

SC NOTICE TO BENGAL, TN OVER 'KERALA STORY' BAN — No merit in ban as no ire anywhere: SC

'If people do not like the movie, they will not watch the film'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Friday sought replies of the West Bengal and Tamil Nadu Governments on a plea of the producers of 'The Kerala Story' that the movie is not being shown in theatres in these two States. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha questioned the West Bengal Government saying the film is being screened in the rest of the country without any problem and there appears to be no reason for the ban.

'Movie is running in the rest of the country including in States having similar demographic composition and nothing has happened. This has nothing to do with the artistic value of the film. If people do not like the movie, they will not watch the movie,' the bench told senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the West Bengal Government.

Singhvi said according to intelligence inputs, there may

Block links as viral video of alleged forced conversion puts man's life in danger, HC orders media platforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed certain media houses and social media platforms, including Twitter and Google, to block the links of news reports and videos claiming that a Muslim man allegedly forced a woman to convert to Islam. Justice Prathiba M Singh passed the order after considering that there was a severe threat which was evident from the comments made by viewers on the news reports and videos available online.

The High Court issued notice to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY), Press Council of India (PCI), News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) and Google LLC, Twitter Inc. It also issued notice to Sudarshan News chairman Suresh Chavhanke, Odisha Television Limited, Pittie Media LLP, Bharat Prakashan (Delhi) Limited which is the owner of 'The Organiser, Voice of the

Nation.

The High Court asked the parties to respond to the petition filed by the man, who is also facing a rape case lodged by the woman, and listed it for further hearing on May 24. Petitioner Azmat Ali Khan, who claims to be a classical music teacher, sought removal of news items and videos published and circulated on online platforms regarding the FIR lodged against him on April 19 by the woman, a Delhi resident, accusing him of forcing to convert. He submitted that the reports are in the form of fake news, threats and are severely jeopardising his life, reputation and safety.

Advocate Rajiv Bajaj, appearing for the petitioner, contended that such publication and circulation are being carried out by giving a communal angle to the entire story and it was done to incite hatred in the communities involved. The court also issued notice to the Delhi Police and directed it to place on record a status report regarding the investigation carried out in the matter.

11 Pak drones downed by BSF along Punjab border 87 incidents of UAV intrusions reported till April-end

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) has shot down 11 Pakistani drones in the Punjab sector till April 30 this year.

However, 87 incidents of drone intrusion into Indian territory were reported during the same period.

A total of 17 unmanned aerial vehicles were shot down by BSF in the Punjab sector in 2022, according to official data.

While not a single drone was shot in the Rajasthan Sector last year, one unmanned aerial vehicle was downed this year till April 30.

The duration of the movement of Pak drones into Indian territory has drastically decreased in the past few months, due to which BSF



Troopers are facing problems in downing them, officials said.

According to official data on UAV/drone observation on western border for the period from May 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023, Punjab topped the list of States with 224 drone sightings in 2022 and 87 from January to April this year.

As many as four drones were noticed in Gujarat sector in 2022 which jumped to seven in the first four months of this

year. Jammu recorded 21 drone sightings in 2022 and seven from January to April this year. Likewise, Rajasthan recorded 19 drone sightings in 2022 and 15 till April this year.

Two drones were sighted along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir in 2022 and none has been spotted so far this year.

Drone have become a major tool for gunrunning and drugs supply by the Pakistani state actors in cahoots with their terror affiliates, officials said.

The agencies here are also scouting for a foolproof solution to check the drone menace unleashed by the Pakistani terror syndicates backed by the Pak army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

1st India-EU Trade Technology council meeting on May 16

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The first Ministerial meeting of the India - European Union (EU) Trade and Technology Council (TTC) will be held in Brussels on May 16. The meeting will be co-chaired on the Indian side by the Ministers for External Affairs S Jaishankar, Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Communications, Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Announcing this here on Friday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the TTC was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen during the latter's visit to India in April 2022.

Subsequently, both sides

established three Working Groups under the TTC: (i) Working Group on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance and Digital Connectivity; (ii) Working Group on Green and Clean Energy Technologies; and (iii) Working Group on Trade, Investment and Resilient Value Chains. Both sides have maintained continuous engagement thereafter within the Working Groups at various levels and meetings of the three Working Groups have also taken place leading to the Ministerial meeting in Brussels.

The recently-launched TTC is expected to facilitate exchange of critical technologies relating to an array of domains including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors and cybersecurity.

India to launch its carbon credit trading scheme soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After finalising its list of activities to be considered for trading of carbon credits under bilateral/cooperative approaches in the international carbon market under the mechanism of the Paris Agreement on climate change, India is all set to launch the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme soon that will ensure a robust and credible domestic carbon market.

The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Union Ministry of Power along with the Union Ministry of Environment are developing the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme aiming to attract more investment in India into technology and nature-based climate solutions.

The government plans to develop the Indian Carbon Market (ICM) where a nation-



mechanism and the new scheme will enhance the energy transition efforts with an increased scope that will cover the potential energy sectors.

For these sectors, the GHG emissions intensity benchmark and targets will be developed, which will be aligned with India's emissions trajectory as per climate goals, as per the statement.

The trading of carbon credits will take place based on the performance against these sectoral trajectories. Further, it is envisaged that there will be a development of a voluntary mechanism concurrently, to encourage GHG reduction from non-obligated sectors.

"The ICM will enable the creation of a competitive market that can provide incentives to climate actors to adopt low-cost options by attracting technology and finance towards sustainable projects that generate carbon credits.

Labrador tea leaves kill drug-resistant malaria parasite: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Compounds in the leaves of a traditional medicinal plant, Labrador tea — closely related plant of the genus *Rhododendron* — can kill the drug-resistant parasite responsible for malaria, as per a study published in the journal *ACS Omega*.

These are small, evergreen shrubs with fuzzy leaves that are steeped to make herbal teas commonly used by the indigenous regions in the US and Canada, the researchers said.

Past studies have shown that essential oils extracted from the plants have antimicrobial properties, which could help fight antibiotic-resistant microbes, they said.

Researchers from the University of Laval, Canada and colleagues wanted to characterise the makeup of Dwarf Labrador tea, or *Rhododendron subarticum*,



posed of ascaridole, followed by p-cymene at 21.1 per cent. This combination of compounds has not previously been reported in closely related North American Labrador tea varieties, though it has been found in subspecies originating in Europe and Asia, according to the researchers.

The team exposed two strains of *Plasmodium falciparum*, a malaria-causing parasite, to the oil or to just ascaridole. In the experiment, one of the strains was resistant to known antimalarial drugs.

The study found that ascaridole was primarily the component that acted against both strains of the parasite, which is consistent with other, antiparasitic traditional medicines also rich in the compound.

The finding bolsters the importance of investigating and protecting plants used in traditional medicines, especially those from harsher climates impacted by climate change, the researchers added.

Excess QACs in disinfectant solutions: Scientists warn against needless use

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists have flagged increased usage of anti-microbial quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs) in disinfectant solutions, wipes, hand sanitizers, sprays and foggers besides personal care products, textiles, paints, medical instruments and more.

One of the most common QACs is benzalkonium chloride, but others can be identified on ingredient labels with names that end in "ammonium chloride" or similar. Most QACs are not regulated at all, nor are they comprehensively screened for health hazards, more than two-dozen scientists, including Northwestern University's Erica Hartmann have issued a warning about the overuse of antimicrobial chemicals.

They noted that disclosure and regulation of QACs varies widely. For example, pesticide labels are required to list QACs, but paint labels are not.

The scientists have recommended eliminating uses of these QACs that are either unnecessary or where their effective-



ness has not been demonstrated. Disinfection with QACs, for example, often has no benefit over cleaning with plain soap and water. Other recommendations include requiring full disclosure of QACs in all products and closely monitoring their levels in people and the environment.

The Covid-19 pandemic boosted the unnecessary use of these products, many of which are linked to health problems, antimicrobial resistance and environmental harm. In a new critical review, the scientists specifically cite the use of qua-

ternary ammonium compounds (QACs), which are increasingly marketed and used in home, health care, educational and workplace settings — despite the availability of safer alternatives, including plain soap and water.

The review was published May 9 in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

"It's ironic that the chemicals we're deploying in vain for one health crisis are actually fuelling another," said Hartmann, a co-author and associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering. "Antimicrobial resistance was already contributing to millions of deaths per year before the pandemic. Overzealous disinfection, especially with products containing QACs, threaten to make it worse."

"Dramatically reducing many uses of QACs won't spread Covid-19," said Carol Kwiatkowski, a co-author and scientist at the Green Science Policy Institute. "In fact, it will make our homes, classrooms, offices and other shared spaces healthier."

CCPA orders e-com platforms to delist car seat-belt alarm stopper ads, sale

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has directed five major e-commerce platforms — Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, Snapdeal and Shopclues — to delist all car seat belt alarm stopper clips and stop their sale. These car seat belt alarm stopper clips violate Consumer Protection Act and compromise the lives of car passengers as they stop the alarm beep when not wearing seat belts. As a result, 13,118 car seat belt alarm stopper clips have been removed from the five e-commerce platforms. While Amazon has delisted 8,095 such clips, Flipkart has delisted 4,000-5,000, Meesho 21 and Snapdeal and Shopclues one each.

The CCPA headed by its chief commissioner, Nidhi Khare had issued the orders after carrying out investigations into "permanently" delist all car seat belt alarm stopper clips and associated motor vehicle components which compromise the safety of passengers and the public. The issue of the sale of car seat belt alarm stopper clips came to the notice of CCPA by



the consumer affairs ministry after the road transport ministry flagged this issue. The ministry's letter highlighted the issue of blatant sale of car seat belt alarm stopper clips and requested for action on errant vendors and online platforms and to an advisory.

CCPA passed orders against the five e-commerce players for violation of consumer rights and unfair trade practice under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, it said. CCPA said it took cognizance of the issue of the sale of car seat belt alarm stopper clips and "found that said clips were being blatantly sold on several e-commerce platforms in an easy-to-access manner resulting in direct violation of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and pose a high risk to the valuable life of the con-

sumers."

As per the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, wearing seat belts is mandatory for all passengers in cars. However, online sale of such items that compromise passengers' safety by stopping the alarm beep when not wearing seat belts can be unsafe and dangerous to the life and safety of consumers.

MORTH said the rule 138 of Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989 makes it mandatory to wear seat belts. However, online sales of such items that compromise passengers' safety by stopping the alarm beep when not wearing seat belts can be unsafe and dangerous to the life and safety of consumers. The action taken in the present cases assumes significance given that as per the latest report published by MORTH, more than 16,000 persons were killed in road accidents in 2021 due to not wearing seat belts, of which 8,438 were drivers and the remaining 7,959 were passengers.

It was also found during the proceedings that some sellers were selling the clips under the garb of bottle openers or cigarette lighter, etc, it added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Narrative, not numbers

Opposition leaders need more than a patchy arithmetic and Mandal 2.0 to face the Modi juggernaut

In the run-up to every general election, the spectre of a third front haunts the political arena; this time it's no different. Telangana Chief Minister and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) boss K Chandrashekar Rao is arguably the most enthusiastic supporter of a third front. Along with a quest for a third front, search is also on for the holy grail called 'Opposition unity.'



Given the electoral strength of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a number of leaders are striving to cobble together an alliance strong enough to take on the ruling party, at the helm of whose election machine are Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is among those who are trying to bring anti-BJP leaders and parties together. On Wednesday, he met his Odisha counterpart, Naveen Patnaik, leading to the speculation of the satraps coming together. The next day, he met former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray who was elated that the Supreme Court found fault with former Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's action last year.

Kumar and Thackeray talked about restoring democracy in the country, but the former also had a setback the same day: Patnaik announced that his Biju Janata Dal would not join a third front to challenge the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. "There is no possibility of a third front as far as I am concerned," he reportedly said after meeting Modi in Delhi. Then, Patnaik added, "Not now." This looks like 'maybe.' But, they say, when a politician says 'yes,' he means 'maybe'; when he says 'maybe,' he means 'no'; and when he says 'no,' he is no politician. Political pundits may indulge in pedantry over Patnaik's statement, but he doesn't seem very keen on uniting the Opposition and challenging the BJP at the Centre. He seems content in his own State.

Kumar also met Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar; he even proposed that the senior Maratha leader be made the face of the Opposition alliance. The pleasanties apart, there is little that binds various Opposition parties. Pawar, for instance, is not very keen on the Congress' strategy of focusing on the Adani-Hindenburg issue; he has also made it very clear to everyone about that. In essence, the endeavour towards Opposition unity remains an exercise in arithmetic. The Modi phenomenon, however, is not just about arithmetic, though numbers are also on the side of the ruling dispensation; it is principally about a narrative that the saffron party and its sister organisations have been able to build. None of the Opposition leaders striving to forge unity have a viable, alternative narrative to offer to the electorate. In terms of magnitude, they are still struggling to bring big egos and petty interests of parties together; in terms of narrative, the likes of Kumar have nothing but Mandal 2.0 to offer. They need more than that to face the Modi juggernaut.

PICTALK



School children visit the Kaman Post in Uri Sector of Baramulla district, Kashmir, as it opens for tourists. PTI

Digital disruptions affecting the young ones

The policy makers should curb online gaming by imposing heavy usage charges to dissuade youngsters

I remain worried about my younger son. He is 12 years old and studying in 7th standard, addicted to online gaming. Though we set a timer on the tablet to monitor the usage he always exceeded the time limit. When my wife and I interrupt his gaming session or his broadband goes down, he responds with anger or rage-including shouting, screaming, or physical attacks, then this is something worth noting. A strong sense of urgency to get back to gaming remains there and it's become difficult to pull him away. Many times, he skips his regular meals and relies on junk food and even resists taking toilet breaks. Compulsive play can manifest in playing past switch-off times, late at night, or secretly making it harder to get to sleep. The inappropriate violent or hateful content regularly in online gaming can take its toll on children's well-being and growth and can lead to desensitization. I think this trauma is now a 'Kahani Ghar-Ghar Ki.'



and then switched over to cricket but as covid surged he had been forced to leave the outdoor activities. During Covid to continue their online mode of studies we bought a tablet for him. Unfortunately, he comes across inappropriate manners in exams also and begins to copy what his elder brother has done online. Many times simultaneously he uses two or more screens concurrently while in bed. I am talking about a mobile phone, a games console or a tablet maybe with a TV playing in the background but even so. Using a smartphone while watching TV or playing online games is becoming normal for him. The intention defines destiny. Seeing all this technology-led transformation in the surroundings, we recall our childhood days when there was a single black and white

TV screen to watch 'Chitrraah' on every Wednesday, and a movie on Sunday evening kept the families waiting for the whole week. In the last two decades as the technology buzz created, we all have to pay much more for it. The gully (streets) games like Gullidanda, Pakram-Pakrai (Hide and Seek)Staapu, Kho-kho, Kanche (small coloured glass balls), and many more traditional games which were good for physical and mental health, are nowhere around. However, every addiction is bad and best understood as a symptom rather than a problem. I tried a lot to reduce my son's online gaming by restricting access to devices, which probably won't solve the problem permanently. To overcome gaming addiction and how to cope with it in healthier ways, it's an important step for any child to acknowledge the consequences of harmful online gaming including cyberbullying, and how it is vulnerable to mental health like drug addiction causes isolation-affected relationships and education. Does 'New India' can spare its coming

generation to be captured by the dopamine addiction to online gaming? How many productive hours do youths have and how are they spending these days? Are they spending their time in outdoor sports activities to improve their physical and mental fitness or are they spending on online games? A lasting recovery from gaming disorder comes through awareness at the school level itself and emotional distress, anxiety, depression and overall loss of generation when they crave gameplay. The most significant way out is - That policy-makers should come forward to curb dopamine-soaked online gaming through a policy imposing heavy usage charges linked to the time spent on gaming, which would force them automatically to get logged out in a few minutes.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with NSDC, and a Network Member of IISC, View expressed are personal)



DINESH SOOD

The universalism of Gandhi and Tagore

Despite their differences on many issues, both recognised that preserving different cultures, traditions and beliefs were crucial for a vibrant society



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Hail the new, Let the sacred hour of birth approaches once more May you appear in glory, unveiled from the mist as does the sun. ...From this twenty-fifth day of Boishakh

For the last 161 years now, Tagore lovers all over the world have been invoking every 'Pochishe Boishakh (25th day of the month of Baisakh), his birthday, with "He Nutan, Dekha Dik Arbar..." The song, specially created for the occasion, was written and composed by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore himself. While May 7 is Tagore's official birth date, May 9, 2023, will be celebrated as the 162nd birthday of Gurudev Tagore as it is the 25th day of the month of Baisakh.

Welcoming the new dawn, the song, set in the morning raga Bhairavi, prays for the auspicious moment of birth to return, like the sun rises every day displacing all morning haze and mist. He Nutan... celebrates Gurudev's love for life. Written at a time during World War II, when the world was witnessing a dance of death, the song gives the message of a strong hope that human life won't wither away. The date when he wrote the song was May 6, 1941. Two days later, his birthday was celebrated with much fanfare. Exactly three months later on August 7, 1941, the Bard of Bengal breathed his last.

The poem presents the universal values that encompass Tagore's persona which is reflected in his poems, essays, stories, letters and lectures. For Tagore, "Universalism" was not merely an abstract idea, but a practical approach to social, cultural, and political issues. Tagore was a poet, writer, and philosopher, whose work emphasized the importance of cultural exchange and dialogue in building a more inclusive and equitable world. His advocacy for universalism was deeply rooted in his vision of a free and democratic India.

This was perhaps one of the many reasons that brought Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi close to one



another, despite their differences of opinion. Like Gurudev, a title bestowed by Gandhiji to Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, (Tagore had called Gandhi Mahatma for the first time in April 1919) was deeply committed to the principles of 'universalism', which Gandhi saw as a means of promoting social justice and equality. For him, "Universalism" meant recognizing the dignity and worth of every human being, and working to create a society that was inclusive, compassionate, and respectful of diversity.

Moreover, both recognized that different cultures, traditions, and beliefs were an essential part of human experience and that preserving these differences was crucial for maintaining a healthy and vibrant society, which could find common ground to build bridges between different communities.

The relevance of Gandhi and Tagore's philosophy of 'universalism' is evident in today's world, where divisions and conflicts are all too common. The principles of respect, tolerance, compassion and empathy that underpin universalism can help to build bridges between different communities, promoting understanding and cooperation. American philosopher Martha Nussbaum has argued that



THE PRINCIPLES OF 'UNIVERSALISM' CAN ALSO BE SEEN IN THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL ISSUES SUCH AS CLIMATE CHANGE, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY, WHICH HAVE AN EFFECT ON PEOPLE

"Universalism is an antidote to the politics of fear and exclusion that are so prevalent today." In her book "The Cosmopolitan Reader," she points out that "The global interdependence of our world makes it increasingly necessary for us to recognize the importance of our shared humanity and to build institutions and practices that reflect that recognition." Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen also points out that "The world is much more connected now than ever before, and the only way forward is to understand and respect each other's cultures and traditions."

The principles of 'universalism' can also be seen in the growing importance of global issues such as climate change, poverty, and inequality, which have an effect on people, regardless of their nationality, race, or religion, and require collective action and cooperation to address this effectively, further emphasizing, the shared responsibility that all individuals have to bear for the health and well-being of the planet.

Tagore and Gandhi's philosophy of 'universalism' has influenced leaders around the world. Nelson Mandela, for example, was inspired by Gandhi's ideas of nonviolent resistance, which he applied in his own struggle against

apartheid in South Africa. Similarly, the Dalai Lama has spoken about the importance of Tagore's philosophy of universalism, emphasizing the need for a compassionate and inclusive approach to global issues. Similarly, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber saw Tagore's ideas as a way to bridge the divide between East and West and to create a more inclusive and interconnected world. International organizations such as the United Nations, which is based on the principles of respect for human rights, equality, and social justice have upheld this principle of 'universalism' and even through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that provide a blueprint for building a more equitable and sustainable world.

In a world that is increasingly interconnected and facing global challenges, the principles of 'universalism' can provide a basis for building a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all which can be found in the vision of Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, where focus on respect, empathy, and compassion, rejecting violence and intolerance has been given prime importance. It is time we add it to our DNA.

(The writer is a programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BANGA NEW WORLD BANK CHIEF

Sir — One Happy & one Sad news for India. Indian-origin financial wizard Ajay Banga has been elected as the new President of the World Bank (Head Office: Washington: USA: North America). Hearty congrats to him. Sad and shocking that Indian woman Aishwarya Thatikonda was one of the nine dead in the Texas (USA) shooting incident. May God give enough energy and courage to her family to bear the agony.

We request the US government to immediately ban all pistol and gun licences for civilians. Take back those weapons already allotted. Increase security personnel in public places as a balancing act. One solution is to have separate classrooms (at least benches) for girls- students and boys- students. Also separate cabins/rooms for Male employees and female employees (as the White House, USA Govt. had suggested earlier). Can that help? Worth trying.

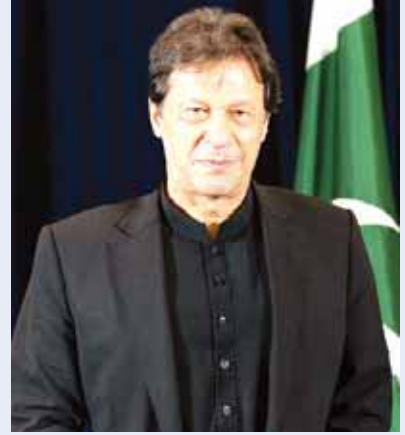
God's grace is always full of happy development, peace, prosperity and progress. It is human acts that are devilish.

PV Srinivas Sreelekha | Secunderabad

POLITICAL UNREST IN KERALA

Sir — In the wake of political unrest in the state of Kerala after the release of Kerala Story, now a lady doctor is killed in a bizarre incident in front of onlookers, which include the police and a home guard. A police detainee fatally stabbed a woman doctor, Vandana Das, at the Kottarakkara government taluk hospital in Kollam district and the daylight murder caused concern. The attack occurred at 4 a.m. Ms Das succumbed to her injuries at a private hospital in Thiruvananthapuram later. Kerala Government Medical Officers Association (KGMOA) State president for a Statewide protest against the government's alleged failure to give workplace protection to health profes-

Turmoil in Pakistan



As per a report the Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday said the anti-graft agency's arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan was illegal and ordered his immediate release. "What happened was not justice

for Imran Khan," the Pakistan Supreme Court observed. PTI chief Imran Khan was arrested on Tuesday by Pakistani Rangers from outside the Islamabad High Court. He was arrested in connection with the Al-Qadir Trust Case. An arrest warrant against him was issued by National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in Rawalpindi on May 1. Following his arrest, supporters of Imran Khan stormed the Pakistan Army headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi and the Corps Commander's residence in Lahore. Violence erupted in several cities in Pakistan. On Thursday, a three-member bench of Pakistan's Supreme Court, comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Athar Minallah, ordered the country's anti-corruption watchdog to bring the former prime minister as it heard his plea against his dramatic arrest in a graft case. Thereafter the Pakistan SC ruled the arrest of Imran Khan as illegal.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

sional. The incident kicked off a political row over Health Minister Veena George's statement before the media that the victim was a house surgeon and therefore, inexperienced and got scared when the attack occurred adding salt to the wound. It is a matter of shame to function in such a shape when the health worker suffered such a fatal fate.

CK Dorairamani Suresh | Calicut

KARNATAKA EXIT POLLS

Sir — As the results of the Karnataka election exit poll start coming in, it is clear that the race between the major parties is neck and neck. The results have shown a close contest between the BJP and the Congress, with the possibility of a hung assembly. This is not surprising, as both parties have been aggressively campaigning for the past few weeks. However, what is concern-

ing is the amount of money and resources that have been poured into these campaigns. The sheer amount of money being spent on political advertising and rallies is staggering, and it raises questions about the role of money in our democracy. It is important to remember that the voters have placed their trust in these politicians, and they have a responsibility towards the people who elected them. While it is still too early to predict the outcome, the exit poll results suggest that there is no clear winner. I hope that whoever forms the government in Karnataka, prioritizes the welfare of the people and works towards making the state a better place for everyone.

Vishal Mayur | Tumkur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

RISING POPULARITY OF ELDER CARE HOMES

Technology is making elder home services more efficient and responsive



TARUN SHARMA

As the whole world is aging, India is no exception. According to the United Nations Population Division, the number of elderly persons aged 60 years or over in India is expected to increase from 133 million in 2021 to approximately 300 million by 2051 – to put that into perspective, that is slightly lesser than the entire population of The United States at the moment. This fast-approaching demographic shift has increased the demand for elder care services in India. Many individuals, especially those living abroad, turn to care-at-home service providers to support their loved ones with any required assistance.

In the past, joint families had been a traditional way of life in the country, where all elders were revered and respected. However, the trend of nuclear families, and the brain drain that started in the 1980s, when individuals moved abroad to explore better career and personal opportunities, has changed modern family dynamics. The traditional family structure, where parents and grandparents were cared for at home by family caregivers, is no longer sustainable for many families. With children living in different cities or countries, the elderly are often left alone and vulnerable.

While this has led to a clear-cut need for elder care services, many of these individuals are often opposed to shifting their elders into assisted living facilities or nursing homes due to their prohibitive, high-cost nature. There is also often a strong sense of abandonment, loneliness, and resentment associated with this transition. On the other hand, home-based care is a more affordable, flexible, and comfortable alternative that families use. Another advantage of home-based elder care is that they allow seniors to age in place, surrounded by a familiar environment and companions. This can be particularly important for these seniors with some cognitive impairments who may become confused or disoriented in new spaces. Home-based care can also be customised to meet the specific needs of each individual, thus providing a level of support and care that is difficult to achieve in institutionalised settings.



Some companies, like Yodda, use this philosophy coupled with state-of-the-art technologies to provide reliable, efficient, and easy-to-use services to elders. There are many ways in which Yodda is leveraging technology effectively for premium service delivery. In the growing technological world where everything from groceries to banking is conducted online, it can be overwhelming for most seniors to complete their routine tasks easily. However, failure to use the available infrastructure can make simple tasks challenging to fulfil and navigate. Now they are being trained to do just that. Members request routine assistance by simply tapping a button on their app, and for emergencies, they keep that button pressed and held for 3 seconds.

Furthermore, integrations have also been done with numerous lines of smartwatches, including the Apple Watch, which allows elders to seek help no matter where they are. In addition, AI/ML technologies also have great potential to improve elder care. For example, intelligent cameras and motion sensors can be used to detect falls, bleeding, and other accidents, alerting family members, caregivers, and organizations in real-time. AI-powered speech recognition tools can help seniors with cognitive or speech impairments communicate more effectively and analyse speech changes and other behaviours that may indicate health concerns.

Lastly, the rise of telemedicine and health record digitisation after the COVID-19 pandemic are essential technologies that support elder care, particularly in unstructured healthcare systems like those found in India. Telemedicine allows remote consultations, enabling disabled seniors to access healthcare providers without leaving their homes. Health record digitisation improves coordination between all parties involved in a particular service by ensuring that all relevant medical information is available to providers, regardless of anyone's location. This technology can help reduce medical errors and improve patient outcomes.

(The writer is the founder and CEO of Yodda Elder Care)

Govt flip-flop over banning pesticides

The Union Government has reversed its earlier decision on 27 pesticides, which were banned in May 2020



UTTAM GUPTA



The manufacturing, import, sale, distribution and use of pesticides are regulated under the Insecticides Act (1968) with a view to preventing risk to human beings or animals and for matters connected therewith. The Registration Committee (RC) - set up under the Act - registers every pesticide after scrutinising the formula, verifying claims of efficacy and safety to human beings and animals and specifying the precautions against poisoning and any other functions. It is empowered to refuse registration of any pesticide if issues pertaining to safety have not been satisfactorily adhered to.

From time to time, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) — the nodal Ministry for the regulation of pesticides — orders a review of the registered pesticides with particular reference to the risk these pose to human beings, animals and the environment. Based on examination by a committee of experts, it arrives at an appropriate decision on "whether to allow their continued usage (with additional precautions, if any) or prohibit their use completely." In July 2013, the MoA&FW set up an expert committee under Anupam Verma to study the continued use or otherwise of a total of 66 pesticides, which are banned in two or more other countries, but continue to be registered for use in India. The committee submitted its report in November 2015.

In December 2015, the Government accepted the report and based on its recommendations, ordered a review of 27 pesticides (including 12 insecticides, eight fungicides and seven herbicides, comprising almost 130 formulations) to be completed by 2018. Till the completion of recommended studies and the review, it allowed continued usage of the 27 pesticides.

In December 2016, it issued a draft ban order on 27 pesticides seeking public feedback. During 2017-18, it constituted two more committees to look at public feedback on the draft order. Meanwhile, in December 2019, the RC set up another committee (this was a 'sub-committee')

to review the proposed ban on 27 pesticides. In May 2020, the RC accepted the recommendations of this sub-committee and sent it to the MoA&FW for taking a final decision.

In a gazette notification issued on May 14, 2020, the MoA&FW issued a draft order intended to ban the manufacture, usage and storage of these 27 pesticides and sought comments or suggestions from stakeholders over 45 days.

The notification said: "Sixty-six insecticides, which are banned or restricted or withdrawn in other countries but continue to be registered for domestic use in India, were reviewed by an expert committee set up by the MoA&FW. The Ministry considered recommendations of this committee and recognised that use of 27 insecticides is likely to involve risk to human beings and animals as to render it expedient or necessary to take immediate action". It also mentioned the names of the pesticides proposed to be banned.

At the same time, the ministry also set up another panel under the chairmanship of TP Rajendran, former assistant director general of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), and a well-known expert in the field. Based on the recommendations of this panel, on February 15, 2023, the Union Government came out with a Draft notification seeking to lift the ban on 24 out of the 27 pesticides which were banned as per its earlier order.

The February 15, 2023 order was challenged by Civil society groups in the Supreme Court (SC) which will take up the matter after the summer vacation. Meanwhile, the Centre has submitted an affidavit saying this was "merely a proposal and has not attained finality". A spate of committees to deliberate on a given subject mat-

ter by itself looks weird. Apart, a number of anomalies can be seen in the manner it was handled.

First, as per the decision on the Anupam Verma committee report taken in December 2015, the government needed to wait for the 'completion of recommended studies and the review' by 2018. Only thereafter, it could decide what to do with the 27 pesticides. Then, how come it issued a draft ban order before that i.e. in December 2016? It was seeking public comments and set up committees (albeit two) to examine those comments on something it couldn't have made up its mind as the study reports weren't available.

Second, instead of taking the Anupam Verma committee report to its logical end, in December 2019, another sub-committee was set up (this time by the RC) and based on its recommendation, the government issued a draft order on May 14, 2020, banning all the 27 pesticides. If, the intention was to go by the latter then why did it spend so much time and energy on the former?

Third, the government had no intention of even staying with this decision as alongside it set up another committee (read: TP Rajendran). Based on its recommendations, on February 15, 2023, it has come up with another draft notification that reverses its May 14, 2020. ALAS! even this is not final.

Going by what it has stated in the affidavit submitted to the SC it is just a proposal on which feedback from all stakeholders concerned has been taken; that is "to be reviewed by the central government in consultation with the RC, considering all aspects related to technical and scientific requirements, substitutes available, farmer's interest, safety of the pesticides, toxicity and efficacy con-

cerns, updated status of required study and submission of data in compliance to recommendations of the various expert committees, etc.", and a final decision will be taken accordingly.

Pesticides are hazardous substances with the potential of damaging impact on human health and the environment. If, following a review based on scientific studies, it is concluded that any pesticide is harmful then the government must not delay a decision on its withdrawal. The RC sub-committee had indeed found some of the above pesticides have severe health effects viz. hormonal changes, neuro-toxic effects, reproductive and developmental health effects, carcinogenic effects as well as environmental impacts such as toxicity for bees.

For others, adequate data needed for regulatory purposes are not available. There are 17 pesticides in this category also referred to as "deemed to be registered pesticides" in the country. These were in use before the Insecticides Act (1968) came into force. The concerned companies were required to generate the required data to convincingly demonstrate their safety and efficacy to the regulator. But, that hasn't been done to date. Thus, there was a strong case for banning all 27 pesticides. This is precisely what May 14, 2020, did.

The volte-face now to let 24 remain in use (the decision to ban the other three pesticides is inconsequential as the manufacturers are no longer making them) is untenable. Dr Rajendran's argument that "all chemicals and pesticides including the toothpaste we use is harmful for human health. What matters is the dosage, the formulation composition and the way humans have been asked to use the product" is generic; it can't be a credible basis for arriving at the decision.



THE SC MAY HAVE PUT A BRAKE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S DIFFERENT STROKES NOW. BUT, EVERY BIT OF DELAY IN TAKING THESE PESTICIDES OFF FARMERS' FIELDS WOULD MEAN CONTINUED DAMAGE TO HUMAN AND ANIMAL HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

(The Writer is a Policy Analyst)

The caste-based discrimination continues unabated

The hidden nature of caste atrocities indicates that the problem is more pervasive and deeply rooted than official records may suggest!

Caste-based discrimination is a persistent problem deeply ingrained in Indian society. Addressing this complex issue requires a collective effort from various stakeholders, including the government, communities, and educational institutions. However, a significant challenge arises when individuals in positions of authority within these entities themselves believe in the caste system and engage in discriminatory practices.

Multiple reports highlight the prevalent issue of caste discrimination in rural schools, where generations of students have been subjected to such discrimination, even during activities like the mid-day meal program. Take the case of the government school locat-



NEEMA GADIYA

(The writer is a student of class 10 from Pothing village in Bageshwar in Uttarakhand. Charkha Features)

ed in Charson village in Bageshwar district in Uttarakhand. The principal of this school is accused by the locals of discriminating against students based on their caste. Recently, the principal faced allegations of severely beating an 11-year-old child belonging to the scheduled caste.

Manju Devi, the mother of the child, recounted her repeated visits to the school, where she pleaded with the principal to refrain from physically abusing her child and making derogatory comments about their caste. Despite her efforts, her child returned home on several occasions, sharing stories of being physically assaulted and humiliated due to their caste. "The government school in our village is the only viable option for my

child's education, as we lack the means to afford private schooling. The prevalence of such discrimination within government institutions directly impacts the quality of education my child will receive," Manju expressed.

Her child was beaten up so much that she was forced to go to the police station and file a complaint against the principal. Following Manju's complaint, parents of many other children also came forward and lodged complaints against the discrimination faced by their children. Although the principal has refuted all the allegations, the gravity of the situation called for an administrative-level investigation into the matter. Currently, the accused has been removed from her position of principal

by the higher authorities.

Besides educational institutions, the community has a bigger role in promoting this age-old discriminatory practice. 20 km away from Charson, lies Lamchula, a remote village, where caste discrimination is even more deeply rooted. The settlement of the entire village is divided based on upper and lower caste communities. Different sources of water have been reserved for both the lower and upper castes. Moreover, the right to worship has been taken away from the people belonging to lower castes, as they are not allowed to enter temples in the village. "During the fair held in our village during Janmashtami, Dalits are not allowed to enter inside the temple. They don't even have

the right to worship. When offering is being distributed outside the temple, two lines are formed based on our caste," informed Dolly (name changed), a teenager from the village. Padam Ram, the village head, strongly condemns the discriminatory treatment of individuals from lower castes, particularly concerning their freedom to worship as they please. He expressed his dismay over the upper caste households maintaining separate utensils exclusively for visitors from lower castes. Padam Ram also highlighted the troubling prevalence of caste-based favouritism in political dynamics, emphasising the need to address caste politics and foster a more inclusive society. Regardless of education, caste takes prece-

dence over everything else, revealing that society still grapples with deep-rooted casteism. Not only do Indian villages suffer from such discrimination, but even renowned institutions in metropolitan cities are making headlines for this very reason. A recent tragic incident at IIT Bombay, where a young boy from the Dalit community took his own life due to the unbearable humiliation he faced based on his caste, vividly illustrates the extreme and severe nature of this practice. In the period spanning from 2019 to 2021, India has witnessed a distressing 11 per cent surge in atrocities against Dalits. Recent data sourced from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reveals a notable escalation in

recorded cases, with numbers escalating from 45,961 incidents in 2019 to 50,900 incidents in 2021. Notably, the state of Uttarakhand alone has experienced a staggering 35% increase in crimes targeting the Scheduled Caste and Tribe communities over the past three years.

These cases represent only a fraction of the numerous caste-based atrocities occurring within society. It is important to acknowledge that many incidents go unreported, allowing the insidious roots of caste discrimination to further entrench themselves. The hidden nature of these atrocities highlights a concerning trend, indicating that the problem is more pervasive and deeply rooted than official records may suggest!

GATTI SAVES JUVE FROM DEFEAT

AP ■ TURIN
Federico Gatti headed home in the 97th minute to earn Juventus a 1-1 draw against Sevilla in their Europa League semi-final first leg on Thursday.
 Youssef En-Nesyri gave the record six-time champions the lead in the first half and they seemed set to take that advantage back to Sevilla before Gatti's late intervention.
 Moroccan international En-Nesyri finished a sharp counter-attack in the 26th minute to break the deadlock in Turin.
 Jose Luis Mendilibar's side deserved their lead at the break and although Juventus improved, the Andalucians shut them out well in their bid to take their advantage back to the rowdy Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan next week.
 However Gatti nodded home from point blank range after substitute Paul Pogba headed the ball back into his path from a corner.
 "It's a shame, given the game that we played, that they levelled in the last play of



the match, but it is what it is," said Mendilibar.
 "We stopped Juventus in every moment and we played well at times too, we have to think about that, not the last moment of the game."
 Sevilla, who dumped Manchester United out in the

quarter-finals, have never been knocked out of the tournament in the semi-final stage.
 The Spaniards, who won the Europa League at the Juventus Stadium in 2014, made themselves at home in the first half.

ROMA BEAT LEVERKUSEN
 Edoardo Bove fired Roma to a 1-0 win over Bayer Leverkusen in a tight first leg of their Europa League semi-final.
 Bove scored the only goal of the game in the 63rd minute at the Stadio Olimpico, allow-

ing Jose Mourinho's side to take a slender lead into next week's second leg in Germany.
 The win gives Mourinho the chance to reach his second European final in as many years as Roma coach after winning the Europa Conference League last season.
 "It's all down to the boys tonight who played with desire and the right mentality," Mourinho said to Sky Sport.
 "I have put in a lot of miles over the course of my career but even I really felt the support of the fans tonight and the boys responded with the desire to make them happy."
 Roma took the win despite having a host of players either out or barely fit to play, with stars Paulo Dybala and Georginio Wijnaldum only coming on in the final 15 minutes to help out an exhausted, largely second-string team.
 "Roma were a bit more dangerous in the second half, but we had the feeling that we could beat them in their own backyard," said Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky.
 "It's not the best result for us but it could have been worse."

West Ham, Basel take control of Conference League semis

AP ■ LONDON
West Ham moved a step closer to a first European final for 47 years as Michail Antonio sealed a 2-1 win over AZ Alkmaar in the Conference League semi-final first leg on Thursday.
 While West Ham eye a landmark final appearance, FC Basel are chasing history of their own after seizing control of the other semi-final with a dramatic 2-1 victory against Fiorentina.
 At the London Stadium, David Moyes' side trailed to Tijjani Reijnders' first-half goal before fighting back with a stirring display after the interval.
 Said Benrahma equalised with a penalty before Antonio bagged the late winner to put West Ham in control of the tie ahead of the second leg in the Netherlands on May 18.
 West Ham have won 12 of their 13 games in the competition this season, taking them to the brink of a first major trophy since the 1980 FA Cup.
 Last season, the Hammers lost in the Europa League semi-finals against Eintracht Frankfurt, but they are in position to go further this term.
 The east Londoners haven't reached a major



European final since they were beaten by Anderlecht in the 1976 Cup Winners Cup showpiece.
 Despite being one of the smaller clubs in the Dutch Eredivisie, AZ have reached their first European semi-final since 2005.
 Swiss club FC Basel have even less European pedigree than West Ham, but that could be about to change after they stunned Serie A side Fiorentina.

Man City fully focused on Everton: Guardiola



AP ■ MANCHESTER
Pep Guardiola said all thoughts about Manchester City's Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid have been banished ahead of Sunday's Premier League trip to Everton.
 Treble-chasing City hope to claim a place in the final of Europe's elite club competition when they host Real on Wednesday after drawing 1-1 in the first leg of their last-four tie this week.
 City have never won the Champions League, while Guardiola's wait to get his hands on the trophy has now reached 12 years since he lifted it for the second time as Barcelona boss.
 Despite the significance of the Real tie, the Premier League leaders cannot afford to take it easy when they travel to relegation-threatened Everton in a clash that is crucial at both ends of the table.
 Any slip-up at Goodison Park would open the door again to second-placed Arsenal, who are just one point behind City, although they have played a game extra.
 "My thought is just Everton -- no more than that," Guardiola said on Friday.
 "It's 11 months working for the Premier League. We don't have much time to Madrid because we play Sunday -- thank you so much -- but it's a real, real priority, Goodison Park."

not going to fight it anymore," said the City boss. "I don't understand it but we have to adapt. The schedule, it is what it is."
HAALAND WINS
 Erling Haaland was voted "Footballer of the Year" in England for his prolific debut season with Manchester City, and Chelsea striker Sam Kerr became the first back-to-back winner of the women's award on Friday.
 The Football Writers' Association said Haaland took 82% of the vote, ahead of Arsenal teammates Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard.
 The 22-year-old Norway international has scored 51 goals in all competitions to help put City in contention for titles in the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League. He set a record for most goals (35) in a Premier League season. Kerr beat out Aston Villa forward Rachel Daly and Chelsea teammate Lauren James for her second straight FWA award.

Messi returns for PSG after ban

AP ■ PARIS
Paris Saint-Germain coach Christophe Galtier confirmed Lionel Messi "will start" Saturday's Ligue 1 game against Ajaccio, marking the Argentinian superstar's return from suspension.
 The 35-year-old World Cup winner was banned by the club after an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia.
 "Yes, Leo is going to start tomorrow," Galtier told an



eve of match press conference.
 "Obviously I've spoken to him, he's very relaxed, really keen to play, and very determined to claim another French league title."
 With PSG out of the Champions League and only four Ligue 1 matches remaining as they target a record 11th title, this is likely to be Messi's penultimate appearance at the Parc des Princes.
 After an uninspiring two years in France, the seven-

Newcastle 'excited' by top-four challenge: Howe

AP ■ NEWCASTLE
Eddie Howe is confident his Newcastle players will not be daunted by the challenge of securing Champions League qualification as the Premier League season enters its final stretch.
 The Magpies have four games in which to cement a top-four finish as they, Manchester United, Liverpool, Brighton and outsiders Tottenham jockey for position behind top two Manchester City and Arsenal.
 A 2-0 home defeat by the Gunners last weekend slowed Newcastle's charge and prompted hopes among the chasing pack of a late-season wobble, but head coach Howe remains upbeat.
 "We're excited, that has to be our emotion," he said on the



eve of Saturday's trip to relegation-threatened Leeds.
 "We're looking forward to the challenges ahead, we're not in any way, I don't feel, daunted by it."
 "In sport, sometimes the more you think the more you damage yourselves, so play the game. These players have played all their lives and played because they enjoy it, so let's strip away everything and let's just perform well in our next game."

Rice could leave West Ham: Moyes

AP ■ LONDON
David Moyes says there is a "good chance" that in-demand Declan Rice will leave West Ham in the summer transfer window, admitting the club are making contingency plans.
 Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United are all understood to be interested in the England midfielder, who is valued at around £100 million (\$125 million).
 "We honestly hope he stays," West Ham manager Moyes said on Friday. "We'd love for him to be a West Ham player but we are aware that might not be the case at the end of the season."
 "So that's one of the scenarios around planning. There are plans that we have Dec here but we're also fully aware there is a good chance we won't have him."
 Moyes has been unable to formulate plans for next season while West Ham's Premier League status remains unclear, although last week's win over Manchester United has left them all but safe.
 "The planning has been put on the back burner," added the Scot. "It's always been about making sure you're a Premier League club. Your planning will go completely if you weren't."
 "A lot of it will only start to go into place once we've realised we have kept our Premier League place. We're watching a lot of players, a lot of games, doing a lot of scouting, but the truth is the focus has been on staying in the Premier League."
 West Ham, seven points above the relegation zone, head to Brentford on Sunday.

Hussamudin, Deepak, Nishant sign off with bronze at World's

PTI ■ TASHKENT
Deepak Bhoria (51kg), Mohammad Hussamudin (57kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) signed off with bronze medals at the World Boxing Championships, wrapping up India's best-ever show at the marquee event here on Friday.
 It was heartbreak for Hussamudin as the Nizambad boxer was forced to withdraw due to a knee injury about an hour before his semifinal bout.
 But Deepak and Nishant gave a good account of themselves, stretching their more experienced and revered opponents in their respective semifinal bouts.
 Deepak's phenomenal campaign came to an end as he went down fighting to two-time World Championships bronze medallist France's Bilal Bennaama 3-4 in a close contest which went into bout review.
 Nishant's semifinal also went to bout review with the judges ruling in favour of the 2022 Asian champion and 2018 Asian Games silver medallist Kazakhstani Shymbergenov of Kazakhstan.
 The fact that all three medals come in Olympic categories bode well for India heading into the Asian Games, which is the first qualifying event for the Paris Olympics.
 It was the first men's World Championships under new High Performance Director Bernard Dunne, for-



eign coach Dmitry Dmitruk and CA Kuttapa, who returned as head coach.
 It was also the first time the men's team was selected based on the new selection policy, under which boxers are evaluated over a period of time.
 In the first bout of the evening session, Deepak, who was named in the squad ahead of 2019 Worlds silver medallist Amit Panghal, began cautiously as did his opponent. Both boxers tried to get the measure of their opponents.
 Deepak was able to land a few punches but Bennaama effected and took the round 3-2. Bennaama was the aggressor in the second round as he moved around the ring to dodge Deepak's punches but the Indian found a way to breach the frenchman's defences and land some eye-catching right crosses.
 The final three minutes were fought intensely with both boxers throwing punches but the frenchman was successful in blocking Deepak's blows to take the win. Like Deepak, there was very little separating Nishant and Shymbergenov.
 The 22-year-old southpaw, who had missed a medal by a whisker in the last edition, did well to throw several left and right crosses, jabs and hooks but the inaccuracy of those punches helped the Kazakh edge past him.
 Earlier, the 29-year-old Hussamudin sustained a knee injury in his quarterfinal bout against J Diaz Ibanez of Bulgaria.
 With the Olympics next year and qualifiers approaching, Hussamudin decided against risking aggravation.
 Hussamudin, who was competing in his debut World Championships, was scheduled to face Cuba's Saidel Horta in the last four clash.

Swiatek gets off to perfect start in Italian Open

AP ■ ROME
Iga Swiatek started her bid to win her third straight Italian Open title in perfect fashion on Friday, not dropping a game in her straight-sets thrashing of Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.
 World number one Swiatek looked in exceptional form as she demolished Pavlyuchenkova 6-0, 6-0 in just over an hour to ease her way into the third round in Rome. Losing finalist in Madrid last weekend, Swiatek looked in great form in the tournament she won last year before going on to blitz the French Open.
 Swiatek now faces either



set he played a little bit better. I also had a couple of chances which I didn't use but very happy about how I served, I struck the ball very well."

Rome has not seen an Italian winner of the tournament since Adriano Panatta in 1976.
 With local boy Matteo Berrettini out of action again with abdominal problems, Sinner will be getting the bulk of the capital city's support.
 "It is a very special feeling especially here in Rome," Sinner added.
 "You know trying to be an example for the young kids, also spending a little bit of time with them. It's important to show them the love."
 Sinner has had a decent season, winning in Montpellier in February and losing the finals in Miami and Rotterdam to Daniil Medvedev.

Djokovic 'feels good' after return from injury

AP ■ ROME
Novak Djokovic said Thursday that Carlos Alcaraz is the man to beat at the Italian Open, but reassured fans that he "feels good" after his recent elbow injury.
 Top seed Djokovic comes into the clay-court tournament, where he has been champion six times, braced to lose top spot in the world rankings to Alcaraz.
 The flamboyant Spaniard, fresh from back-to-back clay

titles in Barcelona and Madrid, just needs to play a match in the Italian capital to return to the summit ahead of the French Open which starts later this month.
 "He's going to be number one after this tournament and if it happens it will be deservedly so. He plays very impressive tennis, a great level. He's the player to beat on this surface no doubt," said Djokovic.
 Djokovic won a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam at the Australian Open in January but missed the American hard-

court swing in March due to his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid.
 The 35-year-old has endured a tough start to the European clay-court season, being eliminated in the last 16 at the Monte Carlo Masters, in the quarter-finals at Banja Luka and then pulling out of Madrid with his elbow problem.
 However Djokovic said that he had overcome the physical problems which have blighted this part of his season.
 "It's all good. There are always some things here and there that bother you at this level," he added.
 "It's normal. When you're not 20-25 anymore you experience that a bit more than what used to be the case."
 "I feel good... Historically throughout my career Rome has been a very nice tournament for me, I had success in it many times, got to finals."
 "It's my most successful clay court event. Coming into the French Open it can be a great springboard for what's coming up in Paris where I want to be at my best."

