

OPINION 6
UCC: MODERNITY OVER
MEDIEVALISM

WORLD 8
HINDU TEMPLE ATTACKED WITH
ROCKET LAUNCHERS IN PAK

MONEY 10
GOVT PROCURES 3 LAKH TONNES
OF ONION FOR BUFFER STOCK

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JULY 17, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 33 Issue 196
* Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

**BUMRAH SET
TO MAKE
COMEBACK
12 SPORT**



BJP, Opp parties gear up for show of strength

AAP to attend B'luru meet as Cong decides to oppose services ordinance; BJP gets new ally in Rajbhar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over the next two days, both the BJP-led NDA and the Congress-led Opposition will be engaged in forging alliances ahead of the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls in 2024. While the Opposition parties are set to meet in Bengaluru to devise a joint strategy to confront the BJP, the BJP has called for a meeting of NDA partners, both old and new, in Delhi on Tuesday.

On Sunday, significant developments occurred in both camps. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) decided to participate in the meeting of Opposition parties in Bengaluru after the Congress declared its opposition to the ordinance on controlling Delhi services. On the other hand, OP Rajbhar, the chief of



AAP leader Raghav Chadha announces the party's decision to attend the Opposition meet in Bengaluru.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with national president and founder of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Om Prakash Rajbhar after the latter joined the BJP-led NDA, in New Delhi on Sunday

Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, joined the NDA and attended the BJP-led alliance meeting on July 18 in Delhi. Several regional parties from the North East, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh are also likely to attend the NDA meeting.

BJP president JP Nadra has invited LJP (Ram Vilas) chief and MP from Jamui, Chirag Paswan, to the NDA meeting. Nadra has also extended an invitation to former Bihar Chief Minister and Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) chief patron Jitan Ram Manjhi to participate in the meeting. Manjhi, along with his

son and HAM president Santosh Kumar Suman, recently met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and declared their party's decision to join the NDA. However, Chirag has not yet confirmed his participation, fueling speculation that his demands regarding the number of seats have not been met. He has also been demanding to be allotted the Hajipur seat, currently held by his estranged uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras, who is a Union Minister. Paras made it clear on Saturday that he will not give up his claim over the Hajipur seat, setting the stage for potential intra-party

conflicts. Meanwhile, after a crucial meeting of the AAP's highest decision-making body, the political affairs committee (PAC), held at the residence of party national convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, AAP leader Raghav Chadha appreciated the Congress' decision to oppose the Centre's ordinance regarding administrative services control in Delhi. Following the PAC discussions, Chadha announced that, under Kejriwal's leadership, the AAP will actively take part in the Opposition gathering in

Bengaluru, commencing with a dinner on Monday.

The Bengaluru meeting assumes significance as a larger number of Opposition parties are expected to attend compared to the Nitish Kumar convened Patna meet. The second meeting occurs against the backdrop of new political equations in Maharashtra and a truce between the AAP and Congress over the contentious Delhi ordinance issue. UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi will be present at the meeting for the first time.

However, Trinamool chief and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee will skip the meeting-eve dinner on Monday due to medical advice in view of a recent surgery. But she will participate in the day-long meeting of the parties on July 18. Sources within the Congress have confirmed that Sonia personally spoke to Mamata to ensure that all necessary arrangements were made with her health in mind.

Banerjee underwent a microsurgery on her left knee at the State-run SSKM Hospital in Kolkata on Thursday. The TMC chief suffered a ligament injury on her left knee during the emergency landing of her helicopter at the Sevoke Airbase in north Bengal on June 27.

Continued on page 2

Ajit, NCP rebels pay Pawar surprise visit

Nephew seeks blessings and guidance; uncle remains unmoved

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a development that raised eyebrows in State political circles ahead of the start of the Monsoon Session of the Maharashtra Legislature, Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister and breakaway group leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Ajit Pawar and the party's other leaders on Sunday called on NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar, ostensibly to seek the latter's blessings.

Ajit Pawar — who had a fortnight ago rebelled against his uncle Sharad Pawar and joined the Eknath Shinde Government along with 40-odd MLAs — took the senior Pawar by surprise, as he and other party rebels and MLAs called on the latter at the Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan Centre at Nariman Point in south Mumbai, where the NCP supreme had come for a meeting.

Apart from Ajit Pawar, the NCP's breakaway group leaders who met Sr Pawar included Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, newly sworn-in Ministers Chhagan Bhujbal, Dilip Walse Patil, Dhananjay Munde and



Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar along with other party leaders after meeting with NCP president Sharad Pawar, at YB Chavan Centre, in Mumbai on Sunday

Aditi Tatkare.

Talking to media persons after meeting the NCP patriarch, Patel said: "Today we met our god and our leader Sharad Pawar to take his blessings... We were all sitting at Ajit Pawar's residence when we came to know Pawar sahib was at the YB Chavan Centre. Without seeking any appointment, we came here, fell at his feet and took his blessings. We told him we respect him a lot and requested him to guide us in keeping the NCP together".

"Pawar sahib listened to us patiently but did not react," Patel said.

Later, interacting with the media, State NCP president Jayant Patil of the Sharad Pawar camp said that he rushed to the YB Chavan Centre after receiving

a call from the party's MP and working president Supriya Sule who told him that the NCP rebel leaders had met the party patriarch.

"After coming here, I came to know that the rebel party leaders had expressed their regret for their act. They requested Pawar sahib to guide them out of the complicated situation they were facing. After their request, Pawar sahib did not give any reaction," Patil said.

Asked if there was any change in the party's position after the rebel leaders met Sr Pawar, Patil said: "We have already decided not to join the Shinde-Fadnis Government. There is absolutely no change in our stand".

Continued on page 2

Yamuna water level recedes

But waterlogging in several stretches led to traffic jams in city on Sunday

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Yamuna water is receding and its level constantly falling, giving the people of Delhi and its Government a breather but waterlogging in several stretches led to traffic jams on Sunday. However, heavy rainfall in upper catchment areas could worsen the situation in the coming days.

After visiting a relief camp in North Delhi's Mori Gate, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that the Delhi Government will provide financial aid of Rs 10,000 each to the flood-affected families.

Taking to Twitter, he said many poor families living along the Yamuna banks have lost their homes in the floods and some have lost all their belongings. "A financial aid of Rs 10,000 will be provided to each family affected by the floods," he tweeted.

"Houses in the low-lying areas near the Yamuna were



Commuters move through the floodwaters of the swollen Yamuna river, at ITO, in New Delhi on Sunday

inundated. The Delhi Government has set up relief camps for residents. Six districts of Delhi are affected. We have set up camps in schools and dharamshalas so that toilets and water are readily available. People said the water came all of a sudden and many have lost their documents like Aadhaar cards. We will set up special camps for them. Many children lost school books and uniforms. We will make arrangements for them as well. There is a lot of muck in the area and we will send some dry soil there to help it dry," he said. The Chief Minister further

announced the closure of all schools in the east, northeast, north, northwest, central and southeast districts till July 18.

Many areas of Delhi like ITO, Civil Lines, Rajghat, Kashmere Gate, Yamuna Bank, Pragati Maidan, Sarai Kale Khan and Yamuna Bazar witnessed waterlogging with the flood water yet to recede. Fresh showers in various parts of the city also caused traffic snarls on some routes.

Maintaining its downward trend, with the volume of water from Haryana's Hathnikund barrage reducing gradually, the Yamuna was flowing at the 205.

56 meter mark at 8 PM.

The Delhi BJP on Sunday demanded a judicial probe into whether any desilting of the Yamuna river and drains in the city was done by the AAP Government, and how much money was spent on it.

AAP Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj hit out at the BJP, saying the party falsely accused the AAP of not paying for the maintenance of the ITO barrage even though it is managed by the Haryana Government.

Meanwhile, an operation to open the gate of the Yamuna Barrage at ITO is underway with the aid of the Naval diving team. Also, after remaining shut for three days, the entry-exit gates of the Yamuna Bank Metro Station were also opened.

In a big relief, the water supply in central Delhi is set to improve as the Chandrawal water treatment plant was reopened on Sunday after floods forced the closure a few days ago, leading to water shortage for residents. The Okhla water treatment plant started work at full capacity on Saturday evening, according to officials.

Continued on Page 2

'Body for flood-control under Kejriwal didn't meet for 2 yrs'

AAP Govt denies charges levelled by Raj Niwas, BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Apex Committee under Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal responsible for flood control and preparedness in the national Capital did not meet for the last two years.

According to a statement issued by Raj Niwas, the meeting of the Apex Committee should have taken place by the end of June before the issue of the flood control order. Strangely, the flood control order was issued without the Apex Committee meeting and preceding preparations.

The Apex Committee is mandatory to ensure seamless coordination among the various agencies, including the Central Government, the Army, and the Central Water Commission.

Sources claimed that the flood order issued by the Delhi



Government was "half-baked".

The Delhi BJP slammed the Kejriwal Government saying the meeting of an Apex Committee on flood control, headed by Kejriwal, has not been held in the last two years.

Addressing a Press conference, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, Bansuri Swaraj, and Praveen Shankar Kapoor alleged that no desilting of Yamuna and drains was carried out by the Kejriwal Government and the flood in Delhi was caused because of this failure and demanded a judicial probe in the matter.

However, the AAP Government denied the charge, saying the meeting to discuss flood preparedness chaired by

Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj took place on May 9. It also said a flood control order was issued as per due process.

However, Raj Niwas official said as chairman of the Apex Committee to review, recommend, supervise and coordinate flood control measures in the NCT of Delhi, Kejriwal chose not to allow the committee's mandatory meeting scheduled in June-end this year, despite the revenue department moving a file to this effect on June 19.

"Even last year, Kejriwal did not let this meeting happen," said sources. "The statements being given by Kejriwal and his Ministers are blatant lies," the official added.

This high-power committee chaired by the Delhi CM consists of all Government Ministers, Delhi MPs, four MLAs of the AAP, and the Chief Secretary, along with other stakeholders like the Delhi Development Authority, GOC-Indian Army, and member of the Central Water Commission.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

SUSPECTED ISI AGENT ARRESTED IN UP

Lucknow: A suspected ISI agent was arrested on Sunday for allegedly supplying vital information about Indian military establishments to his handlers in Pakistan, an official statement said. "Raees, a resident of Gonda, was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS). He was summoned to the ATS headquarters here and during interrogation, he confessed to spying," Prashant Kumar, Special DG (Law and Order), said in a statement. According to police, Raees came in contact with one Armaan in Mumbai who persuaded him to spy against India. P2

ALLIANCE TALKS WITH JD(S) AHEAD OF 2024: BOMMAI

Hubballi (K'taka): Senior BJP leader and former Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, said in a statement at talks regarding the JD(S) joining the NDA ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Bommai said the results of the discussion would determine the future political developments. Claiming that their allegations over JD(S) being the 'B-team' of BJP were now proven, the ruling Congress in the State took a dig at the developments calling the regional outfit an "opportunistic party", which is ready to join hands with anyone for the sake of power.

REPORTS ON TWO CHEETAH DEATHS SPECULATIVE: GOVT

New Delhi: The Environment Ministry on Sunday said five out of the 20 adult cheetahs brought from Namibia and South Africa died due to natural causes and media reports attributing the deaths to factors like radio collars were based on "speculation and hearsay without scientific evidence". In a statement, the Ministry also said several steps have been planned to support the cheetah project, including the establishment of a Cheetah Research Center with facilities for rescue, rehabilitation, capacity building, and interpretation. P4

JALGAON MOVES ROW: TRUST QUOS HC

Aurangabad: A trust managing a mosque in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district has moved the Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court against the Collector's order banning entry into the premises following a complaint claiming the structure has the "appearance of a temple". The trust's advocate, SS Kazi, said the petition would be taken up for hearing on July 18. The petition, filed by the Jumma Masjid Trust Committee said the Collector passed the "arbitrary and illegal" order on July 11 directing them to give the keys of the mosque to the Erandoli Municipal Council.

Cash-strapped Pak seeks to outsource ops of key airports



ANI ■ ISLAMABAD

amid the continuously-depleting Forex reserves, the Government of Pakistan has been pushing for outsourcing the operations of major airports. The Finance Minister has already convened multiple meetings of the committee formed to engage foreign operators for outsourcing, Dawn reported. Finance

Minister Ishaq Dar told the stakeholders to finalise formalities to outsource the operations of Islamabad International Airport (IIA) by August 12, the final day of the incumbent Government's term, Dawn reported, quoting sources. Dawn is a national daily of Pakistan that reports on politics and current affairs of Pakistan.

Continued on page 2

Doctors warn of flood of diseases due to dirty water

'Wading in floodwater, high humidity can cause fungal infection in skin'

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As disruptions due to flooding continue across parts of the country, claiming over 100 lives in Northern India, medical experts are raising concerns about the potential health risks associated with the aftermath of floods. Doctors have flagged that disease-causing microbes lurking in the muddy waters, along with increased humidity, moisture, and various other weather-related factors, can lead to a range of skin problems, with fungal infections being a major concern.

Dr. Bhawuk Dhir from the Department of Dermatology at RML, Delhi, warned that these fungal infections can have



long-lasting health impacts if ignored. The most common fungal infections that people are prone to in such situations include ringworm (Tinea), athlete's foot, and candidiasis.

These infections are characterised by itching, redness, scaling, and discomfort. To prevent fungal infections, it is crucial to keep the skin clean and dry, especially in the aftermath of flooding when the risk of exposure to contaminated water is high. Immediate atten-

tion to any skin issues and maintaining good hygiene practices can significantly reduce the risk of fungal infections and their potential health consequences.

Dr. Ramesh Bhat M, skin specialist and Professor at the Department of Dermatology and dean of Father Muller Medical College, Mangalore said that immune-compromised people, like those suffering from diabetes, obesity, foot deformities, barefoot walk-

ers, migrant workers should be especially careful as they are more prone to develop this type of infection. Also, fungal infections, especially candidiasis of the feet are common during floods.

It mainly affects the inter-digital space in the feet, but even web spaces in the hands can be affected in view of constant contact with water, Dr. Bhat said adding that "They also get severe pain and swelling of limbs with fever when it gets secondarily infected with bacteria leading to cellulitis which may require hospital care and antibiotic injections."

Dr. Ekta Nigam, Senior Consultant-Dermatologist, Paras Hospitals, Gurugram echoed similar concerns and noted that they are getting cases of jock itch skin diseases, too, besides those of athlete's foot and ringworm.

She explained that while athlete's foot infection affects the feet, particularly between

the toes as it thrives in moist environments, making it more prevalent during floods where people may be exposed to contaminated water, ringworm affects the skin, causing a red, itchy rash with a ring-like appearance. It is commonly transmitted through direct contact with contaminated surfaces or people.

Jock itch affects the groin area and inner thighs. Similar to an athlete's foot, it thrives in warm, moist conditions, making it more common during flooding events, she said. According to the doctors, Candidiasis which is a yeast infection, too, is becoming a major cause of concern, infecting various parts of the body, including the mouth (thrush), skin, genital area (vaginal yeast infection in women), and moist folds of skin.

Prolonged exposure to moist conditions during floods can increase the risk of developing candidiasis.

Continued on page 2

Didi Govt to fall in 5 months: BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal BJP has once again issued threats of toppling the ruling Mamata Banerjee Government. Close on the heels of demanding Article 355 for the violence-torn State the BJP which lost heavily to the Trinamool Congress in the bloody rural elections that has till now seen 56 deaths junior Union Minister Shantanu Thakur on Sunday said that the TMC's fall was imminent and that its Government would not last beyond five months.



that they will not survive beyond that period," he said. When asked as to whether he was expecting a mass defection he said that a large number of Trinamool legislators were not happy with the way the corrupt regime was functioning.



refusing to divulge whether the BJP was planning a Maharashtra-like horse-trade in Bengal or whether his party was in touch with the TMC MLAs.



defeat they should have felt ashamed... instead of doing so they are issuing ultimatums... the TMC is not afraid of those hollow threats... because their leader Suwendu Adhikari had issued similar threats last December but produced a big zero."

Thakur was vehemently backed by Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar who even went on to predict an in-house coup in the Bengal ruling party, stopping short of announcing an Uddhav Thackeray-like fate for Mamata Banerjee.

"There are a number of ways through which this Government may fall... it may fall if a majority of MLAs put in their papers and say with folded hands that they do not want to continue with this corrupt and murderous regime... they may also extend their support to some other political party to form a new Government," Majumdar said

The saffron leaders' statements came days after Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari and senior central leader Ravi Shankar Prasad who led a fact-finding-team to the violence-hit areas of Bengal claimed the situation was ripe for the imposition of Article 355 in the State.

Reacting strongly to the BJP leaders' statements TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said that the BJP itself was in danger in the Centre adding, "they are talking about Article 355 in Bengal... but why are not they talking about it in Manipur... first they should go an clamp central rule in Manipur and then come to

Bengal." He also reminded the kind of violence perpetrated on the Opposition workers by the BJP cadres in Tripura.

Political analyst BN Chakrabarty too felt that the BJP leaders' statements should not be taken seriously as they were issuing those statements in order to rejuvenate their workers after the loss they suffered in the panchayat elections.

"They are aware that their vote share has come down by 16 percent from 38 to 22 whereas the Left-Congress alliance winning 21 percent vote is fast re-emerging as the principal opposition party with a gain of 11 percent votes," Chakrabarty said adding "the BJP will do nothing to Bengal Government until Mamata Banerjee does not actively join the Congress-led alliance in the Centre or stops disturbing the Congress that she has been doing for the past several years helping the BJP's cause by default."

Flooding in Delhi due to lack of dredging of Yamuna: Lekhi

'AAP seeks to do politics in every adversity'



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi on Sunday alleged that the flood situation in parts of Delhi happened due to "lack of dredging of the Yamuna", even as she asked as to why the Arvind Kejriwal government has not announced any compensation to farmers and others who have suffered damage of crops and loss of properties in the deluge.

politics" in every adversity, and its leaders only go for "photo-ops" but make no efforts to serve the masses impacted by the flooding. Lekhi, during her interaction with media, also alleged that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal did not attend meetings of the apex committee for flood control and preparedness in the past. From June 30, the meeting was further postponed to July 3 and then to July 6, she said.

Lekhi claimed that more volume of water than 3,59,760 cusecs was released in some of the previous years, including in August 2019 when 8,28,000 cusec water was released. "So, how did the flood come? Will someone answer?" she asked.

"Only Kejriwal can answer this... And the dredging that was to happen. And, if Rs 6,800 crore budget for five years was there for cleaning of the Yamuna, we would like to know where was that money spent. Where did the money go? Because dredging was not done. I feel there should be a probe on this spending," she told reporters. Lekhi also quoted a July 14 tweet by Kejriwal to buttress her claim on lack of dredging of Yamuna.

Lekhi claimed if the tweet mentions that "silt from under the water" was extracted, it suggests, dredging was not done.

ISI agent arrested for passing military secrets to Pakistan-based handlers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Sleuths of the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) here on Sunday claimed to have trapped an agent of the Pakistan-based Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) passing on important military secrets to his bosses in Pakistan.

managed important information about the Indian Army and later passed off the information to his ISI bosses in Pakistan.

ATS officials said that after collecting evidence of his involvement in anti-India activities, they summoned Mohammed Rayees to the ATS office here on Saturday. Later the ATS team confronted Rayees with the evidence to which he failed to give a reasonable answer.

Rayees disclosed that a few years back he used to work in Mumbai where he met one Arman who influenced him to work for ISI citing atrocities on Muslims and Babri Mosque demolition case.

Rayees said that he informed Arman about his willingness to work in Saudi Arabia. Arman gave Rayees a mobile number of a Pakistan-based ISI handler and told him that if he convinced the ISI men that he could pass on important military secrets to them, he would get good money and also a job in Saudi Arabia.

Rayees further revealed that he received a WhatsApp call from one person who informed him that he was a friend of Arman. The caller also told him that one Hussain would now call him and would help him in getting a job in Saudi Arabia.

Rayees said that he interacted with Hussain several times and the latter asked him to send photographs of important military bases and also other secrets about army movement. Rayees said that under the influence of Hussain, he also asked his friend Salman and some others to help him in collecting military secrets and passed them on to Hussain. They also sent some secrets and photos to Hussain and in return he paid them Rs 15,000 in installments.

Rayees said that Hussain also introduced him to one Bangladeshi with whom he was in regular touch. On the basis of interrogation, the ATS team officially arrested Rayees and booked him under the relevant section for anti-India activities.

Yogi receives death threat on social media

'Case filed, probe begins'



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has received a death threat on social media.

A tweet issuing a threat to the UP chief minister's life surfaced on Friday, officials said. A case has been registered and the probe is going on in the said case.

Following the incident, the monitoring team of the cyber crime police station, which keeps an eye on social media posts involving political figures, government and ministers, registered a case on Saturday evening and started an investigation.

Reports said that the intelligence agencies noted a tweet containing abusive language directed towards the chief minister, accompanied by death threats.

The tweet was posted by a user named Khalid Qureshi (@rock:Qureshi), as mentioned in the FIR.

Advocate Kalpna Srivastava's twitter handle shared this information, stating that Khalid Qureshi had made derogatory remarks against the chief minister and issued threats to kill him.

Officials said that the user had deleted some of the abusive posts.

Station House Officer Mohammed Muslim Khan from the Cyber Cell confirmed that an FIR has been registered under sections 504 (intentional insult), 507

ABVP sets up helplines for CUET admissions in DU

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Sunday set up helplines to assist students taking admission through CUET in central universities of Delhi.

Common Seat Allocation System, the process is a bit more complicated than normal. In such circumstances, a large number of students aspiring to take admission to DU will have some queries.

"In other universities also, even after CUET, admissions will be done by filling out the form of the respective institute. In such a situation, these helpline numbers will make the process much more convenient for the aspirants," the statement read.

ABVP Delhi state secretary Harsh Attri said students facing issues related to the admission process can contact the helpline numbers for assistance.

Over 22,000 candidates scored 100 percentile in the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG in various subjects, the maximum of them in English followed by Biology and Economics, in results declared on Saturday.

According to NTA, 22,836 candidates had a 100 percentile score this year compared to 21,159 last year.

'Body for flood-control under Kejriwal...

From Page 1

It is scheduled to meet on any date towards the end of June, before the onset of the monsoon, to review the situation at hand and pass a "Flood Control Order" every year, the sources said.

including those from the Centre, to handle any eventuality, they added.

The Divisional Commissioner, who is also the convener of the committee, requested Kejriwal on June 21 to suggest a suitable date and time for convening the mandatory meeting of the Apex Committee in the last week of June. The file was submitted to the CM through Atishi.

tional secretary, a relatively junior functionary, returned the file after four days, on June 26. To Atishi with the noting that, "The CM has desired that the Minister (Revenue) may convene the meeting," of the Apex Committee, which is chaired by the CM."

After Kejriwal offloaded this responsibility on Atishi, she again did not deem it fit to see the file and convene a meeting of the all-powerful Apex Committee."

"Her OSD instructed the Divisional Commissioner, on file, to have a short meeting (not the Apex Committee) for releasing the Flood Control Order 2023, on 30.06.23 at 6:30 pm in her conference room with Divisional Commissioner, Pr Secy (I&FC), DM (East) and Chief Engineer," the official said.

The meeting chaired by Atishi, did not have the presence of the Chief Secretary, Police Commissioner, MCD

Commissioner, CEO DJB, and various other important stakeholders, leaving apart the representatives from the CWC. This happened because Atishi did not ask for them to be present in the meeting.

The meeting subsequently happened on July 6, after which a perfunctory half-baked flood control order was issued without taking the main stakeholders into confidence," the official said.

Yamuna water...

From Page 1

Kejriwal on Sunday said the Chandrawal water treatment plant - one of the three shut since flooding - has started. "Chandrawal water treatment plant has also started," Kejriwal tweeted on Sunday.

The Delhi Police has reopened several stretches for traffic movement including Bhairon Marg, both the carriageways of Ring Road between ISBT Kashmere Gate and Majnu ka Tilla for Medium and light Vehicles. While the Delhi Police had reopened a few roads after the water level at Yamuna River receded, police said the traffic movement is still affected on arterial roads due to waterlogging. Police said many areas reported waterlogging

due to rains, overflowing sewer water, and river water.

North Delhi people who had left after an overflowing Yamuna ravaged their shops and dwellings have begun to trickle in now that the river is retreating with little to no rain in the past few days in the city.

A few returned to take stock of their shops at the monastery market near Kashmiri Gate, which was flooded after the last week's rain, leaving the entire market covered in sludge and flotsam and residents with no choice but to move out to relief camps. The record flooding forced the administration to engage the navy to help it open the jammed gates of the ITO Barrage.

BJP, Opp...

From Page 1

"While her doctors have given her permission to fly and attend the Opposition summit, they have advised her to rest. As a result, she will skip the dinner but will actively participate in the daylong meeting on July 18," a source within the TMC stated.

Meanwhile, the return of Rajbhar to the NDA fold is seen as an attempt by the BJP to bolster its OBC push in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Rajbhar, who had quit the Yogi Adityanath government ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, is also likely to rejoin the state cabinet.

SBFC
Address Unit No. 103, First Floor C&B Square, Sangam Complex, 127, Andheri-Kurla Road, Village Chakrah, Andheri (East), Mumbai 400059 | Telephone: +91 22 67875300 | Fax: +91 22 67875334 | www.sbf.com | Corporate Identity Number: U67190MH2008PTC178270

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Ltd. on 25th July 2023 at Delhi District branch A-56, First Floor, Arjun Nagar, Bhisma Pitamah Marg, Opposite Defence Colony, New Delhi - 110024 and Faridabad District: branch D-2, First Floor, N.I.T., Near 1-2 Chowk, Faridabad, Haryana-121001 at District : Gautam Budh Nagar : Branch add- Plot No. 5, Ground Floor, Opposite White Hotel, Main Dadr Road, Salarpur, Bhangal, Sector 101, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida-201304 (UP), Ghaziabad District : branch add- B2, Basement, Rd. Raj Nagar, Ghaziabad - 201002, Hapur District : add- First Floor, Above PC Jewellers, Garah Park, Garah Road, Tehsil & District Hapur 245101, (UP)

The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers which have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to all linked accounts of Customer ID for various customers mentioned below with branch details.

GURUGRAM: AP00173855, AP00186216, AP00188023, AP00274465, AP00305183, AP00315442, AP00370518, AP00401107, AP00429999, AP00430161, AP00448159, AP00475348, AP00505578, AP00520172, AP00530746, AP00530967, AP00533431 **KOTLA MUBARAKPUR:** AP00016182, AP00407255, AP00430773, AP00432092, AP00485932, AP00507117, AP00521746, AP00529847, AP00532266 **LAXMI NAGAR:** AP00270759, AP00393631, AP00430622, AP00431015, AP00431068, AP00431912, AP00432284, AP00432619, AP00433590, AP00433633, AP00438290, AP00441006, AP00458553, AP00459731, AP00461518, AP00469582, AP00476455, AP00488723, AP00495932, AP00513894, AP00518775, AP00518928, AP00529914 **ROHINI:** AP00112174, AP00168196, AP00271216, AP00431151, AP00525233, AP00529883, AP00530947 **NOIDA:** AP00399246, AP00431188, AP00467422, AP00475420, AP00480197, AP00532577, AP00545675, AP00545963, AP00551802, AP00555437 **FARIDABAD:** AP00175965, AP00191203, AP00192718, AP00193067, AP00197822, AP00202199, AP00202503, AP00203473, AP00209555, AP00256718, AP00265297, AP00274977, AP00281365, AP00292948, AP00309903, AP00309794, AP00314469, AP00320560, AP00329437, AP00329544, AP00329667, AP00330092, AP00330184, AP00330528, AP00330924, AP00336580, AP00370316, AP00372069, AP00413072, AP00415443, AP00421434, AP00431503, AP00431716, AP00432791, AP00437731, AP00437827, AP00437847, AP00444736, AP00458071, AP00466896, AP00467602, AP00467752, AP00468556, AP00472920, AP00476319, AP00479593, AP00482860, AP00501614, AP00504480, AP00507878, AP00510561, AP00511523, AP00519804, AP00524210, AP00524229, AP00527865, AP00529070, AP00529112, AP00529232, AP00529242, AP00529544, AP00529667, AP00530092, AP00530184, AP00530528, AP00530924, AP00531435, AP00531657, AP00531685, AP00534910, AP00535011, AP00535282 **HAZARIBAG:** AP00330554, AP00345506, AP00378539, AP00413189, AP00422822, AP00431486, AP00431620, AP00443177, AP00520716, AP00531518 **HAPUR:** AP00348933, AP00351008, AP00362484, AP00378826, AP00384627, AP00428333, AP00433133, AP00437422, AP00447757, AP00467192, AP00519089, AP00528347, AP00528658

For more details, please contact:
SBFC Finance Limited
Contact Number(s): Lajpat Nagar 1800-102-1012 / 011-40305228 / 207, Ghaziabad branch - 9205325672, Hapur branch - 8439761293, Noida branch: 8368589407, (SBFC Finance Limited reserves the right to alter the number of accounts to be auctioned & postpone / cancel the auction without any prior notice.)

Docs warn of flood of diseases due...

From Page 1

Another fungal infection that is rearing its ugly head is aspergillosis. "It is a type of mold commonly found in damp environments, such as flooded buildings. Inhalation of aspergillus spores can lead to respiratory infections, particularly in individuals with weakened immune systems or pre-existing lung conditions," added Dr Bhat.

Talking about preventive measures, the health experts stressed on keeping the feet dry especially the skin in between the toes. "If you have walked in flood water, clean it with lukewarm water and mop immediately with dry cloth. Foot hygiene is very important in diabetics to prevent cellulitis and gangrene," Dr Bhat said. Topical pure antifungal creams like Azoles and Terbinafine

are helpful. Systemic antifungals like Fluconazole and Itraconazole should be taken with a doctor's (preferably dermatologist's) advice. One should avoid steroid-containing creams usually dispensed by drug stores (Even though they are schedule H drugs) like Betnovate, Dermi 5, Fourderm or Quadriderm cream which will invariably result in side effects, said Dr Bhat.

Dr Dhir concurred with Dr Bhat as he, too, warned against use of steroid combination creams Panderm which are often recommended by pharmacists. "They might result in improvement initially but will later cause severe infection which is difficult to treat." The dermatologists suggested usage of antifungal powders or creams that will help treat these infections effectively.

Cash-strapped Pak seeks to outsource...

From Page 1

The Minister chaired a meeting of the steering committee for assessing the progress of airport operations outsourcing on Saturday.

A source privy to the meeting told Dawn that the committee had given explicit instructions to complete the necessary procedures for IIA outsourcing as a priority, Dawn reported.

An official announcement issued after the meeting said World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC), the transaction adviser for the outsourcing, briefed the meeting on the progress.

Dar wants changes to aviation laws approved before month-end. The meeting agreed to fast-track IIA's outsourcing to improve service delivery in line with best industry practices, Dawn reported.

The IFC also gave a presentation to the committee which also took decisions on the future course of action.

Ajit, NCP rebels pay Pawar...

From Page 1

The rebel NCP leaders' meeting with Sr Pawar came two days after Ajit Pawar rushed to the NCP supremo's south Mumbai residence 'Silver Oak' to meet his aunt Pratibha Pawar and enquire about her health after her surgery.

Ajit dada — as Ajit Pawar is known in the State political circles — who spent half an hour with Pratibha Pawar and other family members had said: "After heeding the call of my conscience, I went to meet my aunt to enquire about her health."

On July 2, Ajit Pawar and eight other NCP MLAs were inducted into the State Cabinet, after they rebelled against NCP chief Sharad Pawar, broke away from the parent party and joined the

Shinde government.

Meanwhile, after the erosion in the strengths of its allies NCP and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, the Congress is all set to get the post of the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Maharashtra Assembly. Though its chief Sharad Pawar — after the Ajit Pawar-engineered rebellion within his party — had on July 2 appointed its leader Jitendra Ahwad as the leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, the NCP appears to have given up its claim on the LoP's post, after having realized it did not have numbers to stake a claim on the post.

The Congress has a strength of 45 MLAs in the 288-member State Assembly. While its allies — the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena has

16 MLAs with it, the strength of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP has been reduced to "14 to 15 MLAs" though the party claims it has "19 to 20" MLAs with it.

Talking to media persons, State NCP president Jayant Patil of the Sharad Pawar camp said: "A decision on the LoP's post would be taken during the monsoon session of the State Legislature beginning tomorrow. I have spoken to senior Congress leaders Ashok Chavan and Balasaheb Thoaat. They will speak to their party high command and take a decision on the LoP's post."

Replying to queries, Patil said: "We (NCP) have 19 to 20 MLAs with us. Many MLAs are trying to give an indication that they are on both sides."

Govt faces criticism over running 'parallel' civil service

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government in Delhi is facing severe criticism over allegedly running a parallel civil service, employing 437 private individuals as Fellows and Consultants without any accountability.

Sources said most of these appointees are allegedly AAP workers who receive hefty salaries funded by the public exchequer. "The shocking revelations have raised serious concerns over the flouting of Constitutional provisions related to Reservation and the alleged manipulation of the selection process," an official said.

According to official, the modus operandi of the AAP Govt was to bulldoze every Constitutional norm and every rule in the rulebook. These private individuals/political workers were filled in almost every



department, agency, Board and PSU under the Delhi Government, in many cases in place of senior government officers, essentially to evade any accountability and tweak the rules to their political advantage.

One of the gravest allegations leveled against the AAP government is its failure to adhere to the Constitutional mandate of providing reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes

(OBCs) in temporary appointments lasting 45 days or more.

Despite guidelines from the Union Government and the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD), the appointments were made without any reserved category seats. Sources said the AAP government faces the charges of rigging the entire selection process, favoring candidates aligned with the party's interests, and using the appointed "Fellows" and "Consultants" for political pro-

paganda and party activities. The involvement of AAP-affiliated individuals in conducting interviews for selection has raised questions about transparency, meritocracy, and ethical governance, they said.

The alleged violations of Constitutional norms have come to light, with multiple Delhi government bodies, including the Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, the General Purpose Committee of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and others, endorsing reservation for these appointments. Despite this consensus, the AAP government chose to disregard the recommendations, sparking accusations of unscrupulous practices.

"In nutshell, a Brahmin Minister in the AAP Government, Shri Saurabh Bhardwaj, gave government jobs to several of his fellow Brahmin AAP workers,

through backdoor, and snatched away the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs," official said. "Multiple documents prove that the AAP Govt led by Arvind Kejriwal appointed its own people in the selection panel to secure government jobs for his own party workers, thereby indulging in unscrupulous practices and looting public money," he said.

Two glaring instances of potential violations are as follows: Firstly, Saurav Kumar Pandey, an AAP MLA's former "Office Assistant," was appointed as an Associate Fellow at Delhi Assembly Research Centre with a substantial increase in salary without clear justification. Pandey, who was working as "Office Assistant" at a monthly salary of Rs.18000/- per month, has been engaged as Associate Fellow in Delhi Assembly Research Centre at a monthly salary of Rs. 60,000/- per month (an increase of 333%).

AAP will file defamation suit against BJP leaders: MLA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Denying the allegations of the Raj Niwas, the Arvind Kejriwal led AAP Government said the baseless allegations appear nothing less than political vendetta and a desperate attempt to create a media sensation ahead of the hearing in the Supreme Court on Delhi Ordinance.

AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar said the party will file defamation suit against BJP leaders for spreading misinformation about MLAs.

"Those terminated illegally by the L-G come from prestigious institutes like Oxford, IIT, IIM; BJP is

spreading lies," he said. "The Government unequivocally reiterates that the appointment of these fellows/specialists was made in accordance with the prescribed rules and regulations of the departments or institutions they were hired by."

"This statement of the LG follows the brazenly illegal and unconstitutional order issued by the Services department dt. 05.07.2023 terminating hundreds of young professionals hired under one fellowship programme of Delhi Assembly (DARC i.e. Delhi Assembly Research Center Fellowship) and two fellowship programmes of

CMULF (CM's Urban Leaders Fellowship) and CMIE (Change Maker in Education Fellowship)," the AAP government said in a statement. "It is a matter of record that these prestigious Fellowship programmes follow a very transparent, objective and rigorous selection process comprising of open public advertisements in newspapers followed by eligibility-criteria based shortlisting, essays/presentation-based evaluation and final round of interviews."

The entire selection process of these programmes is administered by government officers of the concerned departments



Waterlogged road behind the Red Fort as floodwater continues to recede in New Delhi on Sunday RANJAN DIMRI | PIONEER



People walk through a waterlogged area after the Yamuna river inundated Yamuna Bazar in New Delhi on Sunday RANJAN DIMRI | PIONEER



Flooding outside the Rajghat on Sunday RANJAN DIMRI | PIONEER

Got ₹1,071 cr from Clean Ganga Mission, spent ₹1,011 cr: DJB

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Jal Board has said it received Rs 1,071.37 crore from the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) in the last eight years and spent Rs 1,011.67 crore under the Yamuna Action Plan - III during the period.

In response to an RTI query, the DJB said it received another Rs 205 crore in funds from the NMCG in the last five years and spent all of it in expenditure under the Namami Gange Project.

With the NMCG funds, nine major projects were taken up since 2015-16 and the most expensive among them was the construction of 564 MLD

Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) at Okhla under the Yamuna Action Plan - III at a cost of Rs 431.40 crore, the DJB said.

The DJB, responsible for the production and distribution of drinking water as also for collection, treatment and disposal of domestic sewage in the national capital, shared the figures in response to a query by Noida-based RTI activist Amit Gupta.

Sharing the year-wise details of funds received in the last eight years, the DJB said it got Rs 4.96 crore in 2015-16, Rs 2.17 crore in 2016-17, Rs 36.37 crore in 2017-18, Rs 190 crore in 2018-19, Rs 160 crore in 2019-20, Rs 225 crore in 2020-

21, Rs 390 crore in 2021-22 and Rs 70 crore in 2022-23. In terms of expenditure, the DJB said it spent Rs 1.11 crore in 2015-16, Rs 3.68 crore in 2016-17, Rs 15.93 crore in 2017-18, Rs 113.74 crore in 2018-19, Rs 219.49 crore in 2019-20, Rs 299.91 crore in 2020-21, Rs 233.21 crore in 2021-22 and Rs 124.60 crore in 2022-23, according to the written reply.

The DJB, which functions under the Delhi government, also received funds from the NMCG under the Namami Gange project. In 2018-19, the DJB said it received Rs 120 crore, followed by Rs 55 crore in 2019-20, Rs 10 crore in 2020-21, Rs 15 crore in 2021-22, Rs 5.45 crore in 2022-23.

Special camps for those who lost Aadhaar cards

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced the Delhi government will set up special camps for those who lost their Aadhaar cards and other important documents, and make arrangements for books and clothes for the affected children.

He made the announcement during a visit to a relief camp in north Delhi's Mori Gate. Kejriwal also said the government will soon announce assistance for those who have suffered significant losses due to the floods, and assured the people that life in Delhi will soon return to normalcy. Regarding the ongoing efforts to control the flood sit-



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal interacts with people at a flood relief camp following monsoon rains, at Mori Gate in New Delhi on Sunday. Delhi minister Atishi Singh is also seen PTI

uation, Kejriwal said that pumps are being used to reduce the water level in the affected areas. The progress varies across different locations, but the water level is gradually decreasing, he said. "We have established relief camps in various locations, primarily in schools and dhamshalas, to provide necessary amenities such as toilets and clean water," he told reporters at the relief camp. The chief minister acknowledged the challenges faced by the people of Yamuna Bazaar, where the floodwaters caused significant damage.

As many individuals lost their important documents, including Aadhaar cards, the chief minister assured them that special camps would be organised to help them get

these essential documents. He also highlighted the plight of children who lost their books and school uniforms due to the flooding. He assured the affected families that the government is actively working on providing replacements for these items at the earliest.

Considering the muddy conditions in the affected areas, Kejriwal said efforts would be made to fill up 'keechad' with dry soil to expedite the drying process. "The government is exploring various means to provide ad hoc relief to the flood-affected individuals, including compensation for their losses," he said, adding specific details and announcements regarding this assistance will be made soon.

'ITO barrage maintained by Hry not Delhi Govt'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj on Sunday attacked the BJP, saying the party falsely accused the AAP of not paying for the maintenance of the ITO barrage even though it is managed by the Haryana government.

"BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri should know that the ITO barrage is managed by the Haryana government, which accepted that the barrage was not maintained, five gates were not opened and this led to the rise in Yamuna's water levels. This is also the reason why there was a breach in our regulator," Bhardwaj said at a



press conference here. "To cover up for the damage caused by them, the BJP has come up with the excuse that the Delhi

government is not paying for the maintenance of the barrage," he alleged. The AAP leader further claimed that let-

ters were written by the Delhi government to Haryana in 2017 and in 2021, seeking the handover of the ITO barrage to the national capital.

"In 2017, Secretary of Irrigation and Flood Control of Delhi, IAS officer Keshav Chandra, had told the Haryana government in a letter to give the barrage back to the Delhi government. He also referred to a 2015 meeting of Delhi and Haryana officers where the same matter was discussed. In 2021, another letter was sent to the Haryana government asking them to hand over the barrage, citing no maintenance," he claimed. "Despite receiving several letters from the Delhi

government, the Haryana government did not give the ITO barrage to us," he said. "The company in question previously operated a thermal power plant and had an agreement through which it would give monetary compensation to the Haryana Government for sourcing water from them."

However, that agreement has since expired, and the company has shut down its meters as well. The misinformation being spread by BJP around this is absurd and baseless, and we remain focussed on demanding a clear response from Haryana on the transfer of ownership of the barrage," he added.

Govt, pvt schools bordering Yamuna to remain shut on July 17, 18: DoE

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate of Education (DoE) said on Sunday all government and private schools in areas bordering the Yamuna river will remain closed on July 17 and 18. "All flood-hit schools may arrange online classes, it said."

Parts of Delhi have been inundated after the Yamuna in the city breached its banks following days of heavy rains in its upper catchment areas, prompting the evacuation of thousands from low-lying areas. "As flood relief camps are likely to continue to run in



schools in the areas bordering the river Yamuna, all schools (government and private) in the affected Districts of DoE - East, North East, North West-A, North, Central and South East -- shall remain closed for students on July 17 and 18," the

DoE said in a circular. The schools affected due to the floods may arrange online classes, it said.

All schools in the remaining DoE districts (North West-B, West-A, West-B, South, South West-A, South West-B and New Delhi) shall remain open, the circular stated. "The Heads of Schools in these seven districts are at liberty to run (classes) in physical mode or hybrid mode (either offline or online) as per convenience of their students. Heads of such schools must inform parents about their decision well in advance," it said.

Govt has not made proper arrangements for flood-hit people of Delhi, claims BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday claimed that the Kejriwal government has not made proper arrangements for people affected by the floods especially providing tents and started relief efforts in some parts of the national capital.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva also met and consoled the husband and children of deceased Usha Devi at the relief camp near DND flyover in Mayur Vihar and the BJP workers made arrange-



ments for last rites of deceased. The party also demanded a compensation of Rs 50 lakhs to the family of deceased. Sachdeva charged that it is raining repeatedly in Delhi and government has not made proper tent arrangements for the flood affected people anywhere.

The BJP has been continuously demanding that government should shift flood-affected people under a concrete roof, but the Kejriwal government is not paying any attention to this. It resulted in the sudden death

of Usha Devi, he claimed. He said this was not an accident but a murder by the negligence of Kejriwal government. The Delhi BJP President has demanded a compensation of Rs.50 lakh from the Delhi Government for the family of Usha Devi's husband and five children. Meanwhile, the BJP has started two new food and relief camps at ITO Bridge and two new medical camps at Majnu Ke Teela and Geeta. Now 17 relief camps and 4 medical camps of the party are running.

AAP, BJP playing football on flood: Cong

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Sunday set up a relief camp at Majnu Ka Tila near Civil Lines to provide food and other relief material to the affected people. Delhi Congress leaders accused that AAP and BJP are playing football on flood.

Senior Congress leaders, led by Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar, and consisting of Jai Prakash Agarwal, Arvinder Singh Lovely, Haroon Yusuf, Anil Bhardwaj and Anuj Attrey, visited the submerged Majnu Ka Tila near Civil Lines. Choudhary said the Congress relief camps will continue to operate till the flood situation normalizes. Earlier, addressing a press conference, Delhi Congress leader and former Delhi ministers Arvind Singh Lovely, Harun Yusuf and former Delhi



Congress president Jai Prakash Agarwal said the calamity exposed the flaws of the AAP and BJP as it was their failure to take precautionary measures and co-ordinated efforts to prevent flooding. They said when Congress was in power for 15 years, Delhi faced flood situation five-six times,

but the Congress Government took advance steps to prevent flooding of the streets, low-lying areas and causing inconvenience to the people in general, as the 36 shutters of the Yamuna barrage were always kept in working condition, unlike the present situation when Army personnel had to be summoned to open the jammed five of the 36 shutters, blocked with silt, garbage and sludge.

Agarwal said the Congress party did not want to join the "tu-tu, mai-mai" blame-games with the Kejriwal Government and the BJP, as its only aim was to prevent any inconvenience to the people of Delhi.

Lovely said Congress kept quiet about the flood woes as it did not want to politicize the issue, unlike the blame-games by the AAP and BJP.

Rajbhar rejoins NDA, Shah welcomes him

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the crucial National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting on July 18, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Sunday that the OP Rajbhar-led Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (S BSP) has rejoined the NDA.



This development has provided the BJP-led NDA with visible momentum among the backward class community in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, which are just 10 months away. Uttar Pradesh sends 80 Lok Sabha MPs.

After his meeting with Shah, Rajbhar expressed his decision to join the NDA, stating, "We met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on July 14 and discussed various issues, and decided to fight the 2024 elections together. I want to thank PM Modi, Amit Shah, and CM Yogi Adityanath for taking us along." Pointing out that S BSP the party

was previously in alliance with the NDA in 2017 but separated due to some issues, Rajbhar said. "This time, the alliance has been worked out after agreement on those issues."

Both parties have vowed to fight together for social justice. Shah welcomed Rajbhar's return to the NDA fold after their meeting, stating that it would contribute to the strengthening of the backward and poor communities.

"Met Shri @oprajbhar ji in Delhi and decided to join the NDA alliance led by Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji.

I welcome him to the NDA," tweeted Amit Shah. Shah further emphasized that Rajbhar's entry into the NDA would bolster the alliance's reach in Uttar Pradesh, where the Prime Minister is making persistent efforts to look after the welfare of the poor and downtrodden.

Formed in 2002, the S BSP enjoys substantial support from the Rajbhar community in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The party was in an alliance with the SP in the 2022 UP assembly polls, fighting on 19 seats and winning six, but later broke away during the Presidential election.

Earlier, in the 2017 Assembly polls, the S BSP contested in alliance with the BJP under the NDA and won four seats. Rajbhar was appointed Minister of the Backward Class Welfare Department in the first Yogi Adityanath-led Cabinet but resigned soon after following a tussle with the saffron party.

The S BSP has been demanding the inclusion of the Rajbhar

community, constituting roughly 4% of UP's electorate, in the list of Scheduled Castes.

Speculations regarding S BSP's entry into the NDA had been ongoing for some time, especially after Rajbhar's meeting with UP Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak in Lucknow on Tuesday.

Negotiations over Lok Sabha seats were reportedly underway, with the BJP offering one seat and the S BSP seeking three to four seats, citing their ability to win those seats in association with the BJP in Eastern UP.

Rajbhar might be offered a Lok Sabha ticket from Ghazipur, and his son could become a cabinet minister in the Yogi Adityanath government.

In a counter to the opposition's attempt to unite ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has been reaching out to regional parties like the Telugu Desam Party and Shiromani Akali Dal to expand the NDA.

India is a global bright spot with strong desire to grow more: PM

Political instability, market volatility may increase in run up to general elections next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is a global bright spot with a strong desire to grow even more, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday as he shared on social media a recent Capital Group report which stated that the country is poised for a period of secular growth, fuelled by significant expansion in direct and fixed asset investment.

Sharing the report on Twitter, Modi said, "Youngsters and entrepreneurs will find these 9 points interesting." "And yes, India is a global bright spot with a strong desire to grow even more!" he said.

The Capital Group, in a recent report, said India is poised to rise among emerging



markets in this decade.

The country has had political stability over the last 10 years allowing economic development to be a top priority. "While political instability and market volatility may increase in advance of general elections next year, we believe that India is poised for a period of secular growth, fueled by significant expansion in direct and fixed asset investment," the Capital Group said.

The report has listed several key aspects that make India appealing compared with other emerging markets. Those aspects include reforms measures taken under Prime

Assam delimitation exercise: AIUDF moves SC against draft proposal

Guwahati: Protesting against the draft delimitation proposal for Assembly and Parliamentary seats in Assam, opposition All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) on Sunday said it has filed a case in the Supreme Court against the exercise.

Addressing a press conference here, AIUDF organisational general secretary and MLA Aminul Islam said the Election Commission of India (ECI) carried out the exercise instead of a Delimitation Commission because of amendments in relevant Acts in 2008 by the UPA government.

"We have challenged those amendments which handed over the delimitation power to the ECI. Because of the amendments, ECI can now form guidelines on its own and carry out delimitation without any accountability to anyone," he added.

Since Independence, delimitation has been carried out by only Delimitation Commission, not by ECI and same should be continued, the AIUDF MLA said. PTI

'Cong has unique position in Opp ranks' United Opp can challenge Modi in 2024, says PC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the crucial Bengaluru meeting, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday exuded confidence that the Opposition, by staying united, can certainly challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and asserted that the leader of the anti-BJP bloc will emerge in "due course".



In an interview with PTI, Chidambaram said the Congress has a "unique position" in the ranks of the opposition parties but there was "no need to talk about it now". The former Union minister also said that the manner in which the AAP formulated and posed the Delhi ordinance issue at the Patna meeting of the opposition parties was "unfortunate".

Each issue will be decided on its own merits and at the appropriate time and place, he said. Chidambaram stressed that the Opposition parties have several objectives in common as they are opposed to the social and economic policies of the BJP government, are concerned about slow economic growth, high inflation and rising unemployment, as well as about the "curtailment of civil liberties, the gagging of the media, the emasculating of institutions, and the misuse of investigating agencies".

"They are concerned about the security situation on the borders. These common concerns have brought them together to oppose the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. There is enough justification for the Opposition parties to meet as often as possible in the run up to the elections," he said.

The meeting at Bengaluru will certainly be purposeful, Chidambaram said and added that "we must wait and see what the next steps will be". Asked about the Opposition having sidestepped the leadership question for now and whether going to polls without

a PM face face would work when Modi has been at the helm for 10 years, Chidambaram said, "That Mr Narendra Modi has been at the helm of the BJP and the central government for 10 years is not a strength but a weakness. Mr Modi's hands are bare and he has not delivered on his promises."

There is nothing more that he can deliver in the last year, "except perhaps more slogans", he added. "The Opposition, by being united in their opposition to the BJP, can certainly challenge Mr Modi," the senior Congress leader said.

Chidambaram said the leader of the "united Opposition" will emerge in "due course". On the comparison of the Opposition uniting to take on then PM Indira Gandhi in 1977 to the present scenario of opposition parties coming together, Chidambaram said the situation in 1977 was different from the situation in 2023 as in that election, the sole issue was Emergency but today, and in the run up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, there are plenty of issues that are bothering the people.

"I have referred to the common concerns of the Opposition parties. They are sufficient to erect a platform that can be shared by parties," he said. On Prime Minister Modi's swipe at the Opposition that the corrupt were joining hands, Chidambaram said that in Modi's view, every Opposition party and every Opposition leader is corrupt.

Cheetahs died due to natural causes: Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry on Sunday said five out of the 20 adult cheetahs brought from Namibia and South Africa died in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park due to natural causes. It said media reports attributing the deaths to factors like radio collars were based on "speculation and lacking scientific evidence."



The Ministry's response has come amid concern expressed by chairperson of the Cheetah Project Steering Committee Dr Rajesh Gopal who had recently said that the cheetahs' deaths were due to infected wounds caused by the radio collars around their necks.

He had said that the radio collars of the felines will be inspected and a detailed health checkup will be done. Adrian Tordiffe, a South Africa-based

veterinarian who is on India's Cheetah Project Steering Committee too has expressed similar views. So far, three cubs born to Namibian cheetah Jwala have also died. In a statement issued on Sunday, the Ministry said that out of the 20 adult cheetahs that were translocated, five mortalities were due to natural causes.

Efforts are underway to investigate the cause of the cheetah deaths, including consultations with international cheetah experts and veterinary doctors from South Africa and Namibia. "Independent national experts are also

reviewing existing monitoring protocols, protection measures, managerial inputs, veterinary facilities, and training and capacity building aspects," said the Ministry. "These deaths can result from various factors, including intraspecific fights, diseases, accidents before and after release, hunting-related injuries, poisoning, road accidents, and predation by other predators."

To address these eventualities, the action plan includes provisions for annual supplementation of the initial founder population to manage the demographic and genetic com-

position of the reintroduced population," the statement said.

It also tried to bring home the point that the cheetahs have been reintroduced to India after a gap of seven decades, and such a project is expected to face challenges and fluctuations.

"Global experiences, particularly in South Africa, indicate that during the initial phase of cheetah reintroduction, mortality rates of over 50% among introduced cheetahs are not uncommon," the Ministry said, adding that additional forest areas will be brought under the administrative control of Kuno National Park for landscape-level management.

Moreover, more frontline staff will be deployed, a Cheetah Protection Force will be established, and a second home for cheetahs will be created in the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, it said.

Opp parties forming Protection of Dynasties Alliance, alleges Nadda

PTI ■ JAIPUR

BJP president JP Nadda charged on Sunday that Opposition parties were in the process of forming an alliance to "protect" their dynastic politics and that the UPA of Congress stood for "utpidan, pakshpat and atyachar" - oppression, favouritism and atrocities.



The proposed coalition is not a "Patriotic Democratic Alliance" but a "Protection of Dynasties Alliance", he said. Calling the Congress a party of "mother-son-daughter", Nadda said its government in Rajasthan is setting new records of corruption and has no right to be in power even for a minute.

Addressing a rally after launching the BJP's "Nahi Sahega Rajasthan" campaign against the Congress government, he targeted the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Congress and said, "UPA of Congress stands for 'utpidan, pakshpat and atyachar'."

"Whereas the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working with the mantra of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas'," he said. Nadda said that these days the opposition parties have started saying a new thing, PDA or Patriotic Democratic Alliance.

"I call PDA the Protection of Dynasties Alliance...It is a way to protect dynastic politics," he said. "All these people join the alliance to save their families while Modi works to take the country forward. We should understand this difference," he said.

After more than a dozen prominent opposition parties resolved to take on the BJP unitedly in the 2024 assembly polls at their meeting in Patna last month, some reports claimed that their proposed coalition could be called "Patriotic Democratic Alliance" (PDA). Nadda named parties

such as the JDU and the Samajwadi Party and said these were parties of dynasts and cannot give anything to each other. He termed the Congress a party of "mother-son-daughter" and said that except them, all other leaders of the party including Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot were on "contract" while former deputy CM Sachin Pilot was on "sub-contract".

At the event in Jaipur, Nadda launched the party's poll campaign — "Nahi Sahega Rajasthan" — to oust the Congress from power in Rajasthan. Assembly elections are due in the state by the year-end.

This campaign will be run in the entire state. Nadda launched the campaign and a theme video which highlights crime against women, the murder of Kanhaiya Lal in Udaipur, communal riots and other issues.

He also released a "Fail Card" of the Congress-led state government. He targeted the state government saying that it loots and tortures people and has broken all records of atrocities against Dalits, tribals, women, children and the poor. "It has no right to be in power even for a minute," he said.

He said that encouraging corruption and creating new records of corruption is the character of the Ashok Gehlot government in Rajasthan.

₹2,416 cr drugs to be destroyed today: Officials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As part of a mega anti-narcotics drive, over 1.44 lakh kg of drugs worth Rs 2,416 crore will be destroyed in various parts of the country on Monday in the virtual presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. With the destruction of drugs on Monday, the total quantity of drugs destroyed in the last one year will reach around 10 lakh kg. The combined value of the destroyed drugs will then reach Rs 12,000 crore.

Destruction of the narcotics will be carried out in different cities when the Home Minister will witness it through video-conferencing from the national capital while attending a conference on 'Drugs Smuggling and National Security', an official statement said.

The drugs to be destroyed will include 6,590 kg seized by the Narcotics Control Bureau's (NCB) Hyderabad unit, 822 kg

by Indore unit and 356 kg seized by its Jammu unit. Besides the action by the NCB, various law enforcement agencies of different States will also conduct similar operation and as much as 1,486 kg drugs will be destroyed in Assam followed by 229 kg in Chandigarh, 25 kg in Goa, 4,277 kg in Gujarat, 2,458 kg in Haryana, 4,069 kg in Jammu and Kashmir, 1,03,884 kg in Madhya Pradesh, 159 kg in Maharashtra, 1,803 kg in Tripura and 4,049 kg in Uttar Pradesh.

The Centre has adopted a 'zero tolerance policy' against narcotics to create a drugs-free India, the statement said. Since June 1, 2022 till July 15, 2023, all regional units of the NCB and anti-narcotics task forces of the States have collectively destroyed around 8,76,554 kg seized drugs worth around Rs 9,580 crore which is over 11 times of the target. This campaign of destruction of drugs will continue actively with the same zeal, the statement added.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visits an open gym at Nirala Nagar area in Lucknow on Sunday

PTI

Opp raps Assam CM for blaming Muslims for high vegetable prices

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Spiralling vegetable prices in Assam's largest city Guwahati has triggered a war of words between political opponents, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's blaming 'Miyas' for the escalating rates drawing sharp reactions from Opposition parties.



While AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal said 'Miyas' have been 'hurt' by the CM's comment, Congress and other opposition parties sniffed a collusion between BJP and

AIUDF in 'communal politics' ahead of next year's Lok Sabha elections. Sarma, while responding to reporters' questions on high price of veggies in Guwahati, had said,

"Vegetables are not priced so high in villages. Here the Miyas vendors charge us more. Had it been Assamese vendors selling vegetables, they wouldn't have fleeced their own people."

"I will clear all the footpaths of Guwahati and I urge our Assamese people to come forward and start their businesses," he added.

Bengali-speaking Muslims are generally referred to as 'Miyas' in the state, with community largely engaging in agricultural activities. Reacting to Sarma's statement, Ajmal

said such words are unbecoming of a chief minister, who is the head of a state, and the community has been 'feeling hurt and offended'.

"This is creating a communal divide. If it triggers any incident, Himanta Biswa Sarma will be responsible for it," the Lok Sabha MP added. Ajmal also maintained that the prices of vegetables are not controlled by the Miyas. Urging Assamese youth to take up agriculture, he added, "We will welcome Assamese youth join in farming activities."

India, Mongolia to hold 15-day joint military exercise from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further strengthen their defence ties, India and Mongolia will take part in a bilateral army exercise named 'Nomadic Elephant-23' for nearly 15 days starting Monday. The Indian contingent comprising 43 personnel on Sunday reached the venue of the exercise in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Giving details here, army officials said the contingent will participate in the 15th edition of bilateral joint military exer-

cise from July 17 to 31.

The exercise is an annual training event with Mongolia which is conducted alternatively in Mongolia and India, the last edition was held at Special Forces Training School, Bakloh in October 2019.

Soldiers of the Mongolian Armed Forces Unit 084 and Indian Army soldiers from the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry will be participating in the exercise. Indian Army contingent reached Ulaanbaatar on Sunday by an Indian Air Force C-17 aircraft. This exercise aims to build positive military

relations, exchange best practices, and develop inter-operability, bonhomie, camaraderie and friendship between the two armies. The primary theme of the exercise will focus on counter-terrorism operations in mountainous terrain under a United Nations mandate.

The scope of this exercise involves platoon-level Field Training Exercise (FTX). During the exercise, Indian and Mongolian troops will engage in various training activities designed to enhance their skills and capabilities.

These activities include

endurance training, reflex firing, room intervention, small team tactics, and rock craft training.

Soldiers from both sides will learn from each other's operational experience. India and Mongolia have a shared commitment to regional security and cooperation.

Exercise Nomadic Elephant will be yet another significant milestone in the defence cooperation between the Indian Army and Mongolian Army which will further foster bilateral relations between the two nations.



“The schemes which earlier remained only in files, have been implemented on ground. Projects pending from decades have been speeded up.”
- Narendra Modi

Sh. Manohar Lal, Chief Minister, Haryana will Launch (through video conferencing)

347
 New Projects
 worth
Rs.2741
 crore

Inauguration

Laying of Foundation Stone

Cost
Rs.1279
 crore
 Projects
157

Cost
Rs.1462
 crore
 Projects
190



Date - Tuesday, July 18, 2023 | Time - 11 am
Venue - Ferozpur Jhirka, Nuh

Scan QR code to join the programme



Scan the QR code for information of all 347 new projects



You are cordially invited



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

India-France ties

PM Modi had a fruitful France visit but Manipur cast a shadow over the tour

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent two-day official visit to France marked an important diplomatic milestone for India, strengthening bilateral ties and opening new avenues of collaboration between the nations. PM Modi talked about the possibilities of co-development. PM Modi along with French President Emmanuel Macron watched the Bastille Day parade as the Guest of Honour. He received the honour at the Elysee Palace in Paris. The French President hosted a banquet dinner for Prime Minister Modi at Louvre Museum. Overall, it was one of the best visits the PM has had in recent times. The visit, however, was not without its share of challenges, particularly concerning the European Union's stance on the issue of Manipur. While the visit showcased several significant achievements, it also highlighted the complexities of navigating international relationships in an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. Modi's visit to France served as an opportunity to deepen the historical and multifaceted relationship between



India and France. This visit strengthened their commitment to fostering cooperation across various sectors. Prime Minister Modi engaged in extensive discussions with Macron, focusing on areas such as defence, trade, climate change and technology transfer. During the visit, several crucial agreements were signed, reflecting the shared vision of both countries. These agreements encompassed diverse domains, including defence and security, space exploration, renewable energy and sustainable development. Beyond bilateral relations, Prime Minister Modi's visit to France provided an opportunity to address pressing global challenges. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the Paris Agreement and explored avenues for increased cooperation on renewable energy, sustainable development and conservation efforts.

However, amidst the positive momentum, Modi faced challenges on the diplomatic front, particularly concerning the European Union's stand on Manipur. The EU's resolution condemning alleged human rights violations in Manipur posed a challenge to the PM's visit, potentially straining relations and impacting the overall agenda. Though the Prime Minister demonstrated his diplomatic acumen by engaging in constructive dialogue with EU officials to address their concerns emphasising India's commitment to upholding human rights and ensuring justice also highlighting the complexities of internal security. Having said that, the Prime Minister must also realise that he has first and foremost duty towards the people of the nation he represents, or else it will cast a shadow over his international reputation. References to Manipur were just one such incident. In Europe, there is a strong human rights activism that wields considerable clout and strongly condemns human rights violations across the world. We just can't hide behind the veil that Manipur is our internal matter. The violence must end there, otherwise it would fly in the face of the Modi Government, in France and everywhere else.

commitment to the Paris Agreement and explored avenues for increased cooperation on renewable energy, sustainable development and conservation efforts. However, amidst the positive momentum, Modi faced challenges on the diplomatic front, particularly concerning the European Union's stand on Manipur. The EU's resolution condemning alleged human rights violations in Manipur posed a challenge to the PM's visit, potentially straining relations and impacting the overall agenda. Though the Prime Minister demonstrated his diplomatic acumen by engaging in constructive dialogue with EU officials to address their concerns emphasising India's commitment to upholding human rights and ensuring justice also highlighting the complexities of internal security. Having said that, the Prime Minister must also realise that he has first and foremost duty towards the people of the nation he represents, or else it will cast a shadow over his international reputation. References to Manipur were just one such incident. In Europe, there is a strong human rights activism that wields considerable clout and strongly condemns human rights violations across the world. We just can't hide behind the veil that Manipur is our internal matter. The violence must end there, otherwise it would fly in the face of the Modi Government, in France and everywhere else.

PICTALK



A transgender devotee dances during Bonalu festival celebrations in Hyderabad

UCC: Modernity over medievalism



PRAFULL GORADIA

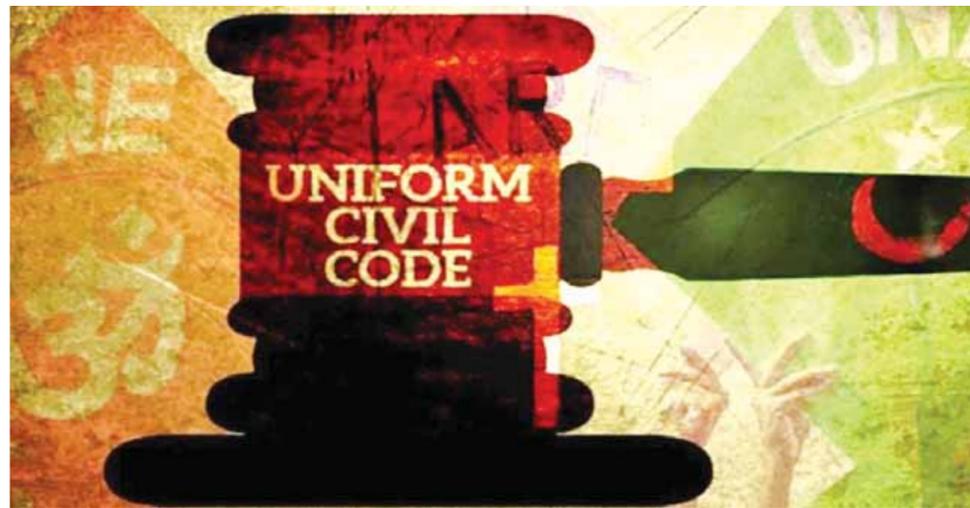
No country that permits the existence of personal laws based on religion can legitimately call itself secular. UCC is the way forward

In 1954, replying to a question from a Member of Parliament, Jawaharlal Nehru said in the House, "Well, I should like a civil code which applies to everybody but wisdom hinders. If anybody else brings forward a Civil Code Bill, it will have my extreme sympathy. But I confess I do not think that at the present moment the time is ripe in India for me to try to push it through. I want to prepare the ground for it". Today, 69 years later, Nehru's great-grandson Rahul Gandhi feels the time is still not ripe.

Many Hindus are unaware, but marriage is a virtual Damocles' sword Muslim wife. Her husband's slightest displeasure can result in divorce for her. A well-known cine actress of Bollywood once admitted in a television chat show some years ago that no relief is possible for Muslim women except through a Common Civil Code? This actress was referring to the obduracy of her religion's clergy, who have obstructed any reform in the personal law.

If the clerics insist on their separate and distinct personal laws, why shouldn't all other aspects of those laws, including their criminal law, be applied to them? A Muslim caught stealing should have his right hand chopped off. "Jahangir ka insaf" (Jahangir's justice) expected that if a man kills another man's wife, the widow would be entitled to kill the murderer in order to render his wife a widow.

In talking of "one country, two laws", not all the blame should be laid on the Islamic clergy. Its root also lies in political party politics. Many may recollect that Gandhi in 1946 wanted an election for a new party president as there had been no change since the 1942 call for "Quit India". Congress party procedure mandated that provincial party committees had to first vote. Fifteen of the then sixteen Pradesh Congress Committees voted for Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel while one opted for Acharya J.B. Kripalani; none for Jawaharlal Nehru, whom Gandhi wanted as party president. He was appointed by the 21-member Congress Working Committee.



Nehru relished being the Congress president but realized he did not have a strong base among the Congress members and in turn, among the people. His search for a leadership slot materialized when many Muslim leaders emigrated to Pakistan upon Partition. This created a vote bank that continues to be pampered by the party to this day. As a result, Muslim clerics call the shots on behalf of India's largest minority.

The Muslim Women's Bill passed by Parliament in 1986 was a glaring example of the influence of the vote bank in the grip of the clerics. Yet another is the trimming of the stanzas of the national song "Vande Mataram", so that no part of the song should imply sajda (bowing) to anyone other than Allah the merciful. The trimmed version of the song is the one still sung at the opening session of Parliament.

Article 14 of the Constitution of India says, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law", meaning, all are equal. But a woman cannot have four spouses at a time, whereas her husband can. A non-Muslim man cannot have more than one wife at a time, a privilege the Muslim male

enjoys. Usury is forbidden in Islam: why then do banks and financial institutions pay interest to Muslims depositing money? Without a Common Civil Code, Article 14 is a travesty of the Constitution.

A Uniform Civil Code is a law, or a set of laws covering areas of personal and family life, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption and worship. It is uniform because it would apply to everyone regardless of class, caste, religion or personal attributes such as gender or sexual orientation. It is a complex issue, rendered more complicated owing to the multitude of traditions and practices, strongly held views and the interplay of politics and history, particularly India's experiences of the medieval period.

The knee-jerk, almost automated reaction to any talk of a uniform civil code is that it violates the "rights of the minorities" and is violative of secularism itself, a favourite objection readily banished by the liberals. But overlooked is the fact that there was no secularism in the Constitution's Preamble. It was surreptitiously inserted in it (with socialism) during the dark months of the 1975-77 Emergency, when the coun-

try's legitimate political opposition had been jailed, and the Constitution itself had been suspended.

More to the point, no country that permits the existence of personal laws based on religion, denying the same rights and privileges to the people of other religions, can legitimately call itself secular by any vestige of logic. The ideal of secularism applies not to the individual but to the state and here, the Indian state has been disgustingly theocratic.

Also, the absence of a uniform civil code means condemning a large segment of the country's womenfolk to remain trapped in the clutches of medieval obscurantism. India, which rightly aspires to be a top-ranking nation in the world, can in no way countenance the continued existence of a blatantly discriminative religious personal law that not only keeps our society divided but can also ignite a civil war. Medievalism and modernity cannot co-exist. A Uniform Civil Code is imperative to become a modern nation.

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



IN TALKING OF "ONE COUNTRY, TWO LAWS", NOT ALL THE BLAME SHOULD BE LAID ON THE ISLAMIC CLERGY. ITS ROOT ALSO LIES IN POLITICAL PARTY POLITICS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNSEEDED WIMBLEDON CHAMPION

Sir — What a result for Marketa Vondrousova! Kudos to Marketa, the world No 42 is Wimbledon's first unseeded, unheralded, untipped women's champion in the Open era having defeated five seeded opponents en route to the title. Vondrousova is also the latest in the unending series of Czech female players to establish themselves at the top of the sport and the third Czech Wimbledon champion after Jana Novotna and Petra Kvitova. One wonders how a player without sponsorship does, without a seeding, go on a run of results (6-4, 6-4) like that and win at Wimbledon so convincingly against someone as good as Ons Jabeur (could not manage to find her best tennis under pressure). Once again Ons remained third time unlucky: this makes her thrice a runner-up. Though we should not forget that Vondrousova is a former French Open finalist and had beaten Jabeur twice already this season. Many congratulations to Marketa who plays tennis of a different kind. Happy for Marketa. Keep it up, Ons. Good luck to both in the upcoming US Open.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

CHANDRAYAAN PROGRAM

Sir — Two decades after then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced the Chandrayaan programme, India has launched its third lunar mission. It is expected to be a challenging month-long journey for the spacecraft to the moon. The soft landing of the payload is of course the most important phase of the mission. If all goes well, India will emulate the US, the erstwhile Soviet Union and China - countries that have landed on the moon. The most important question is: Will Chandrayaan 3 avoid the fate of its predecessor? The 2019 Chandrayaan-2 mission was a classic case of 'too close and yet'. However, at a mere 2.1 km

floods in North India



Frequent flooding once again has shown that whether it is a hilly or plain region, unpreparedness by the concerned department in all states always results in losses of lives. Why proper check dams are not made in hilly regions to stop the large flow of water towards plains and regular desilting is not done in these

dams? Which authority allows the haphazard development of houses, roads, large-size buildings, or hotels in hilly regions? Similarly, before the release of the large flow of water through dams, why proper desilting is not done in rivers in plain regions by respective state irrigation departments? This results in the breach of bands and gushing of water in surrounding villages in plain regions and hence loss of crops and animal lives. This is what has happened in Punjab. In Delhi, roads have been inundated with overflow of Yamuna river water. After flooding, every political party will blame others to avoid the loss of their vote bank. The need of the hour is proper and regular auditing of all these dams and rivers in hilly and plain regions respectively before the onset of monsoon and proper coordination between all concerned states so that situations like recently happened floods can be avoided in the future.

Harvinder Singh Chugh | Jalandhar

above the lunar surface, ground stations lost contact with 'Vikram', which was destroyed in an accident near the spot where Chandrayaan-3 would attempt touchdown.

Hopefully, the lessons learned from the sudden and heartbreaking end of Chandrayaan-2 will ensure positive results this time around. The mission team must be well prepared for the worst-case scenario. At stake is India's ambitious goal of expanding its footprint in space, a strategically important domain that is witnessing intense global competition.

MT.Farooqi | Hyderabad

RIGHT MONUMENT

Sir — While former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi created a world-class library in Chennai in honour of the founder of the DMK party and former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu C N

Annadurai on his birth centenary and named it Anna Centenary Library, M K Stalin, the incumbent Chief Minister has inaugurated an equal world-class library in Madurai in honour of his father and former CM of the state M. Karunanidhi on his birth centenary and has named it Kalaingar Centenary Library.

Among all the welfare measures the DMK government has given to the state, it would not be an exaggeration if we say that the creation of these two libraries is the most beneficial welfare measure for the people of the state as the same is going to be a boon to the people for generations to come. This is indeed the fitting monument for Kalaingar Karunanidhi who was keen that every child should get the best education.

Anna Mary Yvonne | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SCO and int'l cooperation to combat terrorism

A terrorist is a terrorist and has no religion. The local populace must cooperate with security agencies for the larger good of the society

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's recent address to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) asking members to work out a common strategic strategy for combating international terrorism highlights the urgency to nip in the bud the ever-increasing tentacles of the monster. The ruthless deeds of highly skilled modern terrorists recently have cast a long shadow over the security network across the globe. The recent terrorist attacks in Europe, Africa, Asia, West Asia and CAR have not only exposed the pitfalls of the security and intelligence network but also robbed the confidence of nations in combating terrorism. The latest modus operandi particularly the use of Drone, IED (battery operated Improvised explosive device) and the increasing role of car bombs around the world have demonstrated the ability of terrorists to attack with accuracy at the time and place of their choice. Next could be the triggering of biological warfare or different nuclear devices, which could throw up biological and chemical toxins in the atmos-



phere, resulting in large-scale destruction and deaths.

The rapidly changing nature and the devastating potentiality of modern terrorism have created a situation where even the most powerful nations have increasingly become dependent upon international Cooperation. What is required is to develop a multi-layered anti-terror mechanism for a more mature and accurate understanding between the nations to enunciate a new strategy of retaliation, threatening a severe response to any attempt to destabilise peace.

The new opportunities such as the Presidency of G 20, Quad Group and Chair of the Interpol and the SCO have provided huge opportunities to India to have an in-depth analysis and systematic examination of the problem

of International terrorism and create a solid framework of anti-terror mechanism and bringing contiguity and international cooperation to find concrete solutions. This will help in working out a new security road map in dealing with the most obnoxious forms of modern terrorism. International cooperation through such platforms may further provide help in tracing the roots of the problems. It is already getting clear that nations across the globe and more so in Asia need to diversify their strategies to counter the numerous challenges they face because of terrorism.

A more up-to-date intelligence network through collaboration among the security forces can be very important in providing information about terrorist targets and sites in advance. But the Government alone cannot do much to check this menace. Individuals and groups can make significant contributions towards improving the general security environment. There is a need for a positive response from all individuals who can bring about general awareness.

No civilised political system can progress until terrorism is wiped out, but terrorism cannot be eliminated unless there is a political solution. The need of the hour is the political will to solve the problems that generate terrorism. The states affected by terrorism should open the avenues for a negotiated settlement of disputes and exhibit a genuine willingness to resolve long-festering problems.

A terrorist is a terrorist and should not be recognised by religion. The local populace must cooperate with security agencies even at the cost of personal misery. The consequences of the failure to diagnose the early symptoms of the disease at the early stage can be pernicious for various countries. Although the hope of a permanent solution to the problem of terrorism is still far away, one hopes that the powerful nations will develop a more mature understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism that has assumed alarming proportions.

(The writer, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award, is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs)



SUDHIR HINDWAN



FIRST COLUMN

AVOID MAHILA SAMMAN SAVINGS CERTIFICATE

The very purpose of this scheme is suspect, many schemes give better returns



S KALYANASUNDARAM

An official from the government has recently informed that collections under the Mahila Samman Savings Certificate scheme stood at Rs.3,666 crore at the end of May 2023. The average deposit per account is in excess of Rs.73,000. The scheme was announced in the 2023-24 Budget by the Union Finance Minister to commemorate 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and it is claimed as a significant step towards financial inclusion and empowerment of the women, including the girls. In his Twitter message, the Prime Minister said "I also urge more women to enroll for MSSC. It offers many advantages for our Nari Shakti."

It is not clear why this scheme is termed as a significant step towards financial inclusion, as there are so many schemes like basic savings bank accounts with any bank or any post office savings schemes already in existence. The MSSC scheme is a fixed-income investment. Its features are to be compared with other similar schemes before making an investment. Let us see the important features of this scheme. Accounts can be opened in the name of women or girls. The minimum deposit amount is Rs.1000 and in multiples of rupees one hundred. The maximum deposit amount is Rs.2 lakh. The scheme offers interest of 7.5 percent per annum and the interest will be credited every quarter and will be paid at the time of closure of the account.

The investment is for a 2 years period. A partial withdrawal facility is provided. The account holder can withdraw up to 40 per cent of the account balance after one year from the account opening date. The account can be closed before two years under some specific situations. There can't be any reinvestment option as the scheme is only up to March 2025. As the scheme is backed by the government it is hundred per cent safe and there is no credit risk.



Accounts can be opened in Post offices and banks. A woman or guardian of a girl can open a second account after a minimum gap of three months from the opening of the existing account. A Gazette Notification issued by the Ministry of Finance states that the scheme is available in 1.59 lakh post offices. Though it is not mentioned that accounts can be opened with banks (maybe a specific bank or branch), it is understood so, as all the forms prescribed mention banks also. KYC documents should be provided with an account opening form. The interest received is taxable. However, there is no Tax Deducted at Source, as the quantum of interest will not exceed the Rs.40000 set for TDS.

WHY IS THIS SCHEME NOT ATTRACTIVE?

This scheme offers an interest of 7.5 per cent with quarterly rests for a tenure of 2 years. For the same tenure, the following are some of the banks which offer higher rates of interest: DCB Bank 8.00%, IDFC First Bank 7.75%, IndusInd Bank 7.75% and Yes Bank 7.75%.

- Longer tenure deposits with banks or longer tenure post office schemes like Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Senior Citizens' Savings Scheme, National Savings Certificate etc. offer higher rates.
- These deposits are covered by Deposit Insurance & Credit Guarantee Corporation (which is a unit of RBI) up to Rs.5 lakhs deposit. This ensures the safety of the deposit.
- There is no restriction on the quantum of deposits as in MSSC.
- Taxation and TDS provisions are the same
- A nomination facility is available for bank deposits also.
- Banks provide foreclosure facilities freely. There is also a provision to take a loan up to 75 or 90 per cent of the deposit balance. Banks may even allow overdraft facilities against deposits.

To conclude one fails to understand the purpose of this MSSC scheme. Informed investors may go in for alternative schemes as described above. (The writer is a retired banker)

Parliamentary questions in times of logjams



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

The right to ask questions is an inherent and inalienable right of members in a parliamentary democratic set-up. It is a most versatile and powerful tool for accountability



The purpose of asking questions is manifold to elicit factual information which would otherwise be time-consuming; to build up a picture for the constituents; to raise local issues and to build the case for redressal of problems in the constituency; to highlight the inadequacy or otherwise of policy issues; to find things out or seek clarifications; to make the case as a backbencher and to ask the minister to improve, explain, rectify or justify the policy.

Unfortunately, Question Hour is the first casualty due to logjams, adjournments or persistent interruptions.

The loss of Question Hour time is irretrievable as it provides a blithe escape route to ministers whittling down ministerial accountability. The import of questions unfolds if one wades through our Indian legislative history. In fact, the origin of Questions and the evolution of constitutional reforms in pre-independent India are intimately associated and inextricably intertwined.

Prior to the enactment of the Govt of India Act, of 1919, the Council chaired by the Governor-General had both legislative and executive powers. With the enactment of the Indian Charter Act, of 1853, the legislative Councils began to follow the procedure of the British House of Commons by asking questions and discussing the propriety of the actions of the Govt. of the day.

It was said that Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General, ran the Council with a 'certain flourish like the British House of Commons' with verbatim recording and an open press gallery. This was not liked back home as the Britishers did not want the Council as a grand inquest and sow seeds of parliamentary democracy in India. Therefore, the Indian Councils Act, of 1961, curtailed the functions of the Council to law-making as the Britishers did not want the Council to become a debating society or sort of a Parliament having more weight and authority.

However, with the rising demand for self-rule in India, the Indian Councils Act, of 1892, conferred the right of asking questions to both the supreme council and the provincial councils.

The first question asked in the Central Legislative Assembly on 16 Feb. 1893 by



UNFORTUNATELY, THE QUESTION HOUR IS THE FIRST CASUALTY DUE TO LOGJAMS, ADJOURNMENTS OR PERSISTENT INTERRUPTIONS. THE LOSS OF QUESTION HOUR TIME IS IRRETRIEVABLE AS IT PROVIDES A BLITHE ESCAPE ROUTE TO MINISTERS WHITTLING DOWN MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

(The author is ex-Additional Secretary Lok Sabha and a Member of the Delhi Bar Council. Views expressed are personal)

the Maharaja of Bhinga was about the hardships faced by the cultivators and village shopkeepers on account of supplies needed for revenue officers on tour having 500 to 600 persons in their entourage. The Legislative Assembly constituted under the Government of India Act, 1919 had the first hour as a question hour. The system of starred questions (SQs) and unstarred questions (USQs) was also introduced in 1921 in the Assemblies constituted under the GoI Act, of 1919.

The Indian members like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Nauroji, Madan Mohan Malviya, Sacchidanand Sinha, Chitnavis, VJ Patel, Moti Lal Nehru, Jinnah, Satyamurthy, NV Gadgil, Govind Ballav Pant, NG Ranga, and others in the successive Councils/Assemblies asked questions on a whole range of subjects, often causing considerable discomfiture to the colonial Govt. On many occasions, the Govt. refused to disclose information by invoking the plea that disclosure of the information would be detrimental to government interest, cause public disaffection, impinge on friendly foreign relations or that the time and cost involved in the collection of information would not be commensurate with the result sought to be achieved.

Today, unless decided otherwise, the first hour of every sitting, namely the Question Hour- is devoted to the asking and answering of Questions. The Rajya Sabha, of course, changed the Rule and the Question Hour is held at noon. There are four types of questions. A Starred Question is one to which a member desires an oral answer from the Minister in the House. An answer to such a question may be followed by supplementary questions, time permitting with the permission of the presiding officer. An Un-starred Question is one to which a written answer is desired by

the member. Its answer is deemed to be laid on the Table of the House by Minister at the end of Question Hour. No supplementary question can be asked thereon.

A Short Notice Question (SNQ) can also be raised for an oral answer if the notice is on a matter of public importance and if it is of an urgent character at a notice shorter than ten clear days. However, the Member is required to give reasons and the Minister in charge must be willing to answer it at a shorter notice.

If a minister declines to accept the SNQ, the Speaker may treat it as an SQ and put it in the List of Questions for the due rotational date, otherwise it will lapse. Each Assembly may have a different notice period or a slightly different procedure. Further, a Question may be addressed to a Private Member, if the subject matter of the Question relates to some Bill, Resolution or other matter connected with the business of the legislature for which that member is responsible. Any member who is not a minister is a private member under the Rules. The procedure in regard to such questions is the same as that followed in the case of questions addressed to a Minister. However, it's almost a dead provision seldom used in many legislatures.

An important device connected with questions is the Half Hour Discussion. It can be raised on matters of sufficient public importance which have been the subject of recent questions, oral or written and which need further elucidation. So, while framing replies to Questions, due diligence has to be exercised to ensure that the replies are drafted properly, replied part wise and complete information is given. A half an hour discussion, if admitted by the Speaker, will surely create a lot of work for the Ministry and take an enormous time- a heavy price for furnishing

evasive or incomplete replies.

No legislature can work effectively and efficiently without the willing cooperation of the bureaucracy.

However, there are occasional complaints and laments that the replies to Questions are often evasive, incomplete, factually incorrect, roundabout and misleading. It is also complained that the replies are not given part wise.

Instead, the answer is lumped together as -(a) to (d) to avoid responsibility or controversy. The officers tasked with the responsibility of preparing draft replies must bear in mind that the Members have many sources of information. Instead of seeking information, the real purpose and intent are to draw attention to a particular problem, irregularity or dereliction of duty on the part of some distant field functionary or highlight a delay in project implementation.

As responsible functionaries of the Govt., the bureaucracy has a duty to ensure that correct and complete facts are furnished to the legislature and within the appointed time. Even the all-powerful Julius Caesar, the ruler of Ancient Rome, refused to send a lie to the Senate. It's contempt to give wrong and misleading information to the legislature. A member may bring a motion of breach of privilege or contempt against the Minister. The Minister May himself, on being pointed out, fix responsibility for such a lapse or lack of due diligence. What reply should appropriately be given it's for the govt. to decide but surely, the govt. can use the opportunity to set the record straight, scotch rumours, quell public doubts and misgivings, make its policy decisions known, silence public criticism or remove erroneous ideas by furnishing the correct information in the answer to a question. Let the Question Hour run.

Modi Govt has successfully uplifted the downtrodden

India's performance in the various dimensions of poverty has not only been better than before but has out paced other countries

According to the recent report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), there has been an unprecedented reduction in the number of people under multidimensional poverty in India in the 15-year period from 2005-06 to 2019-21 and the number of people under multidimensional poverty has decreased from 64.5 crores in the year 2005-06, to only 23.0 crores in 2019-21. That is, during this period 41.5 crore people have come out of the clutches of multidimensional poverty. UNDP has praised India for this achievement. The special thing about this report is that whereas number under multidimensional poverty declined by 42 per cent in 10 years from 64.5 crores in 2005-06 to 37.0



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

crores in 2015-16. However, between 2015-16 and 2019-21, the number has declined by 38 per cent in just 5 years, including more than one year of the worst pandemic. In such a situation, it would be necessary to understand what happened so special in between, which made UNDP praise India. What is multidimensional poverty?

Internationally, the UNDP uses a definition of poverty called multidimensional poverty. This definition is the same for all countries. Due to the different definitions of poverty used by the governments of different countries in the world, a uniform assessment of poverty is not possible and due to this, comparison between different countries of the world also becomes

difficult. UNDP's measurement of multidimensional poverty includes a number of deprivation elements, which are common to all countries. It includes nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets. How much has poverty decreased and when?

Going into the details of the report, it is found that India's performance in various dimensions of poverty has not only been better than other countries but has also been better in the last 5 years than in the 10 years prior to 2015-16. Today the child mortality rate in India has come down to just 1.5 per cent, which was 2.2 per cent in 2015-16. This is a living proof

of better health of Indians, than before. There is also a huge improvement in nutrition and the percentage of malnourished children, which has come down from 44.3 per cent in 2005-06 to 21.1 per cent in 2015-16 and to only 11.8% in 2019-21. Significant improvement is in cooking fuel, where now only 13.9 per cent of the population is deprived of clean cooking fuel, that is, LPG gas. The direct benefit of the central government's Ujjwala scheme is seen here.

The incidence of poverty in the country reduced from 55.1 per cent in 2005-06 to only 27.7 per cent in 2015-16. But in the next five years, the number of poor reached 23 crores, which is only 16.4 per cent of the total population. This shows that during the

Narendra Modi government, the rate of reduction in multidimensional poverty was much faster, that is, 10 per cent annually. In the ten years of the UPA government led by the Congress Party, this speed was only 6.6 per cent annually. Pace of poverty reduction accelerated in the Modi era?

Although some of the benefits of consistent growth in India continued to reach the poor, the rate of poverty reduction has generally been lowering in comparison to the rate of growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The reason for this is that the GDP and per capita income in the country definitely increased, but the inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth also increased. This means that the growth benefited the rich

more than the poor. For this reason, from the point of view of various dimensions of poverty, the condition of the poor did not improve on expected lines in the past.

Inclusive policies of the Modi government

Various efforts have been made by successive governments to reduce poverty. Since there is a special relationship between poverty and unemployment, there has been a lot of emphasis on rural employment programs in the context of rural unemployment for nearly 5 decades. Housing schemes for the poor, education, public health initiatives, etc., have been undertaken by successive governments. But on the determinants of multidimensional poverty, considerably better progress has been

seen during the tenure of the Narendra Modi government.

The Modi government at the Center has often been accused by the opposition parties that it pays less attention to the poor and more to the rich. But the figures published by UNDP seem to dismiss this allegation outright. It is also concluded from this that the government should complete the goals of housing, drinking water, electricity, toilets, health, education, Ujjwala gas connection scheme etc. as soon as possible and the poor people are freed from their miseries and are engaged in the development of the country. May our country stand in the front row, as a developed country by the time it completes 100 years of independence.

(The author is a Professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi)

Hindu temple attacked with rocket launchers in Pak

PTI ■ KARACHI

A Hindu temple was attacked with rocket launchers by a gang of dacoits in the Southern Sindh province of Pakistan on Sunday, a senior police official said.

The assailants attacked the small temple and adjoining homes belonging to Hindus in the Kashmir area of the Sindh province. The assailants fired indiscriminately at the temple built by the local Hindu community on Sunday, prompting a police unit led by Kashmir-Kandhkot SSP Irfan Sammo to reach the scene.

They fired "rocket launchers" at the place of worship, which was closed during the attack, the police official said, adding that the temple opens annually for religious services conducted by the Bagri community.

"The attack happened in the early hours of Sunday. They fired indiscriminately and fled when a police party reached the spot. We are con-

ducting a search operation in the area," Samoo said.

The police officer estimated that eight or nine gunmen were involved in the attack. Dr Suresh, a member of the Bagri community, said that the "rocket launchers" fired by the dacoits failed to explode, resulting in no loss of life.

He called on the police to protect the community, saying the incident had left the residents in a state of panic.

SSP Samoo assured the Hindu community members they would be protected. The Kashmir area has a sizeable Hindu population.

The attack comes days after dacoits in the Kashmir and Ghotki riverine areas had threatened to attack Hindu places of worship and community members in retaliation to Seema Haider Jakhra's PUBG love story.

Seema, a Pakistani mother of four, left her country and entered India to live with a Hindu man she befriended and fell in love with while play-

ing on online gaming platform PUBG in 2019.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) has said it was alarmed by reports of "deteriorating law and order in the districts of Kashmir and Ghotki in Sindh, where some 30 members of the Hindu community — including women and children — have allegedly been held hostage by organised criminal gangs."

"Moreover, we have received disturbing reports that these gangs have threatened to attack the community's sites of worship, using high-grade weapons," the Dawn newspaper quoted the commission as saying.

It called on the Sindh Home Department to investigate the matter without delay, the report said.

Meanwhile, a Hindu temple, believed to be built nearly 150 years ago, has been demolished after being declared an old and dangerous structure in Karachi, the provincial capital

of Pakistan's Sindh province, leaving the Hindu community in shock. The Mari Mata Temple in Karachi's Soldier Bazar was razed to the ground by bulldozers in the presence of a heavy contingent of police force late on Friday night.

"They (authorities) did it very early in the morning and we were not informed this was going to happen," said Ram Nath Mishra Maharaj, who looks after old Hindu temples in the area.

Mishra, the caretaker of the nearby Shri Punch Mukhi Hanuman Mandir, said that the bulldozers left the outer walls and the temple's main gate intact, but they demolished the entire inside structure.

Mishra said that the temple was built some 150 years ago and told stories that there was treasure buried beneath its courtyard. He said that the temple, which covered some 400 to 500 square yards in the area, had been the target of land grabbers and developers for years now.

Trump, DeSantis in their own tier in fundraising

MIKE PENCE, OTHER REPUBLICANS STRUGGLE

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis are dominating the fight for campaign cash in the Republican presidential contest, according to federal filings made public.

While some struggled, like former Vice President Mike Pence, others reported significant hauls that help ensure the GOP's 2024 primary will be crowded for the foreseeable future.

On the Democratic side, President Joe Biden's reelection campaign has quickly amassed a sizeable fortune. But longshot Democratic primary opponent Robert Kennedy Jr also raised enough to ensure he won't be ignored.

Overall, the 2024 presidential class's second-quarter filings with the Federal Election Commission, covering the period between April 1 and June 30, leave unanswered several questions.

For example, the total number of individual donors for each campaign, a figure tied directly to GOP debate participation, won't be known until the end of the month.

And each candidate's allied super PACs, which in some cases account for the majority of their campaign's cash, won't file the latest figures until the end of the month.

Still, the federal reports offer several insights six months before the first primary votes are cast.

While Trump is leading most polls, he and DeSantis are in a tier of their own on the fundraising front.

Trump's team recently confirmed that his joint fundraising operation -- which splits the money between Trump's campaign and the Save America PAC -- received USD 35 million in the second quarter.

The campaign did not say how much of that USD 35 million went to the campaign and how much went to Save America, which has covered non-campaign-related expenses in the past, including Trump's legal bills.

The average donation to Trump's 2024 campaign now stands at USD 34, evidence, the campaign said, of his grassroots backing.

Earlier in the week, DeSantis announced raising USD 20 million for the six weeks he was in the race.

The Florida governor's allied super PAC, which is legally barred from coordinating with the campaign, said it raised a stunning USD 130 million since the committee launched in March. More than half of that came from a state-level political committee once controlled by DeSantis.

Regardless of where it came from, DeSantis' fundraising will buy him some time to strengthen his candidacy as he struggles to catch Trump in the polls.

The fundraising numbers carry additional significance because they are tied directly to the GOP's first presidential debate next month.

Beyond a 1 per cent polling threshold, the Republican National Committee has announced that candidates must have a minimum of 40,000 unique donors with at least 200 unique donors per state or territory, in 20 states and territories.

Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, Sen. Tim Scott, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and conservative businessman Vivek Ramaswamy announced in recent days they had reached the 40,000-donor threshold. Pence has yet to make such an announcement.

Overall, Haley's campaign raised USD 7.3 million in the second quarter and ended June with USD 9.3 million in the bank. That's as the main pro-Haley super PAC claimed USD 17 million cash on hand.

Scott raised USD 6.1 million since announcing his campaign in May. And Ramaswamy, a 37-year-old entrepreneur, raised more than USD 7.7 million in the quarter, including lending his campaign USD 5 million from his own personal fortune. He finished the quarter with more than USD 9 million on hand.

Christie, in the race for just 25 days of the second quarter, raised USD 1.65 million through his campaign and reported nearly USD 1.6 million in the bank as of June 30.

Pak police arrest 5 terrorists

PTI ■ LAHORE

Law enforcement agencies have arrested five terrorists, including the members of the ISIS group, in the Punjab province of Pakistan, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police said on Sunday.

The arrests were made on Saturday during intelligence-based operations in Multan and Gujranwala districts of Punjab, it said.

The terrorists belong to the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group, Baloch Liberation Army and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). The suspected terrorists wanted to target important installations and religious places in Multan and Gujranwala, it said.

The CTD recovered 555-gram explosives, detonators, safety fuse and banned literature of ISIS and Baloch Liberation Army from the terrorists.

They have been shifted to an undisclosed location for interrogation.

The CTD has arrested hundreds of suspected terrorists of TTP and ISIS in Punjab this year.

UK signs treaty to join trans-Pacific free trade bloc

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK on Sunday formally signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade bloc, a move it says will help grow the country's economy and provide access for British businesses to a market of over 500 million people.

UK Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch, who is also leading the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with India, signed the pact agreed earlier this year during a visit to Auckland and hailed it as a major post-Brexit win for the country.

The UK will now seek to ratify the agreement, which will include parliamentary scrutiny as the CPTPP member countries complete their legislative processes to admit Britain into the trading bloc -- of which India is not a member.

"I'm delighted to be here in New Zealand to sign a deal that will be a big boost for British businesses and deliver billions of pounds in additional trade, as well as open up huge opportunities and unparalleled access to a market of over 500 million people," said

Badenoch.

"We are using our status as an independent trading nation to join an exciting, growing, forward-looking trade bloc, which will help grow the UK economy and build on the hundreds of thousands of jobs CPTPP-owned businesses already support up and down the country," she said.

The signing comes as a new UK government report reveals one in every 100 UK workers was employed by a business headquartered in a CPTPP member nation in 2019, equating to over 400,000 jobs across the country.

Membership of the trade group is expected to spark further investment in the UK by CPTPP countries, already worth GBP 182 billion in 2021, by guaranteeing protections for investors.

"The agreement is a gateway to the wider Indo-Pacific which is set to account for the majority of global growth and around half of the world's middle-class consumers in the decades to come, bringing new opportunities for British businesses and supporting jobs," the UK's Department for Business and Trade (DBT) said.

The UK will be the first European member and first new member since

CPTPP was created, which the government stresses would have been impossible without leaving the European Union (EU) economic bloc.

"The UK's formal accession to CPTPP marks a significant milestone for UK trade, enabling ambitious British businesses to connect with the world's most exciting growth markets for start-ups, innovation and technology," noted Ian Stuart, CEO of HSBC bank in the UK.

With the UK as a member, CPTPP will have a combined GDP of GBP 12 trillion and account for 15 per cent of global GDP, according to the DBT.

The agreement for the UK's membership is expected to come into force by next year after all member nations ratify the deal.

British whisky and cars have been flagged as among 99 per cent of current UK goods exports to the CPTPP countries set to be eligible for zero tariffs as UK businesses gain "unparalleled access" to the new trans-Pacific free trade market which includes 11 countries around the Pacific rim: Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan.

Migrants form group to head to US from southern Mexico

AP ■ LONDON

Nearly a thousand migrants that recently crossed from Guatemala into Mexico have formed a group to head north together in hopes of reaching the border with the United States.

The group, made up of largely Venezuelan migrants, walked along a highway in southern Mexico, led by a Venezuela flag with the phrase "Peace, Freedom. SOS." The men, women, children, and teenagers were followed by Mexican National Guard patrols.

Migrants said they crossed into Mexico illegally through a river dividing the two countries.

They said they decided to organise the group and start out because many had been sleeping on the street and

had run out of money to buy food.

"We just want to move forward, to fulfill our American dream and work, because we're all workers here," one Venezuelan, Roseli Gloria said while taking a brief rest along the highway.

She carried a backpack and a piece of rolled-up foam for sleeping. She said she had been in Mexico for a week before joining the group.

Participants in the group said that they received little aid from Mexican immigration authorities and that they were given mixed and confusing instructions about how to move forward or seek asylum in the US.

The formation of the latest migrant group in southern Mexico comes amid a record migratory flow to the United

States from countries across Latin America.

In the 12 months through May 2023, US authorities reported nearly 2.5 million encounters with migrants on its southern border, an uptick from the year before.

The journey is not an easy one, with migrants often targeted by kidnappings, extortion and other violence from armed groups in the region. As a result, migrants often travel in groups of hundreds to stay safe.

Migrants from Venezuela previously sought refuge in other South American nations like Colombia and Peru, but increasingly they are making the perilous journey through the jungles of the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama in an attempt to reach the US.

Palestinian gunman opens fire, wounds three

AP ■ TEL AVIV

A Palestinian gunman opened fire on a car in the occupied West Bank on Sunday wounding three people, including two girls, before fleeing, Israeli authorities said.

The bloodshed was the latest in a relentless cycle of violence that has gripped the region, driving up the death toll and sparking the worst fighting between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank in nearly two decades.

The Israeli military said the gunman opened fire on a car from a passing vehicle. Israel's rescue service MDA said three people were wounded, including a 35-year-old with gunshot wounds in serious but stable condition. Two girls, aged 9 and 14, were lightly wounded by flying debris.

The military said forces were on the lookout for the assailant.

Fighting between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank intensified early

last year when Israel launched near-nightly raids into Palestinian areas in the West Bank in response to a spate of Palestinian attacks against Israelis.

The violence has spiked this year, with more than 150 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire since the start of 2023 in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

Israelis says most of those killed have been militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting the raids and others not involved in the confrontations have also been killed. At least 26 people have been killed in Palestinian attacks against Israelis during that time.

Israel says the raids are essential to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks. The Palestinians see the violence as a natural response to 56 years of occupation, including stepped-up settlement construction by Israel's government and increased violence by Jewish settlers.

Netanyahu discharged from hospital

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was discharged on Sunday after an overnight hospital stay for check-ups and monitoring following a dizzy spell.

Netanyahu, 73, was rushed to Sheba Medical Centre on Saturday after feeling mild dizziness.

His office said he had left the hospital around midday after stating earlier that his test results were normal and that he was feeling "very good."

The medical centre said Netanyahu was in "excellent" condition after a series of tests, including cardiovascular ones.

Netanyahu's office said he had spent the previous day at the Sea of Galilee, a popular vacation spot in northern Israel where temperatures climbed to about 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) amid a stifling country-wide heat wave.

Tel Aviv anti-Govt protests enter 28th week

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Tens of thousands of protesters packed the streets of Tel Aviv on Saturday night, marking the 28th straight week of demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to overhaul the country's judiciary.

Protest leaders promised further "days of disruption" lie ahead.

Netanyahu's government gave initial approval to a key portion of the overhaul earlier this week, breathing new life into the grassroots movement.

The bill still needs to be approved in two more votes, expected by the end of the month, before it becomes law.

Saturday night protests have become a mainstay of the grassroots movement — but this week was larger than usual.

In Tel Aviv, protesters unrolled a massive banner reading "SOS." They threw paint powder into the sky, streaking it pink and orange. "Handmaids" —



Israelis protest against plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to overhaul the judicial system in Tel Aviv

women dressed in red robes as characters from the dystopian novel and TV series "The Handmaid's Tale" — once again took to the streets. Their jarring appearance is meant to drive home the notion that, if the overhaul passes, women could be stripped of their

rights. On Tuesday, protesters blocked major highways and disrupted operations at the country's main international airport after Netanyahu's parliamentary coalition advanced a bill that is part of the overhaul.

Organisers said they would hold another "day of disruption" on Tuesday if he continues to move ahead with the plan.

The Israeli leader was hospitalised on Saturday for dehydration after suffering a dizzy spell and having spent the previous day in the sun without drinking water. He later released a video from the Tel Aviv hospital, saying he felt good.

However, Netanyahu was to spend the night in the hospital, according to his office, and a weekly Cabinet meeting scheduled for Sunday was pushed to Monday.

Saturday's protest in Tel Aviv was joined by others across the country. Protesters brandished lit torches outside Netanyahu's home in Jerusalem and demonstrated in the coastal cities of Herzliya and Netanya.

After more than six months of protests, the movement shows little sign of abating. Israel's national labour union and its medical association have joined a long list of

groups speaking out against the bill. Military reservists, fighter pilots, and business leaders have all urged the government to halt the plan.

Arnon Bar-David, head of the country's national labour union, the Histadrut, threatened a possible general strike that could paralyse the country's economy.

"If the situation reaches an extreme, we will intervene and employ our strength," Bar-David said, calling on Netanyahu to "stop the chaos."

The Histadrut called a general strike in March as the government pushed the judicial overhaul legislation through parliament after weeks of protest. The move shut down large swaths of Israel's economy and helped contribute to Netanyahu's decision to suspend the legislation.

The Israeli Medical Association, which represents 90 per cent of Israeli physicians, joined the Histadrut on Friday, voting to "employ all available means, including significant organisational measures"

Family, neighbours of Seema Haider don't want her to return to Pak

PTI ■ KARACHI

A Pakistani mother of four, who sneaked into India to live with a Hindu man whom she befriended through an online game platform, has been ostracised by her family and neighbours here for daring to defy the societal norms in this conservative Muslim country. Seema Ghulam Haider and Sachin Meena got in touch while playing PUBG in 2019 and a dramatic love story unfolded between the two living more than 1,300 kms apart, in countries not too friendly to each other.

Seema, 30, and Sachin, 22, live in the Rabupura area of Greater Noida, near Delhi, where he runs a provision store, according to Uttar Pradesh Police.

Seema's neighbours and a relative made it clear to this PTI Correspondent that they don't

want her back in Pakistan. "She should just send her children back to Pakistan. She can stay there. Now she is no longer even a Muslim," said the 16-year-old son of the landlord in whose rented home Seema stayed with her children for the last three years before deciding to illegally enter India to be with her Hindu lover.

The story of how this largely uneducated mother of four and the wife of a husband working abroad could have the courage in Pakistan's largely conservative society to abandon everything and enter India illegally to be with a much younger man still fascinates everyone in her neighbourhood.

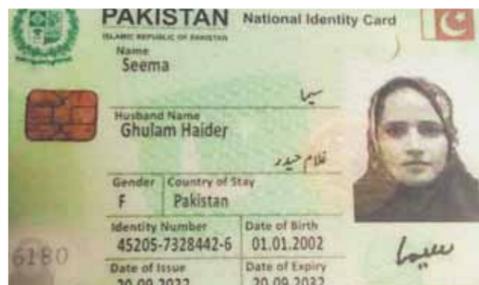
Her home is in a neighbourhood of Bhitiaabad a Katchi Abadi in the heart of Gulistan-e-Jauhar and is nothing much to talk about as it is a three-room portion in a

building devoid of any paint and located in a narrow lane full of garbage and overflowing sewerages.

The stench of sewage is toxic in the air as one drives down the crowded un-constructed lane and broken road bustling with people and shops on both sides with flies aplenty and a general unsanitary environment.

As soon as one reaches Seema's house, one myth is broken that her husband Ghulam Haider who works in Saudi Arabia brought her the house for Rs 1.2 million. "No, she was a tenant with us for three years with her children. She lived alone with her children. Her father-in-law lives some distance away from here," Nur Muhammad, the landlord's son, explained.

Seema and Ghulam Haider had eloped 10 years back to Karachi and got married



against the wishes of their parents.

"We saw her call a taxi and leave one day with her children and some bags and we thought she was going to her village in Jacobabad. But after nearly a month, when we heard about her escapade on TV channels, we were all shocked," adds Jamal Jakhraani, an elderly man, who was her neighbour. Efforts to try to talk to

women in the narrow lane failed as the area is mostly inhabited by tribal area Pashtuns, Sindhis and Seraikis from rural areas and the men don't allow their women to talk to strangers and make them observe Purdah.

But one noticed some women peeking out of their windows and main door inquisitive to know what was happening.

Jamal, who belongs to the same tribe that Seema and Ghulam Haider belong to, believes it is best Seema remains in India now.

"If ever she thinks of coming back, she will not be forgiven by the tribe and secondly her decision to stay with a Hindu has angered everyone now," Jamal said.

Mian Mithoo, a high-profile religious leader in rural Sindh, known for using his girls to Islam and even bandits, has openly threatened to punish Seema if she returns. His supporters have also threatened to attack Hindu worship places in Seema's village but SSP Kashmir-Kandhkot, Irfan Samoo, assured Hindus and Sikhs they would be protected.

Samoo, however, is puzzled by the whole case and has found anomalies in Seema's

documents and tale.

"Her national identity card says she was born in 2002. So, she should be 21 years of age now and yet she has four children all up to the age of 6 years," he said.

Samoo also said the police have asked Ghulam Haider to return from Saudi Arabia but he has been in touch with them only on video or phone calls. Samoo is not convinced that a woman with a rural background would have the courage to plan her way to India via Dubai and Kathmandu.

An officer at the police station in Karachi where Seema's father-in-law filed an FIR is also not convinced that it is a simple case as it looks. "The husband also keeps changing his stories to the police. First, he said he bought the house now he says he paid one million rupees to Seema's

family to settle a tribal decision when they first fled to Karachi," he said.

"One thing is clear Seema was frustrated with her husband's absence and being forced to take care of four children by herself as she had no support even from her in-laws," he said.

Malik, a mobile shop owner, remembers how after a year that Seema moved into the neighbourhood, she used to visit his shop to get her balance recharged frequently.

"She always wore a chaddar over her head and had half of her face covered and also didn't talk much so that is what surprised me when I learnt about her decision," Malik said. Maulvi Samiuddin, a prayer leader in the neighbourhood mosque, was initially not even willing to talk about the incident but then says Seema was evil.

Russia has sufficient stockpile of cluster bombs: Putin

AP ■ KYIV

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview published Sunday that Russia has a "sufficient stockpile" of cluster munitions, and warned that Russia "reserves the right to take reciprocal action" if Ukraine uses the controversial weapons.

In his first comments on the delivery of cluster munitions to Ukraine from the US, Putin said that Russia has not used cluster bombs in its war in Ukraine so far. The use of cluster bombs by both Russia and Ukraine has been widely documented, including by The Associated Press and international humanitarian organisations,

and cluster rounds have been found in the aftermath of Russian strikes.

"Until now, we have not done this, we have not used it, and we have not had such a need," he said.

Rossviya TV reporter Pavel Zarubin published excerpts of the interview to his Telegram channel Sunday ahead of a scheduled broadcast Sunday night.

The Pentagon said Thursday that cluster munitions provided by the United States had arrived in Ukraine.

The munitions, which are bombs that open in the air and release scores of smaller bomblets, are seen by the US as



a way to get Kyiv critically needed ammunition to help bolster its offensive and push through Russian front lines. US

leaders debated the thorny issue for months, before President Joe Biden made the final decision last week.

Cluster bombs have long been criticized by humanitarian groups, and some US allies, because those used in previous conflicts have had a high "dud rate," meaning that they often leave behind unexploded bomblets that can harm civilians long after a battle has ended.

Proponents argue that Russia has already been using cluster munitions in Ukraine and that the weapons the US is providing have been improved to leave behind far fewer unexploded rounds. Ukraine has promised to use them only

away from densely populated areas.

On the ground, the Ukrainian military said in a regular update Sunday morning that over the previous 24 hours Russia had launched two Iranian-made Shahed exploding drones, two cruise missiles and two anti-aircraft guided missiles, in addition to 40 airstrikes and 46 attacks from multiple rocket launchers.

The Ukrainian General Staff wrote that Russia continues to concentrate on offensive operations in Ukraine's industrial east. Donetsk regional Gov Pavlo Kyrylenko said Sunday that two residents of the region were killed on Saturday, and one other person

was wounded.

Elsewhere in the country, two boys, aged eight and 10, were wounded when an explosive device left by Russian forces detonated in the southern region of Kherson on Sunday, according to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office.

Regional Gov Oleksandr Prokudin said that Russia had launched 69 shelling attacks against Kherson region. A 59-year-old man died on Saturday when attempting to disarm a round in the regional capital, also called Kherson.

Yurii Malashko, governor of the neighbouring, partly occupied, Zaporizhzhia region, said Russia had attacked 13

populated areas in the region, wounding seven people in the town of Stepanivka.

Moscow-installed authorities in Russian-occupied Crimea on Sunday reported "a massive and prolonged" drone attack overnight targeting Sevastopol, the peninsula's largest port, which hosts Russia's Black Sea Fleet. According to Moscow-installed Sevastopol governor Mikhail Razvozhayev, air defense shot down all of the drones and there was no damage.

Vyacheslav Gladkov, the governor of Russia's Belgorod region, said that a woman was killed Sunday by shelling in the town of Shebekino near the border with Ukraine.

9 bodies pulled out from flooded tunnel in S Korea

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean rescuers on Sunday pulled nine bodies from a flooded tunnel where around 15 vehicles were trapped in muddy water, as days of heavy rain triggered flash floods and landslides and destroyed homes across the country, officials said.

A total of 37 people have died and thousands have been evacuated since July 9, when heavy rain started pounding South Korea's central regions.

Nearly 900 rescuers including divers were searching the tunnel in the central city of Cheongju, where the vehicles, including a bus, were swamped by a flash flood Saturday evening. Seo Jeong-il, chief of the city's fire department, said in a briefing. Fire officials estimated that the tunnel filled with water in as little as two or three minutes. Photos and video from the scene showed rescue workers establishing a perimeter and pumping brown water out of the tunnel as divers used rubber boats to move in and out of the area.

Yang Chan-mo, an official from the North Chungcheong provincial fire department, said it could take several hours to pump out all the water from the tunnel, which was still filled with 4 to 5 metres (13 to 16.4 feet) of water dense with mud and other debris. Workers were proceeding slowly to prevent any victims or survivors from



Rescuers work to search for survivors along a road submerged by floodwaters leading to an underground tunnel in Cheongju, South Korea on Sunday

being swept out, Yang said. Nine survivors were rescued from the tunnel and around 10 others were believed to be missing based on reports by families or others, but the exact number of passengers trapped in vehicles wasn't immediately clear, Seo said.

More than 60 cm (23.6 inches) of rain was measured in the South Chungcheong provincial towns of Gongju and Cheongyang since July 9. Cheongju, where the tunnel is

located, received more than 54 cm (21.2 inches) during the same period.

The Korea Meteorological Administration said the central and southern parts of the country could still get as much as 30 cm (12 inches) of additional rain through Tuesday.

More than 8,850 people have been evacuated and 27,260 households had been without electricity in the past several days. The rain damaged or destroyed nearly 50 roads

and more than a 100 homes, the Ministry of the Interior and Safety said. At least 35 people were reported injured.

President Yoon Suk Yeol, who is on a trip to Europe, discussed the rain-related casualties and damages during an emergency meeting while travelling to Poland on a train after visiting Ukraine on Saturday, according to his office. Yoon called for officials to mobilise all available resources to respond to the disaster.

Passenger takes control of plane, crash lands

AP ■ BOSTON

A passenger of a small airplane took the controls and crash landed on a Massachusetts island on Saturday after the pilot suffered a medical emergency, police said.

The crash happened on Saturday afternoon near Martha's Vineyard Airport in West Tisbury, Massachusetts. The 79-year-old male pilot suffered the emergency during the plane's final approach, Massachusetts State Police said.

State police said the crash "resulted in a hard landing outside the runway that caused the aircraft's left wing to break in half."

Authorities did not name either person on the plane and said both were transported to a hospital. The pilot was then flown to a Boston hospital in life-threatening condition. The female passenger was uninjured and released from a local hospital, police said.

The 2006 Piper Meridian airplane departed from Westchester County, New York, earlier Saturday afternoon. The pilot and passenger are Connecticut residents, police said.

Iraqi premier in Syria to boost cooperation

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Iraq's prime minister held talks on Sunday with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus during the first trip of its kind to the war-torn country since the 12-year conflict began.

Iraq and Syria have had close relations for years even after many Arab countries withdrew their ambassadors for Damascus and Syria's membership in the 22-member Arab League was suspended because of the crackdown on protesters in 2011.

Assad received Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who was heading a high-ranking delegation, at the presidential palace in Damascus.

They discussed mutual relations and cooperation between the two neighbouring countries among other issues, according to the office of Syria's president. Al-Sudani's office said in a statement that talks revolved around ways of expanding cooperation in the fields of trade, economy, transportation, tourism, how to combat climate change and collaboration to fight terrorism. Security cooperation against extremist groups was likely to be on top of the two-day visit's agenda.

The two countries, where Iran enjoys wide influence, have a joint 600 kilometres-

long (373 miles) border. In June 2014, the Islamic State group declared the establishment of a self-styled "caliphate," a traditional model of Islamic rule, in wide areas under its control in Iraq and Syria.

After a yearslong campaign that left tens of thousands dead in both countries, IS was defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in March 2019 in Syria.

Over the past years, Syrian government forces regained control of much of Syria with the help of Russia and Iran.

Earlier this year, Syria's membership in the Arab League was reinstated and Assad attended the Arab summit that was held in Saudi Arabia in May.

Al-Sudani was invited to visit Damascus during a trip by Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad to Baghdad last month. The US has a presence in both Syria and Iraq and Syrian officials have been calling for the withdrawal of American troops from the country who first arrived in 2015. On any given day there are at least 900 US forces in Syria, along with an undisclosed number of contractors attempting to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State group. US special operations forces also move in and out of the country but are usually in small teams and are not included in the official count.

UK Defence Minister to quit in next reshuffle

PTI ■ LONDON

UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said on Sunday that he will step down from the Cabinet at the next reshuffle, expected in a few months' time, after serving four years in the job.

The 53-year-old Conservative Party member of Parliament since 2005 also told 'The Sunday Times' that he will not stand as an MP at the next general election, expected next year.

Wallace has served as defence minister under three British prime ministers - Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak - and has played a high-profile role in the UK's response to the Russia-Ukraine war conflict.

"I went into politics in the Scottish parliament in 1999. That's 24 years. I've spent well over seven years with three phones by my bed," Wallace told the newspaper.

"While I am proud to have worked with so many amazing people and helped contribute to protecting this great country, the cost of putting that ahead of my family is something I am very sad about," he said.

The minister is believed to have informed Prime Minister Sunak of his decision to stand down from the Cabinet last month.

Iran's morality police return to impose Islamic dress

AP ■ DUBAI

Iranian authorities on Sunday announced a new campaign to force women to wear the Islamic headscarf and morality police returned to the streets 10 months after the death of a woman in their custody sparked nationwide protests.

The morality police had largely pulled back following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini last September, as authorities struggled to contain mass protests calling for the overthrow of the theocracy that has ruled Iran for over four decades.

The protests largely died down earlier this year following a heavy crackdown in which over 500 protesters were killed and nearly 20,000 detained.

But many women continued to flaunt the official dress code, especially in the capital, Tehran, and other cities.

The morality police were only rarely seen patrolling the streets, and in December, there were even some reports - later denied - that they had been disbanded.

Authorities insisted throughout the crisis that the rules had not changed. Iran's clerical rulers view the hijab as a key pillar of the Islamic revolution that brought them to power, and consider more casual dress a sign of Western decadence.

On Sunday, Gen Saeed Montazerolmahdi, a police spokesman, said the morality police would resume notifying and then detaining women not wearing hijab in public. In Tehran, the men and women of the morality police could be seen patrolling the streets in marked vans.

The battle over the hijab became a powerful rallying cry last fall, with women playing a leading role in the

protests. The demonstrations quickly escalated into calls for the overthrow of Iran's clerical rulers, whom the mostly young protesters accuse of being corrupt, repressive and out of touch. Iran's government blamed the protests on a foreign conspiracy, without providing evidence.

Several Iranian celebrities joined the protests, including prominent directors and actors from the country's celebrated film industry.

Several Iranian actresses were detained after appearing in public without the hijab or expressing support for the protests.

In the most recent case, actress Azadeh Samadi was barred from social media and ordered by a court to seek psychological treatment for "anti-social personality disorder" after appearing at a funeral two months ago wearing a cap on her head.

Earthquake off Alaska coast triggers brief tsunami advisory

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A 7.2 magnitude earthquake triggered a brief tsunami advisory for southern Alaska late Saturday, but the advisory was cancelled about an hour later, monitoring bodies reported.

The earthquake was felt widely throughout the Aleutian Islands, the Alaskan Peninsula and Cook Inlet regions, according to the Alaska Earthquake Center.

In Kodiak, Alaska, sirens warned of a possible tsunami and sent people driving to shelters late at night, according to video posted to social media.

The United States Geological Survey wrote in a social media post that the earthquake occurred 106 kilometers south of Sand Point, Alaska, at 10:48 pm on Saturday. The quake initially was reported as 7.4 magnitude but downgraded to 7.2 soon after.

The US National Weather Service sent a tsunami advisory



This image made from the video posted to social media by Jared Griffin shows vehicles around Kodiak High School following the earthquake, in Kodiak, Alaska on Saturday

saying the quake occurred at a depth of 13 miles (21 kilometers). The agency cancelled the advisory about an hour after the first alert.

Before the cancellation, the National Weather Service in Anchorage, Alaska, tweeted

that the tsunami advisory applied to coastal Alaska from Chignik Bay to Unimak Pass, but Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula were not expected to be impacted.

The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency said

shortly after the tsunami warning went out that there was no threat to the islands.

There were an estimated eight aftershocks in the same area of Alaska, including one measuring 5.0 magnitude within three minutes of the original

earthquake, KTUU-TV reported.

Residents were advised not to reoccupy hazard zones without clearance from local emergency officials, KTUU reported. Small sea level changes were still possible, KTUU reported.

Alaska experiences thousands of earthquakes each year, most of which are too deep and too small to be felt. It is the US's most seismically active state and location of the second-largest earthquake ever recorded, according to the Alaska Earthquake Center.

In 1964, a magnitude 9.2 earthquake in Prince William Sound caused extensive damage throughout south-central Alaska.

The tremor late Saturday occurred in the same region as several other earthquakes over 7 magnitude in the past few years, The Center said via Twitter.

"The once quiet 'Shumagin Gap' isn't so quiet anymore!" the tweet said.

Five guilty of 'honeytrap' murder of Indian-origin man in UK

London (PTI): Three men and two women members of a gang have been found guilty of the "honey-trap" murder of an Indian-origin man in the east of England.

Vishal Gohel, 44, was discovered unresponsive inside a flat in Bushey, Hertfordshire, in January and pronounced dead at the scene.

A post-mortem examination showed he had suffered severe blows to his head. According to court reports in the UK media, a jury at St. Albans Crown Court on Friday was told that Gohel had been led to believe he would be having a sexual liaison but the gang had intentions to rob his home -- hence a honeytrap was laid by the gang.

Officers from the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) Major Crime Unit launched a murder investigation and made six arrests in the case.

"Our thoughts are with Vishal's family and friends at this extremely difficult time. Specialist officers

are supporting his family and I would ask for their privacy to be respected," said Detective Inspector Justine Jenkins, who led the investigation earlier this year.

Gohel was found with tape on his face at his flat after a neighbour noticed his front door was ajar and the kitchen light was on. It emerged that Gohel had been in contact with the suspects through Craig's List, a website offering goods and services.

Tevin Leslie, 23, was convicted of murder and had already pleaded guilty to conspiracy to rob.

Sakeen Gordon, 22, was convicted of murder and conspiracy to rob; Yarley Georgia Bruce-Annan, 22, was convicted of murder after earlier admitting a charge of conspiracy to rob; Brandon Browne, 22, was found not guilty of murder, but convicted of manslaughter and conspiracy to rob; and Faith Hoppie, 22, was found not guilty of murder, but convicted of manslaughter and conspiracy to rob.

Maid sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering elderly woman in Singapore

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

A maid from Myanmar was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering her employer's 70-year-old mother-in-law from India, a media report said on Sunday.

Zin Mar Nwe was found guilty of murder for intentionally inflicting multiple fatal stab wounds on the victim. Mar Nwe was sentenced on July 4 after she admitted that she had stabbed the victim 26 times in anger after the woman threatened to send her back to the agent, reported The Straits Times.

The report said the maid was 17 years old when she arrived in Singapore to work on January 5, 2018 but her passport had her age as 23-years-old -- the minimum age to work as a domestic worker in Singapore.

Four months later, she started working for her third household -- a couple and their two

teenage daughters.

Her latest employer, a financial controller identified by the court as Mr S, had hired her because his family's maid for the past four years was returning home to the Philippines.

By her own accounts, Zin Mar Nwe had no complaints about her working conditions and had no issues interacting with Mr S' family and her agents.

She woke up at about 5.30 am and went to bed at about 11 pm and also made multiple phone calls to her relatives in Myanmar. Part of her SGD 450 monthly salary went towards repaying her loan to the maid agency.

About two weeks after she started work, her employer's mother-in-law arrived from India on May 26, 2018, to stay with the family for a month, but she found it difficult to get along with the elderly woman.

The elderly woman began hitting the maid to get her atten-

tion or to reprimand her. Zin Mar Nwe said she was hit when she did not understand what the woman wanted her to do.

At the beginning, the elderly woman used her knuckles to knock the maid on her head and back two to three times a day on average. She later started using objects such as ladders. The mother-in-law also started returning tit for tat when on many occasions the maid accidentally hurt her.

On the morning of June 25, 2018, the two women were alone at home when the older woman became upset with the maid for causing an object to drop on her foot and for missing her instructions. As the older woman lay down on the sofa to watch television, she declared that the maid would be going back to the agent.

Zin Mar Nwe understood that because S was already her third employer, this would result in her being sent back to her home country in debt.

Federal judge rules Oregon's new gun law is constitutional

Portland (AP): A federal judge has ruled Oregon's voter-approved gun control measure - one of the toughest in the nation - is constitutional.

US District Judge Karin Immergut ruled that banning large capacity magazines and requiring a permit to purchase a gun falls in line with "the nation's history and tradition of regulating uniquely dangerous features of weapons and firearms to protect public safety," Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

The decision comes after a landmark US Supreme Court decision on the Second Amendment that has upended gun laws across the country, dividing judges and sowing confusion over what firearm restrictions can remain on the books.

It changed the test that lower courts had long used for evaluating challenges to firearm restrictions, telling judges that gun laws must be consistent with the "historical tradition of firearm regulation."

Oregon voters in November narrowly passed Measure 114, which requires residents to undergo safety training and a background check to

obtain a permit to buy a gun.

The legislation also bans the sale, transfer or import of gun magazines with more than 10 rounds unless they are owned by law enforcement or a military member or were owned before the measure's passage.

Those who already own high-capacity magazines can only possess them at home or use them at a firing range, in shooting competitions or for hunting as allowed by state law after the measure takes effect.

Large capacity magazines "are not commonly used for self-defence, and are therefore not protected by the Second Amendment," Immergut wrote.

"The Second Amendment also allows governments to ensure that only law-abiding, responsible citizens keep and bear arms."

The latest ruling in US District Court is likely to be appealed, potentially moving all the way up to the US Supreme Court.

The Oregon measure's fate has been carefully watched as one of the first new gun restrictions passed since the Supreme Court ruling last June.

Sitharaman for strengthening global architecture to combat financial crimes

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday made a case for further strengthening of global architecture to combat financial crimes, money laundering and sharing of information about different asset classes including crypto currencies.

Addressing a 'G20 High-Level Tax Symposium on Combating Tax Evasion, Corruption and Money Laundering', the minister exuded confidence that G20 will continue to assist the jurisdictions in enhancing their law enforcement capacity.

Under the G20 Presidency, Sitharaman said, India has taken the lead for building capacity in

tax and financial crime investigation in the South Asian region in collaboration with OECD.

India has decided to launch a pilot on tax and financial crime investigation in collaboration with OECD for the South Asian Region beginning at the Regional Campus of National Academy of Direct Taxes in New Delhi on July 18.

Observing that G20 has helped spearhead a number of reforms to the global tax, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering architecture, she said, these have helped shape the discourse towards jurisdictions not only adopting a more holistic approach to financial crimes, but also aided them to collaborate with one another.

"We hope that the G20 con-



tinues exploring the options to further strengthen the global architecture to fight financial crime and assist jurisdictions in enhancing their law enforcement capacity," she said.

The minister said that there was scope for evolving solutions

that can help tackle financial crimes in a more synchronised and effective way.

The G20 has helped spearhead a number of reforms to the global tax, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering architecture, which has helped

shape the discourse towards jurisdictions not only adopting a more holistic approach to financial crimes, but also aided them to collaborate with one another, she added.

In addition to increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies and enhanced capacity building, Sitharaman said, "it is also imperative that we remain alive to the emerging risks to financial transparency. In this context, the progress of work towards the development of the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework and the update to the Common Reporting Standard is a welcome step."

Besides these, she said, "we should also examine closely whether there are any other

classes of assets, in respect of which information needs to be shared in a systematic way amongst jurisdictions."

With the advancement in technologies and openness in international trade and commerce, criminals have started utilising sophisticated measures to transfer illegal proceeds across borders through multi-layered transactions involving various forms of assets including Financial Assets, Crypto Assets and Real Estate, she said.

During tax investigations, she said, tax administrations acquire access to large amounts of incriminating information obtained through tax treaties, which could have relevance for investigations in other financial crimes.



'File ITR at earliest as Govt not contemplating extension of July 31 deadline'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra has asked income tax payers to file their return at the earliest as the finance ministry is not contemplating extension of the July 31 deadline.

"We expect that the filing would be higher than the last year...We are hopeful that it should be more than the last year," he said in an interview to PTI.

About 5.83 crore income tax returns were filed as on July 31 last year, the last day for filing returns for assessment year 2022-23.

"We would like to thank income tax return filers as ITR filing has been at a much faster pace than last year and we would advise them not to wait to the last moment and also not to hope for any extensions."

"So, I would advise them to file their tax return at the earliest because the deadline of July 31 is approaching fast," he said.

With regard to the tax mobilisation target, Malhotra said, it is more or less in line with the target growth rate,

which is 10.5 per cent.

The growth rate as far as Goods and Services Tax (GST) is concerned, it is 12 per cent so far, he said.

However, the growth rate is lower than 12 per cent on the excise duties front due to rate reduction.

"It is rather negative as of now. Hopefully going forward, once the impact of the decrease in the tax rates is over, we will see some increase in collection of excise duties. So, overall we feel it's still early days...We feel that we should be able to achieve the target," he said.

As per the Budget 2023-24, the government expects gross tax receipts of Rs 33.61 lakh crore in the current fiscal.

Of this, the government aims to mobilise Rs 18.23 lakh crore, 10.5 per cent higher than collected from corporate and individual income tax, as per the Budget papers.

Collections from customs duty are expected to rise by 11 per cent to Rs 2.33 lakh crore from Rs 2.10 lakh crore in the revised estimates for FY23.

Don't let 2G overhang influence space spectrum allocation: ISpA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Space Association (ISpA), the industry body representing space sector start-ups, made a strong pitch for administrative allocation of space-based spectrum, saying the overhang of the 2G spectrum row should not be a deterrent in any move in this direction.

ISpA Director General Lt Gen A K Bhatt (ret'd) said the Presidential reference in the 2G issue should be seen in "more detail" and there was a need to pay attention to the issue where it says that for the common good auction is not the only method and other methods can be exercised by the government.

"We have to see the public good and the social impact and not the economic value of allocation because, if only economic value for revenues is important, space is at a weaker wicket compared to terrestrial communication," he said in submission to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India.

Bhatt said space has to be a "co-traveller, in overcoming the digital divide in the country."

"Space provides connectivity to the furthest corners in India and today where rural

internet is only 38.93 per cent, this can overcome the digital divide and provide services including vital services for education, health care, and everything to the furthest corner," he said.

"And of course, we recommend that all our members believe that if spectrum is assigned by administrative method, this opportunity will grow more," Bhatt said.

He cautioned that if spectrum was auctioned, it will fragment and unnecessarily divide a very vital resource. "If our aim is growth, opportunity, and getting the smaller, new startups which are the larger part of space, who have opportunities and especially in certain areas like telemetry, usage in earth observation and usage for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and remote sensing, we need to protect the interests by not auctioning the spectrum," Bhatt said. Trai is expected to come out with its recommendation on the allocation of spectrum for space-based communication to the industry. The authority in April launched a consultation paper in April to seek comments and counter comments from stakeholders on various aspects of the allocation of space spectrum.

Credit card spending at record high of ₹1.4L cr in May; cards in use at 87.4 mn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Credit card spending has hit a record high of Rs 1.4 lakh crore in May, the latest data from Reserver Bank of India showed.

The total spending or outstanding dues on credit cards, which remained rang-bound throughout the year in the previous fiscal, have been rising by 5 per cent month on month this year.

Similarly, the number of cards in use has also jumped by more than 5 million since January and crossed 87.4 million

in the reporting month, making this also an all-time high in May, according to the RBI data.

Of the new additions, as much as 2 million were used in the first two months of the current fiscal alone.

In January 2023 there were 82.4 million active cards in the country. The number has been growing steadily and reached 83.3 million in February, 85.3 million in March and 86.5 million in April, the data showed.

Credit card spends were in the range of Rs 1.1-1.2 lakh crore throughout FY23, but reached

an all-time high of Rs 1.4 lakh crore in May this year, according to the RBI data, which also showed that the average spend on a card scaled a new peak of Rs 16,144.

Market leader HDFC Bank has the maximum number of cards in circulation at 18.12 million in May and the bank also leads the market in terms of outstanding dues with 28.5 per cent of the total industry-wide dues.

SBI Card is a close second with 17.13 million cards in circulation, followed by ICICI Bank at 14.67 million. Axis

Bank is the fourth largest with 12.46 million and its recent takeover of the retail portfolio of Citi has helped it close the gap with ICICI Bank. Citi had 1,62,150 active card users when it sold to the portfolio along with retail banking to Axis in 2022.

Meanwhile, indicating the rising stress level among individuals, a Transunion Cibil report last week said delinquencies in the credit card portfolio of banks have been rising and have jumped by 66 basis points to 2.94 per cent in March 2023.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Sunday asked farm scientists to focus more on research in areas of animal husbandry and fisheries, to boost production and their contribution in the overall farm sector growth.

Addressing virtually, the 95th foundation day of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Tomar said India holds the position of number one or two in the world in terms of production of most of the crops.

In achieving this feat, he said there has been immense contribution from agriculture scientists along with efforts from the farmers community and policy initiatives taken by the govern-

Focus more on research in animal husbandry, fisheries for overall farm sector growth: Tomar to farm scientists

ments.

He said the Modi government in the last nine years has taken a lot of initiatives to promote technology in the agriculture sector, as part of its objective to boost farm income.

The efforts have also been made to better productivity and production in agriculture, he said, adding that the focus has also been on improving the quality.

Tomar highlighted that the Indian farm products are being globally accepted and therefore the annual farm export has

crossed USD 50 billion.

As the ICAR will celebrate its 100th Foundation Day after five years, Tomar asked the council to set targets to be accomplished and start working towards them.

The minister noted that the contribution of animal husbandry and fisheries in agriculture GDP is higher than crops.

Therefore, he said, "I feel we should pay more attention towards research in animal husbandry and fisheries."

Increased focus on research in areas of animal husbandry



and fisheries, which are growing at 7.7 per cent and 8.8 per cent, respectively, would help in increasing their share in the overall farm GDP and also

strengthen the rural economy.

Tomar talked about the challenge of climate change and said the scientists are already working to overcome it successfully.

The minister also emphasised on taking all new research and technology at farmgate level.

Tomar also stressed on the need to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and highlighted steps taken by the Centre to promote organic/natural farming and alternative nutrients.

Parshottam Rupala, Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, urged farm scientists to do research in the area of millets to augment their production and productivity.

He said the global demand for millets would rise significantly in the coming years.

Minister of State for Agriculture Kailash Choudhary asked ICAR and its scientists to set targets not only for its 100th foundation day but also for the next 25 years.

Net debt of top 8 listed realty firms fell 43% to ₹23,000 cr in last 3 yrs: Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The net debt of top eight realty firms fell 43 per cent to Rs 23,000 crore last fiscal, from around Rs 40,000 crore in 2019-20, as their cash flow improved on strong housing sales, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock noted that the unfettered demand for housing across the country has enabled the country's leading large and listed developers to reduce their debt.

Anarock analysed financial performances of the top eight developers engaged in the development of residential real estate.

These developers are DLF, Macrotech Developers (Lodha brand), Godrej Properties, Prestige Estates Projects, Sobha, Brigade Enterprises, Puravankara and Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd.

Net debt of top eight listed developers has reduced from Rs 40,500 crore in FY20 to over Rs 23,000 crore in FY23.

The average cost of debt for these eight players fell to 9 per cent in FY23 from 10.3 per cent in FY20. In 2020-21, the interest cost was 9.05 per cent, while the cost of debt was 7.96 per cent in 2021-22.

Commenting on the findings, Anarock Chairman Anuj



Puri said, "This decline in net debt is essentially because of boosted sales and revenues."

These developers' sales volumes have surpassed pre-pandemic levels and are headed for a new peak, he added.

"With improved cash flows over the last few years, their debt has reduced significantly. Interestingly, the widening gap between the gross and the net debt also indicates a comfortable financial position for these players," Puri said.

For instance, the difference between the gross and net debt of the developers was about Rs 7,400 crore in FY20, which has widened to almost Rs 15,200 crore in FY23.

Anarock pointed out that the periodic interest rate hikes since April 2022 have led to a marginal rise in the cost of debt, though it remains lower than the pre-pandemic levels of FY20.

FPIs continue to bet on Indian equities; infuse ₹30,600 cr in first fortnight of July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) flow into the Indian equity market remained unabated as they invested over Rs 30,600 crore in the first fortnight of this month, driven by the country's robust economic growth and strong corporate earnings.

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.

With this, inflow in the equity market reached Rs 1.07 lakh crore so far this year, data

with the depositories showed. Market analysts are of the view that the outlook for FPI inflows into Indian equities remains quite bright and broad-based.

"The concern, however, is the rising valuations which are getting stretched. The valuations in China are hugely attractive now compared to valuations in India and, therefore, the 'Sell China, Buy India' policy of FPIs cannot continue for long," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategy at Geojit Financial Services, said.

According to the data, FPIs have been continuously buying Indian equities since March

and infused Rs 30,660 crore this month (till July 14).

This figure includes investment through bulk deals and primary market, too, apart from investment through stock exchanges. Before March, overseas investors pulled out Rs 34,626 crore collectively in January and February.

The incessant buying by FPIs could be attributed to a variety of factors such as the country's robust economic growth, strong corporate earnings, and relatively competitive valuations of Indian equities compared to other markets, Sonam Srivastava, Founder of Wright Research, said.

DICGC asks banks to display logo, QR code on their websites

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) has asked all banks to prominently display its logo and QR code on their websites and internet banking portals by August 31 with a view to create awareness about the deposit insurance scheme.

Deposits up to Rs 5 lakh in banks are insured by the DICGC. The scheme covers deposits in commercial banks, local area banks (LABs), payments banks (PBs), small finance banks (SFBs), regional rural banks (RRBs), and cooperative banks.

In a circular, the Reserve Bank's subsidiary said deposit insurance plays an important role in protecting especially the small depositors, instill confidence in the banking system and maintain financial stability.

"With a view to enhance the awareness about deposit insurance in a focused and sustained manner and in consultation with the RBI, it has been decided that all banks registered with DICGC shall henceforth display the logo of DICGC and QR code linked to the DICGC website prominently on their website and internet banking portal," it said. The display of logo and QR code, it added, will enable customers to easily identify banks covered by the deposit insurance scheme of DICGC and facilitate timely access to information on deposit insurance.

All insured banks have been asked to ensure compliance to the requirements with effect from September 01, 2023.

Goodnight business has implied value of around ₹30K crore, says GCPL chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The implied value of Goodnight business based on the current market capitalisation of Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) is around Rs 30,000 crore, which was bought by the group's FMCG arm in just Rs 100 crore in 1994, the company said in its latest annual report.

Godrej Group had bought the Goodnight brand in just Rs 100 crore in 1994. A year later in 1995, it sold a 51 per cent stake in Goodnight to Sara Lee and started a joint venture with the US-based consumer goods company.

Later in 2010, GCPL acquired Sara Lee's 51 per cent stake for Rs 1,240 crore and merged the business into the company.

"We went on to invest in and grow our household insecti-



cides business over the decades. It was a separate business from GCPL till 2010 when we acquired Sara Lee's stake and merged the business into GCPL," said GCPL chairperson Nisaba Godrej addressing shareholders of the company.

She further added: "We believe this business has an implied value of around Rs 30,000 crore today, based on the current GCPL market cap, with

an underlying 30 per cent CAGR on value creation.

GCPL's total market capitalisation is around Rs 1.08 lakh crore, as per information available on BSE.

Nisaba Godrej was referring to this in the context of GCPL's recent Rs 2,825-crore acquisition of the FMCG business of Sighanias promoted Raymond Consumer Care Ltd along with Kamasutra and Park Avenue brands.

"At our analyst meeting in May, I shared my excitement and how perspectives from the past can give you some thoughts for the future. For me, it goes back to the story of how we acquired our Goodnight brand," she said.

GCPL is a market leader in the fast-growing home insecticide (HI) market in India with the powerful brand Goodnight and HIT.

Govt procures 3L tonnes of onion for buffer stock; piloting irradiation of onion with BARC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has procured 20 per cent more onion at 3 lakh tonnes as buffer stock this year, while also piloting irradiation of onion with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) to increase shelf life, Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh said on Sunday.

In the 2022-23 fiscal, the government had maintained 2.51 lakh tonnes of onion as buffer stock.

The buffer stock is maintained under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to meet any exigencies, if rates go up significantly during the lean supply season.

"To meet any eventuality in the festival season, the government this year developed a robust buffer to an extent of 3 lakh tonnes. There is no prob-



lem with onions," Singh told PTI.

Onion that is procured for the buffer stock is from the just completed rabi season. Presently, the kharif onion sowing is underway and its arrival begins in October.

The Secretary said, "Usually, onion prices in the retail markets come under pressure for 20 days or so till the fresh kharif

crop hits the market. But this time, there won't be a problem."

Meanwhile, the Consumer Affairs Ministry is also trying a technology for storage of onions with the Department of Atomic Energy and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

"On a pilot basis, we are experimenting with onion irradiation of 150 tonnes with

gamma radiation from Cobalt-60 at Lasalgaon in Maharashtra. This will increase the shelf life of onions," Singh said.

In 2022-23, the government had procured a record 2.51 lakh metric tonnes of onions from Rabi-2022 crop under the PSF and released it in major consumption centres during September 2022 and January 2023.

Rabi onion harvested during April-June accounts for 65 per cent of India's onion production and meets consumers' demand till the Kharif crop is harvested in October-November.

The procured buffer stocks are usually released through targeted open market sales and also to states and Union territories and government agencies for supplies through retail outlets during the lean supply season.

KING OF ENGLAND

Magical Alcaraz Ends Djokovic Streak In Classic, Claims Wimbledon Crown

PNS ■ LONDON

Sunday's Wimbledon final was billed as the 'ultimate showdown' by Alcaraz's opponent, seven-time champion, Novak Djokovic, and the Spaniard responded with a suitably inspired performance for a 1-6, 7-6(6), 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 victory. Alcaraz recovered from a shaky start to deliver a high-quality championship-match display and become just the fifth man in the Open Era to win multiple major titles prior to turning 21.

Alcaraz, who won his first major at the 2022 US Open, snapped Djokovic's 34-match winning streak at Wimbledon with his four-hour, 42-minute victory in an SW19 classic. The 20-year-old, whose brand of huge groundstrokes and delicate touches has lit up the All England Club this fortnight, is just the fourth active male player to lift the trophy at the All England Club, after Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray.

Seven-time champion Djokovic made a sizzling start in south-west London, but Alcaraz dug deep to clinch a crucial second-set tie-break before later holding off a Djokovic comeback to claim the title. With the pair going toe to toe in a series of scintillating exchanges on the slick London grass, their third Lexus ATP Head2Head encounter frequently had the crowd on its feet on Centre Court.

Alcaraz's task of defeating Djokovic at Wimbledon, where the Serbian was chasing a fifth consecutive title, only became tougher after he was outplayed in the first set. Yet the Spaniard demonstrated his comfort on the big stage by rallying to a famous victory, just the second defeat Djokovic has suffered in 81 Wimbledon matches when he has won the opening set.

Home favourite and two-time former Wimbledon champion Murray was among those who enjoyed a fascinating clash on Centre Court, where Hollywood stars Daniel Craig and Brad Pitt, and the Prince and Princess of Wales were also in attendance. They could have witnessed Djokovic make history by equalling former WTA star Margaret Court's record of 24 major singles trophies, but instead saw Alcaraz add to his burgeoning reputation as one of sport's brightest young stars.

Set One, Djokovic 7-6(1)

The Serbian produced a masterful first-set performance on Centre Court, where his clean, deep returning piled the pressure on Alcaraz's delivery. Djokovic converted two of his six break points to deliver an early statement as Alcaraz, whose huge groundstrokes helped him reach his maiden Wimbledon final for the loss of just two sets, was unable to penetrate his opponent's defence with any kind of reg-



ularity.

Djokovic, who dropped serve just three times en route to the final, continued his sensational tournament on serve. He faced just one break point in the set, in the opening game, and at one point responded to Alcaraz attacking his second serve by sending his next one down at

120mph.

The depth of Djokovic's groundstrokes also prevented Alcaraz from moving forward frequently. The 20-year-old won 28 of 36 points at the net during his stunning semi-final win against Daniil Medvedev, but he only ventured forwards four times in the opening set against

Djokovic, winning the point twice.

Set Two, Alcaraz 7-6(6) After Djokovic's first-set whirlwind, Alcaraz required a fast response, and he engineered one by claiming his first break of serve in the match in the second game of the second set. It was just the fourth time across his

Wimbledon run that Djokovic had dropped serve and, despite that setback, the Serbian remained on course to beat his record-low of six service games dropped en route to a Wimbledon title, which he set in 2015.

Just as Alcaraz appeared to settle and with a supportive Centre Court crowd urg-

ing the Spaniard to work his way back into the contest, Djokovic immediately reasserted himself in trademark fashion. He notched his third break of Alcaraz's serve in the following game, before crucially outlasting his younger opponent in a mesmerising 29-shot rally when break point down at 1-2, 30/40.

The rest of the set passed without another break point, leaving Alcaraz trying to become the first player to defeat Djokovic in a tie-break at a major since Enzo Coucaud in the second round of January's Australian Open. The Serbian was on the brink of his 15th consecutive tie-break triumph at the majors at 6/5 but Alcaraz held firm behind serve before powering a backhand return winner on his first set point.

Set Three, Alcaraz 6-1

Buoyed by his tie-break triumph, Alcaraz carried the momentum through to the third set as he continued to showcase his full repertoire of shotmaking. His forehand power combined with some stunning deft touches kept the pressure on Djokovic, who made 18 unforced errors in an uncharacteristic third-set performance.

Alcaraz had opened up a 3-1 lead with a single break when one of the games of this year's tournament, featuring 13 deuces, played out across 27 breathtaking minutes on Centre Court. Alcaraz saved

eight game points and Djokovic six break points before the Spaniard converted his seventh to take a 4-1 lead and assume complete control of the set.

The end of the set was far less complicated for Alcaraz, who won eight of the final 10 points to move within one set of becoming just the fifth man in the Open Era to win multiple major titles prior to turning 21. His three breaks of Djokovic's serve in the third set was equal to the number of games the Serbian had dropped across his six previous matches this year at SW19, an indication of how dialled in the 20-year-old was on return.

Set Four, Djokovic 6-3

Djokovic had no intention of fading away in his bid for a historic 24th major, however, and the Serbian raised his game again in the fourth set of what was rapidly becoming an all-time classic final on Centre Court. He recovered from 15/40 to hold in the second game but then rediscovered his rock-solid form from the first set, breaking Alcaraz twice to recapture the momentum and set up a one-set shootout for the title.

Having dropped serve three times in the previous set, The upturn in Djokovic's service game was key to him coming back into the match. The Serbian saved both break points he faced to prevail in a set in which he struck just nine winners to Alcaraz's 14.

Wales captain Ramsey back at Cardiff on two-year deal

AFP ■ LONDON

Wales captain Aaron Ramsey is to return to boyhood club Cardiff on a two-year contract, it was announced Saturday. Ramsey, who is coming back to Wales from French side Nice, made 22 appearances for Cardiff as a teenager and six more on loan from Arsenal in 2011. He remains the Bluebirds' youngest player.

The now 32-year-old midfielder also played for Cardiff in their 2008 FA Cup final defeat by Portsmouth before going on to win the competition three times with Arsenal.

He later added a Serie A title and a Coppa Italia in an injury-hit stint at Juventus and lifted the Scottish Cup on loan at Glasgow giants Rangers before joining Nice.

He has played in Europa League finals with Arsenal, for whom he made over 350 appearances, and Rangers and for Wales at two European Championships and a World Cup.

But he is now back at Cardiff, who play in English football's second-tier Championship, following reports he had turned down a lucrative offer to continue his career in Saudi Arabia. "It feels unbelievable to finally be back here," Ramsey told Cardiff's website.

"I always thought one day I'd come back, and now it's the perfect time to do that.

"To be back with my family



and around familiar faces is just brilliant, so I'm delighted to be back here now. I've missed that a lot in the last year or so, so it was important for me to be back around them.

"Obviously I'm a Cardiff City fan and watching them over the years since I've been away, we've had some low points but some big highs as well, being in the

Premier League and representing Cardiff on the big stage."

He added: "That's a target of mine -- to try and help my team-mates and this club to get around them."

Ramsey later tweeted photographs of himself and seven-year-old son Sonny, who has joined Cardiff's academy, signing their respective contracts.

'Hugs always welcome', tearful Jabeur tells Princess Kate

AFP ■ LONDON

Ons Jabeur was so disconsolate after her shock Wimbledon final defeat on Saturday that she told Kate, the Princess of Wales, that "hugs are always welcome".

In a moving moment on Centre Court, the wife of the heir to the British throne, gave the tearful Tunisian a warm embrace as she handed her the runners-up trophy.

"She didn't know if she wants to give me a hug or not. I told her hugs are always welcome from me. That was a very nice moment and she's always nice to me," Jabeur said after losing a second successive Wimbledon final.

When asked what Princess Kate told her following the 6-4, 6-4 loss to Marketa Vondrousova, she said: "Same thing after last year.

"To encourage me to be strong, to come back and win a Grand Slam, win a Wimbledon. Obviously she was very nice."

Jabeur has now lost all three of the Grand Slam finals in which she has appeared, only the eighth woman to have suffered such a fate.

Lakshya Sen out of US Open

PTI ■ COUNCIL BLUFFS (US)

Ace Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen fought hard before going down in three games against reigning All England champion Li Shi Feng of China in the men's singles semi-finals of the US Open badminton tournament here.

A Commonwealth Games gold medallist, Lakshya, seeded third here, lost 17-21, 24-22, 17-21 against second-seed Feng in a gruelling last-four match that lasted one hour and 16 minutes in the BWF Super 300 event on Saturday night.

It was a close fight between world No. 7 Feng and Lakshya, ranked 12th, in the opening game till 17 points before the Chinese surged ahead with aggressive play as the Indian committed some unforced errors to take the lead.

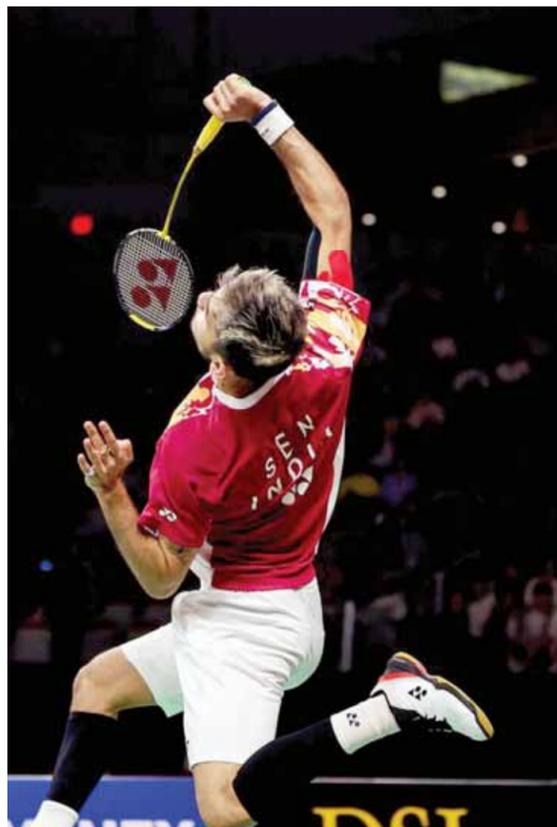
But world championships bronze medallist Lakshya was in no mood to give up without a fight and bounced back strongly in the second game.

Just like the opener, the second game too witnessed a tooth-and-nail fight between the two shuttlers as they looked in no mood to give an inch to each other.

Both the players were involved in long rallies and tried to outwit each other with a mix of clever drop shots and smashes but the battle continued till 22 points before Lakshya pocketed two straight points to draw level and take the match into decider.

The decider was a carbon copy of the first game as Feng took the early initiative to lead 11-8 at the break.

But Lakshya kept himself in the hunt till 17 points before his Chinese opponent pressed the



accelerator to pocket the game and the contest.

Lakshya, who enjoyed an 5-2 win-loss record against Feng com-

ing into the match, had defeated the Chinese 21-18, 22-20 to win the Canada Open, his second BWF Super 500 title last week.

Lionel Messi signs contract with Inter Miami

AFP ■ MIAMI

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi has signed a contract through the 2025 season with Inter Miami, the Major League Soccer team announced on Saturday.

The 36-year-old striker, who sparked Argentina to a World Cup title last year in Qatar, is set to be unveiled by the team in a Sunday ceremony and expected to join Inter Miami on the pitch by Friday.

"I'm very excited to start this next step in my career with Inter Miami and in the United States," Messi said in a statement.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner's arrival in Miami from Paris Saint-Germain has already caused a sensation and is expected to spark greater interest in the

game and MLS across the United States.

It's also hoped the long-time Barcelona talisman can revive the fortunes of a Miami squad at the bottom of the MLS Eastern Conference at 5-13 with three drawn.

"This is a fantastic opportunity and together we will continue to build this beautiful project," Messi said. "The idea is to work together to achieve the objectives we set and I'm very eager to start helping here in my new home."

Messi's debut match is planned for Friday when Inter Miami will host Cruz Azul in the Leagues Cup, a revamped competition between MLS and Mexican league squads.

It's the biggest boost for MLS since English star David

Beckham, now a co-owner of Inter Miami, joined the Los Angeles Galaxy in 2007. He launched the MLS Miami squad in 2020 after years of trying to find a stadium site.

"Ten years ago, when I started my journey to build a new team in Miami, I said that I dreamt of bringing the greatest players in the world to this amazing city, players who shared the ambition I had when I joined LA Galaxy to help grow football in the USA and to build a legacy for the next generation in this sport that we love so much," Beckham said in a statement.

'WORLD'S GREATEST'

Inter Miami head coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino has managed Messi in two separate



Maestro Messi captained the Albiceleste to victory at the 2021 Copa America as well as the Qatar World Cup and has records of 103 goals and 175 appearances for Argentina

prior stints -- with FC Barcelona in the 2013-14 campaign, winning the 2013 Spanish SuperCup, and from 2014-2016 with the Argentine national team.

Maestro Messi captained the Albiceleste to victory at the 2021 Copa America as well as the Qatar World Cup and has records of 103 goals and 175 appearances for Argentina.

"We're overjoyed that the greatest player in the world chose Inter Miami and Major League Soccer," MLS commissioner Don Garber said. "His decision is a testament to the momentum and energy behind our league and our sport in North America."

Messi is set for a glitzy arrival ceremony on Sunday at "The Unveil" with 18,000 expected to watch his first public

event with his new club, followed by his first training session on Tuesday.

"We made a promise to build an ambitious club that would attract the world's elite players," Inter Miami managing owner Jorge Mas said.

"A heartfelt thank you to our fans that never stopped believing. Together we will continue to turn dreams into reality."

With iconic Messi expected to be joined by Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets, the hope is Inter Miami can rise from a dormat to a champion.

"Lionel Messi is an incomparable talent," said Inter Miami sporting director Chris Henderson. "What he brings on and off the field will elevate everyone around him."

MARUFA, RABEYA HELP BANGLADESH CLINCH FIRST-EVER ODI WIN OVER INDIA

FIANS ■ DHAKA

Fine performances from fast-bowler Marufa Akter and leg-spinner Rabeya Khan helped Bangladesh clinch their first-ever ODI victory over India with a 40-run win in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on Sunday.

Electing to bowl first, debutant Amanjot took four wickets as India restricted Bangladesh to 152 in 43 overs, with the game being reduced to 44 overs a side due to a two-hour rain interruption.

In a chase of 154 according to the DLS method, Marufa struck twice at the start and middle overs respectively to pick 4-29 while Rabeya took 3-30 to bowl out India for just 113 in 35.3 overs.

For India, who suffered their first loss of the ICC Women's Championship cycle, they were hit hard by another disappointing showing from the batters on a slow and turning pitch. Smriti Mandhana began with two pulled fours through midwicket off Marufa. But the pacer bounced back by having Smriti chase a wide delivery and nick behind to the keeper, who made a dive to her left to complete the catch.

Priya Punia, who was playing in her first ODI since March 2021, fell after flicking against Marufa to mid-on, who dived forward to complete a good catch. India lost their third wicket in the first 10 overs when left-arm spinner Nahida Akter trapped captain



Harmanpreet Kaur lbw.

India's slide continued as Rabeya castled Yastika Bhatia and had Jemimah Rodrigues mistiming her pull to mid-on. Their hopes rested on Amanjot and Deepti Sharma, who stitched a 30-run partnership off 71 balls, investing a lot in strike rotation to get India back in the game.

Marufa was brought back in the attack in the 29th over and made her captain Nigar

Sultana's decision count by having Amanjot nick behind, with the all-rounder not happy and having a word with the umpire on his decision.

On the very next ball, Marufa castled Sneha Rana for a golden duck with an inswinging yorker, followed by Rabeya having Deepti pull straight to short mid-wicket to complete a team hat-trick as India went from 91/5 to 91/8. Soon after, Pooja Vastrakar nicked behind

off Sultana while Anusha Baredy was run-out to give Bangladesh one of their most forgettable days on the field.

Previously, the wet outfield caused a 20-minute delay in the toss, with the start time pushed by 10 minutes. Bangladesh had a horror start to their chase as a bad mix-up resulted in Sharmin Akter's run-out for a duck after playing 18 balls.

Amanjot had Murshida Khatun caught at mid-off in

the next over before Nigar and Fargana Hoque added 49 runs for the third wicket on either side of rain interruption. But after play resumed, Nigar and Fargana struggled to get going.

As a result, Fargana nicked behind off Amanjot, while Ritu Moni mistimed a pull-off leg-spin all-rounder Devika Vaidya to midwicket. Amanjot again provided the breakthrough for India by trapping Nigar lbw and completed her four-fer by

having Rabeya chip a catch to cover.

Sultana Khatun hit a few boundaries off Pooja to take Bangladesh past 100 before being castled by Devika. After Marufa was run-out by Devika, Bangladesh's innings ended at 152 with debutant Shorna Akter absent hurt. They were also aided by India bowling 19 wides as Bangladesh pulled off a stunning win, thanks to their young bowlers Marufa and Rabeya.

Bumrah To Make Comeback With Ireland Tour

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India pacer Jasprit Bumrah is close to regaining his full-fitness and is likely to make his highly-anticipated return to action next month during the tour of Ireland.

According to an Indian Express report, Bumrah, who underwent a back surgery in March and had resumed bowling last month after successfully undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, has been gradually increasing his workload.

The pacer is continuing his rehab program under the watchful eyes of NCA chief VVS Laxman and he is bowling full throttle at the nets, where he is bowling 8-10 overs.

While the selectors and the team management were looking to include Bumrah for the Asia Cup in September, the progression he has made in the last couple of weeks means he could travel to Ireland next month with a second-string India team. The decision on his travel would be taken in the coming days.

The report further said that Bumrah is being handled with extra care given the nature of injury he suffered and has missed the competitive cricket since last September.

"...Bumrah isn't showing any discomfort at the nets, where he is training on a daily basis. There are indications that Bumrah could even play a few practice matches at the NCA, where camps are underway," the report added.

The development comes as a big boost for the Indian crick-



et team ahead of major events such as the Asia Cup and the ICC ODI World Cup, the latter hosted by India in the months of October and November.

Meanwhile, another Indian pacer Prasidh Krishna, who underwent surgery for a lumbar stress fracture is recovering well and has resumed bowling. The 27-year-old pacer had missed the IPL 2023 with an injury and last featured in a competitive match in August 2022 in Zimbabwe. Since then he has been battling a stress fracture, which eventually ended up with him undergoing surgery.

As of now, Prasidh is not a certainty for the Ireland tour next month, he is in line to feature in the Asia Cup, which could boost India further.

On the other hand, Shreyas Iyer, who also underwent surgery for a recurring back injury has also resumed batting after completing his rehab. The KKR captain had missed the IPL 2023 after picking up the injury during the Tests against Australia last February-March. If he gets fit, Iyer could travel to Ireland.



Hanuma Vihari says he enjoys captaincy

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Hanuma Vihari has shown that captaincy sits lightly on him as he led South Zone to the Duleep Trophy title triumph, and sweetened the moment contributing with 105 runs in two innings.

The performance will definitely boost Vihari's credentials in his attempt to reclaim his lost spot in the Indian team. But for now, it is quite understandable that the right-hander termed the whole experience as an "enjoyable" one. "Ye a h! Definitely I enjoyed captaincy. When you have a team like that you will enjoy doing captaincy," said Vihari, who will turn out for Madhya Pradesh for the rest of the domestic season.

However, Vihari paid wholesome compliments to the bowling attack of South Zone.

"When you have this kind of bowling attack, captaincy pressure will come down. It was our plan to curtail them to below three runs (per over), and they executed it as the quality bowlers will make the captain's job really easy," said Vihari.

Vihari also reserved a spe-

cial word of praise for three Karnataka pacers, Vidwath Kaverappa, Vijayakumar Vyshak and Vasuki Koushik.

The troika grabbed 16 of the 20 West Zone wickets to have fallen in this match.

"All three Karnataka fast bowlers who played this match knew the wicket very well. I had said earlier as well that having bowlers who know the conditions is an advantage to us.

"But to be able to put it into use is another thing, all three of them showed their skills. The West Zone bowlers have a lot of quality on paper and to get them out needed special skills and they executed it really well," he said.

Vihari said the dismissal of Sarfaraz Khan late on the fourth evening was the turning point of the match.

"Yesterday in the third session, Priyank and Sarfaraz batted really well. His dismissal was the turning point, I thought.

"If Sarfaraz was there, he could have handled that spell of Vidwath and Koushik, and getting Sarfaraz's wicket in the last session was the turning point," said Vihari.

RCB review contracts of Hesson

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore may affect a revamp in their coaching staff as the franchise is reviewing the contract of director of cricket operations Mike Hesson and head coach Sanjay Bangar.

In general, the IPL coaching staff contracts are up for renewal in September, and the RCB indicated that their performance will be closely deliberated before arriving at a decision.

"Their contract with RCB is still intact. The team is still under the process of review. We will come back if any announcement is made," the franchise said in a statement.

Bangar and Hesson were not immediately available for reaction about the status of their contract with the RCB.

Hesson joined the Royal Challengers in 2019 after the club ended up beneath the pile that season. Bangar was promoted as head coach ahead of IPL 2022 after Simon Katich



decided to part ways with the club for personal reasons.

Even though RCB could not land an IPL title, they had a good run during the tenure of Hesson - first as coach and then as the director of cricket operations.

In his first season in charge in 2020, Hesson guided RCB to fourth in the league stage but they lost the Eliminator to the Sunrisers Hyderabad.

In the IPL 2021, RCB finished third in the table but

once again lost the Eliminator, this time to Kolkata Knight Riders.

In the following IPL, RCB were fourth in the league table but lost Qualifier 2 to Rajasthan Royals. However, they failed to enter the playoffs during the IPL 2023.

Hesson was also in charge of Royal Challengers Bangalore women team during the inaugural Women's Premier League. The Smriti Mandhana-led RCB finished fourth in the five-team league.

I have always found it very hard bowling to Warner: Stuart Broad



FIANS ■ MANCHESTER

Though Stuart Broad has dismissed David Warner 17 times in Test cricket, the veteran England fast-bowler feels that dominating in the battle against the left-handed opener hasn't been as easy as it looks.

In the third Ashes Test at Headingley, Broad got Warner out in both innings, taking the tally of him being dismissed by the pacer thrice in the series. The 37-year-old Broad had earlier dismissed Warner seven times in the 2019 Ashes series in England.

"A video was doing the rounds on social media last week showing all 17 of my Test dismissals of David Warner, including the two at Headingley. It explained the journey, because the early ones are all from over the wicket, and the later ones from round the wicket," wrote Broad in his column for Daily Mail on Sunday.

Broad also recalled how Ottis Gibson, who was serving as England's bowling coach during the 2015 Ashes, guided him to find a way to restrict left-handers like Warner from scoring freely against him.

"He used to sit back against me and hit me through the off side, and before the 2015 Ashes our bowling coach Ottis Gibson pointed out that my average was much higher against left-handers. The Aussie team that season was full of lefties, and Ottis said I'd be out of the team if I didn't find a way to bowl to them," the pacer wrote further.

"I spent four months practising round the wicket. I wanted to bring the stumps into play, while still threatening the outside edge. By the time I got to Trent Bridge eight years ago I bowled round the wicket all the time -- and picked up eight for 15.

The truth is I've always found it difficult bowling to Davey, and I still do. By going round the wicket I've tried to minimise the width he loves outside off stump, but also bowl a fuller length and make him play at 80 to 85 percent of deliveries," concluded Broad.

Australia are currently leading five-game Ashes 2-1, with the fourth Test starting on July 19 at Old Trafford, Manchester.

Gill's Selection Is Based On Favouritism: Prasad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Indian cricketer, Venkatesh Prasad slammed star Indian batter Shubman Gill over his recent performance in Test cricket. He even said that Gill's selection is not based on performance but on favouritism.

Shubman Gill had a dismal outing in the 1st Test match against West Indies as he got out after scoring just 6 runs. The young batter has not played an impressive Test knock outside Asia lately and has been on the receiving end of criticism.

"I have a lot of regard for Shubman Gill's talent and ability, but sadly his performances have been well below par. A test average of 30 after 30 Innings in international cricket is ordinary. Can't think of many who have been given so many chances," wrote Venkatesh Prasad on his official Twitter handle.

"When there are so many waiting in the wings & in top form. Shaw is in sublime form, Sharfraz has been scoring tons in FC cricket and many who deserve a chance ahead of Gill. Some are just lucky to be given chances endlessly till they succeed while some aren't allowed to.

"Gill's selection is not based on performance but favouritism. Has been consistently inconsistent. One of the reasons why many ex-cricketers aren't vocal despite seeing such favouritism..." added Venkatesh Prasad.

Shubman Gill's Underwhelming Outing In Test Cricket

Shubman Gill has played 17 Test matches



and has scored 927 runs with an average of 32. The batter has an average of 65.5 in ODIs and 40.4 in T20Is. In comparison to these, his outing in Test has been quite underwhelming.

The batter has not crossed the 20-run mark in his last 6 Test matches played outside the Asian sub-continent. Venkatesh Prasad is known for openly criticising Indian cricketers over their disappointing performances, KL Rahul has been on the receiving end of it for quite some time too.z

SL fights back to reach 242-6 at stumps Pak

AP ■ NEW DELHI

Sri Lanka staged a fightback after being reduced to 54-4 in the first session and reached 242-6 at stumps on day one of the first test against Pakistan at the Galle International Stadium on Sunday.

Only 65.4 overs of the scheduled 90 were possible due to rain and play will get underway early on day two in a bid to make up for the lost time.

Vice-captain Dhananjaya de Silva put on an inspired show as he posted a back to the wall 94 and more importantly shared two crucial partnerships to help Sri Lanka recover.

De Silva was scheduled to bat at No. 6 wouldn't have expected to be called upon in the first session of the game but found himself doing just that after Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah bowled terrific spells with the new ball.

Afridi hadn't played any test cricket after hurting his knee in July last year and on his comeback accounted for three top-order wickets to peg Sri Lanka back. Naseem also troubled the batsmen with genuine pace and was unlucky not to pick up more than one wicket.

Afridi became the 19th Pakistan player and the fourth quickest among fast bowlers from his country to the 100-wicket milestone when he had



opening batsman Nishan Madushka caught behind.

After the early damage by the seamers, de Silva added 131 runs with Angelo Mathews for the fifth wicket.

Mathews looked uncomfortable against pace earlier on in his innings but once the spin came on he settled down and went on to post his 39th test half-century. He was dismissed for 64 when he nicked one to the wicketkeeper off

the bowling of leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed.

De Silva was then involved in a 57-run stand with Sadeera Samarawickrama for the sixth wicket. The wicketkeeper was dismissed in the last over of the day for 36.

De Silva dominated the spinners and used his feet to smash nine fours and three sixes during his entertaining 94 that came off 133 deliveries.

Pakistan had picked three

spinners but they proved expensive and sent down too many loose balls easing the pressure that the fast bowlers had created. Naseem and Afridi were called back for second spells but were not as dangerous with an old ball.

The match is both teams' opening game of the World Test Championship.

The second test will be played at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club ground starting on July 24.