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MEN NOT DOGS ARE
REAL KILLERS

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CHINA BIGGEST GLOBAL JAILER
OF JOURNALISTS: PRESS GROUP

MONEY 10
INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES
RISE TO 4588.78 BN

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5 elite commandos martyred in Rajouri

Manhunt on to track foreign ultras who fled into thick forest

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In one of the deadliest attacks, coinciding with the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), five elite commandos of Para Special forces were "killed in action" by a well entrenched group of heavily armed terrorists, possibly trained in guerilla warfare, in the thickly forested belt of Kotranka in the frontier district of Rajouri on Friday.

One of the senior Army officers, who received critical injuries during an explosion triggered by the terrorists, was airlifted and is undergoing specialised treatment at a military command hospital in Udhampur. His condition is stated to be "stable" till the time of filing the report.

Earlier, on April 20, five Indian soldiers were killed in action after a group of terror-



Security personnel near the site of an encounter with terrorists in Kandri area of Rajouri district on Friday

ists ambushed an Army truck in Bhatta Durrian area of Poonch. It is suspected the same group of foreign terrorists, hiding in the thickly forested areas of Rajouri and Poonch, were behind the deadly attack.

It is after a gap of almost three long years that the elite para commandos suffered heavy casualties during counter-terrorism operations in Jammu & Kashmir.

A group of five commandos were martyred in the Keran sector of Kupwara on April 5, 2020 while foiling a major infiltration bid. Five terrorists

were neutralised in the hand to hand combat by the elite commandos. Similarly, on February 22, 2016, two officers of the Para Unit along with one para commando had attained martyrdom while neutralising holed up terrorists inside the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) in Pampore.

According to the ground reports the group of terrorists vanished inside the deep forests after triggering an explosion thereby causing heavy army casualties.

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Bilawal spokesperson of terror: EAM

Victims of terrorism don't sit together with perpetrators of terrorism, says Jaishankar

PNS/ AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/ BENAULIM (GOA)

Reiterating India's stand that terrorism and talks can't go together, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday ruled out bilateral talks with his Pakistani counterpart on the sideline of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' meeting. He said, "Victims of terrorism do not sit together with perpetrators of terrorism to discuss terrorism."

Jaishankar termed Pakistan foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari a "promoter, justifier and spokesperson" of the terrorism industry, and said his position on the menace was called out at the SCO meeting on Friday.

Addressing the conclave, Jaishankar said "Taking our eyes off the menace would be detrimental to our security interests. We firmly believe that there can be no justification for terrorism and it must be stopped in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism."

"The channel of finances for terrorist activities must be seized and blocked without distinction. Members need not be reminded that combating terrorism is one of the original mandates of the SCO," he added in an apparent reference to Pakistan.

Chairing the meet, he said India firmly believes that there can be no justification for terrorism and

noted that combating the menace is one of the original mandates of the SCO.

Bilawal was present when Jaishankar underlined the challenges posed by scourge of terrorism at the two-day SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting.

Jaishankar also underlined that while connectivity is key to progress, it must come with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all member states. It was in apparent reference to China. Its foreign minister Qin Gang was also present at the conclave.

The meeting at a luxury hotel in this beach resort was attended by Qin Gang, Russia's Sergey Lavrov and their counterparts from other SCO member nations.

In his remarks, Bilawal said the "collective security of our peoples is our joint responsibility."

"Terrorism continues to threaten global security. Let's not get caught up in weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring. When I speak on this topic, I do so not only as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan whose people have suffered the most in terms of number of attacks and number of casualties. I also speak as the son whose mother was assassinated at the hands of terrorists," the Pakistan foreign minister said. Former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated by a suicide bomber in Rawalpindi in 2007.

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External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' meeting in Goa on Friday

Pak's Kashmir rant: Bilawal says no talks till Article 370 restored

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Given the frosty ties between the two countries, Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari said on Friday unless India reviews abrogation of Article 370 giving special status to Jammu & Kashmir, "Pakistan is not in a position to engage bilaterally with India."

He was in Goa to attend the two-day SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting which started on Thursday.

Replying to a question on why there had been no talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar during his visit, he

said, "Unless India reviews the action it took on August 5, 2019 (abrogation of Article 370), Pakistan is not in a position to engage bilaterally with India".

He added, "As far as Pakistan's position on bilateral relations with India or any meaningful engagement or dialogue with my Indian counterpart, our position remains unchanged."

The Pakistani foreign minister said the country wishes to quell terrorism "not because India said it or the Indian government said so, but because we want to end this menace".

"Pakistan has suffered the

most. I myself am a victim of terrorism, so Pakistan and myself are wholly committed to combating this menace," Bilawal said in an exclusive interview with *India Today*.

Speaking on India's stance that it will not engage in bilateral talks with Pakistan unless the latter controls cross-border terrorism and stops alleged funding of terror outfits, Bilawal Bhutto stated, "As far as accusations are concerned, we are willing to engage any concerns that India might have but India will also have to address our concerns."

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CAPSULE

SPORADIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR; 13K RESCUED

Imphal: The Imphal Valley in Manipur which remained peaceful for most of Friday witnessed sporadic clashes later in the day as more security forces were rushed in from other States to calm down a State which had witnessed bloody ethnic rioting over the last 48 hours. A Defence spokesperson said a total of 13,000 people were rescued and shifted to safe shelters, some in Army camps as the Army brought Churachandpur, Moreh, Kakching and Kangpokpi under its "firm control".

TAJPURIYA MURDER IN JAIL: 7 STAFF SUSPENDED

New Delhi: The Delhi Prisons Department on Friday suspended seven staff members of Tihar Jail in connection with the fatal stabbing of gangster Tiltu Tajpuriya on the premises. Tajpuriya was killed early on Tuesday by four members of the rival Gogi gang — Deepak alias Titar, Yogesh, alias Tunda, Rajesh, and Riyaz Khan — who stabbed him "92 times".

6 OF FAMILY SHOT DEAD IN REVENGE KILLING

Morena: Six members of a family, including three women, were shot dead and three others were injured on Friday in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district in a revenge killing. Police have identified eight killers. The victims' relatives have been accused of killing the family members of today's alleged killers, police said.

Pawar back at NCP helm, but insists on hunt for successor



Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar, with party leaders, addresses the media at the YB Chavan Centre in Mumbai on Friday

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an anti-climax to nearly 80-hour-long high-voltage drama that had unfolded after he declared that he was stepping down from his post, Sharad Pawar on Friday took back his earlier decision and said he would continue as the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president, thus restoring normalcy within his party.

Pawar said though he had decided to continue as the NCP chief, he considered it essential to develop someone as his successor who could accept any post or take up any responsibility within the party.

Within hours after a

search-committee appointed to look for a successor to him rejected his resignation and requested him to continue in the post, Pawar said, "Having been in active politics for 63 long years, I had decided to give up political responsibilities. But the announcement I had made on May 2 plunged the party into turmoil and it resulted in unrest in the rank and file of the party. Countless party workers, leaders, office bearers and well-wishers rallied together and requested me to reconsider my decision. Even leaders from various political parties insisted that I re-accept the party chief's post."

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Khalistanis vandalise Swaminarayan temple in Oz

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/ MELBOURNE

Days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sydney to attend the Quad Summit on May 24, alleged Khalistanis on Friday vandalised a prominent Hindu temple there.

Earlier this year, three Hindu temples in Melbourne and two temples in Brisbane were targeted by the so-called Khalistan supporters residing in the country.

In the latest incident in Sydney, the perpetrators defaced the temple with anti-India graffiti on the walls.

The incident took place at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Rosehill.

Reporting about the incident, the *Australia Today* newspaper said temple authorities also found a Khalistani flag hanging on the gate, and reported the matter to New South Wales (NSW) police.

Continued on Page 2

Cong backs terror groups, says Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping up his relentless attack on the Congress amid intense campaigning for the Karnataka Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked "The Kerala Story" movie at a public rally in the north-east part of the State on Friday to accuse the Congress of having a "backdoor understanding" with terror groups and standing with them.

Modi alleged the Congress has nurtured, given shelter and surrendered before terror for the sake of vote bank politics.

At Tumakuru in the east-central part of the Mysuru rally, Modi said, "The BJP is returning to power in Karnataka with a thumping majority."

Addressing a public rally in Bellary, Modi alleged that the Congress had opposed the film "The Kerala Story", which, according to him, exposes a terrorist conspiracy. He further



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets the crowd during a roadshow ahead of the Karnataka Assembly elections, in Tumakuru, on Friday

claimed the Congress was backing individuals who support terrorism by attempting to ban the film.

The Hindi film "The Kerala Story" directed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah depicts the story of three women from Kerala who are said to have

been converted to Islam and made to join the extremist ISIS.

A petition to ban the film was rejected by the Kerala High Court on Friday asserting that "secular Kerala society will accept the film for what it is".

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Modi guest of honour at French National Day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Signifying strong bilateral ties between the two countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend this year's Bastille Day Parade, France's National Day, in Paris as the guest of honour on July 14, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Friday.

An Indian Armed forces contingent will also participate in the parade along with their French counterparts, it said.

Reacting to the announcement, French President Emmanuel Macron in a tweet in French and Hindi said, "Dear Narendra, it will be my pleasure to welcome you to Paris as the guest of honour for the 14th of July parade."

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, Modi has accepted Macron's invitation to attend this year's Bastille Day Parade as the guest of honour, the MEA statement said.

Continued on Page 2

Friday namaz calls for clean Yamuna

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After Hindu priests' espousal of the "green" cause, the imams of several mosques located alongside the Yamuna on Friday during khutba (prayers) urged their community members to ensure cleanliness of the Yamuna river.

For the last few days, Hindu priests of major temples situated along the banks of the Yamuna have taken initiatives, sensitising Delhiites not to dispose of waste items like clothes, old idols, calendars, posters, flowers among others in the river.

Efforts to clean the river are being carried out through wide-ranging awareness campaigns, including discour-

aging people from throwing waste into it.

The imams reminded their community members that Islam gives primacy to cleanliness — of the mind, soul, body, house, neighbourhood and water bodies like rivers and canals.

"If the Yamuna river is clean, it is good for Muslims as they perform ablution in the river itself and offer namaz (prayers)," they said.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) VK Saxena had launched the Yamuna cleanliness drive on February 16 and after inspecting cleaning work at the Qudsia Ghat, he had said that the target is to rejuvenate the Delhi stretch of the river by June 30.



"The recent efforts by the L-G towards cleaning and rejuvenation of the Yamuna have begun to show visible and concrete results," said Muslim clerics after Friday namaz at

mosques in Dwarka, Rohini, Darya Ganj and Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin.

"Even as critical steps to clean the Najafgarh drain and restore the Yamuna floodplains

have been going on in the right earnest, efforts at preventing disposal of physical waste into the river have started bearing results," they noted.

In view of the extreme importance of public participation in the Yamuna rejuvenation efforts, it has been decided to undertake wide ranging awareness generation and motivational IEC (information, education and communication) campaigns on various media platforms.

Various macro and micro-level steps have been taken by a high-level committee chaired by the L-G, formed at the direction of National Green Tribunal, that have begun showing results in the shape of relatively improved pollution

levels in the Yamuna where the Najafgarh drain empties into the river, the L-G office had earlier said.

Trapping of sub-drains flowing into the Najafgarh drain, restoration of floodplains at Kudasia Ghat, Asita East, Baansera and the stretch between Bela Farm and Garhi Mandu, are other initiatives for rejuvenation of the river and its floodplain. Earlier this week, Saxena inspected the 11-km Signature Bridge-ITO Barrage stretch of the Yamuna on a boat and said he was exploring the chances of starting boat rides on the 22-km stretch in the future. He was accompanied by Delhi Government officials, mediapersons and NDRF teams in over twenty-five boats.

Demands met, wrestlers should let probe take its course, says Anurag

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Friday urged the wrestlers protesting in Delhi to let an unbiased probe be completed by Delhi Police as all their demands have been fulfilled.

"It is my request to all the sports persons who are agitating there that whatever their demands were, they were met. Court has also given its directions and they should let an unbiased probe be completed. Delhi Police will do 'doodh ka doodh pani ka pani' and take strict action as per law," Thakur told reporters here.

Several wrestlers have been



Bajrang Punia takes a selfie with kids during the protest at Jantar Mantar on Friday

protesting at Jantar Mantar since April 23 with a demand that the findings of a committee which was formed to probe sexual harassment charges against WFI chief Brijbhushan Sharan Singh be made public.

17 IAF flights, 5 sorties of Navy ships rescue Indians from Sudan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday wrapped up 'Operation Kaveri', launched to rescue its nationals stranded in crisis-hit Sudan, with the transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force making its final flight to bring 47 passengers home.

India launched Operation Kaveri on April 24 to evacuate its nationals from Sudan, which has witnessed deadly fighting between the country's army and a paramilitary group.

With the arrival of the Indian Air Force C130 flight on Friday, 3,862 people have been moved out of Sudan through Operation Kaveri, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said.

The Indian Air Force operated 17 flights and the Indian Navy ships carried out five sor-



ties to move Indians from Port Sudan to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, he said.

Jaishankar said 86 Indians were evacuated through countries bordering Sudan.

"The flight from Wadi Sayyidna which was executed at great risk also deserves recognition," he said, adding that air force and commercial

flights were pressed into service to bring people home from Jeddah.

Jaishankar also expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for hosting Indians rescued from Sudan and facilitating the evacuation process. He also appreciated the support of Chad, Egypt, France, South Sudan, the UAE, the UK, the US and the United Nations.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of all Indians abroad was our inspiration," he said.

Jaishankar also lauded Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan, who was present in Saudi Arabia to oversee the rescue efforts.

Muraleedharan's presence on the ground was a source of

strength and reassurance, he said.

The Indian Embassy in Riyadh also announced closure of the transit facility created at the International Indian School in Jeddah for evacuees from Sudan.

The facility provided comfort to more than 3,500 evacuees and served as a nerve centre for planning their onward movement to India, the embassy said on Twitter.

"Applaud the spirit, perseverance and courage of all those involved in Operation Kaveri. Our embassy in Khartoum (Sudan) showed exceptional dedication in this difficult time. Efforts by Team India stationed in Saudi Arabia and MEA Rapid Response Cell coordinating in India were commendable," Jaishankar said.

6 of family shot on return to Chambal village after 10 yrs in revenge killing

PTI ■ MORENA

Six members of a family, including three women, were shot dead on Friday after they returned to their village in a Chambal village in Morena district after a decade.

The assailants, who apparently blamed the victims' relations for the murder of some people in their family in the past, were waiting for them, a woman who survived the bloodbath told reporters.

The killings took place around 10 am at Lepa village, about 60 km from the district headquarters. The village adjoins Bhidosa, the birthplace of athlete-turned-dacoit Paan Singh Tomar.

Three of the victims died on the spot while others succumbed while being rushed to the district hospital, Inspector

General of Police (Chambal Zone) S Saxena told PTI over phone. Three others were injured and are undergoing treatment, he added.

Additional Superintendent of Police Rai Singh Narwariya identified the deceased as Gajendra Singh (55), Sanju (40), Satyaprakash (35), Les Kumari (46), Babli Tomar (age not known), and Madhu Kumari (36).

IGP Saxena said that police have identified eight persons allegedly involved in the murder and a case has been registered against them.

Kusuma Tomar, who lost her husband, two sons and three daughters-in-law in the attack, told reporters that their family had had a dispute with the accused in 2013 over a piece of government land.

"Two members of their

family were killed back then. We had nothing to do with the killings, but the names of our family members were dragged in the case," she said.

"Later a compromise deal was struck between them and our family in jail. We gave them Rs 6 lakh as compensation and transferred our land in their name," she added.

On Friday morning, when Kusuma and others returned to the village from Ahmedabad after ten years, the killers were waiting for them, she said.

"The police arrived on the scene after two hours," she claimed. Notably, in the case of Paan Singh Tomar, whose story became the subject of an acclaimed Bollywood film starring Irrfan Khan, a land dispute was what apparently triggered his tragic descent into the world of crime.

Rajouri attack: BJYM holds anti-Pakistan protests

PTI ■ JAMMU

The Bhartiya Janta Yuva Morcha (BJYM) on Friday held anti-Pakistan protests here following the death of five soldiers in an explosion triggered by militants during an anti-terror operation in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district.

The explosion took place in the thickly forested Kandi area in Rajouri where the operation is underway to flush out the terrorists. Led by BJYM's North Jammu president, Rajat Singh Manhas, scores of the outfit's members held anti-Pakistan protests in the Janipur area.

Manhas said the central government should carry out operations in the hilly areas of Rajouri and Poonch to flush out terrorists and their supporters.

Khalistanis vandalise...

From Page 1

Incidentally, Prime Minister Modi is likely to attend a reception organised in his honour by the Indian Diaspora on May 23 in Sydney.

"We are deeply saddened by the anti-India graffiti on the walls of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Rosehill, Sydney by anti-social elements," the temple said in a statement.

"We are further disheartened that BAPS temples in Australia have been targeted. For the last 23 years, the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir has been a cornerstone of the local community and a prominent Hindu Temple which, like all BAPS temples worldwide, is an abode of peace and harmony, equality, selfless service and universal Hindu values," it said.

Member of Parliament for Parramatta Andrew Charlton reached the BAPS Temple as soon as he was informed of the Hindu hate incident, the Australia Today newspaper reported. Charlton along with temple authorities helped to repaint the wall.

"This morning, the BAPS temple in my electorate of Parramatta was vandalised by religious extremists. I am deeply shocked and saddened by this act of mindless vandalism. Everyone in Australia has the right to practice their faith in peace," he was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

"At this time, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha prays for peace and unity and has

appealed to all devotees and well-wishers in the community to maintain peace.

We are thankful to the local police command, the Department of Home Affairs, State and Federal Members of Parliament, the Indian High Commission and the Consul General of Sydney for their continued support," the temple said.

"BAPS temples across Australia are symbols of a thriving multicultural society that nurture Australian values of respect, mateship and tolerance. We request everyone to join in worldwide prayers that God blesses and guides us all to continue to do good and think good of all," it said. "Officers from Cumberland Police Area Command have commenced an investigation following reports of malicious damage to a religious site in Rosehill," NSW Police spokesperson said in a statement. "Police are conducting inquiries into the circumstances surrounding the incident." Earlier this year three Hindu Temples in Melbourne and two Hindu Temples in Brisbane were vandalised by Khalistan supporters.

In March, during Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to India, Modi raised the issue of frequent attacks on Hindu temples with him and conveyed his concerns. Albanese assured Modi that Australia will not tolerate attacks on religious places and that anyone responsible for such activities will face the "full force of the law".

5 elite commandos...

From Page 1

Additional reinforcements were rushed to the area to launch a massive manhunt to track down the footprints of the terrorists. Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh along with Additional DGP Mukesh Singh, visited the thick forest belt during the day long operations in the area.

Meanwhile, in a written statement Indian Army said, "Indian Army columns have been conducting relentless intelligence based operations to

flush out a group of terrorists involved in an ambush on an army truck in Tota Gali area of Bhata Dhurian in Jammu region on April 20. Five Indian soldiers had sacrificed their lives in the terror attack.

According to a statement of the Indian Army, "a joint operation was launched on May 3, 2023 on the basis of specific information about the presence of terrorists in the Kandi Forest belt in Rajouri sector. At about 7.30 am on May 5, 2023, a search team established contact with a group of terrorists

well entrenched in a cave. The area is thickly vegetated with rocky and steep cliffs. The terrorists triggered an explosive device in retaliation. The Army team has suffered two fatal casualties with injuries to four more soldiers including an officer."

Later in the day, a Defence spokesman in Jammu confirmed out of four injured soldiers, three of them succumbed to their injuries in the command hospital, Udampur.

List of Martyred soldiers

1. L/Nk Ruchin Singh

Cong backs...

From Page 1

In his address, Modi sought to draw the attention of the public to the film saying "The Kerala Story" has exposed the terror conspiracies and sought people in Karnataka to be 'wary' of the Congress which as 'Congress is standing with such terror elements'.

"There was a lot of discussion about The Kerala Story, which discusses ploys to make the country hollow from within. They say The Kerala Story is based on the terrorist plots in just one State. Such a beautiful State, where people are hard working and talented. The Kerala Story has exposed the terror conspiracies. But look at the misfortune of the country, the Congress

today is standing with such terror elements that have destroyed the nation. Not only that, the Congress is having a backdoor understanding and deals with such elements. People of the State should be wary of the Congress," the Prime Minister said.

Modi said when many big nations were not keen on evicting their citizens from war-hit Sudan, India deployed its Army and Navy to evict its citizens under Operation Kaveri.

"We brought back our Indian brothers and sisters from areas where even aircraft could not land. Yet, in such challenging times, the Congress did not stand with the country," he said, accusing leaders of the Opposition party of trying to expose Indian citizens to the

warring factions in Sudan."

The Prime Minister said this was done to jeopardise the operation and thereby reap electoral dividends in Karnataka. "But they forgot that Modi is here. That this Modi will cross all limits if our citizens are in danger," he said. Modi said the Congress had corrupted politics in the State and that the party was using money power and "its ecosystem" to set a false narrative to win the elections.

While the BJP manifesto set a roadmap to make Karnataka "number one" state in the country, the Congress's manifesto was a document of appeasement, he alleged.

"Their manifesto says that we will stop this, repeat that... This is their focus," he said in the backdrop of the Congress's promise in its manifesto to ban 'Bajrang dal' and give back Muslims their four per cent quota deleted by the BJP's Bommai Government recently.

Pak's Kashmir...

From Page 1

"India will have to explain what Kulbhushan Jadhav — a state actor, a navy commander, was doing in Pakistan carrying out terrorist attacks on Pakistani soil. Does that not come under cross-border terrorism?," he asked.

Kulbhushan Jadhav is a retired Indian Navy officer who was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

Bhutto also mentioned the 2007 Samjhauta Express bombing where around 70 people, reportedly mostly Pakistanis, were killed. He also said "We are yet to see any justice."

Pawar back at NCP...

From Page 1

Addressing a crowded news conference at the YB Chavan Centre in south Mumbai, Pawar said, "I am overwhelmed with the love, trust and faith bestowed in me. I can ill-afford not to honour these overwhelming sentiments that I should continue in the post. In view of the requests I received and the resolution by the party's search committee rejecting my resignation and asking me to continue in the post, I have decided to roll back my decision to resign from the NCP chief's post."

With Pawar's announcement to continue as the NCP chief, the curtain has come down on an unprecedented drama witnessed within the party after Pawar announced his decision to step down as the president of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), a party he founded and built brick by brick after breaking away from the Congress as a rebel leader in 1999 and remained in the post for the past 24 years.

After Pawar's announcement, hundreds of party workers had gone on a spontaneous agitation demanding the NCP chief to take back his resignation and continue in his post. While party leaders met him on several occasions and tried to convince him to continue in the post, the search committee appointed by the NCP chief on Friday rejected Pawar's decision and asked him to continue in the post.

Thursday's development helped regain full control over the party set up — especially after the intense speculation that his

nephew and current leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Ajit Pawar might switch sides and join the ruling BJP along with a group of MLAs supporting him.

Pawar's return as the NCP chief has put paid to the possibility of Ajit dada, as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles, indulging in misadventure like he did in November 2019 when he teamed up with BJP leader Devendra Fadnis to form an eighty-hour-long Government in Maharashtra.

No wonder that immediately after he resumed his office as the NCP chief, Pawar announced his plans to make major organisational changes and develop new leadership within the party. "In the coming days, I will concentrate on bringing about organisational changes, developing new leadership and taking the party's aims and ideologies to the people in a big way," he said.

Replying to an Ajit Pawar-related query, Pawar revealed that he had dropped hints to his nephew about his plans to step down as the party's chief. Queried about Ajitdada's reported move to quit the NCP, Sr Pawar said, "We cannot stop those who wish to quit."

Pawar asked the party workers to prepare hard for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "The 2024 Lok Sabha polls are extremely crucial. The Maha Vikas Aghadi should win as many seats as possible in the polls. Some surveys have predicted that the MVA will win 30 out of 48 Lok Sabha seats in the state. We should work hard and win as many seats as possible."

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is known to all that the original Provisional Allotment Letter, Number Allotment Letter, Possession Certificate and HPTA of my Residential Flat No.05 (Ground Floor), Pocket/Block-7/25, Sector-82, NOIDA, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar-U.P. has been misplaced/lost anywhere on dt.13.04.2022 and could not be traced till date and I had already lodged the complaint for the same before Police Station, Crime Branch, Delhi, bearing LR No. 345394/2022 dt.26.04.2022. If the said documents are found, I shall never misuse the same.

Atima Mehrotra W/o Sh. Neeraj Mehrotra, R/o Flat No.05, Pkt/Block-7/25, Sector-82, Noida.



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I, Rajiya W/o Mohd. Salim R/o H.no-139-D, Savitri Nagar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017 have declare that I have changed my name from Sushama Singh to Rajiya After my marriage for all future purpose.

PD(026)C

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PD(027)C

Modi guest of honour at French National Day

From Page 1

Modi's visit is expected to herald the next phase of the India-France strategic partnership by setting new and ambitious goals for strategic, cultural, scientific, academic and economic cooperation, including in a wide range of industries, the MEA said.

India and France have a shared vision on peace and secu-

riety, especially in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, and uphold the objectives and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which are also the basis of their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, it said.

"This historic visit will also deliver common initiatives in order to respond to the key challenges of our time, including climate change, biodiversity loss and the achievement of

Sustainable Development Goals, and will be an opportunity for India and France to reaffirm their commitment to multilateralism, including in the context of India's G20 presidency," the statement said. The French Embassy here said, also called Bastille Day, July 14 is France's National Day. It is a day on which the French people celebrate the values of "liberty, equality, fraternity". The celebrations are

marked by a military parade on Paris' most iconic avenue, the Champs-Elysées. This is the second time that a Prime Minister of India will be the guest of honour for July 14, after Manmohan Singh in 2009. Modi's visit this year bears special significance since France and India are celebrating the 25th anniversary of our strategic partnership, launched in 1998. A contingent of troops from the Indian Armed

forces will march down the Champs-Elysées with French troops, reflecting the solidarity, trust, and exceptionally close ties between our two countries.

Indeed, this visit will provide a historic opportunity to celebrate our joint achievements of the last 25 years, and set our common ambitions for the next 25 years in all areas.

France and India are committed to further strengthening

our partnership, to contribute to peace and security, especially in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, make our nations stronger, and advance common initiatives to face the main challenges of our time.

Since 1880, July 14 has been marked as France's National Day. Its significance dates back to the French Revolution of 1789: the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, and the Fête de

la Fédération celebrating the unity of the French people on July 14, 1790.

The high point of the celebrations is the military parade on avenue des Champs-Elysées and the flypast in the skies of Paris. France does not systematically invite heads of State or Government as chief guest at the Bastille Day parade. Such invitations are extended on few occasions, it said.

Bilawal spokesperson of terror: EAM

From Page 1

Bhutto-Zardari said he and his country are firmly committed to be part of regional and global efforts for eradicating terrorism. "This requires not only a comprehensive approach but also a collective approach. It demands we address the root causes as well as the threats posed by specific groups. It requires that we let this challenge unite us to fight it rather than divide us to become its victim. Our success requires us to isolate this issue from geopolitical partisanship," he added.

Jaishankar also delved into the situation in Afghanistan and the impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic as well as the consequences of geo-political upheavals that impacted supplies of energy, food and fertilisers.

On Afghanistan, he said the unfolding situation in that country remains at "centre of our attention. Our efforts should be directed towards the welfare of the Afghan people. Our immediate priorities include providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring a truly inclusive and representative government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities."

Jaishankar noted that current crises facing the world have exposed a credibility and trust deficit in the ability of

global institutions to manage challenges in a timely and effective manner. He said reform and modernisation of the SCO will aid a more contemporary outlook which India will actively support.

The external affairs minister also noted the progress for the admission of Iran and Belarus as full member states of the SCO. He also said constructive steps are being taken to make English the third official language of SCO. Currently, Chinese and Russian are the two official languages of the SCO.

In his address, the Pakistan foreign minister, talking about the challenge of terrorism, also said that practical and pragmatic solutions

exist to put an end to "this chapter once and for all".

"We must stop conflating non-state actors with state actors. Condemn all forms of terrorism including state sponsored terrorism," he added.

Bhutto-Zardari also called upon "interim Afghan authorities" to uphold their commitments on not allowing the use of Afghan soil for terrorism.

The Pakistan foreign minister also made a special mention of the "commendable role" China has recently played in bridging differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

"We must ensure respect for these universally recognised principles within the SCO. Unilateral and illegal

measures by States in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions run counter to the SCO objectives," he said.

"We need to be unambiguous in keeping our commitments and charting out a new future for our people. One that is not based on conflict preservation but on conflict resolution," he said.

After the SCO meet was over, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted "The SCO Council of Foreign Ministers chaired by EAM Dr S Jaishankar concludes. Members discussed the preparations for the upcoming SCO Summit in India and global and regional situations.

Combating terrorism, expansion and reform of the organisation was also on the agenda."

The SCO summit will be held in New Delhi in July and chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin are likely to attend the high-profile event where 15 decisions will be ratified. The SCO Foreign Ministers' meet in Goa discussed these proposed decisions related to trade and other issues concerning the region.

The SCO is an influential economic and security bloc and has emerged as one of the largest trans-regional international organisations. It was

founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan became its permanent members in 2017.

India was made an observer at the SCO in 2005 and has generally participated in the ministerial-level meetings of the grouping, which focus mainly on security and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.

India has shown a keen interest in deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.

7 Tihar staff suspended over Tajpuriya's murder in prison

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Prisons Department on Friday suspended seven staff members of Tihar Jail in connection with the fatal stabbing of gangster Tillu Tajpuriya on the premises, officials said.

Tajpuriya was killed early Tuesday allegedly by four members of the rival Gogi gang — Deepak alias Titar, Yogesh alias Tunda, Rajesh, and Riyaz Khan — who stabbed him "92 times".

A senior prisons official said they conducted a departmental enquiry in the incident.

"The report was received on Friday and lapses were found on the part of nine staff members. Out of them, seven — three assistant superintendents and four warders — have been suspended. We had a meeting with Tamil Nadu Special Police force officials and they have also agreed to take departmental action against their personnel," the officer said.

The Tamil Nadu Special Police provides security on the jail premises.

A fresh CCTV video from Tihar Jail emerged on social media purportedly showing that Tajpuriya was attacked in front of security personnel as well when they were carrying him away after he was stabbed.



Tillu Tajpuriya File photo

Tajpuriya was assaulted with improvised weapons by the Gogi gang members inside the high security prison Tuesday morning. But he was still alive and was being carried away by the prison security personnel when the accused attacked him for a second time, according to the fresh CCTV footage.

The fresh footage shows security personnel were in a corridor when the accused barged in through the door and again attacked Tajpuriya. He could be seen moving his leg in the video, confirming he was alive at that time. In the footage, it appears the security personnel remained a bystander while the assailants keep attacking the gangster.

DG Tihar today met LG VK Saxena and presented a detailed report on the Tihar incident, said LG house sources.

Increased indiscipline leads to such killings: Former prison official

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

There were scuffles between jail inmates earlier too but the level of indiscipline has increased now leading to fatal attacks, primarily because of incompetent officers, untrained personnel and government apathy, a former official said on Friday, after two gangsters were killed inside the Tihar jail.

"The current state of affairs shows the (prison) management is going downhill, and unless drastic changes are made to the staff structure and overall functioning of the prison, such instances are here to stay," former public relations officer of the Delhi Prisons Department Sunil Gupta said. Gupta, now an author and expert in prison administration, pitched for a training school for jail staffers and the appointment of officers in uniform, instead of civil officers, to higher posts.

Gangster Tillu Tajpuriya was stabbed to death by four

rival gang members inside the Tihar jail early Tuesday. Tajpuriya's gruesome killing — he was stabbed "92 times" using improvised weapons cut from iron grille — came less than a month after another gangster, Prince Tewatia, was killed inside the high-security prison by members of a rival gang. Gupta said, "While negligence has always been there, one of the most pressing problems that, in my view, has led to the present situation is the deputation of incompetent officers at commanding posts. What Tihar needs right now are young and energetic officers."

"A majority of the jail staff are DANICS (Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands Civil Services) officers. Instead of fresh recruits, promotee DANICS personnel are deputed, which leads to maladministration as they do not possess the requisite competence and expertise to handle jail affairs", he said.

City got 200% pre-monsoon rain

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi has received over 200 per cent excess rainfall in the pre-monsoon period — March 1 to May 31 — so far due to back-to-back western disturbances in the last two weeks. The Safdarjung Observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, has recorded 221 per cent more precipitation (119 mm against a normal of 37.1 mm) during this period.

Normally, it logs 48 mm of rainfall during the entire pre-monsoon period. The manual weather station at Palam has recorded 109.9 mm of rainfall against a normal of 33 mm.

The rainfall recorded at Lodhi Road (119.5 mm), Ridge (114.2 mm) and Ayanagar (113.4 mm) is at least 220 per cent above normal. Delhi has been experiencing cloudy weather and sporadic rainfall for the last 15 days, which is rare during this time of the year. May has historically been the hottest month in Delhi, with a mean maximum tem-



perature of 39.5 degrees Celsius.

Officials attribute this to the back-to-back western disturbances, weather systems that originate in the Mediterranean region and bring unseasonal rainfall to northwest India.

Another western disturbance is likely to affect the region starting May 5. Under its influence, cloudy skies and sporadic rain are predicted in the capital until May 7, an IMD

official said. The maximum temperature is predicted to remain below 35 degrees Celsius until May 8.

On Thursday morning, Delhi saw an unusual episode of dense fog, much to the bemusement of its residents. The minimum temperature dropped to 15.8 degrees Celsius, making it the third coldest morning in May since the IMD started keeping weather records in 1901.

According to IMD data, the Safdarjung Observatory has recorded 45.7 mm of rainfall in May so far. On an average, the capital logs 19.7 mm of rainfall in the whole month.

Delhi recorded more than 20 mm of rainfall in April, the highest in the month since 2017, due to back-to-back western disturbances. The prolonged wet spell has resulted in below-normal maximum temperatures during the pre-monsoon period.

In fact, the Safdarjung Observatory has not reported any heatwave day in the summer season so far. The IMD has also predicted below-normal maximum temperatures and fewer heat wave days in northwest India this month.

In 2022, Delhi had recorded its second hottest April since 1951 with a monthly average maximum temperature of 40.2 degrees Celsius.

The city saw nine heatwave days in April last year, including four in the first 10 days, which was the maximum in the month since 2010.

NCR PULSE

DU CLASSROOMS, LABS TO OPEN FROM 8 AM TO 8 PM

New Delhi: The Delhi University (DU) has directed all its colleges and departments to keep their classrooms and laboratories open from 8 am to 8 pm on working days to ensure the efficient use of resources. A notification to this effect has been posted on the university's website. Additionally, the colleges and departments have been instructed to submit a report on the actions taken by May 31, according to an official statement.

IIMS TO LAUNCH 2 NEW EXECUTIVE MBA PROGS

New Delhi: The Indian Institute of Management Sirmaur (IIMS) has announced the launch of two new Executive MBA programmes — General Management & Digital Transformation and Analytics in the current academic year. The two programmes are designed for working professionals in collaboration with University of Bordeaux and University of Paris, France, with an aim to empower business leaders with the knowledge and skills of today rapidly changing work environment. "We are confident that these programs will have a positive impact on our participants and their organizations, and are proud to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of executive education in India," said Dr. Prafulla Agnihotri, Director, IIM Sirmaur during the launch of new courses.

BROTHER-IN-LAW SLITS MAN'S THROAT IN NANGLOI

New Delhi: A 20-year-old man died on Friday after his brother-in-law allegedly slit his throat in west Delhi's Nangloi area, police said. Accused Pankaj Rana is absconding and the reason for the murder is not clear. However, the pair was not on good terms, they said. Around 1.30 pm on Friday, the police received a PCR call where the called informed the operator that his brother had killed a man. The body was found at Railway Station Park of Veena Enclave in the Nangloi area. A blood-stained kitchen knife was also found near the body, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra Singh said. The victim has been identified as Vikas alias Akash from Kirari Suleman Nagar.

PEOPLE FROM MANIPUR STAGE PROTEST IN DELHI

New Delhi: A group of people from Manipur on Friday staged a demonstration at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the ongoing violence in the state over the Meitei community Scheduled Tribe status issue. The protesters were seen carrying placards bearing messages such as "Save Manipur, Save Meitei". Clashes broke out in Manipur on Wednesday in the Torbung area of Churachandpur district during a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised by the All Tribal Student Union Manipur to protest against the demand of Meiteis for Scheduled Tribe status. The march was organised by tribal groups, including the Nagas and the Kukis, after the Manipur High Court last month asked the state government to send a recommendation to the Centre within four weeks on the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

TECHNICAL GLITCH HITS VIOLET LINE SERVICE

New Delhi: Services on Delhi Metro's Violet Line were affected for nearly two hours on Friday due to technical issues, causing inconvenience to commuters. The Violet Line runs between Kashmere Gate in Delhi and Ballabhgarh in Haryana. Many people took to Twitter to share the inconvenience faced by them due to the delay in services.

MOVIE ON AP TRIBE TO HIT SCREENS NATIONWIDE

New Delhi: 'Love in 90s', the first-ever movie based on the Tagin community, one of the major tribes in the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh will be soon screened nationwide, showcasing the rich culture, song and food of the far Northeastern State. The trailer of the film will be launched by Minister for Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju on Saturday at an event at the National Media Centre here. "It is a celebration of Arunachal Pradesh's culture and tradition and a tribute to the resilience of its people," says Tapen Natam, Director of the film.

JOINT CONVOCATION PROGRAMME ORGANISED

New Delhi: A Joint convocation ceremony of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies (MRIIRS), including Manav Rachna Dental College (MRDC) and Manav Rachna University was held recently to celebrate the achievements of its students of batch 2022. This was the 8th Convocation for MRU and the 18th convocation for MRIIRS. Dr Raghunath Anant Mashelkar, Indian Chemical Engineer and former DG CSIR and Prof. Yogesh Singh, Vice-Chancellor, DU were the guests of honour at the event.

CM HOUSE RENOVATION CONTROVERSY

BJP likens Kejriwal to world dictators with luxury palaces

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Friday fired a fresh salvo at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal amid the row over the ₹45 crore expenditure on his residence, comparing him with the likes of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in terms of "luxury" linked to their "palaces". The BJP alleged that Kejriwal has transformed from a "common man" to the "Sultan of Delhi" with his ₹45 crore house makeover. The party also deferred an indefinite protest it had earlier announced it will hold outside the Chief Minister's house over the allegations that he spent the inordinate sum on the renovation of his official residence.

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi played videos of Kejriwal's old statements in which he presented himself as a crusader against political leaders spending public money on maintaining expensive lifestyles, including big houses, and luxurious cars. Trivedi hit out at Kejriwal, quoting a 2013 tweet of him in which he had targeted the then Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit for allegedly having 10 ACs in her house when so many people lived in slums.

He accused the Aam Aadmi Party leaders of playing an "important role" in creating a crisis of credibility in Indian politics and claimed that it is the conduct of the likes of him that causes distrust among people about the political class.

The BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi symbolises credibility while the AAP and other opposition leaders symbolise the crisis facing it, the Rajya Sabha leader



BJP party leaders raises slogans during a protest against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of spending crores on the renovation of his official residence, in New Delhi on Friday

alleged. Hinting that the AAP government deliberately divided the expenses on Kejriwal's house under various projects to keep every single budget estimate under ceiling to avoid scrutiny, Trivedi said government agencies will do their job as per the law but Kejriwal's party should provide "political and moral" answers.

Noting that Kejriwal's residence has doors controlled by sensors, he took a swipe at the AAP leader, saying he is running everything from his party to governments, including the one in Punjab, by remote control.

He said, "Kejriwal's luxurious palace unveils so many truths about him. The way and extent of the luxury Kejriwal's palace possesses seem similar to Saddam Hussein's and Kim Jong Un's palaces one has heard." Kejriwal's Party has not only attained national stature but "international" recognition too, he said in a jibe at the AAP.

Trivedi added, "The issue here is not just to make allegations, to just show the real face, the issue is about the pain, about the betrayal that the people of Delhi have experienced! The people of Delhi had believed him, and he so shamefully cheated on them all."

Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi said that Kejriwal should open the door of his "palace" to the people of Delhi, otherwise the door of law will open for him. Lekhi further alleged that Kejriwal renovated his 6-Flagstaff Road house in Civil Lines area without proper permission.

BJP had announced the dharna to open the doors of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's "Raj Mahal" for the public to see what was there, but now that a TV channel has shown the inside of the bungalow to the public, the dharna is being deferred, said Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly.

Two suspected members of Gogi gang held from Timarpur

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two members alleged to be from the Jitender Maan alias Gogi gang, were arrested in North Delhi's Timarpur area with 12 pistols and 30 cartridges that they had procured from illicit firearms manufacturers in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar to execute the escape of their gang's jailed gangster Karambir alias Kaju in Delhi and Haryana. The arrested Gogi's gang members have been identified as Abhishek alias Amit alias Mitta, 24, and Naveen alias Shanichar, 38, both residents of Sonapat district in Haryana. According to police, 12 pistols and 30 live cartridges were found on them at the time of the arrest.

Abhishek was involved in an attempt to help escape jailed gangster Karambir from a hospital last year, they said. On April 27, police got a tip-off that two members of Gogi gang have recently purchased illicit weapons from some suppliers in Madhya Pradesh and would come to Gandhi Vihar area of Timarpur.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

In a crackdown against defaulter builders, the Noida Authority has sealed 113 unsold flats across three projects, a project office and a marketing office of three developers for non-payment of dues to the tune of Rs 1,086 crore. According to Noida Authority officials, the action was taken jointly by the departments of group housing which include Gardenia Aims Developers Private Limited, Logix Infrastructure Private Limited and Gardenia Gateway India Limited. The sealing action was taken up in different projects located in sectors 46, 137 and 75.

"The action was taken over non-payment of dues by the builders and to expedite the process of registry of homes taken by buyers," Officer on Special Duty (Group Housing) Prasun Dwivedi said. A residential tower of Gardenia Aims Developers in Sector 46 has been sealed which has approximately 110 unsold flats. Its project office has also been sealed, he said.

At Logix Infrastructure's project in Sector 137, two unsold flats, two stores and a marketing office have been sealed. An unsold flat of Gardenia Gateway India's project in Sector 75 has also been sealed, the officer said.

As of March 31, 2023, the Gardenia Aims Developers Private Limited has dues to the tune of Rs 603.15 crore. The Noida Authority officials on May 4 sealed a tower D2, which has 110 unsold flats, and also the office of the project located in sector 46 over non-payment of dues, the Authority noted.

Gardenia Aims was approved on September 3, 2009 and it has 20 towers of which seven were given occupancy certificate (OC), the Authority said.

In a separate action, the Authority also sealed two unsold flats, two store premises and the marketing office of sector 137-located housing project of Logix Infrastructure Private Limited. This project was allotted on January 14, 2010 and has 17 towers of which 10 have been issued OC. Till March 31, 2023, the developer had pending dues to the tune of Rs 379.65 crore, it said.

Similarly, one unsold flat was sealed at a sector 75 located Gardenia Gateway project by the Noida Authority officials. The land for this project was allotted on January 12, 2012 and has nine towers. None of tower has been given OC by the authority. The builder has to clear dues to the tune of Rs 103.38 crore, the Authority said.

Hry PCB directs builders to install dust monitor systems at big sites

STAFF REPORTER ■ G'GRAM

The Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB) has directed builders to install a dust monitor system at every construction site larger than 500 square meters to install reliable PM2.5 and PM10 dust devices to measure microscopic fractions of particulate matter or PM (a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets) in the air, which cause serious health problems when inhaled. This is the first



time that such order was issued by the pollution body in the state.

Air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, ground-level ozone, particulate matter, sulfur oxides

etc are dangerous when they reach human lungs with the air we inhale.

Experts said air pollution goes beyond permissible levels inviting a blanket ban on all construction activities in Delhi MGR every year in a bid to reduce air pollution and this results in losses led to project delays including major impact on homebuyers, developers and construction workers. Meanwhile, HSPCB has told all large construction sites to install a dust monitoring system.

Farmers in large numbers to join wrestlers' protest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha on Friday said a large number of farmers will gather at the Jantar Mantar here on May 8 in support of wrestlers protesting against Wrestling Federation of India president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

A blame game erupted between the Delhi Police and the wrestlers on Thursday over a late-night scuffle at Jantar Mantar which led to a political slugfest and a threat by the grapplers to return their medals and awards, including Padma Shri, to the government.

site on May 8 in support of wrestlers, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) said in a statement. The outfit also reiterated its demand for Singh's arrest.

The SKM (non-political), a breakaway group of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha that spearheaded the year-long agitation against the now-repealed farm laws of the Centre, said farmers' organisations associated with it also unanimously passed a resolution demanding the arrest of the WFI chief during a virtual meeting. The wrestlers have launched a second round of protest at Jantar Mantar here against Singh, a sexual harassment accused.

Red Sand Boa trapped in metal rings rescued in Uttam Nagar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the help of alert and Good Samaritan and trained wildlife experts, a red sand boa, a non-venomous snake, was rescued unhurt on Friday after it was found trapped in two metal rings in Uttam Nagar's Tilak Enclave area here.

The rings were part of a motor pump being serviced outside a house, and the snake is suspected to have gone through them, getting itself stuck.



Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) sanitation worker Sanjeev, 54 who was the first to discover the snake trying to enter his home said that "The reptile was unable to move as the rings were stuck around its body and it tried to enter a drain to escape. However, it was unable to do so. It then tried to go indoors, but again, the reptile found it hard to move. Since snakes are fairly common in the fields around the nearby Najafgarh drain, I had a helpline number handy with

me and I immediately alerted them." They confined the snake to a corner till the rescuers arrived. Wasim Akram, deputy director, special projects at Wildlife SOS, said they received a call that locals had sighted a red sand boa and sent a two-member team to the spot.

"After identifying the snake, we safely lifted it and used a metal cutter to sever the motor pump rings. The snake is currently under medical observation and will soon be released back into its natural habitat in a forested area," he said.

Akram added that the red sand boa is a non-venomous snake endemic to India, Iran, and Pakistan.

Bharat Vandana Park to reflect India's rich cultural, architectural heritage

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharat Vandana Park coming up in Dwarka sub-city in Delhi will have a glimpse of India's rich cultural and architectural heritage in the form of replicas of famous monuments and places.

The lotus-shaped park, spread over 220 acres, is being developed by the Delhi Development, officials said. A presentation on 36 monuments and finest pieces of India's rich cultural heritage from different states and Union Territories was recently made before Lt Governor VK Saxena, they said.

The LG has directed officials to complete it before



Independence Day this year. The list of monuments to be installed in the park include Sun temple, Odisha; Boramdev temple, Chhattisgarh; Kamakhya temple, Assam; Kedarnath, Uttarakhand; and Lepakshi Nandi, Andhra Pradesh. A replica of the Parliament House at the park will showcase Delhi's architectural richness. Viceregal Lodge, Himachal

Pradesh; Cellular Jail, Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Hawa Mahal, Rajasthan; House boat, Jammu and Kashmir; Golghar, Bihar; Stone chariot, Hampi, Karnataka; Charminar, Telangana; Light House, Lakshadweep; Victoria Memorial Hall, West Bengal; and Virasat-e Khalsa, Punjab, will be also showcased there.

Caves of Elora in Maharashtra; Leh Palace, Ladakh; Live Tree bridge, Banaras Ghat; and Vishwanath temple, UP; Live Tree bridge, Meghalaya; engravings at Vanghchhia village (Mizoram); Brahm Sarovar (Haryana) too will be at display at the park. The park will also have an eco-forest zone and lakes.

Covid-19 no longer global emergency, asserts WHO

'Pandemic is not over, so people need to be careful'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after it noted that the health situation is recovering across the Covid-torn countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday declared that Covid-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency. But at the same time, it treaded cautiously as it added that the pandemic hasn't come to an end. The cautious note comes amid recent spikes in cases in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The UN Health agency noted that thousands of people are still dying from the virus every week.

"It's with great hope that I declare Covid-19 over as a global health emergency," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "That does not mean Covid-19 is over as a global health threat."

The WHO made its decision to lower its highest level of



alert on Friday, after convening an expert group on Thursday when it had also announced that the health system across the countries is gradually improving.

The UN Health agency had first declared the coronavirus to be an international crisis on January 30, 2020.

More than three years later, the virus has caused an estimated 764 million cases globally and about 5 billion people have received at least one dose

of vaccine. When Tedros declared Covid-19 to be an emergency in 2020, he said his greatest fear was the virus' potential to spread in countries with weak health systems he described as "ill-prepared."

In fact, some of the countries that suffered the worst Covid-19 death tolls were previously judged to be the best-prepared for a pandemic, including the US and Britain. According to WHO data, the number of deaths reported in Africa account for just 3 per cent of the global total.

The WHO is the only agency mandated to coordinate the world's response to acute health threats, but the organization faltered repeatedly as the coronavirus unfolded. The WHO also recommended against members of the public wearing masks to protect against Covid-19 for months, a mistake many health officials say cost lives.

India, China should learn from history: Qin

Chinese Foreign Min says bilateral ties should be handled with long-term perspective

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/BEIJING

As External Affairs Minister Jaishankar said the focus of his talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Goa on Thursday was on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquility in the border areas, the visiting Minister said the "two sides should learn from history and handle bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective."

He also reiterated Beijing's stance that the situation at the India-China border is "generally stable." Qin Gang's statement was released on Friday in Beijing. The two ministers held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' meet and discussed the situation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

Calling for joint efforts with India to bring bilateral relations back on track with stable and sound development, Qin said the "two sides should learn from history and handle bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective."

He called on the two neighbours to respect, learn from and reinforce each other, and embark on a new path of harmonious coexistence, peaceful development and common revitalisation, contributing to their respective national rejuvenation and injecting stability and positive energy into world peace and development, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Gang also said both sides should take joint action to further ease and cool down the border situation and maintain sustainable peace along the LAC. Tension prevails at the LAC in Eastern Ladakh for the last three years and more than 50,000 troops each from both the sides are now deployed in



the front.

In his talks with Jaishankar at Benuaim in Goa on the sidelines of the meeting of the SCO Foreign Ministers on Thursday, Qin restated China's oft-repeated recent stance that the current situation on the China-India border is generally stable, in an apparent reference to the ongoing military standoff in eastern Ladakh which brought the relations to a standstill.

"Both sides should continue to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, consolidate the existing achievements, strictly abide by relevant agreements, take joint action to further ease and cool down the border situation and maintain sustainable peace and tranquility in the border areas," Qin was quoted as saying by a press release.

In a tweet after the talks, Jaishankar said the focus remained on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquility in the border areas.

"A detailed discussion with State Councillor and FM Qin Gang of China on our bilateral relationship. The focus remains on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquility in the border areas," he said.

The Indian and the Chinese troops are locked in a standoff at a few friction points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh for the last three years

though they disengaged in several places following a series of military and diplomatic talks.

EAM greets Bilawal, other Foreign Ministers with customary 'namaste'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari became the first minister to visit India since 2014, External Affairs S Jaishankar on Friday welcomed him with a 'namaste' in Goa at a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Visuals showed the foreign ministers' customary greeting with folded hands before the two posed for pictures and Jaishankar directed him to the venue. In fact, Jaishankar greeted all his other counterparts of the SCO grouping with a 'namaste'.

Incidentally, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh did not shake hands with his Chinese counterpart General Li Shangfu in New Delhi during the SCO Defence Ministers' meet on April 27.

At Thursday evening's reception for the SCO Foreign Ministers, Jaishankar shook hands with his Pakistani counterpart like he did with others, according to a few people who



are part of Bhutto-Zardari's entourage. Bhutto-Zardari's visit to India to attend the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting came amid continuing strain in ties between the two countries on a host of issues, including Islamabad's use of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

He was received at the airport in Goa on Thursday by JP Singh, the joint secretary heading the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran division at the external affairs ministry.

On his arrival in the coastal state, Bhutto-Zardari had said he looks forward to constructive discussions with his counterparts from friendly countries. Bhutto-Zardari attended the SCO conclave at Jaishankar's invitation. "I am happy to arrive in Goa for participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. I am leading the Pakistan delegation at SCO and hope that the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) will be successful," Mr Zardari said in a video on Thursday.

SC to hear plea challenging promotion of Guj judicial officers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on May 8 a plea challenging the promotion of 68 Gujarat lower judicial officers, including Surat Chief Judicial Magistrate Harish Hasmukhbhai Varma who had convicted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case, on the ground of alleged disregard of the "merit-cum-seniority principle".

A bench comprising Justices M R Shah and Ansanuddin Amanullah, on May 1, fixed the plea of senior civil judge cadre officers, Ravikumar Maheta and Sachin Prataprai Mehta, for hearing on Monday challenging the selection of the 68 judicial officers to the higher cadre of district judges.

Varma, the CJM of Surat, is one of the 68 officers of the district lower judiciary whose promotion has also been challenged by Maheta and Mehta, presently working as under-secretary in the legal department of the Gujarat government and the assistant director at the state legal services authority.

The top court, which had issued notices to the state government and the Registrar General of the Gujarat High Court on April 13 on the plea of the two judicial officers, was very critical of the decision and the order passed on April 18 to promote the 68 officers despite knowing the pendency of the case before it.

HC calls Health Secy over order's non-compliance

Court had directed release of ₹5 Cr for treatment of 40 kids with rare diseases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Stating it cannot turn a blind eye to the medical condition of 40 children suffering from rare diseases, the Delhi High Court has sought the presence of the Secretary of the Union Health Ministry before it following the non-compliance of its order directing release of ₹5 crore for their treatment.

Justice Prathiba M Singh, who was hearing a batch of petitions relating to their treatment, said the effectiveness of the medicines already administered to such children would be completely obliterated if further doses are not continued and asked the official to be physically present in court on May 10 when she would consider whether notice of contempt ought to be issued.

"The Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare shall physically remain present in Court on the next date of hearing. On the next date, the Court shall consider whether notice of contempt ought to be issued in these matters. List on 10th May, 2023," ordered the court.



DMD, one of the various forms of muscular dystrophy, is a rare genetic disease that affects boys almost exclusively and causes progressive weakness. MPS II is a rare disease that is passed on in families and it mainly affects boys and their bodies cannot break down a kind of sugar that builds bones, skin, tendons and other tissues. In the order passed on May 3, the court observed that a "large amount of funds" were allocated for rare diseases but the budgets lapsed and the amounts were not released in spite of repeated judicial orders.

"The lapse of budget has also been confirmed in the affidavit by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Union of India to the tune of almost ₹193 crore. The said affidavit also demonstrated that as against the elapsed budget, only a sum of ₹7 crore was spent between 2018 and 2021," noted the court.

The court further noted that while the treatment commenced for several children upon the release of the sum of ₹50 lakh in terms of the National Policy for Rare Disease, the amount is yet to be released.

Rahul visits Delhi University campus

Spends time with students, shares meal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after his interaction with competitive exam aspirants, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday interacted with students at the Post Graduate Men's Hostel of the Delhi University.

Dressed in a white T-shirt and trouser and sporting a trimmed beard, Rahul Gandhi arrived at the hostel to interact with the students.

Rahul Gandhi, who studied at DU's St Stephen's College for a year before leaving for the United States, met students and also shared a meal with

WHO urges India to cut ties with tobacco lobby

students and their career plans. Last month, Rahul Gandhi had interacted with students preparing for the Union Public Service Commission and the Staff Selection Commission examinations in Mukherjee Nagar area here.

In Mukherjee Nagar, Rahul Gandhi was seen seated on a chair on the roadside with the students as he asked them about their expectations and experiences. Rahul had earlier taken up the UPSC examination attempt issues and helped giving an extra chance during the Manmohan Singh government and later during the covid pandemic time he had demanded from the government to facilitate extra attempts for the aspirants.

Sources said he sought to know about issues faced by the

Slamming the tobacco players and their surrogates for furthering their interests by influencing scientific research, public perception, policy making, and the media with an aim to proliferate and sale of nicotine and tobacco products, the WHO has urged its member states including India to not to partner with or accept fund from the industry or its front groups. The cautionary note comes amid concerns that tobacco will kill one billion people this century, if business will continue as usual.

"The tobacco industry continues to amplify misinformation in the media, including the recent egregious attacks on tobacco control organizations. The tobacco industry is the only one that stands to benefit by undermining tobacco control organizations," said the WHO in a statement here recently.

The international community must not forget that the tobacco industry knowingly denied its products were linked with cancer and falsely claimed there was no harm from secondhand smoke, said the global health body.

The WHO was echoing the concerns of its Global Ambassador for Non-Communicable Disease Michael R Bloomberg who in a sixth edition of Tobacco Atlas

too had noted that while "we know the most effective strategies for stopping it. The challenge we face is persuading more leaders to embrace them—and empowering those leaders to implement them."

The WHO further said that the misleading conduct by the tobacco players continues today with tobacco, e-cigarette, and other nicotine companies concealing the addictive nature of their products, while directly targeting children and young adults with advertisements for their harmful products. The tobacco industry has no place in tobacco control or harm reduction policy.

"The tobacco industry should not be a partner in any initiative linked to setting or implementing public health policies, knowing that its interests are in direct conflict with the goals of public health," it said.

The WHO also called upon the international community to protect the implementation of the WHO FCTC, a legally binding instrument that is celebrating 20 years since its adoption at the World Health Assembly.

Long chats on phone lead to high blood pressure, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

If you are among those who spend more than 30 minutes per day or more every week talking on the phone then, beware. A team of researchers have flagged that such a habit of talking long on the phone can leave the user prone to high blood pressure or hypertension.

In their study published in the European Heart Journal - Digital Health, the scientists from the Southern Medical University in China, investigated if there was a link between making and receiving phone calls and a new diagnosis of high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.

Almost three-quarters of the global population aged 10 and over own a mobile phone. Mobile phones emit low levels of radiofrequency energy, which has been linked with rises in blood pressure after short-term exposure, the study said. Hypertension is a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke and a leading cause of premature death globally.

"It's the number of minutes people spend talking on a mobile that matters for heart



health, with more minutes meaning greater risk," said study author Xianhui Qin of Southern Medical University, Guangzhou, China.

Using data from the UK Biobank to examine the relationship between talking over phone calls and new-onset hypertension, a total of 212,046 adults aged 37 to 73 years without hypertension were engaged in this study.

Over a median follow up of 12 years, 13,984 (7 per cent) participants developed hypertension. Mobile phone users, who for the purposes of this study used a mobile phone at least once a week for making and taking phone calls, were found to have a 7 per cent higher risk of hypertension compared with non-users.

Weekly usage time of 30-59 minutes, 1-3 hours, 4-6 hours and more than 6 hours was associated with an 8 per cent, 13 per cent, 16 per cent and 25 per cent increased risk of high blood pressure, respectively.

Secondary pneumonia, not cytokine, caused Covid deaths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

It was not a "cytokine storm" as often believed to cause mortality due to Covid-19, a team of US scientists have argued, but secondary bacterial pneumonia that does not resolve was a key driver of death in patients with the infection.

They found that secondary bacterial infection of the lung (pneumonia) was extremely common in patients with Covid-19, affecting almost half the patients who required support from mechanical ventilation. It may even exceed death rates from the SARS-CoV-2 viral infection itself, they said in a study published in the



Journal of Clinical Investigation.

"By applying machine learning, a form of artificial intelligence (AI), to medical record data, scientists at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in the US found evidence that Covid-19 does not cause a "cytokine storm," severe immune reaction in which the body releases too many cytokines into the blood too quickly.

Cytokines play an important role in normal immune responses, but having a large

amount of them released in the body all at once can be harmful. "Our study highlights the importance of preventing, looking for and aggressively treating secondary bacterial pneumonia in critically ill patients with severe pneumonia, including those with Covid-19," said study senior author Benjamin Singer, an associate professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, US.

"Those who were cured of their secondary pneumonia were likely to live, while those whose pneumonia did not resolve were more likely to die," Singer said in a statement.

"Our data suggested that the mortality related to the

virus itself is relatively low, but other things that happen during the ICU stay, like secondary bacterial pneumonia, offset that," he added. The findings also negate the cytokine storm theory, said Singer.

"The term 'cytokine storm' means an overwhelming inflammation that drives organ failure in your lungs, your kidneys, your brain and other organs," Singer said. "If that were true, if cytokine storm were underlying the long length of stay we see in patients with Covid-19, we would expect to see frequent transitions to states that are characterized by multi-organ failure. That's not what we saw," he added.

Large parts of India got above normal pre-monsoon rain: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Three more weeks of the pre-monsoon season — March to May — are still left. But, rainfall data of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) shows large parts of the country have already received way beyond their normal share of the pre-monsoon showers.

The data showed India has received 101.3 mm rainfall as against the normal of 77.7 mm, around 30 per cent excess

rainfall so far during pre-monsoon season, with the central region gauging precipitation 268 per cent above normal while East and northeast India recorded 29 per cent rain deficit -- 141.5 mm against the normal of 199.9 mm -- from March 1 to May 3.

Of the total 717 districts across the 36 meteorological subdivisions in the country, 446 have received "large excess" rainfall between March 1 and May 3 this year while 59 districts have received excess rain

while 89 received normal rainfall during the pre-monsoon season. In other words, 16 subdivisions in 36 meteorological subdivisions have received "large excess"; two subdivisions received "excess" rains while five of them received "normal" rainfall so far.

Northwest India, i.e. Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Uttarakhand, recorded 21 per cent more rainfall (102.8 mm



against the normal of 85.21 mm), while the peninsular region received 91 per cent excess rain (110.9 mm against

the normal of 58.1 mm) during this period.

Central India, including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, recorded 268 per cent surplus rainfall -- 71.1 mm against the normal of 19.3 mm. Starting April 21-22, large parts of the country, barring the eastern and north-eastern parts, experienced a prolonged wet spell owing to several back-to-back weather systems.

As a result, most parts of the country experienced sig-

nificantly lower-than-normal day temperatures during the period. According to the IMD, not a single place in India has reported a heatwave since April 21. A senior IMD scientist said such a long period without heatwaves in April and May is "very rare." May typically sees the highest number of heatwave days in India. During the month, temperatures can soar above 45 degrees Celsius, particularly in the north, north-west and central parts of the country.

Imphal Valley peaceful but tense

Intermittent gunfights between militants, security forces on in hills



PTI ■ IMPHAL

The Imphal Valley in Manipur remained peaceful but tense on Friday, however intermittent gunfights between militant groups and security forces were reported from the hill districts surrounding the valley. The exchanges of fire between militant groups, who have involved themselves in the ethnic clashes in the State, and security forces were reported at Kangvai in Churachandpur district, western hill range of Phougakchao in adjoining Bishnupur district and Dolait-habi and Pukhao in Imphal East district, a senior police officer said. However, it was not immediately known whether there was any casualty on either side. Over 6,000 soldiers from the Army and the Assam Rifles have been deployed in the State and more brought in by road from Nagaland and by air using

C17 Globemaster and AN 32 transport aircraft of the IAF from Assam. Officials said the Army's Sikh regiment is currently carrying out rescue operations in Langol in Imphal West district, shifting over 500 people to safe shelters in the Leimakhong Army camp. The defence PRO, in a statement, said, "The situation has been brought under control through coordinated actions by all stakeholders. The Indian Air Force (IAF) undertook continuous sorties from two airfields in Assam employing C17 Globemaster and AN 32 aircraft." "Induction commenced on the night of May 4 and additional columns commenced domination with effect from wee hours of May 5. Domination & evacuation of civilians of all communities from affected areas continued throughout the night. Flag march in Churachandpur and other sensitive areas are underway," it added.

Fifty-five columns of Army and Assam Rifles have been deployed and 14 more have been kept in reserve, defence officials said. Violence first erupted in Torbung area in Churachandpur district during the 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised by the All Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) on Wednesday to protest the demand of Meiteis for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The march was organised by tribals — including Nagas and Kukis — after the Manipur High Court asked the State Government last month to send a recommendation to the Centre within four weeks on the demand for ST status by the Meitei community. During the march in Torbung, an armed mob allegedly attacked people of the Meitei community, leading to retaliatory attacks in the valley districts, which escalated the violence throughout the state, police said.

Shah reviews situation in violence-hit Manipur

Holds virtual meeting with CM Biren Singh, top State and central officials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is closely monitoring the situation in Manipur and is in constant touch with top functionaries of the Central agencies and State administration. On Friday, Shah held a review meeting through video conference with Manipur with Chief Minister N Biren Singh and top officials, even as the Centre dispatched additional security forces and anti-riot vehicles to maintain peace on the ground. Around 1,000 more Central paramilitary personnel with anti-riot vehicles reached Manipur on Friday, sources said. Article 355 of the Constitution has not been invoked in Manipur. Under the provision, the central Government can handle the law and order machinery of a State, they said. Shah, who is staying put here, is also taking regular inputs from security and intelligence agencies about the Manipur situation, which remained peaceful but tense on Friday. Meanwhile, at least five Deputy Inspector General (DIG) rank officers and seven Senior Superintendents of Police (SSP) and SP-rank officers of the CRPF have been tasked with coordinating the deployment of various security forces in violence-hit Manipur, sources



The Centre has also rushed in about 20 fresh companies of paramilitary or the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), including the CRPF and the BSF to the violence-hit State. Induction of the CAPF units apart from that of the Army columns and the Assam Rifles is going on. Some of these senior officers are being rushed in from Delhi and Ranchi, the sources said. Clashes broke out in Manipur on Wednesday and intensified overnight with counter-attacks being mounted by rival communities in retaliation to earlier attacks after Naga and Kuki tribals organised a 'Tribal Solidarity March' to protest moves to give scheduled tribe status to the Meitei community. On Thursday, the State Government issued a shoot-at-sight order in "extreme cases" to contain the spiralling violence which has displaced over 9,000 people from their villages.

Bommai junks pre-election surveys giving Cong an edge

BJP will retain power with comfortable majority, says Karnataka CM

LAXMI DEVI ■ SHIGGOAN

Junking pre-poll surveys giving Opposition Congress an edge in the May 10 Assembly elections in the State, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Friday exuded confidence his party BJP will retain power with a "comfortable majority" and without the JD(S)' support. In an interview to PTI, Bommai said whether he will continue as CM in the event of the saffron party coming to power will be decided by the BJP high command and it's Parliamentary Board.



He also said former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar, who defected to Congress over denial of a BJP ticket to yet again contest from Hubli-Dharwad Central, will lose this time. Whereas, the 14 defectors who helped the BJP topple the Congress-JD(S) Government in 2019 will win from their respective segments. Bommai also alleged the Congress has taken the election discourse to a "very low level". "There was no edge to

Congress at all. We know how surveys are made. I am expecting a comfortable majority," Bommai said, and added the party may not require the support of the JD(S). "No chance at all (of taking JD(S) support). We will get an absolute majority," he said. Asked if the exit of Shettar will impact Lingayat votes, the chief minister said, "Not at all. We will win Shettar's seat." The dominant Lingayats comprise 17 per cent of Karnataka's population. "Looking into his background and track record, it is neither acceptable to BJP nor to some of the Congress supporters. So, it is totally not at all an organic shift for Shettar," he said. On the caste-based quota, he said internal reservation under OBCs and other things were a long pending demand and "I have addressed" them.

No question of banning Bajrang Dal if it plays by rule book: Cong

Reference should be viewed as warning, says Veerappa Moily

PTI ■ BENGALURU

There is no question of banning the Bajrang Dal if it plays by the rule-book and behaves itself, senior Congress leader M Veerappa Moily said on Friday. Speaking to PTI, Moily said the reference in the manifesto should be viewed as the Congress issuing some kind of a notice and warning to Bajrang Dal, and not as if the party is going to ban it if it's voted to

power in the May 10 Assembly elections in Karnataka. On this issue, the former Chief Minister indicated that the Congress would adopt the approach of the then Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel who, he said, lifted the ban on RSS after receiving an undertaking from the organisation that it would not indulge in "illegal activities". The Congress in its manifesto for the Assembly polls released earlier this week said it was committed to take firm and

decisive action against individuals and organisations spreading hatred amongst communities on grounds of caste and religion. The party said: "We believe that law and Constitution are sacrosanct and cannot be violated by individuals and organisations like Bajrang Dal, PFI or others promoting enmity or hatred, whether among majority or minority communities. We will take decisive action as per law including imposing a ban on such organisations."

Cong demands imposition of President's Rule in State

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday demanded President's Rule in Manipur, which has been hit by violence between tribals and the majority Meitei community. The party also asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil his duty towards violence-hit Manipur instead of being busy in election campaign in Karnataka and sought Home Minister Amit Shah's sacking for his "complete failure" in maintaining peace in the northeastern state. "Modi ji, you are an elected Prime Minister of the country and the people of Karnataka are also watching what is happening in Manipur and want that you should save Manipur from burning and restore peace in the state first. "Seeking votes in Karnataka is against your 'kartavya' (duty) and we want to remind you that your duty is to save Manipur instead," Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said.



do you have to remain in your post. Actually, President's rule should be imposed immediately by invoking Article 356 (of the Constitution) and attempts should be made to bring back peace in the state," the Congress leader said. All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Randeep Surjewala shared a government order on social media and pointed that the state government has written that it is "pleased to authorise shoot at sight orders". "Just like the British government, only the Modi government could use such draconian language as there is a complete breakdown of law and order and constitutional machinery in Manipur," he said in a video message.

She charged that the home minister has totally failed, and referred to an earlier clash between police forces of Assam and Mizoram and the border rift between Maharashtra and Karnataka. "What moral right do you have to remain in your post. Actually, President's rule should be imposed immediately by invoking Article 356 (of the Constitution) and attempts should be made to bring back peace in the state," the Congress leader said. All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Randeep Surjewala shared a government order on social media and pointed that the state government has written that it is "pleased to authorise shoot at sight orders". "Just like the British government, only the Modi government could use such draconian language as there is a complete breakdown of law and order and constitutional machinery in Manipur," he said in a video message.

Initiate talks in Manipur, CPI urges Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI has urged the Centre to initiate dialogue in Manipur, alleging that the violence that has broken out in the State is the result of the policy of "dividing the people". In a statement on Friday, the Left party said the reports of violence and arson coming from Manipur are matters of serious concern for the entire nation. "The ongoing turmoil in Manipur is a direct result of the policy of dividing the people pursued by the so-called 'double-engine' Government of the BJP. Divide and strife between people were encouraged for electoral gains and has resulted in a strategically located state like Manipur being engulfed by all-encompassing violence. "This violence has a background of divisions and it cannot be controlled enduringly by using force. This is testimony to the failure of the Manipur policy pursued by the Union Home Ministry and the state government," it said, adding that while many people have lost their lives in the violence, a



greater number has been displaced. The conflict reaching alarming level of violence is "disheartening and shows that the people of Manipur are losing their confidence in the State", the CPI said. It further said, "(The) CPI understands the conflict as a political and social conflict and not merely a law and order issue. The CPI demands of the Union Home Ministry and the State Government of Manipur reach out to all stakeholders and political parties for the immediate cessation of hostilities. "A political solution to the crisis should be reached by taking all opinions and people into confidence and restoring normalcy and peace in Manipur. CPI appeals to all sections of the people of Manipur to maintain peace and tranquility," said the Left party.



NGT slaps ₹4K Cr green compensation on Bihar for poor waste treatment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has imposed a Rs 4,000 crore environmental compensation on Bihar for failing to scientifically manage solid and liquid waste, in accordance with the polluter pays principle. A Bench of Chairperson Justice AK Goel directed that the amount be deposited in a ring-fenced account within two months. The account will be operated only under the Chief Secretary's directions for waste management in the State. The Bench, also comprising Justices Sudhir Agarwal and Arun Kumar Tyagi, besides expert members Afroz Ahmad and A Senthil Vel, said, "We levy compensation of Rs 4,000 crore on the State on the 'polluter pays' principle for its failure in scientifically managing the liquid and solid waste in violation of the mandate of law, particularly judgments of the Supreme Court and this tribunal. "The amount will be used for setting up solid waste processing facilities, remediation of legacy waste and setting up of sewage treatment plants (STPs), and faecal sludge and septage treatment plants so there remains no gap, the Bench said. The NGT noted there was a legacy waste of more than

11.74 lakh metric tonnes as well as unprocessed urban waste of 4,072 metric tonnes per day and the gap in liquid waste generation and treatment was 2,193 million litres per day. "Better alternatives to utilize the wet waste for composting at appropriate locations be explored. The scale of expenditure for sewage treatment plants may be reviewed in the light of realistic expenses involved in decentralized/traditional systems or otherwise," the NGT Bench said. It said restoration plans need to be executed simultaneously at the earliest in all districts, cities, towns and villages in a time-bound manner without further delay with a well-laid monitoring mechanism at the state and district level. "District Magistrates must take ownership for monitoring of sewage and solid waste management and regularly providing the report to Chief Secretary on monthly basis and overall compliance be ensured by Chief Secretary for which regular meetings be conducted," the tribunal directed. It also directed the State's Chief Secretary to take further remedial measures to ensure compliance with solid waste management (SWM) rules in sync with statutory timelines.

SC notice to NMC on plea by Telangana medical college

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has sought responses from the Centre and others on a plea by 38 post graduate students of a Telangana-based medical college challenging its non-recognition by the National Medical Commission (NMC). A Bench comprising Justices S Ravindra Bhat and Dipankar Datta took note of the submissions of senior lawyer Siddharth Bhatnagar and advocate Tanvi Dubey that the recognition of MNR Medical College and Hospital in Telangana has not been restored by the NMC despite a specific order of the high court plunging the future of students pursuing PG courses there into uncertainty. The petition has been filed by Simhadri Ravi Shankar and 37 others pursuing different PG courses at the medical college located at Fasalwadi in Sangareddy district. "The petitioners are aggrieved by the alleged inaction on part of the NMC of not providing a specific order restoring the recognition as per the National Medical Commission Act, 2019 in favour of the MNR college for the PG course for academic year 2021-22, in terms of the November 28, 2022 order of the High Court," one of the lawyers said. The plea said the doctors have been left in the lurch due to NMC's inaction. "It is most humbly submitted that the candidates are shocked to note that despite an oral assurance given to the students by NMC on 27.03.2023, while the SLP filed by NMC ... Was heard, NMC has till date not complied with the direction passed by the Telangana High Court," the plea said.

Mamata calls for Opp unity for 2024 polls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday called upon all the Opposition parties to unite against the BJP in next year's general elections. Alleging that the BJP Government at Centre was trying to overwhelm the Opposition parties by using the central agencies Banerjee said, "I call upon all the Opposition parties to put up a united fight against the BJP in the 2024 elections." She said that though the BJP could gain some mileage by using the ED and the CBI to harass Opposition leaders, the "central agencies will not help it get votes."

She was addressing a Government programme at the Murshidabad-Malda border where Ganga erosion was a grave problem. Even as the Chief Minister handed over 'pattas' to people who had lost their lands to erosion, Banerjee alleged that "though we made several requests to the Government, the State administration has not received any help in this regard." She said that instead of using its merit to develop the country the BJP Government was busy doing politics. "The BJP Government is busy doing politics, spreading canards and committing atrocities on the Opposition parties..."



they used their skills to develop the country it would have been better," she said. Erosion has been a major issue in Malda and Murshidabad districts with an advancing

Bhattacharya said, "instead of criticising the Centre her Government should stop corruption so as to use those funds in 'developing the quality of people's life... Furthermore let her Government first account for the previous grants before asking for more money... After all this is public money...not meant for the thieves." On the question of Opposition unity CPI(M) leader Samik Lahiri said that TMC and BJP were two sides of the same coin. "It is Mamata Banerjee who brought BJP to Bengal and now she is asking for Opposition unity ... She is doing so because she knows that her party is on its way out."

Bihar Govt to provide arms training to mine inspectors

Move comes days after 3 mining officials were beaten by illegal sand miners in Bihta

PRAMOD KUMAR ■ PATNA

Days after the brutal attack on three mining officers, including two women mines inspectors, by illegal sand miners in Bihta, the Mines and Geology department has decided to provide

arms training to its officers to counter such attacks in future. The department has also initiated the process to reward the two women mines inspectors — Ameya Kumari and Saiyad Farheen — for their spirit and undaunted courage in handling goons of the alleged sand mining mafia during an operation to check illegal sand mining in Bihta block in Patna district on April 17. Decision has also been taken to provide a dedicated company of security forces each in five districts to assist mining department officials in carrying out operations to check illegal mining (sand), its storage and transportation in Patna, Saran, Vaishali, Bhojpur and Kaimur districts, a top official of

the Mines and Geology department said. Talking to PTI on Friday, Harjot Kaur Bamhrah, Additional Chief Secretary-cum-Mines Commissioner said, "After the Bihta incident in which our three officers, including two women inspectors, were brutally attacked by miscreants, the department has now decided to provide arms training (of two week duration) and also how to command force to its all 90 inspectors, including around 30 women officers, to counter such attacks in future." The arms training and force commanding skills to mining officials will be imparted at the training centre of the Prohibition, Excise and Registration department of the state government, she

said, adding it will start very soon as the process has already been initiated. "We have also initiated the process to reward our two women mines inspectors — Ameya Kumari and Saiyad Farheen — for their spirit and undaunted courage in handling miscreants during an operation to check illegal mining (sand) in Bihta last month. I personally met these two women officers... they are the new face of women in Bihar. They are undaunted with whatever happened with them, they are busy with their regular official works, including carrying out operations to check illegal mining," said Bamhrah. Besides, a dedicated company of security forces each in five districts is

being provided to assist mining department officials in carrying out operations to check illegal mining (sand), its storage and transportation in Patna, Saran, Vaishali, Bhojpur and Kaimur districts. A team of mining officials, including two women mines inspectors, was attacked by a group of anti-social elements involved in illegal sand mining in broad daylight in Patna's Bihta block on April 17. Three officers and several constables suffered injuries in the incident, the police had said. A purported video of the incident had also surfaced on social media, in which a group of men were seen assaulting the woman officers, while they were lying on the ground and pleading.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Right decision

The Patna High Court has ordered the Nitish government to stop the caste-based survey in the state

Our political masters often grumble about judicial overreach when court orders go against their interests, so it would not be surprising if the functionaries of the Nitish Kumar Government are unhappy over the Patna High Court on Thursday stopping the caste-based survey in the state with immediate effect. So far, however, they have not said anything critical of the HC order. The Mahagathbandhan Government, RJD spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwari said, respects the stay put in place by Patna High Court. The court did the right thing by doing so. The division Bench of Chief Justice K Vinod Chandran and Justice Madhuresh Prasad slammed the state Government for acting irresponsibly regarding the right to privacy: "We also see from the notification issued that the Government intends to share the data with leaders of different parties of the State Assembly." The State Government began the survey in Bihar on January 7 at a project cost Rs 500 crore. Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav has deployed semantic convolutions to justify the action: "Everyone knows it was a caste-based survey, not a caste survey. The caste-based survey aims to benefit the poor of Bihar. Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar are committed to a caste-based survey. Our government will do it. At present, the detailed order of the court is awaited." The convolutions, however, cannot conceal the fact that the Mahagathbandhan and other parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party are veering towards a narrative which promotes caste-oriented politics. This type of politics revolves around caste-based reservations.



The Opposition's strategy seems to derive a lot of inspiration from history. It is a well-known fact that the Mandal Commission Report over three decades ago had baffled the BJP. The report's recommendations divided Hindu society, the saffron party's potential constituency, on caste lines. The party was on the two horns of a dilemma: if it opposed Mandal, it would perpetuate the belief (promoted by anti-BJP leaders and intellectuals) that it represented the interests of the so-called upper castes only; and it supported the recommendations which would hurt the prospects of upper castes, it would displease the core constituents. Lord Ram came to the redemption of the BJP. All this happened long ago; a lot of sewage has flown down the Yamuna since then. The political and ideological progeny of Ram Manohar Lohia are trying to flog the dead horse. Today's India is not the same as it was in 1990; nor is today's BJP the party that was under LK Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee; it is led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. The Lohaites should not downplay the facts that the BJP is a much more inclusive party today than it was in 1990 and Modi himself comes from an other backward class or OBC—the social group around which much of Mahagathbandhan politics revolves. History does not and will not repeat itself.

PICTALK



Artists perform Lama Gana Cham mask dance on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Jayanti in Lahaul-Spiti

Men not dogs are real killers

Chronicles of atrocities that make one's stomach turn

There have been, of late, several reports of stray dogs attacking people but perhaps only one of the savage atrocities humans have perpetrated on stray dogs. Three such incidents are cited below as one should not get away with the impression that humans are innocent, helpless victims of vicious, predatory street canines.

According to a report in The Indian Express datelined April 13, 2023, a group of local people had tied a stray dog's limbs with ropes in the Garden City of the Sahnewal area in Ludhiana and beat it mercilessly for hours. They removed the body after it died. The incident occurred late on Monday, April 10 but it was only on 12 April that the police filed a First Information Report (FIR) on the complaint by Mani Singh, a member of People for Animals and the president of an NGO, 'Help for Animals'. A local animal lover had recorded a video of the incident on his phone. It suggested that the accused had lured the dog with eatables, tied its limbs and choked its mouth with ropes and beat it to death.

The report in The Indian Express stated that an FIR under Sections 428 (Mischief by killing or maiming animal of the value of ten rupees), 429 (Mischief by killing or maiming cattle, etc., of any value or any animal of the value of fifty rupees) of IPC, and Section 11 (A) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was registered against the accused at the Sahnewal police station. The report cited sub-inspector Harmeet Singh, the officer investigating the case, as saying that the residents claimed that the dog used to bite strangers, which infuriated a group that assaulted it.

The claim that the dog was biting strangers had all the trappings of a post-facto justification for a heinous crime. There could have been a demand for identifying the victims and proving that the dog had bitten them if it was said that they were people from the locality. On the other hand, one could argue that the victims were strangers who were untraceable. That possibility that the



claim that the dog was biting strangers was fabricated, is further suggested by the fact that the report of the incident in Hindustan Times cites Mani Singh as saying that the accused had started making the excuse that the dog was biting local people. Not just that. The report also stated that it had been killed for allegedly defecating on the streets. Lies have a way of contradicting one another.

In another horrifying incident, nearly two dozen students and staff of Don Bosco Technical Institute in Zakir Nagar, Okhla, Delhi, had, according to a NEWSTRACK report, savagely beat a pregnant bitch to death. A video showed the bitch silently hiding in a tin shed and a student approaching it with a baseball bat. Soon many more students arrived with baseball bats and attacked the bitch when it came out, beating it to death. As the video went viral and animal activists demanded strong action. New Friends Colony police station registered an FIR and arrested four persons, all students of Don Bosco Institute of Technology



THE CLAIM THAT THE DOG WAS BITING STRANGERS HAD ALL THE TRAPPINGS OF A POST-FACTO JUSTIFICATION FOR A HEINOUS CRIME

who were seen in the video. And why did the accused murder the bitch so cruelly? The NEWSTRACK report quoted the police as saying that they were upset with the bitch barking at them!

A report datelined 29 January 2016, by Vivek Surendran in India Today, records a Facebook post by a student, Haardikaa Goswamy, narrating an act of stomach-turning cruelty with which some people treated a stray dog in a housing colony in Chandigarh. The dog, according to Goswamy's account, arrived in the colony two months before the incident. Though he was frail, people feared him and some of them even called a dog-catcher to get rid of him. He, however, had become a pet of the colony's children who gave him food, water and care. They even collected money to get him vaccinated against rabies hoping that this would prevent him from being killed or removed.

According to Goswamy, however, some people tied him to a tree and savagely beat him with lathis, pushing away the children who tried to save

him. Even their attempt to record the incident was foiled as the video was deleted. Meanwhile, someone informed the police. The policemen, however, started beating the half-dead dog. Haardikaa Goswamy reportedly further stated that the dog was then put in a sack and taken away. The children, who had no idea whether the dog was dead or alive, were reportedly looking for him, hoping to find him alive.

Not surprisingly, Erich Fromm wrote in The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness: "If human aggression were more or less at the same level as that of other mammals—particularly that of our nearest relative, the Chimpanzee—human society would be rather peaceful and non-violent. But this is not so. Man's history is a record of extraordinary destructiveness and cruelty and human aggression it seems, far surpasses that of that of man's animal ancestors, and man is in contrast to most animals, a real killer."

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAN ON BAJRANG DAL AND PFI

Sir — I think Congress has struck the right chord by announcing a ban of PFI and Bajrang Dal, but still Congress party didn't directly say that it will ban Bajrang Dal. The Congress party knows very well that banning an outfit is not possible by a State Government. It is said by the Congress party that they will take firm and decisive action against individuals and organizations spreading enmity and hatred, whether among majority or minority communities. Further Congress party rightly said we believe that law and constitution are sacrosanct and cannot be violated by hate mongers.

Bajrang Dal took responsibility for vandalizing churches and Mosques in the country. A Muslim youth was assaulted by Bajrang Dal for talking to a woman Hindu friend. Bajrang dal in Karnataka created havoc against Hijab, Halal meat and boycotting

Muslim traders. A Muslim trader was killed by a Bajrang dal activist for selling Halal meat. The law and order were spoiled in Karnataka by the dictates of Bajrang dal activists. It is hard to forget how Bajrang dal activists killed Graham Stuart Staines an Australian Christian Missionary along with his two sons Phillips and Timothy were burnt to death in our country. Now BJP Party terms the Congress party's move as an insult to Lord Hanuman and the height of appeasement is nothing but diverting the issue. BJP Party and its leaders should know that Lord Hanuman is different and banning Bajrang dal is different, and these leaders should know that the Bajrang Dal is an organization that is converting the country into hatred and violence.

Zeeshaan | Kazipet

SAVE HERITAGE

Sir — Your editorial 'Save Heritage' (4-5-23) disturbs the sentiments of have-nots. No doubt, occupying the area of ASI cannot be endorsed by anyone to be right. There is a vast sheet of temple lands occupied by many bigwigs not questioned by

Manipur boiling



That major clashes erupted between two massive groups in Manipur state over scheduled Tribe status requiring Army to control is unfortunate. The High Court order there asking the state government to include and forward to the union government one group into the list of STs is a fresh cause for concern. The ethnic group named Meities who are majority there in population as well as in political representation are seeking scheduled Tribe status for a long. Now as the High Court order has come in support of their demand, the apprehensive tribal groups have come to the streets against the verdict. The protracted issue cannot be sorted out legally which needs a dialogue between the groups in the society. All political parties there should act above the political calculations and help the situation to come under control.

Dr. DVG Sankararao | Vizianagaram

anyone. The fact that no one can deny is that such an occupation can happen only with the blessings of some powerful political party or leader. Poor man, though badly in need of a small place to shelter himself with his dependents, never ventures on his own to occupy a place and have his hut or small structure. The question is, are these poor people on the road? But those under whose encouragement or blessings such occupation was done remain silent spectators not even questioned. The law needs to be corrected to hold them responsible and rehabilitation should be provided for the evacuees. Appreciating the demolition sprays more chilly powder on the wounds.

G Rajmohan | Anantapur

BJP IS SHELTERING CRIMINALS

Sir — After the intervention of the apex court, Delhi police which have been altogether reluctant to register an FIR against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, President Wrestling Federation of India against sexual harassment of the players had to reg-

ister two FIRs. It should be remembered that it is not a solitary case where the BJP has been giving shelter to notorious criminals of the party. The reason is clear — Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is a six-time MP from the BJP. Further people have to recall the notorious Kuldeep Singh Sengar also a BJP MLA, who was accused of the rape of a 17-year-old minor girl case in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh. It was only after the High Court's intervention that the CBI was handed over the case and eventually Sengar was arrested and sentenced.

There was another complaint against the Haryana sports minister, Sandeep Singh, of sexual harassment. Besides, the Kathua rape case and an endless list of criminals are still in the minds of the people. The BJP's attitude to charges of sexual harassment levelled against its leaders and even ministers is one of trying to shield them and avoid action.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A grim reminder of pollution menace

Ludhiana gas leak is a direct fallout of the disposal of untreated industrial waste which has reached a crescendo in Punjab

The 30th of April 2023 is a Sunday that will be painfully etched in the memories of the Giaspura locality of Ludhiana forever when 11 people lost their lives and many others had severe breathing problems when a gas leak caused people to drop dead where they stood. Surprisingly, leakage of odorous gases and effluents is an accepted fact for the residents of this locality who live amid rickety, polluting industrial units. According to the residents, in the rainy season, industrial acid is often seen mixing with rainwater and contact with the same causes rashes and skin problems. For a long time, Ludhiana and its industrial units with their suspect pollution compliance standards have been escaping national attention. The Giaspura gas leak shows that the Giaspura gas leak shows that the deplorable conditions goes to an almost unregulated industry sector riding on "flexible" pollution norms. Be it small or big industry, the environment is continuously being degraded by these units in the industrial hub of Ludhiana. The furnaces, dyeing units, electroplating units, foundries, brick kilns or iron



Ludhiana was featured in the top 50 most polluted cities of the world in 2021. Ludhiana reported an average yearly particulate matter (PM) 2.5 value of 71.8 micrograms per metric cube (µg/m³).

Thanks to these dubious achievements, the city saw a big jump of more than 100 ranks as compared to the previous year earning it the 41st spot among the cities of the world. The credit for these deplorable conditions goes to an almost unregulated industry sector riding on "flexible" pollution norms. Be it small or big industry, the environment is continuously being degraded by these units in the industrial hub of Ludhiana. The furnaces, dyeing units, electroplating units, foundries, brick kilns or iron

moulding units, all are contributing immensely to polluting the city environment. The illegal and harmful discharge and disposal of industrial waste and effluents has reached a crescendo in Punjab. The Giaspura disaster, an outcome of disposal of industrial effluents in the local sewer network became a nightmare in minutes and snuffed out lives.

Small units run from homes and single-room tenements are accorded tacit nod to operate as a result these boot-strapped units running on shoestring budgets have never heard of waste treatment plants, let alone afford them. As a result, the liquid and solid waste management rules framed by the National Green Tribunal in 2016 are alien to the industry operators. But the state pollution control board's (PCB) apathy is glaring and possibly this is why the local police authorities have warned the PCB officials in Giaspura to find out the offending parties that have caused the gas leak or be ready to be included in the FIR. Many more towns and cities in India have an inter-

mix of residences and industries, for example, Kanpur city maybe at the threshold of disasters that may unfold anytime. This requires more funds, infrastructure and manpower, however, the government must not see this as an expense but more as an investment because new industries especially small and medium-scale enterprises will spell the growth of the economy and if these units are not set up and run as per norms, the nation will have to pay major social and environmental costs in future.

Growth and prosperity cannot be at the cost of human and environmental loss. This is not the definition of inclusive growth. Businesses that are not environmentally sustainable are at best set up and run for the short term and cannot grow to be larger companies of the future. Every state in India must champion the concept of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and that alone can bring accountability to every business operator towards the environment and prevent collision of business and environmental interests.

(The writer is a policy analyst)



KOTA SRIRAJ



FIRST COLUMN

PLI GIVES A NEW LIFE TO THE SOLAR INDUSTRY

The PLI scheme is a big step towards making India energy independent



KUNAL SAXENA

Electrification is an essential lever for India to grow. For electrification to be aligned with the net-zero target, renewable energy development is an absolute must. Renewable energy production requires equipment like solar modules, wind turbines etc. Talking about solar energy, currently, there is 38 GW of manufacturing capacity of solar modules in India, but the upstream products are largely missing from the Indian territory. This renders the Indian solar module manufacturers exposed to the vagaries of foreign suppliers for the ancillary and upstream materials viz. solar cells, wafers, polysilicon etc., in turn making Indian solar modules uncompetitive.

Therefore, the need is to develop a full-blown solar manufacturing ecosystem in India. For this, the Government of India came up with the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme where the bidders were required to bid based on the extent of integration, technology, and local sourcing. The PLI – tranche 1 of INR 4500 cr. was concluded in 2021 with a total winning capacity of ~ 9 GW, while the PLI – tranche 2 of INR 19500 cr. is recently concluded with a winning capacity of ~ 40 GW.

In the recent PLI- tranche 2 bid, a bidder was supposed to quote the extent of integration, manufacturing capacity to be installed, efficiency & temperature co-efficient of the module and local value addition to be achieved each year. Also, sales volume is a factor in the PLI subsidy calculation. So, the bidder is expected to sell the solar modules of the committed technology while maintaining the local value addition. In case, during bidding, a bidder gets over-optimistic in technology to grasp a higher PLI amount, it may act against the bidder when it comes to selling the modules, for the said module might be expensive thereby facing limited offtake.



Against this, if a bidder quotes a technology, which becomes obsolete at the time of selling the modules, the bidder is expected to face push-back from the customers. So, the government has left it to the industry's prudence to decide on the module technology. The same goes for local value addition. PLI scheme has mandated a trajectory of % local value addition on a y-o-y basis. E.g., in the "Cell + Module" category, starts with a minimum of 50% in the first year and goes to 75% in the 5th year. If we look at the current scenario, most of the cost-sensitive raw materials viz. wafers, silver paste, module BOM etc. are imported. This leaves the local value addition to 35% - 40%. Given this, it is up to the industry to develop the ancillary capacities and make the scheme a success. The PLI indirectly addresses the ancillary development in India. Overall, the scheme's success would position India more strongly in its energy supply chain while minimizing India's import bill.

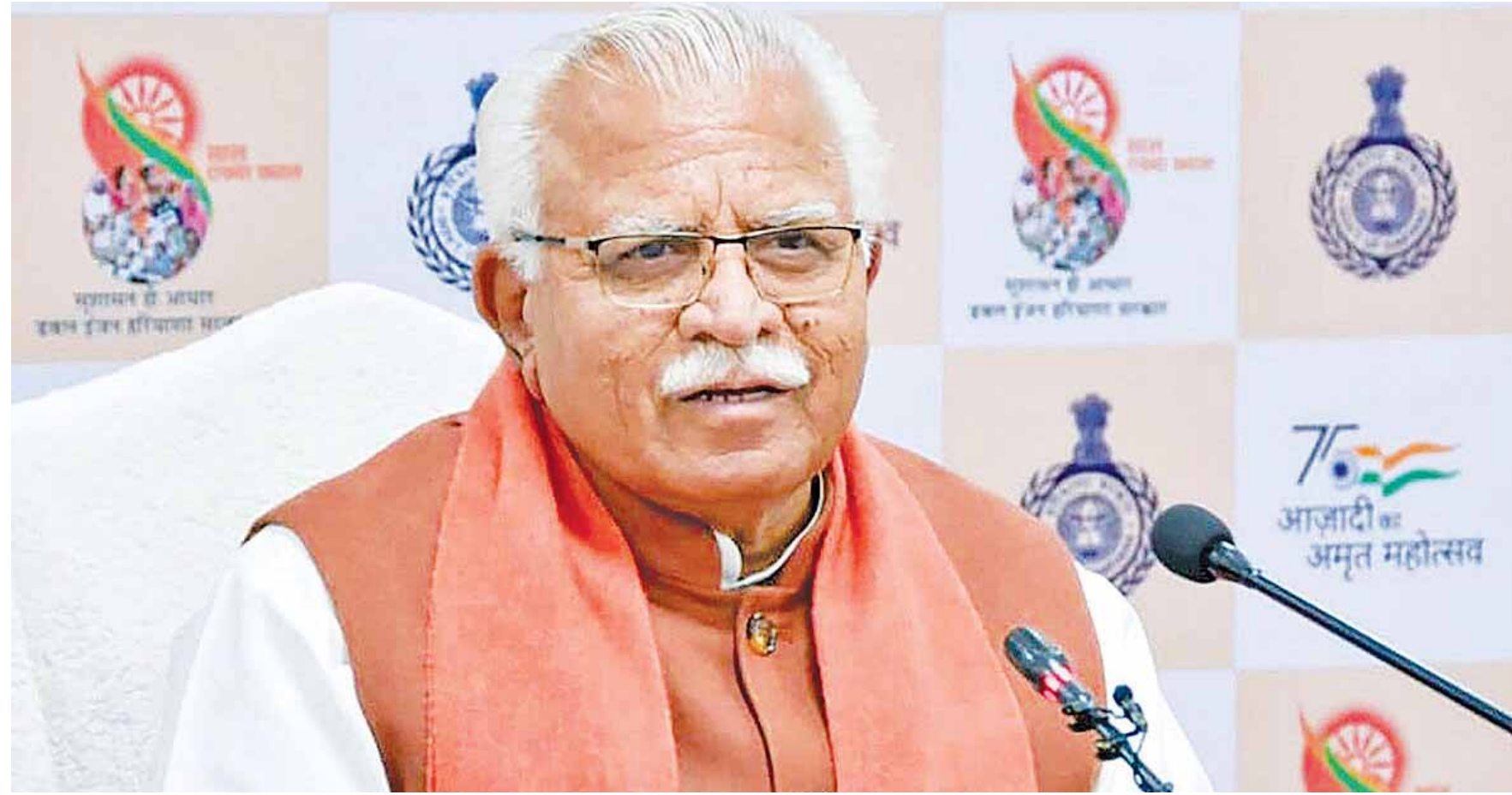
Moreover, once an industry's ecosystem is developed, it cross-pollinates with other industries. With a big downstream capacity announcement, every related industry smells the opportunity. Currently, process equipment and robotics manufacturing is completely missing from the ecosystem. This may lay a foundation for that.

The PLI scheme brings a new life to the solar manufacturing landscape of India and prompts the industry to choose what's best for it. It directly addresses the need for home production of solar modules and is a big step towards making India independent in terms of Energy. Besides this, the benefits associated with installing a technology manufacturing sector come with a big bonus. There are examples in manufacturing history when the development of a manufacturing ecosystem brought in development in other industries. This provides a multiplier effect to the Indian economy and helps boost the GDP growth, making India truly an "Atmanirbhar Bharat".

(The writer is General Manager- Strategic Initiatives, Amp Energy India)

Opposition unity is a failed project: Manohar Lal Khattar

The Haryana CM remains unfazed despite Opposition unity bids. In an interview, he tells Manish Anand that such attempts don't work



Haryana also has at least three big political players in the state. How do you look at the prospect of the Opposition unity and what impact will there be in Haryana? Khattar: This is nothing new. The Opposition unity plank is a failed project. They tried in the past also but failed miserably. The Opposition parties have tried all tricks in the 2019 elections, but the people rejected them. The Opposition parties fail to realise that they have a disconnect with the people. Congress has unveiled a slew of measures such as cash allowances for the unemployed, free electricity and several other promises.

Will Congress pose a challenge in the Haryana Assembly elections next year? Khattar: The people in Haryana are very proud and they have no appetite for freebies. The BJP government in Haryana has shown that good governance can guide the people to a fast path of progress and prosperity. Before the BJP government took office in Haryana, the losses of electricity were to the extent of over 34 per cent. But we explained to the people the benefits of paying the electricity bills. 'Jag Mag Gaon Yojna' was thus born, and the villagers began paying electricity bills for a 24-hour electricity supply. With electricity in villages, the people engaged in gainful activities, which improved their incomes. We have shown that good governance with the right intention can change the situation for the better. Thus, there are no takers for freebies in Haryana.

The Narendra Modi government at the Centre will complete nine years on May 30. What are your thoughts? Khattar: The Modi government has shown good governance. The employment of technology in governance has brought benefits to the people. The use of technology also weeded out corruption. The benefits of good governance are reaching out to the

people on a great scale.

In the last eight years, how many people have come out of the poverty line?

Khattar: The Centre mandates states to screen the people below the poverty line with an income cut-off line of Rs 1.20 lakh per family annually. But Haryana has a very high per capita income, and the poor as discussed in the cases of other states may not be here in Haryana. So, we decided that the state government will screen people in the BPL category with an annual income ceiling of Rs 1.80 lakh, much above what the Centre mandated. At the same time, we launched a massive exercise backed by IT to prepare 'Parivar Pehchan Patra', which fetches all data based on the field surveys on the basis of criteria. This has enabled a system of automatic inclusion and exclusion of the people in the BPL list based on their income.

There are currently 31.5 lakh people on the BPL list. But there may be scopes for the exclusion of genuine people because of the system error.

Khattar: Even in the case of exclusion, ration doesn't stop automatically. Such people continue to get ration for three months during which they can challenge the exclusion which will be checked with another round of field inspection. But we have been able to exclude over nine lakh such families who were filing income tax returns and holding government or private jobs from the BPL list. In place, we added over 12 lakh families who were previously deprived of their right to free foodgrains.

Is there any consideration to include families who may have a marginally higher income than the ceiling of Rs 1.80 lakh annually?

Khattar: We are contemplating including another eight lakh families in the ambit of the ration scheme with the monthly cost of Rs 3000 shared equally by the government and the beneficiaries. We seek to cover families with an annual income of Rs 1.80 lakh to Rs 3 lakh. You are leading a coalition government in Haryana.

Will there be a possibility of a pre-poll adjustment with the ally JJP? Khattar: The BJP contested the 2019 Haryana Assembly elections on its own. We formed an alliance government after the elections. Therefore, the BJP will contest the next year's poll once more on its own. Haryana mandates that 75 per cent of the unskilled workforce is sourced from within the state.

What is the impact on the industries?

Khattar: The industries have positively adopted the measure, which is also prevalent in several other states. We have launched an initiative whereby we have become a facilitator to bring employees and employers together. The first lot of demand was for 6,000 unskilled employees and we provided over profiles of 12000 candidates whose records are already verified by the government department. This eliminates middlemen and also ensures that the employees avail of all statutory benefits and get full payments.

Does the Haryana government

also give incentives to the industries for hiring locally?

Khattar: We have divided Haryana into four categories, from Group A to Group D. Haryana government extended monthly support of Rs 4,000 per employee to industries in Group D as part of an initiative to promote the industrialization of such districts.

How has Haryana employed technology in governance?

Khattar: Haryana has a very robust technology-enabled governance model. Farmers upload details of their cultivable land on the designated portal and they get benefits as given under the existing schemes. Bhavantar Yojna under which the state government pays the difference between the Minimum Support Price and the prevailing market price is fully executed through the portal. We have eliminated the scope of the middle class. Even in the case of the farmers leaving their land fallows, they are automatically paid compensation.

What changes are being seen in agriculture in Haryana?

Khattar: Farmers in Haryana are highly progressive. Farmers here are also environmentally sensitive and open to adopting the best tools and techniques. We launched 'Mera Pani, Meri Virasat' to encourage farmers to sustainable agriculture. Paddy is a water-intensive crop. We want farmers to shift from paddy cultivation to other crops which require less water. In the last few years, a significant number of farmers have shifted away from paddy to take up short-duration crops, which are also highly remunerative.

HARYANA HAS A VERY ROBUST TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED GOVERNANCE MODEL. FARMERS UPLOAD DETAILS OF THEIR CULTIVABLE LAND ON THE DESIGNATED PORTAL AND THEY GET BENEFITS AS GIVEN UNDER THE EXISTING SCHEMES

Major takeaways from Mann Ki Baat after 100 episodes

PM Modi is clear that to realise his grand plans, support of all Indians is needed

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's radio outreach programme Mann ki Baat's 100th episode has indicated a host of geopolitical underpinnings that could have a long-term impact on India at the regional level at the least. Apart from 22 Indian languages and 29 dialects, Mann Ki Baat was broadcast in 11 foreign languages including French, Chinese, Indonesian, Tibetan, Burmese, Baluchi, Arabic, Pashto, Persian, Dari (a dialect of the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan) and Swahili besides English.

The choice of foreign languages for the broadcast like Chinese, Indonesian, Tibetan, Burmese, Baluchi, Pashto and Dari is indicative of the Prime Minister's confidence to enhance support on the cultural



RAKESH SINGH

(The writer is a special correspondent, The Pioneer)

front from people outside India, especially countries that were part of India over two millennia back.

The outreach is intended for these regions and several related cultural aspects were covered in the 100th episode, which is important in the current context. The areas where Chinese, Indonesian, Tibetan, Burmese, Baluchi, Pashto and Dari are spoken were under Chandragupta Maurya empire (350-295 BCE).

The choice of these foreign languages used for the broadcast coincides with the Akhand Bharat map. The areas in which these languages are spoken have been separated from the Akhand Bharat in the historical past. Geopolitical analysts said the disintegration of the common cultural fabric



also referred to as sindhu ghati ki sabhyata (Indus Valley Civilisation) from the Akhand Bharat is indicative of the pain the Prime Minister feels for the historical shift.

However, the experts pointed out that the outline of the Akhand Bharat in Modi's vision is more focused on co-existing cultural values and not religion-based as either Islam

or Buddhism is prevalent in these regions. The policy also discounts military integration for assimilation. The vision is also indicative of Modi's strong adherence to the parent organization's ideology and willingness to accommodate people of various cultural backgrounds if Akhand Bharat becomes a reality. Modi's strong bond with the BJP's par-

ent organization RSS is also explicit.

The vision and the discreet implementation of the idea are a pointer that Prime Minister Narendra Modi relies mostly on National Security Advisor Ajit Doval for policies related to this. Doval directly deals with the region in which these languages are spoken. He has also spent several years on the ground in this region.

The vision is also indicative of a grand strategy for the next five years where India will challenge, compete and contain China through the cultural initiative. The challenge, competition and contain strategy will make India more secure and help New Delhi create a regional cultural umbrella. With the execution of the grand strategy, the

Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb concept formulated by the Britishers to maintain law and order will fade with a broader cultural concept like the revival of Sindhu Ghati Sabhyata covering Balochs, Tibetans, Muslims and Hindus, experts said.

"To fulfil this strategy, the cultural and moral support of the Balochs in Balochistan, Tibetans in China and Pashtuns in Afghanistan is envisioned. All of these groups-- Balochs, Tibetans and Pashtuns are opposed to China. The strategy aims to make India more relevant by supporting these groups who harbour anti-China sentiment," Geopolitical analyst Dr Rituraj Mate told The Pioneer. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a clear understanding that it is not

easy to realize the grand strategy unless the support of all Indians is enlisted, a reason why the Mann ki Baat programme is being broadcast in 22 regional languages and 29 dialects across the country, Dr Mate said.

The vision further highlights the willingness to expose the original concept of Hindutva ideology which postulates vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the world is one family) and implement the grand strategy through cultural interventions as military means can neither be afforded nor is sustainable in the current era. The cultural influence of India will not increase unless significant acceptance from a cross-section of people in the region is garnered across geographies, he added.

Sunak admits 'disappointing' first electoral test outcome

AP ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Friday admitted it was a "disappointing" run for the governing Conservative Party, with the Opposition Labour and Liberal Democrat parties making significant gains in the local elections.

Voters went to the polls on Thursday to elect local representatives in 230 of England's 317 councils in what marked Sunak's first electoral test at the ballot box since the British Indian leader took charge at 10 Downing Street in October 2022. Even as the results continue to be counted, Labour gained control of some of its top target councils including Medway in south-east England which has been under Tory control for 20 years. Pollsters had forecast that a loss of fewer than 1,000 seats for the governing Tories would be seen as a good result for Sunak, given that the government usually faces a drubbing in

local polls close to a general election – which is expected towards the second half of next year. However, that threshold seems set to be crossed and will add immense pressure on the British Indian leader within his own party ranks.

"It is always disappointing to lose hardworking Conservative councillors," said Sunak as the early results and trends poured in. "I'm not detecting any massive groundswell of movement towards the Labour Party," the 42-year-old prime minister stressed. However, the Opposition parties have declared the results a big sign of things to come in the general election.

"Make no mistake, we are on course for a Labour majority at the next general election. We've won the trust and confidence of voters and now we can go on and change our country," said Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer. Starmer travelled to Medway to celebrate his party's victory in the Kent council with



local activists. "You didn't just get it over the line, you blew the doors off," he told the crowd. He said Labour were "on course" to win a majority at the next general election. Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey, meanwhile, described the results as a "ground-breaking night" for his party. "The Liberal Democrats are the big winners in this year's

local elections," he declared. While poll experts are striking a note of caution to say that local elections have never proven to be very reliable indicators for a general election, the mood music around Sunak having taken over a deeply divided party without the backing of the wider British electorate has only got louder. "The clear message of the night is indeed that the Conservatives have done badly," polling expert John Curtice told the BBC.

"The slightly more difficult thing for the Labour Party is that yes, it has hit some of its targets and it has made significant gains already, [but] it is having to share the spoils with other Opposition parties. "And in particular, the one niggle the Labour Party will really have I think about these results if it continues is that yes, the swing in the local elections is almost what you would expect from the national polls — but not quite," he cautioned.



Writer Mtserratt Luna-Ballantyne, right, wears a Darth Vader mask while doing fellow members of The Writers Guild of America to picket outside of Universal Studios on Thursday in Universal City, Calif. The first Hollywood strike in 15 years commenced Tuesday as the 11,500 members of the Writers Guild of America stopped working when their contract expired AP | PTI

Biden sending top aide to meet with Saudi crown prince

Washington (AP): US President Joe Biden is dispatching one of his top advisers to Saudi Arabia to meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto leader of the oil-rich kingdom, later this week.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Thursday he will travel to Saudi Arabia on Saturday for talks with Saudi officials and will also meet with his counterparts from the United Arab Emirates and India during his visit.

Sullivan said he would "discuss new areas of cooperation between New Delhi and the Gulf, as well as the United States and the rest of the region." India and UAE last year signed a comprehensive economic partnership aimed at improving ties between the two countries.

Sullivan is expected to meet with the crown prince, who is often referred to by his initials MBS, during the visit, according to a person familiar with Sullivan's travel plans who was not authorised to publicly discuss that element of them.

Erdogan faces tough election amid earthquake, inflation

AP ■ ANKARA

Early in his political career, a devastating earthquake and economic troubles helped propel Recep Tayyip Erdogan to power in Turkey. Two decades later, similar circumstances are putting his leadership at risk.

The highly divisive and populist Erdogan is seeking a third consecutive term as president on May 14, after three stints as prime minister, which would extend his rule into a third decade. He already is Turkey's longest-serving leader.

The presidential and parliamentary elections could be the most challenging yet for the 69-year-old Erdogan. Most opinion polls point to a slight lead by his opponent, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who heads the secular, centre-left Republican People's Party, or CHP. The outcome of the presidential race could well be determined in a runoff vote May 28.

Erdogan is facing a tough test in this election because of public outrage over rising infla-

tion and his handling of the February 6 earthquake in southern Turkey that killed over 50,000 people, levelled cities and left millions without homes. His political adversaries say the government was slow to respond and that its failure to enforce building codes is to blame for the high death toll.

Some even point to government malfeasance after a 1999 earthquake in northwestern Turkey near the city of Izmit that killed about 18,000 people, saying that taxes imposed from that disaster were misspent and worsened the effects of this year's quake.

The political party founded by Erdogan in 2001 came to power amid an economic crisis and the Izmit quake. His Justice and Development Party, or AKP, capitalised on public anger over government mishandling of the disaster, and Erdogan became prime minister in 2003 and has never relinquished leadership of the country. Still, even with resent-

ment directed toward Erdogan over his handling of the February quake and the economy, analysts caution against underestimating him, pointing to his enduring appeal among working- and middle-class religious voters who had long felt alienated by Turkey's former secular and Western-leaning elites. Erdogan's nationalist policies, often confrontational stance against the West and moves that have raised Islam's profile in the country continue to resonate among conservative supporters. They point to an economic boom in the first half of his rule that lifted many people out of poverty, adding that his past successes are proof of his ability to turn things around. "There is an economic crisis in Turkey, we can't deny it. And yes, this economic crisis has had a huge impact on us," said Sabit Celik, a 38-year-old shop owner selling cleaning products in Istanbul. "But still, I don't think anyone else (but Erdogan) can come and fix this."

'US effort to extradite Assange not worth it'

AP ■ CANBERRA

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese expressed frustration at the United States' continuing efforts to extradite WikiLeaks founder and Australian citizen Julian Assange, saying: "There is nothing to be served by his ongoing incarceration." Albanese's comments Friday in an Australian Broadcasting Corp. interview appeared to escalate diplomatic pressure on the United States to drop the charges against the 51-year-old Assange, who has spent four years in Britain's Belmarsh Prison fighting extradition to the United States.

Before that, Assange had taken asylum for seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Albanese said Assange's case had to be examined in terms of whether the time Assange had "effectively served" was in excess of what would be "reasonable" if the allegations against him were proved.

"I just say that enough is enough. There is nothing to be served by his ongoing incarceration," Albanese said.

"I know it's frustrating, I share the frustration. I can't do more than make very clear what my position is and the U.S. administration is certainly very aware of what the Australian government's position is," Albanese added.

Assange has battled in British courts for years to avoid being sent to the U.S., where he faces 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse that stem from WikiLeaks' publication of a huge trove of classified documents in 2010. American prosecutors allege he helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

To his supporters, Assange is a secrecy-busting journalist who exposed US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Several MoUs to be signed, Jewish Trail to be inaugurated next week

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

India and Israel are expected to sign several MoUs next week to boost bilateral trade with a focus on agritech, energy, tourism and healthcare during Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen's visit to New Delhi, a top Israeli trade body official has said. Cohen, who will be on a three-day visit to India from May 9 to 11, will also inaugurate a "Jewish trail" in Mumbai.

A business delegation of 25 multi-sectoral companies will be accompanying the Israeli foreign minister during his trip to explore opportunities, along with members of leading economic organisations who will be signing MoUs with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Anat Bernstein-Reich, President of the Israel-Asia Chamber of Commerce, told PTI.

Israel-Asia Chamber of Commerce, The Israeli Manufacturers Association (IMA) and the Israeli Export

Institute will all be signing MoUs with CII.

"The growing trade relations between Israel and India require a stronger collaboration between the economic organisations of the two sides. CII has been a close friend of our Chamber and we are planning to host several of their delegations in the near future. As part of the I2U2 programme, we hosted in Israel a delegation of CII from UAE and India. We are planning an I2U2 event in India soon," Bernstein-Reich said. From a humble beginning of USD 200 million in bilateral trade (primarily in diamonds) in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, merchandise trade has diversified and reached USD 7.86 billion (excluding defence) during the period 2021-2022.

In addition, bilateral trade in services in 2021 was USD 1.1 billion and in FY 2022-23 bilateral merchandise trade from April to December 2022 stood

at USD 8.09 billion (excluding defence).

I2U2, a quad comprising India, Israel, UAE and the United States was unveiled during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Israel in October 2021 and since then it has held several meetings, including one in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated along with the top leaders of the other three countries involved.

The quad has indicated a firm commitment to enhancing the economic interests of the involved nations by putting in place projects related to ensuring food security and strengthening the renewable energy sector. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier this week conducted the India Forum with the participation of several ministries with the aim of enhancing governmental coordination leading to a larger trade, innovation, tourism and cultural collaboration, Bernstein-Reich said.

1 killed, 13 hurt in Japan earthquake

AP ■ TOKYO

A strong, shallow earthquake hit central Japan on Friday afternoon, killing at least one person and injuring 13 others, but no tsunami warning was issued. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck Ishikawa prefecture on the west coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, the US Geological Survey said. The Japan Meteorological Agency measured the quake at 6.5 and said it was centred at a depth of about 12 kilometres (7.5 miles). One person was reported dead and at least 13 were injured in Suzu city at the northern tip of Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa prefecture, a city official said. He said six homes were damaged and rain could trigger mudslides, causing further damage. He did not say how the person died, but the Fire and Disaster Management Agency reported that a person was found without vital signs after falling from a ladder.

Britain to start free trade with New Zealand, Australia

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Britain's free trade agreements with New Zealand and Australia will come into force by the end of this month, the leaders from the three nations said Friday.

The announcement came while the prime ministers from the two Southern Hemisphere nations are in London for the coronation of King Charles III. The deals are part of Britain's efforts to expand its economic ties after it left the European Union. Both deals were first agreed to in 2021. Zealand officials say its deal will help boost sales of products like wine, beer, beef and honey, and will increase the size of its economy by up to 1 billion New Zealand dollars (USD 629 million).

New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said it was a gold-standard agreement. "The market access outcomes are among the very best New Zealand has secured in any

trade deal," Hipkins said in a statement.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the deal with New Zealand reflected the close relationship between the nations.

"This deal will unlock new opportunities for businesses and investors across New Zealand and the United Kingdom, drive growth, boost jobs, and, most importantly, build a more prosperous future for the next generation," Sunak said in a statement.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said it would mean more market access for its exporters. "So for beef, for our sheep products, for our seafood, for our other products it will mean much greater access to the British market," Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. in an interview.

Albanese said it would also mean greater access for younger Australians to work in Britain and vice versa after the terms of a working holiday arrangement were expanded.

Gilded carriages, crown jewels polished up for coronation

PTI ■ LONDON

Charles, who acceded to the British throne on the passing of Queen Elizabeth II in September last year, will be formally crowned King at a solemn religious ceremony at Westminster Abbey in London on Saturday, last seen 70 years ago for his late mother.

Over 7,000 troops have been rehearsing into the early hours of the day in preparation for one of their most historic royal duties to date – to line up the procession route and the gilded horse-drawn carriage of Charles, 74, and Camilla, 75, to be ridden from Buckingham Palace for their Coronation.

While Saturday's ceremony will include many similar elements from Queen Elizabeth II's crowning in June 1953, there are several crucial changes – not least the cut-size congregation of 2,200 as compared to 8,000 of the past, as a nod to Charles' sustainable outlook in the face of a cost-of-living crisis facing the country. The many multi-faith elements incorporated into the Christian ceremony are also reflective of his more modern touch.

"It is my prayer that all who share in this service, whether they are of faith or no faith, will find ancient wisdom and new hope that brings inspiration and joy," said Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who will be presiding over the ceremony.

Britain's first Hindu Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will read from the biblical book of Colossians soon after he and wife Akshata lead the host nation procession into the Abbey. House of Lords peers who belong to different faith traditions of Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam will present key Regalia to the King. While Lord Indrajit Singh, 90, will represent the Sikh faith and present the Coronation Glove, Lord Syed Kamall, 56, of Indo-Guyanese heritage, will represent the Muslim faith and present the Armills or a pair of bracelets. Lord Narendra

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Akshata Murty wife of the British Prime Minister greets the US First Lady Jill Biden on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street in London on Friday. The First Lady is in London to attend the Coronation of King Charles III, on Saturday AP/PTI

Babubhai Patel, 84, will represent the Hindu faith and hand over the Sovereign's Ring to Charles.

India will be represented at the gathering by Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar and his wife, Dr Sudeep Dhankhar.

On Saturday morning, the King and Queen will travel from Buckingham Palace to the Abbey in the Diamond Jubilee

State Coach created for Queen Elizabeth II to commemorate the 60th anniversary of her reign in 2012.

This horse-drawn carriage is the far more comfortable one of the two to feature in the two-way procession, including air-conditioning and shock absorbers. The less comfortable royal carriage, the ancient Gold State Coach, will be used for a

shorter return journey from the Abbey to the palace.

The Gold State Coach was last seen during the Pageant of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in June 2022 and was commissioned in 1760.

The Coronation Regalia, the heart of the Crown Jewels which remain at the Tower of London for public display at all other times as a set of sacred and secular objects which symbolise the service and responsibilities of the monarch, will get their full ceremonial outing.

Charles will be crowned King as the St. Edward's Crown is placed upon his head during the ceremony – which will be made up of five key elements: the Recognition; the Oath; the Anointing; the Investiture and Crowning; and the Enthronement and Homage.

Camilla will be crowned with St. Mary's Crown studded with Cullinan diamonds, having made the diplomatic choice to shun the customary crown embedded with the infamous Kohinoor diamond due to its colonial link with India.

King to confer thank-you medals to thousands

PTI ■ LONDON

As a thank you gift from King Charles III, around 400,000 Coronation Medals will be handed out to the UK armed forces personnel and emergency frontline workers taking part in the historic ceremony on Saturday.

The UK government unveiled the design of the medal, which will be handed out to everyone actively contributing and supporting the Coronation, including choristers, police officers, military personnel and St. John Ambulance personnel, as well as those directly involved in the delivery of the mega event.

The design features a double portrait of King Charles and Queen Camilla on the front and a version of their Royal Cypher, a laurel wreath and the date of the Coronation on the

reverse. The ribbon is made up of red, blue and white vertical stripes – the colours of the UK's Union Flag and are made of nickel silver and plated in nickel.

"This medal is a symbol of the critical role our emergency services will play in this potentially once in a lifetime opportunity to honour our new King," said UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman. "However, it recognises not just those who are helping at the Coronation, but the heroes across our emergency services, such as the police, fire and rescue services, that go to work every day to protect and support us all," the Indian-origin minister said. The medals will also be given to serving frontline members of the police, fire, emergency services, prison services and armed forces that

have completed five full calendar years of service.

"The Coronation would not be possible without the dedication and selfless service shown by our armed forces and other public servants. This medal is a fitting recognition of their efforts, and a thank you from the nation. It will be worn with pride for years to come," said UK Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden.

The double portrait of the King and Queen Consort on the front of the newly unveiled Coronation Medal was designed by Martin Jennings who also designed the official effigy of the King for the new coins issued by the UK's Royal Mint. The Coronation Medal is made by Worcestershire Medal Service Ltd in Birmingham.

"The Coronation Medal will act as a reminder of the impor-

tant part each person has played in this moment of history. From our Armed Forces who protect our country to the emergency services who care for us at home, alongside those volunteers who are giving up their time to make this event so special, I am delighted that we can mark their contribution to this special day, and for each and every day that they go above and beyond serving their country," said UK Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer. "Our Armed Forces and the monarch have a unique bond. Our histories and customs mirror the reigns of Kings and Queens. Our deployments are in their names and our allegiance is sworn by each and every one of us. The Coronation Medal will celebrate that bond and allow huge numbers of service personnel to reaffirm that linkage as King Charles is crowned

our new monarch," added UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

The tradition of Coronation Medals dates to the reign of King James I when the first medal was awarded in 1603, featuring a bust of James I wearing the costume of a Roman Emperor. Its reverse included a crowned lion rampant holding a beacon and a wheat sheaf. The estimated 400,000 Coronation Medal recipients for this weekend will include: individuals who have actively contributed to the official Coronation events in Westminster Abbey and processions, and other officially recognised ceremonial Coronation events; serving members of the Armed Forces who have completed five full calendar years of service on May 6 or participate in Armed Forces Coronation events during the course of 2023.

British Indian chef Manju Malhi all set for her big day as guest

PTI ■ LONDON

When King Charles III is formally crowned Britain's monarch at a grand ceremony on Saturday, Indian-origin chef Manju Malhi will be among the chosen few British Empire Medal (BEM) recipients seated at Westminster Abbey in London.

She is among the last batch to be awarded a BEM by Charles' mother, late Queen Elizabeth II, for services to the community in London during the COVID-19 response. The medal recognised her work offering remote cookery classes to the old age charity Open Age during lockdown and got her the coveted Abbey invite to a gathering of an estimated



2,000 guests made up of community champions, charity representatives, world leaders and royalty.

"When I realised it is actually happening, I felt like gosh – who am I to be at one of the most historic moments in global history, sitting in the Abbey

watching the ceremony take place for real," shares Malhi.

"I'm quite nervous because normally I just cook and throw on some clothes and an apron. But this is almost like a wedding but more important than that. I think I have everything ready; I have to do a checklist like I do with my ingredients," she said.

Malhi has chosen British Indian fashion designer Geeta Handa to create an Indo-Western outfit that reflects her heritage and resonates with the regal theme of the day.

The result is a bespoke design, tailored from pure Indian broderie cotton to a vibrant royal blue tone and styled as a kameez over trousers.

8 killed in yet another Serbia shooting

AP ■ BELGRADE

A gunman apparently shooting at random killed eight people and wounded 14 in three Serbian villages, authorities said, shaking a nation still in the throes of grief over a mass shooting a day earlier. Police arrested a suspect on Friday after an all-night manhunt. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic called on Thursday's shooting an attack on the whole nation.



Police officers prepare for a chase in the village of Dubona, some 50 kilometers south of Belgrade, Serbia on Friday. AP/PTI

It came a day after a 13-year-old boy used his father's guns to kill eight fellow students and a guard at a school in Belgrade, the capital. The bloodshed sent shockwaves through a Balkan nation scarred by wars, but unused to mass murders. Though Serbia is awash with weapons left over from the wars of the 1990s, Wednesday's shooting was the first at a school in the country's modern history.

50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital. Vucic said the assailant targeted people "wherever they were."

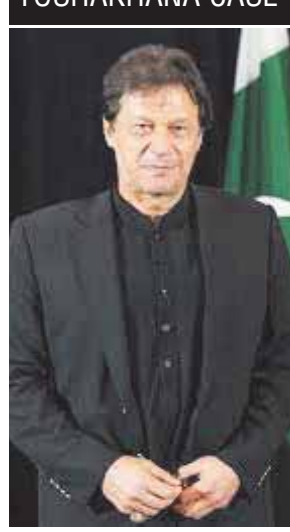
Prokic added. Police said a suspect, identified by the initials UB, was arrested near the central Serbian town of Kragujevac, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Belgrade. Authorities released a photo of the suspect in a police car, showing a young man in a blue T-shirt with an inscription and a map of part of Europe on it. Vucic vowed to the nation in an address that the suspect "will never again see the light of the day." He referred to the attack as an act of terror, as is typical and announced a series of "anti-terrorist" measures, including the hiring of 1,200 policemen and putting a police officer on guard each day at schools. Before the second shooting, Serbia spent much of

Thursday reeling. Students, many wearing black and carrying flowers, filled streets around the school in central Belgrade as they paid silent homage to slain peers. Serbian teachers' unions announced protests and strikes to warn about a crisis in the school system and demand changes. The same day, authorities moved to boost gun control, as police urged citizens to lock up their guns and keep them away from children. The government ordered a two-year moratorium on short-barrel guns and tougher sentences for people who enable minors to get hold of guns. Under current law, a registered gun owner in Serbia must be over 18, healthy, and have no criminal record. Weapons must be kept locked and separately from ammunition. Wednesday's shooting at the Vladislav Ribnikar school also left seven people hospitalized, six children and a teacher. One girl who was shot in the head remains in life-threatening condition, and a boy is in serious condition with spinal injuries, doctors said Thursday.

Pak ex-premier to face indictment on May 10

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

TOSHA KHANA CASE



An Islamabad court on Friday announced that it will indict former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan on May 10 in a case in which he allegedly hid the proceeds from the sale of state gifts.

The Toshakhana case was filed against Khan last year after the Election Commission of Pakistan ruled that he failed to declare the funds he received after selling the gifts given by foreign dignitaries.

A toshkhana is a treasure house where gifts that are received as honour from foreign dignitaries are stored. Khan, 70, has challenged the maintainability of the case but Additional Sessions Judge Humayun Dilawar of the sessions court dismissed the pleas and objection regarding the jurisdiction after hearing arguments by the lawyers.

The judge announced to indict the accused, Khan and also summoned the chief of

the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in person on the day of the indictment.

Earlier, the court had fixed February 7 to indict him but the process was deferred several times as Khan was not present and his lawyers also pressed to decide the issue of

maintainability of the case. The case is based on the ECP ruling of November 22 last year that decided to hold a trial of Khan and later sent a reference to the court that he had misled officials about the gifts he had received from foreign dignitaries during his tenure as the prime minister.

The cricketer-turned-politician is currently facing over 140 cases registered against him under treason, terrorism, murder, attempted murder, blasphemy, and other charges.

Khan was ousted from power in April last year after losing a no-confidence vote, which he alleged was part of a US-led conspiracy targeting him because of his independent foreign policy decisions on Russia, China, and Afghanistan.

In an informal chat with journalists in the Islamabad High Court on Thursday, Khan said that a double-hundred of cases would soon be filed against him.

China biggest global jailer of journalists: Press group

AP ■ WASHINGTON

China was the biggest global jailer of journalists last year with more than 100 behind bars, according to a press freedom group, as President Xi Jinping's government tightened control over society.

figure in decades, called during a 2016 meeting with journalists who had been awarded official prizes for them to adhere to "the correct orientation of public opinion."

Xi is pursuing a "crusade against journalism," Reporters Without Borders said in a report Wednesday. It called China's decline in press freedom "disastrous."

Beijing operates what is regarded as the world's most extensive system of internet controls.

Its filters try to block the Chinese public from seeing websites abroad operated by news outlets, governments and human rights and other activist groups.

Chinese journalists have been prosecuted on charges of spying, leaking national secrets and picking quarrels, a vague accusation used to jail dissidents. Others are subjected to surveillance, intimidation and harassment.

Journalist Dong Yuyu, who worked at a ruling party-

affiliated newspaper and is a former Harvard University fellow, faces espionage charges after being detained for more than one year, his family said last week.

In 2022, Chinese-born Australian journalist Cheng Lei was tried in China on national security charges but has yet to learn the verdict, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in March.

Cheng worked for CGTN, the English-language state TV channel aimed at foreign audiences. She was detained in August 2019 and accused of sharing state secrets.

In Hong Kong, the Communist Party forced a prominent newspaper, Apple Daily, to shut down as part of a crackdown on pro-democracy sentiment.

Apple Daily's founder, Jimmy Lai, was convicted of fraud last year that his supporters said were politically motivated. Six other former executives of the newspaper pleaded guilty.

Foreign ministers of Pak, China & Af to meet in Islamabad

Islamabad (PTI): The foreign ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan will meet here for a trilateral meeting on Saturday that aims to forge cooperation on the vexed Afghan issue and also have bilateral interactions with top Pakistani leaders.

Pakistan's Foreign Office in two separate statements confirmed the visit of Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang and acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to attend the 5th China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, of which Pakistan is a member.

"China's State Councillor and Foreign Minister H.E. Qin Gang will pay an official visit to Pakistan on May 5 and 6, 2023. This would be his first official visit to Pakistan since assuming office," FO said in a statement. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and State Councillor Qin will co-chair the 4th round of the

Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue, which is a structured mechanism that reviews bilateral cooperation in key areas.

The two sides will reaffirm the abiding vitality of the All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership; develop a roadmap for multidimensional cooperation between Pakistan and China; and discuss the evolving regional and global landscape.

The 3rd round of the Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue took place in July 2021 in Chengdu, China.

Separately, FO said that Muttaqi will lead a high-level delegation, including Acting Afghan Minister for Commerce and Industry Haji Nooruddin Azizi, and senior officials from the Afghan ministries of foreign affairs, transport, and trade. "The visit of the Acting Afghan Foreign Minister is a continuation of Pakistan's political engagement process with Afghanistan," FO said.

Russia's Wagner boss threatens Bakhmut pullout in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

The owner of Russia's Wagner Group military contractor threatened on Friday to pull his troops out of the protracted battle for the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut next week, accusing Russia's military command of starving his forces of ammunition and causing them heavy losses.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a notorious millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, claimed that Wagner had planned to capture Bakhmut by May 9. That day is a major Russian holiday marking the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

But, Prigozhin said, his force hasn't received enough artillery ammunition supplies from the Russian military since Monday.

Known for his bluster, Prigozhin has previously made unverifiable claims and made threats he hasn't carried out. Hours before releasing the

statement, Prigozhin's spokesperson published a video of him angrily demanding ammunition from Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov.

In the video, Prigozhin stands in front of around 30 uniformed bodies lying on the ground. He says they are the bodies of Wagner fighters who died on Thursday alone.

Prigozhin speaks in a furious tone and uses numerous expletives in the video.

"These are someone's fathers and someone's sons," Prigozhin says, pointing at the bodies. "The scum that doesn't give us ammunition will eat their guts in hell."

He alleged that Russia's regular army was supposed to protect the flanks as Wagner troops pushed forward but is "barely holding on to them," deploying "tens and rarely hundreds" of troops.

Russia's Defence Ministry did not immediately comment on the claims, and it was not possible to independently ver-

ify them. "Wagner ran out of resources to advance in early April, but we're advancing despite the fact that the enemy's resources outnumber ours five-fold," Prigozhin's statement said. "Because of the lack of ammunition, our losses are growing exponentially every day."

The Wagner Group has spearheaded the struggle for control of Bakhmut, which is the longest — and likely bloodiest — battle of the war.

The more than eight months of fighting there is believed to have cost thousands of lives, though neither side is saying how many.

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survive a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

Canada mulls expulsion of Chinese diplomat for targeting lawmaker

AP ■ TORONTO

Canada's foreign minister said on Thursday the country is considering the expulsion of Chinese diplomats over an intelligence agency report saying one of them plotted to intimidate the Hong Kong relatives of a Canadian lawmaker. Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said her department was summoning China's ambassador to a meeting to underline that Canada won't tolerate such interference.



She said the intelligence agency report indicated that opposition Conservative lawmaker Michael Chong and his Hong Kong relatives were targeted after Chong criticised Beijing's human rights record. "We're assessing different options including the expulsion of diplomats," Joly said before a Parliament committee.

Canada's spy agency has not released details publicly. Chong has said the report identifies a Toronto-based diplomat as being part of the plot. Chong has been critical of Beijing's treatment of Uyghur Muslims in China's Xinjiang province. "I cannot imagine the shock and concern of learning that your loved ones have been targeted in this way," Joly said to Chong at the committee hearing. "There will be consequences." Chong said the diplomat should be on the first plane out of Canada.

"It is inexplicable that this diplomat hasn't been told to leave the country already," he said. "If we do not take this course of action we are basically putting up a giant billboard for all authoritarian states around world that says we are open to foreign interference targeting Canadian citizens. That's why this individual needs to be sent packing." Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu denied interference in a statement and warned

against expelling its diplomats. Once again, China strongly urges the Canadian side to immediately stop this self-directed political farce, and not go further down the wrong and dangerous path. Should the Canadian side continue to make provocations, China will play along every step of the way until the very end," Cong said. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday that he did not learn of the spy agency report until a Globe and Mail article Monday, citing top-secret documents, said the spy agency had the intelligence. But Chong told Parliament that Canada's national security adviser informed him the 2021 report went to various points in government, including to the national security adviser at the time. Trudeau has ordered Canada's intelligence agencies to immediately inform lawmakers of any threats against them, regardless of whether those threats are considered credible.

Canada's spy agency didn't tell Chong about the targeting of the family until this week. Many governments, the UN, and human rights groups accuse China of sweeping a million or more people from its Uyghur community and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups into detention camps, where many have said they were tortured, sexually assaulted, and forced to abandon their language and religion.

'Lanka's foreign reserves improves to USD 2.69 bn'

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Colombo (PTI): Debt-ridden Sri Lanka's foreign currency reserves improved to USD 2.69 billion in March 2023 from a mere USD 50 million in May last year, giving indications of marginal improvement of the island nation's economy, data from the Central Bank said on Friday.

Sri Lanka has been in financial turmoil and its total debt is USD 83.6 billion, of which foreign debt amounts to USD 42.6 billion externally and domestic debt amounts to USD 42 billion.

In April 2022, Sri Lanka declared its first-ever debt default, the worst economic crisis since its independence from Britain in 1948, triggered by forex shortages that sparked public protests.

According to Central Bank of Sri Lanka data, the island's foreign currency reserves had improved to 2.69 billion dollars in March 2023, an improvement from under 50 million in May last year.

Analysts said that the USD 2.69 billion, includes a 1.4 billion US dollar currency swap from China with conditions attached to its usage.

Therefore the usable reserves would be just 1.6 billion dollars, the analysts say. By May last year, the country was deeply plunged into its worst-ever economic crisis since 1948.

Reserves not sufficient to pay for imports led to shortages of essentials and power cuts.

Sri Lanka was then thrown a lifeline with an Indian line of credit worth USD 4 billion which paid for the imports of essentials and fuel. This triggered public protests which culminated in the resignation of the then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout which was released mid-March amounts to nearly 3 billion dollars to be disbursed over 4 years.

Wickremesinghe calls for unity in solidarity to build affluent nation

PTI ■ COLOMBO

President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday called on Sri Lankans facing "troubled times" due to the unprecedented economic crisis to unite to rebuild an affluent nation. In his message on the occasion of Vesak Poya Day, Wickremesinghe, also the cash-strapped country's finance minister, said the timeless philosophy of the Buddha becomes a source of solace.

Vesak Poya Day commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha. The three events in his life are said to have happened on the same date.

The president, in his message, urged the people to rise above all differences and unite in these "troubled times."

"At this juncture of the



country's unprecedented economic crisis, the timeless philosophy of the Buddha becomes a source of solace," he said.

"Therefore, during these troubled times, it is imperative to rise above all differences and join together in unity and service as espoused by the Buddha, to overcome the dangers in pursuing a life of nor-

malty," Wickremesinghe said. Wickremesinghe also granted presidential pardons to 988 inmates serving time for minor offences in the island's jails on the occasion, the NewsFirst news portal reported on Friday.

The Indian High Commission in Colombo organised a special exhibition on India's rich Buddhist Heritage as a part of the festivities in Colombo, the state-run Daily News newspaper reported.

Wickremesinghe, accompanied by Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay, senior ministers and other dignitaries, visited the exhibition at the soft opening of the Vesak Festival, jointly organised by the President's Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office and Gangaramaya Temple on Wednesday.

Ukraine delegate hits Russian official at Black Sea summit

Istanbul (AP): Ukrainian and Russian delegates have had to be separated after a scuffle during a meeting of Black Sea countries in the Turkish capital Ankara.

Oleksandr Marikovski, a Ukrainian member of parliament, landed several blows to the head of a Russian official after his Ukrainian flag was ripped from his hands during a summit at the Turkish parliament building on Thursday.

A video posted on Marikovski's Facebook page shows him waving the flag behind Russian delegate Ola Timofeeva as she records a video on her phone. A man approaches, grabs the flag and is chased by Marikovski.

During a brief altercation in parliament's hallway, Marikovski grabs the flag back, pushing the man in the face. Others separate the men and plead "please, no fight-

ing," Marikovski replies: "It's our flag. We're going to fight for this flag."

In a caption to his Facebook video, Marikovski wrote: "Paws off our flag, paws off Ukraine, Russian filth!"

The outburst happened at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, a grouping of 13 countries. It came a day before officials from Russia, Ukraine and Turkey were scheduled to meet in Istanbul to discuss extending the deal for exporting grain and fertiliser through Black Sea ports, which is due to expire on May 18.

The deal, which was first agreed last July, has allowed cargo ships to transport millions of tons of food for export safely through the Black Sea, despite the war in Ukraine.

Indian-origin bros killed in US; compatriot held

Houston (PTI): Two Indian-origin brothers were shot dead by a compatriot in the US state of Oregon in a case of possible homicide, police and media reports said. The incident occurred on Wednesday when the accused, 21-year-old Jobanpreet Singh, shot and killed two men in their 20s in a strip mall in Portland city, KGW news channel reported.

The identities of the victims were not released by the police. However, Kamal Singh, an owner of a tobacco shop across the mall, said he believed the two victims were his cousins. The two men were brothers and in their 20s, Singh said. "We just talked this morning," he said of his cousins. "My employee called and said something was wrong. There'd been a shooting." The Oregonian

newspaper quoted him as saying. Jobanpreet Singh was detained at the scene on two counts of first-degree murder and booked into a detention centre, police said on Thursday.

He made a brief appearance in court for an arraignment, entering an initial plea of not guilty on both murder charges, the local media reported.

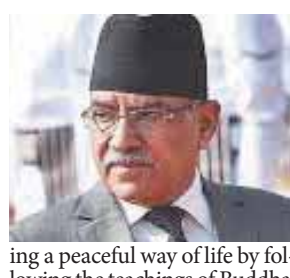
Tanus Allen, who works at a company across the street, said he was sitting in the store when he heard some type of argument and yelling. "Then all of a sudden, I heard shots and I looked up and I saw the two men fall," he said. The killings bring the city's homicide toll to 30 so far this year, compared with 35 at this time last year, according to the report.

Nepal PM: Buddha inspired me to renounce violence

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" on Friday said he was inspired by Lord Buddha to abandon the path of violence after conquering many smaller states and adopt a peaceful path shown by him.

Addressing a special function on the occasion of Buddha Purnima organised at Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, Prachanda compared himself with Maurya King Ashoka, who renounced violence after coming into the fold of Buddhism. Recalling the historic incident of Maurya emperor Ashok transforming himself by shunning the path of war and adopt-



ing a peaceful way of life by following the teachings of Buddha, Prachanda said the same is true with the Nepalese Maoists, who renounced armed struggle and adopted peaceful politics through signing Comprehensive Peace Agreement (in 2006). It is estimated that the 10-year-long conflict (1996-2006) resulted in the death of over 17,000 people. The Maoist rebels started an armed agitation in 1996 to overthrow the monar-

chy in Nepal and establish a people's system.

Prachanda said his party had abandoned the path of violence by signing the peace process as they are inspired by the teachings of Buddha. "This has also proven that peace and revolution are complementary to each other," he remarked. Nepal on Friday celebrated the 2567th Buddha Jayanti by organising various programmes. The special programme organised at Lumbini saw Prachanda as the chief guest. Speaking at the programme the Prime Minister further said that "the government is committed to resolving the instability and adverse economic situation that has currently surfaced in the country."

CAs, CS, cost accountants brought under PMLA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chartered and cost accountants and company secretaries have been brought under the anti-money laundering law for five specified financial transactions, including buying and selling of any properties and management of bank accounts, undertaken on behalf of their clients.

A notification to this effect was issued by the Finance Ministry on May 3.

The five broad categories of financial transactions listed in the notification are buying and selling of immovable property; managing of client money, securities or other assets; management of bank, savings or securities accounts; organisation of contributions for the creation, operation or management of companies; and creation, operation or management of companies, limited liability partnerships or trusts, and buying and selling of business entities.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) in a statement said chartered accountants have now become reporting entity for the purposes of these specified transactions.

"As a reporting entity they have to do KYC of all clients entering into above transac-

Plan return filing to avoid last-minute rush: GSTN

New Delhi (PTI): GST Network has advised taxpayers to plan return filing and invoice uploading better and avoid the last-minute rush, which results in the clogging of GST systems.

It said that 20.05 lakh GSTR-3B returns were filed on April 20 -- the last day for filing tax returns for sales in March, resulting in a waiting queue on the GST system and causing inconvenience to some of the taxpayers.

Around 45 per cent of the returns filed on April 20 were either NIL returns (no tax liability and no ITC availment) or were such returns where no tax was paid in cash. It also highlighted that some taxpayers are uploading a large number of invoices (up to 27 lakhs) of the past period in one GSTR-1 on the due date of filing.

"Taxpayers are advised to inculcate a month-wise return filing discipline for all the B2B invoices for the month and avoid reporting invoices of the past period in one go, as such behaviour can adversely impact the queue

(waiting time) on the GST system," GSTN said in an advisory to taxpayers.

Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) manages the technology backend of the indirect tax regime, which was launched on July 1, 2017. Currently, there are over 1.39 crore taxpayers registered under GST.

GSTN said it has upgraded its infrastructure over a period of time. However, it has observed that some taxpayers faced difficulty in filing GSTR-3B for March on April 20, 2023.

"On analysing the reasons, it was noted that a large number of taxpayers attempted to file GSTR-3B returns in the afternoon of the last day," it said. GSTN further said that taxpayers with 'Nil' returns can file them earlier and not wait for the last day to file GSTR-3B. It also suggested that taxpayers may use the SMS filing option to file NIL returns as it would be quicker and a more convenient way to file NIL returns and will also help to reduce the queue on the GST system.

tions and maintain record thereof," ICAI said.

It further said that ICAI will conduct an awareness programme for its members in relation to such financial transactions which are already prohibited on behalf of one's client, in the course of his or her profession.

"ICAI will also continue to work with the authorities and other regulators so that these changes are implemented in the right perspective and role of professionals is understood," ICAI added. The government has been tightening PMLA provisions in recent months to check black money.

In March, the Ministry had amended rules under the PMLA making it mandatory for banks and financial institutions to record financial transactions of politically exposed persons (PEP).

Also, financial institutions or reporting agencies were mandated to collect information about the financial transactions of the non-profit organisations or NGOs under the PMLA.

The government also made it mandatory for crypto exchanges and intermediaries dealing with virtual digital assets to do KYC of their clients and users of the platform.

Sensex, Nifty fall over 1 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined more than 1 per cent at close on Friday dragged down by a heavy sell-off in index major HDFC twins.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 694.96 points or 1.13 per cent to settle at 61,054.29. During the day, it plunged 747.08 points or 1.20 per cent to 61,002.17.

The NSE Nifty fell 186.80 points or 1.02 per cent to end at 18,069.

Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank tumbled 5.80 per cent followed by HDFC which plummeted 5.57 per cent. Both the stocks fell sharply amid reports that the merged HDFC entity could see significant outflow.

"The Indian market was dragged down by heavy selling in HDFC twins on fears of post-merger fund outflow. In addition, the cues from global peers were lacklustre as the ECB raised rates by 25 bps and signalled the need for further rate hikes.

"Wall Street has witnessed prolonged selling pressure due to apprehensions in the banking sector about the strength of regional banks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj



Finserv, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Wipro and NTPC were the other major laggards.

Titan, UltraTech Cement, Maruti, Nestle, ITC and Larsen & Toubro were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Shanghai ended lower, while Hong Kong settled in the green.

European equity markets were trading higher. The US markets ended lower on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers on Thursday also as they bought equities worth Rs 1,414.73 crore, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.59 per cent to USD 73.65 per barrel.

The BSE benchmark had climbed 555.95 points or 0.91 per cent to settle at 61,749.25 on Thursday. The Nifty had advanced 165.95 points or 0.92 per cent to end at 18,255.80.

FinMin allows 22 finance cos to use Aadhaar-based verification for clients

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry has allowed 22 financial companies, including Amazon Pay (India) and Hero FinCorp, to undertake Aadhaar-based authentication of clients.

The ministry, through a notification, said these 22 companies, which are already reporting entities under the PMLA, will be able to verify the identity of clients and beneficial owners' details using their Aadhaar numbers.

These 22 financial companies include Godrej Finance, Amazon Pay (India) Pvt Ltd, Aditya Birla Housing Finance, Tata Motors Finance Solution, IIFL Finance and Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Ltd.

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala said that while Aadhaar authentication of clients is made available as one of the modes of verification for banking companies, the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) provides that Aadhaar authentication can also be adopted by reporting entities

other than banking companies as may be notified by the central government.

"Accordingly, the CG has notified a list of 22 financial institutions/intermediaries, which are permitted to use Aadhaar authentication to verify the identity of clients/beneficial owners," Jhunjhunwala said.

The other modes of verification prescribed under the Money Laundering Act include offline verification under the Aadhaar Act, use of a passport and any other officially valid document or modes of identification as may be notified by the central government, and the client has a voluntary choice to opt for the mode of verification.

"In the interest of safeguarding the identity information and authentication records of individuals, the Money Laundering Act prohibits reporting entities from storing the Aadhaar number or core biometric information of the client, where Aadhaar is used to verify identity," Jhunjhunwala added.

Gold falls Rs 160; silver climbs Rs 650

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices declined Rs 160 to Rs 62,040 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a fall in international precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at Rs 62,200 per 10 grams. Silver, however, climbed Rs 650 to Rs 77,950 per kg. "Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 62,040 per 10 grams, down Rs 160 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, gold was quoting lower at USD 2,040 per ounce and silver was up at USD 25.88 per ounce. Gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Friday.

India's forex reserves rise to USD 588.78 bn

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's foreign exchange reserves jumped USD 4.532 billion to USD 588.78 billion for the week ended April 28, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

The overall reserves had dropped USD 2.164 billion to USD 584.248 billion in the previous reporting week.

In October 2021, the country's forex reserves had touched an all-time high of USD 645

billion. The reserves had been declining as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused mainly by global developments.

For the week ended April 28, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased nearly USD 5 billion to USD 519.485 billion, according to the Weekly Statistical Supplement released by the RBI.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets

include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves dropped USD 494 million to USD 45.657 billion, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up USD 35 million to USD 18.466 billion.

The country's reserve position with the IMF was down USD 4 million to USD 5.172 billion in the reporting week.

TVS Motors cumulative EV sales crossed more than one lakh units

Bengaluru (PTI):

TVS Motor Company's revenue from operations in the quarter ended March 2023 grew by 19% at Rs 6,605 Crores against Rs. 5,530 crores in the quarter ended March 2022.

Operating EBITDA for the fourth quarter is higher at 10.3%. The Company achieved record Operating EBITDA of Rs. 680 Crores for the fourth quarter with a growth of 22% as against Rs. 557 crores in fourth quarter of 2021-22. During the financial year 2022-23, revenue from operations grew by 27% at Rs. 26,378 Crores as against Rs. 20,791 Crores recorded in 2021-22.

During the year ended March 2023, the overall two and three-wheeler sales of TVS Motor Company, grew by 11% at 36.82 Lakh

units as against 33.10 Lakh units in the year 2021-22.

Motorcycles sales during the fiscal year recorded 17.33 Lakh units as against 17.32 Lakh units in the year ended March 2022. Scooter sales during the fiscal year grew by 45% at 13.34 Lakh units as against 9.23 Lakh units in the year ended March 2022.

Electric vehicles registered sales of 0.97 Lakh units in the year 2022-23 as against 0.11 Lakh units during 2021-22. Cumulatively TVS Motor has more than one lakh delighted EV customers.

Three-wheeler sales for the fiscal year is 1.69 Lakh units in the year ended March 2023 as against 1.72 Lakh units in the year ended March 2022.

Indian market is incredibly exciting, dynamic, vibrant: Tim Cook

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Apple CEO Tim Cook has said India is an "incredibly exciting market" and a "major focus" for the company, as the Cupertino-based iPhone maker highlighted that business in India "set a quarterly record, grew very strong, double-digits year-over-year".

India is at a "tipping point", the top honcho said during the Q2 earnings call of the company.

Apple charted an ambitious retail expansion in India last month, when it launched two retail outlets here, in Mumbai and Delhi, during Cook's

first trip to the country in seven years.

The two stores are "off to a great start", Cook said during the quarterly earnings call.

"Looking at the business in India, we did set a quarterly record, grew very strong, double-digits year-over-year. So it was quite a good quarter for us, taking a step back, India is an incredibly exciting market," Cook said.

The Apple CEO praised the "dynamism in the market" and asserted that its "vibrancy is unbelievable".

"It's a major focus for us. I was

just there, and the dynamism in the market, the vibrancy is unbelievable. Over time, we've been expanding our operations there to serve more customers, and three years ago, we launched the Apple Store online, and then, as you just mentioned, we launched two stores just a few weeks ago, and they're off to a great start, one in Mumbai and one in Delhi," he said.

Apple has a number of channel partners in the country and is "very happy with how that's going overall".

"Overall, I couldn't be more delighted and excited by the enthusiasm I'm seeing for the brand there.

There are a lot of people coming into the middle class, and I really feel that India is at a tipping point, and it's great to be there," Cook said.

Cook, during his recent India trip, had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as well as Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnav, and Minister of State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar, as he pledged the company's investment commitment to India.

Looking to replicate what China did to Apple's business in the last 15 years, the tech giant is eyeing India's massive market with an expanding middle class to power sales growth,

and potentially make it a home base for the production of millions of Apple devices.

The new stores in Mumbai and Delhi come at a time when Apple is trying to deepen its retail push in India, the world's second-largest smartphone market.

As such, India is also home to factories that produce 5 per cent of total iPhones as Apple diversifies its supply chains away from China.

"And as I noted earlier, in a milestone for Apple, we just opened our first two Apple stores in India, in Mumbai and Delhi. I was there to see it for myself, and I couldn't have been

more delighted by the excitement and enthusiasm of the customers, developers, creators and team members I got to spend time with," Cook said during the earnings' call.

Apple has announced financial results for its fiscal 2023 second quarter ended April 1, 2023. The company posted quarterly revenue of USD 94.8 billion, down 3 per cent year over year.

"Today, we're reporting revenue of USD 94.8 billion for the March quarter, which was better than our expectations. We set an all-time record for services and a March quarter record for iPhone," Cook said.

Proptech firm PropertyPistol raises Rs 45 cr from investors

NEW DELHI (PTI): Proptech startup PropertyPistol, which is into real estate advisory services, has raised Rs 45 crore from investors including ICICI Bank and Baring Private Equity Partners to expand its business.

Mumbai-based PropertyPistol was founded in 2012 by IIT alumni Ashish Narain Agarwal and later joined by Tushar Shrivastava as co-founder. It offers various tech solutions and advisory services to home buyers, real estate brokers and developers.

The company has raised Rs 45 crore in Series A funding led by ICICI Bank and Baring Private Equity Partners India.

It plans to utilise the fund to expand its leadership team across business functions and augment its presence in newer markets - both in India and abroad.

"This fund raise will help expand the company's operations into newer geographies and yield significant business growth and value in the future," Ashish Narain Agarwal, Founder and CEO, PropertyPistol, said.

The company will focus on new product development and also strengthen core verticals, such as the syndicate broker platform and project mandates. Varun Batra, Partner, Baring Private Equity Partners India, said, PropertyPistol has built a highly credible and profitable business with prudent capital deployment.

ACME, IGL ink pact to explore biz avenues in Green Hydrogen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Diversified renewable energy firm ACME Group and city gas distribution company IGL have signed an initial pact to jointly explore potential business opportunities in Green Hydrogen.

ACME and IGL will work jointly to promote the adoption by the customers and create demand for Green Hydrogen in the country, an ACME Group statement said.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by Ashwani Dudeja (President & Director - Green Hydrogen and Ammonia, ACME) and Sanjeev Kumar Bhatia (Vice President -

Business Development & Gas Sourcing, IGL), it added.

The companies will also work together to explore the opportunity of setting up hydrogen generation plants including setting up electrolyzers to blend Green Hydrogen in IGL's existing pipeline networks supplying gas to households, industrial & commercial set ups and CNG for vehicles.

"I would like to thank IGL for their commitment to develop infrastructure and supply green hydrogen to customers. Both the partners will identify areas/projects for green hydrogen adoption in the country," Manoj K Upadhyay, Founder & Chairman, ACME Group said.

MG Motor India to open bookings for Comet EV from May 15

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

MG Motor India will open bookings from May 15 for its small electric car Comet EV, which has been launched at an introductory price range of Rs 7.98 lakh and Rs 9.98 lakh. Deliveries of the smart electric vehicle developed on the company's GSEV pure electric platform will begin May 22.

Comet EV will be available at an inaugural price, starting at Rs 7.98 lakh for the Pace variant; Rs 9.28 lakh for the Play and Rs 9.98 lakh for the Push variant (all prices ex-showroom) for the first 5,000 bookings, MG Motor India said in a statement.

Travel agents urge Go First to process ticket refunds

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Amid uncertainty over tickets booked by passengers with crisis-hit Go First, a travel agents' body on Friday urged the carrier to make the refunds from the agents' funds deposited in a credit shell with the airline.

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has also urged Go First that the ticket refund amount be directly credited to the agents' bank accounts as many passengers are seeking refunds.

TAFI, which has more than 1,400 members, in a letter to Go First CEO Kaushik Khona said that thousands of tickets need to be cancelled due to the suspension of flights.

Go First has cancelled all flights till May 9 and has suspended sale of tickets till May 15.

On GoFirst's website,



bookings are available from May 23 but there was no official word on whether the suspension of ticket sales has been extended beyond May 15.

"Hundreds of travel agents across the country have placed substantial deposits with your airline in a credit shell to be used for immediate and future bookings and which currently

remain unutilised," the letter said.

While noting that it will not be possible to refund the passengers unless funds are received from the airline, TAFI said that "refunds be effected as a direct credit to the agents' bank accounts, rather than being placed in a credit shell".

NAPOLI'S WAIT IS OVER

AP ■ NAPLES

Napoli finally ended their long wait to win Serie A on Thursday, joining late club icon Diego Maradona in the history books by being crowned Italian champions with a record-equalling five matches to play.

A 1-1 draw at Udinese gave Napoli the point they needed to end 33 years of waiting and spark wild celebrations among the thousands of fans in Udine, at the Stadio Maradona in Naples and all around southern Italy's biggest city.

Supporters streamed onto the pitch at the Dacia Arena to celebrate after a season dominated by Luciano Spalletti's side, creating moments of tension with home fans not happy at such open partying on their ground.

Victor Osimhen scored the decisive goal in the second half as Napoli's current stars came back from trailing to Sandi Lovric's opener at half-time and emulated the teams led by Maradona which won the league in 1987 and 1990.

"To be compared to him, to be the captain after Maradona to lift the Scudetto, I just have no words," said skipper Giovanni Di Lorenzo.

"This isn't my title, it belongs to every player and the people who worked to make our dream come true."

Spalletti and his squad will receive an emotional welcome when they return to Naples, where the city-wide partying is set to continue to until at least their next home fixture against Fiorentina on Sunday evening.

"Seeing Neapolitans happy is enough to give you a sense of that joy they are feeling," Spalletti told DAZN on the verge of tears.

"These people will look to this moment when life gets hard, they have every right to celebrate like this. You feel a bit more relaxed knowing that you've given them this moment of happiness."

It was appropriate that Osimhen was the man to take Napoli over the line as the Nigeria striker has had the best season of his career and been key to Napoli's historic charge to glory.

Osimhen's title-deciding strike was his 22nd goal in 28 league appearances and rightly caused



bedlam among the massed ranks of away fans who took over Udine.

Napoli's 16-point lead over second-placed Lazio leaves them with a month-long parade between now and the end of the season which will allow their long-suffering supporters to fully unload more than a generation of frustration.

OSIMHEN SEALS DEAL

Napoli were straight on the front foot but looked worryingly bereft of ideas in the final third, and the away side were stunned in the 13th minute following the first spell of play in Udinese's favour.

Lovic was given the freedom of the penalty area after being fed by Destiny Udogie, and the Slovenia midfielder took advantage by placing a lovely shot in the top corner.

Lovic stung the fingers of former Udine youth product Alex Meret in the Napoli goal just after the half-hour mark, by which point Napoli hadn't created a single goalscoring opportunity.

Seconds later Osimhen, who looked like Napoli's only hope of scoring in the opening period, headed a deep cross just the wrong side of the post.

However, in the 52nd minute the 24-year-old stepped up as so often he has this season to unleash a wave of relief and blue smoke from the stands with his 27th goal in all competitions.

Osimhen was on hand to ram home the leveller when, after a corner, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's low shot was blocked and fell to the clinical striker. He had the ball in the net again in the 67th minute but was denied by referee Rosario Abisso who rightly whistled for a foul by Eljif Elmas.

But by that point the fans grew ever more sure that Thursday night would be the night, chanting victory songs in Udine while flares billowed and fireworks were set off at the other end of the country.

While fans had to be cleared from the pitch in Udine to avoid clashes with home supporters the Stadio Maradona was lit up by phones held by teary-eyed Neapolitans singing along to songs by late local singer-songwriter Pino Daniele.

Brighton beat Man Utd to avenge FA Cup defeat



AP ■ MANCHESTER

Brighton gained sweet revenge on Thursday for their defeat by Manchester United in the FA Cup semi-finals, with Alexis Mac Allister converting a 99th-minute penalty to dent the visitors' Champions League hopes.

Classy Brighton dominated possession but lacked a cutting edge until Luke Shaw's handball deep into stoppage time presented them with an opportunity to take all three points.

The 1-0 win completes a league double for the Seagulls against United, who beat Erik ten Hag's men in their first match of the season but suffered a painful defeat on penalties in last month's FA Cup semi-final at Wembley.

United remain in the fourth and final Champions League qualification spot in the Premier League, four points ahead of fifth-placed Liverpool with a game in hand, while Brighton are up to sixth.

"There is a God of football,"

Kaoru Mitoma intercepted a careless ball across the defence at the other end and broke into the box before hitting a shot that smashed goalkeeper David de Gea in the face.

The lively Mitoma, putting United right-back Aaron Wan-Bissaka under huge pressure, danced into the area again in the 13th minute but was unable to finish. The home side, bursting with confidence after a 6-0 win against Wolves, were enjoying the bulk of possession but United looked dangerous on the break.

The impressive Marcus Rashford hit a shot from a tight angle that Brighton goalkeeper Jason Steele did well to keep out at his near post.

Argentine World Cup winner Mac Allister shot wide of De Gea's goal while Anthony Martial's effort was pushed away by Steele at the other end.

De Zerbi's team were again on top in the early stages of the second half but Mitoma and Danny Welbeck were guilty of wasting openings.

As the half wore on the game became more scrappy, suiting United, who were struggling to find fluency, but Brighton finished the stronger of the two teams.

In the 90th minute De Gea produced a smart save to keep out a Mac Allister strike, puffing out his cheeks in relief.

But the home side had one final chance after Shaw was penalised for handball following VAR intervention and Mac Allister made no mistake, lashing the ball high into the net to spark wild celebrations on the south coast.

Two minutes later Japan's

PL side Brighton sign Watford's Joao Pedro

AP ■ LONDON

Brighton have signed Brazilian forward Joao Pedro from second-tier Watford for an undisclosed fee, the Premier League high-flyers announced on Friday. The 21-year-old will join the Seagulls on a contract until June 2028 when the post-season transfer window opens.

Brighton technical director David Weir told the south coast club's website: "Joao has been a long-term target of ours and he has also attracted a lot of interest from across Europe."

"He's a brilliant young talent, technically very good, quick and with an eye for goal. He will complement our existing forward line very well."



"He also has settled well here (in England), with good experience of both the Premier League and Championship and more than 100 games for Watford."

Lloris ruled out for rest of season

AP ■ LONDON

Tottenham goalkeeper Hugo Lloris has been ruled out for the rest of the season due to a thigh injury.

The 36-year-old suffered the problem during the first half of Tottenham's 6-1 thrashing at Newcastle on April 23.

The French World Cup winner has not featured since then and caretaker boss Ryan Mason on Friday confirmed Tottenham's captain is sidelined for the remainder of the campaign.

"Hugo's out for the season," Mason said ahead of Saturday's visit of Crystal Palace.

"We had the results back. Obviously disappointing, but we kind of feared that initially. We did some more tests and he won't play for us again this season."

Lloris has only one year left on his Tottenham contract and could leave north London in the close-season as his troubled club face up to a turbulent period.



Messi says 'sorry' for Saudi trip



AP ■ PARIS

Lionel Messi on Friday apologised for going on an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia that led to Argentina's World Cup-winning captain being suspended by his club Paris Saint-Germain.

"I want to apologise obviously to my teammates and to the club," Messi said in a video posted on Instagram to his 458 million followers.

He was suspended by the Qatar-owned club after failing to turn up for training on Monday, a day after their 3-1 home defeat by Lorient in Ligue 1.

Instead, the seven-time

MESSI SUSPENSION 'NOT MY DECISION TO TAKE'

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain coach Christophe Galtier sought to deflect questions about Lionel Messi's suspension by the French club as he spoke to reporters on Friday, insisting the decision was not his to take in the first place.

"I was informed at the beginning of the week by management about the decision to suspend Leo. Once they had let me know, I took the responsibility to not comment as a paid member of staff of the club," Galtier said during a press conference at PSG's training ground Paris. "It wasn't my decision to take. I was informed of the decision and I defer to it."

Saudi Arabia having cancelled it previously. This time I couldn't cancel it. I am sorry for what I did and I wait to see what the club decides to do."

The affair has made it increasingly unlikely that Messi will remain at PSG beyond this season, when his two-year contract with the club expires.

Nadal to miss Rome Masters

AP ■ ROME

Rafael Nadal on Friday withdrew from the Rome Masters tournament as he continues his recovery from injury, casting serious doubts over his fitness for the French Open.

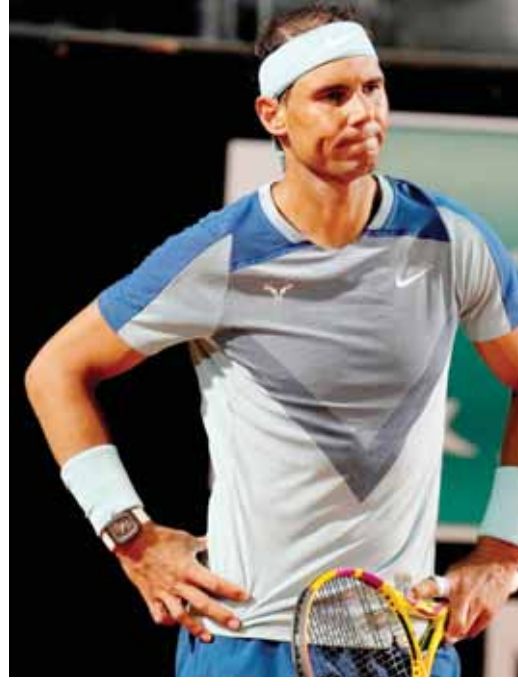
The 22-time Grand Slam winner has not played since suffering a hip injury at the Australian Open in January.

The French Open, which the 36-year-old has won on a record 14 occasions, gets underway in Paris in three weeks' time.

Nadal said his injury situation has improved in the past few days but not sufficiently to be able to compete next week in the Italian capital.

"I am very sorry to announce that I will not be able to be in Rome," Nadal wrote on his social media accounts.

"You all know how much it hurts me to miss another of the tournaments that have marked my



professional and personal career because of all the love and support of the Italian tifosi (fans)."

"Although I have noticed an improvement in the last few days, it has been many months without being able to train at a high level and the process of readjustment takes a certain amount of time, and I have no choice but to accept that and continue working."

The 22-time Grand Slam champion — he shares the men's record with Novak Djokovic — had originally thought he would be out for up to two months.

He pulled out of hard-court tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami, with his sights set on a PSG at the start of the clay-court season, but it did not come to fruition.

Nadal had to withdraw from events in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Madrid, before eventually adding Rome, the final French Open warm-up event, to the list.

GT CRUSH ROYALS BY 9 WICKETS

Sciver-Brunt retires from international cricket

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Gujarat Titans made light work of a 119-run target set by Rajasthan Royals as the defending champions romped home with a commanding nine-wicket win in a one-sided Indian Premier League match here on Friday.

After bundling Rajasthan Royals out for a mere 118 in 17.5 overs, a 71-run resolute opening stand between Shubman Gill (36) and Wriddhiman Saha (41 not out off 34 balls) set the platform for the huge victory, which was also accomplished with captain Hardik Pandya's brisk 15-ball 39 not out (3x4s, 3x6s).

Gujarat Titans finished at 119 for one in 13.5 overs, winning with 37 balls to spare.

Gujarat Titans thus also got back to winning ways against last year's finalists Rajasthan Royals, handing them their fourth defeat in an overall five meetings, while consolidating their position at the top of the points table.

The Pandya-led side took their tally to 14 points in 10 matches with seven wins and only three losses, while Sanju Samson's Royals remained fourth with five wins and as many losses in 10 games.

Both Saha and Gill got off the blocks quickly against RR pacer Trent Boult, hitting the left-arm for a couple of fours each inside the powerplay, at the end of which GT were 49 for no loss. Yuzvendra Chahal got Gill stumped for a 35-ball 36 (4x4s) in the 10th over but the breakthrough had no impact on the Gujarat Titans' juggernaut.



Pandya was severe on RR's Adam Zampa, hitting the Australian leg-spinner for three sixes and a four to collect 24 runs in the 11th over and hasten the process. Earlier in the first half, Rajasthan Royals surrendered against the Gujarat Titans' duo

of Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad to be bundled out for a poor total, as the two Afghan spinners shared five wickets.

Rajasthan Royals' decision to bat after winning the toss backfired as their batting crumbled against Rashid, who

returned 4-0-14-3 to spark a collapse, and Noor, who registered 3-0-25-2.

Rajasthan looked in control until the fifth over of the innings at 47 for one, but the home side collapsed without any resistance to lose nine wickets for a

mere 71 runs and was bowled out in 17.5 overs, at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium.

Hardik Pandya had Jos Buttler (8) caught by Mohit Sharma at short third man after the batter cracked two fours in a row in the second over.

The pair of Samson and Yashasvi Jaiswal (14) tried providing RR with momentum, but their 36-run second-wicket stand was broken in the final over of the powerplay with Abhinav Manohar putting in a dive to stop a cut from Samson.

Mohit threw the ball to Rashid, who broke the stumps with Jaiswal far out from the crease. The Rashid-led bowling attack then took firm control of the proceedings. Little ended Samson's promising start at 30 off 20 balls (3x4s, 1x6s), getting the RR captain caught inside the ring off a mistimed stroke.

Samson moved across the line to play on the on side but could only get a leading edge, collected by Pandya as the RR skipper looked at the surface in disbelief. Rashid then outgunned his counterpart Ravichandran Ashwin (2) for the majority of the eighth over, dismantling his off-stump on the final ball.

Riyan Parag (4) continued to disappoint as he failed to read the Afghan leggie's googly in the 10th over and appealed unsuccessfully against the umpire's leg-before call.

At the halfway mark, RR were stuttering at 72 for five.

Noor got into the act to keep RR under the pump, casting the left-handed Devdutt Padikkal (12) in the 12th over and trapping the dangerous Dhruv Jurel (9) leg-before in his next.

Rashid returned in the 15th over to dismiss Shimron Hetmyer (7) leg-before, with the Caribbean batter's horrendous run continuing in this IPL.

With scores of 3, 2, 8, 8 and 7, Hetmyer has now recorded five single-digit scores on the trot. Rashid nearly had his fourth wicket in his final over but a return shot off Trent Boult's bat was a bit too far away for his reach in the follow-through.

AP ■ LONDON

Katherine Sciver-Brunt retired from international cricket on Friday after a superb 19-year career in which she took more wickets than any other woman for England.

Sciver-Brunt, who made her international debut in 2004, amassed 335 wickets in 267 appearances for England. The fast bowler helped England's women to three Ashes series victories and three World Cup wins, two coming in ODIs and one in T20s. Only India's Jhulan Goswami (355) has more dismissals than Sciver-Brunt in all women's international formats. Sciver-Brunt, 37, quit playing Tests last year and also stepped away from ODIs.

She has now elected to walk away from England altogether, despite contemplating staying on for the T20 portion of this summer's multi-format Ashes series.

"Well here I am, 19 years later, at the end of my international journey," she said. "I thought I'd never be able to reach this decision but I have and it's been the hardest one of my life. I never had any dreams or aspirations to do what I've done, I only ever wished to make my family proud of me. And what I've achieved has gone way beyond that." Sciver-Brunt's last England appearance came in the T20 WC semi-final defeat against hosts South Africa.

CSK face MI in IPL Clasico

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Their confidence low after earning just a point from the last three games, Chennai Super Kings will look to get their campaign back on track when they host a resurgent Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday.

The four-time champions will, however, be wary of MI, which has a superior record at M A Chidambaram stadium here and has claimed victories in the last two matches.

The Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led Super Kings lost the two matches they played against five-time champions MI in 2019 and will be playing their arch-rivals at home after nearly four years.



CSK head into Saturday's game on the back of a rained off fixture (vs LSG) and two losses.

Having endured a defeat at the hands of Punjab Kings in a last-ball thriller on April 30, CSK will hope their fortunes change in the second afternoon match at home.

Devon Conway (414 runs) and Ruturaj Gaikwad (354 runs) have provided strong starts but the middle-order has not been able to build on them on occasions, leaving the think-tank and fans flummoxed.

While the experienced Ajinkya Rahane has pulled his weight as has Shivam Dube, CSK will be hope Ambati Rayudu and Moeen Ali.

The talismanic Dhoni, batting way too low down the order, has smacked a few out of the park to boost the score. However, as many wonder, it remains a mystery as to why the out of form Rayudu and

Ravindra Jadeja bat ahead of him.

Rahane was in brilliant form as CSK won the first game in Mumbai and would be raring to do an encore here.

The bowling department has been boosted with the return of Deepak Chahar. However, bowlers like Tushar Deshpande (17 wickets, economy rate: 12.11) leaking runs despite picking up wickets has hurt the team's cause.

Jadeja, who has been brilliant with the ball though not so with the bat, like always would be key for CSK along with fellow spinners Maheesh Theekshana and Moeen Ali.

There have been calls for playing Mitchell Santner in the XI as he can be handy with the bat apart from his bowling exploits but it remains to be seen



Rahane will make most of Test recall: Ganguly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hailing the Team India comeback of Ajinkya Rahane, former BCCI president Sourav Ganguly hoped that the seasoned batter makes "most" of the opportunity in next month's World Test Championship final against Australia.

On the back of his splendid show in the ongoing Indian Premier League, the 34-year-old has earned a Test recall after 18 months. The WTC final is scheduled to be held from June 7-11 at the Oval in London.

"I have always liked him. He has always been a good player for India," said the former India captain during a promotional event here.

The Chennai Super Kings batter has scored 224 runs in six innings this IPL at an average of 44.80 and with an astonishing 189-plus strike-rate.

"Opportunities don't come everyday and if he gets the

chance to feature in the playing XI during the WTC final, he will make the most of it. So, I wish him all the best," said Ganguly.

Ganguly further termed India opener KL Rahul's injury unfortunate as he has pulled out of the WTC final to undergo a thigh surgery.

"It's unfortunate, I have read that it's an injury that will keep him out of the IPL as well as the WTC final. Only physios can tell the extent of the injury. Injuries are part of the sport.

"These boys keep playing all the years, so injuries will happen. So, I wish him a speedy recovery," Ganguly said.

The mentor of Delhi Capitals said they have not given up on making the playoffs in the IPL.

"In the last five games, we have won three. We have five more games to go, it could well be that we win five. So, let's not jump the gun and take it one match at a time," he said.

Delhi, RCB look to end their batting woes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coming on the back of improbable wins, both Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bangalore will not want to leave anything to chance and put up a better batting display in a crucial IPL contest here on Saturday.

While RCB are better placed than Delhi in the standings, the Faf du Plessis-led side can't afford any slip ups as the IPL reaches its business end.

Delhi, who have had a tournament to forget up till now, needed something to go their way and it did in the low-scoring thriller against table leaders Gujarat Titans.

Back in action after three weeks, pacer Khaleel Ahmed and veteran Ishant Sharma got Delhi out of a hole and kept them alive in the competition.

After a win like that, the morale of any team would be on the higher side but Delhi will need to find a way to bat well against the star studded RCB.

Skipper David Warner was at pains to explain their batting troubles after the previous game. The performance of Indian batters remain a big concern but the effort of Aman Hakim Khan and Ripal Patel after a batting collapse offers hope to the struggling outfit.

Phil Salt at the top has either gone boom or bust in the four chances he has got so far while Warner has not got runs in his last three innings. The captain's strike rate has also been a subject of debate but that can be attributed to the collective batting failure of the side.

Batting at three, Priyam Garg looked out of place against



high quality fast bowling and he would want to prove his doubters wrong. The team also expects a lot more from the experienced Manish Pandey.

The in form Axar Patel batted at six against Gujarat but there is a case for him to bat higher up the order.

Considering the game involves Virat Kohli, the stadium is expected to be packed to the rafters.

The RCB star had a lengthy net session on Thursday before he headed back into the pavilion named after him. Following an ugly spat with Gautam Gambhir after the win over LSG, Kohli will be fired up as ever to let his bat do the talking.

Kedar Jadhav, who not so long ago was commenting on

the game, finds himself in the thick of action after getting a surprise call up from RCB head coach Sanjay Bangar midway into the tournament.

The former India batter is expected to solve RCB's middle-order issues, something which has plagued them all through the season. On a tacky wicket at Lucknow, the bowlers bailed the team out of trouble. Mohammad Siraj got much needed support from a fit again Josh Hazlewood who both made impact with the new ball.

The spinners Karn Sharma and Wanindu Hasaranga also revelled in friendly conditions but the strip at Feroz Shah Kotla and small dimensions will make their task much tougher.

KL Rahul rules himself out of WTC final

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top-order batter KL Rahul on Friday ruled himself out of the upcoming World Test Championship (WTC) final against Australia and will undergo a thigh surgery on the advice of his medical team.

Rahul, the captain of the Lucknow Super Giants franchise, has been ruled out for an indefinite period due to the injury he sustained during an Indian Premier League game against Royal Challengers Bangalore earlier this week.

The other players who are not available due to injuries are Jasprit Bumrah, Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant.

The WTC final will be played at the Oval in London from June 7.

"Absolutely gutted that I

won't be at the Oval next month with Team India. I'll do everything I can to get back in blue and help my country. That has always been my focus and priority," Rahul said in a statement he uploaded on his social media handles.

"After careful consideration and consultation with the medical team, it's been concluded that I'll be undergoing a surgery on my thigh shortly.

"My focus will be on my rehabilitation and recovery in the coming weeks. It's a tough call to make, but I know it's the right one to ensure a full recovery," he added.

Meanwhile, his IPL franchise too issued a press release saying the batter has suffered a significant tear to his tendon and was facing a "lengthy lay-off".

"... Further tests and scans have unfortunately confirmed a significant tear to his tendon which will require surgery," LSG said in the release.

"We are continuing to provide all possible support to KL at this difficult time and are working with him to ensure the best care on his road to recovery. However, the extent of the injury means that he is set for a lengthy layoff, which will include the remainder of this IPL season."

Rahul injured himself while trying to stop a boundary against RCB at Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow, after which he limped off the field with the help of team physio and a player who was in the reserve's list.

"As the team captain, it pains me deeply not to be able



to be there during this crucial period. But, I'm confident that the boys will rise to the occasion and give their best performance as always. I'll be cheering for them from the sidelines with all of you, watching every game," Rahul said.

"I want to express gratitude to each one of you - my fans, that gave me the strength to get back up, the LSG management and the BCCI for their promptness, and my teammates for their unwavering support during this difficult time."

Chasing 127 in the game on Monday, Rahul returned to bat at number 11 but struggled to run between the wickets, as RCB won in the last over.

"... I promise to keep you all updated on my progress, and hope to be back on the field sooner than soon. The last few

days have been really hard, but I'm determined to come out on top.

"Injuries are never easy, but I'll give it my all as always. Thank you for all the support and good wishes," Rahul said.

In the absence of their regular skipper, experienced all-rounder Krunal Pandya led the team against Chennai Super Kings, which ended in a no result after LSG struggled to 125/7 in 19.2 overs batting first.

"His presence on and off the field will be sorely missed by the Super Giants, as we continue our push to reach the playoffs for the second consecutive year. We can't wait to see KL back on the field doing what he does best, and hope he gets back as soon as possible," the franchise added.