 people would attend the

proposed public meeting of Modi including 5,000 party workers each from all the three assembly constituencies of the city areas.

Besides, it is also expected that Modi will inaugurate several projects and lay the foundation stones of many others. An ambitious project for the redevelopment of the mythological Manikarnika Ghat may also be launched. According to information, apart from this the PM will also give cheques and articles to many beneficiaries of different central government schemes. Just a few days

ago, Yogi had addressed a public meeting at Jagatpur Inter College grounds on Varanasi-Prayagraj highway virtually to kick off the election campaigning for 2024 parliamentary elections and now Modi is also going to address the people which will boost the party's campaign in this region further.

According to information, after addressing the public meeting, Modi will take a night stay at Officers' Guest House at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) where next day, he will interact with some intellectuals before leaving the city.

KV Temple area to be plastic-free zone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the auspicious month of Shrawan, the area of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple will be plastic-free zone and the Municipal Corporation has asked the shopkeepers of this area to take Rs 50 additional as security money before selling any food items, drinking water or other goods in plastic bags and return this amount after taking back the same bags from the customers.



The Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari chairing a meeting with the officers of Municipal Corporation regarding the preparations for the Shrawan.

Chairing a meeting with the officers of Municipal Corporation held regarding the preparations for the auspicious month of Shrawan at his office here on Saturday, the Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari directed the officers to ensure that no good items, drinking water or other articles be sold in the plastic bags in the temple area and asked the Nagar Swasthya Adhikari Dr NP Singh to apprise the shopkeepers of it through pamphlets and other means. It should also be ensured that no shop should be installed on the road in the temple area and no vehicle should also be parked on the road, he directed.

route and also ensure the sprinkling of lime and asked the Chief Engineer Moinuddin to get all the roads repaired if they are damaged.

The monitoring should be made from an integrated control command centre through CCTV cameras installed in and around the temple to ensure the proper arrangement.

As per the desire of the state government, the local authorities are making several exercises to ensure the smooth traffic flow in the city and in this order it was decided that any person could run private parking on his or her unused land and also can earn money. But there is a need to seek permission from the Municipal Corporation before running the private parking, the Municipal Commissioner Shipu Giri informed.

The operation of private parking has also been started at Maruti Nagar in Samne Ghat area, the Additional Municipal Commissioner Sumit Kumar informed, adding that the Corporation earns around Rs 1.5 crore annually from its 33

Meanwhile, the Municipal Commissioner Shipu Giri released a circular asking the shopkeepers of the temple area to take Rs 50 additional as security money before selling any food items, drinking water, flowers, garlands or other goods in plastic bags and return this amount after taking back the same bags from the customers.

The Mayor directed Dr Singh to ensure cleanliness in and around the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple, other Shiva temples and panch koshi

parkings while the Smart City runs four parkings.

UNION MINISTER RELEASES BOOK: Union Minister of Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan released the book authored by Prof Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and late Debendra Kumar Dash, former professor at KK Women's College, Bhubaneswar.

The book titled 'Fakirmohan Senapati: The Making of an Author' was released at a function in Delhi. It traces the evolution of Fakirmohan Senapati from a literary and political activist to an author who has become one of the principal markers of Odia identity.

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The operation of private parking has also been started at Maruti Nagar in Samne Ghat area, the Additional Municipal Commissioner Sumit Kumar informed, adding that the Corporation earns around Rs 1.5 crore annually from its 33

announced the names of other award winners. The welcome address was given by president of chapter Ravi Katara and the annual report was submitted by secretary Sandeep Goyal. The programme was conducted by Amit Ahuja.

Among those present were district commandant BK Singh, Raj Bahadur Singh, Rajesh Singh, Asheesh Mehrotra and Sandeep Jain.

CONDOLED: MLC Vineet Singh, MLA Rama Shankar Singh Patel, president Mirzapur Press Club Trust Akash Dubey, Vimal Kumar Dubey and other dignitaries have condoled the death of veteran Teerth Purohit of Vindhyachal Chhabeley Mishra who passed away on Saturday.

Lightning claims three lives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Three persons died due to lightning strikes at different places in the district since Saturday. According to reports, Rahul Nishad (20) of Jalalpur Bhati in Kareli, had gone to bathe in the Yamuna on Saturday evening with friends. He sustained burn injuries due to lightning in the midst of heavy rain. His friends informed his family members about it. By the time the relatives reached, Rahul had died. The police have sent the body for the postmortem examination.

In another case, Anshika (17), daughter of Pankaj Paswan of Mahilagram locality in Dhoomanganj was enjoying the rain on the roof of her house on Saturday when she was struck by lightning. She received burn injuries. Her relatives took her to the SRN Hospital where the doctors declared her dead. Anshika was a student of class XII. The third death occurred in Kaitha village of Kaundhiyara. Deshraj Yadav's nine-year-old son Divyanshu Yadav died when he was struck by lightning when he had gone to pluck mangoes in an orchard. ADM (Finance and Revenue) Jagdamba Singh, who is also the district nodal officer in charge of all affairs related to natural disasters said: "Apart from the three deaths on Saturday, there were no deaths reported in the district on Sunday."

Meanwhile, the heavy rains that lashed the city as well as rural areas of the district led to power outages for long hours causing much inconvenience to the locals. Among various localities, several households of George town locality remained in the dark for the whole Saturday night till Sunday noon. "Locals of my area had to face the brunt of power disruption and had to spend the entire night without electricity and because of shortage of water, preparing food was also difficult for many households," said one of the students living in a PG of the area. Students living in the hostels faced problems of water and food, she added.

High humidity coupled with power fluctuation and low voltage further complicated the problems. Because of low voltage, water motors, ACs and other electric gadgets too were unable to function properly.

FIVE ARRESTED: The police have arrested five people in connection with the attack on Neeraj Shukla, who became a government witness in the encounter of Atiq Ahmed's shooter Vijay Chaudhary alias Usman, in Kaundhiyara area here. Kaundhiyara police station incharge Sanjay Kumar Dwivedi said Neeraj Shukla of Bhamokhar, Kaundhiyara, was attacked late on June 27 night while going home from the shop. During it Rakesh Chaudhary of his village, was injured when his Bolero hit him. After the firing and attack, Neeraj left the vehicle and fled home on foot. The assailants had looted his Bolero and fled from there.

Later his Bolero was found parked in an abandoned condition on the Rewa Highway in Gauhanaya. Rakesh is undergoing treatment at Swaroopnari Nehru Hospital. Neeraj Shukla

lodged an FIR against five people, including Rakesh Chaudhary, under various sections, including murderous attack. In it he said the assailants attacked him and looted Rs 2 lakh in cash, more than a dozen mobile handsets, tablets etc.

On the basis of written complaint, the police arrested five people involved in the attack. Among the arrested attackers, Rakesh Chaudhary son of Virendra Chowdhary a resident of Bhamokhar, Kaundhiyara, Mohd Nayab, son of Nafees Ahmed Mahtab, Alam, son of Mohd Jalil Mohd, Saif, son of Mumtaz Ahmed, all residents of Pothania, Ghurpur and Vijaykant Dwivedi, son of Gaurishankar Dwivedi resident of Baddiha, Kheri were arrested. Neeraj Shukla, a resident of Bhamokhar village under Kaundhiyara police station and his family do their own business. Neeraj is a wholesale supplier of mobiles. Apart from this, there are other businesses, including JCB. The distance between Kaundhiyara market and his house Bhamokhar is about 10 kms. After the Umesh Pal shootout on February 24, the police and crime branch team killed Vijay Chaudhary alias Usman, who was involved in it, in an encounter on March 6, five kilometers away from his village.

In this encounter his family members made many allegations and counter-allegations.

SHERA'S PHOTO GOES VIRAL: A photo of Shera alias Shahrukh, a criminal who threatened Bollywood actor Salman Khan, is going viral on social media in which he is sitting in a car waving a revolver. Shera, who is synonymous with terror in Kareli area here also has connections with underworld don Chhota Shakeel and mafia Atiq Ahmed. A few days back one of his audios also went viral in which he was describing himself as close to Chhota Shakeel. Dozens of cases are registered against Shahganj police station's history-sheeter, Shera, at Shahganj, Khuldabad, Kareli and Dhoomanganj police stations. At present action under Goonda Act is pending against him. Shahrukh is out on bail.

Two days ago Shera's audio also went viral, in which he was threatening by calling himself a man of underworld don Chhota Shakeel. It is being told that Shera had threatened Zeeshan Gaddi whose audio went viral. After Shera's photo went viral, the police started looking for him. At present more than two dozen cases are registered against Shera. Police are investigating the threatening audio as a fight for supremacy.

Station incharge Shahganj Mudit Rai said both Shera and his brother Vicky are of criminal nature. Shera is a history-sheeter of Shahganj police station. His house which is in Ahmedpur Saira Shahjamaal in Shahganj police station area is locked.

Raids were conducted in search of him. One of his sisters, Juhi, lives in Yakubganj. The police had gone there too, but Juhi said that she had nothing to do with Shera. There has been no conversation between the two for years.

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Campaign to identify eligible couples for family planning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In an attempt to bring down the Prayagraj district's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 2.4 to 2.1, the officials of the Health department have taken up an extensive campaign to identify eligible couples for family planning under the population stabilisation fortnight exercise. Ironically, Prayagraj is the most populous district of state and its TFR is more than state of UP (2.2).

The measures that have contributed to the lowering of fertility rate includes improving literacy levels, empowerment of women, delaying of the first child birth, enhancement in the compensation package for sterilisation, encouraging male participation in sterilisation and involving village level community health workers in promoting family planning. Meanwhile, health officials also laid stress over pre-marital counselling for to-be-married couples regarding family size and gap between two children. There should also be counselling of lactating mother who cometo hospital either for immunisation or for treatment of children and counselling and services of postpartum intrauterine contraceptive device (PPIUCD) before discharging them from maternity wards.

Although women are a step ahead in adopting family planning measures, officials of the Health department are now promoting and encouraging males for no-scalpel vasectomy (NSV), terming it a safe and sound method for family planning. In fact, the department has come up with 6S (advantages) of NSV, including scalpel-less, stitch-less, safe, sound, simple and short formula among males.

OATH ADMINISTERED: Professor of Zoology, Deendayal Upadhyay Government Post Graduate College, Saidabad, Prayagraj, Dr Ashok Kumar Verma has been made a member of the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC).

Governor Anandi Ben Patel has ordered this appointment of Dr Verma in exercise of the powers conferred under Clause (1) of Article 316 of the Constitution of India.

The Personnel department of the state sent the appointment letter to Dr Verma. Public Service Commission Chairman Sanjay Srinetra administered the oath of office and secrecy to Dr Verma on Saturday.

Dr Verma was awarded the highest Saraswati Samman of the Education department in 2017 by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. Dr Verma has more than 100 research papers/review papers and a dozen books published. He has also received the Human Excellence Golden Award by the American University in the international seminar organized at Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) last month. He has received more than 50 awards so far. Dr Verma's research papers have so far received more than 2200 Google Scholar citations, including 26 H-index and 74 I-index. This is an excellent record in itself.

Dr Verma's research on Sarus Crane is quite famous. That is why he has been invited to Indonesia to present his research paper. Scientists, professors and researchers from many countries have been invited to the international symposium on 'Natural Resource Management and Sustainability' organised by Udayana University, Bali (Indonesia) in November 2023.

The total fertility rate (TFR) of a population is the average number of children that would be born to a female over their lifetime if they were to experience the exact current age-specific fertility rates through their lifetime they were to live from birth until the end of their reproductive life.

District Programme Manager (National Health Mission) Vinod Kumar Singh said, "After Prayagraj being placed as most populous district in the state as per the census authorities of the Health department have taken up an extensive campaign to identify eligible couples (those couples who have completed their families) in all 21 blocks and urban pockets of the district to promote family planning.

Singh said "After the identification of eligible couples and maintaining eligible couple registers, the Health department will take up the use of safe and secure family planning methods, both temporary and permanent, including family stabilisation treatment, NSV, IUCD, PPIUCD and Antara among eligible couples. Singh said "The department has also set an estimated level of achievements block wise and urban pockets including FST (2875), NSV (367), IUCD (4,800), PPIUCD (1,123) and Antara (2,989).

A senior health official said, "We are persistently approaching and convincing eligible couples telling them the benefits of small family." He said, "Health officials are exhibiting various methods of family planning and awakening masses about reproduction rate, child health and HIV."

Health officials said counselling is an important factor to convince eligible couples for family planning methods and teams of doctors will be doing the same during the fortnight at government hospitals and community health centres.

Interestingly, health workers concerned are focusing on high fertility areas for population stabilisation fortnight. Health authorities are focusing on efforts to create awareness and persuade eligible couples to have smaller families for the betterment of health of mother, child and the entire family.

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Officials hear grievances of aggrieved

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The Sampoorna Samadhan Diwas was organised on Saturday in all tehsils of the district. At Sadar tehsil DM Divya Mittal asked the officials to dispose of cases without inordinate delay and on the basis of merit and report about their disposal timely. Taking instant action on some applications she directed the officials to inform her about the disposal. Out of 355 cases seven were disposed of on the spot. CDO Srilaxmi VS, SP Santosh Kumar Mishra, SDM Chandrabhanu Singh and other district level officers were also present.

ADM(F&R) Shiv Pratap Shukla and SDM Bharat Lal Saroj heard the grievances at tehsil headquarters, Lalganj.

Out of 159 cases five were disposed of on the spot and for the rest joint teams were formed with the direction to dispose them of under a time bound programme. He said in cases related to land the joint team will have to go on the spot and dispose of the matter on merit.

At Madihan tehsil CRO Satya Prakash Singh heard the cases of the aggrieved and issued the necessary directions to the officials. Out of 63 complaints two were disposed of on the spot. In a matter related to Dandiya village under Rajgarh block the CRO inspected the disputed spot along with tehsil staff and directed to solve the problems without inordinate delay. SDM Navneet Sehra heard the problems at Chunar tehsil. Out of 91 complaints 15

were disposed of on the spot.

CEREMONY: Chairman Nagar Palika Parishad (NPP) Mirzapur Shyam Sundar Keshari while addressing the award giving ceremony organised by Rotary Club Mirzapur Gaurav as the guest of honour on Saturday said it was the contribution of organisations like the Rotary Club that it has instilled the spirit of service among the elite class. He suggested to the club members to adopt villages or schools.

Former district governor of Rotary Club Sanjay Agrawal while speaking as the chief guest underlined the priorities of the club. He said the work of the club was a mission.

Deepak Kushwaha was declared as the best rotarian of the year and Shivam Agrawal

announced the names of other award winners. The welcome address was given by president of chapter Ravi Katara and the annual report was submitted by secretary Sandeep Goyal. The programme was conducted by Amit Ahuja.

Among those present were district commandant BK Singh, Raj Bahadur Singh, Rajesh Singh, Asheesh Mehrotra and Sandeep Jain.

CONDOLED: MLC Vineet Singh, MLA Rama Shankar Singh Patel, president Mirzapur Press Club Trust Akash Dubey, Vimal Kumar Dubey and other dignitaries have condoled the death of veteran Teerth Purohit of Vindhyachal Chhabeley Mishra who passed away on Saturday.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

France burning

Recent riots bring to the fore the ugly face of racial discrimination

As the tempers ease, unease settles in France after almost a week of rioting that started after the alleged gunning down of Nahel, a boy of Algerian descent by a French policeman for allegedly not having a driver's license and breaking the signal. French President Emmanuel Macron has appealed for calm amid heavy police deployment. France is far from being the peaceful country that it once used to be. A simmering discontent in its streets often erupts in violent protests which this time took the shape of a full-fledged riot. France, known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant society, has recently experienced a wave of riots that have captivated the world's attention. From the streets of Paris to the suburbs of Marseille, protests and violent clashes have disrupted the tranquillity, raising questions about the underlying causes and motivations behind these events. One of the primary causes fuelling the riots in France is social inequality and economic discontent. While France enjoys a high standard of living, there is a stark divide between different segments of society. Many protesters argue that the Distribution of wealth and opportunities is heavily skewed, leaving a significant portion of the population struggling to make ends meet. Issues such as unemployment, rising living costs, and limited access to affordable housing have generated frustration and anger, ultimately contributing to the unrest. Another critical factor is unemployment and marginalisation.



The lack of job prospects and the feeling of exclusion from mainstream society has left many young individuals disenchanted and desperate. They often see riots as a means of expressing their grievances, demanding attention from the government, and seeking change. Police brutality and alleged discrimination against minority communities have played a significant role in triggering the riots. Instances of excessive use of force by law enforcement, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, have led to widespread anger and a sense of injustice. Accusations of racial profiling and mistreatment have further deepened the divide between communities and law enforcement, creating a volatile environment ripe for social unrest. France, like many other countries, is facing significant political and social fractures. A lack of trust in the government, disillusionment with political elites, and a feeling of disconnect between policymakers and the general population have all contributed to the rise of protests and riots. These events serve as a way for people to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo and demand meaningful change. The recent wave of riots in France is a reflection of deep-rooted societal issues that demand attention and action. Social inequality, economic discontent, youth unemployment, police brutality, political fractures, and the power of social media have all contributed to the unrest. Addressing these underlying causes will require comprehensive efforts from the government, civil society, and citizens alike.

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PICTALK



A fisherman casts net on the river Hooghly in Nadia

PTI

Industrial collaboration helps scientific research

National Research Foundation (NRF) bridges the gap between the research institutions and the industry

The recently approved National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill, 2023 will be a landmark decision in facilitating Indian science. The passage of this bill will allow for the creation of a National Research Foundation (NRF) to nurture, grow, and promote R&D and encourage a culture of research and innovation across India's academic institutions. The National Research Foundation (NRF) is supposed to facilitate cooperation between various sectors, including the private sector, academic institutions, government agencies, and research organisations. Even though Indian researchers do world-class research and are at the top in the number of scientific publications, there is hardly any industrial contribution to our research. This has badly affected the credibility of our scientific community.



Most of the time our researchers do research either to fulfil the minimum requirements of their doctoral program or to satisfy the needs of the funding agencies. Public respects science only when scientific research finds

application in their daily life. They are not at all concerned whether a scientist has high-impact publications or not. Whatever great things our researchers do in their labs, if it's not delivered to community people they start criticizing the scientific community. It's not always possible for scientists to develop products out of their research. For example, many labs that are undertaking fundamental research, especially in areas like ecology, systematics, cell biology etc. may not directly contribute to the development of products. But these types of research also have wide applications for humanity and we need to promote researchers working in basic science. The research will have to reach only when some industry takes the research output for developing a product.

Whether it is the 'Chitra Heart-valve' developed by Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology or 'Jeevani' developed by Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute or any product that we see in the market, e.g., food products, medicines, home appliances etc. is the output of scientific research. Premier research institutions and universities have long been collaborating with industries, in fact, many companies closely monitor the discoveries from these labs. But for lesser-known institutions and universities have long been collaborating with industries, in fact, many companies closely monitor the discoveries from these labs. But for lesser-known institutions and universities have long been collaborating with industries, in fact, many companies closely monitor the discoveries from these labs. But for lesser-known institutions and universities have long been collaborating with industries, in fact, many companies closely monitor the discoveries from these labs.

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BIJU DHARMAPALAN

collaboration will bring a lot of benefits to the scientific community, the government should check the overinfluence of industries in research. Most of the time industries will prefer to support research that involves a marketable product. This may change the research culture in the country affecting basic science research, that may not produce a product immediately. The government should give strong support to people who are working on basic science research also. Basic science research is the fuel to run the applied research. Without a strong foundation in basic science, neither the country nor the industry can prosper. Many Nobel-winning discoveries were carried out as basic research, but later they found applications in a wide range of areas. The policymakers should make sure that the industrial collaboration envisioned in NRF should not hamper our strong research foundation in basic science, the fruits of which we enjoy today in various fields of our life. (The writer is a Science communicator & columnist)

Even though industrial

Jihad doesn't lead to emigration

There have been incidents wherein majority community has felt outraged with what is perceived as a deliberate attempt to hurt their sentiments



PRAFULL GORADIA

A point of view has been projected in the national dailies that love jihad, and the societal reaction to it has become so frequent that it has become a leading cause of death among Indian youth. The net result of this fear psychosis is driving the smartest young Indians to foreign shores and thus threatening the country's social fabric such emigration is likely to hurt the future of the country.

In the context of India's 140 crore citizens, the incidence of love jihad is minuscule. Nor all those who die are highly educated or particularly talented. In any case, if these few incidents can say to be leading to large-scale emigration, the phenomenon, often looked upon as some sort of brain drain, need not be seen as a disadvantage to the country. The émigrés of yesteryear can also be seen as our ambassadors of today. The more the number of non-resident Indians (NRIs) the bigger the advantage; they are also a source of influence for India abroad. Right through history, India has not had an imperialistic or colonizing mindset and record. Yet, influence overseas is important, more so as the world is proceeding towards becoming a village.

Was it not desirable to see our Prime Minister being sought after by American President (s), seeking the vote of Indian immigrants who have become citizens of the United States of America? In case we are apprehensive of a brain drain, preventing or discouraging emigration is hardly the step to resort to. We have a population huge enough to be able to absorb emigration of any size. What we do not have in adequacy are the educational facilities, in quantity as well as quality to educate and train the young population.

In fact, in the basket of education, we should include the teaching of foreign languages. For example, it is believed that at the current rate of decline in population, there would be no Japan left in another hundred years. Our aspiring youth should consider learning how to live and flourish in Japan. As far as population goes, Russia has already



fallen to becoming a country smaller than Pakistan.

Coming back to the subject of love jihad, has anyone asked why no one has protested against a "love crusade?" Christianity, like Islam, is also a religion of the book. From a bride's point of view, a Christian male can have only one wife. If he wishes to divorce her, the challenge before him would be like that facing any other husband. For a Roman Catholic, the Church does not permit divorce under any circumstances. In any case, the fundamental Christian ethic is that marriage is a sacrament; it is as if oneness, divine and indivisible.

In Islam, marriage is a contract, cancellable by divorce, by the husband giving the wife three notices of 'talaq' spread over three months even if verbally. Moreover, even without resorting to divorce, the husband can take on three more wives at a time. If the reader were a parent of daughters, would they prefer a 'love-jihad or love-crusade'?

A recently came across a book The Long Divergence: How Islamic Laws Held Back the Middle East by Prof. Timur Koran, Timur Koran,



IN ISLAM, MARRIAGE IS A CONTRACT, CANCELABLE BY DIVORCE, BY THE HUSBAND GIVING THE WIFE THREE NOTICES OF 'TALAQ' SPREAD OVER THREE MONTHS EVEN IF VERBALLY

who is a Turkish scholar teaching at Duke University, USA. In the course of his lengthy presentation, he pointed out several laws that have held back the progress of West Asia for centuries. It is only petroleum that has brought prosperity for as long as demand lasts or the wells dry up. While discussing the views of Prof. Koran with (the late) Dr Yoginder Alagh, who had been vice-chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) as well as a minister in the Deve Gowda, Inder Gujral regimes at the centre during 1996-98, some interesting points arose. That the Green Revolution logically should have taken place first in the UP-Bihar. Bengal belt because the waters of the Ganga and Yamuna flow through these states. UP has begun progressing recently, whereas Bihar and West Bengal. Prof. Alagh attributed this phenomenon to the socio-communal profile of the people, an opinion that may understandably cause disquiet to many, but one that would be hard to dismiss, statistically and objectively speaking.

The discussion at hand merits a more dispassionate analysis than the usual hand-

wringing and the often one-sided blame game one is accustomed to seeing. It is true that there have been incidents wherein members of the majority community have felt outraged enough to take the law into their own hands to settle what is perceived as a deliberate slight to their sentiments and even way of life.

Also, incidents where the womenfolk of only a particular section are targeted for fraudulent marriages that usually have ulterior motives, namely, religious conversions have only added fuel to the fire of an already inflamed polity. With past administrations either turning a blind eye to repeated offences by one community, either in a bid to appear secular or more acutely, to perpetuate their hold over vote banks, this problem had already assumed a gargantuan nature. That many among the majority have become emboldened now so as to resort to lesser subtle methods of reclaiming their identity merits an honest look and not a diatribe based on worn-out shibboleths.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JAI-VEERU OF CHHATTISGARH

Sir — TS Singh Deo's elevation as the first Deputy Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh just a whisker away from the Vidhan Sabha elections is being billed as a masterstroke by many. Back in 2018, Bhupesh Baghel and TS Singh Deo were known as the 'Jai-Veeru' of Chhattisgarh politics. The suave Singh Deo with his princely demeanour and the rustic farmer Baghel swept the elections, reducing the Bharatiya Janata Party to an unimaginable tally.

Strong regional leaderships create a typical dilemma for national parties such as the Congress and the BJP. Balancing this essential need for strong leadership with the imperatives of party decorum is not an easy task. Mr Baghel has created a combat model- in the BJP in the heartland, which the Congress could seek to replicate in other comparable regions. But Congress can ill-afford to let success devour it. The history of the party in the State is instructive. Under the late Ajit Jogi, the first Chief Minister of the State, the party wilted as it alienated communities and its leaders. Mr Baghel's leadership was a critical factor in the revival of the party, but so were the contributions of several others, known and unknown. For it to retain power in the State, the Congress will have to hold all of them together. Mr Singh Deo's elevation is, hence, a first step in the right direction. There is more to be done, including a renewed outreach to tribal communities. But at least the Congress seems ready to project a united front in Chhattisgarh.

TKR Noori | Hyderabad

RAHUL CONCLUDES VISIT TO MANIPUR

Sir — Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said "violence is not the solution" to the conflict in Manipur and appealed for peace, as he concluded his two-day visit to Manipur with a meeting with the Manipur governor. according to me giving a speech, appealing to peace and giving up the conflict leaders is not enough

Study Goa, then decide on UCC



Study Goa (with UCC) and other nations (with UCC and without UCC), also study the status of harmony, peace, prosperity, and progress there ... then decide on UCC (uniform civil code) in entire India to ensure smooth flow and harmony. Goa is the only state in India with a uniform civil code (UCC). Still, people are living harmoniously there. We never hear about any riots or friction at all. 25% population are Christians, 66% Hindus and 8% Muslims. This smooth going has been

possible there because the Portuguese civil code of 1867 was continued when it was captured from Portugal in 1961 and reunited with the main family of India (by the smart, brave, patriotic and excellent Indian troops of airforce and navy)

Will that work out for the entire India? For all Indians to live in harmony, peace, prosperity and progress? Without friction and riots? Experts must do research and decide. Also studied/researched may be a few foreign nations with and without UCC. How is the harmony there?

A brief history of Goa:- it was captured by the Portuguese from Adil Shahis (of India) in 1510 AD. Then merged with an Indian family in 1961. Hence, Goa Civil Code or Goa Family Law was authorised by the parliament according to/as a continuation of the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867 after the Goa Daman and Diu administration act 1962. The trio remained UTs Until Goa became the 25th state of India in 1987. On 9th December 2019, UT Nagar Haveli was merged with UTs Daman, Diu with Daman as the common capital of the trio.

P Vasudeva Rao Nivriti | Secunderabad

solution to issues at all. Rather, all leaders with the ruling party must think deeply about effective solutions and take effective practical steps to control the situation in Manipur. If this is not done, the situation in Manipur will get worse than before. So save Manipur from further destruction? Otherwise, the next Manipur generation will never forgive government.

Afazuddin Kazi Qasmi | Assam

TRANSPARENT SYSTEM

Sir — With the advent of July 2023, those who had failed to link their PAN Card number with that of the Aadhaar Card, will be facing the problem of having an invalid PAN. So far, lasted government had extended this deadline

multiple times and therefore June 30th would be the last of such kind of linking the both Aadhar and PAN duo. Now that the government has closed the window for linking the duo, Indian taxation will enter into the realm of a new era. This will be a historic effort in curtailing tax evasion and improving the tax system of the country. Also after this, we can expect the beginning of a more transparent regime in Indian Taxation history as more and more tax invaders will be under the radar of the authorities. We can expect a transparent regime after all this.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

SEEK SHELTER IN GOD FOR GOOD RELATIONS

If we have a good relationship with God, he will reward us handsomely



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We all do. Because good relationships with other people benefit us in many ways. Don't we all need a strong support base to exist well? It has been estimated that we need the help of roughly twenty-five persons every day to exist well. Then, we must have good relationships with our family members, especially those with whom we live. They must be accepted as they are just as we should be with our many faults. We all have several faults without any exceptions; only others may have different faults. Unfortunately, we try to ignore our own faults or consider them normal, which is not right.

All faults are faults, and they must be worked on and can be rectified only if we personally work on them, especially with help from God. Because we have been programmed thus due to our impious acts done in our past lives. For example, a person gets readily angry from his childhood. This habit is likely to continue for the rest of his life unless he has a desire to change and for that, he seeks help from God. Because such changes in one's nature are very difficult to achieve; God's help is crucial for effecting this change.

Additionally, we must think for others, i.e. how can we help them, because, yes, we all need help. Who can help us? The answer is those with whom we associate with either at home or in workplaces. And in order to get help we must respect them, and appreciate them generously, just as we crave to be given attention. How do you create a support base of experts, who are reliable also, for example, good doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc.? The answer is the same again: be very respectful and appreciative. Good health is hugely dependent upon getting the right advice at the right time. The same is true about lawyers. Do you know that dishonest lawyers are only interested in getting



dates? They obtain them by getting together with lawyers of the opposing side, and cases drag on. Good relationships benefit us in many more ways. Aren't we social animals, created to co-exist? That is how the family concept came into being. Why? As mentioned earlier, we must take the help of many. Aren't we incomplete in ourselves? Doesn't the husband provide what the wife lacks and what she can provide what he lacks? Then, we are always looking for attention, appreciation, etc, because we are not really self-sufficient.

This is how the creation was meant to go on. We must support others and others must do likewise. We can give respect to others and they can respect us, and the world can go on. Can we be experts in everything? The truth is: we can be experts in a few things only, if at all. Others provide expertise in order to fulfill all our needs. For example, a doctor provides medical expertise to us and an accountant fulfills his accountability needs. And we suffer less stress because there are others who complement and supplement what we lack. You please God and get whatever you desire. Isn't God inside us and outside too? He is and should be very much a part of our lives if we wish to exist well. This is how the Cosmic Design works. We must develop an excellent relationship with God. Isn't He the controller? Isn't He the one to decide the results of our acts? Isn't He, being omniscient, the one who can provide the perfect answer to problems faced by us?

Yes, God and He alone can see the big picture; we can see only a part of it if we try hard. There is another important fact we should know. God even knows what we are thinking. That is how we are punished for evil thoughts. We should know that all acts done by body, mind and words are taken into consideration for deciding our fate.

(Bishnoi is a spiritual writer)

Agroforestry boosts agricultural ecology

Agroforestry not only improves the ecology of the agricultural domain but can salvage the economic and social condition of farmers



BKP SINHA



ARVIND KUMAR JHA

Agroforestry in simple terms is a "sustainable land-use management system" that combines the cultivation of food crops (annuals) with woody perennials (such as trees, shrubs, palms, bamboo etc.) and/or livestock on the same land-management units.

The path to the introduction of agroforestry was in fact paved by the Forest Policy itself when it declared that the community's requirement, not possible to be provided through the recorded rights and concessions on the forests, should be met by social forestry outside the reserved forests. The diversion of good and productive agricultural lands to forestry was discouraged highlighting the need for increased food production, it simultaneously emphasized that forests should not be looked upon as a source of revenue. It rather professed to encourage farmers, particularly small and marginal ones, to grow on their marginal/degraded lands wood species required for industries. The policy further advocated that the farmers be supported by forest-based industries with inputs including credit, constant technical advice, harvesting and transport services, and even by the adequate strengthening of the research base for better outputs.

The forest policy declared that the derivation of direct economic benefit from forest must be subordinated to the need for environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance, an overriding imperative for the sustenance of ecosystem services that support crop production and humanity. The overall attempt was towards strengthening agricultural systems along with appropriate diversification to meet the growing needs and expectations of the country and its economy. Forest, the foster mother of agriculture, had to play its role in a subtle but definite way.

India's Agroforestry Policy 2014 acknowledges that agroforestry is the only alternative to meeting the target of increasing forest or tree cover to 33 per cent of its geographical area, as envisaged in the National Forest Policy 1988. It describes agroforestry as an ecologically based natural resource management system that sustains production and has the potential to improve ecosystem services through carbon storage, reduction in damage to forests, conservation of biodiversity, and soil and water conservation enabling agricultural land to withstand extreme weather events like floods and droughts, and climate change. The emphasis on Agroforestry perhaps also came as a response to the statement in National Agriculture Policy 2000 which said, "Agriculture has become a relatively unrewarding profession." It stressed, "Farmers will be encouraged to take up farm/agro forestry".

The field situation, however, shows that economic considerations have pushed agriculture in a big way towards industrial agriculture which, in its present exploitative form, is robbing the future generations of their entitlement to resources that they are not here to defend. Intensive sugarcane cultivation dependent on water mining in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra is a case in point. Agroforestry is conspicuously different from this. As a land use system with long-term sustainability and relatively lower risks, its true potential of providing unyielding support to the economy and well-being of our farmers is yet to be realized. The operationalization of site-specific treatment models; duly developed using



INDIA HAS TAKEN A GREAT STEP BY NOTIFYING THE DRAFT GREEN CREDIT PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION RULES, 2023. THE CONCEPT OF THE GREEN CREDIT PROGRAMME IN THE COUNTRY HAS IDENTIFIED ACTIVITIES FOR INCREASING THE GREEN COVER

(The writers are Former IFS officers and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of UP, Maharashtra)

local species combinations within the broadly conceptualized agri-silvi, agri-horti, and agri-silvi-pasture systems in combination with animal husbandry; remains to be firmly institutionalized.

The Agroforestry policy outlined several obstacles that plagued agroforestry in the country. Some of these have been attempted to be addressed but a lot has still to be done. Some of the learnings from the field may help in taking future action on various aspects.

On the regulatory framework aspect, while the Policy recommended the creation of simple mechanisms/procedures to regulate the harvesting and transit of agroforestry produce, the Tree Felling Regulation Acts in many states have been amended to exempt species mostly grown on private lands. Interestingly, as per the India State of Forest Report 2021 by the Forest Survey of India, the tree cover outside the recorded forest area is a significant contributor (721 sq. km) to the increase of 2,261 sq. km of total forest and tree cover in the country. The impact of generously removing 'Bamboo' from the definition of the tree under the Indian Forest Act 1927 just with the objective of deregulating the transit of farm-grown bamboo, however, provides a lesson. The result is the decriminalization of bamboo felling even in the Reserved Forest areas and a loss of 10,594 sq. km of bamboo-bearing area in the country as per this report. Further, there are reports from Maharashtra where farm-grown farm-grown bamboo is

difficult to sell because of the easy availability of bamboo from forests on account of unregulated removals in the name of community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act 2006. Needless to say, prior to legal interventions all possible implications on the ground must be assessed.

Better and farmer-friendly institutional credit and insurance are a must for promoting agroforestry. The major issue of non-participation of small farmers needs optimization of farm productivity coupled with the creation of a mix of livelihood opportunities and mechanisms to address gestation and market access-related issues. The prevailing perception of high-output monoculture systems must be replaced by multiple-produce-based sustainable options provided by agroforestry. Over 30 research centres of the ICAR involved in agroforestry research, with the adoption of the latest technologies, have a crucial role to play in this regard apart from the extension wing of the agriculture department.

To raise agroforestry taken up by small farmers at economies of scale, the pathbreaking example created in villages of Palamau district of Jharkhand using 'Chakriya Vikas Yojana' to aggregate the farm-related interests of farmers (including that of absentee landlords) in a transparent manner is certainly replicable. In many areas, support can be got from industries including Ayurvedic Drug Manufacturers for the supply of inputs, buying back of outputs and

marketing. Certification of farm-grown produce and a pro-actively functional canalizing agency at export points will go a long way in providing better markets to the practitioners of agroforestry. The returns can also be augmented by connecting agroforestry initiatives with REDD+.

India has taken a great step by notifying the draft Green Credit Programme Implementation Rules, 2023. The concept of the Green Credit Programme in the country has identified activities for increasing the green cover as eligible for credit by naming it 'Tree Plantation-based Green Credit'. In addition, all entities registered for 'Accredited Compensatory Afforestation' as per MoEFCC guidelines, are registered with the Green Credit Registry under the Programme. This should give a boost to tree plantations under agroforestry. Needless to say, maintaining fungibility across the eight sectors identified for the programme is going to be extremely essential for sustaining the programme.

Agroforestry has a tremendous potential of not only salvaging the economic and social condition of farmers but also promises to improve the ecology of the agricultural domain making it sustainable and climate change resilient. The most crucial points, however, especially while promoting and dealing with agroforestry models adopted by farmers will be to ensure integrity, and transparency so that real benefits for local communities and biodiversity are guaranteed.

The Internet of Things (IoT) is changing everyday life

After impacting industry, IoT has now also found use cases for organisations working in agriculture, infrastructure and home automation industries

The IoT is the network of physical devices, vehicles, home appliances, and other items embedded with electronics, software, sensors, actuators and connectivity which enables these things to connect and exchange data. The term "Thing" in "Internet of Things" is used quite broadly. For example, a thing within the IoT could be a person with a heart monitor implant, a pet with a biochip transponder, a vehicle that has built-in sensors to alert the driver when tire pressure is low — or any other natural or man-made object that an IP address can be assigned to, thus gaining the ability to transfer data over a network.

As a result, it is becoming increasingly easy to create opportunities to directly inte-



SUNIL GOYAL



DIMPLE KHOKHAR

Prof. Sunil Goyal is the Dean and Chairman of – the Board of Studies, Dr BR. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Dr Ambedkar Nagar and Dimple Khokhar is a PhD Research Scholar

grate the physical world into computer-based systems which results in improvements, efficiency, economic benefits and reduced human exertion. The Internet of Things helps people live and work smarter, as well as gain complete control over their lives. In addition to offering smart devices to automate homes, IoT is essential to business. IoT provides businesses with a real-time look into how their systems really work, delivering insights into everything from the performance of machines to supply chain and logistics operations.

IoT enables companies to automate processes and reduce labour costs. It also cuts down on waste and improves service delivery, making it less expensive to manufacture and deliv-

er goods, as well as offering transparency in customer transactions. As such, IoT is one of the most important technologies of everyday life, and it will continue to pick up steam as more businesses realize the potential of connected devices to keep them competitive.

Over the last few years, the concept of IoT has become a vital role player across various industries. More and more businesses now look to integrate its many benefits into their network infrastructures. As per Comptia, by 2030, 500 billion gadgets will be connected to the internet. Statistics on how fast technology is advancing reveal that users will connect half a trillion devices to the internet by 2030. The market is already experiencing

steady growth, and IoT spending has already reached \$1.2 trillion by the end of 2022.

As per Data Reportal, 42.5 billion people are using the internet in 2022. Statistics show that 63% of the world's population uses the Internet. Data collected by Statista reveals that Denmark, UAE, and Ireland have the highest internet penetration rates. Internet growth stats show that in 2022, Denmark, Ireland, and the UAE have overtaken the US as the number one country when it comes to internet penetration. In 2020, America had a 90% rate. In 2022, the three countries have a whopping 99% of their citizens accessing the internet. The United Kingdom, Switzerland, and South Korea follow very closely with 98%.

Saudi Arabia comes in third, with 97.9%. It is also predicted that 75.44 billion IoT devices could be in existence by 2025. IoT statistics reveal that there were over 25 billion IoT devices around the globe at the end of 2019. Statista predicts that there could be well over 50 billion by 2023. 70% of all automobiles will be connected to the Internet through the Internet of Things by 2023. Technology statistics and findings show that the automobile industry is one of the few places where innovations in the IoT have seen significant improvements in the past few years.

Aside from developing self-driving cars, research is being made to add lots of other features to the automobile industry through the Internet

of Things. Soon, we could have vehicles that detect bad driving, accidents, and possibly imminent collision. In addition, cars that detect flaws in design while sending a report back to the manufacturer could also be a norm in years to come. Forbes predicts that Cellular IoT connections could reach 3.5 billion by 2023.

Cellular IoT connection is a feature that allows sensors to be able to transfer information directly to a computer or your mobile device within a region or specified distance. Health wearables that transfer information about the state of health of a patient to a doctor or hospital are excellent examples of cellular IoT. According to McKinsey, the IoT could generate up to \$11 trillion in economic value per year by

2025. The IoT can save costs, increase productivity, create employment, and bring in billions and trillions in economic value in the process.

Generally, IoT is most abundant in manufacturing, transportation and utility organizations, making use of sensors and other IoT devices; however, it has also found use cases for organizations within the agriculture, infrastructure and home automation industries, leading some organizations toward digital transformation.

IoT can benefit farmers in agriculture by making their job easier. Sensors can collect data on rainfall, humidity, temperature and soil content, as well as other factors, that would help automate farming techniques.

Unrest continues in France, mayor's home attacked

AP ■ PARIS

Young rioters clashed with police into early on Sunday and targeted a mayor's home with a burning car, injuring members of his family, as France saw a fifth night of unrest after the police killing of a teenager. Overall violence, however, appeared to lessen from previous nights. Police made 719 arrests nationwide by early on Sunday following a mass security deployment aimed at quelling France's worst social upheaval in years.

The crisis posed a new challenge to President Emmanuel Macron's leadership and exposed deep-seated discontent in low-income neighborhoods over discrimination and lack of opportunity.

The 17-year-old whose death on Tuesday spawned the anger was laid to rest Saturday in a Muslim ceremony in Nanterre, a Paris suburb where emotions over his loss remain raw. He has been identified publicly only by his first name, Nahel.

As night fell on Saturday, a small crowd gathered on the Champs-Élysées to protest his death and police violence but met hundreds of officers with batons and shields guarding the avenue and its boutiques. In a less chic Paris neighbourhood, protesters set off firecrackers and lit barricades on fire as police shot back with tear gas and stun grenades.

A burning car hit the home of the mayor of the Paris suburb of I'Hay-les-Roses. Several schools, police stations, town halls and stores have been targeted by fires or vandalism in recent days but such a personal attack on a mayor's home is unusual.

Mayor Vincent Jeanbrun said his wife and one of his children were injured in the 1:30 a.m. attack while they were sleeping and he was in the town hall monitoring the violence.

Jeanbrun, of the conservative opposition Republicans



Police officers patrol in front of the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs Elysees in Paris

party, said the attack represented a new stage of "horror and ignominy" in the unrest, and urged the government to impose a state of emergency.

Regional prosecutor Stephane Hardouin opened an investigation into attempted murder in the attack, telling French television that a preliminary investigation suggests the car was meant to ram the house and set it ablaze. He said a flame accelerant was found in a bottle in the car.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne went to I'Hay-les-Roses to meet Jeanbrun along with Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin and other officials, and promised that "we're going to do everything to bring order back as soon as possible."

Macron planned to hold a special security meeting Sunday evening with Borne, Darmanin and the justice minister.

Skirmishes erupted in the Mediterranean city of Marseille but appeared less intense than the night before, according to the Interior Ministry. A bolstered police contingent arrested

55 people there.

Nationwide arrests were lower than the night before. Darmanin attributed that to "the resolute action of security forces."

More than 3,000 people have been detained overall since Nahel's death. The mass police deployment has been welcomed by some frightened residents of targeted neighbourhoods and shop owners whose stores have been ransacked — but it has further frustrated those who see police behaviour as the core of France's current crisis.

The unrest took a toll on Macron's diplomatic standing. On Saturday, a day before he was scheduled to depart, he postponed what would have been the first state visit to Germany by a French president in 23 years.

Hundreds of police and firefighters have been injured in the violence, although authorities haven't said how many protesters have been hurt. In French Guiana, an overseas territory, a 54-year-old died after being hit by a stray bullet.

On Saturday, Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti warned that young people who share calls for violence on Snapchat or other apps could face prosecution. Macron has blamed social media for fueling violence.

While concerts at the national stadium and smaller events around the country were canceled because of the violence and some neighbourhoods suffered serious damage, life in other parts of France went on as usual.

Fans tuned into the start of the Tour de France cycling race in neighbouring Spain; Marseille hosted a championship in pétanque — a game involving rolling metal balls as close as possible to a small wooden or plastic one; and families who could afford it headed for summer vacation. In the capital, tourists thronged to the Eiffel Tower, where workers set up a nearby clock counting down to next year's Paris Olympics.

A short walk from Nanterre, a shopping mall bustled Sunday with customers

from all walks of life.

Hundreds of mourners stood on a road Saturday leading to a hilltop cemetery in Nanterre to pay tribute to Nahel as his white casket was carried from a mosque to his grave.

His mother, dressed in white, walked inside the cemetery amid applause. Many of the men were young and Arab or Black, coming to mourn a boy who could have been them.

Nahel's mother told France 5 television that she was angry at the officer who shot her son at a traffic stop, but not at the police in general.

"He saw a little Arab-looking kid. He wanted to take his life," she said. Nahel's family has roots in Algeria.

Video of the killing showed two officers at the window of the car, one with his gun pointed at the driver. As the teenager pulled forward, the officer fired once through the windshield. The officer accused of killing Nahel was given a preliminary charge of voluntary homicide.

Thirteen people who did-

7 detained in Swiss city

Berlin (AP): Seven people were detained, most of them teenagers, after several shop windows in the Swiss city of Lausanne were smashed as young people gathered in an "echo" of riots in neighboring France, police said on Sunday. More than 100 people gathered in downtown Lausanne, in French-speaking western Switzerland, on Saturday evening, police said in a statement. It said that they were responding to several appeals on social media linked to several nights of violence that have shaken France after the police killing of a 17-year-old in a Paris suburb.

Several shop windows and a shop door were broken, while officers dispersed youths who threw paving stones and a Molotov cocktail at them, police said. They detained six people ages 15 to 17 — three girls and three boys, with Portuguese, Somali, Bosnian, Swiss, Georgian and Serbian citizenship — and a 24-year-old Swiss man.

No police officers were injured.

On Thursday, about a dozen people were detained in the Belgian capital, Brussels, and several fires were brought under control.

They did not comply with traffic stops were fatally shot by French police last year, and three this year, prompting demands for more accountability. France also saw protests of police violence and racial injustice after George Floyd's killing by police in Minnesota.

The reaction to the killing was a potent reminder of the persistent poverty, discrimination and limited job prospects in neighborhoods around France where many trace their roots to former French colonies.

Four security personnel killed in Balochistan

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least four security personnel and a terrorist were killed in an exchange of fire between them in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province on Sunday.

The attack took place in Dhana Sar area in the province.

Sherani Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bilal Shabbir confirmed the fatalities, adding that the exchange of fire between the security forces and the terrorists continued for almost two hours.

Three police officials and security personnel were killed in the attack in the Sherani sub-district, Shabbir said, adding that a terrorist was also killed.

DC Shabbir added: "The companions of the injured terrorists succeeded in taking them away. The body of the dead terrorist has been handed over to the CTD (Counter-Terrorism Department).

"The terrorists were well armed and they attacked the checkpoints after which the police and security responded and the firing lasted for some two hours," he said.

"One security personnel was also injured but is out of danger," Shabbir said.

He further said that the bodies of those killed have been taken to Zhob District Headquarters Hospital.

Stating that law enforcement agencies have cordoned off Dhana Sar and the surrounding areas, the DC added that the CTD has collected evidence from the incident's site and has initiated its probe.

Meanwhile, Sherani District Health Officer Dr Daulat Khan has said that a state of emergency has been put in place at the Zhob Civil Hospital and that all hospital staff had been called to duty despite the weekend.

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudus Bizenjo condemned the "rocket attack and firing" on the checkpoints and expressed his grief on the killing of the four security per-

sonnel.

He also lauded the police's and the FC's efforts in killing one terrorist. "The terrorists cannot demoralise the security forces by their cowardly actions," he said in a statement.

"The sacrifices of the security forces are a beacon for the nation. The security forces are ensuring the security of the country and the nation with their firm determination and courage," Bizenjo added.

However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, after the outlawed TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A day ago, a police constable was injured in a hand grenade attack at the "smart" police station of Karachi.

On June 24, a police official was killed and two more were injured in a suicide attack on a police van in Balochistan's Turbat.

Meanwhile, Pakistan police on Sunday arrested a senior commander of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and thwarted a terror attack on law enforcement agencies in Multan of Punjab province. Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab Police said that they received a tip-off that a top TTP commander was present in Multan following which a joint operation of the CTD, police and an intelligence agency was launched.

"During the operation, the raiding team surrounded the whereabouts of the terrorist in Multan and arrested him. He has been identified as Kamal and shifted to an unidentified location for interrogation," the CTD said. It said Kamal was an "important commander" of TTP in south Punjab who was in charge of the outfit's operations in the region. He wanted to target the security personnel in Multan.

Baltimore mass shooting: 2 dead, 28 injured

AP ■ BALTIMORE

Two people were killed and 28 were wounded in a mass shooting in Baltimore on Sunday morning, including three who are in critical condition, police said.

Baltimore Police Department Acting Commissioner Richard Worley confirmed there were a total of 30 victims during a press conference at the scene. The shooting took place just after 12:30 am at a block party in the Brooklyn Homes area of South Baltimore in the 800 block of Gretna Avenue, Worley said.

All of the victims were adults. Nine victims were transported by ambulance and 20 victims walked into area hospitals with injuries from the shooting, Worley said.

"I want those who are



Tables are left on their side in the area of a mass shooting incident in the Southern District of Baltimore on Sunday

responsible to hear me, and hear me very clearly," Mayor Brandon Scott said at the scene. "We will not stop until we find you, and we will find you. Until then, I hope that every single breath you take, that you think about the lives that you took, think about the lives that you

impacted here tonight." No arrests were made immediately after the shooting. Scott asked anyone with information to come forward to assist investigators locate the "cowards" who were responsible for the shooting. "Treat this as if it were your family," Scott said.

"How you would want people to treat it if you were mourning, if this was your neighbourhood, if this was an event in your community that this happened at. We want you to treat it that way because that's how we have to treat each other as Baltimoreans."

Sunak speaks of 'sting' of racism growing up in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Rishi Sunak, Britain's first Indian-origin Prime Minister, has spoken of the 'sting' of racism that he experienced growing up in the UK during a special appearance at the England versus Australia Ashes Test match at Lord's Cricket Ground in London.

The 43-year-old cricket lover was interviewed on the BBC's iconic 'Test Match Special' (TMS) radio show on the fourth day of the second Ashes Test on Saturday when he was asked about a recent independent report which found "widespread and deep-rooted" racism, sexism, elitism and class-based bias at all levels of cricket and prompted an unreserved apology by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). "I haven't experienced that in cricket, but of course I've experienced racism growing up," said Sunak, in response to a question by BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew.

"It stings you in a way that very few other things do. I'm in a job where I take



criticism on a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute basis. But racism, it stings you, it does hurt," he said.

Sunak said the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) report had been "hard to read" and "really sad" for cricket lovers like him.

"All of us who love this game want it to be inclusive, open, accessible to absolutely everybody, to welcome people from all backgrounds and for it to be a place where everyone can feel respected and supported," he said.

The Prime Minister went on to say that he was "confident" that the ECB was responding to its conclusions in the right

way and referenced his milestone as the country's first British Indian Prime Minister as "incredible progress" in tackling racism.

"One thing I take comfort from is that I think the things that happened to me when I was a kid, I don't think they would happen to my kids today," he added.

Born in Southampton in Hampshire on the south-eastern coast of England, Sunak revealed how he fell in love with cricket watching Hampshire County games in his home city.

During an India Global Forum UK-India Week reception he hosted in the garden of 10 Downing Street last week, Sunak joked about his bowling action as he expressed his excitement about India hosting the Cricket World Cup in October.

"I can tell you today that England is taking the prospect of playing India very seriously... they've even overcome a specially chosen British Indian bowling attack, but sadly that was me, here in this garden," he said, evoking much laughter from the gathering.

Man pleads guilty to killing Indian-origin girl

London (PTI): A Tunisian man who had been charged with the murder of Indian-origin student Sabita Thanwani at her university accommodation in the Clerkenwell area of north London in March last year has admitted to her killing in court.

Maher Maaroufe, 23, pleaded guilty to manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility during a hearing at the Old Bailey court here on Friday and will be sentenced in September.

The court heard how Thanwani, 19, was found under the sheets with a cut to her throat on March 19 last year.

According to court reports, the pros-

ecution described how Maaroufe and Thanwani had been in a relationship prior to the morning of the killing. They were at the student accommodation when a neighbour overheard various noises and screams coming from the room and called emergency services.

A post-mortem examination gave Thanwani's cause of death as sharp force trauma to the neck.

Before the police arrived at the scene of the killing, the suspect had left the building but as he did so he was seen by officers wearing a balaclava, the court was told.

The Metropolitan Police had issued an urgent manhunt for Maaroufe and charged

him days later.

At this week's hearing, he appeared by video link from high-security psychiatric hospital Broadmoor for the hearing and the prosecution accepted the manslaughter plea.

Maaroufe also pleaded guilty to a charge of assault by beating an emergency worker for head-butting a police officer during his arrest last year. In court, he was assisted by an Arabic interpreter and was remanded back into custody.

In a statement released at the time of her death, Thanwani's family described the student as "our angel" and said she had a "radiant smile and incredible heart".

More power for UK police to curb protests

AP ■ LONDON

New and expanded powers for British police took effect on Sunday, including measures targeting activists who stop traffic and major building works with protests.

Authorities have repeatedly condemned environmental protest groups, including Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion, which have sought to raise awareness about the urgency of climate change by

staging multiple high-profile protests at the busiest highways and roads.

Their protests in recent years often caused serious disruption for motorists.

From Sunday, police will have powers to move static protests. Critics have argued the toughened laws are a threat to the right to protest, but UK officials say the measures were to stop "disruption from a self-interest minority."

"The public have had

enough of their lives being disrupted by selfish protesters. The mayhem we've seen on our streets has been a scandal," Home Secretary Suella Braverman said.

Authorities say that under the new Public Order Act, protesters found guilty of "tunnelling" — or digging underground tunnels to obstruct the building of new infrastructure works — could face three years in prison.

Anyone found guilty of

obstructing a major transportation project could be jailed for up to six months.

Hundreds of protesters were arrested last year in the UK for blocking major roads and bridges. Many activists protested by sitting in the middle of the roads or gluing themselves to the roadway to make them harder to move.

Police have said it's costly to deal with the protests and that they diverted thousands of officers.

Dayanand Saraswati birth anniv in Singapore

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore's Hindi-speaking community of about 1,00,000 celebrated the 200th Birth Anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati through the launch of a new Heritage Gallery and Mural at the 96-year-old premises of Arya Samaj here on Sunday.

A Chinese Singaporean mural artist's work on the Hindi-speaking community on the walls of the Arya Samaj was launched on Sunday as the main part of the 200th Birth Anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Spanning 36m x 8m, across two buildings, the paintings of early migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as sepoy during the colonial raj is the largest in Singapore's Little India precinct.

Artist Yip Yew Chong braved heavy rains, having to repaint the washed-down paint, has helped establish the roots of the community in the Gangetic heartland by incorporating a scene from temple life

along the ghats (riverfront steps) in the ancient city of Varanasi at the banks of the river Ganga. "I aim to make my art as visually relatable and authentic as possible to the public, as I hope my art will contribute to the culture and identity of the communities expressed in my art," said Yip, a former accountant turned mural artist with over 80+ painted in Singapore and overseas.

"I aim to tell stories through my art — stories of my life, people and places," he said as the mural was launched at the Arya Samaj by community leaders representing some 1,00,000 Hindi-speaking residents and expatriates.

Yip is confident in painting murals that showcase non-Chinese cultures. "That's because Singapore is a multicultural country and I live, go to school, serve in the army, and work alongside many other races. I enjoy diverse cultures. Thus, in many of my murals in both Singapore and abroad, I have painted familiar

scenes and elements of non-Chinese cultures. "The audience is just everyone, regardless of race, language, religion and nationality," he told PTI.

"The temple will further strengthen its heritage status through the heritage gallery that includes archival and contemporary images, documentary films, and a stunning mural, the largest in Singapore's Little India," said Associate Professor Rajesh Rai, Head of South Asian Studies Programme at the National University of Singapore and descendent of an early migrant family from Uttar Pradesh.

A community leader and veteran lawyer Sat Pal Khattar launched the heritage gallery, which documents the story of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Arya Samaj, founded in 1927 in Singapore. Also featured in the mural is the DAV Hindi School at the Samaj and the community that has shaped the history of these organisations.

Nepal sees rise in Indian tourists

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nearly 1,68,000 Indian tourists visited Nepal by air during the first six months of 2023, registering a significant increase in their number compared to 97,313 visitors during the same period last year, official data showed on Sunday.

According to the Nepal Tourism Board, the Himalayan nation received a total of 4,76,481 foreign tourists by air in the first six months of 2023.

This marked a significant recovery of 83 per cent compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

In the year 2019 (pre-Covid period), Nepal received 5,36,058 tourists by air. The number of

tourists visiting Nepal in the first six months of 2023 was 16.93 per cent less than those visiting Nepal in the same period of 2019.

The number of Indians visiting Nepal by air during the first six months of 2023 was 167,605, registering a significant increase as compared to 97,313 Indian visitors in the same period last year, the board said in a press release.

In May, Nepal received a total of 1,53,602 foreign visitors out of which 36,575 were Indians.

In June, Nepal received an overall lesser number of international tourists as compared to the same month the previous year. However, the number of Indian tourists was more in June

this year as compared to the same month the previous year.

Nepal's tourism industry was marred by the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out towards the end of 2019, with the number of visiting tourists decreasing.

During the first six months, the influx of tourists dropped to 220,815 in 2020, 58,058 in 2021, and recovered to 240,901 in 2022.

The number of Indian tourists visiting Nepal in June was encouraging as Nepal started recovering from the Covid pandemic, said Sharmila Kafle, Managing Director of Apoorva Tours and Travel - one of the major travel enterprises dealing with inbound tourists from India.

"In the past, Indians mainly used to visit Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu but now a variety of tourists from India with diverse interests are coming to Nepal," she said, adding that Indians also visit Janakpur, Lumbini, Muktinath and other places in Nepal.

Besides Kathmandu, they are also visiting Pokhara and Chitawan. The number of adventure tourists from India is also growing, she added.

"They are going to climb Mt. Everest." Nepal has also become a hub for Indian filmmakers, she pointed out. Last year, the Indian film 'Unchai' produced by Bollywood veteran Amitabh Bachchan was shot in Nepal, she said.

Russia launches first drone strike on Kyiv in 12 days

AP ■ KYIV

After a relative lull, Russia launched a drone attack early on Sunday on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, officials said. It was the first such attack of the war in 12 days.

All of the Iranian-made Shahed exploding drones were detected and shot down, according to Serhii Popko, the head of the Kyiv city administration.

In addition to the city itself, the surrounding Kyiv region was targeted. Kyiv regional Gov. Ruslan Kravchenko reported that one person was wounded by falling debris from a destroyed drone.

Officials in the Ukrainian capital didn't provide an exact number of drones that attacked the city. But Ukraine's air force said that across the country, eight Shaheds and three Kalibr cruise missiles were launched by the Russians.

Further south, a 13-year-old boy was wounded in overnight shelling of Ukraine's partially occupied southern Kherson province, said Oleksandr Tolokonnikov, spokesman for the Ukrainian administration of the province.

The child was wounded when the Russian army shelled the village of Mylove on the banks of the Dnieper River in the Beryslav district, Tolokonnikov said.

"The child was hospitalized, there is no threat to his life," Tolokonnikov added, he said on state TV.

Shelling of Kherson province continued Sunday morning, wounding four people in the regional capital, also called Kherson.

The regional prosecutor's office said that a residential area of the city was targeted by Russian troops operating in the Russia-occupied part of the Kherson province.

"At least four citizens were wounded, two of them due to



a targeted strike on a high-rise building," the office wrote on Telegram.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's military reported that the most intense fighting continued in Ukraine's industrial east, with attacks focused around Bakhmut, Marinka and Lyman

in the country's Donetsk province, where 46 combat clashes took place.

In its regular update Sunday morning, the General Staff said that over the previous 24 hours, Russia had carried out 27 airstrikes, one missile strike and around 80 attacks

from multiple rocket launchers, targeting regions in the north, northeast, east and south of the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the Black Sea port city of Odesa on Sunday — the day the country honours its navy -

to hear a report from the navy commander, discuss prospects for the development of a naval drone and missile program, as well as present awards to service members.

In Russia, local officials reported that air defense systems shot down a drone over the Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, while the neighboring Kursk region faced shelling attacks. No casualties or damage were reported.

Following the drama of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin's rebellion last week, Russian authorities remained defiant. Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, said Sunday that Russian President Vladimir Putin came out of this situation "having strengthened his position even more both in the country and in the world."

Russian society, he said, "having passed this test, has shown its maturity." According

to Volodin, there was "not a single example of someone supporting the rebellion."

But Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the deputy commander of the Russian group of forces fighting in Ukraine, was believed to have been detained days after the mutiny.

It's not clear whether Surovikin, who has longtime links to Prigozhin, faces any charges or where he is being held, reflecting the opaque world of the Kremlin's politics and uncertainty after the revolt.

Writing on Telegram, Volodin said that the Russian president "did everything to prevent bloodshed and confusion," including explaining to Wagner fighters "the real state of affairs." "(Putin) suggested that those who want to defend Russia continue their service with weapons in their hands. As far as I know, many of them agreed to this," Volodin said.

In addition, the speaker of the State Duma said that he had

analyzed the "challenges" Russia faced in the past, affirming that if "someone like Putin" had been leading the country in 1917 and 1991, there wouldn't have been a revolution in Russia, and the USSR wouldn't have collapsed.

But independent observers and analysts say that Putin may come out politically weakened after first announcing that Wagner would face harsh repercussions, only to later say that the group's forces wouldn't face prosecution.

Prigozhin was also allowed to leave Russia for Belarus.

Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski said Sunday that Poland would send 500 police officers to join 5,000 border guards and 2,000 soldiers already on the country's border with Belarus. It follows an announcement earlier this week that Poland would strengthen defences on its eastern border after the relocation of Wagner fighters to Belarus.

'Haiti urgently needs international help'

Port-Au-Prince (AP): UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited Haiti on Saturday and again called on foreign governments with strong security forces to help the struggling country fight a surge in gang violence.

The appeal was made after Guterres met with Prime Minister Ariel Henry, civil society leaders, UN staff and the heads of various political parties during his one-day trip.

"Now is not the time to forget Haiti or weaken our solidarity with its people," he said.

Guterres met with reporters at Haiti's international airport in Port-au-Prince, who pressed him on whether an international security force would be deployed as requested by the prime minister last October.

Guterres said he spoke about the issue with Henry, as well as the need to hold cred-

ible elections.

"I am not here to tell Haitians what to do. I am here to listen to them and to encourage them to build consensus as broadly as possible to move the transition process forward," he said.

Henry, who has been running the country since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, has been under pressure to hold elections. But experts have noted it is impossible to do so given the current level of violence in the country, with gangs controlling an estimated 80% of the capital.

There are no democratically elected institutions left in Haiti, with the country failing to hold legislative elections since October 2019.

"Haiti must return to democratic order as soon as possible," Guterres said.

He also said Haiti urgently needs more humanitarian

aid as poverty deepens and starvation cases spike. Gangs are preventing the movement of goods and people and controlling access to water, food and health care as civilians attempt to fight back via a violent uprising.

"I felt all the exhaustion of a population that has been facing for too long a cascade of crises and unsustainable living conditions," Guterres said.

"One in two people in Haiti live in extreme poverty, face hunger and lack regular access to drinking water."

Guterres' visit came just days after the UN's human rights expert in Haiti visited the country and also called for an international security force and a weapons embargo.

Guterres is scheduled to attend a summit Sunday in Trinidad and Tobago held by Caricom, a Caribbean trade bloc.

Trump's rally draws thousands in South Carolina

AP ■ PICKENS

Former President Donald Trump on Saturday marked a return to the large-scale rallies of his previous presidential campaigns, speaking to thousands gathered in the streets of a small South Carolina city on a blazing day ahead of the July 4 holiday.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be to kick off the Fourth of July weekend than right here on Main St, with thousands of hardworking South Carolina patriots who believe in God, family and country," Trump said to a roaring crowd standing on asphalt as temperatures climbed into the 90s.

It wasn't immediately clear how many people had gathered in the streets of downtown Pickens, a small city in South Carolina's conservative Upstate of around 3,400 residents. Law enforcement officials told some media outlets that around

15,000 people had gathered by 11 a.m., two hours before Trump's remarks.

The heavily Republican area is a popular one for GOP hopefuls as they aim to attract support for South Carolina's first-in-the-South presidential primary.

In recent months, other candidates including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy have all held events in the Upstate, as well as the two South Carolinians in the race: former Gov. Nikki Haley and Sen. Tim Scott.

But none drew a crowd like Trump, whose appearance effectively shuttered Pickens' quintessential southern downtown.

Contrasted with his 2016 and 2020 campaigns, which drew thousands to rallies in states across the country, Trump's 2024 effort has been



markedly different. Earlier this year, instead of addressing voters in a gymnasium or airplane hangar, Trump held his first South Carolina campaign event inside the Statehouse in Columbia, rolling out his state leadership team at an invitation-only gathering in an ornate lobby between the House and Senate chambers.

In other states, the former president has focused his efforts on smaller events, including a series of speeches before state party organizations, as he works to bolster his standing with delegates and local officials.

This was only Trump's second large rally of the 2024 campaign. In March, he rallied in Waco, Texas, disparaging the prosecutors then investigating him on hush-money charges — on which he was later indicted

— and predicting his vindication.

A planned outdoor rally in Iowa in May was canceled due to tornado warnings.

The rallies are also expensive to put on, although Trump has continued to bring in millions in fundraising, after both the New York indictment and also federal charges related to his retention of classified documents after leaving the White House.

Last month, senior Trump aide Chris LaCivita told the conservative Ruthless podcast that the rallies "are half a million bucks a pop."

Trump's campaign has also leaned in on unannounced stops at restaurants — such as at a celebrated Philadelphia cheesesteak restaurant Friday or Versailles, a famous Cuban eatery in Miami — in a bid to showcase his strong appeal among supporters despite the multiple legal challenges.

Syrian air defence missile explodes over Israel



Beirut (AP): Israel carried out airstrikes on areas near the central Syrian city of Homs early Sunday causing material damage but no casualties, the Syrian military said in a statement.

A Syrian anti-aircraft missile exploded over Israeli territory, the Israeli military said, prompting another round of strikes.

Syrian state media quoted an unnamed military official as saying the air defenses shot down some of the missiles fired by Israeli warplanes flying over neighboring Lebanon.

Israeli authorities did not comment on the airstrike on Homs. But the military said one of the Syrian air defense missiles exploded over Israeli territory without causing any damage. Israeli police said the rocket's remains landed in the southern Israeli city of Rahat.

In response to the rocket, Israeli jets struck the air defense battery from where the anti-aircraft rocket was launched. The military said it also struck other targets, without elaborating.

Israel, which has vowed to

stop Iranian entrenchment near door, has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets in government-controlled parts of neighboring Syria in recent years, but it rarely acknowledges them.

The last suspected Israeli airstrike on Syria was on June 14, near the capital Damascus that left one soldier wounded.

Israel has also targeted the international airports in Damascus and the northern Syrian city of Aleppo several times over the past few years, often putting it out of commission.

Religious conservatives lobby to restrict abortion in Africa

AP ■ NAIROBI

Nowhere in the world has a higher rate of unsafe abortions or unintended pregnancies than sub-Saharan Africa, where women often face scorn for becoming pregnant before marriage.

Efforts to legalise and make abortions safer in Africa were shaken when the US Supreme Court ended the national right to an abortion a year ago.

Within days, Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio declared that his government would decriminalize abortion "at a time when sexual and reproductive health rights for women are being either overturned or threatened."

But some US-based organizations active in Africa were emboldened, especially in largely Christian countries. One is Family Watch International, a nonprofit and Christian conservative organization whose anti-LGBTQ+ stance, anti-abortion activities and "intense focus on Africa" led to its designation as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

In April, Family Watch International helped to develop a "family values and sovereignty" meeting at Uganda's presidential offices with lawmakers and other delegates

from more than 20 African countries. The organisation's Africa director also is advocating for his country, Ethiopia, to revoke a 2005 law that expanded abortion access and dramatically reduced maternal mortality.

"It's kind of like the gloves are off," Sarah Shaw, head of advocacy at UK-based MSI Reproductive Choices, an international provider of reproductive health services, said in an interview.

In a September speech to the African Bar Association, the president of Family Watch International, Sharon Slater, alleged that donor countries were attempting a "sexual social recolonisation of Africa" by smuggling in legal abortion along with sex education and LGBTQ+ rights.

"Sexual rights activists know if they can capture the hearts and minds of Africa's children and indoctrinate and sexualize them, they will capture the future lawyers, teachers, judges, politicians, presidents, vice presidents and more, and thus they will capture the very heart of Africa," Slater claimed.

Her speech in Malawi was attended by the country's president, a former leader of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God movement.

Elon Musk imposes daily limits on reading posts on Twitter

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

Twitter owner Elon Musk has limited the amount of tweets that most users can view each day — restrictions he described as an attempt to prevent unauthorized scraping of potentially valuable data from the social media platform.

The site is now requiring people to log on to view tweets and profiles — a change in its longtime practice to allow everyone to peruse the chatter on what Musk has frequently touted as the world's digital town square since buying it for USD 44 billion last year.

The restrictions could result in users being locked out of Twitter for the day after scrolling through several hundred tweets. Thousands of users complained Saturday of not being able to access the site.

In a Friday tweet, Musk described the new restrictions as a temporary measure that was taken because "we were getting data pillaged so much that it was degrading service for normal users!"

Musk has pushed back on what he calls misuse of Twitter data to train popular artificial intelligence systems like ChatGPT. They scour reams of information online to generate human-like text, photos, video and other content.

Musk elaborated on the



limits Saturday, saying unverified accounts will temporarily be restricted to reading 600 posts per day, while verified accounts will be able to scroll through up to 6,000.

After facing backlash, he tweeted that the thresholds would be raised to 800 posts for unverified accounts and 8,000 for verified accounts before later settling on 1,000 and 10,000 tweets, respectively.

The crackdown began to have ripple effects, causing more than 7,500 people at one point Saturday to report problems using the social media service, based on complaints registered on Downdetector, a website that tracks online outages.

Although that's a relatively small number of Twitter's more than 200 million worldwide users, the trouble was widespread enough to cause

the #TwitterDown hashtag to trend in some parts of the world.

The higher threshold allowed on verified accounts is part of an \$8-per-month subscription service that Musk rolled out earlier this year in an effort to boost Twitter revenue. It has fallen sharply since the billionaire Tesla CEO took over the company and laid off roughly three-fourths of the workforce to cut costs and stave off bankruptcy.

Advertisers have since curbed their spending on Twitter, partly because of changes that have allowed more sometimes-hateful and prickly content that offends a wider part of the service's audience.

Musk recently hired longtime NBC Universal executive Linda Yaccarino as Twitter's CEO to try to win back advertisers.

Leading Taiwanese firms looking at relocating production bases to India

PTI ■ TAIPEI

Leading Taiwanese technology firms are looking at relocating their manufacturing bases to India to bring down their exposure to the Chinese market, top policymakers in the Taiwan government have said, amid the self-governed island's increasingly tense relations with China.

Deputy Minister for Taiwan's National Development Kao Shien-quey said there is huge scope for collaboration between New Delhi and Taipei in areas of emerging and critical technologies including manufacturing of semiconductors and electronics equipment.

In an interaction with a group of international journalists, she said major Taiwanese technology giants are looking

at India as a key destination to strengthen their global supply chains.

Kristy Tsun-tzu Hsu, the director at premier policy think-tank Taiwan ASEAN Studies Centre at Chung-Hua Institution of Economic Research, described India as an important country for Taiwan and said Taiwanese companies operating in China are looking at "decoupling" the global supply chain from that country while maintaining it for the domestic consumers.

Leading Taiwanese companies are increasingly looking at relocating their production bases from China to countries in Europe, North America, the US and India in view of Washington's trade dispute with Beijing and the Chinese military's increasing muscle-flexing around Taiwan.

The relationship between China and Taiwan has become increasingly strained after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island in August last year.

India is keen on having production facilities of leading Taiwanese chip producers including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (TSMC), the world's largest chipmaker whose clients included Apple.

"With the larger context of global supply chain restructuring and the 'China plus one' strategy, I am sure that we will see an acceleration of collaboration between the two sides in the field of semiconductor and information and communication industry," Shien-quey said.

It is learnt that a sizable number of Taiwanese companies are going to set up produc-

tion bases at two industrial parks in India which are being set up exclusively for leading industries from Taiwan.

Talks are in the final stages for a Taiwanese semiconductor company to set up a manufacturing facility in India, an official said on condition of anonymity.

Taiwan produces over close to 70 per cent of the world's semiconductors and over 90 per cent of the most advanced chips that are required for almost all electronic equipment such as smartphones, car components, data centres, fighter jets and AI technologies.

The 'China-Plus-one' strategy aims at encouraging businesses to expand their operations outside of China while maintaining their presence in that country.

"We are actively promoting

the diversification of the production bases of the Taiwanese companies and we would like them to move their production bases to other countries with a like-minded value system," Shien-quey said.

Tsun-tzu Hsu said the Indian economy is significantly large and the view is that it can provide some opportunity for Taiwan to change its trade dynamics with China.

"It is not only about trade. It is more about strategic collaboration. Our companies were considering moving to India even before the beginning of the US-China trade war because the Indian economy is so large that it can provide some opportunity to Taiwan to change the dynamics with China and reduce its dependence on China," she said.

Tsun-tzu Hsu said the

Taiwanese government has been trying to negotiate a trade deal with India to expand the trade basket.

Taiwan-based Foxconn, which is Apple's largest supplier, has an iPhone manufacturing facility in Tamil Nadu.

The company is now setting up another iPhone production facility in Karnataka that is expected to start production by April next year.

New Delhi and Taipei inked a landmark bilateral investment pact nearly five years back that seeks to protect Taiwanese investment in India.

The bilateral trade between India and Taiwan is on an upswing. The volume of trade increased from USD 2 billion in 2006 to USD 8.9 billion in 2021.

"Since Foxconn is already there (India) and some of the suppliers in the lower part of the supply chain for Foxconn are also in India, I am sure that this will attract more companies to invest in the upstream of the value chain," she said.

China considers Taiwan as its breakthrough province and insists it should be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary. Taiwan, however, sees itself as completely distinct from China.

India does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but both sides have trade and people-to-people relations.

Following the eastern Ladakh border row with China, some experts in India have been pushing for upgrading New Delhi's ties with Taipei, especially in the trade and investment sectors.

Banks' NIM jumps 46 basis points to 3.3%

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Banks' net interest margin (NIM), a key profitability gauge, grew 46 basis points to 3.3 per cent in the January-March quarter, driven by slower deposit rate resetting, an analysis showed.

This has helped lenders register a 29.5 per cent increase in their net interest income during the period, according to an analysis of the banks' balance sheets by Care Ratings.

Net interest income or NII, which is the money that banks earn from lending and paying to depositors, rose to Rs 1.83 lakh crore in Q4FY23 due to healthy loan growth and a higher yield on advances as against the year-ago period, it said.

The NIM saw an on-year improvement of 46 basis points (bps) to 3.3 per cent in the fourth quarter due to the faster repricing of loans, while deposit rates have not yet reflected the increased interest



rates.

The anticipated rise in deposit rates, which is expected to be a lag effect, is likely to be counterbalanced by the withdrawal of the Rs 2,000 banknotes in May this year, it added.

The NIM of private sector lenders stood at 4.03 per cent, which was more than 43 bps, and that of public sector lenders at 2.85 per cent, up 46 bps.

Despite rising interest rates on loans, the overall economic growth led to higher credit

income rose 32.1 per cent overall led by private sector lenders which reported a 32.6 per cent growth. Their state-owned peers registered a 31.7 per cent growth in the interest income during the quarter. This was based on an increase in advances by 17.3 per cent and 130 bps higher yields from 7.5 per cent in Q4FY22 to 8.8 per cent in Q4FY23.

Interest expenses rose by 34.3 per cent with private banks witnessing a 37.5 per cent growth and the state-owned lenders registering a much lower 32.6 per cent hike. It rose due to higher deposit rates triggered by RBI's monetary policy tightening which also led to an increase in the cost of funds by 77 bps.

According to the report, private banks' deposits rose by 15.5 per cent to Rs 62.2 lakh crore while public sector banks registered a slower growth of 9.3 per cent at Rs 117.1 lakh crore, taking the system-wide growth to Rs 179.3 lakh crore,

up 11.3 per cent.

On a cumulative basis since May 2022, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has increased the repo rate by 250 bps to 6.5 per cent in FY23, which was accompanied by an increase in interest rates in the debt market.

Accordingly, banks have realigned their interest rates which were usually reset within one-year window, and that has been reflected in lending rates. However, it has not fully reflected in deposit rates since these are usually not reset before maturity.

On the impact of the withdrawal of the Rs 2,000 notes worth Rs.3.62 lakh crore since May 19, the report said these additions are expected to represent around 0.5-1 per cent of overall deposits in the banking sector.

According to RBI, of the total Rs 2.55 lakh crore that has come back to the system as on June 20, as much as 85 per cent are deposits.

Declining exports: Commerce Ministry to meet exporters today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has called a meeting of exporters on Monday to take stock of the situation, as the country's outbound shipments have been contracting for the last four months, an official said.

Exporters are expected to flag issues like extending greater support to participate in global exhibitions and fairs; expediting negotiations to conclude free trade agreements with the UK, Canada, Israel and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council); and allowing industry double weighted deduction on salary to professionals to retain talent in India.

Exports declined for the fourth-consecutive month by 10.3 per cent year-on-year to USD 34.98 billion in May, while the trade deficit widened to a five-month high of USD 22.12 billion, according to the ministry data.

Cumulatively, exports during April-May this fiscal contracted by 11.41 per cent to USD 69.72 billion, while imports declined 10.24 per cent to USD 107 billion.

Demand slowdown in major markets, high inflation in developed economies and the Russia-Ukraine war are impacting the country's exports.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPCC) Chairman Naren Goenka said greater support measures from the government, such as attending global exhibitions, would help in pushing exports.

FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai said that the RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products) scheme benefits from Advance Authorisation, special economic zones and export-oriented units would also help in boosting exports.

When asked about ways to promote the shipments, Sanjay Budhia, Chairman - CII National Committee on EXIM and MD - PATTON Group, said that given the global recessionary trends, a strategic approach is required



to stimulate exports.

"Resolving the specific issues faced by exporters, particularly those related to non-tariff barriers impacting supplies to crucial markets, should be the primary focus," Budhia said, adding "geopolitical strains, the rapid adoption of e-commerce and the Covid-19 pandemic have led to a rethinking of strategies for sourcing, diversification of supply routes and manufacturing."

He added that promoting technology upgradation and innovation in manufacturing processes will also help improve the quality and competitiveness of Indian products, leading to higher exports.

Budhia also said that the focus should be on skill development initiatives to enhance the capabilities of the workforce, particularly in sectors with export potential.

"Support should be provided for modernising the manufacturing processes, skill development, promoting sustainable practices and encouraging research and development to enhance the competitiveness of sectors like pharmaceuticals, chemicals, textiles and auto and auto components," he added.

Attention should also be given to the promotion of quality standards and streamlining of regulatory processes, he said, adding that this can also help India enhance its exports in the agriculture and food processing sectors.

India is already an agricultural powerhouse with a diverse range of food products, and its exports should

also reflect this.

India should also set up a Trade Promotion Body with dedicated offices overseas for branding and promotion activities as well as providing marketing services to Indian exporters, he suggested.

This body, he said, would further help in the areas of trade facilitation, capacity building and awareness generation, and would assist to achieve the desired targets of USD 2 trillion by 2030 and make India a global economic powerhouse.

Further, he suggested that facilitation centres for free trade agreements, as they would become one-stop points of information on all FTAs by India and aim to reach out to exporters for developing markets in FTA-partner countries.

"These centres will facilitate a better understanding of the provisions of the FTA in goods, services and investments, and could help the Indian industry to better utilise the existing FTAs and reap the benefits from preferential liberalisation through capacity building programmes as well," Budhia said.

Investments in expanding cold chain networks can open up export opportunities for sectors like agriculture, horticulture and pharmaceuticals, he said.

Representatives from export bodies, including the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), Apparel Export Promotion Council and Council for Leather Exports are likely to participate in the meeting, the official said.

Hind Copper hopeful of getting final Govt nod to reopen closed Rakha mine

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Central PSU Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) is hopeful of commencing mining at its closed Rakha mine in Jharkhand, which will entail an investment of over Rs 2,000 crore, after getting final clearance from the state government, a top company official said.

The Rakha mine has been closed since 2001, and the Jharkhand government has recently given in-principle consent to renew the lease.

However, the final approval is still awaited, and discussions are on in this regard. "The Rakha-Chapri mine development and other allied investment in mine infrastructure will cross more than Rs 2,000 crore over the next few years and will go a long way in copper production for the country," HCL chairman and managing director AK Shukla said.



"We will engage a mine developer and operator (MDO) for the project," Shukla said.

The MDO tender is expected to be floated in July 2023.

"We expect some flexibility from the government, as we are a PSU," another official said. Another mine, Surda, also in Jharkhand, has issues with the execution of the lease deed and is currently under process. At a time when ore quality is gradually dwindling in the world, Jharkhand's mines are in focus for the copper major. These mines also have traces of gold and silver. The delay in the process of approval has led to a stagnation of output in the

Jharkhand region.

Malankhand in Madhya Pradesh is the current major block through which HCL is aiming at a 10 per cent rise in ore output in the current fiscal.

In 2022-23, it produced 3.35 million tonnes of ore. The company raised close to Rs 500 crore through a qualified institutional placement (QIP) in 2021 towards partial funding of Phase I expansion to ramp up capacity to 12.2 million tonnes per annum.

The company has also got board approval to raise another Rs 1,000 crore through QIP and non-convertible debentures but it will be raised as and when required.

Hindustan Copper was aiming at a capex of Rs 400-450 crore in the current fiscal, up from Rs 385 crore in 2022-23. The capex will be principally utilised in mine expansion, mine development and exploration, officials said.

Mundra Port anchors 400-metre MV MSC Hamburg vessel



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said its Mundra Port in Gujarat has anchored or berthed one of the longest container ships in the world.

MV MSC Hamburg is 399 metres long and 54 metres wide vessel. The vessel dimension equals 4 football fields, APSEZ said in a statement.

"Mundra anchors one of the longest vessel. MV MSC Hamburg vessel dimension

equals 4 football fields," it said.

The MV MSC Hamburg, a container ship built in 2015, anchored at the Mundra Port on July 2, 2023. Its carrying capacity is 15,908 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit), APSEZ said. Mundra Port has resumed all its services after the temporary suspension of operations ordered by the government due to cyclone Biparjoy.

The flagship port of APSEZ is the largest integrated transport utility in India and a part of the diversified Adani Group.

Share of housing loans in total advances rises to 14.2% in 11 years: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The share of residential housing loans in total advances has increased over the last eleven years to 14.2 per cent in March 2023 from 8.6 per cent in March 2012, as per the Reserve Bank's latest Financial Stability Report (FSR).

It also said the housing sector is witnessing a healthy growth with sales growing by 21.6 per cent in the fourth quarter (January-March) of 2022-23. In addition to rising sales, new launches also maintained healthy growth, reflecting strength in demand by end-users.

The share of residential housing loans in total loans has increased over the last eleven years to 14.2 per cent in March 2023 from 8.6 per cent in March 2012, the report said.

During this period, the share of commercial real estate (CRE) in total loans has hovered between 2.0-2.9 per cent. "Total exposure of the banking system to real estate stood at 16.5 per cent of total loans in March 2023. Given the secured nature of these loans and loan to value (LTV) ratio regulations, loan defaults remain less than 2 per cent," it said.

Pradeep Aggarwal, Founder and Chairman, Signature Global (India), said historically, Indians have shown a preference for avoiding loans, and if they do take one, their inclination is to repay it as quickly as possible.

"This approach is particularly evident when it comes to home loans, as buyers seek to clear their debts promptly. Home ownership is viewed as a source of pride and accomplishment, and individuals are motivated to avoid loan defaults and the potential loss of their homes. As a result, the non-performing asset (NPA) rate in the home loan segment remains low," he said.

Additionally, the regulations and guidelines set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)



pertaining to home loans play a crucial role in maintaining this low NPA rate," Aggarwal added.

Executive chairman of Andromeda Sales V Swaminathan said the residential housing segment has experienced notable growth in demand, thanks to factors such as the implementation of RERA (Real Estate Regulation and Development Act), and the impact of the pandemic. Consequently, the share of home loans in the overall retail loan portfolio has increased.

"Home loans are secured loans, often involving the borrower's equity as down payment. Due to the potential risk of losing their equity in case of default, borrowers generally prioritize early repayment of their home loans. As a result, the non-performing asset (NPA) rate in the home loan segment remains low," he added.

According to an RBI data, housing (including priority sector housing) loan outstanding in March 2023 was Rs 19,36,428 crore, up 15 per cent year-on-year. The FSR further said the all-India house price index (HPI) recorded its highest increase over the last seventeen quarters (4.6 per cent y-o-y) in the fourth quarter of 2022-23.

On a sequential (q-o-q) basis, HPI has been rising over the last one year and inched up further by 0.6 per cent during January-March.

It also said that during the fourth quarter of 2022-23, house sales grew by 21.6 per cent and new launches also maintained healthy growth, reflecting strength in demand by end-users as well as investors.

Market valuation of top 10 most valued firms jumps ₹1.88L cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of the top 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 1.88 lakh crore last week, with HDFC Bank and Tata Consultancy Services emerging as the biggest gainers, amid bullish investor sentiments.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,739.19 points or 2.76 per cent.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 803.14 points or 1.26 per cent to settle at its lifetime closing high of 64,718.56 on Friday. During the day, it zoomed 853.16 points or 1.33 per cent to reach its record intra-day peak of 64,768.58.

Propelled by optimism in equities, the combined market valuation of the top 10 most valued firms increased by Rs 1,88,050.82 crore.

The valuation of HDFC Bank surged Rs 32,600.19 crore to Rs 9,51,584.36 crore, the most among the top 10 firms.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) added Rs 30,388.43 crore, taking its market valuation to Rs 12,07,669.91 crore.

The valuation of Infosys jumped Rs 28,862.38 crore to Rs 5,54,091.27 crore, and that



of Reliance Industries zoomed Rs 23,984.28 crore to Rs 17,25,704.60 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC climbed Rs 19,050.56 crore to Rs 5,22,368.64 crore, and that of the State Bank of India advanced by Rs 16,153.55 crore to Rs 5,11,201.77 crore.

The mcap of Bharti Airtel rallied Rs 12,353.29 crore to Rs 4,90,063.76 crore, and that of ITC went up by Rs 8,699.61 crore to Rs 5,61,311.42 crore. Hindustan Unilever's valuation soared Rs 8,517.26 crore to Rs 6,29,314.52 crore, and that of ICICI Bank gained Rs 7,441.27 crore to Rs 6,53,704.04 crore.

In the ranking of the top 10 firms, Reliance Industries remained the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Infosys, HDFC, State Bank of India and Bharti Airtel.

Over 12k fake entities in GST; CBIC plans biometric authentication, tighter return filing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

CBIC is working on biometric authentication of risky entities under GST as it looks to crack down on fraudsters who are misusing the PAN and Aadhaar of other people to obtain GST registration, CBIC chief Vivek Johri said.

Johri further said that the tax authorities are also discussing some more tightening in the GST return filing system to limit the scope of claiming Input Tax Credit (ITC), when taxes have not been paid by suppliers in the supply chain.

The biometric authentication of authorised representatives or directors or partners of a company will be made for new registration applications and existing businesses registered under Goods and Services Tax (GST) if tax officers have a suspicion that the entities are being set up only to fraudulently claim ITC.

Also, geo-tagging of all entities is being planned by the officers of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) to authenticate that the address provided during GST registration is the place from where the entity operates, Johri told reporters.

A pilot on biometric authentication and geo-tagging is already underway in a couple of states, and depending on the results and evaluation of



digital infrastructure requirements, the project will be launched pan India.

"We are trying to see how we can tighten the system further. We have been using OTP-based authentication earlier. Now, we are going to go in for biometric authentication also. Which would mean that in suspicious cases, persons will be asked to go to an Aadhaar centre to have their biometrics verified," Johri said.

The CBIC chief further said that during the ongoing drive against fake registration, GST officers have identified around 12,500 bogus entities, which were used to claim fake ITC and defraud the exchequer.

Johri said there are certain locations where fake entities are rampant, like Delhi, Haryana, and Rajasthan. Certain parts of Gujarat, Noida, Kolkata, Assam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra also have fake businesses with GST registration.

Sectors, in which fake entities are, include metal or plastic scrap and waste paper.

"We are also finding that it is being generated for services. So, manpower services and advertising services have instances of fake billing," Johri added.

With regard to controlling fake ITC claims, Johri said the tax authorities have tightened the system but there is still some latitude for taxpayers to edit how much ITC they will be able to claim in GSTR-2A.

That is there because concerns were raised by trade the supplier doesn't upload invoices on time, and there are some invoices for which they have already made the payment, but they are not able to take credit because they are not uploaded, he added.

"We have allowed some editing facilities. We will see how we can tighten that so that the scope for passing certain ITC is reduced," Johri added.

Diesel sales fell in June as monsoon set in

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Diesel sales dropped in June as the arrival of monsoon cut demand in the agri sector and reduced vehicular movement, preliminary industry data showed.

Demand for diesel, the most consumed fuel in the country - accounting for about two-fifths of the total demand, fell 3.7 per cent to 7.1 million tonnes in June compared to the year-ago period.

Diesel had soared 6.7 per cent in April and May, respectively, as agriculture demand picked up and cars yanked up air-conditioning to beat summer heat.

Month-on-month sales were almost flat compared to 7.09 million tonnes of diesel consumed in May.

Petrol sales, however, rose 3.4 per cent to 2.9 million tonnes in June 2023 compared to the year-ago period. Sales were unchanged month-on-month, the data showed.

Petrol and diesel sales have been on the rise since the second half of March on the back of a pick-up in industrial and agriculture activity. But the arrival of monsoon has cooled temperatures and reduced demand for running diesel gensets to irrigate fields and cut down consumption in tractors and trucks in the first half of June.

TN CM's intervention sought on strike called by construction materials manufacturers

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu chapter of industry body CREDAI on Sunday requested for Chief Minister M K Stalin's intervention following the strike called by the construction materials manufacturers operating in the state.

A section of workers under the Tamil Nadu Stone Quarry, Crusher and Lorry Owners Association engaged in manufacturing crusher dust, m-sand, p-sand have gone on strike



since June 26 pressing for various demands including relaxation of rules on mining minerals essentially used for roads and construction of buildings.

Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) Tamil Nadu president R Illankovan said the construction industry was facing a tough time due to the non-supply of construction materials following the protest.

"Due to the non-availability of the materials, we are forced to stop all our con-

struction activities. Construction labourers have been rendered jobless," he said in a press release.

Illankovan cautioned that the shortage of construction materials would further delay in completion of ongoing real estate projects and would have a cascading effect in the form of additional interest for the contractors, promoters, and also to the home buyers.

CREDAI Coimbatore president Gagan Elango said the strike has brought the con-

struction industry to a 'grinding halt'.

"Several lakh laborers in the construction sector will be thrown out of jobs resulting in chaos. The common man is unnecessarily being burdened with the resultant rise in costs," Elango said.

At a time when the construction sector was returning to normalcy (after the COVID-19 pandemic), this has become a big setback, CREDAI Coimbatore secretary Aravind Kumar said.

'HUNGRY' DJOKOVIC FIRED UP FOR MORE GRAND SLAM GLORY

AFP ■ LONDON
Novak Djokovic says he is still "hungry" for Grand Slam glory as Wimbledon rivals queue up to hail him as the "greatest" and his achievements as "phenomenal". Having wrapped up a men's record 23rd Grand Slam title at the French Open, Djokovic now targets an eighth Wimbledon title to equal Roger Federer's mark. The 36-year-old Serb has won the title at the All England Club on the last four occasions. A fifth successive victory in two weeks' time will take him level with Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Slams. He is also bidding to become just the fourth player in history to win eight or more Wimbledon titles after Martina Navratilova (nine), Federer and Helen Wills Moody (eight). "I still feel hungry for success, for more Grand Slams, more achievements in tennis," said Djokovic. "As long as there's that drive, I know that I'm able to compete at the highest level. He added: "A few days after Roland Garros, I was already thinking about preparation for grass and what needs to be done." Worryingly for his rivals, Djokovic, one of the most polarising figures in sport, shows no sign of slowing down. Eleven of his 23 majors have come since he turned 30. Victory in what would be his 35th Grand Slam final on July 16 would crown him as the tournament's oldest champion in the Open era. "A lot of people are coming up to me and congratulating me, reminding me of the his-



toric success," said Djokovic. **'Phenomenal'** "It's very flattering, but at the same time my mind was already directed towards Wimbledon, what's the next Slam, what's the next task." Djokovic's career-long rival Murray said winning 23 majors was "phenomenal". Murray, a former world number one, was the last man to defeat Djokovic on Centre Court when he won the first of his two Wimbledon titles in 2013. "What he's gone on to achieve in the latter stages of his career, it's been incredible. Also doesn't look like he's slowing down," said Murray who practiced with Djokovic at the tournament on Saturday. "What he did at the French Open, it was phenomenal." At the end of 2010, Djokovic's Grand Slam tally consisted solely of the 2008

Australian Open title. By comparison, Federer had already won 16 of his 20 career majors while Nadal had racked up nine of his 22. Nine more of Nadal's Slam trophies came in Paris. Djokovic's third win at Roland Garros last month made him the first man to win all four majors on at least three occasions. "I don't know how it is possible? He doesn't have bad days?" asked world number three Daniil Medvedev. "Actually, he does, like everybody but even on these bad days, he manages to beat the opponent. I don't know how he's doing it. "That's why he's for me the greatest in the history of tennis." Should Djokovic successfully defend his Wimbledon title, he will just need to pocket the US Open in September to become the first man since 1969 to claim a calendar Grand Slam. Djokovic had the same opportunity in 2021 but lost the final in New York -- to Medvedev. "To be able to beat him when he was going for a Grand Slam, maybe he was a little bit tighter than usual, but I played an amazing match," recalled Medvedev. On Monday, Djokovic will open proceedings on Centre Court against Argentina's Pedro Cachin. The 53rd-ranked Argentine is making his main draw bow at the tournament while for Djokovic it is familiar territory. "When I enter the Centre Court, I guess it just awakens something in me and I'm able to perform at a very high level," said Djokovic.



Djokovic does nothing wrong, says Alcaraz

AFP ■ LONDON
ly tough to find some weakness in his game." US Open champion Alcaraz made the last 16 at Wimbledon in 2022 in only his second appearance at the tournament. However, he warmed up for the third Grand Slam event of the season by lifting the Queen's grass-court trophy last weekend. It was his fifth title of 2023 and allowed him to knock Djokovic off the top of the rankings. "I started Queen's with no expectation to win and I won it," he said. "I feel great playing such a great level. The confidence grew up a lot. But obviously for me the main favourite here is Djokovic. That's obvious." Alcaraz starts his Wimbledon campaign on Tuesday against French veteran Jeremy Chardy who will retire after the tournament. Carlos Alcaraz on Sunday summed up the unique challenge of facing Novak Djokovic by insisting his rival "doesn't do anything wrong". World number one Alcaraz is seen as the only player possible of preventing Djokovic from claiming an eighth Wimbledon title and 24th Grand Slam. However, at the French Open, he was swept aside by Djokovic in the semi-finals, admitting the cramping he suffered in that Roland Garros duel was caused by the "stress and tension" of seeing the Serb on the other side of the net. "He does things really, really easy. He moves really well. He hits the ball well, really clearly," said 20-year-old Alcaraz. "He has clean shot. It's a mix of everything. I would say he doesn't do anything wrong. It's real-

Absence brutal but didn't miss tennis: Kyrgios

AFP ■ LONDON
Australian whirlwind Nick Kyrgios will blow back into Wimbledon where he made a storming run to the final in 2022, admitting his injury-enforced absence from tennis has been "brutal". The 28-year-old firebrand has only played one match in 2023 -- in Stuttgart last month -- after undergoing knee surgery. It was the worst possible preparation for a return to the All England Club 12 months after losing the final to Novak Djokovic. "It's been brutal, it's been hard," Kyrgios said Sunday.



However, he added: "I didn't miss the sport. I was almost dreading coming back a little bit, but it's my job." At Wimbledon in 2022, the Australian dominated most of the headlines. His high-octane, flamboyant shot-

making was accompanied by signature clashes with rivals and officialdom. He was fined \$10,000 for spitting and \$4,000 for shouting obscenities -- one of which sent the British tabloids into meltdown as it was within earshot of eight-year-old Prince George. Kyrgios also fought out an explosive third round clash with Stefanos Tsitsipas with the Greek even describing him as "evil" and a "bully". In the final against Djokovic, he demanded a woman be ejected from the crowd for consuming "700 drinks, bro". "In a way it was good to be home. Obviously heartbreaking as well," said Kyrgios as he reflected on his time out of the sport.



Ex-Arsenal, Barcelona star Cesc Fabregas hangs up his boots

AFP ■ MADRID
Former Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea midfielder Cesc Fabregas announced his retirement from football at the age of 36 on Saturday, revealing his plans to immediately go into coaching. Fabregas won the 2010 World Cup and two European Championships with Spain, two Premier League titles with Chelsea and La Liga with Barcelona. "It is with great sadness that the time has come for me to hang up my playing boots," Fabregas wrote on social media. "It has been a journey that I'll never forget," he added. "From my first days at Barca, Arsenal, Barca again, Chelsea, Monaco and Como, I will treasure them all. "I lived experiences that I never thought in a million years I would even come close to." Fabregas set up Andres

Szoboszlai joins Liverpool in 70-million-euro deal

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL
Liverpool confirmed the signing of Dominik Szoboszlai from RB Leipzig on Sunday after paying the Hungarian's 70-million-euro (£60 million, \$76 million) release clause. The 22-year-old will further bolster the Reds' midfield options after the arrival of Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister last month. "The last three or four days went really long; it was not that easy. But at the end I'm here, I'm happy and I can't wait to get started," Szoboszlai told Liverpool's website. "A really historic club, really good players, good coach, everything is good. For me it was perfect to make the next step in a club like this. The fans, the stadium, everything is really good." Liverpool were in the market to refresh their midfield after a fifth-place finish in the Premier League last season saw them miss out on Champions League qualification for the first time in seven years.



Midfielders James Milner, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and Naby Keita all left the club when their contracts expired at the end of last season. Szoboszlai will inherit the number eight jersey vacated by Keita to follow in the footsteps of one of his childhood heroes Steven Gerrard. "I have a tattoo from Steven Gerrard," he added. "When I was a child, to be honest I didn't watch that much football, but when it was Champions League, I watched and he was one of the biggest."

Szoboszlai scored 20 goals and provided 22 assists in 91 games for Leipzig since joining in January 2021 as he helped them to win the German Cup and finish in the top four of the Bundesliga for the past two seasons. "It has been an intense and above all successful few years at RB Leipzig," Szoboszlai said in a statement released by Leipzig. "I have met lots of people on and off the pitch who have really helped me in my development. I matured in Leipzig and have been able to learn a lot, so I have a lot to thank the club for." Szoboszlai is the second Leipzig star to make a big money move to the Premier League in recent weeks following Christopher Nkunku's arrival at Chelsea. And there could be an even bigger deal to come with Manchester City reportedly keen on a deal for Leipzig centre-back Josko Gvardiol that could make the Croatian the world's most expensive defender.

Ledecky wins US 1,500m free title

AFP ■ LOS ANGELES
Katie Ledecky closed out the KUS swimming championships on a high note Saturday, winning the 1,500m freestyle in an impressive 15min 29.64sec to book a fourth individual event at the World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan. Ledecky, who set the world record of 15:20.48 in the same Indianapolis Natatorium pool in 2018, posted the sixth-fastest time ever and now owns the top 15. After checking the scoreboard, the seven-time Olympic gold medalist pounded the water in delight, having cleared the taste of a dissatisfying time in her 400m free win on Friday. "It's amazing what a morning off can do," Ledecky beamed. I just wanted to finish on a good note. "I really don't like ending a meet with a bad swim so I just really wanted to have a



great swim tonight. "I think that's the first time I've been under 15:30 since the pandemic, so I'm really happy with that," she added. Katie Grimes, winner of the 400m individual medley, booked another World Championships event with a distant runner-up finish in 15:58.34. Ledecky, who also owns 19 world titles, bookended her meet with two strong perfor-

mances in her longest events, starting with the 800m free on Tuesday. In between she settled for second in the 200m free behind teenager Claire Weinstein and won the 400m free in a, for her, pedestrian 4:00.45 -- leaving her work to do to challenge world record-holder Summer McIntosh of Canada and Australian Olympic gold medalist Ariarne Titmus in Fukuoka next month. The 26-year-old, now training in Florida with coach Anthony Nesty, appears up for that challenge and more. "There's a lot more to come," she said. Kate Douglass claimed her second title of the meet with an impressive 200m individual medley win in 2:07.09 -- second-fastest in the world this year behind McIntosh's 2:06.89. Carson Foster, silver medalist at last year's World Championships in Budapest, won the men's 200m medley in 1:56.19. Shaane Casas, who the eighth and last qualifier for the final, grabbed second in 1:57.47 to earn a World Championships berth. Bobby Finke, winner of 1,500m and 800m freestyle gold at the Tokyo Olympics, completed a distance free double with a win in the 800m in 7:40.34. Dant Ross was second in 7:48.10.

Bhambri thrilled with maiden ATP doubles title

IAN S ■ SPAIN
India's Yuki Bhambri bagged his first ATP Tour title after clinching a win in the men's doubles final of Mallorca Championships 2023 in Spain on Saturday. Bhambri and Lloyd Harris continued the perfect start to their partnership by winning the Mallorca Championships doubles title as they defeated the Indian-South African duo Robin Haase and Philipp Oswald 6-3, 6-4 in the ATP 250 final, completing their run without losing a set. The trophy represents both men's first singles and doubles ATP Tour victory. Only Harris had ever advanced to a tour-level final, once in doubles and twice in singles. "Definitely a lot of fun. We went in with no expectations I think this week. We just enjoyed playing, took it match by match and had a great tournament. It's a great city, a great place and I really enjoyed playing here," 30-year-old Bhambri was quoted as saying by ATP.com. "We had so much fun out there. We really enjoyed it. I didn't even know I was going to play this week. For me, it's just all a bonus. Super stoked with the title," added Harris, who became the first South African to win an ATP Tour title since Raven Klaasen last year in Seoul. Leclerc's second place earned Ferrari their 800th podium finish as team-mate Carlos Sainz finished fourth ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, two-time champion Fernando Alonso and the Mercedes of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell. Pierre Gasly was ninth for Alpine and Lance Stroll 10th in the second Aston Martin. The race was preceded by a minute's silence in memory of Dutch racer Dilano van't Hoff, 18, who was killed racing in heavy rain at Spa-Francorchamps on Saturday.



AFP ■ SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD (AUSTRIA)

Verstappen wins Austrian Grand Prix

Defending champion Max Verstappen continued his relentless charge towards a third world title on Sunday when he claimed a record fourth Austrian Grand Prix victory in emphatic style on Sunday. The 25-year-old Dutchman finished 5.155 seconds clear of a revived Charles Leclerc of Ferrari, in second, with Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez, showing revitalised form, taking a battling third after starting 15th on the grid. In a race of attrition, punctuated by Safety Cars

and influenced by a high number of drivers' receiving penalties for exceeding track limits, Verstappen's unbroken run of laps led ended on 249, when he pitted. But it was only a pause in his serene progress to a fifth consecutive victory, seventh in nine races this year and 42nd of his career, extending his lead ahead of Perez in the title race to 81 points. It followed the Dutchman's success in Saturday's sprint and with the fastest lap gave him a maximum points haul from the weekend. "That is the full sweep, class Max, very very classy," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner over the team radio. "The car was on fire!" replied Verstappen after his 42nd career win. Despite a third title being his to lose Verstappen said he preferred to take it one race at a time. "I don't like to think about that yet," he said.



"I am just enjoying driving this car and racing for this team. The sprint weekend can be very stressful so I'm just glad it all went to plan." His win total lifted him to fifth in the all-time list of winners and clear of Ayrton Senna, with whom he had shared 41 victories since winning in Canada. Including a triumph in the 2022 Styrian Grand Prix, run during the Covid pandemic, this was Verstappen's fifth win

at the Red Bull Ring circuit overall. Leclerc and Perez were also pleased with their performances. "We have maximised what we have," he said. "It was just yesterday that I was off it a bit. The upgrades have worked as expected, but there is still a lot of work to do." Perez said: "It's been a rough patch for me so I hope we are back now and we can keep some consistency."

LORD OF THE RINGS

Australia Beat England By 43 Runs In Lord's Test To Go 2-0 Up In Ashes 2023

AFP ■ LONDON

Australia took a stranglehold on the Ashes series after beating England by 43 runs in a fiery and controversial second Test in Lord's on Sunday to take a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

England captain Ben Stokes hit a stunning 155 after Jonny Bairstow was controversially given out stumped after straying out of his ground on the last day.

But England were bowled out for 327 chasing a stiff target of 371.

Australia captain Pat Cummins led the attack with 3-69.

However it was Bairstow's dismissal shortly before lunch on the last day that lit the blue-tongued paper on this match and incited the fury of the usually sedate Lord's crowd.

Bairstow, the last of England's specialist batsmen, fell in bizarre fashion for 10 when he wandered out of his ground after ducking a Cameron Green bouncer and quick-thinking wicketkeeper Alex Carey under-armed the ball onto the stumps.

Bairstow thought he had secured his ground by tapping his bat behind the crease.

Cummins could have withdrawn the appeal but the decision was referred to third umpire Marais Erasmus, who ruled Bairstow had been stumped, with England now 193-6.



AFP ■ LONDON

Jonny Bairstow's controversial dismissal in the second Ashes Test sent the Lord's crowd into an unprecedented rage as Australia players were abused by spectators in the famous Pavilion Long Room.

Bairstow was given out when Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey threw the ball at the stumps after the England batsman walked out of his crease after ducking under a Cameron Green bouncer.

There was confusion in the middle, Bairstow seem-

Bairstow's controversial dismissal sends Lord's into revolt

ingly believing the ball was dead at the end of the over but Australia were happy to proceed with a deeply divisive appeal.

The umpires sent the decision upstairs for review by TV umpire Marais Erasmus, who had no option but to confirm Bairstow's stumping dismissal.

Bairstow was livid and the usually sedate Lord's crowd responded by chanting 'Same



old Aussies always cheating" while booing rang around the famous old arena for several minutes.

England's Stuart Broad, the batsman who came in after Bairstow's exit, immediately let his frustrations show as the stump microphone caught him telling Carey: "That's all you'll ever be remembered for that."

Broad also shouted at Australia captain Pat

Spectators at the 'Home of Cricket' reacted in fury with a chant of "Same old Aussies, always cheating" -- a taunt they repeated for the rest of the day's play.

England were ultimately left to rue not making the most of winning the toss in overcast conditions as Australia made a first-innings 416 built on batting star Steve Smith's 110.

England were well-placed at 188-1 in reply only for several batsmen, including Ben Duckett on 98, to throw their wickets away while succumbing to a blatant hooking trap.

The only occasion when a team have won a Test series from 2-0 down came when the Australia team of 1936/37, inspired by batting great Don Bradman, recovered to win an Ashes 3-2.

Cummins, ranting: "That's the worst thing I've ever seen in cricket".

The England pace bowler kept up his barrage as he exchanged angry words with Australian fielders and mockingly tapped his bat in his crease after each delivery to ensure he didn't depart the same way as Bairstow.

A bitter row about the 'spirit of cricket' was underway, with furious fans chanting "cheats" and England's players clearly angry Australia did not withdraw their appeal on grounds of fair play.

Won't Pick Anderson For third Test: Michael Vaughan

IAN S ■ LONDON

Former England captain Michael Vaughan feels that James Anderson has not looked in any kind of rhythm and lacked the required zip in his bowling in the ongoing Ashes series, saying that he would leave out veteran pacer for the third Test at Headingley in Leeds, which starts on July 6. The seasoned English pacer picked up only one wicket in the opening Test at Edgbaston. In the ongoing Test at Lord's, he has claimed one scalp in each innings. The 40-year-old, who is known for his exceptional fielding, surprisingly let go of two catches.

"There are three Tests to go after this and he certainly can't play everyone. I'll be leaving him out next week. He's just had no impact, he's an incredible performer but you see him drop catches in the field. I've not seen that from Jimmy Anderson, he's so sharp in the field. His bowling has just lacked that zip and if England are going to turn to the short ball theory, surely they are going to have to go to a Mark Wood with a little bit of extra pace," Vaughan told Cricbuzz.

The 48-year-old further said the legendary player could still contribute to England's efforts but currently requires a breather after bowling in the two Tests on the trot.

"Not saying Jimmy is done. Miss next week, potentially play at Old Trafford, his home ground, in the 4th Test. Just give him a week off. He's 41 years of age; he probably needs a little breather after bowling two Tests on the trot on absolute placid surfaces," Vaughan said. "He's coming to the end. He'll hope he can have one more say and hope his team can win and go 1-1. But even if they do that, I've seen enough this week that he just needs a breather, potentially give him a rest and then play him at Old Trafford," he added.



Aus takes command of Women's Ashes

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

An unbeaten 61 off 47 balls by opener Beth Mooney helped Australia beat England by four wickets with one ball to spare in the first T20I of the Women's Ashes at Edgbaston.

Australia's thrilling victory also means they are now at six points as compared to England, who are yet to get off the mark in the ongoing multi-format Ashes series and need just one more win in the remaining two T20Is and three ODIs to retain the trophy. Beth was calmly spearheading the chase despite a mini-collapse at the other end, with Australia losing three wickets for ten runs in the space of 11 deliveries at the back-end of the chase.

Annabel Sutherland helped Mooney edge Australia closer through the 19th and 20th over by hitting two boundaries, before Georgia Wareham finished the job, nudging a single off the very first ball she faced against Sophie Ecclestone to chase down the target of 154.

Australia were effective with the ball at the start of the match, with Jess Jonassen (3-25) and Megan Schutt (2-33)

stifling England's aggressive batting line-up. It needed Sophia Dunkley's 56 (49) and Amy Jones' 40 not out from 21 balls as well as Heather Knight's 29 (22) to ensure the hosts posted a competitive score.

After Sophia and Heather shared a 55-run stand for the fourth wicket, Amy hit 29 of England's 31 runs in the final two overs of their innings for the hosts' to go past 150, as Danni Wyatt, Alice Capsey and Nat Sciver-Brunt fell cheaply.

In the chase, Australia lost skipper Alyssa Healy (5) early, though Mooney and Tahlia McGrath (40 off 29 balls) pushed them forward. Though Tahlia fell to the left-arm spin of Ecclestone (2-24), Ashleigh Gardner (31 off 23 balls) ensured the momentum didn't suffer a dip.

Leg-spinner Sarah Glenn (2-33 off four overs) gave England hope through her tight bowling to dismiss Ashleigh and Grace Harris in quick succession. But it was Beth's maturity with the lower order, especially Annabel and Georgia, that ensured victory for Australia.

Deshpande replaces injured Sakariya in West Zone squad

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai seam bowler Tushar Deshpande was on Sunday added to the West Zone squad for Duleep Trophy in place of injured left-arm pacer Chetan Sakariya.

Saurashtra pacer Sakariya has been ruled out of the tournament due to an elbow injury in his bowling arm.

"He will need two to three weeks to recover," a BCCI source told PTI.

Central Zone are coming off a huge 170-run win over the East Zone in the quarter-final played at Alur from June 28 to July 1.

The 28-year-old right-arm pacer Deshpande had a breakthrough season for the IPL 2023 winners Chennai Super Kings recently, taking 21 wickets in 16 matches to finish as the highest wicket-taker for the franchise and overall sixth in the list.

PCB Writes To Pak Govt Seeking Clearance To Travel To India

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has written to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the interior and foreign ministry seeking clearance to travel to India for the ODI World Cup later this year.

The ICC announced the schedule of the 13th edition of the ODI World Cup, albeit after an extended delay, on Tuesday, 27 June. According to the schedule, Pakistan are scheduled to play their nine league games across five venues — Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata.

Pakistan face arch-rivals India at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on 15 October.

According to a report on ESPNcricinfo, PCB had dispatched the letter addressed to Sharif shortly after the sched-



ule was announced by the global body.

"Soon after the World Cup schedule was announced last Tuesday, we wrote to our Patron, Honourable Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz

Sharif, through the Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Ministry, copying the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, requesting clearance to participate in the World Cup," the

Pakistan board told ESPNcricinfo.

"The decision to visit India and approve venues at which we can play our matches is the prerogative of the Government of Pakistan. We

have absolute trust in the judgment of our government and will follow whatever is advised," added the board.

Unlike touring other nations, the PCB are required to obtain a clearance from the Pakistan government in order to tour India due to ongoing political tensions between the two nations. It had also been the case when the Pakistan team last travelled to India, for the 2016 T20 World Cup in which they faced the Men in Blue in Kolkata.

The PCB had earlier threatened to boycott the World Cup after India refused to travel to Pakistan for the Asia Cup that takes place right before the quadrennial event.

Pakistan were initially awarded hosting rights for the Asia Cup, which will now be taking place in a 'hybrid' format with four matches taking place in Pakistan and the remaining games — including India's fixtures — being hosted in Sri Lanka.

Karthik Backs Ashwin To Lead India In Asian Games

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik feels that Ravichandran Ashwin should be made captain of India for the Asian Games 2023 if the off-spinner is not part of the ODI setup and BCCI decides to send a 'B' team for the event in Hangzhou, China later this year.

Karthik's comments have come at a time when multiple reports suggested that the BCCI will send both men's and women's teams for the Asian



Games to be held from September 23 to October 8.

However, the mega Asian event is set to collide with the

ODI World Cup as India men's team will also begin its campaign against Australia on October 8 in Chennai. So, the board is likely to send a second-string team to China.

It was also reported that veteran batter Shikhar Dhawan, who is currently not part of the main team setup, is likely to lead the team in the quadrennial extravaganza. But, the 38-year old Karthik has urged the selector to name Ashwin as the captain.

"Ashwin is arguably one of the greatest players to have ever

played in terms of his quality of bowling and the number of wickets he has picked. I genuinely feel that if India are sending a B team, with the main team preparing for the World Cup, they should make him the captain if he is not part of the ODI setup.

I genuinely feel he deserves it and has earned the right of being the captain of the team. I wish they name Ashwin as captain for at least the Asian Games. That will be a feather in his hat," Karthik said at an event.

Territorial mindset needs to change in WI cricket: Holder

PTI ■ HARARE

West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder appealed fellow cricketers to shun "territorial" mindset and come together "as a region" for the good of the sport after the team failed to qualify for the ODI World Cup in India.

The two-time former title winners will not feature in the 50-over World Cup for the first time since the competition's inception in 1975.

The team from the Caribbean was on Saturday eliminated after its seven-wicket loss to Scotland in a Super Six match of the World Cup Qualifier here.

West Indies scored 181 and Scotland chased down the target with more than six overs to spare.

"It's (cricket) not an individual thing or a territorial thing. We've got to come together as a region... And really, really think about how we want to go forward as a group and make it happen," one of the world's top all-rounders said during the post-match press conference here on Saturday.

Holder scored 45 and took a wicket on Saturday.

Cricketer West Indies (CWI), the governing body of the team, consists of six associations, namely Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Leeward



Islands, Trinidad & Tobago and Windward Islands.

The tall 31-year-old cricketer added his team knew the importance of the contest against Scotland and had a real good chance, but couldn't cross the line in the end.

"We knew what was at stake and we still had a chance to qualify. We had a really good opportunity to play Scotland and beat them (but) we didn't do that."

"This is probably one of the lowest points I've had with the team. But, you know, there are still a lot of positives. I was really happy for Nicholas Pooran, the way he played through this entire competition. And, it's good to see some of the younger guys get an opportunity on the big stage," he said.

Holder said no short-term patchwork will help West Indies cricket and changes will have to take places at the grassroots.

SL book WC spot with win over Zimbabwe

PTI ■ BULAWAYO

Opener Pathum Nissanka anchored the chase with a stylish century after spinner Maheesh Theekshana grabbed four wickets as Sri Lanka thrashed hosts Zimbabwe by nine wickets to ensure qualification in the upcoming ICC ODI World Cup in India, starting October 5.

After Chennai Super Kings spinner Theekshana took 4 for 25 to effect a middle-order collapse to bowl out Zimbabwe for 165 in 32.2 overs, right-handed Nissanka scored unbeaten 101 off 102 balls with the help of 14



boundaries as Sri Lanka knocked off the paltry target in 33.1 overs.

Sri Lanka's victory took them to eight points and even if they lose their final Super Six

encounter, the champions of the 1996 edition are assured of a top-two finish.

"See coming for the qualifiers. It's always tough but still, if you go through the process... And we know with the team we got, we are going to qualify for the World Cup. Credit to the other teams; they played really well in the tournament. Some other teams gave us some good fights but still, we are the better side," Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said after the match.

For Zimbabwe, it will be important to beat Scotland on Tuesday and clinch the second spot available. In case the hosts

lose to Scotland, they will have to pray that Scotland lose by a big margin to the Netherlands and they qualify by virtue of a better net run-rate.

Sunday's defeat dented Zimbabwe's net run-rate (+0.030) as it is currently inferior compared to Scotland (+0.188).

Once Sri Lanka opted to field, new ball bowler Dilshan Madushanka (3/15 in 5 overs) in his opening spell rocked the Zimbabwe top-order reducing them to 30 for 3 inside the first powerplay.

In-form Sean Williams (56) and Sikandar Raza (31) howev-

er steadied the ship with a 68-run fourth-wicket stand.

However, it was Theekshana, who then ran through middle and lower-middle-order as wickets tumbled like nine pins. He breached through Williams and Ryan Burl's (16) defence with sharp turners to set up an easy win for Sri Lanka.

The last seven wickets went for 67 runs.

The chase was always a cakewalk as Nissanka attacked at one end while Dimuth Karunaratne (30 off 56 balls) dropped anchor at the other during their 103-run opening stand.