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INDIA BEAT
BANGLADESH
BY 7 WICKETS
12 SPORT

Monsoon rains misery on lives across N India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The monsoon fury has devastated north India, resulting in tragic loss of life and widespread destruction. In the past 24 hours, 15 deaths have been reported across the region as heavy rain continues to lash several States for the second consecutive day.

Landslides, flash floods, and severe waterlogging have affected tens of thousands of people, creating a dire situation. Social media platforms have been flooded with pictures and videos showing commuters wading through inundated roads, stranded vehicles, and flooded underpasses.

The worst-hit States include Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. In UP, at least 6 people have died, and over 10,000 people have been displaced due to the floods. At least five people were killed as torrential rain continued to lash HP on Sunday, causing floods and landslides and leading to the washing away of roads and bridges. In Bihar, 4 people have died, and over 5,000 people have been affected by the rains. In Rajasthan, 3 people have died, and over 2,000 people have been displaced. And in Madhya Pradesh, 2 people have died, and over 1,000 people have been affected.

The IMD has forecast more rain in the coming days, warning of a "red alert" in several districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. The IMD has also advised people to stay away from flooded areas and to follow the instructions of local authorities.

"Himachal Pradesh has decided to close all schools and colleges till Tuesday to ensure



Beas river in spate following heavy monsoon rain, in Mandi on Sunday PTI

CATASTROPHIC FLOODS

- Over a dozen deaths reported in 24 hours, lakhs affected.
- Traffic woes prevalent on waterlogged roads, flooded underpasses.
- Himachal Pradesh, has closed all schools-colleges till Tuesday
- Northern Railways has cancelled 17 trains and diverted 12 others
- IMD has issued red alerts for several States, heavy rain in 1-2 days.
- Uttarakhand on red alert, numerous roads blocked by landslides.
- UP witnesses casualties, a woman and her daughter killed due to a collapsed roof, and a 10-year-old girl died as tree fell on her house.
- Rajasthan sees four deaths due to lightning and drowning
- Ladakh witnessed unseasonal snowfall and heavy rains, prompting closure of the Leh-Kargil-Srinagar National Highway.
- Bodies of two soldiers swept away by flash floods in Poonch.

the safety of students," said a government official, highlighting the severity of the situation. Similar steps are being considered by other states as well, prioritizing the well-being of their residents.

The Northern Railways has taken precautionary measures due to the heavy rainfall. "We have canceled around 17 trains and diverted around 12 others," said an official. Traffic has been suspended at four locations due to extensive waterlogging, causing significant disruptions.

An interaction between a western disturbance and monsoon winds has intensified the rainfall spell over northwest

India, including Delhi. The capital experienced the highest amount of rainfall in a single day in July since 1982.

Concerned about the situation, Home Minister Amit Shah reached out to Delhi LG Vinai Kumar Saxena and J&K LG Manoj Sinha to gather updates on the ground.

Shah commended the efforts of the National Defense Response Force in providing a safe Amarnath Yatra to every pilgrim, stating, "The National Defense Response Force has done an exemplary job in ensuring the safety and well-being of the Amarnath Yatra pilgrims."

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Delhi breaks 41-yr record

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi received a spell of heavy showers in 24 hours between Saturday and Sunday, breaking a 41-year record. The Safdarjung observatory, which is representative of the national Capital, recorded 153 mm of rainfall during this period. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has announced that all the schools in Delhi will remain closed on Monday. Schools in Noida have also been closed.

A boundary wall of a newly built government school in the Srinivaspuri area collapsed. The incident occurred at Garhi Jharia Maria in the East of Kailash area. Two people were rescued after a tin shed collapsed in Zakhira. Several roads, including those in Rohini and East of Kailash in the city, were affected. In the last 24 hours, as many as 15 houses have collapsed following heavy rain in Delhi.

Meanwhile, the backside wall of Deshbandhu College,

located in the Kalkaji area of Delhi, collapsed, damaging approximately 15 luxury cars and 10 to 12 motorcycles and scooters.

Delhi PWD Minister Atishi's residence at Mathura Road also submerged in the waterlogging. According to officials, the PWD received 38 complaints related to waterlogging till the afternoon. The majority of the complaints pertained to Okhla main road, Kamla Nagar, Nilothi, Ranhola, and Kirari.

According to IMD, the Safdarjung Observatory, the city's primary weather station, recorded 153 mm of rainfall in 24 hours ending 8:30 am on Sunday, the highest since the 24-hour rainfall of 169.9 mm on July 25, 1982. It was the third-highest single-day rainfall for July since 1958. The city logged 133.4 mm of rain on July 10, 2003, 126 mm on July 28, 2009, and 125.7 mm on July 8, 1993. The all-time high was 266.2 mm on July 21, 1958.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, Delhi has recorded eight "very heavy" rain events (between 115.6 mm and 204.4 mm) in July since 1969. Any amount exceeding 204.4 mm is classified as "extremely heavy" rainfall.

The weather stations at Ridge, Lodhi Road, and Delhi University recorded 134.5 mm, 123.4 mm, and 118 mm of precipitation, respectively.

The heavy rain submerged parks, underpasses, markets, and even hospital premises, causing chaos on the roads. Pictures and videos of commuters wading through knee-deep water flooded social media platforms, raising concerns about the efficiency of the city's drainage infrastructure. The Delhi government issued a flood warning on Sunday as Haryana released more than one lakh cusecs of water into the Yamuna river from the Hathnikund barrage.

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Commuters wade through a waterlogged road in Delhi on Sunday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva visits the site after a wall of a government school collapsed following rain at Garhi Jharia Maria Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Rain deficit erased: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) data shows the bountiful rain in many parts of India in the first eight days of July have bridged the rainfall deficit for the entire country. The cumulative rainfall in the monsoon season has reached 243.2 mm, which is 2 per cent above the normal of 239.1 mm. The incessant rain over northwest India since Saturday have set all-time records at many places. However, there are large-scale regional variations in rainfall.

While the eastern and northeastern region has recorded a deficiency of 17 per cent (375.3 mm against a normal of 454 mm), north India has witnessed 59 per cent excess rainfall (199.7 mm against a normal of 125.5 per cent), the latest IMD data showed.

Central India, where a

large number of farmers rely on monsoonal rains, has recorded 264.9 mm rainfall against a normal of 255.1 mm, an excess of 4 per cent. The rainfall deficiency in south India has reduced from 45 per cent to 23 per cent.

At the end of June, the cumulative rainfall for the entire country was 148.6 mm, which was 10 per cent below the normal precipitation. However, the rain has significantly improved the situation.

The IMD had earlier predicted normal rainfall in July, ranging from 94 to 106 per cent of the long-period average. However, below-normal precipitation is expected in many areas of northwest, northeast and southeast peninsular India. The incessant rain over northwest since Saturday have set all-time records at many places. Chandigarh and Ambala reported record rainfall of 322.2 mm and 224.1 mm respectively.

Telecom firms' voice-SMS revenue plummets as data usage rise: Trai

Revenue share per user from data usage grew over 10 times in 9 yrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operators' revenue share from voice calls has declined by about 80 per cent and by 94 pc from SMS in the last 10 years as the usage of internet-based calling and messaging apps grew, according to a Trai paper. However, revenue share per user from data usage grew over 10 times between June 2013 quarter to December 2022 quarter, it said.

Trai in its latest paper to regulate internet messaging and calls app like WhatsApp, Google Meet, Facetime, etc, said that with growing usage of OTT applications for messaging, voice communication has led to a transition from voice and SMS



towards data as a primary source of revenue for telecom service providers globally.

"In India, the composition of the revenue basket of wireless access service providers has undergone a sea-change in the period from the year 2013 to 2022," the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) said in its consultation paper on "Regulatory Mechanism for Over-The-Top (OTT) Communication Services, and Selective Banning of OTT Service."

The major components of average revenue per user (ARPU), which is a key matrix to measure telecom operators' growth, except data revenue share, have declined between June 2013 quarter and December 2022 quarter.

According to the paper, while the share of the revenue from data has grown over 10-fold to 85.1 per cent in December 2022 quarter from 8.1 in June 2013 quarter per subscriber, the ARPU grew only about 41 per cent to ₹146.96 from ₹123.77 during the same period.

The data in the paper shows the share of revenue calls declined to ₹14.79 or 10.1 per cent in ARPU of ₹146.96 from ₹72.53 or 58.6 per cent between December 2022 quarter or June 2013 quarter. Similarly, revenue share from SMS declined to 23 paise or 20 per cent of ARPU from ₹3.99 or 3.22 per cent. Trai in the paper is exploring if OTT players can be brought under licensing framework which will result in them coughing up entry fees, paying revenue share, facilitating lawful interception, providing call data records, spending on regulatory compliance, etc for providing service

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Digvijaya stokes fresh row after FIR over Golwalkar post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

After an FIR was registered against Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh at Indore's Tukoganj police station on Sunday regarding his alleged remark on Guru Golwalkar, former chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Singh sparked another controversy with his next post addressing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

Singh has been booked under sections 153A, 469, 500, and 505 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), an official said on Sunday.

On Saturday, Singh tweeted, "Do you know what Guru Golwalkar's thoughts were for the Dalits, backwards, and Muslims and on the right on national water, forest, and land." In the tweet, Golwalkar was



quoted saying that he would rather live under British rule than have equal rights given to Dalits, backwards and Muslims.

After the Sangh Parivar hit back at him and the police registered an FIR against him, on Sunday, Singh said that he wished for good sense to prevail on PM Modi and Amit Shah, adding that he appreciates how they never compromised on their values and ideology.

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Bengal post-poll death toll soars to 20 as clashes on

SAUGAR SEN GUPTA ■
KOLKATA

The aftermath of Saturday's violence in rural Bengal continued on Sunday as post-panchayat poll clashes erupted between political miscreants from rival parties, involving the use of bombs and bullets. The violence reportedly spread across Murshidabad, Malda, East Midnapore, and North and South 24 Parganas.

The death toll, which stood at 15 on Saturday, rapidly rose to 20 by Sunday afternoon. In Malda, a TMC worker was allegedly stabbed to death by some Congress members. Responding to the escalating situation, the State Election Commission and the police deployed Central forces in Salar and Shamsheganj in Murshidabad, where the civil-war-like scenario persisted throughout the day.

The single-phase panchayat elections held on Saturday witnessed massive violence, resulting in 15-16 deaths and



over 350 cases of grievous injuries. Numerous people, particularly Opposition workers from various districts, claimed to have fled their homes due to threats from the police and Trinamool Congress members.

Complaints came from Harischandrapur and Manikchak in Malda, Salar, and Shamsheganj in Murshidabad, De Ganga and Amdanga in North 24 Parganas, and Basanti in South 24 Parganas.

Among those killed was 62-year-old Ajahar Lashkar, an active TMC worker who was injured in a clash in Basanti. A clash between the TMC and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) in Basanti, South 24 Parganas, left ten people injured. Lashkar is currently receiving treatment in the ICU. "We are unable to leave our residences as there is constant bombing outside our houses," said a villager from Manikchak in Malda.

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Stalin questions Guv conduct, writes to Prez for Ravi's recall

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has reportedly written a letter to President Droupadi Murmu, raising serious concerns about the conduct of Governor RN Ravi. In the letter, Stalin accused the Governor of various violations and called for his removal from the position. The Chief Minister has highlighted that the Governor's actions have been contrary to the interests of the State, the people, and the Constitution, thus breaching his oath of office.



One of the alleged violations mentioned by Stalin is the Governor's unilateral decision to dismiss arrested Minister Senthil Balaji and suspend it within hours. The Chief Minister pointed out that the appointment of Ministers falls within the jurisdiction of the Chief Minister, not the Governor.

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Kiwi fruits sustain growth on AP tribes' habit of consuming bugs

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers have discovered that the indigenous Apatani tribes in Arunachal Pradesh's Ziro Valley, through their consumption of Kiwi fruits' bug-Chafer beetles are effectively managing the fruit crop in an environmentally sustainable manner, without the need for harmful insecticides and pesticides.

The study, published in the journal Current Science, revealed that not only has the usage of toxic insecticides been eliminated, but the yield of kiwi crops has actually increased in areas where entomophagy (insect eating habit) is practiced.

Impressed by these findings, the researchers emphasized the importance of



encouraging such entomophagy practices to be adopted in other regions as well, as a means of managing pest species in an environmentally friendly manner.

The study, titled

"Traditional knowledge of pest management and entomophagy: perspective on kiwi crop management by the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, North East India," involved interviews with com-

munity members and kiwi farmers from seven villages each in the Ziro Valley and Yachuli region, as well as six villages in the Bomdila region—important kiwi-producing areas. Field visits were con-

ducted, and all activities related to insect harvesting were documented through photographs.

Jharna Chakravorty, from the Department of Zoology at Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Itanagar, explained, "We discovered that the Apatani tribe favours three varieties of edible chafer beetles, locally known as Jojer, Dikang-Diilang, and Sanko-Tapu. These beetles, belonging to the Anomala, Phyllophaga, and Lepidiota species respectively, emerge from the soil and swallow kiwi plantations and wild chestnut trees, causing extensive defoliation."

The villagers collect these insects during their peak infestation season and consume them as a delicacy. The beetles are typically prepared by

removing their wings and then roasting, smoking, or boiling them. Chakravorty further noted, "In the history of the Apatani tribe, it has also been reported that these beetles were once used in the barter system to exchange other goods and services, both within and between tribes."

In addition, organic kiwi cultivation has witnessed significant growth in the region in recent years, with no pesticides being used in these horticultural fields.

The rise in organic kiwi fruit production has greatly benefited Arunachal Pradesh, particularly the Ziro Valley, where numerous micro, small, and medium enterprises specializing in kiwi-based products have been established.

Continued on Page 2

Punjab former Dy CM OP Soni arrested in DA case

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) on Sunday arrested Congress leader and former deputy chief minister O P Soni for allegedly amassing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income during 2016 to 2022.

An FIR was registered on Sunday under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act at Vigilance Bureau Police Station, Amritsar Range against Soni following investigations in the inquiry, which was ordered on October 10, 2022, a VB spokesperson said.

The spokesperson, in an official statement, said that "during the check period from April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2022, the income of the former Deputy CM and his family was Rs 4,52,18,771 while the expenditure was Rs 12,48,42,692, which was Rs 7,96,23,921 or 176.08 per cent more than his known sources of income".

"During this period, accused OP Soni had made properties in the name of his wife Suman Soni and son Raghav Soni," he claimed.

The spokesperson said further investigations in this case are on.



Earlier, Soni had appeared before the VB in Amritsar and joined investigation. Before demitting his office, he had promised to give the bureau all details of his moveable and immovable properties.

The investigation is a result of an anonymous complaint the bureau had received accusing Soni of amassing properties beyond his known sources of income.

In May, the Punjab Vigilance Bureau had arrested former Congress MLA Kushaldeep Singh Dhillon for allegedly amassing "huge wealth" than his known sources of income, officials had said earlier.

The Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann-led AAP gov-

ernment has said it has a zero tolerance policy towards corruption and will proceed in accordance with law against anyone who indulges in any wrongdoing.

Earlier, Congress leaders and former Punjab Ministers, including Bharat Bhushan Ashu and Sadhu Singh Dharamsot, have faced vigilance cases under the present dispensation.

Under the present AAP dispensation, Congress leader and former Punjab chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi has also appeared before the Vigilance Bureau a few times in connection with a disproportionate assets case. Channi has described the probe as "totally political".

Church calls off 'marriage of convenience' with BJP

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The "marriage of convenience" between the BJP and the Church has been called off by the latter on Saturday. Joseph Pamplany, the Archbishop of Thalassery Archdiocese declared on Saturday that there would not be any kind of alliance between the Hindutva party and the Church hereafter. "What is happening in Manipur and the silence maintained by the Centre on reports about continued attacks on Church establishments and the Christians are a matter of concern. This is the main reason behind our decision not to have any kind of liaison with the BJP," said the Archbishop to a TV news channel.

It was Archbishop Pamplany, a strong voice in the Church hierarchy in Kerala who floated the possibility of an alliance between the Christian community and the BJP. While addressing a convention of the Church-sponsored Farmers Union of Kerala, he had said that if the BJP helps the rubber cultivators in Kerala to get a price of Rs 300 per quintal, the party need not worry about the fact that they do not have any Lok Sabha members from the State.



"The Church would help them win at least three seats from Kerala," the Archbishop had said during the convention.

The Archbishop also said that neither he nor the Church subscribe to the views of the Sangh Parivar viz-a-viz Love Jihad and Narcotics Jihad. "We will not use these terms hereafter because it hurts the sentiments of the Muslim community," he said on Saturday. Interestingly, the Bishop of Pala Joseph Kallarangattu had declared during a religious congregation that Narcotics Jihad was a reality and had spoiled the lives of many girls from the community. The Kerala Police has filed a criminal complaint against the Bishop for "hurting the religious sentiments and trying to foment hatred between various communities in the State".

When the Archbishop was asked about the Christian Association and Alliance for Social Action (CAASA) that was campaigning for an alliance with the Hindus and the BJP, he said that he does not know anything about the organization. "There are many such outfits claiming to be working with the blessings of the Church. But CAASA is not one among them and nobody from it has contacted me," said Archbishop Pamplany.

Taking a cue from the statement made by the Archbishop, the Kerala Catholic Bishop's Council issued a statement that the Church was against any move to bring in Uniform Civil Code in the country. "We will not support any move that is against the religious pluralism of India.

22L BPL families in K'taka may not get DBT benefit at once under Anna Bhagya

PTI ■ BENGALURU

As Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is set to launch Direct Benefit Transfer under the Anna Bhagya scheme on Monday, about 22 lakh families living Below Poverty Line (BPL) may not get the assistance immediately as they do not have bank accounts.

Karnataka has 1.28 crore ration card of Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Priority Households and 99 per cent of these cards are seeded with Aadhaar numbers. Among them, 82 per cent comprising 1.06 crore of these cards are linked with active bank accounts. The cash will be transferred to those card holders. The remaining card holders will be intimated to open new accounts," an official statement said on Sunday.

A total of 1.27 crore ration cards have one member designated as Head of the Households (HoH). "Cash will be transferred to the bank accounts of these HoH. Of them 94 per cent are women and five per cent are men," it said. The Congress had



promised to give 10 kg rice to each BPL family member in the state under the Anna Bhagya scheme if voted to power in Assembly elections.

According to Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister K H Muniyappa the entire money would be transferred into the account of the beneficiaries in a fortnight. There are 4.41 crore beneficiaries in the state under the scheme.

Of the 10 kg rice, five kg is the Central share, which the beneficiaries have been getting. The Congress had decided to give additional five kg. However, in absence of adequate supply of rice, the state government decided to give cash in place of five kg additional rice at Rs 34 per kg to each beneficiary.

Kiwi fruits sustain growth on AP...

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The researchers also observed that as kiwi cultivation expanded, the edible polyphagous beetles shifted their preference from chestnut trees to kiwi plants in the Ziro Valley agroecosystem. They further noted that regions practicing entomophagy of these edible insect pests experienced a decrease in the emergence of pests in the subsequent generation compared to non-practice regions.

Contrasting patterns were observed in kiwi plantations within the Ziro Valley. "The chafer beetle population remained stable in the next generation, possibly due to less intense insect collection in the kiwi plantations located far from the settlement areas," added Nending Muni, also from the Department of Zoology at Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Itanagar.

Stalin questions Guv conduct, writes to President for Ravi's...

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Stalin expressed concern that the Governor's actions appear to be aimed at destabilising an Opposition-led State Government, which raises questions about his impartiality and his role as an "agent of the Centre".

Stalin left it to the President to determine whether the continued tenure of Ravi as Governor is acceptable and appropriate. He accused the Governor of engaging in a "political party" with the ruling DMK party and undermining the State Government's policies. The

Chief Minister highlighted the Governor's repeated delays in granting assent to bills passed by the legislature, even after providing clarifications as requested. Furthermore, Stalin alleged that the Governor is divisive and lacked a belief in secularism. He criticised Ravi for expressing personal views on religion, glorifying Hinduism while disparaging Tamil culture and hurting people's sentiments. The Chief Minister also accused the Governor of insulting the Indian Constitution by referring to the federal setup as merely an "administrative con-

venience". Stalin highlighted instances where the Governor omitted the names of prominent leaders such as Periyar, BR Ambedkar, Kamaraj, Anna, and Kalaignar in his official Assembly speech. He also claimed that the Governor failed to mention social justice, equality, and the Dravidian model of governance. Additionally, Stalin alleged that during his tenure in Nagaland, the Governor interfered with the elected Government, citing concerns raised by political voices from the State.

Digvijaya stokes fresh row after FIR over Golwalkar...

From Page 1

In his post, Singh cautioned Modi and Shah that they were gathering a group of power-losing cowardly traitors. He tweeted in Hindi which translates into: "Modi ji @narendramodi Amit Shah ji @AmitShah those who supported you in bad times, today they all sitting at home. Will you fight with the army of traitors leaving the army of self-respecting individuals? You both are making a big mistake".

In response to Singh's tweet on Golwalkar, senior RSS official Sunil Ambekar said in Hindi: "In the context of Shri Golwalkar Guruji, this tweet is baseless and is going to create social disharmony. This false photoshopped picture has been put up with the aim of tarnishing the image of the Sangh. Shri Guruji never said such a thing. His whole life was dedicated to ending social discrimination".

The FIR against Singh was filed by an advocate in

Madhya Pradesh High Court, Rajesh Joshi, who claimed that Singh made the remarks against Golwalkar deliberately to harm social harmony. In his complaint, Rajesh Joshi alleged that Singh shared a controversial poster on Facebook and Twitter bearing the name and picture of "Guruji" to incite people by creating conflict among Dalits, backward classes, Muslims, and Hindus. The complaint claimed that Singh's post allegedly hurt the religious beliefs of Sangh workers and the Hindu community.

A Sangh official from Indore accused Singh of making a "false and unwarranted post" about Golwalkar on social media to tarnish the organisation's image.

Following Singh's post, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan accused him of spreading misinformation and creating social hatred against Golwalkar.

ATS, IB, STF grill man for links with Pakistan intelligence operatives

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS), Maharashtra, Intelligence Bureau, and the Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha Police on Sunday grilled Abhijeet Sanjay Jambure, arrested for his alleged involvement in sharing of OTP with Pakistani intelligence operatives, an officer said.

The Odisha STF had arrested Abhijeet from Pune on June 29 and brought him to Bhubaneswar on transit remand after getting evidence against him on his links with Pakistani intelligence operatives, the officer said. Abhijeet, a graduate in Statistics from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University, Gujarat, was working in a private software company in Pune.

"Senior officers of the ATS, IB and STF grilled Abhijeet on Sunday to confirm his link with Pakistani intelligence operatives. Abhijeet was in link with a Pakistani



agent since 2020 and he was sending money to another arrested accused including Pathanisamanta Lenka of Odisha. ATS is likely to take the accused on transit remand. We will seek NIA help if needed," STF SP K K Panigrahi told PTI.

Panigrahi said six persons were arrested in this connection and more arrests could be made. The STF has taken Abhijeet on a four-day remand from Saturday.

The grilling of Abhijeet is significant as he is suspected to have links with Pakistani intelligence officials, he said.

The STF official said that Abhijeet met one Danish alias Syed Danish Ali Naqvi of

Khanki, Faisalabad, Pakistan through Facebook Messenger, who identified himself as Freelancer at 'Chegg' in 2018.

Danish in fact introduced Abhijeet to his friend Khurram alias Abdul Hamid of Karachi. Khurram is suspected to be a senior Pakistan Army intelligence officer having a big network of agents in India.

The officer said that Abhijeet used to transfer money to various Pakistani intelligence operatives working in India based on the instruction of Khurram. Abhijeet also talked to at least seven Pakistan citizens and 10 Nigerian Citizens through WhatsApp, the official said.

Meanwhile, the STF has arrested five other Odisha residents in connection with the OTP sharing scam. It is also suspected that Abhijeet has shared some secret documents relating to the Indian Army, Navy and other defence materials with Pakistan's ISI.

Delhi breaks 41-year record

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The irrigation and flood control department said this was the first warning, with 1,05,453 cusecs of water discharged at 4 pm.

Traffic police officials said waterlogging has also been reported in areas of Lajpat Nagar, Neb Sarai, Rajdhani Park, Okhla underpass, the road near Delhi Golf Club, near Tikri Kalan metro station, and near Apollo Jasola metro station, Bahadurgarh, Nangloi, Najafgarh, etc., leading to traffic congestion on these stretches.

Mangolpuri Industrial Area Phase-I and Pocket B Industrial area, Inder Enclave, Block-D Samalka, Phirni Road, Kanjhawala village,

Ladpur Majra road, New Friends Colony, Seelampur, Shahdara, Lohe Wali Gali, Hauz Qazi, Chandni Chowk, Jangpura, Bijwasan, were among other areas that witnessed waterlogging, according to the data shared by the Central Control Room of the MCD from 8 am and 4 pm. Traffic congestion was also reported to be heavy in Kashmere Gate ISBT, Wazirabad road, Afsara border, and Anand Vihar stretch.

Tree uprooting incidents were reported in Ashok Vihar Phase-3, Begampur, Jhilmil Colony, Timarpur, Defence Colony, Karol Bagh, Dwarka, Sarai Rohilla, Preet Vihar, IP Estate, Daryaganj, Pitampura, Alipur, Shakur Basti, Naya

Bazar, Patel Nagar, Govindpuri, Wazirpur, Bhajanpura, Kirti Nagar, and Govindpuri.

With the showers bringing back the familiar scenes of waterlogged roads and long lines of vehicles stuck in the deluge, residents expressed anguish over Delhi's "poor drainage system." Delhi has three major drainage basins: Najafgarh, Barapullah, and Trans-Yamuna.

During rainfall, stormwater on the eastern side of the central ridge directly flows into the Yamuna. On the western side, smaller drains merge into the Najafgarh drain, which eventually empties into the river.

The eastern region of Delhi is low-lying and was

originally part of the Yamuna floodplain. The existing stormwater drainage system in Delhi is prone to congestion, primarily caused by waste and sewage, leading to sluggish water flow. The last drainage master plan for Delhi was created in 1976 when the city's population was approximately 6 million.

In April, the PWD had identified 165 waterlogging spots and five hotspots: New Rohtak Road, under the Zakira Nagar flyover, the Loni Road roundabout, near the Jahangirpuri Metro Station, and the Karala Kanjhawala Road. PWD's central control room also monitors serious waterlogging areas through 24-hour CCTV surveillance.

Telecom firms' voice-SMS revenue plummets as data...

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The regulator in its past recommendations has allowed OTTs to operate in the country without obtaining any licence. However, a Parliamentary panel on Communications and IT recommended evaluating a selective ban on services of internet calling and messaging apps to mitigate the impact of a complete internet shutdown in a disturbed area.

Trai in its examination of various recommendations, orders, and studies said that

the shutdown of telecommunications or the internet can have significant ramifications for a country's economy and it also disrupts critical services such as education and healthcare.

"For these reasons, selective banning of specific OTT applications and websites, etc., which are likely to be used by the terrorists or anti-national elements to ferment trouble in the specified regions, appears to be preferable as compared to complete internet shutdown," Trai said.

Bengal post-poll death toll soars to 20 as clashes...

From Page 1

In Shamsheganj, the wife of an Independent candidate stated, "My husband has fled the village, and they are bombing our houses. They are threatening to kill the entire family." When asked to specify who "they" referred to, the woman whispered "TMC."

The Election Commission revealed that around 80.71% of votes were cast, but reports of irregularities emerged, leading to re-polling in certain areas. The exact number of booths requiring re-polling will be disclosed later. The

State Secretary of the CPI(M) accused the Election Commissioner of favoritism toward Mamata Banerjee's family and blamed the Central Government for violence and deaths. The delayed deployment of central forces was attributed to non-cooperation from the SEC. Political parties exchanged accusations, with the CPI(M) and TMC criticizing the BJP's actions in other states and demanding re-polling, while the TMC spokesperson dismissed the opposition's claims.

Monsoon rains misery on lives across...

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The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued red alerts for several states, predicting heavy rainfall to persist over the next 1-2 days. These alerts serve as a warning for residents.

In Himachal Pradesh, the impact of the heavy rains has been devastating. "We have witnessed landslides, damaged houses, and unfortunate casualties," said an official. Three members of a family lost their lives in a house collapse triggered by a landslide in the

Kotgarh area of Shimla district. A woman also perished when a makeshift house near Kullu town was damaged by a landslide. A person was buried alive in a landslide in Katiyan tehsil of Chamba.

With the state grappling with multiple landslides and flash floods, the emergency operation center reported 13 landslides and nine flash floods in the past 36 hours. The impact on infrastructure has been significant, with 736 roads closed for traffic, and 1,743 transformers and 138

water supply schemes affected.

The Himachal MeT office issued a red alert for extremely heavy rains in seven districts of the state on July 8 and 9. "High flash flood risk is expected in Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, Shimla, Sirmour, and Mandi districts," warned a meteorological expert. The closure of National Highway 21 at 6-mile due to a landslide has caused further disruptions, as it was the same location where commuters were stranded for almost 24 hours on June 27 due to a landslide.

The Aut Bridge, an iconic 50-year-old structure connecting Kullu, Banjar, Luhri, and Rampur, was washed away by the swift current of the Beas River in Mandi district.

Uttarakhand is also on high alert as the India Meteorological Department issued a red alert for the state. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama urged all state officials to remain vigilant, acknowledging the heavy rainfall alert. "All pilgrims should proceed on their yatra keeping the weather conditions in mind,"

advised the Chief Minister, emphasizing caution during the challenging times.

In neighboring Jammu and Kashmir, tragedy struck when a landslide hit a passenger bus in Doda district, claiming two lives. Superintendent of Police (Bhaderwah) Vinod Sharma confirmed the incident, stating, "The bus came under the landslide triggered by rains at village Bhangroo on Thathri-Gandoh road." A rescue operation was launched, and three trapped passengers were evacuated. Unfortunately,

two passengers, identified as Amir Sohail and Mudassar Ali, were declared brought dead upon arrival at Gandoh hospital.

The impact of heavy rains extended to Uttar Pradesh as well, where a woman and her six-year-old daughter lost their lives when the roof of their house collapsed in Muzaffarnagar district. In another incident, a 10-year-old girl died when a tree branch fell on the tin shed of her house in Sirathu. Her younger brother sustained injuries and

has been admitted to a hospital.

Rajasthan also faced the wrath of heavy rainfall, resulting in four deaths. Two individuals died due to lightning strikes in Chittorgarh, while two others drowned in separate incidents in Sawai Madhopur.

Ladakh, known for its picturesque landscapes, experienced unseasonal snowfall and heavy rains, prompting a red alert from the meteorological department. Landslides occurred on the

Leh-Kargil-Srinagar National Highway, forcing its closure and disrupting transportation.

In the face of such devastation, communities across the region have rallied together, providing support and relief to those affected. Relief camps have been set up, offering food, shelter, and medical aid to those in need. The government, organizations, and individuals have joined forces to rebuild and heal the wounds inflicted by the relentless downpour.

THERE IS NOTHING BUT WATER



Locals assist passengers to get out of a car that was stuck on an inundated road due to heavy monsoon rains, in Gurugram on Sunday



Traffic jam on a waterlogged road following monsoon rain, near Tilak Bridge, ITO, in New Delhi on Sunday



Delhi Education and PWD Minister Atishi interacts with locals during inspection of the waterlogged areas after heavy monsoon rains, near ITO in New Delhi on Sunday



A tree got uprooted following heavy rainfall, near Vikash Bhawan, IP Estate in New Delhi on Sunday

Schools shut today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With heavy rainfalls lashing the national capital for the second consecutive day, many areas of Delhi witnessed waterlogging on Sunday, causing traffic snarls for commuters. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday ordered that all the schools in Delhi will remain closed on Monday. Kejriwal also cancelled Sunday holiday to all officers and ministers and directed them to be on the ground to inspect problem areas.

The heavy rain submerged parks, underpasses, markets and even hospital premises, and caused chaos on the roads. There are reports of major road caved in Rohini and Greater Kailash areas on Sunday. Pictures and videos of commuters wading through knee-deep water flooded social media platforms, raising concerns about the efficiency of the city's drainage infrastructure. According to officials, the Public Works Department

(PWD) received 38 complaints related to waterlogging till the afternoon. The majority of the complaints pertained to Okhla main road, Kamla Nagar, Nilothi, Ranhola and Kirari. "The PWD control room has been monitoring the situation of waterlogging through 24x7 CCTV camera surveillance. Apart from CCTV cameras, they also receive complaints from people through email, WhatsApp, social media and phone," a PWD official said.

The NDMC has received 42 complaints regarding water logging. Due to water logging, the power supply was cut in North Avenue, a high profile area to avoid any accident. The Delhi Traffic Police has also been alerting commuters through its official Twitter handle about traffic congestion due to waterlogging in some of the areas of the national capital.

Meanwhile, CPRO Northern Railway Deepak Kumar said a strict watch is being kept to run trains from

Delhi area safely because of non-stop heavy rains.

Eight pumps are being run at the Delhi-Sabzi Mandi area and the station trainable area to pump water out of tracks. Trains in Delhi are running at their normal scheduled time.

The MeT Office has issued a "yellow" alert, warning of moderate rain which could cause more problems for the residents of Delhi. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has cancelled the Sunday leave of all government officials and instructed them to be on the field. He also announced all schools would remain close on Monday.

"In view of the torrential rains in the last two days and keeping in mind the warnings of the meteorological department, all schools will remain closed on Monday," Kejriwal said in a tweet in Hindi.

The traffic police officials said waterlogging has been also reported in areas of Lajpat Nagar, Neb Sarai, Rajdhani Park, Okhla underpass, the road near Delhi Golf Club.

3,400 cops deployed to manage traffic chaos

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 3,400 police personnel were deployed on Sunday at 50 locations in the city to manage traffic in view of waterlogging on several road stretches due to heavy rains for the second consecutive day.

There was waterlogging since the morning hours, which resulted in traffic snarls across the city, and the Traffic Control room received complaints regarding congestion, uprooting of trees, potholes and signals not working, according to officials.

Police personnel were deployed at intersections where signals were not working, they said and added that data collected by the traffic police showed that there were potholes at four major locations -

Bagga roundabout, on Ambedkar Road, Rai Bhawan to Windsor Place on Raisina Road and Adhchini on Aurobindo Marg. They said



power failure resulted in signals not working. Trees were uprooted at six locations -- Kishanganj Railway Colony, Tara Chand Mathur Marg, Ajmeri Gate, 12, Janpath, Khan Market and Madarsa to JLN Marg, the officials said. "Trees were removed along footpaths and central verges and traffic movement was managed in best possible manner. The operations at some locations are still going on and services of other departments are also being taken," a senior

Flood warning as Haryana releases water in Yamuna



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government issued a flood warning on Sunday after Haryana discharged more than one lakh cusecs of water into the Yamuna river from the HathniKund Barrage in Yamunaganar.

"The first warning is being issued as 1,05,453 cusecs of water has been released into river Yamuna from Hathnikund barrage at 4 pm," the Irrigation and Flood Control department said in an order.

Normally, the flow rate at the barrage is 352 cusecs, but heavy rainfall in the catchment areas increases the discharge. The water from the barrage takes around two to three days to reach Delhi.

Authorities have been instructed to stay vigilant and take necessary action in vulnerable areas. Quick response teams have been deployed to raise awareness and warn the people living near the river embankments, according to the department.

The Delhi government has set up 16 control rooms, including a central control room, to monitor the flood-prone areas and the water level of the Yamuna. The Central Water Commission (CWC) warned that the water level in the Yamuna in Delhi is rising and is expected to surpass the danger mark of 205.33 metres on Tuesday. According to the

CWC's flood-monitoring portal, the water level in the Yamuna at the Old Railway Bridge stood at 203.18 metres at 1 pm on Sunday. The warning level is 204.5 metres.

The water level is likely to rise to 205.5 metres between 11 am and 1 pm on Tuesday, the CWC said in an advisory. Northwest India has seen incessant rainfall over the last two days, with many areas in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan recording "heavy to very heavy" precipitation.

This has resulted in overflowing rivers, creeks and drains, which have damaged infrastructure and disrupted essential services in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Chandigarh and Ambala reported a record rainfall of 322.2 mm and 224.1 mm respectively. The Yamuna river system's catchment covers parts of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.

Encroachments on the river floodplain have occurred over the years, despite the land belonging to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), revenue department and private individuals. Last year, the river breached the danger mark twice in September.

G'gram DC urges WFH as downpour wreaks havoc

Gurugram: Heavy rainfall led to severe waterlogging and traffic congestion in several parts of Gurugram on Sunday with the Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram Nishant Kumar Yadav on Sunday issued an advisory to private institutions and corporate offices to guide their employees to Work From Home (WFH) on Monday to avoid traffic congestion on roads and schools to announce a holiday.

The downpour wreaked havoc as arterial roads, parks, underpasses, markets, and even schools and hospitals were inundated.

Deputy Commissioner Nishant Kumar Yadav urged residents to stay indoors and venture out only for essential work. He also said corporate offices have been asked to advise their staff to work from home on Monday so that waterlogged roads can be cleared as soon as the rain stops.

School wall collapses; audit of all ordered

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid heavy rainfall, a boundary wall of a newly built government school in the Srinivaspuri area collapsed. The incident occurred at the Garhi Jharia Maria in the East of Kailash area on Saturday.

Delhi Education Minister Atishi on Sunday ordered an immediate physical inspection of all government schools to ensure that children do not face any problem after reaching schools on Monday morning. Shrinivaspuri is the Assembly constituency of Delhi's Education Minister Atishi.

"As we are aware that during last few days, the city has faced continuous heavy rainfalls and it might have affected the conditions of government school buildings. It is directed that all Regional Directors, Deputy Director of Education - Zones and District, Principals and Vice-Principals must conduct physical inspection of all the government schools under their



jurisdiction today itself and ensure that on opening of schools tomorrow there are no such deficiencies are found which may cause problems for the security of the school children," the order stated.

It added that a compliance report be submitted by Sunday night. "In case, any deficiencies or serious problem is found then the same should be cordoned off to avoid any mishapening," the order said. Atishi, however, said that the wall was 35 years old and termed

150 mm of rainfall in the city an "unusual climate event". The order came amid an attack by opposition parties after the collapse of the section of the East of Kailash school. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva visited the area and attacked the Delhi government.

Criticising the AAP government Sachdeva said that despite the expenditure of 16 crores on the construction of the school, the boundary wall had collapsed.

2 rescued after tin shed caves in; 15 houses fall

New Delhi: Two people were rescued after a tin shed collapsed in Zakhira here on Sunday morning, a day after the city was lashed by heavy rains. In the last 24 hours, as many as 15 houses has been collapsed following heavy rain in the national capital.

In another incident, the back side wall of Deshbandhu College, located in the Kalkaji area of Delhi, collapsed, damaging approximately 15 luxury cars and 10 to 12 motorcycles and scooters.

According to the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) officials, search-and-rescue operations were carried out to ascertain if more people were trapped under the debris. However, the operation was concluded by 11.35 am and the two boys

trapped under the debris were safely rescued. Since they had sustained minor injuries, they were admitted to a nearby hospital. The boys were identified as Aalam and Maraluddin one of the fire operators -- Daljeet -- sustained injuries during the rescue operation.

A call about a house collapse was received at 9.34 am on Sunday following which three fire tenders were rushed to the spot, DFS Director Atul Garg said.

Due to rain, 15 buildings collapsed at various places in national capital on Saturday. Speaking on building collapse incidents in the national capital, Atul Garg, Director of Delhi Fire Service, said, "We received a total of 15 calls, the highest in a day. SR

LG OK's land trasher for RRTS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective to speed up the construction of the Delhi-Meerut Rapid Transport System (RRTS) project, Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved the long-pending transfer of land from the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) Department to the National Capital Regional Transport Corporation (NCRTC).

The transfer of land to NCRTC at Anand Vihar and Patparganj Area will help with Multi Modal Integration (MMI)- construction of RRTS Station and traffic circulation, and construction of ventilation

NCRTC to pay ₹14.82 cr for land



shaft at the two locations respectively, the Raj Niwas said on Sunday. It said the transfer of 11,719 square

acre for land transfer on permanent basis for achieving MMI at Anand Vihar and construction of ventilation shaft at Patparganj. In the recent past, Saxena had also approved the transfer of land at Khichripur-Kondli on the bank of Ghazipur Drain and this land parcel has already been handed over to the NCRTC after realisation of the requisite charges.

The RRTS project between Delhi and nearby cities in NCR had been envisaged to reduce the road congestion and pollution with the increasing number of vehicles on the road. Besides this it will also provide affordable and safe Mass Rapid Transit System to people of NCR.

Gujarat Prevention of Anti-social Activities Act for Delhi sent to MHA for approval

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to take strong action against bootleggers, drug offenders, property grabbers and others involved in serious crimes, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has recommended extension of "The Gujarat Prevention of Anti-social Activities Act, 1985" to the National Capital. He has sent the proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The law provides for preventive detention of bootleggers, dangerous persons, drug offenders, immoral traffic offenders and property grabbers for preventing their anti-social and dangerous activities prejudicial to the maintenance of public order, the Raj Niwas said here on Sunday. On June 27, Delhi's Home Department had submitted the proposal to the LG for issuance of notification under Section 2 of the Union Territories (Laws) Act for extending the Gujarat law



to the NCT of Delhi. The Law Department of the Delhi government has vetted the draft notification with the observation that the Administrative Department must ensure to comply with the provision of GNCTD (Amendment) Act, 2021 read with the GNCTD (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 and Provisions of Transaction of Business Rules (TBR), 1993, which entail that the draft notification be sent to the Union Home Ministry for extension of the said Act to the national capital. An identical law from Telangana (The Telangana Prevention of

Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, property offenders, etc Act, 1986) was also examined and it was found that the Gujarat law is more reasonable and better.

LG Saxena also agreed to the proposal that the Gujarat law may be forwarded to the MHA for considering its extension to the national capital after taking note of the observation that between Telangana and Gujarat law, "the Gujarat law is more reasonable and better", the officials said.

In March this year, Saxena had accorded approval to the proposal of the Home Department that Delhi Police should effectively use The National Security Act of 1980 whose purpose is "to provide for preventive detention in certain cases and for matters connected therewith".

Delhi Police through its letter dated February 14 this year had requested that the provisions of the Gujarat Act to

be examined. The Home Department in October last year had forwarded the approval accorded by the LG to the request of the Delhi Police to examine the Telangana and Gujarat laws for taking a decision. Section 2 of the Union Territories (Laws) Act, 1950 dealing with Power to extend enactments to certain Union Territories, entails that "the Central government may, by notification in the official gazette, extend to the Union Territory of Delhi or any part of such territory, with such restrictions and modifications as it thinks fit, any enactment which is in force in a State at the date of the notification".

It is expected that once notified, the said Act will provide the police with more teeth to deal with criminals and at the same time ensure effective deterrence against crimes like chain snatching, bootlegging, drug peddling and trafficking, etc, the officials said.

Khalistan rally overshadowed by pro-India supporters in Canada

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/TORONTO/LONDON

Protests by alleged Khalistan supporters against India in Canada and the UK over the weekend passed off without any incidents with pro-India supporters outnumbering and overshadowing the pro-Khalistanis in Canada.

The Khalistan backers were protesting against the killing of wanted terrorists Hardeep Singh Nijjar last month in Canada.

The protestors earlier, this month had put up posters in their naming and threatening top Indian diplomats in Canada including High Commissioner to Ottawa Sanjay Kumar Verma and Consul General in Toronto Apoorva Srivastava as “killers” of the Khalistan Tiger Force chief Nijjar.

The posters also

announced a ‘Kill India’ rally in front of the Indian embassy on July 8. Similar rallies were planned in Britain and US. Reports said the rally in Toronto turned out to be a damp squib with several members from the Indian community also gathering at the venue with the national flag.

A handful of pro-Khalistan supporters gathered outside the Indian consulate in Canada’s Toronto but they were severely outnumbered by members of the Indian community who waved the national flag and raised slogans like “Bharat Mata ki jai”, “Vande Mataram” and “Long Live India”.

The Khalistani group had posters of Sikhs for Justice leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was killed in United Kingdom (UK) on June 18.

These protests came a month after Khalistanis, marking the 39th anniversary of

Operation Blue Star, put up a tableau of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with blood on her clothes and a poster that read, “Revenge of attack on Shri Darbar Sahib”. India summoned the Canadian envoy in New Delhi earlier this week and issued a demarche over the increasing activities by pro-Khalistani elements in Canada.

The pro-Khalistan protest outside the Indian High Commission in London late Saturday also passed off with an incident. The duration of Saturday’s demonstration was less than the scheduled duration of about 3-3.5 hours.

Only a handful of people gathered in the rain to attend the protest. It was in sharp contrast with protests at the same location earlier this year when the protestors tried to grab the Indian flag atop the Indian High Commission and tried to vandalise the premises.

During Saturday’s protest, the participants displayed banners with the images of India’s High Commissioner to the UK and its Consul General in Birmingham, blaming them for the killing of Nijjar. Similar posters with the heads of various Indian missions around the world have been circulating on social media in recent days.

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly had, on Thursday announced on Twitter that he had provided assurances about the safety of the High Commission and its staff.

On Friday India called for strict action — such as deportation — against those threatening Indian officials. This was conveyed during bilateral discussions between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his British counterpart Tim Barrow who was in New Delhi on Friday.

Rahul’s LS disqualification: Congress to hold ‘maun satyagraha’ in State Capitals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has accused the BJP of using “dirty tricks” to disqualify Rahul Gandhi from Parliament and announced that its cadres and leaders will participate in a ‘maun satyagraha’ near Mahatma Gandhi statues in every State capital on July 12 as a mark of protest.

In a statement, Congress General Secretary K C Venugopal highlighted Gandhi’s role as the strongest and most vocal opponent of the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government.

Venugopal referred to Gandhi’s recent Bharat Jodo Yatra and his historic address in the Lok Sabha, where he exposed the alleged connection between Prime Minister Modi and the Adani Group.

According to Venugopal, the BJP deployed “dirty tricks” to disqualify Gandhi from Parliament as a response to his revelations. The Congress had



LoP in Kerala Assembly VD Sathesnan, AICC General secretary KC Venugopal, Mahila Congress state President and MP JB Mehtar and others hold posters to express support for Rahul Gandhi at the Mahila Congress meeting, in Kochi PTI

announced its decision to move the Supreme Court after the Gujarat High Court refused to stay Gandhi’s conviction in a 2019 defamation case.

The party accused the government of using various techniques to suppress Gandhi’s voice, claiming that

it is intimidated by his truth-speaking. Despite these challenges, Gandhi remains resolute in his determination to confront ruling regime and address concerns of India’s marginalized communities, farmers, laborers, and youth, Venugopal stated. He emphasized that Gandhi continues to

be voice of people and a trusted leader even outside of Parliament. Venugopal claimed that both the Congress party and the nation as a whole are deeply disturbed by what they perceive as an unjust and vindictive disqualification of Gandhi.

He called on all Indians, regardless of political affiliation, to stand together against suppression of democracy and in support of justice and liberty.

To demonstrate their protest, the state units of the Congress party will organize a ‘maun satyagraha’ near Mahatma Gandhi statues in every state capital on July 12, 2023, from 10 am to 5 pm.

Venugopal expressed confidence that truth and party’s commitment to welfare of every Indian will prevail, despite any tactics deployed by the BJP-RSS. He asserted that Indian people will not allow fascist forces to persist for long.

Nadda asks leaders from Telangana to gear up for elections



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda has called upon party leaders from Telangana to gear up for the upcoming Assembly elections. Chairing a meeting of State presidents, organizational secretaries, and in-charges from 11 States at the State BJP office in Hyderabad on Sunday, Nadda emphasized the need for the party to prepare itself for the crucial assembly election.

According to reports, Nadda acknowledged that the party leadership had made organizational changes in response to the requirements of State leaders. He urged the Telangana leaders to ensure that the party performs well in the upcoming assembly and Lok Sabha polls.

The party chief warned that strict action would be taken against those engaging in anti-party activities and internal discord.

Nadda, along with the organizational national general secretary, BL Santosh, briefed the State chiefs on the strategies to be implemented in order to strengthen the party in their respective States.

Sources within the BJP stated that a total of 32 leaders, including national office bearers from various States, participated in the meeting.

Notable attendees from Telangana included State election in-charge Prakash Javadekar, State chief G Kishan Reddy, and Rajya Sabha mem-

ber K Laxman. Nadda felicitated Union minister G Kishan Reddy, the newly elected president of the BJP’s Telangana unit. In the meantime, the BJP State unit is scheduled to hold a meeting of office bearers on Monday, which will be attended by district presidents, in-charges, and other office bearers. The meeting aims to discuss the upcoming election-related programs and initiatives.

The Southern states hold great significance for the BJP, as they collectively contribute 129 Lok Sabha seats. However, in the 2019 polls, the BJP could only secure 12 seats from these five states.

Telangana accounted for four seats, while Karnataka contributed eight. The party failed to secure any seats in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Southern States consist of 20 Lok Sabha seats in Kerala, 25 in Andhra Pradesh, 39 in Tamil Nadu, 17 in Telangana, and 28 in Karnataka, respectively.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a gathering in Warangal of the poll-bound state and came down heavily on Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naraiah and the BRS government, as well as the Congress, over corruption.

“Both BRS and the Congress are dangerous for people of Telangana,” PM Modi said, and added that KCR was running the “most corrupt government”.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi feeds cows during his visit to Bhadrakali temple in Warangal on Saturday PTI

Two drones shot down by BSF in Punjab sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) has shot down two drones in as many days in the Punjab sector. While one of the two drones was of Chinese make, the other was assembled in Pakistan. On Sunday, the BSF and Punjab police launched a search operation on the outskirts of Kakkar village, Amritsar district following specific inputs.

During the search operation, the troops recovered a drone from the farming field adjacent to Kakkar village. The recovered drone is an assembled Quadcopter, the BSF said in a statement. “Yet another Pakistani drone was recovered by the joint efforts of BSF and Punjab Police,” it said.

On Friday, at around 9 PM, the BSF intercepted movement of a suspected drone near Pallopati village in Tarn Taran district. As per the laid down

drill, BSF troops immediately reacted to intercept the drone, the paramilitary said.

Further during a thorough search of the depth area on Saturday, the BSF troops recovered a drone from the farming field adjacent to Rajoke village in Tarn Taran district.

The drone recovered on Saturday was a Quadcopter of DJI Matrice 350 RTK series model.

According to the paramilitary, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones have been used by the Pakistani forces and their cohorts to shore up the terrorist hardware by pushing in arms, ammunition, and drugs.

The Pakistani drones have been mostly sighted in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Rajasthan. The paramilitary forces are also scouring for anti-drone technologies to counter the menace and a host of technologies are undergoing field testing, sources said.

CBI summons station master in Balasore train crash probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned the station master of Bhanaga Bazar Station in Odisha’s Balasore district in connection with the train crash that occurred on July 2, resulting in the tragic death of 293 people and leaving nearly a thousand people injured.

Station Master SB Mohanty has been asked to appear at the CBI’s Bhubaneswar office on July 11 for further investigation into the incident. The CBI’s move comes after three railway personnel were arrested on Friday for their negligence, which contributed to the devastating accident.

The arrested officials include Arun Kumar Mahanta (senior section engineer-signal), Mohammed Amir Khan (section engineer), and Technician Pappu Kumar. They were stationed in Balasore, a nearby station to Bhanaga Bazar Station where the train crash occurred. Sources indicate that a five-member team from the CBI continued to

interrogate the arrested officials on Sunday. The railway staff members have been charged under sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 201 (destruction of evidence) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Currently, the trio is being held at the Chandaka Police Station for security purposes, instead of being housed at the CBI office. Additionally, the probe agency has summoned another railway employee in relation to the case.

Following their arrest, the CBI produced the accused individuals in court on Saturday and requested a seven-day remand for further questioning. However, the Special Court in Bhubaneswar granted the CBI five days of remand.

Earlier this week, the inquiry report from Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), South Eastern Circle, stated that train mishap occurred due to lapses in signaling circuit alteration carried out at North Signal Goomty of station in the past.



Chirag hints at rejoining NDA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan hinted at the possibility of joining the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) during a party meeting in Patna. The meeting authorized Chirag to make decisions regarding the party’s alliance with any political group.

In an intriguing development highlighting the growing closeness between Chirag and the BJP, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai visited Chirag and referred to the Paswan residence as his “second home.”

While Rai refrained from discussing an alliance with Chirag, he emphasized the shared values between the BJP and Chirag’s late father, Ram Vilas Paswan, emphasizing their commitment to serving the people and ensuring their happiness.

When questioned about the potential of joining the NDA, Chirag maintained that he would not make any premature announcements out of respect for the principles of decorum within the coalition. He suggested that further discussions would take place within the NDA before a final decision is reached.

However, a complication arises due to Chirag’s uncle, Pashupati Kumar Paras, who led a revolt following Ram Vilas Paswan’s demise, resulting in a split within the LJP.

Paras currently serves as a minister in the Union cabinet. Both Chirag and his uncle have expressed their unwillingness to be part of any coalition that includes the other.

During the meeting, Chirag did not provide any fresh statements regarding his uncle. However, he made it clear that his party would undoubtedly contest the Lok Sabha polls from Hajipur, a constituency his father had nurtured over several terms and is presently held by his uncle.

When it comes to a potential ministerial position, Chirag stressed that his decision to join a coalition would be primarily influenced by the prospects in the Lok Sabha and assembly polls, rather than solely focusing on a ministerial berth.

In the 2020 assembly polls, Chirag rebelled against Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, fielding candidates against the Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)), which resulted in a significant decline in the JD(U)’s seat tally.

While the BJP contested the elections in alliance with the JD(U), the latter accused the BJP of supporting Chirag, who had given tickets to several rebels from the saffron party.

Many of these rebels, who were previously expelled by the BJP for “violating coalition dharma,” have now returned to the party.

The JD(U) exited the NDA last year, leading to the BJP losing power.

UCC: Vanvasi Ashram hails BJP MP’s suggestion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram has welcomed the suggestion of a parliamentary committee chairman and BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi to keep tribals out of the purview of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

In a statement, the organization also asked the Law Commission not to submit its report in haste, urging it to first understand the customary practices and traditions of the tribal communities from their prominent members and organizations.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) body urged the members of the scheduled tribes and their organizations to submit their views to the Law Commission if they have any concerns with regard



to the proposed UCC, instead of being “misled” by discussions on the social media on the issue. BJP MP Sushil Modi, chairman of a parliamentary panel on Law, recently advocated keeping tribals, including those in the Northeast, out of the purview of any likely UCC at a meeting while some opposition members questioned the Law Commission’s timing of the move to begin consultations on the contentious issue.

“We welcome the role of Sushil Kumar Modi, the head of the parliamentary committee, in keeping the scheduled tribes out of this law,” Vanvasi

Kalyan Ashram’s vice president Satyendra Singh said in a statement. Singh said that a lot of discussions are going on, especially in social media, these days with regard to the UCC “due to which common people are getting confused”.

“Tribal society is also no exception to this. Some people with vested interests are also misleading the tribal society,” he said. In such a situation, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram wants to alert tribal society, especially their socio-cultural organizations and educated class that they should not be misled by anyone, Singh said.

“Right now it is not even clear what the government is going to do. If the people of tribal society and their organizations feel that due to this (UCC) there will be any adverse impact on their customary practices and systems,

then they should directly raise their concerns before the Law Commission,” he said.

Singh said the Law Commission will submit its report to the central government after consultation with all the stakeholders, and only after that the government will bring a bill in Parliament. Kalyan Ashram will also give its suggestions or feedback when such a bill comes, he added.

“Kalyan Ashram also requests the Law Commission to visit various tribal areas of the country and try to deeply understand their transitional system and their views on the subjects like marriage, divorce, adoption, and succession after holding discussions with prominent people and organizations of the tribal society,” Singh said. The Commission should not submit its report in haste, he added.

Congress slams Agnipath, says BJP dashed hopes of aspiring soldiers to serve country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP-led Centre, accusing it of dashing the hopes and aspirations of the nation’s youth with the Agnipath military recruitment scheme.

The Congress general secretary, Jairam Ramesh, criticized the government following a media report that revealed many aspiring soldiers who enrolled as ‘Agniveers’ in the Indian Army were abandoning their training midway.

Taking to Twitter, Ramesh expressed his disappointment, stating, “In the past, it was the cherished dream of our youth to join the Army and serve the nation. Recognizing their ded-



ication, they were provided with better facilities and job security.” He went on to assert, “However, the foundation of the Agniveer Yojana is fundamentally flawed. It has shattered the dreams of our youth to serve the country and has instilled various apprehensions. The outcome is evident for all to see.” The Agnipath scheme involves enlisting citizens into

the armed forces for a period of four years, with a provision to retain 25 percent of them. However, the recent developments have raised serious concerns about the effectiveness and viability of the program.

However, a recent media report highlighted a significant issue within the scheme. It claimed that many youths who had joined the Indian Army as ‘Agniveers’ under the Agnipath scheme were leaving their training midway.

This revelation sparked a wave of apprehension and dissatisfaction among aspiring soldiers and their families. The Congress general secretary, Jairam Ramesh, seized upon the media report to criticize the government’s handling of the

scheme. He accused Agnipath of shattering dreams of young individuals who aspired to serve their country and raised concerns about negative impact it had on their confidence and motivation.

The Agnipath scheme was initiated with the intention of recruiting and training individuals to serve in armed forces. The scheme aimed to provide better facilities and job security to encourage youth to dedicate themselves to nation’s defence.

However, the recent developments and reports of participants leaving training prematurely have cast doubt on scheme’s effectiveness and raised questions about its execution and impact.

Devotees throng KV temple on eve of first Shrawan Monday



Rush of kanwariyas on eve of first Monday of Shrawan at a Ganga ghat in Varanasi on Sunday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Thousands of devotees including hundreds of saffron-clad kanwariyas thronged one of the dwadasa Jyotirlingas Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) amidst tight security arrangements on the eve of first Monday in the auspicious month of Shrawan here on Sunday. As this year, due to 'adimas' (extra month), the Shrawan will be of two months long in which there will be eight Mondays and it is expected that during the Shrawan this year, the number of devotees may cross one crore mark and on every Monday, the number of devotees is expected to be between seven to 10 lakh.

In view of this, recently the temple administration has revised rates of various puja rituals and aartis. Since the inauguration of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor (KVC) in December

in 2021 by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it would be the second Shrawan and the premises are all set to see the heavy rush of devotees on the first Monday. The popularity of the KVC was even mentioned by the PM in the visit to his parliamentary constituency just a couple of days ago and Modi also expected that this time, the rush of devotees might be bigger.

Apart from elaborate security arrangements and traffic restrictions for the first Monday of this auspicious Shrawan at KVT, the local administration is also expecting the rush of devotees at all other famous Shiv temples of the city and its outskirts including Markandey Mahadev (Kaithi), Mahamritunjya Mahadev (Daranagar), Kedareswar Mahadev (Kedarghat), Teel Bandeshwar (Pandey Haveli), Jogeshwar

Mahadev (Ishwarganj), Sarang Mahadev (Sarnath), Vishwanath temple (Banaras Hindu University), Karmdeswar Mahadev (Kandhwa), Rameshwar Mahadev (Rameshwar), Shool Tankeshwar Mahadev (Madhopur in Rohania area) and many others.

At KVC, all the activities have been watched through various CCTV cameras. To avoid congregation the devotees were asked to move towards the KVC only through barricading and heavy police personnel have been deployed both inside and outside of the premises. The barricading was also made at all other famous temples to check the rush of devotees and maintain law and order situation. Rush was also seen at Ganga Dwar, the entry point to the KVC from river Ganga side.

Meanwhile, on the eve of

first Monday, the activists of Namami Gange organised a programme asking the saffron-clad kanwariyas to take pledge to keep the river Ganga clean and pollution-free. They also performed aarti of Maa Ganga and prayed to Lord Vishwanath (Shiva). They also offered shramdaan to keep the ghats clean.

Carrying tricolour flags in their hands, the participants resolved to keep the river Ganga clean and pledged not to use single-use plastic. Regional convenor (Kashi) Rajesh Shukla said that this festival shows the importance of water and the Kanwar Yatra, apart from social concerns along with religious beliefs, highlights the importance of water harvesting. Abhinav Harbola, Satyendra Sharma, Sumit Dubey, Subhash Yadav and many kanwariyas were present in the event.

Alternative arrangement for plying of auto-rickshaws

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the heavy rush of devotees to have darshan and offer prayers in Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple on the first Monday of the month of Shrawan, the Traffic department has made an alternative arrangement for the plying particularly of auto-rickshaws, e-rickshaws and paddle-rickshaw. This alternative arrangement will remain in effect till morning on Tuesday. This alternative arrangement will be applicable on other Mondays too during the auspicious month. It is noteworthy that this year the Shrawan month is of about two months from July 4 to August 31 because of 'adhimaas' and eight Mondays will fall during the auspicious month.

As per alternative arrangement made by the Traffic department to facilitate the devotees, the auto-rickshaw and e-rickshaw will ply from Gollgadda tri-junction to Chowka Ghat through SSU, Lahurabir, Maidagin and Visheshwarganj and from Lahurabir to Lanka through Maldahiya, Sigra, Rathyatra, Mahamoiganj, Manduadih, Bhikharipur Sunderpur, while from Lanka to Cantt railway station through Naria, Sunderpur, Bhikharipur tri-

junction, BLW, Manduadih and Lahartara.

Similarly, the auto-rickshaw and e-rickshaw will ply from Lanka to Chandpur through Naria, Sunderpur, Bhikharipur tri-junction, Manduadih, Lahartara and Chandpur and from Andhrapul to Gilat Bazar through Nadedar, Ambedkar crossing, JP Mehta and Bhojubar while from Chowka Ghat Tadi Khana to Pandeypur through Maqbool Alam Road and Khajuri.

It is noteworthy that the district administration has declared nine routes including four routes which approach the temple as 'no-vehicle zones' and the plying of vehicles particularly auto rickshaw, e-rickshaw and paddle-rickshaw, has been restricted particularly on Monday of the auspicious month. The vehicle restriction will remain in effect till morning on Tuesday.

It is noteworthy that this year the Shrawan month is of about two months from July 4 to August 31 because of 'adhimaas' and eight Mondays will fall during the auspicious month.

During the Shrawan month, the devotees in large numbers reach Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple particularly on Mondays to have darshan and worship Baba Vishwanath.

Keeping this in view, the district administration has made nine routes including four routes approaching the temple as 'no vehicle zones' to facilitate the devotees.

The routes which have been declared as 'no vehicle zones' and the plying of vehicles specially auto rickshaw, e-rickshaw and paddle-rickshaw will remain restricted particularly on Mondays include Benia-Ramapura-Godowlia, Gurubagh-Luxa-Godowlia, Godowlia-Maidagin, Maidagin-Godowlia, Piyari Police Outpost-Benia Bagh junction, Ravindrarpuri-Sonarpura-Godowlia, Shujabad-Bhadau Chungi-Visheshwarganj-Maidagin, Lanka-Samme Ghat and Samme Ghat-Lanka.

The vehicle restriction will remain in effect from the night on Saturday to the morning on Tuesday each week during the month of Shrawan.

VMC MAKES PUBLIC TOILETS AT GHATS FREE ON MONDAYS: To facilitate the kanwariyas and devotees, the Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC) has made public toilets located at ghats free for them on each Monday during Shrawan. It is noteworthy that Shrawan is of two months this time because of adimas and eight Mondays will fall during the auspicious

month which will end on August 31.

The Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari and the Municipal Commissioner (MC) Shipu Giri on Sunday made an inspection of ghats and adjoining areas in view of the first Monday and announced that all 17 public toilets located on the ghats would be free of cost for 24 hours on all Mondays of the month of Shrawan for the use of kanwariyas and devotees. They directed the Nagar Swasthya Adhikari Dr NP Singh regarding this. The MC asked him to ensure the cleanliness in all the public toilets.

Both the Mayor and the MC directed the officers to ensure the proper arrangements of sewage and cleanliness. There should not be any encroachment on the roads approaching to the ghats and the roads should also be repaired if there is any damage, they directed.

It is learnt that the kanwariyas and devotees reach the ghats in large numbers particularly on Mondays during the auspicious month to take holy dip in river Ganga before going to Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple to have a darshan and offer prayer to Baba Vishwanath.

This time, eight Mondays will fall in Shrawan because of adimas.

DM inspects Kurhua Gram Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam on Sunday conducted an inspection of Kurhua Gram Sabha in Kashi Vidyapith block and directed the concerned authority to issue a charge sheet to the lekhpal of the area.

The encroachment is affecting the pond to beautify and preserve the work, the DM said and directed the block development officer to make the village free from polythene by launching a drive and also make the village clean.

The DM inspected the secretary of Gram Panchayat

and took information from the villagers whether the secretary, lekhpal and other block level and revenue employees sit here regularly or not.

The DM also inspected the library in Panchayat Bhawan and directed for keeping a register and knowledge-able books and magazines besides the newspaper here. He also inspected the data register of the door-to-door family survey and took knowledge about the number of families living in the village. The village develop-

ment officer informed that there are 415 families in the village and 44 families have Antyodaya cards as well as ayushman cards.

The DM appealed to the villagers to visit Panchayat Bhawan and gather the knowledge about various schemes being run by the government for their welfare and also take their advantage. The DM also visited the Shoolkanteshwar Mahadev Mandir in adjoining Madhopur village and inspected the ghat.

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State-of-the-art equipment to be installed to monitor Sangam area

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

As the state government has decided that state-of-the-art equipment will be installed to monitor the entire Sangam area during Mahakumbh-2025, the entire infrastructure to keep a close vigil on the mela area will be managed by the Smart city authorities.

The infrastructure will be operated by a private entity, but the control will be with the government security agency, controlled centrally from Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC).

Like 2019 Kumbh, the Prayagraj Smart City Limited has once again been entrusted with the responsibility of developing a surveillance system for monitoring the Mahakumbh area for the safety of the devotees. In the last Kumbh, Prayagraj Smart City Limited had purchased all the equipment and installed the same. However, this time all the needed equipment will be sourced by them. These security equipment will be linked to the ICCC as was the case in 2019. The district administration and the district police control the ICCC. According to mission manager (technical) of

Prayagraj Smart City, Sanjeev Sinha, "Private agencies have been invited to develop surveillance system for Mahakumbh as there is nothing new in this as several events, within and outside the country, are organised with the help of private agencies which are hired for the surveillance system, he added.

Similar arrangements will be there in Maha Kumbh too for which we have estimated to spend Rs 15 crore. In Kumbh-2019, various equipment were installed for monitoring the movement of devotees, vehicles etc in the vast mela area and these were controlled through ICCC. Later, when Kumbh Mela was over, all the CCTV cameras and other equipment were installed in the city and these devices are linked to ICCC which monitors all major intersections and major locations in the city. The surveillance system that would be put in place during Mahakumbh would manage several aspects. The system will monitor the crowd movement through a network of CCTV cameras. Likewise, the lost and found centre will be revamped into a state-of-the-art facility. Technology will also be used in crowd management and all

parking sites will be monitored by cameras. There will be a number of display sites where important messages will be displayed and security devices with sensors will be installed at key locations. There will be arrangements for data centre and disaster recovery as video analysis of protective measures will be done. The security and traffic system will also be linked to ICCC.

ARRESTED: The STF team arrested a contract killer from Bandhwa Tahirpur intersection near Andawa turn Jhansi. An FIR was lodged against him three months ago at Jhansi police station for taking 'supari' for murder of a person. His wife had conspired with her lover. At that time the STF had arrested the lover and his girlfriend and sent them to jail. However, Manoj Pasi, who took the 'supari', was absconding. The STF team recovered a 315 bore pistol, two cartridges, a mobile and some cash from him. The STF claims that more than a dozen FIRs are registered against him.

Manoj Pasi said Kavita Singh along with her lover Surendra Singh had given 'supari' to him to kill her husband Sunil Kumar Singh. He,

was about to kill Sunil along with his accomplices Subhash Pasi, Saurabh Pasi, while he was going to catch the train, but the plan flopped when Kavita and her lover, were caught. A case has been registered against the arrested accused at Jhansi police station.

On March 12, 2023, the STF team had arrested Surendra Singh of Jhansi area, Gangotri Nagar, Havelia, Jhansi, and his paramour Kavita Singh, wife of Sunil of Katsari village under Kadipur police station, Sultanpur.

During interrogation, it was revealed that Surendra and Kavita had conspired to kill Sunil. Meanwhile, STF got a clue and it arrested Surendra and Kavita.

During interrogation, they revealed of them told the name of Manoj Pasi of Chak Karim, Hanumanganj, Saraiyanat, who had taken contract to kill Sunil. STF Deputy SP Navendu Singh said the team which made the arrest included inspector Satya Prakash Singh, head constable Umesh Kumar Singh, Dharendra Kumar Yadav, Gunjan Kumar Singh, Randhir Singh, Satish Chandra besides SI Yogendra Kumar Singh and Navneet Kumar Singh.

₹10 lakh extortion demanded from property dealer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Property dealer Mohd Parvez has lodged a report against five people, including slain mafia Atiq Ahmed's shooter Zulfikar alias Tota, for demanding extortion of ₹ 10 lakh. In the report registered at the Dhoomanganj police station, Parvez of Chakia, Kasari Masari, said he had gone to his sister's house on April 25. He alleged that Akram, his brother Azam, Aslam of Ahmedpur and Faizan stopped him and threatened to kill him. They said that if he did not give ₹10 lakh, he will be shot. Parvez told the police that Faizan took out his gun and put it on his temple. Due to panic, he gave him ₹50,000 kept in his pocket. Akram and Faizan said demanded that ₹10 lakh should be given in 24 hours or else

they will kill him. While leaving, the accused said that all this is happening at the behest of Tota Bhai. ACP Dhoomanganj Varun Kumar said that case has been registered. The matter is being investigated.

MISSING: The son of a tent businessman of Bhadohi has gone missing from Prayagraj Junction. An FIR for the kidnapping of the missing child was registered on July 5. The child's father claims that the police hesitated in registering the FIR which led to delay, while the police say that the complainant's wife is mentally disturbed and did not even know when her child went missing. She went to her sister's place and when she remembered after 15 days, she told her family members. After that they went to the police station.

On getting information the police registered the report. Sunil Kumar of Bhuri Pur village under Gopiganj police station of Bhadohi does paint business in Gopiganj. Sunil Kumar has two children. He said his wife Aarti Devi was going to her sister's in-laws' place in Fatehpur on June 15 with their son Krishna. At the exit gate of platform No 1 of Prayagraj Junction, Aarti was lying with the child while waiting for the train. That's when she fell asleep and when she woke up, Krishna was missing. She searched around but could not find him and then she informed Sunil.

Sunil reached Prayagraj from Bhadohi. He reported this to GRP Prayagraj and Khuldabad police station. The Khuldabad police station in-charge trainee IPS Neetu said

the complaint of the missing child has come late in the police station. Complainant wife Aarti was going to her sister's place in Fatehpur on June 15. She is somewhat mentally disturbed so she didn't know when her child went missing. She went to Fatehpur alone. After 15 days, when husband Sunil asked about the child, she remembered.

She then told the family that the child had disappeared from Prayagraj Junction itself. After that the boy's father Sunil and others came to the police station on July 3. After investigation, FIR was registered on July 5. In the CCTV footage that has been extracted, a person is seen carrying the child, but his face is not clear. It is a very short footage. Teams have been engaged for locating the child, added the trainee IPS.

Admission in UG professional courses through CUET

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The authorities of Allahabad University will be conducting the admission against 468 seats in various undergraduate professional courses in Institute of professional studies (IPS) and Centre for Vocational Studies and Skill Development (CVSSD) through Common University Entrance Test (CUET). It consists of seven courses in IPS and one course in CVSSD. Apart from this, admission to BALLB, BCom, BA, BSc, BFA, BPA will also be done under CUET. There are about 17,000 seats at AU and its constituent colleges. The admission process for post-

graduate courses will start from July 10. Entrance Test (PGAT) results have already been announced and from July 10, the university will send the data of the entrance examination to all departments of PG admission. It is expected that the results of the entrance examination, held under CUET, will be announced from July 15. This time on the lines of Delhi University, AU is preparing to start registration before the result. If all goes well, online registration for admission to graduation will start from July 11. A registration fee of Rs 300 has been fixed for general and OBC candidates and Rs 150 for SC-ST and PWD candidates.

Admissions in Allahabad University will be done in online mode on the basis of National Testing Agency (NTA) score. A portal is being prepared for this. This portal will be linked to the official website of the University. Only students who fill the option of AU at the time of application will be able to register online for admission. In another important development on the campus, superintendent of SSL hostel of AU Santosh Kumar Singh, has been removed and suspended. Singh is working on the post of assistant professor in the Hindi department of AU. This action has been taken on the complaint of the students.

Along with this, the warden of the hostel has also been changed. To investigate the matter, the university administration has formed a five member committee under DSW, JS Naulakha of the department of Ancient History has been appointed as the new superintendent. According to AU's Public Relations Officer, Prof Jaya Kapoor, Santosh Singh has been removed from the post of superintendent in view of the complaints of SSL hostel inmates. The warden of the hostel has also been changed and in place of Ashwajeet, Prof SM Prasad has been appointed as the new warden of SSL hostel.



National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel rescue a child amid flash floods due to heavy monsoon rainfall, in Kullu district on Sunday. PTI



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Death of democracy

There is no place for violence in democracy and Bengal panchayat poll deaths raise serious concerns

The worst fears have come true in West Bengal where widespread violence has taken place during the three-tier panchayat polls. The sporadic violence has led to the death of at least 16 people. This was despite the deployment of central reserve forces across the state. The violence that marred the panchayat elections in West Bengal has raised serious concerns about the state of democracy in the state. The BJP has already asked for the president's rule in the state saying the law and order has collapsed in the state. This electoral process, meant to be a celebration of grassroots democracy, turned into a battlefield, undermining the very essence of democratic principles. It indeed has a detrimental impact on the democratic fabric of our society. Historically, West Bengal has been a hotbed of political rivalry, leading to an environment conducive to violence during elections. Political parties often perceive these local elections as crucial for consolidating power and gaining ground at the state level. This fierce competition and the desperation to secure victory at any cost fuel the violent tendencies witnessed during the polls. Having said that, it could have been stopped had the State and the Central government had the will to do so. TMC, the party in power has most resources at its disposal. Even before the polls, the reports of threats to candidates fighting against TMC were reported. But nothing was done about it. The TMC as per the exit polls is likely to sweep the panchayat polls which is only expected in such a scenario. On the other hand, though the Central Govt did send 60,000+ security forces, it was least bothered to collaborate with the State Govt as it saw an opportunity to discredit the State Government and who knows even a pretext to slap president rule.



Now that the elections are over and results would be out on July 11, a new blame game is going to start after TMC sweeps the polls as predicted by the Exit polls. But this is no democracy. West Bengal is one of the few states in the country to hold panchayat elections and TMC should take the blame for smothering the grassroots democracy painstakingly built over the years. Winning is not everything in a democracy, strengthening democratic institutions is. After winning panchayat elections where ballot boxes were burnt and polling agents beaten up, what locus standi would Mamata Banerjee have to call for strengthening democracy in the 2024 General elections? She wins elections but loses credibility. Not all is lost yet, if she could take the moral responsibility and back the opposition's call for repolls where such incidents took place, she could salvage her image. She should take strict action against those found inciting violence or engaging in criminal activities. Besides, there is a need for electoral reforms, including independent monitoring of the election process. Transparency, accountability, and a level playing field for all parties must be ensured.

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PICTALK



Tourists visit Taj Mahal during light monsoon rains, in Agra.

From culinary staple to pricey delicacy



RAJDEEP PATHAK

By minimising spoilage and ensuring efficient distribution, prices can be kept in check, benefiting both farmers and consumers

The vegetable vendor alarmingly – yet with a mischievous smile – announced that tomatoes per kg today are at Rs 180. Garlic has already dried our desire and ginger has left the refrigerator vacant for some time with its skyrocketing price of almost Rs 380 per kg. Moreover, the customary ginger-garlic paste pouch isn't appealing enough for the taste buds.

As the humble tomato hits record-breaking prices – with ginger and garlic lending their little support – it's time to take a step back and see the historical roots of this peculiar vegetable's journey to the Indian subcontinent. While it may seem trivial to delve into history while grappling with astronomical prices that have hit our kitchens – all thanks to devastating climatic changes – a look at the arrival of tomatoes and their supposed medicinal benefits might offer some relief in these trying times.

It was the 16th century when the brave explorers of the European world embarked on a quest to discover new lands and flavours. Christopher Columbus – the famous Italian explorer – is believed to have stumbled upon America, where he found the red, juicy tomato.

Initially greeted with suspicion and considered poisonous by Europeans, tomatoes soon found their way to the Indian subcontinent through Portuguese traders in the early 17th century. One of the earliest records of this vegetable can be seen in the 19th-century cookbook, 'Nuskha-i Niyamat Khaan' (1801), under a recipe for tomato soup titled 'Tarkeeb-i Tomata Sup Yaani Shorba Wilayati Baingan' (wilayati baingan translates to 'foreign eggplant').

Like we Indians embrace all good-bad things with open arms, we opened our arms and embraced this red flavour to our delicacies and this vibrant vegetable became a staple in Indian cuisine, lending its tangy touch to countless dishes – from curries to chutneys to salads, spicing up our dining area and successfully infiltrating our taste buds.

However, apart from being a culinary sensation, the tomato has



long been hailed for its supposed medicinal benefits. Early European settlers believed that tomatoes possessed extraordinary healing properties. Science, however, debunked many of these early theories, even though it is undeniable that the legacy of the tomato as a medicinal panacea is largely accepted. They are a good source of potassium, manganese, magnesium, phosphorus, and copper.

Fast forward to the present day, and the tomato has become an indispensable part of our daily lives. Whether we slice them onto our salads or squeeze them into our sandwiches, the tomato's versatility cannot be denied. However, the current price of tomato has transformed it from a humble staple to an exorbitantly priced luxury item, which is not surprising as to why tomato, once known for its affordability, has become a symbol of the economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots.

It is necessary to understand that the tomato plant, like many other crops, is highly susceptible to the wrath of climate change. Unpredictable weather patterns, extreme heatwaves, and erratic rainfall have taken a toll on tomato production worldwide. India has also been hit. As a result, the supply of tomatoes has



THE SOARING PRICE OF TOMATOES MAY SEEM LIKE A TRIVIAL MATTER IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS, BUT IT REFLECTS BROADER ISSUES IN OUR AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM THAT NEEDS SERIOUS THOUGHT

dwindled, leading to a surge in prices. Coupled with it are the alleged news reports of the tomato cartels, a clandestine group of individuals who control tomato production and distribution. These cartels allegedly operate in the shadows, manipulating prices, and orchestrating scarcity to maximize their profits.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Experts and agricultural scientists suggest that there is a need to 'diversify agriculture'. Encouraging farmers to diversify their crops can help reduce the over-dependence on tomatoes and mitigate the impact of price fluctuations. Government initiatives and incentives can be introduced to promote the cultivation of alternative vegetables, ensuring a steady supply and stabilizing prices.

Further empowering local farmers and promoting sustainable farming practices can contribute to a more resilient agricultural system. This can happen by supporting farmers' cooperatives and creating direct market links between producers and consumers and helping bypass intermediaries, ensuring fair prices for both parties.

Given the vulnerability of tomato crops to changing climatic conditions, investing in greenhouse farming can pro-

vide a controlled environment for tomato cultivation. This would help protect the crops from extreme weather, increase yields, and stabilize prices.

More than anything else – even thinking beyond promoting backyard gardening and kitchen gardening – there is an urgent need to improve infrastructure and storage facilities and improved transportation infrastructure for reducing post-harvest losses. Also, investments in research and development can lead to the development of tomato varieties that are more resilient to changing climate conditions.

The soaring price of tomatoes may seem like a trivial matter in the grand scheme of things, but it reflects broader issues in our agricultural system that needs serious thought. The tomato's path to stardom has been paved with treacherous plots, rivalling even the most gripping soap operas. From garden to market, it seems every step of the tomato's journey is now laden with expenses and the price that humans are paying today for their role in facilitating climate change per se. The hole in their pockets is becoming bigger.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RAINS CAUSE CONCERN FOR PILGRIMS

Sir — Over 370 pilgrims en route to the Amarnath cave shrine were evacuated and provided shelter by the Army on July 8, as intermittent heavy rains forced the closure of the twin routes to the shrine in the Kashmir valley. So far, 253 yatis at the Barari Marg Camp and 126 yatis at the Chandanwari camp are comfortable. Army columns are reassuring support. Timely help and necessary assistance are being provided by the Indian Army to provide succour to the stranded devotees. The authorities suspended the pilgrimage for the second consecutive day on July 8 as wet weather turned the twin tracks in south and central Kashmir unfit for trekking pilgrims.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

MINORITIES OPPOSE UCC

Sir — There is strong opposition not only from the Muslim Personal Law Board but also from the tribal groups and Sikhs to Uniform Civil Code. Now the moot question is whether India needs such a law and whether this is the time to push it. Now not only Muslims many communities in our country perceive the UCC as infringing on their religious freedom. Bringing the UCC issue is nothing but to divert attention from issues like unemployment, inflation, rising unrest in society, communal violence in the country, rising prices and the failure of the Modi Government in controlling violence in Manipur. The UCC is timed with an eye on the coming Parliamentary poll elections. The proposed UCC is neither relevant nor beneficial for a multi-religious, multicultural and multilingual country like India. The concept of "one nation - one law" will prove ruinous for India's multi-cultural ethos. Former Congress Leader Kapil Sibal has rightly asked PM Modi by bringing the UCC issue not to open Pandora Box and he rightly asked why BJP Government rising now UCC issue after sitting quietly for nine years. The Government before implementing UCC should have to win



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The impact of new UGC regulations

The new regulation of UGC making PhD optional in the appointment of assistant professors will attract youngsters towards teaching

It's often said that the quality of higher education in a country rest in the hands of the number PhDs holders produced by her. It is because of PhD scholars we are producing scientific papers and holding the top position in world rankings.

With this objective policy makers give more impetus to increase the number of doctoral degree holders every year. Even during various accreditation processes like NAAC, NIRE, DSIR, NBA etc, more thrust is given to the number of PhD holders in an institution. It is at this juncture the recent order amending the essential qualification for the post of assistant professor in higher education institutions has created confusion in the academic community. As per the new regulation PhD has become optional for the post of assistant professor in higher education institutions.

There is indeed no correlation between higher degrees of teachers and quality of education or research. Many of our great teachers and scientists didn't have



any doctoral degrees. Degrees or academic grades alone cannot reliably gauge a candidate's research capabilities or potential.

However, the new regulation of UGC making PhD optional in the appointment of assistant professors, though will attract youngsters towards teaching, will badly affect the research environment in higher education. The reason for the decline in higher education-quality is twofold.

The primary reason is the lack of interest among the students towards science courses. The second reason is that syllabus followed in science subjects in many universities across the country is outdated and the students who come out from our universities are not

employable in the current global standards. Most of the syllabi in our state universities are prepared for the convenience of teachers.

Even though there are provisions for research training during the undergraduate and postgraduate periods, most students and teachers don't take it seriously. Most of the students depend on private laboratories that prepare readymade dissertation reports without doing any hands-on work, after paying the necessary amount. Even teachers who work in many colleges depend on such laboratories for their doctoral work and publications. The students who come out of such institutions don't know the fundamentals of research.

The marks received by present-day students cannot be taken as a marker of quality, because of the faulty evaluation scheme followed by many universities. If there is a decline in the pass percentage, the management seeks an explanation from teachers. So nowadays evaluation of answer scripts is just to satisfy the management and students. Students

pursue a course that is easy to pass, looking at the pass percentage of previous years. The NET examination in the current pattern evaluates the student solely based on multiple-choice questions.

Students who are trained by good coaching centres by paying high fees qualify for the NET exam easily. So even the NET examination can't evaluate the skills needed for a teacher in the higher education sector.

A higher education teacher should be able to handle research independently. While exempting people from PhD, one should restructure the NET examination pattern so that it includes ways to evaluate knowledge, research skills and teaching skills. Also, the question patterns of NET should be changed every year so that influence of coaching centres would be reduced and students from every section of society get equal opportunity. If this is not done it may affect the quality of scientific research in the long term.

(The writer is a science communicator and a columnist)

India-Canada spat



A war of words has broken out between the Canadian and the Indian government as the Khalistani protests in the country remained on the rise, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's words on the issue were criticized by India. The Indian government slammed Canada for its unsatisfactory

response to the anti-India activities in the country, saying that the 'freedom of expression' cannot be used to legitimize illegal activities, while Canada begs to differ. After the Indian government raised concerns regarding the Khalistani movement, PM Trudeau seemingly brushed aside the allegations when India said that Canada is not serious about cracking down against the anti-national movement which Canada said is wrong. His remarks came days after India summoned the Canadian envoy in New Delhi and issued a demarche over the increasing activities by pro-Khalistani elements in Canada. His remarks also came two days ahead of a proposed pro-Khalistan rally outside the Indian High Commission in Ottawa on July 8. With this Canada is not a safe place for Indians due to Khalistan attacks supported by the Canadian government.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

the trust of everyone and the issue should be discussed in Parliament thoroughly.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

WORK FROM HOME

Sir — When employees work from home, companies benefit on costs in terms of rent, water, electricity and fuel allowances. Workstations worldwide are generally crowded. Though it is a real challenge to work remotely, it also allows one to acquire and hone many new skills like planning, forward-thinking, coordination in times of distress, and so on. In addition, it is natural that when you are working from home, you save a lot of commute time and get to spend it with your family. ("Address employee burnout on priority", July 4, 2023).

But then there are issues that employees face in the 'work from home' model. The combination of work and personal, and collective health anxiety contributed to a specific kind of burnout brought on

by the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to stress and worries to emerge. The emotional trauma from stress had been even higher among remote workers due to the challenges of balancing home life and office work in the same setting.

However, there are ways to deal with burnout. It could be like taking a few deep breaths or smelling a wonderful fragrance since our brain needs to take small breaks from often monotonous tasks. Also talking to friends and relatives can be helpful as they may give some insights into how you can reduce your stress. A shift towards home working doesn't mean that an employee has to necessarily work from home always. Often splitting time between home and the workplace is, perhaps, the most productive and profitable solution to deal with employee burnout.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

SLEEP WELL TO LIVE WELL

Adequate rest and sleep are an integral part of our healing process



RAVI VALLURI

As per Wikipedia, "Sleep is a condition of body and mind which typically recurs for several hours every night, in which the nervous system is inactive, the eyes are closed, the postural muscles relaxed, and consciousness gets practically suspended."

An Art of Living teacher filled with energy purveyed the participants in a course and asked, "How would a person feel the following morning after sleeping for fourteen hours a day?" In unison, the participants replied, "Sluggish." His next question was, "What if the individual sleeps for barely a few hours a night?" The answer, again was, "The individual would feel restless and irritable." In either situation, the performance of the individuals would be below par.

Quantum of snooze

A baby between the ages of two weeks and two months sleeps anywhere between 15.5 hours to 17 hours during a day, while a normal and healthy adult ought to sleep between 7 to 9 hours to feel refreshed and recharged. As children, we have no option, but to follow the principles laid down by nature. However, as adults, we lose our innocence and to become achievers often neglect our sleep.

Humans, despite all the talent and knowledge seem to lack the intelligence to compute or quantify the repository of energy or full potential within their selves. The nature of a human being is akin to that of an atom. The nucleus of an atom is positive, while negatively charged particles are smeared on the circumference. Negative thoughts and actions are not an integral part of human nature; it merely resides on the circumference. An individual who appreciates that the Divine lives within becomes calm and radiant. Such a human being automatically becomes a magnet for other people.



Silence and siesta

It is noteworthy to mention that a person suffering from any ailment is prescribed several medicines to recuperate. But sleep is the wonder tonic that removes all the toxins accumulated in the body. Adequate rest and sleep are an integral part of our healing process.

The Universe, by the laws of nature, has provided all humans with four sources of energy; namely food, breath, sleep or deep rest and a meditative state of mind. Sudarshan Kriya has all these sources of energy for the benefit of humanity with consummate ease and dexterity, which enables a person to recharge his/her batteries and feel rejuvenated and reinvigorated to enhance their inner potential. In his impish manner, Gurudev says, "Practising Sudarshan Kriya is like romance with breath." And regular practice of the technique helps in the quality of sleep of a person.

It is paramount for a human to eschew violence and ferocity, even if it is in thought. It is important to rediscover the inner potential and become peaceful. Peace dawns on the human mind when there is innocence and what better way to cocoon the mind with efficacious thoughts than to remove the swathes of cobwebs? Humans need to observe the mind, the thoughts which cannonade it and the noise it generates. This cacophony is often generated in pursuit of accumulation and at the cost of fulfilment.

Aggregating and acquisition of fame, recognition, and wealth by offering sacrifices at the altar of humanism is certainly not the sign of a wise person. The seminal British painter, poet and printmaker William Blake who was virtually anonymous during his lifetime put it succinctly, "Think in the morning and act in the noon. Eat in the evening, sleep in the night."

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd, East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living)

FDI in farmlands: DEA says exercise caution



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The Department of economic affairs says the pace of growth can be hit by geo-political stress, volatility in global systems and correction in global stocks



It is an interesting time. It is a trying time. It is growth times. It has paused. India's FDI in greenfield projects rise to \$ 49.3 billion. India cannot rest on laurels, says finance ministry. And the end of sops has sent jitters down the foreign portfolio investors (FPI), revealing tax authorities meet at the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Paris.

QUITE A SCENARIO

The World Investment Report of UNCTAD has come with the good news that FPI in greenfield projects have increased by \$ 5 billion in investments in 2022 from a previous \$ 44 billion. Apart from a sharp increase in foreign investments in greenfield—or new—projects in India, the report also noted that India was the second-largest recipient of international project finance in the world in 2022. Looks good. Is it so? Greenfield projects occupy those areas of land that have minimal to no structure. So, there are no expenditures associated with the clearance of farmlands at the greenfield sites. In short, these are farmlands close to cities and have many strings attached. Farmers have reason to feel concerned as say in the Jewar area of Bulandshahr and Greater Noida in UP.

The Department of economic affairs (DEA) of the finance ministry has issued a significant caution in the pre-poll year. In its Annual Review 2023, it says despite growth, resilience in urban demand conditions with higher auto sales, fuel consumption and UPI transactions and rural demand on the path to recovery, the pace can be hit by increasing geo-political stress, volatility in global systems, the sharp correction in global stock markets, deep impact of El Nino, modest trade activity and lower FDI inflows owing to frail global demand.

"In 2022, emerging market economies (EMEs) remained subdued

and volatile as geopolitical uncertainties rose. Global slowdown in investment flows to EMEs led to India's net FDI inflows dipping in FY 23", the report says. Despite this, it says though GDP growth continued to remain around 7.2 per cent. The current account deficit, unlikely to improve much, it says would be sustainable if "it is financed by normal capital flows".

Those investment blues have given sharp jitters to the foreign portfolio investors as the Indian and French tax authorities meet in Paris. It has set off alarm bells among FPIs based in France. The meeting on the double taxation avoidance agreement between India and France has led to apprehension among foreign funds that India may soon renegotiate the treaty to eliminate capital gains tax exemption.



MANY FOREIGN BANKS AND LARGE FUNDS SHIFTED THEIR INDIA EQUITY TRADES AWAY FROM MAURITIUS AND SINGAPORE TO FRANCE, WHICH IS THE TENTH LARGEST SOURCE OF FPI FUNDS TO INDIA

(The author is a senior journalist)

Currently, France and The Netherlands have major exemptions on capital gains as per treaties with India for share sales. This comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris in the coming week. In 2017, India renegotiated similar tax treaties with Singapore and Mauritius ending capital gains exemptions. Similar provisions with Cyprus were also removed.

Consequently, many foreign banks and large funds shifted their India equity trades away from Mauritius and Singapore to France, which is the tenth largest source of FPI funds to India. It holds Rs 1.2 lakh crore securities in the Indian market as on May 31. If it happens the FPI flows would shift elsewhere and the exposure

to Indian markets may get reduced.

The UNCTAD report also notes that the inflows into India in 2022 were, however, significantly lower than what was seen in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, during which \$64 billion of FDI entered the country.

Still, Indian stock markets are zooming to new highs but on the weekend on July 7, Nifty 50 fell for the first time since it has been rising with the HDFC merger. The US rate hikes have weighed on global equities. The Nifty fell by 0.85 per cent to 19331 and BSE Sensex lost 0.77 per cent at 65280. This in itself may not be an exact indicator but the US rate rise will have an impact on fund flows to India on many counts.

It has been observed whenever funds flow moves back to the US, the dollar becomes expensive, gold prices fall and capital flow to the US increases at the cost of particularly the developing world. The rupee may fall again. The caution of the finance ministry may not be as cursory as many would like to believe. This looks strange despite the growth statistics not being so dismal. If nothing ails it calls for retrospection as to why a \$ 3 trillion economy wavers. There is a perception strengthened by the RBI that the prices are not softening to the extent it is required. It remains RBI's concern because rising prices erode the purchasing capacity and lead to a thaw in the growth process.

It is also an indicator that rising capital expenses largely on construction and rebuilding of structures are not boosting the

economy to the desired levels. It has made steel, cement and other essentials expensive but it calls for a study of whether the benefits are percolating down.

Their finance ministry observations could be challenged as well if the GST collections at Rs 1.61 lakh crore are taken into account. It means financial and economic activity has grown. But why it's not seen in manufacturing and other activities? The Purchasing Managers Index also shows improvement. Still, economic happiness is not a general trend. But it is said that all that GST collects may not be exact. There are reports of leakage. Or it may be that the refunds that are to be made for GST are also shown as collections. It is a flaw in the system. The monthly figures do not exactly reflect the refunds that GST makes for tax payments.

The greenfield investments that UNCTAD mentions also are not that easy. It is bound in chains of rules and takes time to get released. This requires a deeper look into finance ministry assessments. Its apprehensions are grave. Its pessimism on the international scenario calls for caution. Though it has not spoken of the debt burden that too remains high.

A streak of hope larks in the project capital flows as the World Investment Report says. It is a silver line that India has to weigh against the geopolitical crisis. Despite India taking a lead in world affairs, it has to trudge cautiously to put the economy on a fast track overcoming the hurdles.

Need for a robust rating system for housing projects

The rating of real estate projects and developers will be a major booster for property buyers, ushering in transparency in real estate transactions

The introduction of the Real Estate Regulation Act (RERA) has ushered in enhanced transparency, accountability, and customer-centricity and financial discipline. Also, post-RERA there has been a significant drop in the complaints of homebuyers (from 23% in the pre-RERA period to 3.5% in post-RERA), as per Maharashtra RERA (MahaRERA) data. But despite this, the confidence of home buyers has not been fully restored in under-construction projects. It is evident from home buyers' buying behaviour as they are preferring ready-to-move projects, compared to under-construction projects. This is well established in the latest report by a leading real estate consultancy. The report mentions that in



VINOD BEHL

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2022, the share of ready-to-move homes in total home sales was as high as 58%.

There is a need to further boost the confidence of home buyers and it is in this context that MahaRERA has decided to rate real estate projects and developers. It is significant to point out that such rating systems have been prevalent in advanced countries. Since 1989, the Building & Construction Authority (BCA) of Singapore has introduced several assessment frameworks for ratings. Integrated Construction Quality Assurance Scheme (ICQA) is the latest rating system introduced by BCA to ensure greater quality, productivity, sustainability and safety in the real estate sector. Dubai Land Department has intro-

duced 1-4 star ratings for its buildings besides an additional 4 plus rating for sustainability features. Property Council of Australia (PCA) provides a framework for the certification of office buildings with grades like Premium, Grade A, Grade B and others.

In India, in line with global practices, ratings for the hospitality segment of real estate have been in place. The Hotels & Restaurants Accreditation Committee (HRACC) under the Ministry of Tourism ranks hotels with 1-5 star ratings. The credit rating mechanism for real estate companies as per regulations of SEBI and RBI for bank financing and IPO, is in place. The Indian Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) launched a 5-star rating scheme for office buildings

operated only in the daytime in three climate zones— composite, hot & dry, and warm and humid. Similarly, IGBC (Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) ratings, the first rating system exclusively for residential real estate have been there. The rating system pertains to green cities, green residential societies, townships, SEZs, affordable housing, data centres etc. IGBC rating systems are voluntary, consensus-based and market-driven. Coming to the grading system proposed by MahaRERA is aimed at facilitating home buyers get a better sense of projects that fit their needs and make an informed choice for home selection. The parameters for grading include project overview and technical, financial and legal aspects.

The grading /rating system looks at any legal encumbrances, complaints against projects, NCLT or other legal proceedings and warrants against developers. It also looks at financial encumbrances, annual audit reports, penalties and financial progress. The project-related parameters include project registration date, proposed completion date, annual quality certificate, extension application, booking amount, formation of society, and conveyance to the association of allottees. The first rating list of projects is likely to be available from April 2024.

Real estate experts like Boman Irani, President CREDAI, an apex body of real estate developers believe that this rating system will create

a conducive buying environment for home buyers by providing a more transparent and confidence-building ecosystem. It has a dual advantage. On one hand, it will increase the confidence of home buyers about under-construction projects, making investment decisions easier, in turn increasing home sales. On the other hand, it will encourage developers to adopt good practices. Good projects will get easy funding at lower rates and for home buyers mortgage financing will become easier and better for high-grade projects. Brand experts opine that with the rating system, developers will be motivated to earn good grades which will help in better marketing, help home buyers distinguish good projects, boost

the investment quotient of residential real estate and provide an overall impetus to the real estate sector.

It is high time that other states' RERA authorities also follow Maharashtra RERA in introducing grading of real estate projects and developers for creating an eco-system for safe and profitable investments in real estate. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should make a rating of real estate projects and developers mandatory under RERA. And to facilitate this, industry bodies like CREDAI and NAREDCO should lend their support. This will help boost the sentiment of property buyers and investors, paving the way for further strengthening real estate as a safe and investable asset class.

NATO unity to be tested at upcoming summit

AP ■ WASHINGTON

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues with no end in sight, NATO's much-celebrated unity faces fresh strains when leaders gather for their annual summit this week in Vilnius, Lithuania. The world's biggest security alliance is struggling to reach an agreement on admitting Sweden as its 32nd member.

Military spending by member nations lags behind longstanding goals. An inability to compromise over who should serve as NATO's next leader forced an extension of the current secretary-general's term for an extra year.

Perhaps the most difficult questions are over how Ukraine should be eased into NATO. Some maintain admitting Ukraine would fulfill a promise made years ago and be a necessary step to deter Russian aggression in Eastern Europe.

Others fear it would be seen as a provocation that could spiral into an even wider conflict. "I don't think it's ready for

membership in NATO," President Joe Biden told CNN in an interview airing Sunday. He said joining NATO requires countries to "meet all the qualifications, from democratization to a whole range of other issues." He said the United States should provide long-term security assistance to Ukraine — "the capacity to defend themselves" — as it does with Israel.

Bickering among friends is not uncommon, and the current catalogue of disputes pales in comparison with past fears that Donald Trump would turn his back on the alliance during his presidency. But the current challenges come at a moment when Biden and his counterparts are heavily invested in demonstrating harmony among members.

"Any fissure, any lack of solidarity provides an opportunity for those who would oppose the alliance," said Douglas Lute, US ambassador to NATO under President Barack Obama. Russian President Vladimir Putin is eager to exploit divisions as he struggles to gain

ground in Ukraine and faces political challenges at home, including the aftermath of a brief revolt by the Wagner mercenary group. "You don't want to present any openings," Lute said. "You don't want to present any gaps or seams."

By some measures, the war in Ukraine has reinvigorated NATO, which was created at the beginning of the Cold War as a bulwark against Moscow.

NATO members have poured military hardware into Ukraine to help with its counteroffensive, and Finland ended a history of nonalignment to become NATO's 31st member.

"I think it's appropriate to look at all the success," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky told The Associated Press. "So I think the invasion has strengthened NATO — exactly the opposite of what Putin anticipated." He noted Germany's shift toward a more robust defense policy as well as increase in military spending in other countries. The latest test of NATO solidarity came Friday with

what Biden said was a "difficult decision" to provide cluster munitions to Ukraine.

More than two-thirds of alliance members have banned the weapon because it has a track record for causing many civilian casualties.

The US, Russia and Ukraine are not among the more than 120 countries that have not signed a convention outlawing the use of the bombs.

As for Ukraine's possible entry into NATO, alliance said in 2008 that Kyiv eventually would become a member.

Since then, little action has been taken toward that goal. Putin occupied parts of Ukraine in 2014 and then tried to capture the capital in 2022 with his invasion. "A gray zone is a green light for Putin," said Daniel Fried, a former US ambassador to Poland who is now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council.

The US and Germany insist that the focus should be on supplying weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, rather than taking the more provocative step of

extending a formal invitation to join NATO. Countries on NATO's Eastern flank — Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland — want firmer assurances on future membership. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is pushing for that as well. During a visit to the Czech Republic on Thursday, he said the "ideal" result of the Vilnius summit would be an invitation for his country to join the alliance.

NATO could decide to elevate its relationship with Ukraine, creating what would be known as the NATO-Ukraine Council and giving Kyiv a seat at the table for consultations. Also in the spotlight in Vilnius will be Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the main obstacle to Sweden's attempts to join NATO alongside neighbour Finland. Erdogan accuses Sweden of being too lenient on anti-Islamic demonstrations and militant Kurdish groups that have waged a long insurgency in Turkey. Sweden recently changed its anti-terrorism legislation and

lifted an arms embargo on Turkey. But a man burned a Quran outside a mosque in Stockholm last week, and Erdogan signaled that this would pose another hurdle. He equated "those who permitted the crime" to those who perpetrated it. Turkey and the US are also at an impasse over the sale of F-16 fighter jets. Erdogan wants the upgraded planes, but Biden says Sweden's NATO membership has to be dealt with first. It's not the first time that Erdogan has sought to use a NATO summit for Turkish gain. In 2009, he held up the nomination of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as secretary-general but agreed to the move after securing some senior posts for Turkish officials at the alliance. Max Bergmann, a former State Department official who leads the Europe Program at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said there's growing frustration among allies toward Erdogan, building on concerns about his ties to Putin, democratic backsliding and sanctions evasion.

Missile intercepted over annexed Crimea

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian-installed authorities in the Crimean peninsula on Sunday reported shooting down a cruise missile near the city of Kerch and briefly suspending traffic on the Kerch bridge that links the annexed territory to Russia. The Moscow-appointed governor of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said the interception of the missile by Russian air defenses didn't result in any damage or casualties. He didn't offer any details, including the type of the missile and its origin.

In the nearby Russian region of Rostov, authorities on Sunday also reported shooting down a missile. Gov. Vasily Golubev said the missile was Ukrainian, and its debris damaged the roofs of several buildings. No casualties have been reported.

Such attacks far beyond the front line on Russian regions on the border with Ukraine or the annexed Crimean peninsula have become common during the war in Ukraine that has just surpassed its 500-day mark.

Officials in Russian regions and Moscow-appointed authorities in Crimea, which was illegally annexed in 2014, have regularly reported explosions, drone strikes, and even cross-border raids by Ukrainian saboteurs. Kyiv has never openly taken responsibility for these attacks.

Last October, a massive explosion severely damaged the Kerch bridge — a key transport and supply route for Russian troops in Crimea — leaving it out of commission for weeks.

In what appeared to be the first direct admission of Kyiv's involvement, Ukraine's Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar in a Telegram post on Saturday listed the attack among the country's main achievements in the war so far.

"(It's been) 273 days since (we) carried out the first strike on the Crimean bridge in order to disrupt the logistics for the Russians," Maliar wrote. Among other successes, she also mentioned the sinking of the Moskva

cruiser — something the Russian authorities refused to attribute to a Ukrainian attack. Maliar's post on Sunday caught the attention of Russian state media and officials. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova once again called President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government a "terrorist regime" in an online statement condemning the attack.

In other developments: One of the defense commanders of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol who returned to Ukraine on Saturday announced going back to the battlefield. The sprawling steelworks was the last bastion of resistance as Russian forces took control of the port city early on in the war. Azovstal's more than 2,000 defenders left the steelworks in mid-May 2022 and were taken into Russian captivity.

The five leaders, some of whom were part of the Azov national guard regiment that Russia denounces as neo-Nazi, were freed in a September prisoner swap and taken to Turkey, where they were to remain until the end of the war under the Turkish president's protection. On Saturday, however, Zelenskyy brought them back to Ukraine. There was no immediate official explanation of how this squared with the conditions of the exchange.

Speaking to reporters in Ukraine upon returning, Denys Prokopenko — one of the five commanders — said he will return to the battlefield. "I am deeply convinced that the army is a team effort."

And from today we will continue the fight together with you. We will definitely have our say in battle," Prokopenko was quoted by Ukrainian media as saying.

— The death toll from the Russian missile strike on Lyman, a city in the partially occupied Donetsk region that was struck on Saturday, rose to nine on Sunday. Lyman is a few kilometers (miles) from the front line, where Russian troops have recently intensified fighting in the forests of Kremenna.

Condemned building falls in Brazil, 14 people killed

AP ■ BRAZIL

Pernambuco (Brazil): An apartment building condemned for more than a decade but used by homeless people collapsed in Brazil's northeastern state of Pernambuco, killing 14 people, including six children, firefighters reported.

The building in Recife's Paulista suburb crumbled in the early hours of Friday, prompting a frantic search for victims.

Searchers combed through the rubble with the help of sniffer dogs and rescued two 15-year-old girls and a 65-year-old woman alive, firefighters said on Saturday. An 18-year-old man was also removed alive, but later died from his injuries.

"Search operations are now focused on the removal of animals," the fire department said.

The building was occupied by homeless people although living there had been forbidden since 2010, the Paulista city hall said in a statement.

City officials referred to the structure as a "coffin block", a name given to buildings built on a large scale in the 1970s in the metropolitan region of Recife, the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo reported. The city hall statement said the problem of people using officially closed buildings in Paulista is "chronic". It said officials raised the issue during a recent visit by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is from the northeastern state.

The collapse in Paulista was the second such tragedy in less than three months in Pernambuco. A building disintegrated in April in neighbouring Olinda, causing at least five deaths. Heavy rains had soaked the Recife region before the building collapsed in Paulista, prompting Pernambuco's water and climate agency to post an alert for the metropolitan area. A Presbyterian church near the site of the fallen building was offering housing assistance to families who had been living there, city officials said. AP

Protests grow over judicial overhaul in Israel

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel's anti-government protest movement gained new momentum on Saturday night as tens of thousands of people spilled into the streets of cities across the country to oppose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious plan to overhaul the judicial system. The grassroots movement has staged protests for over six months since Netanyahu's government unveiled the overhaul plan. But in recent weeks, the protests had shown signs of weakening.

Plans by the government to push forward with the overhaul next week in parliament, coupled with the firing of Tel Aviv's police chief, who was accused of being too sympathetic to the protesters, appeared to breathe new life into Saturday's demonstrations.

Some 1,500,000 people thronged central Tel Aviv, with large rallies in Jerusalem and other major cities. Late Saturday, dozens of people attempted to block Tel Aviv's



main highway, but they were quickly cleared away by police. Scuffles broke out, and police sprayed a water cannon at the crowd. Netanyahu's allies have proposed a series of changes to the Israeli legal system aimed at weakening what they say are the excessive powers of unelected judges. The proposed changes include giving Netanyahu's allies control over the appointment of judges and the power to overturn court decisions they do not support.

His opponents say the plan will destroy the country's fragile system of checks and bal-

ances and concentrate power in the hands of Netanyahu and his allies. They also say that Netanyahu has a conflict of interest because he is on trial for corruption charges. Wide swaths of Israeli society, including reserve military officers, business leaders, LGBT and other minority groups, have joined the protests.

A legislative committee chaired by a Netanyahu ally last week approved a bill that would prevent Israel's courts from scrutinising the "reasonableness" of decisions made by elected officials.

UN refuses to retract its condemnation of Israel over Jenin military op

AP ■ UNITED NATION

Israel's United Nations ambassador called on Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to retract his condemnation of the country for its excessive use of force in its largest military operation in two decades targeting a refugee camp in the West Bank.

UN deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said the secretary-general conveyed his views on Thursday "and he stands by those views". Guterres, angered by the impact of the Israeli airstrikes and attack on the Jenin refugee camp, said the operation left over 100 civilians injured, uprooted thousands of residents, damaged schools and hospitals, and disrupted water and electricity networks.

He also criticised Israel for preventing the injured from getting medical care and humanitarian workers from reaching everyone in need. Israel's two-day offensive meant to crack down on Palestinian militants destroyed the Jenin camp's narrow roads and alleyways, forced thousands of people to flee their homes and killed 12 Palestinians.

One Israeli soldier also was killed. "I strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror," Guterres told reporters. Asked whether this condemnation applied to Israel, he replied: "It applies to all use of excessive force, and obviously in this situation, there was an excessive force used by Israeli forces."

Mexican newspaper says its reporter killed in western state

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico City (AP): The Mexican national newspaper La Jornada said that its staff reporter in the Pacific coast state of Nayarit has been found dead. The body of journalist Luis Martín Sánchez Iniguez was found on the outskirts of the state capital, Tepic, La Jornada reported.

Sánchez Iniguez, 59, had been missing since Wednesday and an appeal had been made to find him, the Nayarit state prosecutors' office said on Saturday. The journalist's wife reported him missing, along with a computer and his cellphone.

The office said later Saturday that relatives had identified Sánchez Iniguez's body and that he had been dead for one or two days before the

corpse was found.

"The body was found with signs of violence, and two handwritten signs were found on it," prosecutors said in a statement, but did not reveal what the messages said.

Handwritten signs are frequently left by drug cartels with the bodies of victims, but the office said the motive in the killing was still under investigation.

Sánchez Iniguez was last seen in Xalisco, a Nayarit town that has long been linked to the smuggling of heroin and opium. He would be at least the second journalist killed in Mexico this year. In February, news photographer José Ramiro Araujo was stabbed and beaten to death in the northern Mexico border state of Baja California.

Pope Francis names 21 new cardinals

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis on Sunday announced he has chosen 21 new cardinals, including prelates from Jerusalem and Hong Kong — places where Catholics are a small minority.

The pope announced his picks during his customary weekly appearance to the public in St. Peter's Square, saying the ceremony to formally install the churchmen as cardinals will be held on September 30. Among those tapped are several prelates holding or about to assume major Vatican posts, like Argentine Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernandez, whom the pope just named to lead the office for ensuring doctrinal orthodoxy. The new cardinals also include Hong Kong Bishop Stephen Sau-yan Chow and the Vatican's top official in the Middle East, Monsignor Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

president will hold Ukraine-focused talks before both attend this week's NATO meeting in Vilnius, which will discuss how far the military alliance should open the door to Ukraine. NATO leaders said in 2008 that Ukraine would eventually become a member, but have not set out a road map, despite impassioned entreaties from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. "That is an area where the US is a little bit more hesitant than a lot of other NATO allies," said Julie Norman, co-director of the Centre on US Politics at University College London. "There might be some closed-door discussions about where the UK is on that before going into the whole (NATO) meeting." The US and the UK are among the strongest Western supporters of Kyiv. Norman said that "if anything, the UK has taken a bit of a lead on some of the military commitments," nudging the Biden

Biden to discuss environment during UK visit

AP ■ LONDON

A dash of pomp and a dose of politics are on the agenda during a stopover visit to the UK where President Joe Biden will discuss the environment with King Charles III and the war in Ukraine with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Biden flies to London on Sunday on his way to a NATO summit in Lithuania. He is scheduled to hold talks with Sunak at 10 Downing St on Monday before heading to Windsor Castle to meet Charles for the first time since the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in September. Though this is not a full state visit with military honours and palace banquet, the royal imprimatur and backdrop of the 1,000-year-old castle help underscore the importance of the transatlantic "special relationship" — tested by Brexit but reinforced by unity over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Sunak and the

administration to go further on issues including tanks and an international effort to give Ukraine F-16 fighter jets.

"I think in some ways that's worked to Biden's advantage as he's gotten increased resistance at home from some wings of the Republican Party about not over-giving aid to Ukraine," she said. "The fact that the UK is pushing and leading on this gives Biden a bit of a nudge and a bit of a strong ally support in moving ahead."

Biden faces unease from allies including Britain about his decision to give Ukraine cluster bombs, which are banned under a convention signed by more than 120 countries, including the UK. Sunak said Saturday that Britain "discourages their use".

Determined to show unity among Ukraine's allies, the UK has refrained from complaining about failing to secure support from Washington for Defense Secretary Ben Wallace

to become the next head of NATO. Instead, the term of current Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has been extended by a year.

The transatlantic relationship has been strained in recent years by Britain's exit from the European Union, an act Biden has made clear he thinks harmed the UK.

The president, who proudly celebrates his Irish roots, was especially concerned about the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland's peace process. Washington was relieved when Britain and the EU struck a deal in February to settle a thorny dispute over trade rules for Northern Ireland, the only part of the UK that shares a border with an EU member.

Biden briefly visited Belfast in April to mark 25 years since Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace agreement, before spending several days visiting ancestral hometowns in the Republic of Ireland.

South Korean lawmakers berate IAEA chief over plans to release treated Fukushima wastewater

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean opposition lawmakers sharply criticized the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog on Sunday for its approval of Japanese plans to release treated wastewater from the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant.

They met with Rafael Grossi in a tense meeting in Seoul that took place while protesters screamed outside the door. Grossi, the International Atomic Energy Agency's director general, arrived in South Korea over the weekend to engage with government officials and critics and help reduce public concerns about food safety. The IAEA last week approved the Japanese discharge plans, saying the process would meet international safety standards and pose negli-

ble environmental and health impacts. South Korea's government has also endorsed the safety of the Japanese plans.

In his meeting with members of the liberal Democratic Party, which controls a majority in South Korea's parliament, Grossi said the IAEA's review of the Japanese plans was based on "transparent" and "scientific" research. He acknowledged concerns over how the Japanese plans would play out in reality and said the IAEA would establish a permanent office in Fukushima to closely monitor how the discharge process is implemented over the next three decades.

"Our conclusion has been that this plan, if it is carried out in the way it has been presented, would be in line, would be in conformity with the international safety standards," Grossi said. The lawmakers responded

by harshly criticizing IAEA's review, which they say neglected long-term environmental and health impacts of the wastewater release and threatens to set a bad precedent that may encourage other countries to dispose nuclear waste into sea. They called for Japan to scrap the discharge plans and work with neighboring countries to find safer ways to handle the wastewater, including a possible pursuit of long-term storage on land.

The party has also criticized the government of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for putting people's health at risk while trying to improve relations with Japan.

"If you think (the treated wastewater) is safe, I wonder whether you would be willing to suggest the Japanese government use that water for drinking or for industrial and agri-

cultural purposes, rather than dumping it in the sea," Woo Won-shik, a Democratic Party lawmaker who attended the meeting, told Grossi. The party said Woo has been on a hunger strike for the past 14 days to protest the Japanese discharge plans.

Further details from the meeting weren't immediately available after reporters were asked to leave following opening statements. Closely watched by parliamentary security staff, dozens of protesters shouted near the lobby of the National Assembly's main hall where the meeting was taking place, holding signs denouncing the IAEA and Japan. Grossi was to fly to New Zealand later on Sunday and would then travel to the Cook Islands as he further tries to reassure countries in the region about the Japanese plans.

Six killed in plane crash near Southern Calif airport

AP ■ MURRIETA

Murrieta (US): Six people were killed when a small plane crashed and burst into flames in a field during the second of two landing attempts in fog at a Southern California airport, authorities said.

The crash of the Cessna C550 business jet occurred around 4:15 am on Saturday in Murrieta, about 80 miles (130 kilometres) southeast of Los Angeles, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. It took firefighters more than an hour to extinguish the flames, which had engulfed the plane and charred about an acre of vegetation just north of French Valley Airport, said the Riverside County Fire Department.



President Joe Biden, escorted by Col William "Chris" McDonald, waves to members of the media as he walks to board Air Force One at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, on Sunday. Biden is heading to Europe to meet with King Charles III and attend the NATO Summit. AP/PTI

Sudan on brink of full-scale civil war: UN chief

AP ■ CAIRO

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Sudan was on the brink of a "full-scale civil war" as fierce clashes between rival generals continued unabated Sunday in the capital, Khartoum.

He warned on Saturday evening that the war between the Sudanese military and a powerful paramilitary force is likely to destabilise the entire region, according to Farhan Haq, deputy spokesperson for the secretary-general.

Sudan descended into chaos after months of tension between military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and his rival Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, exploded into open fighting in mid-April.

Health Minister Haitham Mohammed Ibrahim said in televised comments last month that the clashes have killed over 3,000 people and wounded over 6,000 others. The death tally, however, is highly likely to be much higher.

More than 2.9 million people have fled their homes to safer areas inside Sudan or crossed into neighbouring countries, according to UN figures. The fighting came 18 months after the two generals led a military coup in October 2021 that toppled a Western-backed civilian transitional government.

The conflict dashed Sudanese hopes of a peaceful transition to democracy after a popular uprising forced the military removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. The war has turned the capital Khartoum and other urban areas across the country into battlefields.

Residents in Khartoum said fierce fighting was underway early Sunday south of the capital. The warring factions

were using heavy weapons in the battles in the Kalaka neighbourhood and the military's aircraft were seen hovering over the area, said resident Abdalla al-Fatih.

In his statement, Guterres also condemned an airstrike Saturday that health authorities said killed at least 22 people in Omdurman, a city just across the Nile from the capital, Khartoum. The assault was one of the deadliest in the conflict.

The RSF blamed the military for the attack in Omdurman. The military, in turn, denied the accusation saying in a statement Sunday that its air force didn't carry out any airstrikes in the city that day. The secretary-general also decried the large-scale violence and casualties in the western region of Darfur, which has experienced some of the worst fighting in the ongoing conflict, Haq said in a statement.

"There is an utter disregard for humanitarian and human rights law that is dangerous and disturbing," Guterres said.

UN officials have said the violence in the region has recently taken an ethnic dimension, with the RSF and Arab militias reportedly targeting non-Arab tribes in Darfur, a sprawling region consisting of five provinces.

Last month, the governor of Darfur, Mini Arko Minawi, said the region was sliding back to its past genocide, referring to the conflict that engulfed the region in the early 2000s. Entire towns and villages in West Darfur province were overrun by the RSF and their allied militias, forcing tens of thousands of residents to flee to neighbouring Chad.

Activists have reported many residents killed, women and girls raped, and properties looted and burned to the ground.

BBC suspends presenter over claims he paid a teenager for explicit photos

AP ■ LONDON

The BBC said Sunday that it has suspended a leading presenter who is alleged to have paid a teenager for sexually explicit photos.

As senior British politicians urged a rapid investigation, the broadcaster said it was working to establish the facts of "a complex and fast-moving set of circumstances".

The UK's publicly funded national broadcaster was scrambling to head off a worsening crisis after The Sun newspaper reported allegations that the male presenter gave a youth 35,000 pounds (\$45,000) starting in 2020 when the young person was 17.

Neither the star nor the youth was identified. Amid speculation on social media

about the identity of the presenter, several of the BBC's best-known stars spoke up to say it wasn't them.

Though the age of sexual consent in Britain is 16, it's a crime to make or possess indecent images of anyone under 18. The Sun said the young person's mother had complained to the BBC in May but that the presenter had remained on the air. The BBC said in a statement on Sunday that it "first became aware of a complaint in May," but that "new allegations were put to us on Thursday of a different nature."

The broadcaster said "the BBC takes any allegations seriously and we have robust internal processes in place to proactively deal with such allegations." It said the corporation had also been in touch with



"external authorities," but did not specify whether that was the police.

"This is a complex and fast-moving set of circumstances and the BBC is working as quickly as possible to establish the facts in order to properly inform appropriate next steps," the BBC said.

"We can also confirm a

male member of staff has been suspended."

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer held crisis talks with the broadcaster's director-general about what she called "deeply concerning" allegations. She said Director General Tim Davie had assured her the BBC was "investigating swiftly and sensitively."

"Given the nature of the allegations, it is important that the BBC is now given the space to conduct its investigation, establish the facts and take appropriate action. I will be kept updated," she wrote on social media.

Rachel Reeves, economy spokeswoman for the opposition Labour Party, said the BBC needed to "speed up their processes" and "get their house in order."

'US drone strike kills ISIS leader'

Washington (AP): A US drone strike killed an Islamic State group leader in Syria hours after the same MQ-9 Reaper drones were harassed by Russian military jets over the western part of the country, according to the Defence Department. Three Reapers had been flying overhead searching for the militant on Friday, a US defence official said, when they were harassed for about two hours by Russian aircraft. Shortly after that, the drones struck and killed Usamah al-Muhajir, who was riding a motorcycle in the Aleppo region, said the official, who was not authorised to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity to describe details of the military operation. The official said al-Muhajir was in northwest Syria at the time of the strike, but that he usually oper-

ated in the east. It was not immediately clear how the US military confirmed that the person killed was al-Muhajir; no other details were provided.

In a statement Sunday, US Central Command said there are no indications any civilians were killed in the strike. The military was assessing reports a civilian may have been injured. Friday was the third day in a row that US officials complained that Russian fighter jets in the region had conducted unsafe and harassing flights around American drones. Lt Gen Alex Grynkeiwich, head of US Air Forces Central Command, said in a statement that during the Friday encounter, the Russian planes "flew 18 unprofessional close passes that caused the MQ-9s to react to avoid unsafe situations".

Imran Khan seeks IMF guarantee for timely elections Ex-PM accused of maligning army chief

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has sought a "guarantee" from the International Monetary Fund that the general elections in the country will be held on its scheduled time.

Days before the IMF executive board meeting to review and possibly endorse the Standby Arrangement (SBA) for Pakistan, a delegation of the global lender met Khan on Friday in Lahore to seek assurance and support for the key objectives and policies under the recently announced USD 3 billion bailout programme, Geo News channel reported on Saturday. Pakistan and IMF reached a long-awaited staff-level agreement on June 29 to inject USD 3 billion Standby Arrangement into the ailing economy after months-long negotiations that pushed the country to the brink of default. The Executive Board of the IMF will meet on July 12 to review the SBA for Pakistan. Quoting sources, Geo News reported that Khan asked the IMF to ensure that the general elections,

scheduled to take place in October, will be held on time. "What guarantee can you (IMF) give that the elections in the country will be held on time," the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief was quoted as saying in the huddle.

The IMF representatives, as per insiders, responded by saying that the Washington-based lender keeps a close eye on the situation in the country but "we cannot interfere too much in internal political matters".

The IMF delegation further added that the short-term bailout package has been chalked out in such a way that the transition of power is expected to take place on time, the report said quoting sources.

The insiders added that the IMF officials expressed hope that the interim set-up will hold general elections in the country within the constitutionally-mandated time period.

The meeting was attended by IMF country chief Nathan Porter who joined virtually from Washington and Resident Representative Ester Perez Luis who was physically present.

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday accused his predecessor Imran Khan of being involved in a "vile, sinister and malicious campaign" against Army chief General Asim Munir.

Taking to Twitter, Sharif said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Khan was using proxies to target the army chief. "Imran Khan continues to engage in a vile, sinister & malicious campaign against COAS General Syed Asim Munir. His trick of using the proxies to threaten the Army Chief of an assassination attempt has been badly exposed," he said.

The prime minister claimed that Khan was using coercive tactics to come back to power.

"After his methodically planned attack on the State symbols failed, he is clearly desperate & wants to coerce his way back into power, little knowing that the time of his

politics of intimidation, violence & hatred is over," he tweeted. Sharif said the former prime minister was exposing himself by using highly condemnable antics, "the core of which is defined by putting his personal interest (power grab) over everything else".

"The people of Pakistan and the political parties stand behind their Army Chief & the armed forces like a rock & will thwart any attempt and conspiracy at undermining their prestige, honour and integrity," he wrote on the microblogging site. Separately, in a press statement shared by PM Office Media Wing, Sharif ordered the authorities to take legal action against those involved in such malicious campaigns inside the country and abroad. "A clear message to the planners, facilitators and handlers of May 9: All conspiracies against Pakistan and its institutions will be crushed," he said.

Violent protests sparked across the country on May 9

after PTI chief Khan was arrested from the premises of the Islamabad High Court.

The government later launched a massive crackdown against the PTI leaders and workers and rounded up thousands of people on charges of attacking civil and military installations.

Khan's supporters vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Lahore Corps Commander's House, the Mianwali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad in response to Khan's arrest.

The mob also stormed the Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi for the first time.

Police put the death toll in violent clashes to 10 while Khan's party claims 40 of its workers lost their lives in the firing by security personnel.

"Desperate elements will not be allowed to create a new crisis in the country," Sharif said in the press release, adding that the nation stood by its armed forces and its leader.

Snap presidential vote in Uzbekistan expected to extend incumbent's rule

Moscow (AP): Voters in Uzbekistan cast their ballots on Sunday in a snap presidential election that is widely expected to extend the incumbent's rule by seven more years.

The vote followed a constitutional referendum that extended a presidential term from five to seven years and allowed President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to run for two more terms in office.

In 2021, Mirziyoyev was elected to his second five-year term, the limit allowed by the constitution at the time.

A set of constitutional amendments approved in April's plebiscite allowed him to begin the count of terms anew and run for two more, raising the possibility that he could stay in office until 2037.

In May, the 65-year-old Mirziyoyev called for a snap election. He is set to win the vote by a landslide against three token rivals.

More than 10,700 polling stations opened in Uzbekistan at 8 am local time (0300 GMT) and were scheduled to close 12 hours later.

By 11 am, more than 33 per cent of voters have cast their ballots, election officials reported, which is enough to deem the vote valid in accordance with Uzbek laws.

Since coming to power in 2016 after the death of longtime dictator Islam Karimov, Mirziyoyev has introduced a slew of political and economic reforms that eased some of the draconian policies of his predecessor, who made Uzbekistan into one of the region's most repressive countries.

At the same time, Uzbekistan has remained strongly authoritarian with no significant opposition. All registered political parties are loyal to Mirziyoyev.

In April's referendum, more than 90 per cent of those who cast ballots voted to approve the amendments extending the presidential term.

Similar constitutional amendments in recent years have been adopted in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

'China warned Pak establishment against any new experiment ahead of 2018 polls'

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

China had warned the Pakistan establishment against any "new experiment" ahead of the 2018 general elections, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal has claimed. The minister made the claim during a Geo News program - 'Jirga' on Saturday night where he lashed out at the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led government for harming the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

"China — in a diplomatic manner — had tried to convey (a message) to the then establishment to avoid any new experiment as it would derail CPEC," the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader was quoted as saying by the Geo TV.

The then establishment, however, assured Beijing that whoever would come into power will not create obstacles in the path of the mega infrastructure and connectivity project. Beijing had asked the establishment not to interfere in elections as "any experiment of change will not be beneficial for Pakistan and will destroy the CPEC", the planning minister added.

Responding to a question, the minister stressed the need for continuity of policies for the progress and development of



Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal

a country. Launching a fresh salvo against the former ruling party, the PML-N minister accused Imran Khan's party of scandalising the game-changer project. Corruption allegations were levelled against the project and the Western media highlighted the controversial statements made by the PTI leaders, he added.

He said that PTI minister Murad Saheed had levelled baseless corruption allegations against him involving the CPEC and embarrassed the Chinese state-owned company.

Perhaps, it happened for the first time

that China's state-owned company issued a condemnation statement against the minister whom it was working with, the minister said. He said that the PTI-led government had ruined the sentiment developed by the PML-N through baseless allegations, delays in visa renewal of Chinese workers and other tactics.

However, Iqbal in a statement on Sunday said that his statement about China in a TV interview was taken "out of context".

"China maintains a policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. Some senior businessmen working on the CPEC projects privately expressed the opinion that fair and free election was in the best interest of Pakistan to ensure continuity," he said.

But the minister added that by March/April 2018, it had become abundantly clear and was being openly discussed in international media that the establishment of that time didn't want the PML-N government to return and it was helping PTI to come into power through interference in the electoral process.

Various political parties, which were in opposition during the PTI rule, claim that Imran Khan was brought to power by the powerful army by rigging the elections.

'Washington might respond to unintended consequences for China due to curbs'

AP ■ BEIJING

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday said she agreed Washington will listen to Chinese complaints about security-related curbs on US technology exports and might "respond to unintended consequences" as she ended a visit to Beijing aimed at reviving strained relations. Yellen defended "targeted measures" on trade that China's leaders complain are aimed at hurting its fledgling tech industries.

She said the Biden administration wants to "avoid unnecessary repercussions" but gave no indication of possible changes.

Relations between the two biggest economies are at their lowest level in decades due to disputes about technology, security and other irritants.

A key Chinese complaint is limits on access to processor chips and other US technology on security grounds that threaten to hamper the ruling

Communist Party's development of smartphones, artificial intelligence and other industries.

"We will open up channels so that they can express concerns about our actions, and we can explain and possibly in some situations respond to unintended consequences of our actions," Yellen said at a news conference. Yellen talked with China's No. 2 leader, Premier Li Qiang, and other officials during 10 hours of meetings. She had a five-hour session Saturday with her Chinese counterpart, Vice Premier He Lifeng. Treasury officials said in advance there were no plans for her to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Yellen received a warm welcome and prominent coverage by the state press, but Chinese officials gave no sign they would change industrial or other policies that Washington and other governments say violate Beijing's free-trade commitments.

On Saturday, He said Washington should "adopt a rational and pragmatic attitude" to improve relations.

On Sunday, Yellen announced no agreements on major disputes or plans for future activity but said her department and Chinese officials would have "more frequent and regular" communication.

US-Chinese political strains are adding to uncertainty that is dampening the willingness of consumers and businesses to spend and invest.

China's economic growth rebounded to 4.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2023 from last year's 3 per cent after anti-virus controls on travel and business activity were lifted in December. But factory activity and consumer spending decelerated in the quarter ending in June.

Xi accused Washington in March of trying to hold back China's industrial development.

Greece govt wins vote of confidence in Parliament

AP ■ ATHENS

Greece's conservative government has won a vote of confidence in Parliament to start its second four-year term, two weeks after Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' New Democracy party handily won the election.

The 300 lawmakers voted 158-142 on Saturday to approve the government's policy statement after a low-key three-day debate. The vote went as expected, with only lawmakers from New Democracy voting for the government. Mitsotakis' New Democracy won the June 25 election with 40.56 per cent of the vote, compared to 17.83 per cent for the left-wing Syriza and 11.84 per cent for the socialist PASOK. There are eight parties represented in Parliament, up from six in the 2019-23 legislature and five in the short-lived parliament elected on May 21.



Greece PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis addresses lawmakers during a parliament session in Athens AP/PTI

That election gave no party an overall majority despite the results being broadly similar. The June 25 election was contested under a different electoral law, which gave bonus seats to the winner. Three of the parties in Parliament are to the right of New Democracy. It was feared that this would make for an unruly legislature, with frequent confrontations. But the debate did not bear out those fears. Mitsotakis himself noted,

and welcomed, the lack of verbal pyrotechnics.

The strong presence of the far right may have reduced the size of Mitsotakis' parliamentary majority, but it has also given him the chance to claim to represent a wide swath of voters, from mainstream conservatives to those on the centre-left who do not want to see Syriza back in power. Exit polls showed New Democracy dominated among voters self-identifying as centrists, much as it did in 2019. The Greek premier's two speeches, the one with which he started the debate on Thursday and the one with which he concluded it on Saturday evening, had something for each of those seemingly disparate audiences. He presented himself as strong on security, touting a massive arms procurement program, including a future acquisition of US-made F-35 multirole combat aircraft.

SL marks first anniv of July 9 people's uprising

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Sunday marked the first anniversary of the historical people's uprising against the previous government's mismanagement of the country's economy which has seemingly ended the Rajapaksa family's hold over power.

The radical Inter University Students Federation has called for protest action at universities today marking the anniversary.

The uprising forced the then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee to the Maldives as tens of thousands surrounded his official residence demanding his resignation as president for steering the country to its worst economic crisis. The public protests which started opposite his private residence in early March last year culminated in his ouster in mid-July.

The activists occupied the entry to his secretariat in

early April and set up the 'Gota go home village' in the nearby Galle Face esplanade. The Aragalaya (protest) campaign was three-fold, an activist said.

"To seek Gotabaya ouster, seek an immediate resolution of the economic crisis, and a political system change," Dr Pathum Kerner, a front-line leader of the protest movement, told reporters on the first anniversary of the protest.

He said while the first two targets had been achieved the political system change could only happen in the longer run.

"It will be the next election that will bring in the system change we hope for," Kerner said. He said the economic situation has improved over the last year with people, who suffered from long hours in queues for essentials, now feeling relieved. Over 20 people died due to exhaustion in long queues. Rajapaksa, who later fled to Singapore and sent in his resignation from there on July 13 last year, was



replaced by the incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe.

A parliamentarian from the ruling SLPP (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna) party was killed while over 70 parliamentarians including Wickremesinghe suffered

arson attacks on their personal properties during the protest.

With several actions to revive the flagging economy accompanied by an IMF (International Monetary Fund) bailout,

Wickremesinghe was able to steer the country into calmer waters after the uprising. He has introduced painful economic reforms and held back holding a local council election citing poor finances to fund holding it.

The country, which declared its first-ever credit default in mid-April last year, secured a bailout from the IMF of USD 2.9 billion spanning over 4 years subject to reforms being put in place.

While approving the bailout by the Executive Board of the fund, the IMF managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, warned that Colombo must continue pursuing tax reform and greater social safety nets for the poor — and rein in the corruption that has been partly blamed for the crisis.

"The authorities should step up growth-enhancing structural reforms with technical assistance support from development partners," she had said.

New GST rules on anvil; biz may have to explain discrepancy in ITC claims

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council is likely to decide on a new rule in GST law under which businesses would be required to explain the reasons for excess input tax credit (ITC) claimed or deposit the amount with the exchequer, sources said.

They said the Law Committee, comprising tax officers from Centre and states, has opined that where the ITC availed in GSTR-3B return exceeds the amount of ITC available in accordance with the auto-generated statement GSTR-2B by a specified threshold, the registered person may be intimidated on the portal about

such difference and be directed to either explain the difference or pay the excess ITC along with interest.

The Committee has suggested that the provision should kick in if the difference is more than 20 per cent and more than Rs 25 lakh.

GST Council is likely to take a final call on the recommendation of the Committee in its 50th meeting on July 11.

Currently, businesses use taxes paid by their suppliers commonly referred to as ITC to offset their GST liability while paying taxes in GSTR-3B.

In cases where the difference in tax liability declared in GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B exceeds the



specified threshold of Rs 25 lakh and 20 per cent, the businesses are required to explain the reason for discrepancy or deposit the taxes.

The GST Network in the backend prepares GSTR-2B form, which is an auto-drafted

ITC statement indicating availability and non-availability of ITC to the taxpayer against each document filed by his suppliers.

The Law Committee, sources said, is of the view that the registered person should not be allowed to file monthly statement of outward supplies or GSTR-1, unless he has explained the reasons for discrepancy to the satisfaction of the tax officer or deposited the excess ITC claimed.

A similar anti-tax evasion move was implemented by the GST officers last month in cases of mismatch in tax liability declared in GSTR-1 and tax paid in GSTR-3B.

The move is aimed at curbing instances of fake invoicing. Fraudsters usually use this route to wrongfully avail ITC with no actual supply of goods or services.

The GST authorities have already initiated a two months long special drive to unearth fake registration under Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Such registrations are obtained with the sole purpose of issuing fake invoices and defrauding the exchequer.

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) has detected GST evasion of over Rs 1.01 lakh crore in 2022-23 fiscal, double that of the previous year, and booked 14,000 cases.



Strategic investment targets initiative: DPIIT identifies 106 firms from 30 countries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has identified as many as 106 companies across sectors from 30 countries under its strategic investment targets initiative, an official said.

The initiative is aimed at promoting investments in the country.

The initiative was recently discussed during a meeting convened by the Commerce and Industry ministry with industry and exporters.

"An outreach was conducted through the ministry and meetings and video conferences are being set-up with leadership of these companies," the official said, adding that under the initiative, there is also a plan to engage with people of Indian origin (PIO).

The government is taking a series of measures such as reducing the compliance burden, easing foreign direct investment norms, rolling out of logistics policy, announcement of production-linked incentive scheme for 14 sectors, and easing procedures through the national single window system to promote investments into the country.

The official, however, did not disclose the name of the companies and sectors.

"Both the department of commerce and the DPIIT are working together to promote trade and investments in a concerted way," the official, who did not wish to be named, said.

There are also plans to hold investment roadshows in countries like the US, Canada, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

The initiative assumes sig-

nificance as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India declined by 22 per cent to USD 46 billion in 2022-23.

Total FDI inflows, which include equity inflows, re-invested earnings and other capital, declined by 16 per cent to USD 70.97 billion in the last fiscal as against USD 84.83 billion in 2021-22.

During April-March 2022-23, Singapore emerged as the top investor with USD 17.2 billion FDI. It was followed by Mauritius (USD 6.13 billion), the US (USD 6 billion), the UAE (USD 3.35 billion), the Netherlands (USD 2.5 billion), Japan (USD 1.8 billion), the UK (USD 1.73 billion), Cyprus (USD 1.27 billion), Cayman island (USD 772 million), and Germany (USD 547 million), according to the DPIIT data.

The FDI inflows have contracted in 2022-23 from Mauritius, the US, the Netherlands, the Cayman Islands, and Germany.

Though the computer software and hardware sector attracted the highest inflows of USD 9.4 billion during the last financial year, these inflows are down as compared with USD 14.5 billion in 2021-22.

Similarly, FDI in the automobile industry dipped significantly to USD 1.9 billion in 2022-23 as compared with about USD 7 billion in 2021-22.

The other sectors which recorded a dip in the inflows in the last fiscal include construction (infrastructure) activities and metallurgical industries.

However, the inflows have recorded growth in sectors, including services (USD 8.7 billion), trading (USD 4.8 billion), telecommunications (USD 713 million), and chemicals (USD 1.85 billion).

DoT to approach Trai for auction of new spectrum bands this week

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecom is likely to approach sector regulator Trai this week for auction of a set of spectrum bands as well as radio waves held by permits that are due to expire in 2024, an official source said.

The source said that DoT is expected to hold the auction in the March quarter of the current fiscal.

"DoT will send reference to Trai in a couple of days for auction of 37 GHz band and radio waves of telecom licenses that are due for renewal in 2024," the source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

The reference is likely to include the auction of spectrum in 600 megahertz band as well as the frequency that remained unsold in the auction held in 2022.

The government had put on offer spectrum in 10 bands but received no bids for airwaves in 600 MHz, 800 MHz and 2300 MHz bands. About two-thirds of the bids were for the 5G bands (3300 MHz and 26 GHz), while more than a quarter of the demand came in the 700 Mhz band -- a band that had gone



unsold in the previous two auctions (2016 and 2021).

DoT expects Trai to recommend auction guidelines for the satellite communication spectrum soon so that it can be included in the auction planned for the March quarter.

However, only one satellite communication player has demanded the allocation of spectrum administratively instead of taking the auction route. According to the source, some of the licenses of Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea are set to expire in 2024 and spectrum held through these permits will also be put for auction in the March quarter.

"DoT will be able to conduct auction if Trai's recommendation is received by January," the source said.

FM nudges PSU banks to take swift action against frauds, wilful defaulters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has asked public sector banks (PSBs) to take swift action in cases concerning fraud and wilful defaults to reduce bad loans and take steps to accelerate growth momentum, sources said.

Banks have written off Rs 11.17 lakh crore bad loans from their books in the last six years till the financial year 2021-22.

The non-performing assets (NPAs), including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, are removed from the balance sheet of the bank concerned by way of write-off.

In a recent meeting with heads of PSBs, the finance minister urged them to focus on having robust risk management practices and mitigating Cyber Security risks.

During the meeting, it was also emphasised that banks should follow a strong internal audit framework and adherence to caveats of internal policies, sources said.

Some of the challenges highlighted during the meeting included the declining share of market share in terms of



advances, and low-cost deposit mobilisation.

It was also pointed out that PSBs should brace for increased competition for deposits due to the merger of HDFC Ltd with HDFC Bank. Now HDFC Ltd housing loan customers will be tapped by HDFC Bank for retail banking.

Another area of concern was pressure on the net interest margin of PSBs due to the high-interest rate regime.

Banks have been asked to focus on high-yield advances categories with due risk management and raise fee income.

With a view to providing further impetus to the resolution of stressed assets in the system, the framework on compromise settlements and technical write-

offs was issued by the Reserve Bank of India last month.

The framework provides clarity on the definition of technical write-off and broad guidance on the process to be followed by Regulated Entities while carrying out technical write-off.

Further, it laid down guidance on important process-related matters covering board oversight, delegation of power, reporting mechanism and a cooling period for normal cases of compromise settlements.

The penal measures currently applicable to borrowers classified as fraud or wilful defaulter shall, however, remain in cases where banks enter into compromise settlements with such borrowers.

FPIs continue to be bullish on Indian equities; invest ₹22,000 cr in July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continue their liking for Indian equities with a net infusion of nearly Rs 22,000 crore in the first week of this month due to resilience of the domestic economy amid an uncertain global macro backdrop.

If this trend continues, investment by FPIs in July will exceed the figures recorded in May and June, which were Rs 43,838 crore and Rs 47,148 crore, respectively, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities, said that FPIs may take some money off the table to maintain caution as concerns over interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve in July once again come up.

According to data from the depositories, FPIs have been continuously buying Indian equities since March and poured Rs 21,944 crore this month (till July 7).

Adani raises \$1.4 bn from stake sale in 3 cos; \$9 bn raised in 4 yrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani has raised USD 1.38 billion (Rs 11,330 crore) through stake sale in three group companies, taking the total capital raised over four years to USD 9 billion as the conglomerate draws interest from a cross-section of investors.

In a statement, the ports-to-energy conglomerate said it "is committed to raising capital to fulfill its 10-year roadmap of the transformative capital management program, which was formulated in 2016 to execute the plans for various portfolio companies." "In the most recent instance, Adani family has raised USD 1.38 billion (Rs 11,330 crore) through stake sale in the three portfolio companies - Adani Enterprises Ltd, Adani Green Energy Ltd and Adani Transmission Ltd," it said. "This ensures higher capital availability at the group level, for growth as well as near-term commitments of both debt and equity for the portfolio companies over the next 12-18 months."

In addition, the three portfolio companies have also received board approval for primary issuances through a share sale to investors as the group continues to build on a comeback strategy to emerge from allegations of fraud levelled by a US short-seller.

Maruti expects sales momentum to continue; hopes to deliver more cars to customers this festive season

PTI ■ JODHPUR

Maruti Suzuki expects to keep growing faster than the domestic passenger vehicle industry riding on the back of strong demand for its models especially the SUV range, according to a senior company executive. The auto major anticipates the overall passenger vehicle market to grow in the range of 5-7 per cent this fiscal.

In an interaction with PTI, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Senior Executive Officer (Marketing and Sales) Shashank Srivastava said the PV industry is expected to close the current fiscal at 40.5-41.3 lakh units.

"We have not revised our estimates which we had made at the beginning of the year. We said the industry growth would be in the 5-7 per cent range and

our growth should be higher than the industry," Srivastava said.

He noted that in the first quarter, the company grew by 12.2 per cent while the industry grew by around 9.5 per cent.

Srivastava said that the demand remains fairly robust so far in the fiscal with the April-June period turning out to be the best quarter ever for the industry.

"We believe going forward while the volumes may hold because bookings remain strong, the growth may be muted and the reason I say that is because the base effect may be coming into effect now," he said.

He said last year in the second quarter, the sales stood at 10.2 lakh units which was the highest quarter in the history of PVs.

Investment in Indian startups in H1 2023 lowest in last four years, says PwC India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Funding in Indian startups fell by 36 per cent in January-June to USD 3.8 billion, the lowest half-yearly number in the last four years, as investors are taking longer time in due diligence of every aspect of business, according to a PwC India Report.

Early-stage deals accounted for 57 per cent of the total funding in the first half of 2023 (H1 CY23) in volume terms, said the report titled, "Startup Perspectives - H1 CY23".

In value terms, early-stage deals contributed to approximately 16 per cent of the total funding in H1 CY23 but was at its lowest in H1 CY23 as compared to the previous two years.

"The Indian startup ecosystem reported the lowest six-month funding in the last four



years in H1CY23 at USD 3.8 billion across 298 deals - a decline of nearly 36 per cent as compared to H2 CY22 (USD 5.9 billion). Fintech, SAAS and D2C continued to be the most funded sectors in H1 CY23," it said.

During the last few quarters, despite challenging funding market conditions, investors have shown strong support for their portfolio companies by doubling down on their investments in companies that

demonstrated positive growth, the report stated. Commenting on the current investment outlook for Indian startups, Amit Nawka, Partner - Deals & India Startups Leader, PwC India, said, a funding winter is just a season in a startup's journey.

"There is a slowdown in startup funding despite significant untapped capital reserves held by venture capitalists (VCs). Active VC firms in India have secured new funds in the

past year and we can expect the pace of investments to pick up in the next few months.

"In the interim, there has been an increase in the due diligence being carried out by investors before making investments, both in terms of detailing as well as coverage - from typical finance and legal, to areas like technology, HR and business processes - to ensure that the startups have a robust corporate governance framework," Nawka added.

The report further said that while venture capital (VC) funding declined in H1 CY23, M&A transactions remained the same when compared to H2 CY22.

Eighty M&A deals involving start-ups were executed in H1 CY23. Of these, 80 per cent were domestic transactions and the rest were cross-border transactions.

Goyal to visit UK for free trade agreement negotiations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is scheduled to visit the UK on July 10-11 to take stock of the negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) to promote economic ties between the two countries, an official statement said on Sunday.

The Minister's visit will be

focused on the ongoing FTA negotiations between India and the UK besides discussing progress on a trade pact with ministers from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member countries, the commerce ministry said.

The visit comes at a crucial juncture, as both India and the UK are committed to expanding their economic ties and

exploring avenues for enhanced bilateral trade.

"With the FTA negotiations gaining momentum, the visit aims to further propel the discussions and pave the way for a comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement that would drive economic growth and strengthen ties between the two nations," it said.

Titan to open 18 international stores of Tanishq in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group firm Titan plans to open 18 new international stores of its jewellery brand Tanishq, primarily in the Gulf region, taking the total count to 25 by the end of this fiscal.

Despite the operational complexities of opening stores in unfamiliar territories, the company plans to "aggressively

expand" in FY24 across GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region and the US market, given the evident consumer demand for Tanishq brand jewellery, said the latest annual report from Titan Company Ltd.

"The company aspires to further strengthen its international presence to 25 international stores by the end of FY 2023-24, with growth primarily

being driven by additions in the GCC region," said Titan.

Tanishq, which increased the number of international Tanishq stores from 2 to 7 in FY23, has received a "positive response" in global markets and now plans to expand its presence further, it added.

"Tanishq aims to become the preferred jeweller in the NRI/PIO markets.

Government to hire agency to estimate size of digital economy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is planning to hire an agency to measure the actual size of the digital economy which is estimated to be around USD 1 trillion by 2025, according to an official document.

The selected agency will be roped in for a period of nine months for the assignment.

The agency will need to submit the draft report on estimation of the size of the digital economy and projections from the current financial year till 2029-30 to Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) within 32 weeks from the date of selection.

"The RFP aims to invite proposal in the area of estimation and measurement of India's digital economy including formulation of measurement framework, capturing data and identifying digital interventions," the document said.

The report will also look into state rankings and their share in the digital economy, along with the impact of e-commerce and emerging technology on such economy.

"Collective action is required in a team India spirit with collaboration between government and private/social sectors," the document said.

GST Council to clarify on TCS liability of e-commerce suppliers on ONDC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council on July 11 is expected to clarify on the TCS liability of suppliers engaged in e-commerce trading through Open Network Digital Commerce in cases where multiple operators are involved in a transaction.

ONDC or Open Network for Digital Commerce is a new initiative of the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT). So far, there is no clarity on who should be liable for TCS compliance under GST laws.

Under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) law, every e-

commerce operator is required to collect TCS at the rate of 1 per cent of the taxable value of goods/services sold through its platform.

Sources said the Law Committee, comprising Centre and state tax officers, has recommended to the Council that in a situation where multiple e-

commerce operators (ECOs) are involved in a single transaction through ECO platform, the TCS compliances is to be done by the supplier-side, who finally releases the payment to the supplier.

ONDC's open network operates in two models - inventory model and marketplace

model.

Under the inventory model, a buyer places an order with an e-commerce platform, who then pays the supplier of the goods or services. Here, TCS is deducted by the e-commerce platform while making payment to the seller.

The confusion regarding

liability of TCS deduction arises in the case of the marketplace model -- where two intermediaries are involved in a single transaction.

Here, a buyer places an order on an e-commerce platform (buyer app) who then sources it from another e-commerce entity (seller app). The

seller app then procures the goods from the actual supplier.

Since several entities are involved, the DPIIT has sought clarity as to whether the buyer e-commerce operator or the seller e-commerce company would be required to deduct the Tax Collected at Source (TCS).

Sources said in this case, TCS would be required to be deducted by the seller app while making payment to the supplier. A clarification to this effect is likely to be issued by the GST Council on Tuesday.

Incorporated on December 31, 2021, ONDC is a Section 8 company.

Djokovic joins Wimbledon 100 club

AFP ■ LONDON

Novak Djokovic contests his 100th Wimbledon match on Sunday as he continues his push for a record-equalling eighth title while Iga Swiatek aims to make the quarter-finals for the first time.

Djokovic tackles Poland's Hubert Hurkacz on Centre Court, where he has not lost in 10 years.

However, if he is to continue his bid for a third major of 2023, and match Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Slams, he needs to find a way of battering through the seemingly impenetrable Hurkacz defence.

The Pole has not dropped serve at the tournament, saving all 11 break points he has faced and winning all 46 service games.

"I don't see too many holes in his game," said Djokovic who has a 5-0 record against the 18th-ranked Hurkacz, including at Wimbledon in 2019.

"He serves extremely powerful, covers the court very well. He has very long arms and a very good feeling at the net."

Hurkacz made the semi-finals in 2021, having become the last man to defeat Roger Federer at Wimbledon in the quarter-finals.

Twelve months ago, however, he crashed out in the first round.

After being banned from Wimbledon in 2022 over the war in Ukraine, seven players



Dimitrov crushes Tiafoe to reach last 16

AFP ■ LONDON

Clinical Grigor Dimitrov picked up where he left off at Wimbledon on Sunday, winning the final five games of his third-round match to oust 10th seed Frances Tiafoe.

Rain forced the suspension of the contest on Saturday with Tiafoe 2-1 up in the fifth game after Bulgaria's Dimitrov had won the first two sets.

Tiafoe needed to make early in-roads but Dimitrov broke in the fifth game and lost just three more points as



he wrapped up a 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 in style.

The 32-year-old outfit the American by 33 winners to 14, did not face a break

point and converted five from nine of his own on his way route to an impressive 99-minute win.

Dimitrov, who reached the Wimbledon semi-finals in 2014, is looking to snap a title drought dating back to his triumph at the 2017 ATP Finals, a result that meant he finished the third in the year-end rankings.

He will face sixth seed Holger Rune in the quarter-finals on Monday at the All England Club.

from Russia and Belarus have made it to the last 16 in men's and women's singles.

Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev kicks off the action on Centre Court, hoping to complete a full set of quarter-finals at all four Slams.

The 25-year-old faces Alexander Bublik, born in Russia but representing Kazakhstan.

Bublik, the world number 26, defeated Rublev on grass in the Halle final in June.

Another Russian, Roman Safullin, has made the last 16 on his main draw debut.

The world number 92, who had never previously got beyond the second round of a Slam, faces 2021 semi-finalist Denis Shapovalov.

UKRAINE V BELARUS

Jannik Sinner, the eighth-ranked Italian, takes on unseeded Daniel Elahi Galan of Colombia, hoping to secure a second successive quarter-final.

Breakthrough: Iga Swiatek bids to make the quarter-finals for the first time

Breakthrough: Iga Swiatek bids to make the quarter-finals for the first time © SEBASTIEN BOZON / AFP

Women's world number one Swiatek, the reigning US Open and French Open champion, has not dropped a set yet on her way to the fourth round for a second time.

She takes on Swiss 14th seed Belinda Bencic, who had fallen

in the first round in her past two visits.

In a last-16 clash tinged with political significance, Victoria Azarenka of Belarus takes on Ukraine's Elina Svitolina.

At the French Open, Svitolina and all Ukraine players refused to shake hands with opponents from Russia and Belarus.

"I won't sell my country out for likes," said Svitolina after refusing to shake hands with world number two Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in Paris. Svitolina was even booed by the French crowd for her defiant stance.

At last year's US Open, Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk offered only a tap of the racquets after facing Azarenka.

Both Svitolina and Azarenka are former semi-finalists at the tournament. Azarenka, however, enjoys a 5-0 head-to-head record over the Ukraine player.

A second Ukrainian, Lesia Tsurenko, faces world number four Jessica Pegula, with both women seeking spots in the last eight for the first time.

The 34-year-old Tsurenko reached the fourth round after triumphing in the longest-ever tiebreak in a Grand Slam women's singles match -- 38 points -- against Romania's Ana Bogdan on Friday.

Tsurenko took victory on a seventh match point after saving five match points herself in a three-hour 40-minute epic.



Pegula hammers Tsurenko to reach Wimbledon quarters

AFP ■ LONDON

US fourth seed Jessica Pegula outclassed Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko 6-1, 6-3 to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals for the first time on Sunday.

Pegula raced into a 5-0 lead on No. 1 Court, as her unseeded opponent struggled to get a foothold in the match.

Tsurenko, 34, eventually got on the board but it only delayed the inevitable as the 29-year-old American wrapped up the first set in 27 minutes.

Ruthless Pegula broke again immediately at the start of the second set, repeating the feat to take a 4-1 lead.

She was held up by a battling Tsurenko, who broke Pegula's serve despite requiring treatment for an apparent blister on her foot.

But it was only a temporary blip as Pegula broke again to seal the win.

She will face unseeded Czech player Marketa Vondrousova in the last eight.

ANDREEVA INTO WIMBLEDON FOURTH ROUND

Mirra Andreeva's fairytale season continued Sunday when the 16-year-old Russian reached the Wimbledon fourth round.

Andreeva, who came through the qualifying tour-

ament, defeated 22nd-seeded compatriot Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 7-5.

"Even if I wanted to show my emotions, I couldn't because I was out of breath on every point," said Andreeva.

The teenager had to battle hard in the second set, coming back from 1-4 down before squandering seven break points in the ninth game.

But she held her nerve to break Potapova in the 11th game before securing victory when her opponent buried an overhead into the net.

It was Potapova's 45th and final unforced error.

"It was an amazing battle," said Andreeva. "She played really well. I was 4-1 down in the second set and I didn't feel great."

Andreeva arrived at Wimbledon having made a run to the third round at the French Open, also out of qualifying.

She will rise in the rankings from 102 to the top 65 at least after Wimbledon.

However, she has loftier ambitions and is targeting the seeded players' dressing room at Wimbledon in 2024.

"I hope to be in the locker room above next year," added the teenager, who will face US 25th seed Madison Keys on Monday for a place in the quarter-finals.

AFP ■ LONDON

Matteo Berrettini has Carlos Alcaraz in his sights at Wimbledon after admitting he would "have signed in blood" to play at the All England Club when injury was threatening to derail his career.

A barnstorming run through the draw has taken the charismatic Italian into a fourth round blockbuster against the world number one on Monday.

"It's what you want, right? You want to play against the best players in the world. Playing against Carlos, it's always been a pleasure, a great fight," said the 27-year-old

'I'd have signed in blood': Berrettini on Wimbledon red alert

Berrettini.

The Italian giant was runner-up to Novak Djokovic in 2021 but missed last year's tournament through Covid.

A stomach injury, which restricted him to one match between April and June, pushed him to the brink of another withdrawal.

"When I arrived I wasn't sure even if I was going to play," he said.

"I thought I'm not ready.



But then I missed too many events in the last years and I couldn't leave this place without trying.

"This place has something special. I feel a kind of energy I don't feel anywhere else."

Berrettini missed a chunk of the 2022 season with a hand injury before his latest physical issues struck. He was forced to withdraw from the Monte Carlo Masters after two rounds because of his abdomen injury

and sat out a second successive French Open. His return for the grass-court season saw him slump to a first round defeat in Stuttgart against compatriot Lorenzo Sonego when he managed just three games.

'ME AGAINST HIM'

However, at Wimbledon, the world number 38 has been reborn. From a set down, he defeated Sonego and then Australia's 15th seed Alex de

Minaur, playing over four days as torrential rain swept across London. On Saturday, he came out on top in a big-hitting duel against 19th-seed Alexander Zverev.

"I spent many days in my bed crying about not being able to play five days in a row," said Berrettini.

"So if they told me a few weeks ago you're going to play five days in a row in Wimbledon, I would have signed with my blood."

So far at Wimbledon, Berrettini has hit 45 aces and saved all the six break points he has faced for a total of 54 unbroken service games.

Climate protesters tell Hamilton to drop fuel sponsor



AFP ■ SILVERSTONE (UNITED KINGDOM)

Climate activists Just Stop Oil on Sunday welcomed Lewis Hamilton's support, but urged him to cut his ties with Mercedes' fuel supplier Petronas.

The protest group has threatened disrupting Sunday's British Grand Prix after obstructing several other major sport events in recent weeks, including at the Wimbledon tennis championships and last week's Ashes Test at Lord's.

Last year, protesters

breached security at Silverstone and sat on the Wellington Straight during the opening lap of the British Grand Prix.

Ahead of this weekend's race, Hamilton told reporters: "I support peaceful protests." But, he added, he did not support actions that endangered lives.

In response Just Stop Oil tweeted: "We welcome Lewis Hamilton's statement of support for peaceful protest but would like nonetheless to stress that non-violent direct action involves brave individuals choosing to put their bodies on the line to demand a better

future for all.

"We urge Mr Hamilton to drop Petronas as a sponsor at the earliest opportunity and to demand an immediate end to new fossil fuel licensing in the UK - doing so would allow us to make assurances that we would not disrupt specific events."

The protesters comments came ahead of Sunday's race and after Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff had revealed the contents of discussions he held with the president of motor sport's ruling body, the International Motoring Federation (FIA) Mohammed Ben Sulayem on Saturday.

As rumours swirled around the paddock ahead of Sunday's race, Wolff confirmed they had talked about the new Concorde Agreement due in 2026, a binding set of rules for the sport.

"We discussed the overall situation in F1," he said. "Concorde and all those things. We hadn't seen each other for a while and there was exchange on some topics."

The president's rare presence at a Grand Prix came after he chose to step back following some controversial comments earlier this year as the FIA and Formula One underwent a spell of strained relations.

PSG make Bayern's Hernandez their fifth new signing



AFP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain signed Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez on Sunday, the club's fifth signing this week.

The French 2018 World Cup winner joins Manuel Ugarte, Milan Skriniar, Marco Asensio and Lee Kang-in as Parc des Princes newcomers since Luis Enrique's appointment as coach on Wednesday.

Hernandez has signed a deal until 2028 at the Qatar-backed side which approaches the upcoming season with Enrique now in the dug out after the sacking of Christophe Galtier.

"I'm feeling so happy, I've been waiting to join PSG for some time now and at last it's

happened," said Hernandez, who will be experiencing Ligue 1 for the first time in his career.

The 27-year-old's transfer was estimated at around 40 million euros (\$44 million) by a source close to the deal, way below the 80 million originally sought by Bayern.

A question mark hangs over Hernandez's fitness with the player only turning out 107 times for the Bundesliga giants in four years.

He has been sidelined since undergoing surgery after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee in the ninth minute of France's opening World Cup match against Australia in Qatar.

Hernandez will link up in defence with Slovakia captain Skriniar, who joined on a free transfer the day after Enrique's unveiling as manager, with forward Asensio moving from Real Madrid.

Uruguay midfielder Ugarte followed the day after from Portuguese club Sporting, with the Ligue 1 champions signing South Korean international Lee from Real Mallorca on Saturday.

Sindhu suffers semifinal loss in Canada Open

PTI ■ CALGARY

Commonwealth Games Champion Lakshya Sen stormed into the final of the Canada Open Super 500 badminton tournament with a straight-game win over Japan's Kenta Nishimoto here.

Sen, who has slipped to world number 19 after struggling to find his form early in the season, saw off the world number 11 Japanese 21-17 21-14 to enter his second Super 500 final and first BWF summit clash in over a year.

The 21-year-old Indian, who claimed a bronze at the 2021 World Championships, will face China's Li Shi Feng in the final on Sunday.

"It was a pretty bad start, I couldn't control the shuttle well. The moment I got the rhythm at the net (it got better). Near-perfect netplay was the key and we were both trying to do that," Sen said.

"Eventually I took control at the net, the smashes were also working. Overall, good tactical game I played and I'm happy with my performance."

Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, however, couldn't produce her best and went down 14-21 15-21 to world No. 1 Akane Yamaguchi of Japan in



her women's singles semifinal. A former world number 6, Sen had undergone a nose surgery for a deviated septum after the World Championships last August and took a lot of time to recover post treatment.

Sen last played a final at the Commonwealth Games in August last year. After a series of early exits from tournaments, he showed signs of recovery when he reached the semifinals of the Thailand Open.

Sen has a 4-2 head-to-head record against his Li Shi Feng, the reigning All-England champion. Sen had defeated him recently at the Thailand Open.

Sen struggled to find his length early on and sprayed the shuttle long and at the net to find himself 0-4 down but he slowly engaged his rival in rallies by taking charge of the net to catch up at 8-8.

Nishimoto managed to hold a slender 11-10 lead at the interval after Sen sprayed one at the net but the Indian turned the tables soon after resumption and kept moving ahead.

His trademark smashes, net play and precision in returns helped him to stay a step ahead, as he wrapped up the game when his opponent hit long.

The second game started on an even note as the duo fought tooth and nail initially but, once again, Sen found his way as he was more alert. He kept a grip on the fast rallies.

From 2-2, the duo moved to 9-9 before Sen managed a two-point cushion at the break after Nishimoto hit long.

The Japanese sent the shuttle long even as Sen pounced on anything weak and produced some exquisite smashes to move to 19-11.

Chhetri wants match against teams like Iran, Japan or Saudi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian captain Sunil Chhetri on Sunday backed head coach Igor Stimac's demand for a four-week camp before the Asian Cup early next year, saying the team needs to have enough preparation time to face the best sides in the continent.

The 38-year-old Chhetri, who will be playing his last Asian Cup in Doha (January 12 to February 10), also pitched for at least one international friendly match against a top-seven ranked country in Asia such as Iran, Japan or Saudi Arabia before the continental showpiece.

"We are going to face Australia, Uzbekistan and Syria in the Asian Cup (group matches), that is why Stimac (as well as goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu) have spoken about long camps. We need it, and I really hope we get it," Chhetri said in a virtual media interaction.

"When you go to the national camp, there are injuries to players and they come with different mental levels from their respective clubs. You need to take care of all these, and to do that, you need more time," he said, attributing the team's success in the recent tournaments to a long camp of more than 50 days.



India won the tri-nation international tournament in Manipur (March 22-28) before clinching titles in the Intercontinental Cup (June 9-18) in Bhubaneswar and SAFF Championships (June 21 to July 4) in Bengaluru. The players were in the national camp from mid-May till the SAFF Championships.

Stimac had said he would need at least a four-week camp to do well in the Asian Cup while the All India Football Federation (AIFF) top brass had indicated that his demand would be difficult to meet as the clubs may not agree to release their players for such a long

period in the midst of the domestic season.

"Eventually, how many days we get (for national camp) depends on the talks (among the stakeholders) but I really hope to get as many days as possible," said the talismanic striker.

Chhetri, who was named the most valuable player after emerging as the top scorer in the SAFF Championships, also said the team needs to play at least one international friendly against a country ranked in the top-six or seven in the continent, ahead of the Asian Cup.

"If we get at least two or three important international

friendly games before the Asian Cup, including at least one against a country ranked in top six or seven in Asia, that will give us a good picture of ourselves and will make us more ready."

"If I throw the name, it could be against Iran, Japan or Saudi Arabia. If we don't play against Japan, Iran or South Korea, we will not know the level of Australia (India's strongest opponents in the Asian Cup)."

"To prepare for these big matches against the top teams, we need a camp of four weeks. If we get five days of national camp we will not be ready for

these big matches. To face Australia in the Asian Cup, we will need at least a couple of levels higher than what we are having in ISL, and for that we need longer preparation time."

India's next assignment will be the Kings Cup (September 7-10) in Thailand where the team faces Iraq, Lebanon and the host country.

"Playing against Iraq will give us an idea about Uzbekistan because they are of similar level. The matches against Lebanon and Kuwait (in SAFF Championships) gave us how Syria is going to be though Syria is little higher in level than the two teams."

England inch closer to cut Aus Ashes lead Leeds

AP ■ NEW DELHI

England moved to within 98 runs of another memorable Ashes victory at Headingley, with Ben Stokes back on centre stage alongside Harry Brook.

Four years on from a famous Stokes-inspired victory at the same venue, England made themselves favourites to claim a gripping third test after another tightly fought morning on day four.

Needing 251 to win the match and keep the series alive at 2-1, the hosts reached 153-4 at lunch. Brook was playing forcefully on 40 not out, having swapped his spot at No. 3 for his favoured position of five, with Stokes new to the crease on seven.

The mere presence of the England captain is a major factor, with memories of his match-winning 2019 century here and last week's 155 in a losing cause both adding weight.

Australia will still fancy their own chances of a late surge though, having picked up each of the top four in a session that would not allow either side to fully take control.

England's openers came out in cautious mood at 27 without loss, adding 15 careful runs to the score before Ben Duckett was trapped in the crease by Mitchell Starc, lbw to a ball destined for leg



stump.

Moeen Ali was the man to replace Duckett at three, a surprise switch with Brook and a hefty promotion from No. 7. The all-rounder has done the job before, but last appeared this high in November 2018. It was a typically bold

gambit from the Brendon McCullum regime but one that did not pay off.

Moeen made five from 15 deliveries and had no answer for a 90mph rocket from Starc, forcing its way through a modest drive and pounding the stumps.

If that dismissal raised any nerves around the ground, the arrival of their primary insurance policy, Joe Root, should have settled them. Instead, he made an unusually skittish start.

He chased his first ball well wide of off stump on a

hiding to nothing and was fortunate to hit fresh air.

Moments later he demanded a quick two off Zak Crawley's bat and almost opened up a run out chance having yet to open his account.

When he did get off the

mark it was in classic fashion, stroking a cover drive to the ropes to offer the crowd a much-needed release after just one boundary in the first 45 minutes.

That stroke, combined with a change of bowling, appeared to break the rhythm and the runs began to flow.

Not all of them were intentional, Crawley carving Scott Boland over the cordon and Root nicking four low past second slip, but Crawley also pinged Mitch Marsh for a pair of authoritative blows through the point.

Crawley's growing confidence cost him his wicket on 44, throwing himself into a drive off Marsh and feeding the edge through to Alex Carey.

At 93-3, both teams were moving towards their destinations and the balance of power was impossible to ascertain.

Brook set about nudging things in England's favour, taking on Boland's natural length and collecting three quick boundaries with the middle of the bat.

A stand of 38 with Root was beginning to give the chase a sense of security, but the latter was undone unexpectedly with the lunch break in sight.

Swivelling into a pull as the returning Cummins dragged one down, Root gloved it through to the keeper for a tame end on 21.



Cook Issues Apology Over Alex Carey's Unpaid Haircut Comment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Australia and England are currently engaged in the third match of The Ashes 2023. At the end of day three, England reached 27/0 at stumps in a chase of 251 after their bowlers made good use of the overcast conditions to bowl out Australia for 224.

During the match, a bizarre incident took place when the hosts former skipper, Alastair Cook, mocked Aussie wicketkeeper Alex Carey. He commented that Alex didn't pay a barber after getting a haircut.

Australia star Steve Smith joined him and added further, suggesting that the stumper didn't even get a haircut.

After Cook's comment turned out to be false, he issued an apology and said it

was probably a case of mistaken identity.

"[The barber] said, he hasn't paid," Cook had said while speaking on BBC Test Match Special on the opening day of the third Ashes Test. "It was one of those cash-only ones, and he promised he would have a transfer later in the day, and this was just before he shut. This is a true story, I'm not making it up."

Smith and Australia cricket reacted to Cook's Claim

Smith claimed that Carey did not have a haircut since they were in London.

"I can confirm that Alex Carey has not had a haircut since we were in London. Get your facts right The Sun," wrote Smith on Threads, the newly-launched Twitter rival.



Lara expects players to come good against India

PTI ■ ROSEAU

West Indies' performance mentor Brian Lara believes his players are moving in the "right direction" and hoped some of them will grab the opportunity and produce the goods against a formidable India in the upcoming two-Test series.

India will begin their Test campaign on July 12 in Dominica, followed by three ODIs and five T20Is in a multi-format series.

"We have two very important Test matches which start the two-year cycle (World Test Championships) for us, it is against India. At home and away from home, they are one of the top teams in the world," said Lara. The guys can come into their own in this series, it is a tough opposition but I feel that's the

"I think the guys are moving in the right direction, in terms of where we started the camp and where we are. It is just a few days off from the first match at Dominica, but it's a young group, ably led by Kraigg Brathwaite.

"But I feel that some of way we can get the best out of them."

West Indies have named two uncapped left-handed batters -- Kirk McKenzie and Alick Athanaze -- in their squad for the upcoming series. The 53-year-old batting great, who was the head coach of the Sunrisers Hyderabad during the IPL this year, said the two youngsters have the right attitude and willingness to learn and can make it big in international cricket.

"Great capable players, young and of course, you would have loved if they had a lot more experience in the first-class arena but looking at their style of play and attitude, I believe they do have what it takes to perform at the highest level," he said.

"It may take some time but obviously as an international cricketer if you are entering this stage, no matter what age you enter, you got to learn very, very quickly. And, I think they have that sort of attitude to want to learn and (are) willing to listen." West Indies finished at the eighth spot with just four wins and seven losses in the last World Test Championship standing.

The Caribbean team has failed to qualify for the upcoming 50-over World Cup in India.

Dhawan likely to lead India in Asian Games

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian opener Shikhar Dhawan is set to make a comeback as captain of the Indian cricket team at the Asian Games 2023 in Hangzhou. With Shikhar leading the side, legendary Indian player VVS Laxman will be occupying the position of head coach for the tournament.

Recently, the BCCI revealed that the national men's and women's cricket teams

will be competing in the forthcoming Asian Games. Though in 2010 and 2014, the Indian cricket team didn't participate in the tournament, but finally, the Board has agreed to send both teams to China.

Earlier, there were a few reservations regarding sending Team India to China, as the tournament coincides with both the Asia Cup and the ICC Cricket World Cup.

The Asian Games will take place in Hangzhou,



China, from September 23 to October 8. On the other hand, the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 will take place in India from October 5 to November 19.

Most of the senior players, including Rohit Sharma, and former Indian captain Virat Kohli will be busy with the World Cup. A different unit will represent India in the Asian Games.

Though there are no official updates about the Indian

squad, it is assumed that the Punjab Kings captain will lead the side. In total, Dhawan has played 174 ODI matches and scored 6896 runs in 171 innings with a strike rate of 90.8 and an average of 39.63.

Dhawan was named India's captain for the first time in the ODI and T20I matches against Sri Lanka in June 2021. He has captained India in 12 ODI matches, winning seven of them.

'Security Is An Excuse': Pak Minister Threatens To Pull Out Of ODI WC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ICC recently announced the official and complete schedule for the upcoming ODI World Cup 2023, which is set to be held entirely in India for the first time ever, starting on October 15. Whereas before the World Cup, the Asia Cup is going to take place in the month of September. But the schedule of the tournament has yet to be announced.

After a lot of speculations and complex decisions, Asia Cup is all set to take place in a hybrid model as Pakistan and Sri Lanka will host Asia Cup 2023 together where in total 6 teams will fight to lift the final trophy.

Pakistan Sports Minister Ehsaan Mazari expressed his views about the hybrid model, he suggested that if India demands to play Asia Cup at a neutral venue, Pakistan should also do the same.

"My personal opinion, since the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) comes under my ministry, is that if India demands to play their Asia Cup games at a neutral venue, we would also demand the same for our World Cup games in



India," Mazari told The Indian Express.

"The committee will be headed by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and I

am among the 11 ministers who are part of it. We will discuss the issue and give our recommendations to the PM, who is also the patron-in-chief of

PCB. The PM will take the final decision," Mazari said.

He also accused India of meddling sports into politics said, "India brings sports into politics. I don't understand why the Indian government doesn't want to send their cricket team here. Some time back a huge baseball contingent from India was in Islamabad to play. There was also the bridge team that had travelled to Pakistan. There were around 60 plus people, I was the chief guest of the event. They won here and left. Pakistan's football, hockey and chess teams also travel to India".

He further said that security reasons are just an excuse for India not travelling to Pakistan, as New Zealand and England cricket teams have also travelled to Pakistan with presidential security.

"The New Zealand team was here, before that the England cricket team was in Pakistan. They got presidential security. Earlier, the Indian team was given a hearty welcome by the fans here. Security is an excuse. We also held the Pakistan Super League (PSL) that had so many foreign players," Mazari said.

I Can't Bat Like Pujara: Shaw Hit Back At Critics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Young Indian batter Prithvi Shaw is one of the most talked about players in the history. The 23-year-old cricketer made his debut at the age of 18 against West Indies in October 2018. Shaw scored 134 runs in the first innings to join an elite list of Indian players, who has managed to score a century in their debut test, whereas Shaw's career has not panned out the way it started, even though Shaw showcased excellent performances in domestic cricket.

He slammed a record-breaking 379 off just 382 balls-the second-highest individual score in the history of the Ranji Trophy. But he failed to perform in the IPL 2023; he could only muster up a total of 106 runs in eight games. It was the lowest the former India U-19 captain has ever managed to score during an IPL campaign.

Shaw opened up about his game and revealed that he will not want to change his aggressive style of batting.

"Personally, I feel I don't have to change my game, but a little smarter than what I am. I can't bat like Pujara sir bats or Pujara sir can't bat like me," Shaw said, as quoted by PTI.

"So, what I am trying to do



are those things that have brought me here till, for example, the aggressive batting, I don't like to change that."

Shaw Confident About Red Ball Format

Shaw further insisted that he remains confident in his red ball form as he has been performing in Test format.

"Everything has been going nice in red ball cricket from last year itself after I scored 370 (379 vs Assam). With white ball, especially the IPL, I feel everything is going the opposite. You just have 20 overs to think about batting. I speak to Sourav (Ganguly) sir, Ricky (Ponting) sir and Praveen (Amre) sir (in Delhi Capitals).

Harmanpreet fifty helps India thrash Bangladesh

PTI ■ MIRPUR

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur started the new international season with a smashing half-century as the Indian women's team cantered to a seven-wicket victory over Bangladesh in the opening T20 International here on Sunday.

Opting to bowl, the Indian spinners used the conditions to their advantage and restricted Bangladesh to a meagre 114 for 5.

In reply, Harmanpreet (54 not out 35 balls) and her deputy Smriti Mandhana (38 off 34 balls) added 70 runs for the third wicket to chase down

the target in just 16.2 overs.

The skipper hit six boundaries and two sixes and made best use of the two relievers that she got off left-arm spinner Nahida Akter's bowling.

Mandhana was the pacesetter for India as she hit some delectable boundaries, five of them in all, including a rasping square cut off seamer Marufa Akter and an inside out lofted cover-drive. They were shots out of top drawer.

This was after the Indian bowlers set it up perfectly for the batters, who had to hardly break a sweat while chasing down an easy target.



The spin attack, led by the experienced Deepti Sharma (0/14 in 4 overs), along with debutants -- slow left arm orthodox Anusha Baredy (0/24 in 4 overs) and off-break bowler Minnu Manni (1/21 in 3 overs) -- executed skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's plan of bowling on one side of the wicket perfectly.

Leg-spinner Shafali Verma (1/18 in 3 overs) was also mostly on target, save a six that top-scorer Sorna Akhtar (28 off 28 balls) hit off her bowling.

The idea was to pack the off-side field with five fielders and bowl on the fourth or fifth off-stump line and the

Bangladeshi batters, mostly right-handers, found it difficult to pierce the cordon.

This was after debutant Mani got her maiden wicket when Shamima Sultana (17), after tonking the offie for a six, couldn't connect her slog sweep and Jemimah Rodrigues took a smart catch at square leg.

Pooja Vastrakar then softened Shathi Rani (22) with a short ball, before casting her with a perfect fuller delivery.

The experienced Nigar Sultana (2) was run-out and Shafali tossed one up to get rid of Shobhana Mostary (23 off 33 balls), who was getting increasingly frustrated.

In fact, Bangladesh consumed as many as 62 dot balls which is more than half of the innings, with only eight fours and three sixes in all. Two of those hits by Sorna ensured that the hosts crossed the 100-run mark.

When India started the chase, Shafali paid price for her lack of footwork as she was adjudged plumb in front while being rooted to the crease.

Rodrigues was played on when she tried to cut an off-break from Sultana Khatun.

However, once Harmanpreet and Mandhana joined forces, there was hardly any concern for the winning team.