

OPINION 6
FIRST RESPONDER TO
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

WORLD 9
TEXAS MALL SHOOTING: NINE
INCLUDING GUNMAN DEAD

MONEY 10
GOLD IMPORTS DIP 24%
TO \$35 BN IN 2022-23

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SABALENKA BEATS
SWIATEK TO WIN
MADRID OPEN
11 SPORT

PM woos K'taka with vikas

This poll is about making Karnataka the number one State in country, says Modi at Nanjangud rally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday promised voters in Karnataka to "develop Karnataka and refund it with interest" as he asserted that the BJP will come back to power with "full majority".

At the Nanjangud rally, Modi said, "The Congress hates that which is associated with India's strength and culture. The Congress only sees vote bank politics in everything they do."

"The Congress' royal family encourages international forces to interfere in the country's affairs", Modi further said. Attacking the Congress and JD(S), Modi alleged that both the parties insulted India's heritage and "never took pride in Karnataka's rich traditions."

"This election is about creating a new history. This election is about making Karnataka the number one State in the



Prime Minister and senior BJP leader Narendra Modi waves at supporters during a roadshow ahead of Karnataka Assembly elections, in Bengaluru, on Sunday

country", asserted Modi.

Addressing the election rallies in the last-leg of campaigning and staging a second consecutive road-show in Bengaluru, Modi came out hard against the Congress party accusing it of inflating a "balloons of lies". "Irrespective of

what the party does, they won't be getting any benefit, and the Bharatiya Janata Party will form the Government with full majority", Modi said while addressing a rally in Shivamogga in Central Karnataka.

Gandhi who addressed her first election meeting in Karnataka on Saturday, he said, "The Congress is so scared that ahead of the polls they were forced to bring people for campaigning so that they can put the whole blame on each other."

Without naming Sonia

EC says, editors responsible for ads published in their papers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the May 10 voting in Karnataka, the Election Commission (EC) on Sunday wrote to editors of major newspapers in the State, making it clear that the Press Council of India's norms for journalistic conduct hold them responsible for all matters, including advertisements, published in their newspapers. "If responsibility is disclaimed, this shall be explicitly stated beforehand," the Commission said in a letter to editors of newspapers in Karnataka.

In a separate advisory to political parties, the EC said that no party or candidate shall publish any advertisement in the print media during silence period — on poll day and one day prior — without clearance and pre-certification from Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC).

China backs Pak on J&K after EAM chides Bhutto

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/ISLAMABAD

Days after External Affairs Minister Jaishankar chided Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on the issues of terrorism and Jammu & Kashmir, Beijing has backed Islamabad and said the issue should be properly and peacefully resolved in accordance with "the United Nations (UN) charter, relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements." This was mentioned in the joint statement issued after a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Bilawal in Islamabad on Saturday. Incidentally, Qin flew to the Pakistani capital immediately after attending the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' meet in Goa on Thursday and Friday. Bilawal also attended the SCO meet chaired by Jaishankar.

He rebuked Pakistan saying the neighbouring country should answer when they will "vacate the illegally occupied territories of Jammu & Kashmir." India has always made it stand clear that terror and talks cannot go hand-in-hand.

China said on Saturday the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan was left over from history and should be resolved as per the UN resolutions while avoiding any unilateral action. The two sides issued a joint statement at the conclusion of the 4th round of the 'Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue' in Islamabad.

Details of the statement were released on Sunday. Qin, on his first two-day visit to Pakistan, chaired a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal.

"The Chinese side reiterated that the Kashmir dispute was left over from history between India and Pakistan and should be properly and peacefully resolved in accordance with UN Charter, relevant UNSC resolutions and bilateral agreements."

Continued on Page 2



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaks during an interactive session on 'Foreign Policy of Modi Government', in Mysuru, on Sunday

If I have a good guest, I am good host: Jaishankar on Bilawal visit

NEW DELHI/MYSORE: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said "he is a good host if the guest is also good" in reference to his no-holds barred slugfest with Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' meet in Goa on Thursday and Friday last.

Jaishankar said at a public function in Mysore on Sunday, Bilawal spoke only on issues pertaining to India in his interaction on the sidelines of the SCO. On India and Pakistan sparring on the sidelines of the SCO meeting Jaishankar said he is a good host if the guest is good, implying that the Pakistan Foreign Minister does not qualify as a good host.

Answering a question at a meet on the foreign policy of the Narendra Modi Government — in Mysore — Jaishankar said the Pakistan Foreign Minister was invited to attend the SCO Foreign Ministers' meet. Contd on P2

Want serious talk, not slanging match: EAM on Rahul's China remarks

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/MYSORE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday said he would like to have a serious conversation on China but not a "slanging match." This remark was in reference to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi criticising the Minister for lacking knowledge on China.

Replying to questions in Mysore about Rahul's criticism that the "Minister does not understand the threat from China", Jaishankar said, "I would have offered to take classes on China from Rahul. But I discovered that he was taking classes on China from the Chinese Ambassador. So I asked myself that I may as well go to the original source and talk to them."

"Unfortunately, foreign policy has also become an arena. I am not innocent and I am not saying that there should not be politics. Today I am in politics. I know everything in politics is political." Contd on Page 2

Centre ready for talks: Union Min

Life in Manipur limping back to normal in violence-hit State



PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Requesting the warring groups in Manipur to maintain peace, Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region G Kishan Reddy on Sunday said the Central Government was ready for talks and settle the issue.

Stating that the Centre was not adamant when it came to people's welfare, Reddy said that it even withdrew the three Farm Laws when agriculturists demanded the repeal of the controversial regulations.

Riots broke out in Manipur between the Meitei community, which mainly live in Imphal Valley, and the Naga and Kuki tribes who are inhabitants of the hill districts, over the demand of the former for Scheduled Tribe status. Life started limping back to normalcy under the watchful eyes

Students from Tripura, residing in Manipur, upon their arrival after being rescued from ongoing violence in Manipur, in Agartala, early on Sunday, PTI

of army drones and helicopters deployed for aerial reconnaissance as curfew was relaxed on Sunday in parts of Manipur. People were seen coming out in large numbers to buy food, medicines and other essential commodities during the curfew relaxation period from 7 AM to 10 AM in riot-affected Churachandpur town. Army and Assam Rifles columns conducted a flag march through the town as soon as the curfew relaxation ended at 10 AM. In all some 120-125 Army columns have been deployed in the entire riot-hit State.

Sources said some 10,000 soldiers, para-military and central police forces have been deployed in Manipur. Contd on Page 2

BJP MLA, others move SC against HC order on ST status to Meiteis

New Delhi: A batch of pleas has been filed in the Supreme Court on the Manipur situation including one by a ruling BJP MLA challenging the High Court (HC) order on the issue of Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei community and a PIL by a tribal outfit for a probe by an SIT into the violence that rocked the State last week.

The clashes started in Churachandpur district last Wednesday after tribals held a protest opposing reservation to the Meiteis following March 27 HC order asking State Government to send a recommendation to Centre within four weeks on the demand for ST status by Meitei community.

Appeals have been filed by Dinganglung Gangmei, BJP MLA and chairman of the Hills Area Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, challenging various orders passed by the Manipur HC on ST status to Meiteis, including the contempt notices on criticism of the HC order. Gangmei in his appeal said the HAC "was a necessary and proper party and the proceedings before the HC were vitiated on account of not making the HAC a party". Contd on Page 2

ED: IAS officer linchpin of illegal liquor syndicate

'Graft money was also used for electioneering in Chhattisgarh'

PTI ■ RAIPUR

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Anil Tuteja was the "kingpin" of an illegal liquor syndicate in Chhattisgarh along with liquor businessman Anwar Dhebar and the corruption money was also used for electioneering.

The ED said its investigation also revealed that from 2019 to 2022, the sale of "unaccounted illicit" liquor was almost 30-40 per cent of the total liquor sale in the State.

In its application filed in a special court in Raipur on Saturday seeking remand of liquor businessman Anwar Dhebar, the ED said there was a massive liquor trade scam in Chhattisgarh by a syndicate comprising high-level State Government officials, private persons and political executives that generated corruption money of more than Rs 2,000 crore.

Anwar is the elder brother of Congress leader and Raipur Mayor Aijaz Dhebar. Tuteja, a 2003-batch IAS officer, is currently posted as the Joint Secretary in the State's industry

and commerce department. The ED arrested Anwar Dhebar on Saturday. The special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court subsequently sent him in four-day custody of the ED.

The agency filed a case last year against Tuteja and others to investigate the matter under the PMLA on the basis of prosecution complaint (chargesheet) filed by the Income Tax Department in a Delhi court against Tuteja and others, it said.

A criminal syndicate was operating in Chhattisgarh which was making illegal bribe collections by controlling the high-level management of key State departments, particularly the excise department (that deals in liquor), and State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), the ED claimed.

"The syndicate comprised of high-level State Government officials, private persons and political executives of the State Government. Tuteja was managing the affairs and was the kingpin of this illegal syndicate along with Anwar," it alleged.

"Huge amount of corruption was happening in the excise department and hundreds of crores of cash was being collected from every possible point of access in a distributed hierarchical manner. The syndicate, after keeping its cut, passed on the final loot for the benefit of political executives and for electioneering..." it said. Contd on Page 2

Pakistani plane strays 120 km into Indian airspace for 10 mins

PTI ■ LAHORE

A Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) aircraft flew in Indian airspace for almost 10 minutes as the plane failed to land at the Lahore airport due to heavy rain, according to a media report on Sunday.

The PIA flight PK248, which returned from Muscat on May 4 at 8 PM, failed to land at the Allama Iqbal International Airport in Lahore due to the heavy rain, The News reported. The pilot attempted to land at the airport, but the Boeing 777 aircraft became unstable and could not land, it added. On the instructions of the air traffic controller, the pilot initiated the go-around approach, during

which he lost his way due to heavy rain and low altitude, the paper said. The aircraft, flying at an altitude of 13,500 feet with a speed of 292 km/hr, entered the Indian airspace from the Badhana police station.

The plane turned back from Naushehra Panuan after travelling 40 kms through the city of Taran Sahib and Rasulpur in the Indian Punjab.

While flying in Indian airspace, the captain took the plane to a height of 20,000 feet, and the plane flew in the Indian airspace for seven minutes. The flight then re-entered the Pakistani airspace from near the village of Jhagian Noor Muhammad in the Indian Punjab. Contd on Page 2

CAPSULE

IMRAN: ISI INVOLVED IN SCRIBE'S MURDER

Lahore: Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan has alleged that top ISI officer Major-General Faisal Naseer, who tried to kill him twice, was also involved in the brutal murder of senior journalist Arshad Sharif. Khan's remarks came while he was addressing a rally in Lahore from his bullet-bomb-proof vehicle. The rally was telecast live in other cities through a video link. P8

TRUCKER WITH CATTLE SHOT BY BSF

Shillong: A 32-year-old truck driver transporting cattle was shot dead by BSF personnel in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills, prompting the force to order a court of inquiry, officials said on Sunday. The incident took place at Mavshun village when BSF personnel guarding a check post opened fire on the truck and killed driver Roning Nongkynrith on the spot on Saturday. Mavshun is around 17 km from the India-Bangladesh border.

PDF MERGES WITH NPP IN MEGHALAYA

Shillong: The People's Democratic Front (PDF), along with its two MLAs, has merged with the ruling National People's Party in Meghalaya, increasing its tally to 28 in the 60-member Assembly. The merger came a few days ahead of the May 10 Sohigh Assembly bypoll. All rank and file of the PDF, led by party president Gavin Mylliem and working president Banteidror Lyngdoh, joined the ruling NPP late on Saturday evening.

FM, FSDC TO REVIEW ECONOMY TODAY

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will review the state of the economy amid global and domestic challenges at a meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council on Monday. P10

'TMC Govt backed TET scam kingpin'

Cabinet extended his term, says CBI

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has questioned the conduct of the Bengal Government in perpetrating the school-level recruitment scam. In a report submitted in the Supreme Court, the Central agency has alleged that the main mastermind of the Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) scam was Manik Bhattacharya, the jailed Trinamool Congress MLA and deposed TET chairman. According to the agency, Bhattacharya was given exten-

sion in 2016 by a Cabinet decision upping the retirement age of the chairman from 62 to 65.

The CBI has also claimed that Bhattacharya had divided the entire fake recruitment network into district-wise teams responsible for collecting cash for jobs.

Incidentally, almost the entire State education department led by former Education Minister and number two in the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet Partha Chatterjee, are at present in jail. Apart from the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate, too, has unearthed a new modus operandi of another TMC office-bearer Shantanu Banerjee, who is, incidentally, also in jail. Contd on Page 2

Khaps, farmers, women back wrestlers

Arrest WFI chief by May 21, insist grapplers; prove allegations says Brij Bhushan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 31-member committee that is advising the protesting wrestlers on Sunday said WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is not arrested by May 21, it will take a "significant decision", even as Vinesh Phogat insisted that their protest has not been hijacked by farmers, and Brij in turn asked them to prove allegations of sexual harassment. Amid heavy security



Farmer leaders Rakesh Tikait, Mehar Singh and Baldev Singh Sirsa along with wrestlers Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat speak with the media during the wrestlers' protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Sunday. Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

deployment, the representatives from various "Khaps" in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and trade unions gathered at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Sunday to extend their support to women wrestlers protesting there.

Four women's organizations also backed the grapplers and in a statement, the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), Coordination POW-PMS-IJM All India Mahila Sanskritik Sanghathan (AIMSS), and the All India Agramagra Mahila Sanghathan (AIMS) said hundreds of protests will be held in different parts of the country. Women will hold meetings in villages, bastis and mohallahs to expose the 'anti-women' face of the BJP. Contd on Page 2

Dimple Yadav seeks fair probe into WFI case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Even as Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav is maintaining a conspicuous silence on the controversy over the harassment allegations against Bharatiya Janata Party parliamentarian and chief of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, Mainpuri MP and Akhilesh's wife Dimple Yadav has demanded a fair probe into the case.

Akhilesh Yadav is usually quick to target the BJP-led Governments at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh on issues ranging from "encounters" to the case of the Sarus crane but he has maintained silence on this issue. His alliance partner and Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary has visited

the dharna site at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. Brij Bhushan, who has denied the allegations against him, lavished praise on former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav last week for not siding with the ongoing protest by wrestlers.

"I want to thank Akhilesh Yadav. I have known him since his childhood," he told media persons on April 30. "I am elder to him. Though there are political differences between us, Akhilesh knows the truth."

Brij Bhushan is a six-time Lok Sabha member from Gonda, Kaiserganj and Balrampur constituencies. He presently represents Kaiserganj in Lok Sabha. Sources in SP said that with the 2024 Lok Sabha elections looming, the party was in a wait-and-watch mode over the wrestlers' alle-

gations against Brij Bhushan. When asked about the SP's stand on the issue, party chief spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary chose to dwell on the rising tide of crime against women, including in Hathras and Unnao, and said that law and order had collapsed in UP.

"Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is only indulging in talks of hatred. Look at what happened in Prayagraj — a government-sponsored crime (apparent reference to recent killing of Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf)," he said.

"Nobody is interested in talking about the rise of LPG prices and the plight of the poor," Rajendra Chaudhary denied speculation that the WFI chief would join the party. "There is no substance in such rumours.

'Nuh's villages emerging as hotspot for cyber criminals'

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

As many as 14 villages of Nuh district in Haryana emerging as new hotspot of cyber criminals. Mostly young generations of the district are indulging in cybercrime by using stolen high-end phones.

This was disclosed by the police after questioning 125 cyber criminals who were apprehended by as many as 102 teams comprising over 5,000 police personnel who raided 300 locations in 14 villages in the district on April 27.

Gokalpur, Godhola, Aminabad, Mahu, Gulalta, Jaimat, Jakhopur, Nai, Tirwara, Mamlaka and Padpa as cyber-crime hot spots. The police said the accused cheated people in the name of selling vehicles on OLX, seeking KYC data, offering loans and even sextortion. Most interestingly the hackers have studied only up to Class XII, while some are even illiterate and even some of them have rewards on their heads.

A senior police officer said earlier illiterate youths who were involved in vehicle theft, phone snatching, cattle smuggling and other crimes shifted to cybercrime during the past two years after being "trained" in it. During the raid police nabbed the highest number of 31 cyber criminals from Nai village, followed by 25 from

Luhinga Kalan village, 20 each from Jaimat and Jakhopur, 17 each from Khedla and Tirwara, and 11 from Aminabad. A total of 66 smartphones, 65 fake SIMs, 166 Aadhaar cards, 3 laptops, 128 ATM cards of different banks, 2 ATM swipe machines, 01 AEPS machine, 6 scanners, 5 PAN cards, etc. were recovered from the suspects.

Police investigation revealed that most of the youth arrested by the police during the raid were trained in the villages of Jurehera and Ghamdi in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district. The two villages, located on the Haryana-Rajasthan border, have emerged as the "cybercrime training hub." These two villages offer fake SIM cards and documents which help in opening bank accounts.

TV reporter arrested after vehicle hit woman, released

PTI ■ LUDHIANA (PUNJAB)

TV journalist Bhawana Kishore was released from a jail here on Sunday, a day after the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted interim bail to her. Kishore and two others were arrested by Punjab Police on Friday when their vehicle allegedly hit a woman, injuring her hand. A duty magistrate on Sunday ordered the superintendent of the Central Jail Ludhiana to release the TV reporter after furnishing of bail bonds.

Assistant Commissioner of Police of Ludhiana Rajesh Sharma said she was released from the jail Sunday evening. The Punjab and Haryana High Court had on Saturday granted interim bail to Kishore. Several journalist bodies have condemned the police action after the TV reporter was booked under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act,

besides charges for rash driving, and "detained". The Editors Guild said the FIR registered against the reporter at a Ludhiana police station "appears excessive and with undue haste".

In a statement, Times Now Navbharat claimed its journalist Kishore, cameraman Mrityunjay and a driver were arrested by the Ludhiana Police on charges of rash driving and insulting Dalits after a series of "orchestrated events".

The media organisation also alleged that Kishore was held without the presence of any woman police personnel in the car and that she was denied legal and telephone access and was arrested post-sunset. The journalist had moved the high court seeking quashing of the FIR. Kishore's counsel Chetan Mittal had on Saturday said the court has granted interim bail to her and fixed May 8 as next date of hearing in the matter.

China backs Pak...

From Page 1
Both sides opposed any unilateral actions that further complicate the already volatile situation, according to the statement. The entire range of bilateral relations and cooperation, including in political, strategic, economic, defence security, education and cultural domains was reviewed while regional and global issues of mutual interest were also discussed during the dialogue, the joint statement read.

At the SCO meeting in Goa, Jaishankar launched one of his sharpest attacks on Pakistan over terrorism and Jammu & Kashmir, calling his visiting Pakistani counterpart Bilawal a "promoter, justifier and a spokesperson" of the terror industry.

Jaishankar also slammed the neighbouring nation for raising objections to India hosting G-20 meetings in Srinagar. "They have nothing to do with the G-20, nothing to do with even Srinagar and Kashmir. They should answer when they vacate the illegally occupied territories of Jammu & Kashmir," he said.

Responding to another question about Bilawal raising the issue of revocation of Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir, Jaishankar said "Wake up and smell the coffee. Article 370 is history." On the Pakistan Foreign Minister's statement that "peace is destiny", he said, "Whether peace is destiny or not, terrorism is not destiny." In March this year, Bilawal accepted there are no takers of its Kashmir agenda at the United Nations Security Council. He also said Pakistan has failed to get any traction or support for its agenda from the wider UN membership.

"Islamabad faces an 'uphill task' to get the Kashmir issue into the 'centre' of the agenda of the United Nations," he had said. India has previously criticised China and Pakistan for their unwarranted references to the Indian Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. "We have consistently rejected such statements and all parties concerned are well aware of our clear position on these matters.

Centre ready...

Chief Minister N Biren Singh said peace committees will be formed in every Assembly constituency to ensure that peace initiatives are implemented at the grassroots level. A Defence statement said that 23,000 civilians from all communities have been rescued so far and were moved to military garrisons.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh, after chairing an all-party meeting over the prevailing situation in the violence-hit State, said, "During the meeting, it was resolved to appeal for peace in the State, and encourage all citizens to avoid any actions that could lead to further violence or instability." Cont on Page 2

The meeting was attended by representatives of various political parties, including the Congress, CPI, JD(U), NPE, Shiv Sena, TMC, BSP, AAP, MPP, AIFB, MNDF, ABHKP, and former CM O Ibobi Singh. "It was further resolved to form a peace committee in every assembly constituency to ensure that peace initiatives are

implemented at the grassroots level," he tweeted. On Sunday Union Minister Reddy stressed, "Please come forward to solve the issues in a peaceful manner.

The Indian Government is ready. You have seen the farmers' issue. When it was peaceful, we tried to convince them. As the issue was not resolved, we agreed to their demand, and those Bills (three farm laws) were withdrawn. So the Indian Government is not adamant."

He stressed that people's welfare was the Government's main agenda and requested Manipur residents to understand this and come forward for talks. He assured them that the Government (State or Centre) will take care of those who suffered losses due to violence and lost lives in the clashes. Reddy said after Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, during the last eight years discussions were held with several insurgent groups (in the Northeast), and peace prevailed in the region. He said Modi would order a comprehensive inquiry into the issue.

'TMC Govt backed...

From Page 1
The CBI has also described how 36 people in Coochbehar district got school jobs without taking TET exams. It also revealed that a number of teachers who appeared for Urdu tests were presently working as Bengali teachers.

According to the ED, Banerjee, while working as a member of the Hooghly district board, appointed a large number of daily wagers whose accounts he used to siphon off the ill-gotten cash raised from ineligible candidates seeking teaching jobs.

The ED had earlier told the Calcutta High Court that the mobile phone of Banerjee — known for his proximity to TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee — was a gold mine of information and that the names it contained could not be disclosed in public for the fear of political unrest.

According to the claims made by both the agencies several thousand recruitments might have been made in exchange of cash and the rates

of appointment varied between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 20 lakh depending upon the position.

Even as the CBI reports have triggered a fresh turmoil in Bengal politics, State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar on Friday said, "The Chief Minister is the real mastermind... As she had got the Cabinet decision passed increasing the retirement age of Manik Bhattacharya... So you think she was doing it without any interest." CPI (M) State secretary Md Salim said, "A free and fair investigation will reveal that all those thousands of crores of rupees raised from the recruitment scam went to Kalighat."

The Chief Minister resides at Kalighat in South Kolkata. The TMC however has strongly refuted the charges brought by the Opposition parties with Bengal Minister Dr Shashi Panja saying: "Though people are trying to malign the name of our Chief Minister she is absolutely not responsible for the scam... Let the agencies not play into the hands of the BJP... let them find out the truth."

From promise to nightmare: Meera's tale of human trafficking from Nepal to India

BISWAJEE BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Meera (23) from Nepal was lured into a false promise of a job in India. She thought that her life would change for the better and her family would benefit from the wages she would earn. However, what she did not know was that her dreams would be shattered when she became a victim of human trafficking.

Meera's story is not unique. In fact, thousands of women are trafficked from Nepal to India every year. According to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), around 15,000-20,000 women and girls are trafficked from Nepal to India annually.

Meera was promised a job as a domestic help in Delhi with a monthly salary of INR 10,000. She was excited about the prospect of earning such a large amount of money and provid-



ing for her family. However, when she reached Delhi, she was taken to a brothel and forced into prostitution.

Meera narrates her story with tears in her eyes, "I was devastated when I realized what was happening. I felt trapped and helpless. I was forced to sleep with multiple men every day. I didn't know how to escape this nightmare."

Meera's ordeal continued for months, until she was finally rescued by an NGO on the initiative of an NGO Maiti, Nepal. She was taken to a rehabilitation center where she received medical attention and

counseling. She now rues the day she left Nepal.

"I wish I had never left Nepal. I was naive and did not know the dangers of human trafficking. I was promised a job, but I didn't know that it was a trap. I lost my dignity and my self-respect. I hope no one else has to go through what I went through," says Meera.

According to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking is the third-largest criminal activity in the world, after drug trafficking and arms trafficking.

"Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights. It is a form of modern-day slavery and must be eradicated. We need to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking and provide support to victims like Meera," says a spokesperson for the NGO, based in Gorakhpur, that rescued Meera.

Want serious talk on China, not slanging match, says Jaishankar

But I think on certain issues, we have a collective responsibility to behave in a way in which we do not weaken our collective position abroad."

Speaking on the issue of China building a bridge in the Pangong Tso area, Jaishankar said, "The Chinese came there first in 1959 and then they occupied it in 1962. But it was projected as if we lost our territory to China.

This was the case of some so-called model villages. These were built on areas which we lost in 1962 or before. You will never see me saying what should not have happened in 1962. I believe

it was our collective failure without attributing any political colour." "What I would like to see is a serious China conversation and I am prepared to accept that there are differences of viewpoints on that. But if you reduce it to a kind of slanging match, well what can I say after that," Jaishankar added.

Jaishankar, during the interaction, was asked about his experience of working with Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. "For me, each one was an experience of a different kind. I would not get into any comparison," Jaishankar said.

On standing up to European criticism on buying Russian oil amid the Russia-Ukraine war, Jaishankar said, "If somebody is being very self-centred, you have to tell them that there are other interests too. With nice people, you are nice, with difficult people, you sometimes have to push back. A lot of countries are feeling pushed, I feel."

ED: IAS officer ...

From Page 1
Anwar was the main collection agent and front man of this syndicate. There is specific digital evidence depicting delivery of Rs 14.41 crore by Anwar to Tuteja, the ED claimed. The agency's application said the syndicate collected illegal money in three different ways from the sale of liquor in Chhattisgarh.

These included illegal commission charged from liquor suppliers for accounted its sale in State, sale of off-the-record unaccounted country liquor (popular in Chhattisgarh) from State run shops and annual commission paid to allow distillers to operate in State, it said. The excise policy in State was amended in 2017 and Chhattisgarh State Marketing Corporation Limited (CSMCL) was thus treated with responsibility to retail liquor in state through its stores.

BJP MLA...

From Page 1
He said, "Even if directions were to be given they could not have been given without notice to the HAC (Hills Area Committee) and hearing the HAC." He said that due to the impugned order, there was tension between both the communities and violent clashes have erupted across the State.

"As a result of it so far 19 tribal people have been killed, various places in the States are blocked, the internet is completely shut down and more people are at risk of losing their lives", the appeal said.

The PIL filed by an NGO 'Manipur Tribal Forum', through advocate Satya Mitra, said it has moved the top court under Article 32 of the Constitution on account of the extreme situation arising out of the attacks on the tribal community in Manipur by a "dominant group".

It alleged that "these attacks have the full support of the party in power... Which supports the dominant group" and sought directions to the Centre and Manipur to evacuate Manipuri tribals who have fled their villages.

Khaps, farmers, women back wrestlers

From Page 1
Meanwhile, in a video statement, WFI chief said he will hang himself even if a single allegation of sexual harassment is proved. He said he cannot openly discuss all issues since the matter is being probed by the Delhi Police and dared the aggrieved wrestlers to produce evidence corroborating the allegations.

The turbaned farmers, clad in dhoti-kurtas, and numbering in hundreds were seen at the protest site on Sunday as a "Mahapanchayat" discussed the next move on behalf of the wrestlers. The scenes were similar to the farmers' protest that continued for 13 months until the Government repealed the law.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, Khap Maham 24 chief Mehar Singh and Sankyt Kisna Morcha's (non-political) Baldev Singh Sirsa joined the wrestlers on the stage and addressed the media. "Many leaders from Khap panchayat and SKM attended the meeting today. We decided that members from every Khap will come to the protest site every

spread to the entire country.

Ahead of the Khap mahapanchayat at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Sunday, the Delhi Police increased deployment and strengthened surveillance teams and checking points for the protest. The police said security has been beefed up near the Singhu border and all vehicles are being stopped and checked.

More than 2000 personnel from CRPF, Rapid Action Force and other paramilitary forces have also been deployed. One side of the protest area has been sealed with three to five layers of barricades. The police said the "extended" to give space to protesters.

In a statement, the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), Coordination POW-PMS-IJM All India Mahila Sanskritik Sanghatan (AIMSS), and the All India Agramami Mahila Sanghatan (AIAMS), expressed solidarity with the protesting wrestlers.

"Hundreds of protests will be held in different parts of the country.

EC says...

From Page 1
The poll body also emphasised on a "clean and serious" campaign as electioneering reached feverish pitch for the polls. Campaign for the Karnataka Assembly elections is set to end on Monday. In a letter to editors of all major newspapers in Karnataka, the EC said, "An editor shall be responsible for all matters, including advertisements published in the newspaper. If responsibility is disclaimed, this shall be explicitly stated beforehand."

"No political party or candidate or any other organisation or person shall publish any advertisement in the print media on poll day and the one day prior to poll day unless the con-

tents of political advertisement are got pre-certified by them from the CMC at the State/district level, as the case may be," the advisory stated. "As there are still 24 hours for the Pre-Certification timeline to come into being, the EC once again reiterates that the spirit underlying its Instruction of 31.03.2023 as contained in para 1.3 of the Instruction dated 31.03.23 needs to be adhered to by the political parties i.e. "that instances of advertisements of offending and misleading nature published in print media have been brought to the notice of the Commission in the past. Such advertisements in the last stage of the election vitiate the entire election process. The affected candidates and parties will not have any opportunity of providing clarification/rebuttal in such cases", it said.

PM ...

From Page 1
Sonia Gandhi, who largely stayed away from campaigning and public rallies since 2019 Lok Sabha polls reportedly due to health reasons, addressed an election meeting at Hubballi on Saturday. At his Shivamogga election rally, as Modi was presented a Hanuman idol and a saffron colour 'Shivaji' turban, the crowd roared with 'Jai Sri Ram' (Hail Lord Ram) chants while the Prime Minister raised 'Bajrang Bali Ki Jai' (Hail Hanuman) slogans. Asking people to re-elect a BJP Government, Modi said, "I want to give you the original guarantee for your love and blessings, I will develop Karnataka and refund it with interest". Dismissing promises of rival Congress, Modi said, "Both pol-

EC says...

itics and development work of the Congress are only on paper. They can never develop Karnataka. They are just peddling lies. Women of Karnataka were completely neglected by the Congress Government in the past. They have done no development work for the farmers". Modi held a second road-show in Bengaluru as Union Home Minister Amit Shah led a road-show in South Belagavi. The Prime Minister's road-show that began with him paying floral tributes to the statue of Kempegowda (founder of Bengaluru) passed through parts of central Bengaluru, touching five Assembly segments. Bengaluru has 28 Assembly segments which are key to tilt the electoral balance in the tightly-fought electoral contest for the Karnataka Assembly with 224 seats.

If I have good guest...

From Page 1
"But if you look at his public utterances outside the SCO meet, he has only spoken on India, — G20, Kashmir, BBC documentary; but nothing about SCO. What do I do as a host? If I have a good guest, I am a good host. But..." Jaishankar said amid a round of applause from the audience. "We invited the Pakistani Foreign Minister because there was an SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting. When it comes to multilateral meetings, you invite people to discuss that subject. He (Bilawal) was invited in his capacity as a representative of Pakistan to put across his views on matters pertaining to the issues pertaining to SCO. We could differ...he may have his viewpoint, I may

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Not ₹45 cr, but ₹171 cr spent on CM's house: Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister and senior Congress leader Ajay Maken on Sunday claimed the alleged that the amount spent on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence was Rs 171 crore and not Rs 45 crore reported earlier as his government had to buy additional flats for officers whose houses had to be either demolished or vacated for the expansion of the CM's residential complex.

Accusing Kejriwal of faking a simple lifestyle and instead spending crores on his residence, Congress spokesperson Ajay Maken said in contrast to this, the epitome of simplicity in Delhi was his party leader and former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit.

"The amount spent by the whole cabinet of Sheila Dikshit on their homes in 15 years of its rule is no match to the amount spent by Arvind Kejriwal on the renovation of his palace," Maken alleged.

He alleged the amount spent on Kejriwal's residence was not Rs 45 crore but Rs 171 crore and that too during the



time of the Covid pandemic when people were running around for hospital beds and for the lack of oxygen.

"I will explain how Rs 171 crore was spent. There are four residence complexes next to Kejriwal's official residence — 6, Flagstaff Road, Civil Lines. Together these four residence complexes have 22 officers' flats. Out of those 22, 15 were either gotten vacated or demolished and for the rest seven, it was instructed that they will not be re-allotted," Maken said.

To compensate for these flats, the Kejriwal government has bought 21 Type-5 flats worth Rs 126 crore in the Commonwealth Games Village, he alleged. "So the

price of these 21 flats also has to be included in the total cost spent on Kejriwal's residence as it was necessitated due to the expansion of his residence," the Congress leader said. This money comes from the state exchequer and this should be added to expenditure made for the Chief Minister's bungalow," Maken said.

The Congress leader said he will write to the Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena highlighting how Master Plan for Delhi has been disrespected. "Higher FAR (floor area ratio) shall not be permissible in redevelopment in Lutyens Bungalow area, Civil Lines area and monument regulated zone," Maken said.

"I remember when I used to go there, this is a single-storey building. This area is older than Lutyens's area. And today, they are making three floors across 20,000 square feet. I want to ask the people of Delhi whether this is not a violation of Delhi's heritage," the Congress leader said adding that 28 full-grown trees have been felled for the renovation.

Maken also contended that this was an issue of breach of privilege as the government got the budget passed but made no mention of the renovation of Kejriwal's residence.

He alleged that the renovation also disregarded heritage, greenery as well as the master plan of Delhi.

Kejriwal has been occupying the official residence at 6 Flagstaff Road in the Civil Lines area after becoming chief minister in 2015. The residence also has the chief minister's camp office spread over a 5000 square metre area, officials said. There is an ongoing political slugfest over the alleged Rs 45 crore expenditure on Kejriwal's official residence.

CM: Liquor scam bogus, means to malign AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court granted bail to two of the accused in the Delhi excise policy case, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday called the liquor scam bogus and said it was a means to malign the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Kejriwal asserted that the entire case is "bogus" and only meant to malign his party.

Taking to Twitter, Kejriwal said, "Now even Court has said that there is no material evidence of any kickback or money laundering. We have been saying right from beginning that entire liquor scam is bogus and meant only to malign AAP."

Addressing a press conference, AAP senior leader and Cabinet minister Atishi said the court order proves that the AAP



is the most honest party. BJP spokespersons had been screaming that there is a scam. But now will they apologise and accept that there was no scam?

Reading out the order, Atishi said, "Yesterday, the Rouse Avenue court granted bail to Rajesh Joshi and Gautam Malhotra. The court order said no evidence had been kept forth by the ED showing any cash payment for bribe or kickbacks. The order said the ED attached some vague statements by witnesses," she added.

Atishi said that entire investigation has proved that CBI-ED came under the pressure of the

Fourth-Pass King, tortured witnesses and took false statements by harassing them. "Further, the court's order has clearly highlighted that not even one rupee has been embezzled in the Excise Case.

"I want the leaders of the BJP to read the order given by the court. I also want all the TV channels that created a lot of noise regarding this case to read this order as well.

This order of the court makes it crystal clear that forget the Rs 100 crore that ED has been alleging in this so-called scam, the agency does not have any evidence to highlight a scam of even one single paisa.

In this 85-page order the judge is seen repeating on key point that the investigative agencies have not provided any evidence to back their claim regarding a scam," she said.

BJP quotes judge, taunts AAP over liquor policy case



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Soon after the Aam Aadmi Party's "big revelation" from a court order on the alleged liquor policy scam in Delhi, claiming there was no scam, the Delhi BJP on Sunday taunted the ruling party with what a judge had earlier said about the former Delhi Minister Manish Sisodia while denying him bail in the case.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said that Atishi's statement that allegations of CBI and BJP on liquor scam are the same is very childish.

15 associates of gangster Deepak 'Boxer' arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's Special Cell has arrested 15 associates of gangster Deepak "Boxer", who was nabbed in Mexico and brought on April 5, in the last one month.

According to police, among those arrested included two men — Mehfooz Khan alias Bhura Dalal (47) and his associate Mohd. Junaid (25), both residents of Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad — who helped gangster Deepak get a fake passport and other forged documents to flee abroad.

The duo had facilitated Deepak to get the fake passport and other documents in the name of Ravi Antil, a resident of Moradabad. On their instance, 15 passports, seven Aadhaar cards, as many PAN cards and six voter ID cards have been recovered, police said.

Other arrested accused have been identified as Ravinder Pahal (21), Deepak Pahal (26), Vikram Dahiya (27), Sachin Mann (30), Sandeep Narwal (32), Gavin Grang (30), Amit Gulati (31), Dinesh Mathur (35), Kapil (32), Rohit (28), Vijay Mann (26),



Yogesh (30) and Ankesh Lakra (35), they said.

According to police, gangster Deepak was nabbed in Mexico and brought to Delhi by a two-member team of the Special Cell and his arrest was termed as the force's first overseas operation.

Deepak headed the Gogi gang after the murder of gangster Jitender Gogi in the Rohini court complex in 2021, they added. Special Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) H G S Dhaliwal said during the 14-day police remand, Deepak was interrogated at length and he disclosed his involvements in more than two dozen cases of murder, attempt to murder and extortions. "During investigation of the cases, his 15 associates were arrested," Dhaliwal said.

During his interrogation, Deepak revealed that in 2015, he was introduced to gangster Gogi, who was then evading arrest, by Deepak Bajana. After Gogi was arrested in 2016, his associates planned to get him escaped from the police custody, the official said.

"Gangster Deepak, along with some associates of Gogi, had boarded the bus in which Gogi who was in police custody was travelling, while two cars carrying other gang members followed the Haryana Roadways bus. When the bus reached Sakol, Bahadurgarh, the two cars intercepted it. While a gang member threw red chilli powder in the eyes of police personnel, Deepak, along with others, snatched arms and ammunition from them and freed Gogi," Dhaliwal said.

Widow accuses friend of rape, forced conversion

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Sikh widow has accused her Muslim friend of rape, recording her obscene video and forcing her to convert to Islam. The victim refused to convert after which the accused, identified as Azmat Ali Khan, threatened to throw acid on her face and kill her.

The police have lodged an FIR under various sections of IPC, including rape. According to the FIR, in 2016 the victim met Azmat Ali Khan, a resident of Laxmi Nagar, on Facebook and they became friends. She said on Facebook, Khan was a mutual friend of her Kathak Dance teacher, and therefore she accepted his request.

Later their friendship grew deeper and by 2017 they were in a relationship. The woman has alleged that Khan recorded her video while they were intimate.

"Khan forced me to adopt Muslim religion which I denied. I told him that I am a Sikh girl and want to remain as Sikh even after marriage. But Khan told me that I will have to accept Islam, will have to wear burqa, offer Namaz five times a day, and will have to keep Roza. I



refused to change my religion and told him that he can't force me to opt Islam in the name of love and decided to sever the ties," she said.

After this, the victim started maintaining a distance from Khan. After 2018, she never met Khan. But the accused kept on sending her messages. In 2019, Khan threatened the victim.

"He threatened me that he would make all the videos of mine viral on social media if I ignored him. He threatened to ruin my whole career. He kept on sending abusive messages to me," the victim has alleged.

She alleged that on April 2, Khan attacked her at the Janakpuri Police Station. He threatened to throw acid on my face. Also he said that if I tried to ignore him he would bury me alive," the victim alleged. The police after receiving her complaint lodged a case of

rape and threatening someone with dire consequences at the Dabri Police Station.

In one of the messages sent on Instagram, the accused went on to say that he would kill her entire community.

A senior police official said that they were looking into the matter. So far no arrest has been made in the matter and the accused has applied for anticipatory bail.

In another case of alleged love jihad case last year, the Delhi Police had registered a complaint against a Muslim person named Mohammad Imran for issuing death threats to a Hindu woman and raping her several times since 2021. The accused also forced the woman to wear a burqa and send pictures of her wearing the same. Imran is a resident of Meerut. He works in R System, an IT company located in Sector 59 of Noida.

₹50 cr fine slapped on 4 housing projects for flouting green norms

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has levied a total fine of Rs 50 crore on four housing projects in Ghaziabad district, including the Uttar Pradesh Aawas and Vikas Parishad, for flouting environmental rules.

The NGT was hearing a petition alleging violation of environmental norms by four project proponents (PPs), Uttar Pradesh Aawas and Vikas Parishad (UPAVP), Prateek Realtors India Pvt Ltd, Apex Heights Pvt Ltd and Gaur and Sons India Pvt Ltd in developing construction projects at Ghaziabad.

According to the petition, the major violations include inadequacy of plantations and sewage treatment plants resulting in continuing damage to the environment and public health. A bench of chairperson Justice A K Goel said on consideration of rival versions and reports of the joint committee (comprising state pollution control board and District Magistrate of Ghaziabad formed earlier by the tribunal), we find there are violations which need to be



remedied and accountability that needs to be fixed on the polluter pays principles, besides duly utilising compensation amount for restoration of the environment.

The bench also comprising judicial member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel then underlined the violations by the four PPs.

"UPAVP has constructed and sold 1,844 economically weaker section (EWS homes) - 1,376 homes are under Kanshi Ram Scheme and 1,292 homes in Ganga, Yamuna and Hindon Apartments Scheme. None of the said schemes have captive sewage treatment plants (STPs) and sewage is being carried by trunk sewer line and disposed of in open areas and the sewer line is not connected to the terminal STP which is still under construction," the bench said.

2 brothers, juvenile held for stabbing man to death over gutka

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two brothers were arrested and a juvenile was apprehended for allegedly stabbing a man to death in outer Delhi's Mangolpuri area on Sunday, police said.

The accused have been identified as Jatin (20) and Mohit (19), they said, adding the incident happened in the early hours of the day.

Police said a scuffle broke out between victim Jitender (28) and four others following which they stabbed him.

Information about the admission of a man with a stab injury was received from a hospital around 6 am, they said.

During the inquiry, it was revealed that a reception

function of Jitender's brother was organised in a temple.

While consuming alcohol with his friends in a nearby lane, the victim slapped one of the accused when he refused to bring 'gutka' for them, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra K Singh said. Angered by this, the accused stabbed the victim in his thigh, he said.

Jitender was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital for treatment. He was further referred to a private hospital where he succumbed owing to excessive bleeding, the DCP said.

The experts of the Forensic Science Laboratory and Crime team conducted an inspection of the crime scene and a case was registered, he added.

Delhi awarded State Leadership Award-EV policy award

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government has been awarded the State Leadership Award - EV Policy at the India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA)'s 6th Industry Excellence Awards 2023 for its commendable efforts in promoting sustainable transportation through its Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy. The event was held at Pragati Maidan and was attended by notable personalities from the industry. N Mohan, CEO of Delhi EV Cell, accepted the award on behalf of the Government of Delhi.

Congratulating the entire EV Cell team, Delhi's Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said, "Since 2022, Delhi has seen immense growth both in electric vehicle sales and charging infrastructure. The

Transport Department of the Delhi Government has worked tirelessly in promoting sustainable transportation in Delhi. Additionally, inclusion of stakeholders while formulating the Delhi EV policy and key schemes under it over the years has played an important part in helping Delhi to become the EV capital of India."

The Delhi EV policy, which was launched in Aug 2020, has seen good growth across the years. Till April 2023, Delhi had registered 1.17 lacs Electric Vehicles during this period. In 2022 itself, Delhi registered 62,241 EVs and is expected to touch 1 lakh EV sales in 2023. In Dec 2022, Delhi also achieved EV contribution of 16.8% of the overall vehicles sold. Complementing the EV sales,

Delhi's charging infrastructure has been boosted by nearly 4,000 charging points across the city and is expected to have 18,000 charging points by 2025.

The Delhi Government has been acknowledged for its comprehensive and ambitious Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy, which aims to establish the city as a front-runner in sustainable transportation. The policy incentivises the adoption of electric vehicles, facilitates the installation of charging infrastructure, and promotes battery manufacturing, creating a supportive ecosystem for EVs in India. The award celebrates the Kejriwal Government's exceptional contribution towards these initiatives, highlighting its efforts to promote clean and sustainable transportation.

Parts of Delhi-NCR see sudden change in weather

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Parts of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) witnessed a sudden change in weather on Sunday evening as dust storms, rain, and thunder lashed parts of the region bringing the mercury two notches below the season's average to 37.4 degrees Celsius.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted partly cloudy skies with very light rain and drizzle at a few places during the day.

Delhiites woke up to a pleasant Sunday morning with the minimum temperature settling at 21.4 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal.

The relative humidity oscillated between 37 and 82 per cent. The observatory at Palam recorded trace rain



between 8.30 am and 5.30 pm.

For Monday, the IMD has forecast partly cloudy skies with strong surface winds reaching speeds of 30-40 kilometres an hour. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to hover around 38 and 23 degrees Celsius, respectively.

On Saturday, the minimum temperature in Delhi settled at 21 degrees Celsius and the maximum at 35.1

degrees. 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 time.

LG plants 300 saplings of cherry blossom, chinar on islands in Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's lush green landscape, particularly those surrounding the River Yamuna, will resplend with the swaths of pink and white Cherry Blossom and the hues of amber, red and yellow Chinara leaves, like never before.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Sunday planted 300 saplings (150 saplings each) of Cherry Blossom and Chinara between Qudasia ghat and ITO Barrage on the three islands in the Yamuna.

Cherry Blossom and Chinara, being planted for the first time in the national capi-



tal. Lt Governor also inspected the ongoing Yamuna cleaning operations and expressed satisfaction over the progress of the works and lauded religious

saplings of other floral species that include Kachnar, Weeping Willow, Semal, Bottle Brush, Bougainvillea and Kaner, were also planted on Yamuna islands.

"In all, 1733 saplings were planted on the three islands in presence of Saxena. The Chinara and Cherry Blossom saplings have been planted at the highest points on each of the three islands with three meters of space between the two saplings.

The other floral species have been planted in grid formation in the remaining areas of the islands," reads a statement issued by Raj Niwas.

Cherry Blossom, also known as Japanese Cherry, is a

deciduous tree that has been adapted at several places in India like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Shimla and Shillong among others.

Similarly, Chinara is also a deciduous tree known for the peculiar shape and color of its leaves. Chinara trees can produce up to 300-400 KG of leaves per year. In India, Chinara trees are mostly found in Jammu & Kashmir.

It is for the first time that an effort has been made to introduce Chinara and Cherry Blossom in Delhi.

The initiative is also aligned with the LG's vision of making Delhi a City of Flowers, for which he has been personally

monitoring the progress of works and coordinating with multiple agencies.

Officials informed Lt Governor that the Chinara and Cherry Blossom saplings were first kept under controlled atmosphere in nurseries for a month to let them acclimatize to Delhi's weather. Thereafter, the saplings were planted on Yamuna islands.

After this, L-G instructed the officials to deploy personnel of Territorial Army to protect these islands from any encroachment, while the Forest Department will take care of the plants. Seeds of a variety of flowering shrubs like marigold, cosmos and others were also

sown along the river banks that will create a flower bed along the edges of the river.

Over the next three days, seeds will be sown along both the banks of Yamuna using drones and in the next 2-3 weeks these flowering plants will grow.

A large number of riverine grasses have also been planted to prevent the islands from erosion. On this occasion, LG also inspected the ongoing Yamuna cleaning operations and expressed satisfaction over the progress of the works. He appreciated the efforts of the agencies and the workers involved in Yamuna cleaning.

This was Saxena's 13th visit to Yamuna in less than 12 months of his tenure after assuming the charge of the Raj Niwas.

Saxena also lauded the religious leaders/institutions for extending their whole-hearted support to Yamuna cleaning and said very soon, industries and its leaders will be brought on board for Yamuna cleaning.

Chief Secretary, Principal Secretary, Environment and Forest Department, GNCTD, Vice Chairman, DDA, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, GNCTD and senior officials of DDA and other stakeholder agencies were present on the occasion.

42 MPs lost Parliament membership since 1988

Maximum 19 in 14th LS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The recent disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha has put the spotlight on provisions of an Act which has been used to remove 42 members from Parliament since 1988, with the 14th Lok Sabha witnessing the ouster of 19 lawmakers in connection with the cash-for-query scam and cross-voting.

The disqualification of these lawmakers has been on various grounds like changing political allegiances, for conduct unbecoming of a parliamentarian and after being convicted by a court for crimes that have a jail term of two years or more.

The latest round of disqualification of Congress leader Gandhi, NCP leader



Mohammad Faizal P P, and BSP leader Afzal Ansari came after their conviction by courts with jail terms of more than two year, invoked the provisions of the Representation of the People Act. The Act deals with automatic disqualification of MPs and state legislators upon being convicted and sentenced for two years or more in a criminal case.

The disqualification of Faizal, who represents Lakshadweep in the Lok Sabha, was revoked after he obtained a stay over his conviction and sentence, in an attempt to murder case, from the Kerala High Court.

Gandhi has moved the

Gujarat High Court to seek relief in the criminal defamation case involving the 'Modi surname' in which a Surat court had sentenced him to two years in jail.

The first disqualification of a Lok Sabha member after the anti-defection law was enacted in 1985 was that of Lalduhoma, a Congress member, who filed his nomination papers for the Mizoram Assembly elections as a candidate of the Mizo National Union, a party founded by him.

The ninth Lok Sabha, when the then Janata Dal leader V P Singh formed a coalition government, saw nine Lok Sabha members fall foul of the anti-

defection law, which led to their disqualification.

However, it was the 14th Lok Sabha which saw ouster of maximum members from the House - 10 for unbecoming conduct as member for accepting bribe for raising questions in Parliament and nine for cross-voting during the Vote of Confidence sought by the UPA-I government in July 2008 after the Left front withdrew support to it over the civil nuclear deal with the US.

Six members of the BJP, two from BSP and one each from the Congress and RJD were expelled from the Lok Sabha in 2005 over the 'cash for query' scam. One Rajya Sabha member from BSP too was expelled from the House.

"The expulsions were upheld by the Supreme Court. None of these cases were referred to the President for approving the expulsions since the legislature itself is competent to do so," Devendra Singh Aswal, former Additional Secretary, Lok Sabha, told PTI.

Posting of women officers of Territorial Army along LoC OK'd

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to give equal chances to women officers, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved the posting of Territorial Army (TA) officers to strategically important Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu & Kashmir facing Pakistan. The LoC is nearly 750 km long.

Similarly, the Republic Day parade next year at Kartavya Path here may see full women marching contingents and those in the tableaux and band contingents. So far, women officers used to lead or be in second in command of the marching contingents comprising all male soldiers.

This proposal may have a problem as the Services including the Army, Navy and IAF, at present, do not have large number of women serving in the ranks or as soldiers. Therefore, to have a full-women contingent may not be possible, sources said here on Sunday.



However, central paramilitary forces will be able to field all women marching contingents as they started inducting women as soldiers many years ago and have sizeable numbers besides women as officers.

As regards the LoC posting, the Territorial Army is based on a Citizen Soldiers' army concept and officers undergo Annual Training on basic military skills while remaining gainfully employed in civilian life.

Giving details here on Sunday, defence ministry officials said Rajnath gave the nod for posting of women officers

in Ecological Task Force Units, TA Oil sector units and TA Railway Engineer Regiment. Based on the experience gained during this period, it has been decided to extend the scope of further employment for women officers in TA.

On all women contingents for the Republic Day parade, sources said the defence ministry, in March, had circulated an office memorandum to the three Services and various ministries and departments on the planning for the 2024 parade, they said. The memorandum mentioned such a proposal being considered and added that a "debriefing meeting" was held under the chairmanship of the defence secretary in early February.

After deliberations, it was decided that the Republic Day Parade 2024 will have only women participants in the contingents (marching and band), tableaux and other performances during the parade at the Kartavya Path, says the memorandum.

Kapileswar temple all set to get ASI's 'National Importance' tag

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The famous Kapilesvara (Kapileswar) temple, located in Odisha's capital Bhubaneswar and dedicated to Lord Shiva is all set to get the tag of 'National Importance' with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) planning to bring it under its ambit.

The ASI plans for its protections come almost a month after Member of Parliament Aparajita Sarangi who represents Bhubaneswar constituency met Union Minister For Culture, Tourism And Development Of North Eastern Region (DoNER) GK Reddy seeking the temple's inclusion in the ASI list.

A notification has been issued recently in this regard by the ASI under the Union Culture Ministry which has sought suggestions and objections from the public as per rules.

Maintained by Kapilesvara Temple Trust Board, the shrine is one of the largest temple complexes in Bhubaneswar city comprising over 30 separate monuments.



As per documents available from the ASI, the temple was rebuilt sometime during the 14th century AD during the rule of Kapilendra of the Suryavamsi dynasty. Architectural elements and fragments incorporated into the rebuilt structures suggest that the original temple complex could be earlier than the 11th century A.D.

The temple is situated within the precinct along with 33 other monuments. It is a satellite of the main temple in Bhubaneswar, the Lingaraj temple. The precinct is located on the northern embankment of Manikarnika tank over an area of 44.00 square metres.

According to the local legend this is the birthplace of sage Kapila, who is considered as the father of Sankhya Philosophy. He is also considered as the brain child of Brahma, an incarnation of Vishnu and lord Shiva himself. Hence it is a sacred place where the shrine is dedicated to Lord Kapilesvara Siva, as per the websites.

There are 80 centrally protected monuments and structures under ASI in Odisha and 21 among them, including Lingaraj Temple and Mukteshwar Temple, are in Bhubaneswar, said an official from the Union Culture Ministry.

LGBTQ activists term RSS body survey on same-sex marriage dangerous, misleading

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several LGBTQ rights activists have called the survey on same-sex marriage by an RSS body "dangerous and misleading" and accused the organisation of "spreading disinformation".

According to the survey by Samwadhini Nyas, an affiliate of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (a women's organisation which parallels the RSS), many doctors and allied medical professionals believe that homosexuality is "a disorder" and it will increase further in society if same-sex marriage is legalised.

"Such a study is dangerous and misleading for a society that is unaware. It goes against basic dignity and amounts to defamation. Who are these doctors who have respondents in the survey? Their licences should be cancelled.

"Be it The Yoga Institute which was founded in 1918 or the Indian Psychiatric Society, both have maintained that homosexuality is legitimate and normal, it is natural, inborn and choiceless," said author and advocate for equal rights, Sharif



Rangnekar, who also point out how Hinduism is replete with references to homosexuality. Activist Harish Iyer said that psychiatric bodies from across the world and India have maintained that homosexuality is not an "aberration but a variation". It is beyond any reasonable doubt, he said.

"No religion that claims to be a protector of humanity can also support this labelling of LGBTQIA+ individuals as deviants. It is against the ethos of our nation and also against the very grain of the belief of every religion that is based on the principle of love and acceptance.

"If you believe that your God created all of humankind. Then God made me too. And

standing up against LGBTQIA+ individuals is akin to working against the intent of your God. God made me this way," he said.

Iyer also appealed to the government to raise awareness on the issue.

"In keeping with the ruling on the Section 377, the government's responsibility is to create awareness to ensure more acceptance and no misinformation. I would appeal to the government of the day to step in and stand against such blatant disinformation," he said. Q Manivannan, a queer scholar and PhD candidate, University of St Andrews, too refers to ancient mythology in debunking the results of the survey.

SC to hear jailed YouTuber's plea against invoking NSA over fake videos

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by jailed YouTuber Manish Kashyap against whom the stringent National Security Act (NSA) has been invoked for allegedly circulating fake videos of migrant labourers being attacked in Tamil Nadu.

A bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala is likely to hear the plea by Kashyap, who was arrested in Bihar after he surrendered at Jagdishpur police station on March 18 and was later brought to Tamil Nadu where NSA was invoked against him in April.

He faces six FIRs in Tamil Nadu and three in Bihar in connection with the matter.

In its reply to the plea of Kashyap, the Tamil Nadu government has said that multiple FIRs that have been registered in the state against Kashyap are not politically motivated but because he disturbed "public order and national integrity" by



circulating fake videos of migrant labourers being attacked in the southern state.

In an affidavit, the state government opposed Kashyap's plea to club the FIRs lodged against him, saying he cannot "seek the shelter of the umbrella of constitutional rights".

The state government claimed Kashyap attempted to instigate violence between Bihar migrant labourers and the people of Tamil Nadu through false and unverified videos.

"The registration of multiple FIRs was not done with any political intention, nor to suppress the constitutional rights of the accused, but with the intention to stop the spread of misinformation and to ensure that the person guilty of such offences does not escape from the clutches of law.

Border Roads Org celebrates 64th Raising Day



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Responsible for building and maintaining strategic roads in border areas facing China and Pakistan for operational readiness of the armed forces, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on Sunday celebrated its 64th Raising Day in all its attachments across the country.

The main function 'Chief Engineers and Equipment Management Conference' was organised at BRO School and Centre in Pune, presided over by Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt. To mark the day, he inaugurated the BRO Technical Training Complex and an Automated Driving Track at the premises. These facilities will enhance the training standards of the BRO personnel and help them to be better prepared for various challenges.

The BRO-centric software, developed as part of 'Digital India' initiative, were also launched on the occasion. These software - Recruitment Management System, Electronic Measurement Book and Work Management System - have been developed

to automate various aspects of functioning of the BRO for smoother and faster output and increased transparency.

In addition, an MoU was signed between the BRO and the Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) for construction of indigenous Class 70R Double Lane Modular Bridges. These bridges will help in bolstering the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces.

In order to progressively evolve as an organisation, the BRO conceptualised several documents, including a monograph on 'BRO Vision@2047'; Compendium on Road Slogans; Improvement and Standardisation of Medical Establishments; Quality Control Laboratories and Design of Bridges and Problem Statements for Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), including use of satellites for monitoring BRO assets.

These were also unveiled by Bhatt along with the special BRO edition of Sainik Samachar, a fortnightly journal brought out by Directorate of Public Relations, Ministry of Defence.

Biological age can be restored upon relieving stress: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chronic stress is hazardous to health and can lead to early ageing, death from heart disease, cancer and other health problems. This we know. Now a new study published in the journal Cell Metabolism said, "When stress was relieved, biological age could be restored. This means that that finding ways to help the body recover from stress could increase longevity."

The study led by investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital has found these strong evidence, from both humans and preclinical models.

"Traditionally, biological age has been thought to just go up and up, but we hypothesized



that it's actually much more dynamic," said lead author Jesse Poganik, PhD, of the Brigham's Division of Genetics. "Severe stress can trigger biological age to increase, but if that stress is short lived, the signs of biological aging can be reversed."

Poganik and colleagues gathered data from several situations that are likely to cause severe physiological stress. In one experiment, they examined blood samples from elderly patients undergoing emergency

surgery, looking at samples collected immediately before surgery, a few days after surgery and before discharge from the hospital. The team also looked at blood samples from pregnant mice and pregnant people, looking at samples from early and late phases of pregnancy and after giving birth. And in a third analysis, the team examined samples from patients who test positive for COVID-19 and were admitted to the intensive care unit.

They analyzed samples taken when the patient was admitted to the ICU and samples collected over the span of their stay. The team also used a classic mouse model in which, through a surgical procedure, the circulatory systems of younger and older mouse are joined together.

National Thalassemia guidelines to ensure uniform treatment

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday will release National Thalassemia guidelines aiming to ensure uniform treatment as per the Indian settings to the persons with the genetic blood disorder at around 100 point of care facilities spread across the country.

Sources in the ICMR said that so far the treatment has been based on the guidelines implemented in western countries, particularly Europeans one. However, for the first time, the guidelines have been developed keeping in mind the Indian settings, availability of new therapies and medical intervention and the need of the patients in India.

The document 'Evidence-



and Control of Hemoglobinopathies in India which was released in 2016 by the Union Health Ministry in partnership with the National Health Mission, the Blood Cell and the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram.

Some of the key features are protocols for early diagnosis and intervention for newborn screening, facilitating stem cell transplant in possible cases and management of co-morbidities.

The official said that management of the thalassemia syndromes can be challenging due to the numerous potential disease complications and the lack of available therapies other than transfusion and hematopoietic cell transplantation, both of which have associated morbidities and costs.

The provisions for Thalassemia care in the guidelines has also been picked from the comprehensive guideline document on the Prevention

NCGG completes capacity-building programme for 58th batch of civil servants of Bangladesh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) completed its flagship capacity building programme (CBP) for 58th batch of civil servants of Bangladesh, which was attended by 45 officers of that country.

NCGG's Capacity Building Programme is strengthening India's bilateral relation with developing countries, civil servants of Bangladesh are learning from citizen-centric public policies and good governance in India.

NCGG has trained 2055 officers of Bangladesh in good governance and field administration, an official statement



and public service delivery.

The programme focused on imparting new knowledge in the field of public policies, programmes, governance, use of technology and new skill sets to the officers to design and execute effective public policies and programmes to improve the quality of life of citizens.

In his valedictory address, Lal urged the officers to be responsive to the needs of people and stressed on the critical importance of redressing public grievances in a time-bound manner.

He appreciated the developmental partnership between the two countries and stated that this programme is an effort to

empower the participants to new developmental paradigms and initiatives among other things.

He highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mantra of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' and urged the public servants to reduce the gap between the citizens and the government, and do away with the old colonial mindset.

He also pointed out that modern technology is a great enabler in bringing transparency and accountability. One should learn and adopt these modern tools of information and communication technology (ICT) to better serve the people.

SCO delegates impressed by Goan cuisine, culture: EAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All the delegates who attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's foreign ministerial meeting in Goa were impressed by Goan cuisine, culture and hospitality, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Sunday.

India hosted the meeting at a beach resort in Goa's Benaulim on May 4 and 5. The meeting was attended by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, China's Qin Gang, Pakistan's Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Uzbekistan's

Bakhtiyor Saidov and SCO Secretary General Zhang Ming.

Tajikistan's foreign minister Sirojiddin Muhiddin, Kazakhstan's Murat Nurtleu and Kyrgyzstan's Zheenbek Kulubaev also attended the meeting.

"The SCO Foreign Ministers held their meeting in Goa on May 04-05, 2023. All delegates were impressed by Goan cuisine, culture and hospitality," Jaishankar tweeted.

High voltage campaigning for K'taka polls to end today

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The high voltage campaign for the May 10 Assembly elections in Karnataka will come to an end on Monday as all three major political parties in the state — BJP, Congress and JD(S) — are busy making their last pitch to woo the voters.

The top guns of all the major political parties were on a campaign blitz across the state in the past few days, even as the ruling BJP has been striving to break the 38-year-old pattern of alternating governments and retain its southern citadel.

The Congress on its part is working hard to wrest power from the BJP to give itself much-needed elbow room and momentum to position itself as the main opposition player in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The JD(S) led by former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda was seen putting all its might into campaigning, wanting to emerge as "king" and not "kingmaker", hoping to get the required numbers to form a government on its own.

"Government with full majority" seemed to be the favourite slogan of the leaders of all the political parties during the campaigning for the elections to the 224-member Assembly, as they stressed on getting a clear mandate to form a strong and stable government in the State.

While BJP's campaign largely centred with the focus being on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 'double-



engine' government, national issues and programmes or achievements of the union government coupled with a few from the state, the Congress's by and large focused on local issues and was also run by its local leaders initially. However, its central leaders like AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra joined in subsequently.

JD(S) too ran a highly localised campaign, anchored solely by its leader H D Kumaraswamy, with party patriarch Deve Gowda too joining in, despite advanced age and related ailments.

Modi's campaign juggernaut in the past one week since April 29 moved steadily ahead with as many as 18 mega public meetings and six road shows so far. The PM canvassed votes for BJP candidates across the state with the poll

slogan 'Ee Baariya Nirdhara, Bahumatada BJP Sarkara' (This Time's Decision: Majority BJP Government).

Ahead of the March 29 announcement of polls, Modi had visited the state seven times since January, to unveil several government schemes and projects, and addressed numerous meetings of beneficiaries of the government's various schemes.

According to BJP leaders, Modi's campaigning across the state has boosted the party's morale and confidence among the electorate, which they hope will convert into votes and help the party script history in the polls.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah too has extensively travelled the state, campaigning and strategising for the polls. "PM and Shah have put Congress on the backfoot in the run-up to the polls," a senior BJP leader said.

Rahul vows to set up Gig Workers' Welfare Board with ₹3K cr corpus fund

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Keeping in view the hardship of delivery persons, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday reiterated his party's promise to set up a Gig Workers' Welfare Board in Karnataka with a corpus fund of Rs 3,000 crore and minimum hourly wages for them.

Gandhi spoke about the promise once again during an interaction with gig workers and delivery persons of various companies here in poll-bound Karnataka.

Over a cup of coffee and masala dosa, Gandhi discussed with them to get an understanding of the lives of delivery workers, lack of stable employment and rising prices of basic commodities, Congress said in a party release. He also keenly listened to why the youngsters had taken up gig jobs, and what were their working conditions like, the release stated.

"Bengaluru alone has over two lakh people doing gig jobs. The Congress party has made specific promises for them in the manifesto, mainly to set up a Gig Workers' Welfare Board with a corpus of Rs 3,000 crore and to ensure minimum hourly wages for gig workers and other workers in the unorganised sector," the party said.

Corruption, unemployment real terrorism in K'taka: Priyanka

PTI ■ MANGALURU

Corruption, looting, price rise and unemployment are the real "terrorism" in Karnataka today and the ruling BJP had failed to address the actual issues of people while the party was in power, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Sunday.

Addressing a huge public meeting at Moodbidri in Dakshina Kannada district here, she said BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi are always talking about extremism and national security when elections are round the corner.

"They are not talking about your (people's) real issues. I want to tell the BJP leaders that price rise, unemployment and the 40 per cent corruption of the BJP government are the real terrorism," she said.

She said the BJP is making promises at the time of elections, but the people should cast their votes on the basis of what they have delivered in the last three years in Karnataka.

"While talking about dharma, national security and terrorism, the BJP leaders do not see that thousands of farmers had committed suicide in Karnataka under their rule. More than 1,000 unemployed youth have taken their own lives," she charged.

The BJP government had looted ₹6 lakh crore during their rule, she alleged. Medium and small industries in the state have suffered big losses after demonetisation and wrong implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and thousands of youth were rendered jobless.

The Union government had destroyed the idea of bank nationalisation by merging four public sector banks - Syndicate Bank, Vijaya Bank, Corporation Bank and Canara Bank - which were the pride of Mangaluru,



she said. Vadra said all the airports and sea ports in the country including the New Mangalore Port are being sold to crorepatris who are the friends of the BJP regime at the Centre, thereby denying employment to thousands of local people.

The BJP is now trying to destroy dairy cooperative Karnataka Milk Federation's Nandini milk brand which has been serving the people of Karnataka by merging it with Amul that is based out of Gujarat, she charged.

"It is the terrorism of corruption ruling the country," the Congress leader said.

Vadra alleged that as BJP is busy indulging in looting the nation's wealth, they have no time to address the issues of women's development, farmers problems, price rise and the unemployment among the youth.

"They don't work for the people when they are in power and visit them during the elections by preaching on dharma, terrorism and security," she said.

Vadra said all the people-friendly schemes of the previous Congress government in the state including low-cost food outlets Indira canteens will be restored. Every promise in the guarantee card given to the people will be fulfilled, she said.

Seer to bat for hike in quota, minority status for Lingayats

PTI ■ BELAGAVI(KTK)

Kudalasangama Panchamasali Peeth Kseer Basava Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami asserted that he will push for a hike in reservation for the Lingayat community, irrespective of the political party that comes to power after the May 10 Karnataka Assembly elections. He said the then Siddaramaiah led government (2013 to 2018) had recommended to the Centre to accord minority status to Lingayat community like it was done for Jainism and Buddhism. However, the central government had neither accepted nor rejected the proposal. "In the coming days, I expect Lingayats to be given a separate minority status."

Basava Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami had led the 32-month protest seeking the classification of the Panchamasalis, the largest sub-sect of the powerful Lingayat community, from 3B to 2A in the Other Backward Classes (OBC). Since it was not possible to provide under 2A, the Bommai government created a new '2D' category and provided 2 per cent more reservation, increasing the total reservation for Lingayats to 7 per cent.

The state has four categories of OBC: 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B based on the economic, social and educational status. These communities get preferential reservations in jobs and educational institutions based on the categories.

Security beefed up in north Kashmir ahead of G20 meet

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Security has been beefed up in north Kashmir ahead of a G20 meet in the valley later this month, in view of three back-to-back encounters with militants in which five ultras were killed, officials said on Sunday.

Additional security personnel have been deployed on the ground and drones are being used for aerial surveillance, they said.

Sniffer dogs are assisting security personnel in checking vehicles at various check points established to prevent movement of militants or explosives, they said.

The officials said the security apparatus has been put on a heightened alert as Kashmir will host the third G20 Tourism Working Group meeting later this month.

North Kashmir has witnessed three back-to-back encounters between security forces and militants in the past five days, in which five ultras were killed.

Three of these five ultras hailed from south Kashmir. Their presence in north Kashmir, close to Gulmarg tourist resort, has given rise to



apprehensions about the possibility of a major terror strike in the valley, the officials said.

Police officials said the forces were alert to thwart any possible plan of militants to carry out attacks in the run-up to the event.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Baramulla Amod Ashok Nagpure said the intelligence grid was working very hard and the forces have been able to neutralize the threats.

"Our forces are on alert for the summit. Our intelligence agencies are also working hard, our network is very strong. So, we are getting timely information of all the suspicious activities in the area," Nagpure said.

He said the security agencies are confident that the summit will pass off peacefully and successfully "because of our preparedness".

The SSP said the security forces have been able to neutralize the threats as there is a complete synergy among various agencies.

The first of these back-to-back encounters in north Kashmir took place on Wednesday as the forces foiled an infiltration bid near the Line of Control (LoC) in Machil sector, in which two militants were killed.

On Thursday, two militants were killed in an encounter in Wanigam Payeen Kreeeri area of Baramulla district.

There should be no politics over terrorism, says Azad

PTI ■ JAMMU

Chairman Nabhi Azad on Sunday said there should be no politics over terrorism and that terror in any part of the world is not in the interest of public.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister also credited the BJP-led Centre for bringing peace to the region, but said several things like the abrogation of Article 370 and reconstituting Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories should not have been done.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a party event here, Azad said, "Terrorism in any part of the world, including Jammu and Kashmir, is not in the interest of the public. It is the public which suffers huge losses and are forced into poverty and illiteracy".



VHP, Bajrang Dal to organise Hanuman Chalisa chanting sessions across India

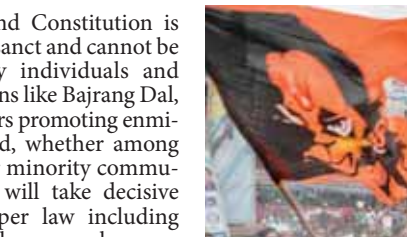
PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its youth wing Bajrang Dal on Sunday said that have decided to chant 'Hanuman Chalisa' on May 9 throughout the country, which happens to be a day before the Karnataka Assembly elections.

The call comes as a counter to the Congress party which in its manifesto released last week said it was committed to taking 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 is (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".

According to VHP secretary general Milind Parande, the programme has been decided to invoke 'Bajrang Bali (Hanuman) to give 'Sadbuddhi' (good sense) to the Congress and other organisations and activists who stand to advocate for and promote the



terrorists, anti-Bharat elements and anti-Hindu mindsets, so that good sense and pro-nationalist character should prevail with them".

"It is very insulting that in the election manifesto of Karnataka Congress, the party has promised a ban on Bajrang Dal and after that in several

states, including Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra, the Congress and some other anti-Hindu leaders have made demands to ban the Bajrang Dal," Parande said in a statement.

He said it was "irrational, ridiculous and outlandish" to compare "this nationalist and patriotic organisation" (Bajrang Dal) with the anti-national, terrorist, violent organisation PFI (Popular Front of India which has been banned). "The Hindu society will surely teach a democratic lesson to the unreasonable perpetrators for such humiliation," he added.

TMC's Abhishek sets target of winning 40 of 42 LS seats in Bengal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee has called upon the party's workers and leaders to ensure that the TMC wins 40 of the total 42 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

The party had bagged 22 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Had the TMC won 34-35 seats in the last Lok Sabha elections, the BJP government at the Centre would not have been able to increase prices of

petrol, diesel and cooking gas in such a way, claimed Banerjee, considered number 2 in the party.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah last month set a target for the BJP to win 35 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal in next year's election and said the Mamata Banerjee government in the state won't survive beyond 2025 if the goal is achieved.

"Let us work towards the target of getting 40 seats in the coming Lok Sabha polls. If we start working from now, if you



can reach the people in a bigger way, if you highlight how despite winning polls BJP has done precious little for people's betterment, we can very well achieve that target," Banerjee said. The BJP now has 18 Lok Sabha MPs from West Bengal.

"Their (BJP's) MPS haven't done anything to project the issues faced by people. They are only interested in building Ram temple and dividing people in the name of religion," the TMC's Diamond Harbour MP claimed at a rally on Saturday night.

He alleged that the Congress and the CPIM will also not utter a single word against the BJP government as they have all ganged up to discredit the TMC administration as they have failed to defeat the state's ruling party.

AIADMK urges TN Govt to take precautionary measures during temple festivals

To prevent stampedes, other incidents

PTI ■ CHENNAI

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami on Sunday urged the Tamil Nadu government to take precautionary measures to ensure the safety of devotees when they congregate in large numbers to take part in events such as the Chithirai Festival in Madurai.

The leader of the opposition in the Assembly was critical of the DMK regime, stating that because it did not take adequate measures, there had been fatal incidents in the past two years in various places, including the chariot accidents in Dharmapuri and Thanjavur and the five youths drowning during a temple ritual in Madipakkam in the city last



month. Observing that over 10 lakh people gather to witness Lord Kallazhagar enter the Vaigai river in Madurai district during the Chithirai festival every year, Palaniswami claimed that during the AIADMK rule precautionary measures were taken with the support of the police force so that even minor incidents would not take place.

However, during the Chithirai Festival held on May 5, 2023, three devotees had drowned in the temple tank while another individual died in a stampede and a youth was murdered near the temple entrance, Palaniswami said, adding that it had deeply saddened him.

The Kerala Story gets poor reception, theatres in TN stop screening film

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Allegedly poor box office collections as well as protests, theatres in Tamil Nadu stopped the screening of 'The Kerala Story' in the State from May 7 onwards.

When this writer tried to book via online platforms for a Sunday afternoon show, it was not possible anymore.

President of Tamil Nadu Theatre and Multiplex Owners Association, M Subramaniam, popularly known as Tiruppur Subramaniam, confirmed the news that the few multiplexes that had shown the film had decided to withdraw it.

"The film was only shown in a few multiplexes owned by pan-India groups, mostly PVR. Locally-owned multiplexes had already decided not to show the film, as it did not have any popular stars. In Coimbatore for instance, there were two shows



so far — one on Friday and one on Saturday. Even those did not do well. Given that, theatres decided that it was not worth going through the threat of protests and such," added Subramaniam.

On April 6, Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) staged a protest against the release of the film in Chennai. Seeman, the party's coordinator, who is also actor and director, along with NTK cadres, had protested near Anna Nagar Arch.

Funds to self-help groups helped BJP secure more women votes in Tripura: CM

PTI ■ AGARTALA

The Tripura Government provided huge funds to self-help groups, which helped the BJP get more votes from women in the last assembly election, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Sunday. Addressing a programme of the BJYM in Rabindra Bhaban, Saha said the party's Mohila Morcha did "wonders" in the last elections in mobilising female voters.

23 percentage points more female voters casting their votes for the BJP in comparison to male voters," he said.

Saha also praised the BJYM's role in the last assembly elections.

"The Yuva Morcha has always been a fighting force for the party — be it elections or the pandemic. We feel secure as Yuva Morcha is always behind the government and the party," he said.

Maintaining that Tripura has a bright future, the Chief Minister said new industries were coming up in the State.

Special flight to be arranged to bring back Maha students stuck in violence-hit Manipur, says CM

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday said 22 students from the State currently stuck in riot-hit Manipur will be first shifted to Assam from where a special flight will be arranged to bring them back home.

As many as 14 of them have been shifted to the Shiv Sena office in Manipur, the CM's office said in a statement.

Violent clashes broke out recently between tribals and members of the majority Meitei community in the north-east-



ern state of Manipur, which has so far displaced more than 13,000 people and killed at least 54. The clashes broke out after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in 10 hill districts of the state to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

In the statement, CM Shinde said his government was keeping a watch on the situation in Manipur. His deputy Devendra Fadnavis also promised help to the affected students.

"There are 22 students (in Manipur) from Maharashtra. I have spoken to two of them - Vikash Sharma and Tushar Awhad - and assured them of arranging a special flight to return home. I told them not to be afraid of anything, the state is making all the necessary arrangements to bring them back safely," he said.

Raje, 2 other BJP leaders helped save my Govt during 2020 rebellion by Cong MLAs: Gehlot

PTI ■ DHOLPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday claimed Vasundhara Raje and two other BJP leaders had helped save his Government during the 2020 revolt by his party MLAs.

However, Raje has rejected the allegations of collusion with Gehlot. Further, she slammed Sachin Pilot over his allegations of corruption and said some people don't find peace without making false statements.

He also took potshots at the rebel Congress MLAs saying they should return the money they had taken from

the BJP so that they can carry out their duty without any pressure. Gehlot's then deputy Sachin Pilot and 18 other Congress MLAs had revolted against his leadership in July 2020. The month-long crisis ended after the intervention of the party high command. Pilot was then removed as the deputy chief minister and state Congress president.

Addressing a programme in Dholpur, Gehlot said his government could be saved because of the support of three BJP leaders — former chief minister Vasundhara Raje, former assembly speaker Kailash Meghwal and MLA Shobharani Kushwah.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bad news

Airlines reaching the NCLT underline a systemic problem that plagues the aviation sector

Something is not right with the domestic aviation sector. Last week, Go First filed for insolvency resolution, blaming the US company Pratt & Whitney for its "faulty engines" which grounded half of Go First's fleet. Days after that, Aircastle, one of the lessors of SpiceJet, dragged the airline to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). It wants the insolvency process to start against the airline for the non-payment of its dues. The case will be heard today, though SpiceJet is "confident of resolving the matter without court proceedings and we are in discussions with their [Aircastle's] senior leadership team." Hopefully, that happens but it is a fact that SpiceJet has been incurring losses since 2018-19. These developments suggest that there is something systemically wrong with the aviation sector. Air traffic is increasing rapidly. In the last decade, the number of domestic passengers has jumped from 14 million to 144 million. The Indian economy has shown considerable resilience and overcome the pandemic blues; it is expected to grow at a rate in the region of 6 per cent in the foreseeable future. The government is spending lakhs of crores of rupees on infrastructure. In such a milieu, it seems incomprehensible that aviation companies are shutting shop. Unfortunately, that has been the story of civil aviation since the opening up of the sector in 1994. In the last 29 years, 27 airlines have died; one aviation company perishing every year is not very assuring.



If the worst comes to the worst and the two airlines, Go First and SpiceJet, are shut down, domestic aviation would be staring at the prospect of duopoly. Indigo is the market leader with a 56 per cent share; the Tatas-owned airlines are distant second with a total market share of 26 per cent. Competition makes a sector vibrant; it is declining in India's nascent aviation business. The business is plagued with several problems, the one with engines appearing quite high on the list. In fact, it troubled Indigo too, but the company was able to overcome it; Go First couldn't. It is, however, indisputable that grounded aircraft are a big issue. As per the estimates of CAPA India, an aviation advisory and research body, about 110 planes or 15 per cent of the country's total fleet is grounded because of various problems. All airlines are facing this challenge—some more, others less. Go First suffered the most; it had to shut down. The high fuel cost is another challenge that Indian airlines face. Then there is the issue of over-regulation. One instance is the Government's affordable flying scheme UDAN (moniker for Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik); it means that airlines have to fly non-lucrative routes. The need of the hour is rethink over aviation policy; it must strike a balance between the financial health of companies on the one hand and revenue generation (fuel tax) and social obligations on the other.

PICTALK



Women perform during 'Yoga Conclave', organised by Patanjali University and Bharat Swabhimani, in New Delhi

First responder to humanitarian crisis



TARUN CHUGH

True to the Indian philosophy that the world is one family, the Indian evacuation efforts in Sudan don't differentiate among the nationalities

In a quick span of time, India has evacuated over 3000 citizens from war-ravaged Sudan. With news breaking of a faction of paramilitary force and army in Sudan fighting it out to grab power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called an emergency meeting. The message was clear for all the stakeholders — each minute is crucial to safely evacuate the Indian citizens. The political leadership seized the moment, knowing that the armed battle for power in Sudan will not quickly end and the Indian citizens should not be caught in the crossfire.

Operation Kaveri was set in motion. INS Sumedha and INS Tarkash quickly sailed the international waters. The IAF pressed into service its heavy transport carriers such as C-130J, C-17, etc. Indian diplomatic Missions threw a ring of safety by connecting with the government of Saudi Arabia, and Jeddah became a point of touch for the evacuated Indians for their journey back home. PM Modi's warm relations with the king of Saudi Arabia have steadied the bilateral ties, and Jeddah once more showed its friendship to India.

Except for one unfortunate death of an Indian, Albert Augustine, in Sudan, the joint efforts of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy in close collaboration with the diplomatic corps have once more demonstrated that India has come a long way in becoming the first responder in crisis for its own people and others also. This has been made possible because of decisive leadership, which doesn't lose time and stays ahead in anticipating the turn of events in regions of strife. Also, 'Operation Sankat Mochan', carried out in 2016 in South Sudan, remained a torchlight for the Indian rescue mission once more in the African nation. 'Operation Samudra Sethu in 2020' also brought 3992 Indians back home during the Covid-19 pandemic. By now it has been well demonstrated that Indians will not be the last but the first to be rescued, and the world noted the growing strength of the Indian passport.

True to the Indian philosophy that the world is one village, our



evacuation efforts don't differentiate among the nationalities. This was acknowledged by President of France Emmanuel Macron who thanked PM Modi for rescuing and evacuating the French embassy staffers from Khartoum, the Sudanese capital.

The Sudan crisis refreshed the global community of the Indian wherewithal in evacuating the people stuck in the strife-torn regions. Only recently, India carried out one of the largest rescue and evacuation missions' Operation Ganga' in Ukraine. Thousands of Indian students stuck in Ukraine were evacuated safely from the war-ravaged region in circumstances that tested the depth of India's diplomatic ties with eastern European nations and also the manoeuvrability of the logistics.

The ministers camped in the capitals of nations bordering Ukraine, while PM Modi worked with Russian and Ukrainian leadership to even pause the war for limited hours to allow the Indian students to cross over to safe zones. Along with the Indian students, India was able to evacuate and rescue scores of people from other countries. India made it clear that there comes no discrimination and distinction in service to humanity. The global commu-



THE SUDAN CRISIS REFRESHED THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF THE INDIAN WHEREWITHAL IN EVACUATING THE PEOPLE STUCK IN THE STRIFE-TORN REGIONS

nity was in full praise of the scale of operation carried out by India in Ukraine. This again has been singularly made possible because of the political capital deployed in responding to humanitarian crises in any part of the world.

In 2015, India carried out a large-scale evacuation exercise from Yemen as part of 'Operation Raahat', evacuating 6710 individuals — 4748 Indians and 1962 foreign nationals. Indian rescue missions have now become household names with films and web series made on them, something which earlier used to be seen only for American films.

Incidentally, Union Minister for External Affairs S Jaishankar has been on record recalling PM Modi's personal involvement in addressing the crisis in many parts of the world. Jaishankar was pleasantly surprised when he saw PM Modi ringing him on his mobile phone late after midnight to enquire about the rescue efforts after the Indian embassy in Kabul had been attacked by terrorists. 'Operation Devi Shakti' evacuated Indian citizens and foreign nationals from Afghanistan after the Taliban captured power in Kabul.

India is globally acknowledged as a country with impeccable capabilities to

respond in situations of natural disasters. Within hours of the earthquakes jolting Turkey, PM Modi had already held an emergency meeting and the special teams of the National Disaster Response Force were airborne to respond to one of the gravest tragedies in any part of the world in the last few decades. The team of doctors, paramedics and other NDRF personnel who carried out relief works as part of 'Operation Dost' won the hearts of the people in Turkey with their quick response to save lives. The Indian efforts in Turkey have been rightly applauded globally for expeditionary response to save lives even in situations that were too harsh in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

Such expertise of India was also seen in the wake of the Nepal earthquakes in 2015 which had left deathly trails. The Indian response to 'Operation Maitri' was quick and timely to save precious lives. India in fact has tested its capabilities as the first responder in times of natural disasters which had been seen during the Bhuj Earthquake and Uttarakhand floods. The scale has come with a massive investment of political capital by PM Modi.

(Author is the national general secretary of the BJP)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COVID NO MORE A HEALTH EMERGENCY

Sir — At last, the COVID has been declared by WHO as the disease ceased to be a health emergency, but continues as a pandemic. Though the deaths due to the virus have come down in number drastically these days, it cannot be taken lightly as it's changing its behaviour often. It's better to observe and encourage COVID-appropriate behaviour in public and keep surveillance by the public health authorities. Understanding the unknown virus which had become a global monster and reigned in its spread in two years is certainly a handsome victory for modern science. That India is on the front line in the war against corona and producing an effective vaccine in time is a feather in its cap.

DVG Sankararao | Vizianagaram

DEPLORABLE ATTACKS

Sir — It is on the extreme condemn note, that had been attempted by the Ukraine with respect to Russian President Vladimir Putin. It is on the extreme now, when the countries are attempting to assassinate the national leader through such short Drone attacks. Although Kyiv had directly denied such allegations of its involvement, what had happened the last couple of days will only exaggerate the intensity of tension between the two. It's been more than 15 months of unending rivalry between Ukraine and Russia. The situation is getting worse with every passing day. Assassination attempts on Putin will be the lowest turning point of this conflict.

No matter whoever had dared to attempt the killing of Putin, by flying a drone over the Kremlin's Palace and residence of the Russian President, one thing is definite this will surely come up with more aggressive counter actions from the Russian side. Global peace will get extremely disturbed and imbalanced due to such nefarious attempts. This should not have happened, as such attempts only exaggerate the matter to more volatile and more panic & unrest for the world order. Ukraine and other Western powers must not invite more fire by fuelling Ukraine,

Freebie or be free



When someone gives you a product or service free of charge, what does he take from you in return—psychological? Nature abhors a vacuum. Nothing is free. People are Promised free water, free education, free medicines, free food but knowledge of what freebies will do to the economy, thus affecting their own life in future is not shared freely but is hidden keeping people in darkness.

'Discount' originated from an Italian bakery, if the customer promptly paid for all slices, one slice is dis-counted i.e. not counted or free. With freebie culture Customer's life has become 'Kashita-Mar.' But we have to ponder: can a marketer really give anything for free?

Greenflation is the additional cost you pay for products that are less harmful to the environment and save the planet. Now Companies are paying trillions of dollars to eliminate carbon emissions. This reminds me of an Akbar-Birbal story, where once the emperor asked - out of 12 if 4 goes what remains? Many so-called wise but really ignorant courtiers replied 8. But the wise Birbal said zero and explained that out of 12 months if we don't get rain for 4, the economy comes to a standstill. Similarly, if we don't protect green nothing will remain!

TS Karthik | Chennai

against Russia. West must step action for a speedy solution and talk mechanism in this urgent matter of neighbour-rivalry. Rather than being in a critical role, by imposing sanctions, and aiding Ukraine with weapons and money, it is suggestible that the West must push both Ukraine and Russia towards a Dialogue Table for Peace Negotiation.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

PROPAGANDA THROUGH FILMS

Sir — While a particular "sensational" film on Kashmir was nothing but an one-sided propaganda story of "ethnic cleansing" in the Valley without any mention of historical context or background and no portrayal of premature deaths and killings of Kashmiri Muslims as well; another "enlightening" film revolving around Kerala atrociously dwells on the myth of "love jihad" bordering on conversion and terrorism with obviously a particular religious community depicted as "devils".

It is learnt that a propaganda film on Bengal is also in final stages of production

which would revolve around the 1947 Partition of India/Bengal and no prizes for guessing which religious community would be made the "sole culprit" behind the gory saga! And all these films (released or in production) are bound by the common thread of invoking Islamophobia! However, in this extremely pathetic context, let Kashmir, Kerala and Bengal continue to inspire the sane section of the population through its syncretic culture. How can we forget the restoration of a century-old Shiva Temple in Achhan village (Pulwama district) where the number of Hindu families was only 1 with the rest being Muslims! Yes, the Muslim villagers and the local Auqaf Committee had restored the temple so that the only Hindu family could celebrate Shivaratri! At the end of the puja, Muslim villagers enjoyed kehwa (Kashmiri tea) and sweets distributed by the Pandit family!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Six years of Yogi Govt's achievements

His Govt has successfully created an investment-friendly environment in the State, resulting from improved law and order situation

In March 2022, Yogi Adityanath was sworn in as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for the second time, following the BJP's victory in the state assembly elections. The state unit of the party celebrated the occasion with various functions, highlighting the achievements of his government during the past six years.

One of this government's notable achievements is the investment-friendly environment created in the state, resulting from improved law and order and employment opportunities. The government has taken a pragmatic step towards combating organized crime, planned violence and riots at the time of religious festivals and that has yielded extraordinary results, the government has acknowledged that the handlers, perpetrators, promoters, and sympathizers are equal partners in crime. The government is working to combat "mafia-giri" not only through legal means but also by targeting the financial investors of these mafia groups.

The government's approach towards combating organized crime is holistic,



aiming to tackle the root causes of the issue, the government is sending a strong message that it will not tolerate any kind of criminal activity, and is committed to maintaining law and order in the state. The state has been cracking down on the mafia, with over Rs 1849 crore worth of property seized and demolished in the past year alone.

The state government has made an unprecedented contribution to improving the rural economy by implementing a multi-pronged strategy. This includes promoting agricultural exports through digital payments, ensuring that farmers benefit directly from Mandis, investing in rural infrastructure and irrigation, and supporting private investment in

rural areas without bias or preference.

The government's investment in rural infrastructure and irrigation has created much-needed employment opportunities in rural areas, while also improving the quality of life for residents. The provision of basic amenities such as electricity, water supply, and sanitation has helped to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, the government has been proactive in supporting private investment in rural areas, creating an environment that is conducive to business growth and development. This has not only generated employment opportunities but has also contributed to the overall development of the region.

The UP Global Investors Summit 2023, resulted in over 20,000 MoUs worth about 35 lakh crore being signed, three times the target set by the state government. The economically backward eastern region received investment proposals worth Rs 9 lakh 55 thousand crores, while Bundelkhand received proposals worth Rs 4 lakh 28 thousand crores.

Despite these achievements, the state government recognizes that many educated youth leave the state to work abroad, and often fail to meet global standards. To address this issue, the government plans to establish a "World Skill Centre," which will polish and develop the skills of the youth necessary for the global job market. The centre will partner with international firms TUV SUD Germany and EHL Switzerland, offering skill development in hospitality and tourism, retail services, logistics, and accounting.

Admission to the centre will be available to youth of 17-23 who have passed their 12th grade with English as a subject and basic knowledge of computers. The target is to impart employment to seventy per cent of trained youth who will receive placement, with efforts made to provide global placement to 10-15 per cent. We look forward to seeing the positive impact of these initiatives on the state's economy and its people.

(The writer is a former secretary, Govt of India. Views expressed are personal)



SHANKAR AGGARWAL



FIRST COLUMN

INFUSE ENTHUSIASM AND WILL TO ACHIEVE

Nothing stays forever. Good as well as bad times go away



RAVI VALLURI

Buddha Purnima is celebrated every year and we pay obeisance to Lord Buddha's robust thoughts and breathing and meditation techniques. Our lexicon today is once again brimful of words such as CoronaVirus, Covid-19, O2(oxygen), ventilator, masks etc., as the lethal virus resurfaces once again accompanied by the painful memories of the misery we all went through. But we fought back with resilience. When our mind is distraught our prana/chi/energy levels get enfeebled and in such a state our motivational levels diminish.

Ageons ago, during the times of Buddha, a king had several elephants, but one elephant was very powerful and brawny, exceedingly obedient, sensible and skilful in everything, especially his fighting skills. In different wars, the pachyderm was sent to the battlefield and used to return only after ensuring victory for the king. Therefore, he became the most loved mastodon of the king.

Time flew by and there came a time when the mammoth started getting old. Now the elephant was not able to perform as in earlier times. Therefore, now the king did not even send his prized possession to the battlefield but it remained as a part of the king's team and retinue. One day the elephant went to a lake to quench its thirst, but unfortunately, the animal's feet got stuck in the mud there and the pachyderm kept on sinking. The mammoth tusker attempted a lot, but it could not extricate itself from the mud.

People came to know from the sound of the elephant's screams that the animal was in dire straits. The news of the trapped elephant also reached the king. All the people of the kingdom including the king gathered around the elephant and made valiant efforts to disencumber it. But alas, despite attempting for a long time, there appeared to be no solution in sight.



At that very time, Gautama Buddha was passing by. Gautama Buddha, the Sakya Muni stopped and inspected the site of the incident and then suggested to the king that battle drums should be played around the lake. The listeners were amazed at the seemingly bizarre suggestion. How could the trapped elephant come out by playing the battle drums? But they could not say anything to the enlightened one and commenced playing the drums. As soon as the drums of war started ringing, there was a change in the gestures, behaviour and determination of the troubled elephant.

At first, the pachyderm slowly stood up and then gradually used its force and intelligence and before long, came out of the mud on his own, shocking everyone. Gautama Buddha merely smiled and uttered softly, "There was no lack of physical ability in the elephant, but only the need to infuse enthusiasm, motivation and will.

To maintain enthusiasm in life, it is necessary that humans maintain purposeful thinking and do not let despair dominate their minds and thoughts. During desperate and rough times, we all need to enthuse ourselves and the people around us with hope and enthusiasm by playing, if need be, the 'battle drums'. These drums will metamorphose our thought process so that we relive the abundance of jollity, health and happiness. The 'battle drums' can invigorate and raise our motivational levels and take the form of yoga, pranayama, breathing exercises like Sudarshan Kriya meditation, service to society and appreciating the nature of impermanence. "Nothing stays forever. Good as well as bad times go away. Be Happy," says spiritual master, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

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

Freebies sending states neck-deep into debt

States are borrowing recklessly as freebies empty their coffers. The burden of debt is more in States where more expenditure is being made on free schemes



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been repeatedly cautioning in his speeches that the politics of free 'revadis' (freebies) is ruining this country. It is seen that in the last one or two decades political parties in different states have been announcing different types of free schemes to woo the voters. Free electricity, free water, free women's travel in public transport, cash transfer to all farmers based on their land, free Mangal Sutra, free Laptops, free scooters, free TVs and many such freebies schemes are frequently announced by the states. Many political parties have been the beneficiary of these freebies, and have been successful in capturing the governments in some states.

The Reserve Bank has said that the state governments are making public borrowing, over and above what was announced in the budget, which is a matter of concern. In the year 2020, the Andhra Pradesh government raised huge debt over and above announced in the budget. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank has cautioned 9 more states that their borrowings have far exceeded their capacity. Of these, Punjab, Bihar, Kerala and West Bengal are said to be under extreme stress. The Reserve Bank report states that the average government borrowing in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana and Kerala is more than 5 per cent of their respective state GDP. Government borrowing is 9.6 per cent in Punjab and 6.1 and 6.0 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal respectively. Apart from this, it is 5.3 per cent in Haryana and 5.1 per cent in Kerala.

It is worth mentioning that India is a Union of States, therefore the debt of both the central government and the state governments together is called Government Debt. The FRBM Committee, given the FRBM Act 2003, had recommended in 2017 that the debt-to-GDP ratio of the General Government (both central and state governments) should be less than 60 per cent, with the debt limits of the central and state governments to be 40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

The year 2020-21 was extremely unfortunate for the country and the world. On the one hand, the income of the governments decreased by a huge amount and on the other hand, the expenditure on health, social services and food aid increased enormously, to deal with the pandemic. Naturally, the total liabilities of the Central Government as a proportion of GDP increased from 50.9 per cent in 2019-20 to 61.01 per cent in 2020-21. But after that, it decreased to 57.33 per cent in 2021-22 and to 55.88 per cent in 2022-23. Similarly, the total liabilities of state governments as per cent of GDP, which were 26.66 per cent in the year 2019-20, increased to 31.08 per cent in 2020-21, which later declined to 28.71 per cent in 2021-22 and 27.87 per cent in 2022-23. The total liabilities of the General Government (central and state governments together) increased from 77.56 per cent in 2019-20 to 92.09 per cent in 2020-21. After this, it decreased to reach 86.04 per cent in 2021-22 and 83.75 per cent in 2022-23.

Significantly, both the deficit and the liabilities of the Central Government are very transparent and there is no possibility of misrepresentation of the same. But



SIGNIFICANTLY, BOTH THE DEFICIT AND THE LIABILITIES OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ARE VERY TRANSPARENT AND THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF MISREPRESENTATION OF THE SAME

(The writer is a Professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi. Views expressed are personal)



the same cannot be said about the liabilities of the state governments. Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has also made some observations about the budgetary and fiscal management of the states. In these comments too, concern has been expressed about the debt of the state governments based on the data till the year 2020-21. The CAG says the debt to GSDP ratio in most states is higher than the targeted 20 per cent (as per FRBM). It reached 48.98 per cent in Punjab, 42.37 per cent in Rajasthan, 37.39 per cent in West Bengal, 36.73 per cent in Bihar, 35.30 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 31.53 per cent in Madhya Pradesh, 27.80 per cent in Telangana, 27.27 per cent in Tamil Nadu and 26.47 per cent in Chhattisgarh in 2020-21.

It is worth noting that the CAG's figures for debt are different from the figures given by the state governments. And if borrowings of state government enterprises and guarantees given by the state government are also included, then by 2020-21, the debt to GSDP ratio in Rajasthan would be 54.94 per cent and in Punjab, it would be 58.21 per cent. In Andhra Pradesh also it has been estimated at 53.77 per cent. Notably, it has reached 47.89 per cent and 47.13 per cent in Telangana and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

It is 40.35 per cent and 40.51 per cent in West Bengal and Bihar respectively, and 39.94 per cent in Tamil Nadu. If the adjusted liabilities of these state governments as estimated by the CAG are compared with the figures provided by

the state governments, it appears to be 10 to 20 percentage points higher. That is, it can be said that the burden of liabilities on the state governments is much more than the figures published by the state governments. Although, the liabilities of the Central and State Governments are more than the prescribed limit as per the FRBM Act, as per the assessment done by the CAG, the gap of the State Governments with the suggested limit in FRBM, is widening continuously.

FREEBIES AND INCREASING DEBT IN THE STATES

Regarding Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank of India says that Punjab is the highest spender on freebies. Notably, 45.5 per cent of the total tax revenue is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 30.3 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Talking about the state's gross domestic product, 2.7 per cent of the state's gross domestic product is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 2.1 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Apart from this, in Madhya Pradesh 28.8 per cent of the tax revenue is spent on subsidies, in Jharkhand this expenditure is 26.7 per cent of tax revenue.

Significantly, according to the assessment of the CAG, the general debt is more in those states, where more expenditure is being made on free schemes. In this, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh are at the top. Where the bulk of the total revenue is spent on free schemes. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu is another southern state which spends more on free schemes. Although Delhi is far

ahead in free schemes, due to this debt Delhi does not increase because the per capita revenue of the state is almost twice that of the national arrangement.

However, due to free electricity, free water and free travel in public transport for women by the Delhi government, the financial condition of Delhi has become very precarious. All the promises made by the Aam Aadmi Party before coming to power, such as building 20 new colleges, providing free WiFi, building 20,000 public toilets, creating a women's security force, installing 5 lakh CCTVs, expanding health facilities, creating 8 lakh jobs creation, skill training to one lakh youth etc. have all gone in the air till now. The civic amenities of Delhi are getting badly affected. Far from building new roads, flyovers, schools and colleges, Delhi's health services are also getting badly affected.

When a state spends such a large proportion of its tax revenue on free schemes, its capital spending on essential services and infrastructure will naturally fall short. The debt on such a state government goes on increasing, due to which social services like education and health as well as transport and other essential services are also affected. For the development of any state, it is essential to increase investment. In the absence of infrastructure, investment is affected and due to this, the development of the state and creation of job opportunities is also affected. The development of the country must be accelerated by curbing the free schemes given by the states.

US is best nation for intellectual property environment

The intellectual property (IP) supports our drive to build a better future. It is the very basis to provide innovators an environment that protects their rights

This year, World Intellectual Property Day focused on the theme, 'Women and IP: Accelerating Innovation and Creativity', celebrating the determination of women inventors, creators, and entrepreneurs around the world. Intellectual property is a major driving force behind global economic growth. This is the reason why experts spend a lot of time gathering intellectual property facts and figures. By doing this, experts can measure intellectual property's efficacy in promoting creativity and development. Indeed, Intellectual property is a safeguard mechanism through which creators and innovators are assured that their work would be credited to them and not by someone else. The fact



SUNIL GOYAL



DIMPLE KHOKHAR

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

remains that countries that have robust IP ecosystems are at the forefront of innovations and creativity thrives in such places.

According to the report published by Statista Research Department, on March 10, 2023, the leading country for the best intellectual property environment was the United States with an overall score of 95.48 points. The International Property Index consists of five key sets of indicators to map the national intellectual property environment of 55 surveyed countries. The United Kingdom and France followed behind.

In 2021, China had the most patent grants worldwide with 695,946 patents granted to resident and non-resident companies or organizations.



The United States followed with 327,307 granted patents the same year. In 2021, China led the ranking with a total of 70,015 international (PCT) patent applications filed in that year. The United States and Japan followed behind with nearly 60,000 and over 50,000 applications respectively. The leading 10 countries accounted for more than 88

percent of all applications filed in 2022.

In 2021, the University of California filed the most international patent applications worldwide, with 551 applications. Zhejiang University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology were ranked second and third. The 2021 ranking of universities with the most international patent

applications was dominated by the U.S. and Chinese universities. As of 2021, the number of patent applications worldwide amounted to about 3.4 million. That was a big increase compared to the previous year when the number reached around 3.28 million applications. It was also the highest number of patent applications worldwide in the last 30 years. In 2021, the national patent office of China received the most patent applications worldwide with about 1.6 million patent applications from resident and non-resident companies or organizations. The United States followed with around 591 thousand patent applications.

In 2021, the number of trademark applications worldwide stood at about 13.9 mil-

lion. That was an increase compared to the previous year when the number of applications amounted to around 13.3 million. It was also the highest number of trademark applications worldwide recorded during the time under consideration.

In 2021, China led the ranking of the 20 national trademark offices with the most trademark applications with about 9.45 million applications from resident and non-resident companies or organizations that year. Second on that ranking was the United States with around 900 thousand applications in 2021.

In 2021, the number of industrial design applications worldwide stood at about 1.18 million. That was an increase compared to the previous year

when the number amounted to roughly 1.1 million applications.

In 2021, the national intellectual property office of China had the most industrial design applications with about 805,710 industrial design applications from resident and non-resident companies or organizations. The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) followed with around 117,049 applications.

All these intellectual property facts are essential because intellectual property is one of the significant economic growth factors. However, the question remains if these figures related to patents and trademarks are sufficient to understand intellectual property complexities thoroughly.

'Top ISI officer involved in scribe's murder'

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has alleged that top ISI officer Major-General Faisal Naseer, who tried to kill him twice, was also involved in the brutal murder of senior journalist Arshad Sharif.

Khan's remarks came while he was addressing a rally in Lahore from his bullet-bomb-proof vehicle. The rally was telecast live in other cities through a video link.

"Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)'s Major-General Faisal Naseer tried to kill me twice. He is also involved in the killing of (TV anchor) Arshad Sharif. He also stripped my party Senator Azam Swati naked and inflicted severe torture on him," Pakistan-Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Khan said.

Arshad Sharif, who was critical of the Army, was killed in Kenya last October as he fled the country citing threats to his life from the security agencies.

The shooting dead of the investigative journalist by police in Kenya caused outrage in Pakistan.

Kenya's police, in an initial report, had said the 49-year-old was shot dead in a moving vehicle in a case of mistaken identity.

Khan, 71, had earlier accused Gen Naseer along with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah of an assassination attempt on his life in November last year in Punjab province's Wazirabad wherein he received three bullets in his leg.

"This man (Gen Naseer) has been involved in atrocities against my party persons for the last 20 months but no one at his institution is bothered about it. No person who loves Pakistan can do what this man is doing," the cricket-turned-politician said, indirectly asking incumbent Army Chief General Asim Munir why he does not take action against this ISI personnel.



The PTI chief asked the nation to come out on roads against the 'mafia rulers and their handlers (elements in the military establishment)'. "Despite these murder plans, I am protesting on the roads for the sake of this country. It is your duty to join me because it is not politics but jihad — fight for real freedom is never politics," he said.

Khan said his party will

organise rallies from next week till May 14 to demand elections in Punjab.

He said if the Sup-reme Court is defied, the Consti-tution will collapse. "It means the end of the rule of law and the beginning of the law of the jungle. We will not let it happen," Khan stressed.

The ousted premier also questioned what Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was doing in the UK.

Shehbaz Sharif travelled to the UK to attend the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. "Shehbaz is there because his wealth is stashed away in Britain.

His kids are abroad. This country is only a ruling pastime for the family," Khan said. He also lambasted Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for visiting India to attend a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Khan asked what benefit was gained from the trip to

India. "Pakistan is humiliated in the world," he said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar mounted an offensive against Bhutto-Zardari in his address at the SCO meeting, contending Pakistan foreign minister's statement that terrorism shouldn't be "weaponised for diplomatic point-scoring", in remarks seen as directed at India. Hours later at a press conference, Jaishankar said Bhutto-Zardari's statement on the weaponisation of terrorism unconsciously revealed a mindset. Jaishankar accused him of being a "promoter, justifier and a spokesperson of a terror industry".

"As a foreign minister of an SCO member state, Bhutto-Zardari was treated accordingly. As a promoter, justifier and a spokesperson of a terrorism industry, which is the mainstay of Pakistan, his positions were called out and they were countered including at the SCO meeting itself," Jaishankar said.

Worries grow over nuclear plant safety in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog is expressing growing anxiety about the safety of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, after the governor of the Russia-occupied area ordered the evacuation of a town where most plant staff live amid ongoing attacks in the area.

The plant is near the front lines of fighting in the war, and Ukrainian authorities on Sunday said that a 72-year-old woman was killed and three others were wounded when Russian forces fired more than 30 shells at Nikopol, a Ukrainian-held town neighbouring the plant.

Ukraine has also been regularly attacking the Russian side of the lines.

"The general situation in the area near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is becoming increasingly unpredictable and potentially dangerous," International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said in a warning that came Saturday before the latest report of attacks.

"I'm extremely concerned about the very real nuclear safety and security risks facing the plant."

Grossi's comments were prompted by an announcement Friday by Yevgeny Balitsky, the Russia-installed governor of the partially-occupied Zaporizhzhia province, that he had ordered the evacuation of civilians from 18 settlements in the area, including Enerhodar, which is located next to the power plant, which is Europe's largest.

The settlements affected are about 50 to 70 kilometres (30 to 40 miles) from the front line of fighting between Ukraine and Russia, and Balitsky said that Ukraine had intensified attacks on the area in the past several days.

Analysts have for months pointed to the southern Zaporizhzhia region as one of the possible targets of Ukraine's expected spring counteroffensive, speculating that Kyiv's forces might try to choke off Russia's "land corridor" to the



Crimean Peninsula and split Russian forces in two by pressing on to the Azov Sea coast.

Some of the fiercest ongoing fighting is in the eastern city of Bakhmut, where Ukrainian forces are still clinging to a position on the western outskirts despite Russia trying to take the city for more than nine months.

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said on Sunday that Moscow's forces had captured two more districts in the city's west and northwest, but provided no further details.

Ukraine's Special Operations Forces on Saturday accused Russia of using phosphorous in the city and on Sunday released a new video showing the telltale white fire from such munitions.

International law prohibits the use of white phosphorous or other incendiary weapons — munitions designed to set fire to objects or cause burn injuries — in areas where there could be concentrations of civilians, though it can also be used for illumination or to create smoke screens.

It wasn't possible to independently verify where the video was shot or when, but chemical weapons expert Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a former British army colonel, said it was clearly white phosphorous.

"This is being fired directly at Ukraine positions and this would be a war crime," he said.

"I expect because the Russians have failed to take Bakhmut conventionally, they are now using unconventional tactics to burn the Ukrainian soldiers to death or to get them to flee."

Russian forces haven't commented on the claim, but have rejected previous accusations from Ukraine that they had used phosphorous munitions.

In the south, the exiled Ukrainian mayor of the Russia-occupied coastal city of Mariupol said in a Telegram post Sunday that there was evidence that Moscow's forces had intensified their transfer of tracked vehicles through the city and into the front-line Zaporizhzhia region.

Petro Andriyushchenko claimed that more and more vehicles were being spotted crossing the city "every day." He posted a short video showing heavy trucks transporting armoured vehicles along an expressway, without specifying where or when it was taken.

In Enerhodar, the town near the nuclear plant, the Ukrainian General Staff said Sunday that the evacuation announced Friday had already begun.

According to an update posted on Facebook, the General Staff said the first residents evacuated were those who took Russian citizenship following the capture of the town by Moscow early in the war.

Pak, China and Afghanistan agree to combat terrorism

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan, China and Afghanistan have agreed to combat terrorism and enhance cooperation in different economic fields, the foreign office here said on Sunday.

The foreign ministers of the three countries participated in the 5th China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue held in Islamabad on Saturday, it said in a statement.

"The three sides agreed to advance political engagement, counterterrorism cooperation and enhance trade, investments and connectivity under the trilateral framework," it said. No further details about the three-way interaction were provided for which Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was specially allowed by the UN to travel to Pakistan.

Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang flew from Goa, where he attended the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting, to Islamabad to participate in the trilateral.

Separately, Muttaqi met Pakistan foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Sunday and held "a candid and in-depth exchange" on key issues of mutual concern, including peace and security, as well as trade and connectivity.

The two foreign ministers reaffirmed their desire to pursue continuous and practical engagement.

On peace and security, they emphasised the need for enhanced coordination to counter-terrorism and deepen bilateral cooperation.

Regarding bilateral and transit trade, the two sides stressed the importance of removing impediments to trade in order to advance the goal of enhanced regional economic integration and connectivity, the statement said.

Muttaqi also met Pakistan

army chief General Syed Asim Munir and the two discussed issues of mutual interest including aspects related to regional security, border management, and formalisation of bilateral security mechanisms for improvement in the current security environment, according to a statement issued by the army's media wing.

COAS stressed the need for enhanced cooperation between the two brotherly neighbours to effectively tackle the common challenges of terrorism and extremism.

"He reiterated the need for full support and commitment from the Afghan Interim Government in matters of mutual interest," it said. Muttaqi appreciated Pakistan's traditional support for the people of Afghanistan and acknowledged the important role that Islamabad continues to play in facilitating peace and development in Afghanistan, it said.

Pak SC judges must follow Constitutional provisions, says CJ

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial said on Sunday that the Supreme Court judges were duty-bound to follow the Constitution and must not "blink" their eyes while enforcing its provision of holding polls within 90 days of an assembly's dissolution.

Speaking at a conference on minority rights in Lahore, the chief justice said he was optimistic that the country's leaders, institutions and people were all committed to the Constitution.

"When it comes to constitutional enforcement we must not blink our eyes. If it says 90 days for holding elections, it is our duty to say that and not our choice, instead of finding a reason why we should avoid saying that," he said.

His statement came as the

May 14 deadline set by the apex court for holding elections in the Punjab province was approaching fast even as the country's Election Commission and the government have shown inability to organise the polls.

It is feared that the court may hold the government or some individual responsible for contempt for violating the orders, leading to disqualification of the person(s) held responsible. The chief justice rejected that the apex court verdict of April 4 to hold elections was controversial.

"You must support the Supreme Court if you stand up for the law and the Constitution and not [for] any individual," he said. He said when the Supreme Court speaks on merit, then its judgement has moral authority.

South Korean, Japanese leaders to meet again to improve ties

Seoul (AP): The leaders of South Korea and Japan are to meet Sunday for their second summit in less than two months, as they push to bolster cooperation following years of fraught ties over historical issues. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is to arrive in South Korea on Sunday for a two-day visit, which reciprocates a mid-March trip to Tokyo by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The exchange of visits between the leaders of the Asian neighbours, the first of its kind in 12 years, signals that both nations are serious about strengthening ties in the face of shared regional challenges such as North Korea's growing nuclear arsenal and China's increasing assertiveness.

"I hope to have an open-hearted exchange of views with President Yoon based on our relationship of trust," Kishida told reporters before his departure at his official residence. "Since March, there have been various levels of communication in areas including finance and defense, and I plan to further

develop this ongoing trend." Yoon's spokesperson, Lee Do-woon, told reporters Thursday that Sunday's summit was expected to focus on security, economic and cultural cooperation. He earlier said North Korea, overall South Korea-Japan relations and unspecified international issues would be on the agenda.

In their summit in March, Yoon and Kishida agreed to resume leadership-level visits and other talks. In recent weeks, the two countries have also withdrawn the economic retaliatory steps they had earlier taken against each other in previous years when their history row rekindled. Ties between Seoul and Tokyo have long suffered on-again, off-again setbacks over issues stemming from Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. The most recent sticking point in their ties was 2018 court rulings in South Korea that ordered two Japanese companies to financially compensate some of their aging former Korean employees for colonial-era forced labour.



Supporters wave Turkish and CHP party flags during an election campaign rally of the leader and Nation Alliance's presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu, in Istanbul, Turkey

12 dead in multi-vehicle crash in Hatay

Istanbul (AP): A multi-vehicle crash in southern Turkey's Hatay province killed at least 12 people and injured 31 others, including three seriously, officials said.

A truck crossed into opposite lanes after the driver lost control late on Saturday, colliding with nine cars and two minibuses, the state-run

Anadolu news agency reported. Many of the vehicles were parked by the roadside near a gas station as friends and relatives said goodbye to men leaving to carry out mandatory military service.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said that fires broke out on the Iskenderun-Antakya highway.

The minister tweeted that 22 ambulances and three medical rescue teams were sent to the scene in Topbogazli. "May God have mercy on our citizens who lost their lives, I express my condolences to their relatives," he tweeted. "We will do our best to ensure that the injured regain their health as soon as possible."

Arab govt reps vote for Syria's return to the Arab League

AP ■ CAIRO

Arab government representatives in Cairo on Sunday voted to return Syria to the Arab League after a 12-year suspension. The vote in the Egyptian capital came days after regional top diplomats met in Jordan to discuss a roadmap to return Syria to the Arab fold as the conflict continues to de-escalate, and soon before Saudi Arabia hosts the upcoming Arab League Summit on May 19. The decision for Syria to return also includes a commitment to ongoing dialogue with Arab governments to gradually reach a political solution to the conflict, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

The Arab League in the decision also set up a communications committee consisting of Saudi Arabia and Syria's neighbours Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to follow up on devel-

opments. There is still no Arab consensus on normalisation with Damascus. Several governments did not attend the meeting. Among the most notable absentees was Qatar, which continues to back opposition groups against Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, and continues to resist normalisation with Damascus.

Syria's membership in the Arab League was suspended 12 years ago early on in the uprising turned-conflict, which has killed nearly a half million people since March 2011 and displaced half of the country's pre-war population of 23 million. Egyptian Foreign Minister Samer Shoukry in a public statement before the meeting said only an Arab-led "political solution without foreign dictates" can end the ongoing conflict that restores Syria's unity and stability and allow refugees and the internally displaced to return.

Three people killed in avalanche in Nepal: Report

Kathmandu (PTI): At least three people were killed and nine others were injured in an avalanche in Nepal's Karnali province, a media report said on Sunday. The incident occurred on Saturday morning at Chyarkhu pass of Mugu district of the province, the Kathmandu Post reported.

Officials said that fourteen people from Patarasi municipality in the district had gone Chyarkhu to collect Yarshagumba (caterpillar fungus). Of them three passed away and nine others sustained minor injuries in the avalanche.

"So far in the incident a total of three people have died and nine others have got injured. A team of police personnel moved to the incident site," the report said. Hundreds of people have travelled to the highlands in Mugu district to collect caterpillar fungus though the local authorities have not allowed the pickers to the site before May 18.

Singapore to plant 10k trees to mark PM Lee's 100th b'day

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Some 10,000 trees will be planted across Singapore to mark the 100th year since the birth of the city-state's founding Prime Minister, the late Lee Kuan Yew, who was known as the economically prosperous Republic's chief gardener.

Lee, who died in 2015, had launched the first nationwide tree-planting campaign in 1963 and introduced the "Garden City" vision in May 1967, which started a greening movement that has lasted for decades.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lawrence Wong, who kicked off the LKY100 series of initiatives on Sunday with tree planting day, noted that Lee's goal was to make Singapore clean and green to

improve the quality of life for all Singaporeans.

He said the LKY100 initiatives, which will also include community dialogues and public programmes, will honour Lee's values and ideals that helped shape the People's Action Party (PAP) and made Singapore what it is today though it has one of the most concentrated high-rise building developments in the world. The party has ruled the prosperous city-state since its independence in 1965, after separating from the Federation of Malaysia.

Singapore has a population of 5,980,854 as of May 7 based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. The city-state's population is equivalent to 0.08 per cent of the total world population.

Amid challenges brought by external developments such as the war in Ukraine and rising protectionism, Singapore can draw confidence and strength from what the country's founding leaders went through in the past, Wong added. "Our pioneers did not stumble and fall; they defied the odds, they gritted their teeth and built today's Singapore which we enjoy," Wong was quoted as saying by The Straits Times.

"So, I'm confident that if we continue to draw strength from what they have been through and motivate ourselves with those same founding values and ideals that were built today, we can overcome whatever challenges that come our way and continue to build a fantastic Singapore together," he added.

Over 200 dead, many more missing after Congo floods

Kalehe (Congo): The death toll from flash floods and landslides in eastern Congo has risen beyond 200, with many more people still missing, according to local authorities in the province of South Kivu.

Thomas Bakenge, administrator of Kalehe, the worst-hit territory, told reporters on the scene Saturday that 203 bodies had been recovered so far, but that efforts to find others were continuing. In the village of Nyamukubi, where hundreds of homes were washed away, rescue workers and survivors dug through the ruins Saturday looking for more bodies in the mud. Villagers wept as they gathered around some of the bodies recovered so far, which lay on

the grass covered in muddy cloths near a rescue workers post. Grieving survivor Anuarite Zikujuwa said she had lost her entire family, including her in-laws, as well as many of her neighbours. "The whole village has been turned into a wasteland. There's only stones left and we can't even tell where our land once was," she said.

Michake Ntamana, a rescue worker helping look for and bury the dead, said villagers were trying to identify and collect the bodies of loved ones found so far. He said some bodies washed down from villages higher in the hills were being buried shrouded just in leaves off the trees. "It's truly sad because we have nothing else here," he said.

Indian-origin man sentenced for murdering woman in New Zealand

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A 33-year-old Indian-origin homeless man has been sentenced to nearly 20 years imprisonment in New Zealand for sexually violating and fatally strangling a woman with Down's syndrome in September 2021, a media report said.

Shamal Sharma violently preyed on 27-year-old Lena Zhang Harrap, a woman with Down syndrome when she was out on her daily walk in Auckland on September 22, 2021. The NZ Herald newspaper reported on Thursday.

Harrap's body was found partially concealed along a bush-lined walkway about a kilometre from her Mt Albert home after a large-scale, hours-

long search involving police and members of the public, the report said.

Sharma, who has been ordered to spend the next 19 and a half years in prison was arrested on September 24, two days after committing the heinous crime, the report said. According to police, Harrap was tortured over a period of about two hours, inflicting multiple blows to her face before strangling her, which led to her death.

Harrap had received 13 bruises and abrasions to her head, as well as blunt force trauma that caused brain injuries but was not fatal.

Some injuries were so brutal that they could have independently caused her death, Crown prosecutor

Matthew Nathan was quoted as saying as he acknowledged Sharma's history of schizophrenia but noted that he was not found to be legally insane at the time of the offending and that the attack was motivated by sexual desire.

"This has a degree of sadism through the infliction of pain," Nathan told the judge. Sharma was also charged with harassing another woman who was jogging in Henderson, West Auckland, 24 hours prior to violently murdering Harrap.

He stared forward with no discernable emotion in the High Court after the court announced the minimum term of imprisonment for the mandatory life sentence, it said.

Texas mall shooting: Nine including gunman dead



People raise their hands as they leave a shopping center after a shooting on Saturday in Allen, Texas. AP/PTI

PTI ■ HOUSTON

A gunman opened fire at a crowded mall in the US state of Texas, killing at least eight people before being shot dead by a police officer, officials have said, in the latest in a relentless series of gun violence across the country.

The gunfire erupted around 3:30 pm on Saturday at the Allen Premium Outlets as throngs of shoppers filled the outdoor mall, which is about 25 miles north of Dallas and has more than 120 stores.

Police said they shot the gunman dead and believe he acted alone.

Police are yet to identify the victims and the gunman. A Dallas-area medical group says it was treating victims as young as 5 years old.

At least seven people are being treated in hospital, three of whom are critically ill.

Allen Fire Chief Jonathan Boyd said seven people - including the gunman - were pronounced dead at the scene and two died later in hospital.

According to the officials, an Allen police officer, who was at the mall on an unrelated call, heard gunshots at Allen Premium Outlets.

"The officer engaged the suspect and neutralised the threat," Allen Police Department posted on Twitter.

"He then called for emergency personnel." The department said, "There is no longer an active threat."

Video footage showed hundreds of shoppers exiting the

One person killed, 5 hurt in California party shooting

Chico: A 17-year-old girl was killed and five other people were wounded in a shooting early Saturday at a party near a college campus in Northern California, police said.

Officers responding around 3:30 am to reports of gunfire found six people shot at an apartment building in Chico, police Chief Billy Aldridge said. All the victims were taken to hospitals, and the teenager died at a hospital, he said.

Two men, ages 21 and 19, and a 17-year-old girl remained hospitalised in sta-

ble condition with non-life-threatening injuries, the chief said. Two other men, ages 18 and 20, were treated at the hospital and released, Aldridge said.

The shooting appeared to be an isolated incident, and there was no ongoing threat to the community, police said. They released no information on the shooter. Police had been called to the same address about 30 minutes before the shooting and arrested a man on suspicion of brandishing a firearm, Aldridge said. AP

area at the time of the shooting. Shoppers and employees scrambled into storage areas and hid when they heard gunshots, CNN reported.

Witnesses said some people sheltered in place for up to two hours as law enforcement cleared the sprawling complex.

One witness said that he saw a man holding his neck, and "blood (was) just dripping down."

Kaleo Palakiko, 36, was shopping with his parents for an upcoming vacation when they saw people running outside.

"It was just kind of chaotic for a second. Then when someone said, 'shooter,' we all

ran to the back of the store," Palakiko told the New York Times. "As Americans, we're used to this, because everyone knew exactly what to do."

Governor Greg Abbott called the shooting an "unspeakable tragedy." He said the state was ready to offer any assistance to local authorities.

"We all want the victims and their families impacted by this tragedy to know that we will wrap our arms around you and we are here for you," Ken Fulk, the mayor of Allen, said at a news conference.

Early reports from police and witnesses said a gunman pulled up in a grey Honda Accord at the Premium Outlets in Allen.

Kishida sympathises with colonial victims

AP ■ SEOUL

Japan's prime minister expressed sympathy for the suffering of Korean forced labourers during Japan's colonial rule, as he and his South Korean counterpart on Sunday renewed resolve to overcome historical grievances and strengthen cooperation in the face of shared challenges such as North Korea's nuclear programme.

Comments by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during his second summit in less than two months with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol are closely watched in Seoul.

Yoon has faced domestic criticism that he had preemptively made concessions to Tokyo without getting corresponding steps in return. Kishida's statement, which avoided a new, direct apology over the colonization but still sympathised with the Korean victims, suggests he felt pressure to say something to maintain momentum for improved ties.



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida burns incense as his wife Yuko, right, stands during a visit to National Cemetery in Seoul, South Korea on Sunday. AP/PTI

"And personally, I have strong pain in my heart as I think of the extreme difficulty and sorrow that many people had to suffer under the severe environment in those days," Kishida told a joint news conference with Yoon, referring to Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

"Japan and South Korea share various history and development, and I believe it is my responsibility as prime minister of Japan to cooperate with President Yoon and the South Korean side as we follow through the effort of our predecessors who have also overcome the difficult times," he said.

Kishida arrived in South Korea earlier Sunday for a two-day visit, which reciprocates a mid-March trip to Tokyo by Yoon and marks the first exchange of visits between the leaders of the Asian neighbors in 12 years.

The back-to-back summits were largely meant to resolve the countries' bitter disputes caused by the 2018 court rulings in South Korea that ordered two Japanese companies to financially compensate some of their aging former Korean employees for colonial-era forced labour.

Japan has refused to abide by the verdicts, arguing that all compensation issues were already settled when the two countries normalized ties in 1965.

The wrangling led to the countries downgrading each other's trade status and Seoul's previous liberal government threatening to spike a military intelligence-sharing pact. The strained South Korea-Japan ties complicated US efforts to build a stronger regional alliance to

better cope with rising Chinese influence and North Korean nuclear threats.

In March, however, Yoon's conservative government took a major step toward mending the ties by announcing it would use local funds to compensate the forced labour victims without demanding contributions from Japanese companies.

Later in March, Yoon travelled to Tokyo to meet with Kishida, and the two agreed to resume leadership-level visits and other talks. Their governments have since taken steps to withdraw their economic retaliatory steps against each other.

Yoon's push, however, drew strong backlash from some of the forced labour victims and his liberal rivals at home, who have demanded direct compensation from the Japanese companies. Yoon has defended his move, saying greater cooperation with Japan is required to jointly tackle North Korea's advancing nuclear programme, the intensifying US-China strategic rivalry and global supply chain challenges.

Black voters backing Biden, but not with 2020 enthusiasm

AP ■ COLUMBIA

Lajoia Broughton, a 41-year-old small-business owner, considers herself a fan of President Joe Biden. He's provided opportunities for Black-owned businesses while bringing integrity to the White House, she said. Her decision for 2024 is not in doubt.

"Biden has proven himself in the last few years, and I'll be voting for him in the next election," said Broughton, who owns a lobbying and public affairs firm in Columbia, South Carolina's capital city.

Destiny Humphreys is less enthusiastic. The 22-year-old senior at South Carolina State University, the state's only public historically Black college or university, or HBCU, said she's disappointed in the president, feeling his accomplishments have so far not lived up to his promises.

"Honestly, I feel like right now America is in a state of emergency. We need some real change," said Humphreys, who remains unsure about her vote

in next year's election.

After a dismal start to his 2020 presidential campaign, Black voters in South Carolina rallied behind Biden, reviving his White House ambitions by driving his Democratic rivals from the race and ultimately putting him on a path to defeating then-President Donald Trump.

But at the outset of Biden's reelection bid, the conflicting views among the same voters provide an early warning sign of the challenges he faces as he aims to revive the diverse coalition that proved so crucial to him before.

Black voters formed the heart of Biden's base of support and any dip in support could prove consequential in some of the most fiercely competitive states, such as Georgia, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Well aware of the challenge, the Biden campaign says it's confident in its message and is planning to highlight how the president has prioritized issues that are important to Black Americans.

"The progress made in the first two years - whether it's the historically low black unemployment rate, unprecedented funding to HBCUs, or halving the black poverty rate in half - is all at stake in 2024," campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz said in an emailed statement.

"The campaign will work hard to earn every vote, and expand on its winning 2020 coalition."

Yet there are some early signs that Biden will have work to do to generate enthusiasm among Black voters for another run.

Biden's approval rating among Black adults has fluctuated over his two years in office. As with most demographic groups, the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds his 58 per cent current approval rating among Black adults sitting well below where he began. Roughly 9 in 10 Black adults approved of Biden over his first months in office.

Brazil's Lula calls for efforts to free Julian Assange

AP ■ RIO-DE-JANEIRO

After attending the coronation of King Charles III in London, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva denounced the lack of concerted efforts to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has spent four years in Britain's Belmarsh Prison. "It is an embarrassment that a journalist who denounced trickery by one state against another is arrested, condemned to die in jail and we do nothing to free him. It's a crazy thing," Lula told reporters. "We talk about freedom of expression; the guy is in prison because he denounced wrongdoing. And the press doesn't do anything in defense of this journalist. I can't understand it."

Lula offered the remarks in response to a question about Assange, who is a native Australian. He said he had forgotten to discuss the matter with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, but that he would write to him upon returning to Brazil.

Assange has been fighting extradition to the United States, and Lula's comments come at a moment that he has shown little reluctance to voice his differences of opinion with Washington regarding geopolitical matters, particularly in his opposition to providing arms to Ukraine for its war against Russia, and accusing the US and Europe of encouraging the fighting. His stance and repeated statements have drawn sharp rebukes from the White House and Europe. For its part, Australia has been stepping up diplomatic pressure on the US government to call off its prosecution of Assange.

On Friday, Australia's Prime Minister Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. in an interview that "enough is enough. There is nothing to be served by his ongoing incarceration." Last November, Albanese told Parliament that his "position is clear and has been made clear to the US administration: That it is time that this matter be brought to a close." Assange has battled in British courts for years to avoid being sent to the



US, 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 US 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.

"I think there must be a movement of world press in his defense. Not in regard to his person, but to defend the right to denounce," Lula told reporters. "The guy didn't denounce anything vulgar. He denounced that a state was spying on others, and that became a crime against the journalist. The press, which defends freedom of the press, does nothing to free this citizen. It's sad, but it's true."

Last year, Assange's father John Shipton sought to convince Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to address the issue of his son's prosecution with the US' top diplomat, and to get Australia's Albanese to raise the issue with US President Joe Biden at Queen Elizabeth II's funeral. In his comments to reporters on Saturday, Lula also noted that Charles III asked him to take care of the Amazon rainforest, and that he responded he needs resources in order to do so. Prime Minister Sunak on Friday pledged to contribute USD 101 million to Brazil's Amazon Fund that aims to stop deforestation, adding to contributions from Norway and Germany, as well as a recent promise from the Biden to seek congressional approval for USD 500 million.



Prime Minister Rishi Sunak holds an oversized tea pot as he goes to pour a cup as he sits next to US First Lady Jill Biden as they attend the Big Lunch party at Downing Street in London on Sunday. The Big Lunch is part of the weekend of celebrations for the coronation of King Charles III. Guests at the big lunch include community heroes and Ukrainians displaced by the war, and youth groups. AP/PTI

Scotland Yard defends arrest of anti-monarchy protesters

PTI ■ LONDON

A total of 52 arrests were made during the Coronation including the head of the country's largest anti-monarchy group, a move defended by Scotland Yard as part of its efforts to ensure protests did not become criminal or disruptive.

The Metropolitan Police said on Saturday evening that the arrests were made for offences including affray, public order offences, breach of the peace and conspiracy to cause a public nuisance and the people remain in custody. Among them is Graham Smith, chief executive of Republic, who was arrested at Trafalgar Square during a #NotMyKing protest against the crowning of King Charles III. "We absolutely understand public concern following the arrests," said Met Police Commander Karen Findlay, who led the security operation for Coronation Day.

"Protest is lawful and it can be disruptive. We have policed numerous protests without intervention in the build-up to the Coronation, and dur-

ing it. Our duty is to do so in a proportionate manner in line with relevant legislation. We also have a duty to intervene when protest becomes criminal and may cause serious disruption," she said. "This depends on the context. The Coronation is a once in a generation event and that is a key consideration in our assessment," she added.

The Met insisted that despite the arrests a protest involving large numbers did go ahead at Trafalgar Square "with police knowledge and no intervention".

"Earlier this week we said our tolerance for any disruption, whether through protest or otherwise, will be low and that we would deal robustly with anyone intent on undermining the celebration," the force said.

It said it took action only on information that protesters were "determined to disrupt the Coronation procession". This included information that individuals would attempt to deface public monuments with paint, breach barriers and disrupt the official movements.

Prince Harry an odd man out at father's coronation spectacle

AP ■ LONDON

In the fairy-tale ending to the ancient pagentry in which King Charles III was crowned monarch, he stepped into a gilded horse-drawn carriage with his queen and rode off to his palace.

Following closely behind was Prince William, his eldest son and heir, along with his family, including 9-year-old Prince George who is second in line to the throne.

The king's youngest son was nowhere to be seen. On his father's biggest day, Prince Harry arrived at Westminster Abbey alone and he left alone. The disgruntled Duke of Sussex was assigned to sit two rows behind his brother.

His isolation was likely the result of him quitting his royal duties and, thus, no longer ranking as a senior family member - as well as alienating himself from his father and

brother by airing grievances and telling palace secrets in his explosive best-selling memoir, "Spare."

If anyone was hoping the coronation would help break the ice between Harry and his brother, who were once so close, they are sure to have been disappointed. The siblings were not seen speaking or even acknowledging each other during the ceremony. After months of speculation about whether he would attend, it was announced about three weeks ago that Harry would come alone, leaving behind his wife, Meghan, and their two young children at their Southern California home.

Harry and Meghan, who is biracial, left royal life and moved to the US in 2020 after complaining about intense scrutiny and racist attitudes from the British press.

In a six-part Netflix series, they lobbed other criticisms at

the royal family, alleging racial bias. In January, Harry dropped his bombshell book dishing family dirt along with intimate details about losing his virginity behind a pub at 17, taking drugs and killing enemies in Afghanistan.

The book was particularly unflattering toward his stepmother, Camilla, who was once blamed for wrecking his father's marriage to his mother, the late Princess Diana. He accused Camilla of leaking private conversations to the media to rehabilitate her own image after marrying Charles.

Buckingham Palace had announced before the coronation that Harry and the king's brother, Prince Andrew, would not have any role in the service.

Andrew, the Duke of York, relinquished royal duties after revelations about his friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. He was later stripped of his honorary mili-

tary titles and patronages and settled a lawsuit with a woman who said she was forced to have sex with him when she was a teenager.

William played a prominent role, kneeling at his father's feet, pledging his loyalty and then kissing him on the cheek. George served as page boy, helping to carry the train of his grandfather's robes.

Harry entered the cavernous church in a black custom Dior three-piece suit with coattails. An honorary cross hung around his neck and military medals were pinned to the left side of his chest. He nodded, waved and spoke a few words to clergy and several guests already seated.

He proceeded along behind his cousin, Princess Eugenie and her husband, Jack Brooksbank, who followed her father, Andrew. They all sat in the same row. During the two-hour spectacle, keen attention

was focused on Harry by the media and royal watchers. He appeared to join the congregation in one of many refrains of "God save the king" during the pomp- and music-filled ceremony. Some British tabloids even consulted professional lip-readers to interpret what Harry was saying.

The Daily Mirror revealed that it appeared he said, "hello," "morning" and "nice to see you" when he entered the church. Harry has vowed to make media reform part of his mission in life. He has filed several lawsuits against the publishers of British tabloids for a phone-hacking scandal dating back more than a decade. His trial against the publisher of the Mirror begins Wednesday in the High Court. Harry is expected to testify in June. After the carriages departed from the church, Harry was seen waiting for a car. He was later seen at Heathrow Airport.



FM, FSDC to review economy today

Meet amid international, domestic challenges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will review the state of the economy amid global and domestic challenges at a meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on Monday. The 27th meeting of the high-level panel to be held here will be attended by all financial sector regulators, including RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, sources said. This would be the first meeting of the FSDC after the passage of ₹45 lakh crore Budget for 2023-24 with greater emphasis on capital expenditure with an outlay of ₹10,00,961 crore.

The FSDC is the apex body of sectoral regulators, headed by the Union finance minister. The meeting will review the current global and domestic economic situation and financial stability issues, including those concerning banking and NBFCs in view of failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank and liquidity pressure faced by Credit Suisse, according to the sources. The council would review the progress of measures approved earlier for further development of the financial sector and to achieve inclusive economic growth with macro-economic stability, they said. RBI in its latest bi-monthly policy marginally revised upward the economic growth projection for the current fiscal to 6.5 per cent, from its earlier estimate of 6.4 per cent. Unveiling the first bi-monthly monetary policy of 2023-24 fiscal in April, RBI Governor had said the GDP growth in the first quarter of 2023-24 is expected at 7.8 per cent. The growth for second, third and fourth quarter of the current



fiscal has been projected at 6.2 per cent, 6.1 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively. The last meeting of the high level panel had taken place in September, 2022. The Council during the last meeting deliberated on the early warning indicators for the economy and preparedness to deal with them, improving the efficiency of the existing Financial/Credit Information Systems and issues of governance and management in

Systemically Important Financial Institutions including Financial Market Infrastructures, and strengthening cyber security framework in financial sector. Besides, common KYC for all financial services and related matters, update on account aggregator and next steps, issues relating to financing of power sector, strategic role of GIFT IFSC in New Aatmanirbhar Bharat, inter-regulatory issues of GIFT-IFSC, and need for utilisation of the services of registered valuers by all government departments were also discussed. The FSDC meeting will also review activities undertaken by the FSDC sub-committee chaired by the RBI governor and the action taken by members on the past decisions of FSDC. Besides RBI governor, Securities and Exchange Board of India chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) chairman Debasish Panda, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) chairman Ravi Mital and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority's newly appointed chairman Deepak Mohanty will attend the meeting. The sources said the FSDC meeting will also be attended by Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, Finance Secretary T V Somanathan, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and other top officials of the finance ministry.

Gold imports dip 24% to \$35 bn in 2022-23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the current account deficit, dipped 24.15 per cent to \$35 billion in 2022-23 due to global economic uncertainties, according to data from the commerce ministry. Imports of the yellow metal stood at \$46.2 billion in 2021-22. The growth rate in the imports was in the negative zone during August 2022 to February this year. It jumped to \$3.3 billion in March 2023 as against \$1 billion in the year-ago month, the data showed. Silver imports, however, rose 6.12 per cent to \$5.29 billion during the last fiscal. The significant fall in gold imports though has not helped in narrowing the country's trade deficit — the difference between imports and exports. The merchandise trade deficit in 2022-23 was estimated at \$267 billion against \$191 billion in the year-ago period. According to industry experts, high import duty on gold and global economic uncertainties have led to the dip in imports of the precious metal. "India imported about 600 tonnes of gold during April-January 2023, and it is down because of high import duty. The gov-



ernment should take a view on the duty part to help the domestic industry and push exports," an expert said. India is the largest importer of gold, which mainly caters to the demand of the jewellery industry. In volume terms, the country imports 800-900 tonnes of gold annually. Gems and jewellery exports declined by 3 per cent to about \$38 billion during 2022-23. Last year, the Centre hiked gold import duty to 15 per cent from 10.75 per cent to check the current account deficit (CAD). Former GJPEC chairman and managing director of Kama Jewellery Colin Shah said that it will be challenging for the sector due to inflation in the USA, high interest rates, Russia-Ukraine crisis, and China not making a complete economic revival.

Realtors closed 87 land deals totalling 1,862 acre in FY '23 to expand biz amid demand revival: Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Real estate developers remained active on land acquisition for future development and they closed at least 87 land deals totalling 1,862 acres during the last fiscal year, according to Anarock. During the previous year 2021-22, real estate consultant Anarock noted that 44 land deals accounting for about 1,649 acres were closed across various cities. Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri noted that size of the deals were smaller in the 2022-23 fiscal as compared to the previous year. Of all deals closed in FY23, at least 76 accounting for about 1,059 acres were in seven major cities, and the remaining 11 deals accounting for 803 acres took place in Tier 2 and 3 cities including Ahmedabad, Kurukshetra, Lucknow, Nagpur, Panchkula, Panipat, Raigad and Surat.



Among the top seven cities, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) saw the maximum 25 land deals accounting for over 267 acres, followed by Delhi-NCR with 23 land deals totalling 274 acres. In terms of total land transacted, Chennai saw maximum at 292 acres in nine separate deals. "With land becoming scarcer amid the unfettered real estate development boom,

Large and listed real estate developers are buying land aggressively to create pipeline for future development amid strong housing demand. "Land being a key input commodity for real estate development, they have been making strategic investments across key micro-markets and quite a few prominent deals took place in the last financial year," Puri said. Of the total land deals in FY'23, 57 separate deals for over 951 acres have been proposed for residential or plotted developments. At least 714 acres acquired in 8 separate land deals have been earmarked for mixed-use and township developments in cities including Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Chennai, Panchkula and Panipat. For development of office and retail projects, 11 separate land transactions involving 46.5 acres were closed during the last fiscal.

Coal India Q4 profit drops 18% on wage bill; record net profit in FY23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coal India Ltd, the world's largest coal miner, on Sunday reported 17.7 per cent drop in its March quarter net profit on higher provision made for wage revision of employees. Consolidated net profit of ₹5,527.62 crore, or ₹8.98 per share, in January-March is compared with ₹6,715 crore, or ₹10.86 a share earning in the same period a year back, according to the company's filing with stock exchanges. The decline in profit in the fourth quarter of 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) was despite coal production and dispatches to users. The company said salaries for non-executives are due for revision from July 1, 2021 and pending finalisation of a wage agreement with unions, a provision of ₹5,870.16 crore has been made in the quarter. This is compared with ₹475.28 crore provision in January-March 2022. For the full 2022-23 fiscal, Coal India made a provision of ₹8,152.75 crore as against ₹1,080.97 crore provided in the previous 2021-22 financial year. Coal production rose 7 per cent to 224.16 million tonne in the quarter ended



March 31. Offtake increased to 186.877 million tonne in the quarter as compared to 180.249 million tonne in the period ended March 31, 2022. The company board of directors declared a ₹4 per share final dividend for the fiscal. The firm had previously declared ₹15 a share and ₹5.25 per share interim dividends. Sale was up at ₹35,161.44 crore in Q4 from ₹29,985.45 crore a year back. Coal India has been in negotiations with the employee unions for wage revision. Workers are seeking a 47 per cent increase in wages while Coal India has offered a 3 per cent raise. Its salary bill was ₹49,409 crore in the 12 months ended March, about 22 per cent higher from the previous year. The company, which is facing higher production costs, spent more than a third of its revenue on salaries. Wages of non-executive workers, which account for 94 per cent of Coal India's workforce, are revised every five years. The hike is due from July 2021. In 2017, CIL signed a wage agreement with worker unions proposing a 20 per cent hike in salaries for five years. Coal India has a total workforce of 2.59 lakh. Out of this, around 15,000 are executive staff. Later in a statement, the firm said net profit for FY 2022-23 posted a massive 62 per cent growth at ₹28,125 crore.

"This was despite provisioning ₹8,153 crore in the accounts in 2022-23 towards wage revision of CIL's non-executive manpower," the company said. This is the company's highest ever net profit, beating the previous best of ₹17,464 crore in 2018-19. The net profit in Q4 shrank "primarily due to increased provision towards the wages," it said. "PAT would have been the highest ever profit in any quarter had the provision not been made." The profits rose despite the company capping its coal prices for over the past five years amidst rising input costs, especially diesel and explosives and increased wage cost due to provisioning in the accounts. Though e-auction sales at 16.40 million tonne were lower by 41 per cent in volume terms in Q4 compared to 27.65 million tonne of similar quarter in FY22, higher premiums under the e-window helped CIL in cranking up e-auction sales by Rs 690 crore, the statement said. "The realization per tonne of coal was ₹4,526 under auction segment in Q4 against ₹2,434 in the same quarter of FY22. The jump was ₹2,092 per tonne or 86 per cent."

GSTN defers implementation of e-invoice reporting time limit by three months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GSTN has deferred by 3 months the implementation of time limit for businesses with turnover of over ₹100 crore to upload their old e-invoices. Last month the GST Network had imposed a timeline for businesses with turnover of ₹100 crore and above for uploading e-invoices on the Invoice Registration Portal (IRP) within 7 days of the issue of such invoices beginning May 1. Previously, there was no such restriction for businesses to upload the invoices on the IRP. As per GST law, business-



turnover greater than or equal to ₹100 crore by three months. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said in the last few days, even large businesses have been perplexed over this new requirement to issue e-invoice within 7 days of the invoice date. Apprehensions were mounting due to additional entries posted due to year-end charges originating from auditor recommendations and annual reconciliations. "Large businesses are now given an extension over next three months so that said provisions could have a smooth implementation," Mohan added.

es cannot avail input tax credit (ITC) if invoices are not uploaded on the IRP. In an advisory to taxpayers on May 6, GST Network said it has been decided by the competent authority to defer the imposition of time limit of 7 days on reporting old e-invoices on the e-invoice IRP portals for taxpayers with aggregate

Equitas Small Finance Bank reports Q4 net profit at ₹190.03 cr

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Equitas Small Finance Bank has reported a net profit for the quarter ended March 31, 2023, at ₹190.03 crore, the bank said on Sunday. The bank had registered net profit at ₹119.50 crore during the corresponding quarter of the previous year. For the year ending March 31, 2023, the net profit stood at ₹573.59 crore as against ₹280.73 crore registered in the same period of last year. Total income during the quarter under review stood at ₹1,394.41 crore as against ₹1,043.97 crore registered in the same period of last year. For the year ending March 31, 2023, the total income surged to ₹4,831.46 crore from ₹3,997.22 crore. The Board of Directors at its meeting held on May 5 has recommended a dividend of Re 1 per equity share of ₹10 each fully paid-up subject to the approval of the members at the ensuing annual general meeting of the bank.

'Insurance penetration cannot be done by merely crowding market with large number of players'

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The government and insurance industry regulator IRDAI have been pitching for a greater insurance penetration but it cannot be done by merely crowding the market with a large number of players, AIEA General Secretary Shreekant Mishra said on Sunday. "The government and IRDAI have been arguing that there is a need for greater insurance penetration and every Indian should have an insurance by year 2047. "But it has to be realised that insurance penetration cannot be increased by merely crowding the market with a large number of players. Insurance penetration essentially depends on the level of



disposal income, which is unfortunately rather low in India," Mishra said. At the same time, he also said the country's insurance penetration is higher than in even some of developed nations and credit for this goes to LIC and general insurance companies in the public sector. The All India Insurance Employees' Association gen-

Mcap of 4 of top 10 valued firms falls by ₹56,006 cr; HDFC twins take biggest hit



Four of the top 10 valued firms together lost ₹56,006.15 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC twins taking the biggest hit. Last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark fell by 58.15 points or 0.09 per cent. While HDFC Bank, State Bank of India, HDFC and Bharti Airtel faced erosion in their valuation, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever Limited, ITC and Infosys were the gainers, with a combined addition of ₹44,540.05 crore in their market capitalisation (mcap). Shares of HDFC twins fell sharply on Friday amid reports that the merged HDFC entity could see significant fund outflow. The valuation of HDFC Bank tumbled ₹34,547.61 crore to ₹9,07,505.07 crore, the most among the top 10 firms. HDFC's mcap eroded by ₹13,584.9 crore to ₹4,95,541.41 crore and that of Bharti Airtel fell by ₹6,356.46 crore to ₹4,39,153.22 crore. The market capitalisation of State Bank of India declined by ₹1,517.18 crore to ₹5,14,370.01 crore.

India to become export hub for Skoda Auto from next year: Official

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Czech car maker Skoda Auto has said India will become an export hub for the company as it is set to commence exports of vehicle kits for assembly in Vietnam from next year. The company, which posted a whopping 125 per cent year-on-year surge in its vehicle sales at 53,721 units in 2022, also sounded hopeful of growing into double-digit this year as well. Similarly, Volkswagen Group sales grew 85.48 per cent year-on-year at 1,01,270 units in the previous calendar year. The Group is present through Skoda Auto, Volkswagen, Audi, Porsche and Lamborghini brands under Skoda Auto Volkswagen India Pvt Ltd (SAVWPII).

PTC India inks pact for 115 MW power supply from VS Lignite Power

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Power trading solution provider PTC India has inked a long-term power purchase agreement with VS Lignite Power for 115 MW of electricity supply. PTC India executed a long-term power purchase agreement (PPA) for 115 MW with VS Lignite Power Pvt. Ltd, a company statement said. VS Lignite operates a 135-MW lignite-fired power plant in Bikaner district of Rajasthan. The power plant sources fuel from a captive lignite mine near the project. The company is variously selling power to private discoms (power distribution companies) through short-term power sale agreements. PTC plans to explore various opportunities to sell this power to state utilities under long-term, medium-term and short-term power sale arrangements. PTC has a portfolio of long-term PPAs with 10,000 MW power capacity consisting of coal-based, large hydro and renewable energy projects. This marks PTC's first long-term power agreement with a lignite-based power project. Rajib K Mishra, CMD, PTC India, said in the statement, "This agreement adds to PTC's long-term power portfolio and reinforces our commitment to securing a reliable energy supply."



Big catching up to do for new players, looking beyond non-metros for growth: Barista CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unfazed by the growing competition from new players as well as international chains, coffee house Barista is now looking beyond metro cities for expanding its footprint and drive growth, according to its CEO Rajat Agrawal. From coffee giants Tim Hortons, Tata Starbucks, the recently opened 'Pret A Manger' to local coffee-related startups like Blue Tokai, Sleepy Owl and Rage Coffee, everyone seems to be betting big on the growing coffee culture in the traditionally tea-drinking nation. However, the Barista CEO says that there is a "large level of catch-up" that has to be done by new players as the country's



second-largest integrated coffee house with a presence in over 100 cities is growing at a rapid pace. The homegrown coffee chain brand, which last month opened its 350th store in India in Udaipur (Rajasthan), also looks to reach the count of 500 stores in the coming two years. "Now that we are already 350th, we are

much above or far in terms of our number of stores presence. We have already outgrown some of the newer brands which have just come in. There is a large level of catch up which has to be done. We are also growing at a certain rapid pace with about 60-70 outlets per year," Agrawal told PTI in an exclusive interview. Incepted in 2000, Barista, which for many was among the first brands that introduced Indians to the truly Italian coffee experience, is now looking "beyond metros" where they have been successfully operating over the past two decades. In fact, the brand is already witnessing a lot of "new growth" happening for them in the non-metros in the last two-three years.

SABALENKA BEATS SWIATEK TO RECLAIM MADRID OPEN TITLE

AP ■ MADRID

In another meeting of the top two players in the world, Aryna Sabalenka finally got the better of Iga Swiatek on clay. Second-ranked Sabalenka beat top-ranked Swiatek 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 to reclaim the Madrid Open title on Saturday. Sabalenka lost to Stuttgart final two weeks ago and had never previously taken a set against her Polish rival in three clay-court meetings. But the Belarusian held nothing back by aggressively hitting for winners and breaking Swiatek four times in the 2 1/2-hour final. The Australian Open champion claimed her tour-leading third title of the season and 13th of her career, includ-

ing her second in Madrid after triumphing here in 2021. "I am just super happy with this win, especially against Iga on clay," Sabalenka said. She told Swiatek on court, "It is always tough against each other and you always push me to my limits. I hope we will play many more times this season." It was the first WTA 1000 final between the top two ranked players since No. 1 Serena Williams beat No. 2 Li Na at the 2014 Miami Open. It was also only the third time in the last 40 years that the top two women met twice on clay in a single season. Swiatek, a three-time Grand Slam winner, entered the match with a 5-2 record against Sabalenka. But she was clearly flustered early on by



Sabalenka's superb hitting. She shook her head and talked to her coach in the stands after costly hitting errors. After Sabalenka commanded the first set and the start of the second, Swiatek found her composure and leveled the set score. The decisive set could have gone either way. Sabalenka finally tilted the final in her favor after a running forehand cross-court shot clipped the sideline for a winner to break Swiatek and go up 5-3. Swiatek fended off three match points before Sabalenka smashed a forehand to finish her off. On Sunday, defending champion Carlos Alcaraz plays Jan-Lennard Struff in the men's final.



Deepak storms into World Championships pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ TASHKENT

Fast-rising Indian boxer Deepak Bhoria fashioned a brilliant comeback to stun Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist Saken Bibossinov of Kazakhstan and advance to the 51kg pre-quarterfinals of the World Championships here on Sunday. Trailing by a split verdict in the opening two rounds Deepak, who was selected ahead of World Championship silver medalist Amit Panghal, put up a stellar display in the last three minutes to emerge winner after a bout review. The Indian eventually won 5-2 against the 2021 World Champion Bibossinov to reach the pre-quarterfinals. T w o - t i m e Commonwealth medalist Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) also registered a facile 5-0 victory over Russia's Eduard Savvin to advance to the quarterfinals. Deepak started the bout slowly and took some time to get into the rhythm but Bibossinov used it to his advantage and landed some punches on his opponent. The Indian boxer ended the first round strongly and hit his opponent with a flurry of punches but lost by 2-3. After losing the second round, Deepak picked up the

pace and moved around swiftly in the third round, while hitting his opponent with some hard blows. He evaded the Kazakh boxer's punches consistently and impressed the judges to win the bout. Deepak will face Zhang Jiamao of China in his next bout and will look to register another big win in the tournament. "My target was to play with patience since the start of the bout and gather as many points as I can. The first two rounds were tough but I was focused on not losing my patience and waiting for the right moment to attack," Deepak said after a memorable win. "Coaches had told me to lure my opponent with the right punch before using my left hook to good effect. It worked as I connect a lot of left hooks to get points. Every bout is important for me and I play every match like it's a final match for me," he added. On the other hand, Hussamuddin dominated his bout from the start and never gave his opponent a chance of a comeback. Hussamuddin was quicker than his Russian opponent in the second round as well. In the third round, he kept on counter-punching smartly to register a unanimous decision win.



In first, Real Madrid overcome Osasuna to win Copa del Rey

AP ■ SEVILLE

Rodrygo scored twice to lead Real Madrid to its first Copa del Rey title in nearly a decade after overcoming Osasuna 2-1 in the final. Rodrygo was set up by fellow Brazil forward Vinicius Junior to give Madrid the lead just two minutes after kick-off at La Cartuja Stadium. Osasuna's Lucas Torro equalized in the 58th, but Rodrygo put Madrid back ahead for good in the 70th. With the Spanish cup in hand, Madrid will host Manchester City on Tuesday in the opening match of their Champions League semifinal. Since winning its last Copa del Rey in 2014, the 14-time European Cup winner had won four Champions Leagues while falling short in the Spanish cup. That changed on Saturday, when it defeated an Osasuna that was seeking its first major title in club history after also losing its only other Copa del Rey final in 2005. Madrid has 20 Copa del Rey titles, behind only Barcelona (31) and Athletic Bilbao (23). Now it can seek a cup double if it can get past City for a second straight season and successfully defend its continental title. "We had been talking all week about how it had been a long time since Real Madrid had won this title," Rodrygo said. "I really wanted to win this title since it was this that was the only (club) title I was missing." Just 22 years old, Rodrygo, like many of his teammates, has completed their collection

of club titles after having already won the Champions League, Spanish league, Club World Cup, UEFA Super Cup and Spanish Super Cup. Captain Karim Benzema received the cup from Spain's King Felipe VI, who attended the coronation of King Charles III. Rodrygo was key to Madrid's run to its record-extending 14th-European Cup last season. And against Osasuna he proved clutch in yet another big match, especially when cued by countryman Vinicius. Vinicius dribbled past both Jon Moncayola and Ruben Pena before slipping the ball past three other defenders to find Rodrygo in the middle of the area to score the early opener. Vinicius continued to escape his markers and Moncayola, a midfielder converted into a left back, soon got a yellow card for pulling him down from behind. "It is very tough to defend Vinicius as City will see on Tuesday," said Osasuna coach Jagoba Arrasate, who wept after the final whistle from what he said was the "built up tension." But Osasuna, a modest club from Pamplona in northern Spain, had its chances, too. Abde Ezzalzouli came close to leveling in the 26th when he broke past the defense and chipped goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, only for Dani Carvajal to rush back and clear to safety. The action didn't stop as David Alaba surprised with a long free kick that rattled the crossbar in the 28th.

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Mohamed Salah's 100th goal at Anfield underpinned Liverpool's 1-0 win against Brentford in the English Premier League. Salah's 13th-minute strike was far from his best as he bundled the ball over the line, but he became the first Liverpool player to score in nine successive home matches in all competitions. More importantly, the Merseyside club's sixth straight win moved it to within a point of fourth-placed Manchester United and still in with a shot of qualifying for the Champions League. On the day of the coronation of Charles III, fans jeered the national anthem, "God Save the King", because of what is perceived to be a long-held opposition toward the establishment. But Salah gave the home fans something to cheer when he scored. He has 30 goals for a third successive season, and fourth in six. It put him level with Steven Gerrard in fifth place on the club's all-time goal-scoring list with 186. Much has been made of Trent Alexander-Arnold's passing from a new

Salah scores again as Liverpool win 6 in a row



hybrid midfield position but it was Fabinho, in his more traditional holding role, who set up the winner. His chip over a crowded penalty area picked out Virgil van Dijk, who headed to the far post where Salah pounced.

Asian Championships: Jeremy wins silver in snatch but fails to complete his event

PTI ■ JINJU (KOREA)

Indian weightlifter Jeremy Lalrinnunga won a silver in snatch but could not register an overall total as he failed to lift the weight in any of his three clean and jerk attempts in a disappointing show at the Asian Championships here on Sunday. Competing in his first tournament since winning the gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Jeremy was the only one in the

12-lifter field who did not finish (DNF) his event. The 20-year-old, however, won a silver medal in the snatch event with a personal best-equaling lift of 141kg in the non-Olympic 67kg weight class. Jeremy failed to lift 165kg in his first two clean and jerk attempts. He then increased the weight to 168kg, which would have been 2kg more than his personal best and also a national record, but the reigning Youth Olympic champion fal-

tered again. In fact, out of six attempts -- three each in snatch and clean and jerk -- Jeremy could lift the barbell only twice. "I don't know what happened today. It was just bad luck," Jeremy told PTI. "After two failed attempts in clean and jerk, I went for the national record. I have lifted 168kg several times in training but today it was just not my day," he added. The Mizu lifter, who is returning from a thigh injury



that saw him miss last year's World Championship, looked rusty from the beginning.



Srikanth, Ashmita finish at top in BAI's selection trials for Asian Games

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Kidambi Srikanth and Ashmita Chaliha emerged winners in the men's and women's singles respectively at Badminton Association of India's (BAI) selection trials for the Asian Games here on Sunday. Srikanth, the 2021 World Championship silver medalist, and Chaliha stamped their authorities as they remained unbeaten in their six matches during the four-day long trials. Srikanth, who had topped group A with three wins, beat Siddhanth Gupta 21-13 21-16 before notching up a 21-15 21-14 win over Lakshya

Sen in stage 2 of the trials on Sunday. The former world number one had defeated national champion Mithun Manjunath 22-24 21-13 21-14 on Saturday. While Srikanth topped stage 2, Lakshya was second in 1-4 ranking with his loss against the former being the only blot in an otherwise clean slate. The Commonwealth Games champion had registered four wins to top group B. On Sunday, Lakshya saw off Manjunath 21-17 21-8 before losing to Srikanth. He had beaten Gupta 21-17 21-11 in his first match of stage 2 on Saturday. With two losses and one win, Manjunath finished third in 1-4

ranking in stage 2. In women's singles, Chaliha and Anupama Upadhya grabbed the top two positions followed by Malvika Bansod in stage 2, while Unnati Hooda lost all three matches to sign off at the fourth position. According to the format, nine men's singles players and eight women's singles players had entered the trials for three spots each, while there are four entries each in men's and mixed doubles and three in women's doubles. The singles players were divided in the two groups in Stage 1 with the top-two players in each group going to Stage 2.

Chithravel sets national record in triple jump; Sable, Parul shatter NR in men's, women's 5000m

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Triple jumper Praveen Chithravel shattered the national record and breached the 2023 World Athletics Championships qualifying standard in Cuba while Avinash Sable and Parul Chaudhary set men's and women's 5000m national marks in a track event in USA. Chithravel jumped 17.37m to finish on top of podium at the V Prueba de Confrontacion 2023 competition on Saturday in Havana, Cuba, a World Athletics category F event, to better the earlier national record of 17.30m set by Renjith Maheswary in 2016. The 21-year-old Chithravel also breached the 2023 Budapest World Athletics Championships qualifying standard of 17.20m. His earlier personal best was 17.18m which he had achieved while winning gold during the National Inter-State Athletics Championships in Chennai last year. His 17.37m effort also put him in the second place in the season's top list for non wind assisted jumps. Chithravel is currently training in Cuba under coach Yoandri Betanzos, who is the native of that country.

Lens defeats Marseille in fight for runner-up spot

AP ■ PARIS

Lens was too solid and too clinical for Marseille in their showdown for the runner-up spot in the French league. Lens, the team with the best home record this season, defeated the best side on the road 2-1 to leapfrog Marseille into the second spot and put pressure on stumbling leader Paris Saint-Germain. Goals from Seko Fofana and Lois Openda gave Lens a 15th home win and moved it two points above Marseille, and just three behind PSG. The league leader travels to Troyes on Sunday.

"Frankly, it was an exceptional match, we knew it was a match to move past Marseille again," Openda said after taking his league tally to 19 goals. "We showed what we wanted to achieve in this league. We have four matches left to play, they will be crucial." In a buoyant atmosphere at the packed Stade Delelis-Bollaert, Marseille had the upper hand for long spells and imposed its trademark high press to unbalance the host. But it struggled to get past Lens' solid three-man defense, which has conceded just 26 goals in 34 league matches. "When you are not at your best against this team, it's normal

to lose the match," Marseille goalkeeper Pau Lopez said. "There are many things that we have done wrong and that we need to improve." The defeat ended Marseille's unbeaten run of 11 matches away from home. The visitors pushed hard until the end and substitute Dimitri Payet pulled one back in the 87th, but it was too late. "It could have gone either way," Marseille defender Jonathan Clauss said. The match scenario could have been dramatically different if Marseille striker Alexis Sanchez's goal had not been disallowed after just eight minutes. Under pressure, Lens defend-



er Kevin Danso was not fast enough in clearing a back pass and could not resist Sanchez's challenge, giving the ball away to the Chile international. Sanchez then dribbled past goalkeeper Brice Samba to break the deadlock and silence the home fans. Marseille's celebrations were shortlived, though. The goal was ruled out after a VAR review that convinced referee Clement Turpin that Sanchez fouled Danso in the buildup to the goal. Lens then gradually found its rhythm and spent more time in Marseille's half. The host's first chance came in the 22nd minute when Fofana unleashed a power-

ful and precise strike that crashed onto the post. Fofana had another occasion to score from long range four minutes before halftime, and took it. Lurking outside the box, the Ivory Coast midfielder connected with a back pass and beautifully curled the ball into the right corner. Marseille did not release its pressure and Jordan Veretout's low strike forced Samba to a diving save in first half stoppage time. The visitors looked less flamboyant after the interval following Sanchez's substitution with Vitinha and were punished a second time near the hour mark.

GUJARAT TITANS CRUSH LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS BY 56 RUNS

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Titans' juggernaut continued in the Indian Premier League as the defending champions crushed Lucknow Super Giants by 56 runs here on Sunday to remain perched on the top of the table.

This was their eighth win in 11 matches, taking their tally to 26 points and closer to the play-offs.

Gujarat Titans, propelled to their highest-ever total of 227 for two courtesy a franchise record 142-run partnership between Shubman Gill (94 not out) and Wriddhiman Saha (81), came back strongly in the second half of LSG's chase to emerge winners in a comprehensive manner.

Chasing 228, LSG stroked their way to a strong 102 for one at the halfway mark but the wheels came off eventually, with GT tying down their batters with tight overs.

Despite Quinton de Kock's brilliant 70 in his first game this season and Kyle Mayers' brisk 48 at the top, LSG middle-order crumbled against a mountainous chase to concede the contest, finishing at 171 for seven in 20 overs.

Lucknow Super Giants knocked off 50 runs from the target in only four overs with both Mayers and de Kock finding momentum.

While Mayers began with three consecutive fours off Hardik Pandya in the second over, the third from Mohammad Shami yielded 19 runs with de Kock hitting a couple of fours and Mayers getting a six and a four.

Mayers was also severe on Rashid Khan in the fifth, hitting him for a six and a four to collect 14 runs as LSG reached 72 for no loss after the power-play. However, a brilliant catch from Rashid in the ninth over broke LSG's opening stand at 88.

The Afghan player covered a distance of 26 metres from deep square leg and managed to hold on to the ball while diving to his right, getting rid of Mayers for 48 off 32 balls (7x4s, 2x6s) off Mohit Sharma.

But de Kock continued to flourish, flicking Hardik powerfully over midwicket for a six to take LSG to 102 for one halfway through.

The horror run this IPL, meanwhile, continued for Deepak Hooda (11) who managed to get into double digits



for only the third time in 10 innings, but hit a full toss off Shami straight to deep midwicket.

LSG failed to hit even a single four in overs 11-14 as Gujarat seized control. Marcus Stoinis (4) suc-

cumbed with Mohit getting him caught at short third man in the 15th over. LSG skidded further when

Rashid cleaned up de Kock for a fine 70, coming off 41 balls with three sixes and seven fours, while Nicholas Pooran

(3) fell to Noor Ahmad.

Earlier, Gill's unbeaten 94 and Saha's brutal 81 fired Gujarat Titans to 227 for two - the fourth highest total this season. Saha and Gill went hammer and tongs from the word go to add 142 runs for the first wicket in only 12.1 overs, setting the franchise record for highest partnership for any wicket, as LSG had no respite despite deploying eight bowlers into the attack.

It was also the second-best stand for any team and for any wicket in this IPL, whereas for Gujarat Titans, the total was their highest-ever in IPL since their debut last season.

Saha struck an overall four sixes and 10 fours to make his runs from 43 balls whereas Gill finished close to what would have been a splendid maiden IPL century, hitting seven sixes and two fours in his 51-ball knock.

Gujarat Titans also bettered their overall record of most runs in the powerplay.

Having hit 65 against Chennai Super Kings here in the season-opener, the Saha-Gill pair went ballistic to add 78 runs in the first six overs, scoring at 13 runs per over. Saha got off the blocks

quickly to put pressure on the visiting bowlers, hitting Mohsin Khan for a couple of fours and Avesh Khan for a six and a four in the first two overs of the innings.

The Gujarat wicketkeeper-batter continued with his assault on Mohsin in the left-arm's second over, hitting him for a couple of sixes and fours each to take the defending champions past the 50-run mark inside four overs.

Gill, so far steady at the other end, smacked a six over long-on off Krunal Pandya and in the last over of the powerplay, Saha brought up his fifty off only 20 balls with a six off Yash Thakur.

Saha and Gill's century stand came up in the ninth over itself with the latter hitting Ravi Bishnoi inside out for a six over cover. Saha looked set for his second IPL century - his first came nine years ago in IPL 2014 - but a sharp catch at deep midwicket by substitute Prerak Mankad off Avesh ended his assault.

GT captain Hardik Pandya played a handy cameo hitting two fours and a six to make 15 off 25 balls. David Miller hit a couple of fours and a six to make 21 not out off 12 balls.

SRH beat RR by four wickets in last-ball IPL thriller



PTI ■ JAIPUR

Abdul Samad smashed a six off the last ball as Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Rajasthan Royals by four wickets to keep their playoff hopes alive in a high-scoring IPL thriller here on Sunday.

Riding on aggressive fifties by Jos Buttler (95) and Sanju Samson (66), Rajasthan Royals posted a challenging 214 for two after winning the toss and electing to bat. The SRH bowlers looked clueless throughout the innings with all of them bleeding runs.

The Royals made a rollicking start, reaching 61

for one at the end of power-play, thanks to a quickfire 35 off just 18 balls from the talented Jaiswal who continued his fine form this season to reach 1000 IPL runs.

After a 54-run opening stand with Yashasvi Jaiswal (35), Buttler (95 off 59 balls) stitched another 138 runs with Samson (66 not out) in 13.3 overs to steer the Royals to a big total after opting to bat.

In response, Abhishek Sharma (55), Rahul Tripathi (47) kept them in the hunt before Yuzvendra Chahal (4/29) snapped four wickets to almost derail their chase.

A cameo from Glenn Phillips (25) reignited the chase as Abdul Samad's (17 not out off 7 balls) knocked off the winning runs with a six in the last ball following a no-ball from Sandeep Sharma.

For Sunrisers, Bhuvneshwar Kumar (1/44) and Marco Jansen (1/44) took one wicket each.

Brief scores: Rajasthan Royals: 214 for 2 in 20 overs (Jos Buttler 95, Sanju Samson 66 not out; Bhuvneshwar Kumar 1/44). Sunrisers Hyderabad: 217 for 6 in 20 overs (Abhishek Sharma 55; Yuzvendra Chahal 4/29).

Focus on Narine's place in eleven as KKR face-off Punjab Kings

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A 'Go To' man in Kolkata Knight Riders for more than a decade, Sunil Narine will have to play out of his skin to justify his place in the playing eleven when his team face Punjab Kings in a must-win Indian Premier League game, here on Monday.

The Trinidad man, who has played 158 games spread across 12 seasons, including the current one, has 159 wickets along with 1039 runs with four half-centuries after he worked on his batting once his action was deemed suspect and he lost fizz of the pitch.

Narine hasn't been the same "mystery bowler", who burst into the T20 franchise scene, for many seasons but he

would be first one to admit he has been insanelly lucky.

The architect of 2012 and 2014 IPL wins with 24 and 21 wickets in those two seasons, has struggled for at least two of his last three seasons but KKR management (the principal decision makers CEO Venky Mysore and assistant coach Abhishek Nayar) has stuck with him.

However with KKR staring at another round robin exit with only four wins in 10 games, there is no room for error in next four games.

The question is whether KKR can still afford to still play the man, who only has seven scalps from 10 games with an economy rate of 8.76 and aggregate of 14 runs from 8 batting innings with a strike-rate of less than 80.



While KKR does need to take some tough selection calls, Punjab Kings is also in a spot of bother and the match is of equal importance for them.

Having been out-batted by Mumbai Indians in their last

outing, the Shikhar Dhawan-led side may be a spot ahead of the eighth-placed KKR with a two-point lead but both the teams are staring at elimination.

More so in the case of the Nitish Rana-captained home

side who face a do-or-die situation in their last four matches this season.

Their think-tank led by an astute domestic tactician in Chandrakant Pandit also must think beyond their two Caribbean stars -- Narine and Andre Russell.

The other day during an interaction with the media team CEO and managing director Mysore had reiterated: "Russell is the best T20 all-rounder. Narine, I don't have to say much about him..."

With Narine being a regular, one overseas quota is blocked as KKR are missing out on the options of pace gun Lockie Ferguson and David Wiese, a genuine seam-bowling all-rounder who also can make good cameos with the bat.

Kohli's knock fuels 'dying' anchors debate in T20

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli's 55 off 46 balls in a losing cause against Delhi Capitals has fuelled the growing debate on the "dying" role of anchors in the T20 format.

Chasing 182, Phil Salt put on a masterclass of T20 batting as he went hammer and tongs from ball one to ensure Delhi mowed down the target with 20 balls to spare.

In contrast to the home team's approach, RCB trudged to 23 for no loss in the first four overs before breaking loose to end with 51 in the powerplay.

Kohli's approach of "taking the game deep" was understandable considering the non-performance of the middle-order but it potentially cost them 20 extra runs for what could have been a winning total at the Feroz Shah Kotla. He scored 19 off the first 18 balls he faced.

The game is changing rapidly and this IPL already has the most number of 200 plus totals scored in a season. The batters are striving to add muscle to their game to stay relevant in the shortest format.

The boom or bust approach



has become the need of the hour and Salt epitomised that on Saturday night.

Earlier in the season, Delhi head coach Ricky Ponting also expressed his doubts over the future of anchors in T20s.

"I'm a believer in, you know, if you've got aggressive, powerful batsman, they can change their game to play the anchor role, but anchor role players can very rarely change to be that 200 strike rate. The only one I can think of this year is Rahane," the Australian legend had said ahead of the Sunrisers game.

Taking on opposition's best bowler sends message of calm to dugout: Salt on heated battle with Siraj

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A little bit of "needling" from RCB's best bowler Mohammad Siraj spurred Phil Salt to play a match winning innings for Delhi Capitals at the Feroz Shah Kotla.

Siraj has been lethal with the new ball this season but he was at the receiving end on Saturday night when Salt took him to the cleaners in the fifth over of the run chase.

Salt emerged as the undisputed winner following a heated exchange with Siraj, who was seen pointing fingers at the English opener after bowling a bouncer. The 19-run over saw Salt smash couple of sixes and a four and Siraj wasn't given another spell.

Salt's breathtaking 87 off 45 in his debut IPL season set up an emphatic win for the hosts. He said his chat with Siraj had a lot to do with the intensity of their away game against RCB at Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"I am very satisfied with the knock. Obviously, there



was a little bit of needle. A lot of our pre-match talk was about really taking it to them, which I felt we did really well. There were a few words and a bit of needle. It spurs on most blokes to be honest, certainly myself," said the destructive England keeper-batter.

It was a conscious decision from Salt to take the attack to Siraj as rattling the opposition's best bowler sends "calm" to the dressing room.

"If you take on a side's best bowler and win that particular battle, the message it sends

back to the dug-out is one of calm. When that happens, you see guys come out confidently. You saw Marsh hit his second ball for six and Rossouw come out to bat as if he has already faced 30 balls. So that is the method behind it."

Salt's sensational effort comprised half a dozen sixes and eight fours with the flat six off Siraj over cover standing out. The 26-year-old represents the fearless approach with which England have played their white ball cricket in the recent years.

Jitesh has improved a lot, almost ready to play for Team India: Jaffer

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Punjab Kings wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma has impressed with his batting pyrotechnics in this IPL and their batting coach Wasim Jaffer feels he's ready to make Team India debut.

The 29-year-old Vidarbha keeper-batter, who was signed up for just Rs 20 lakh in IPL 2022 auction, has grabbed the opportunity in absence of an injured Jonny Bairstow this season with some eye-catching knocks.

"Of course, last year too he had a decent performance. I think he has become even better, his batting has improved, he's already a good wicketkeeper," Jaffer said on the eve of their match against Kolkata Knight Riders here.

for the Asia Cup and ODI World Cup with Rishabh Pant likely to miss the two marquee events slated in September and October respectively.

And, the Vidarbha cricketer has made all the right moves to grab the attention with his aggressive approach and stroke-making skills. He showed that against Mumbai Indians when he struck an unbeaten 49 off 27 balls in an entertaining partnership with Liam Livingstone.

Sharma had a got a maiden national call up earlier this year when he was picked in the India T20 squad for the series against Sri Lanka and New Zealand but didn't get a game.

"But, you got to give credit to Sunil Narine that his mystery has lasted a long time," he said of

available, the more you play, it becomes easier and easier. There's not much mystery left after you play two-three seasons.

"These days so much data is

available, the more you play, it becomes easier and easier. There's not much mystery left after you play two-three seasons.

"But, you got to give credit to Sunil Narine that his mystery has lasted a long time," he said of

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best for him, but he has been a quality performer. You still got to understand he has been one of the best bowlers who has played in the IPL."

PKBS and KKR are lying on the seventh and eighth spots respectively in the 10-team standings and must win all their remaining four matches to keep their playoff hopes alive.

"We can't think of four games at a time. The situation is obviously different in every game. We have to look to do our best in every game. We came close to winning a lot of games that we lost. It's about taking one game at a time," Jaffer said about their approach.

The 2023 season has witnessed most totals of 200-plus scores and Jaffer feels "it's just about good batting conditions."

little easier. Also the Impact Player rule making the batters bat fearlessly," Jaffer said.

KKR MOOD UPBEAT: ARORA

Having snatched a thrilling five-run win against Sunrisers Hyderabad to keep their playoff hopes alive, the mood in the KKR camp is upbeat, feels their seamer Vaibhav Arora.

"We won the last match by a close margin, it has boosted the confidence," Arora, who claimed 2 for 32 against SRH, said.

KKR still have to win all their four remaining matches to remain in contention for a playoff berth.

"Rinku Bhai (against Gujarat Titans) showed that we can win from any situation. So we are not down on confidence. We're taking one game at a time."