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DHARMA STORM IN TAMIL NADU

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Hindus across the country were shocked and upset over the call made by Udhayanidhi Stalin, Tamil Nadu's Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs to get rid of 'Sanatan Dharma' from India.



plaints were filed in the national Capital with the Delhi Police against Udhayanidhi over the issue. BJP leaders in Tamil Nadu, too, warned that they would take legal action.

Arjun Sampath, founder and president, Hindu Makkal Katchi, called for the dismissal of Udhayanidhi and Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board from the Council of Ministers.

Shah and JP Nadda taking up the issue and slamming the DMK and INDIA grouping. Coming out in defence of Udhayanidhi, DMK spokesman Sharavanan told reporters, "The BJP is blowing the statement out of proportion."

costing millions of rupees to Lord Krishna, the presiding deity of Guruvayur, as per astrological advice as an atonement for the frequent statements made by her husband against Hindu gods. Udhayanidhi himself is no stranger to controversy as he had said in the run-up to the 2021 Assembly elections that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was behind the deaths of former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

India third axis in global economics: PM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A week before India hosts a world leaders at the G20 summit in the national Capital, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that India's economic growth was a "natural by-product" of his nine-year-old Government's political stability.

who are living in this era have a great chance to lay a foundation for growth that will be remembered for the next thousand years. India's \$3.39 trillion GDP overtook that of the UK in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, making it the fifth-largest economy in the world behind the US, China, Japan and Germany.

"Transform," he said. "For a long time, India was perceived as a nation of over one billion hungry stomachs. But now, India is being seen as a nation of over one billion aspirational minds, more than two billion skilled hands, and hundreds of millions of young people," he said.

Delhi braces up for its first Global Summit

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Even though the residents of the national Capital are acutely aware of the great honour that comes with being the city that is hosting the prestigious G-20 Summit from September 8 to 10, Delhiites are also bracing for restrictions that come with the event. A number of banks and shops have been closed in some specific markets and in areas like Connaught Place, Khan Market besides retail liquor stores in the city.

Malls and markets outside NDMC limits will remain open. Essential services like milk booths and medical stores will also remain open. Buses will also ply on the Ring Road except the NDMC areas. Delhi Metro operations will continue as usual except for the Supreme Court station.



45,000-strong Delhi Police, will be deployed during the summit. The 45,000 personnel include commandos who will act as personal security officers for the dignitaries.

ments with the security agencies in a bid to safeguard Delhi's airspace. The IAF will be keeping its airborne warning systems, fighter jets including the Rafale on high alert along with stations the new air defence missile systems at vital locations.

Congress and TMC bare fangs in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Mamata Banerjee may be silent at the moment but she is unhappy, if not angry with the Congress, post the Mumbai Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) meet. With the CPI (M) turning down the Bengal Chief Minister's proposal for a consensus on a blanket nation-wide seat-sharing formula in the Mumbai summit and the Congress doing nothing to restrain CPI (M)'s general secretary Sitaram Yechury, the Trinamool Congress top brass is fuming.

Mamata was initially half-willing to leave only two seats of Bahrapur and Malda South to the Congress in Bengal and back the Left not in Bengal but in Tripura, at present she wants her cadres to go all-out for all the seats. "After Mumbai, the TMC's one-point agenda should be to decimate the Left and the Congress in Bengal even if that means going soft on the BJP in some place... because they must be taught a lesson here," said a senior member of the TMC's think tank.

the Mumbai meeting to put a timeline by which the seat-sharing talks should be completed. According to TMC sources, Mamata was so angry with her proposal not getting received from the Left and the Congress that she even jerked the hands of Maratha patriarch Sharad Pawar — who tried to make some last moment efforts to calm her down by pulling her hands — and went away without talking to Yechury who was seen rising up from his seat to speak to her.

One Nation, One Election: Politicians rush to astrologers

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The nation is agog with debates and discussions about the 'One Nation, One Poll' theory though the Centre has not made any announcement about the same other than constituting a committee to study the feasibility of such a step.

"Those who call me over the phone from New Delhi, Chennai or Kolkata want to know whether the INDIA alliance would succeed in the ensuing poll, whether they would get seat to contest and if so, whether they would win the election," said a leading astrologer from Kerala who has an international clientele from Asia and Europe.

railway compartments through underhand dealings while oppose the people who resort to the same measures. There are politicians in the Congress and the Communist Party who want to know whether they would gain by joining the BJP.



This brought to mind how the late Dr Krishna Kumar, who headed the Coimbatore Aryavaidya Sala (Ayurvedic Hospital) having been trained as a doctor in the traditional Gurukula style by his uncle, himself an acclaimed physician, treated his patients.

entific community. Professor BM Hegde, internationally respected cardiologist who was honoured with Padma Vibhushan, wrote in the editorial of the super peer reviewed magazine 'Journal of the Science of Healing Outcomes' that the science of astrology needs some introspection by scientific astrologers.

which are not marked on the ground," writes Professor Hegde. The professor also lambasted western science which keeps inconvenient scientific data from coming into their mainline journals. "Unless one breaks the western scientific monopoly of the so-called scientific knowledge, this world cannot progress," Prof Hegde writes. He says the science of astrology could be sold to the world by refining the accuracy of the predictability.

FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN MIND

The mind oscillates between the past and the future and is seldom in the present moment



RAVI VALLURI

The date, is 8th January, a Sunday. The weather was salubrious and after a sumptuous meal, I switched on the Yoga Nidra meditation of Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, slipping into a much-needed afternoon siesta.

Little did I realize, I was neither in a state of stupor or reverie, nor carousing after the sumptuous meal, but in a state of deep rest. Shortly thereafter I headed for a radio show on All India Radio, Rainbow FM, Hyderabad for an interview on my book, The Matter of the Mind. The interview drew warm applause and encomiums. A friend texted on WhatsApp, "Lage raho, Munna Bhai." As I was surfing through congratulatory messages, my mind meandered to a character in the film Lage Raho Munna Bhai.

The character was Khurana, who upon the advice of a soothsayer wore several rings on his fingers; and the simple Khurana surname became Kkhurana to overcome obstacles in life and ward off the malefic influence of planets. He did not possess an alert or robust mind. So long as desires linger in the mind, it cannot be at complete rest or experience peace. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says, "You cannot get into yoga unless you drop the desires or hankerings in you."

An unwavering and undaunted mind can overcome negative emotions and feelings by applying the principles of the 7Cs of the mind. These are coaching the mind, characterizing it, communicating with consciousness, commitment, and consistency in the mind, calming the mind, besides enhancing contagious positive energy and aura.



There is a saying in the Bible that if we focus on plenty galore, it magnifies, however, if the mind devotes time towards negativity, nature by sleight of hand takes away whatever was provided and we are in a state of privation. This is nothing but the secret of the Law of Gratefulness. The human mind constantly oscillates between the past and the future and is seldom in the present moment. This is the intrinsic character or chitta of the mind. Invariably, the mind gravitates towards self-reproach and moves towards past events in life. It gets encompassed with fretfulness and becomes anxious when it relocates itself to the future.

Now there are different ways to remain in the present, to elevate our consciousness. Individuals can go for long walks and be in communion with nature, footslog on the treadmill or sweat it out by exercising, reading inspirational literature and keeping the company of people blessed with positive thoughts to increase their prana levels. Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote, "In peace prepare for war, in war prepare for peace. The art of war is of vital importance to the state."

We temporise, exercising only if we put on weight rather than to remain physically fit, students dally to study. The list is endless and in the ultimate analysis, we add liabilities to the balance sheet of life.

Change is inevitable, everything is transitory, and ideologies or thought processes keep altering. However, it is paramount within the ocean churn of change that the mind nurtures a few aspects of life to be consistent. In this age of unabashed aspirations and hankering, these are positive qualities like being grateful to nature or saying a word of thanks, essentially remaining good human beings. If we train ourselves to moor the craft of the mind, to look at the sunshine and radiance with zealously by religiously practising the first 6Cs, it will automatically be sleeved with contagious positivity, generating an aura of propitious and unalloyed energy, which assumes magnetic properties.

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

'Indigenous' fertilisers must be explored

The government must pursue indigenous sources of fertiliser raw materials to minimise India's vulnerabilities on imports



UTTAM GUPTA

The enactment of two laws viz. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 and the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 in the just concluded monsoon session of the parliament bodes well for the Indian fertilizer sector. While the first law paves the way for the auction of critical mineral potash (besides lithium and graphite) blocks for exploration and processing in India, the second provides a fixed 50-year production lease for offshore minerals.

Potash or 'K' is amongst the three major plant nutrients (the other two being Nitrogen or 'N' and Phosphate or 'P') needed for increasing production of foodgrains and other agricultural products. Its requirements are met 'entirely' from imports (these are sourced mostly from Belarus, Canada, Russia, Israel, and Jordan) as India doesn't have its resources. This is primarily because our policymakers in the past never bothered to prop up indigenous exploration efforts.

Besides, the ecosystem under which the fertilizer industry in India operates hasn't been conducive to driving companies to come up with innovative ideas that help in surmounting the deficiency of resources or optimally utilizing them. This, in turn, has to do with the obsession of successive political regimes to make fertilizers available at a low price, come what may.

For close to five decades, they have promised to deliver all types of fertilizers at low maximum retail price (MRP) unrelated to the cost of production and distribution which is higher. Now, if a manufacturer or importer is told by the government to supply at a low MRP without at the same time promising that he would be compensated for the excess of cost over it, he won't. So, the latter commits to compensate the former for the excess by way of subsidy.

This has led to a ballooning fertilizer subsidy bill which hit a whopping Rs 255,000 crore during 2022-23 against a few hundred crore in the late 1970s when the subsidy scheme was introduced. Apart from increasing production and consumption of fertilizers, a paramount reason was escalating cost - most of it going to pay for heavy import bills (during 2021-22, the total value of fertilizer imports by India, inclusive of inputs used in domestic production, was US\$24.3 billion or close to a mammoth Rs 200,000 crore).

During the initial stages, this approach could be justified as India needed to increase fertilizer use - in pursuit of its overarching goal of food security - on the one hand and supplying it mostly from domestic production on the other. Now, when fertilizer use has increased substantially (in fact, there is excess use of Urea, a dominant source of 'N' supply) and the domestic industry has also built up its production capabilities, it can't be justified any more. Yet, the government continues giving wrong signals.

Farmers know that they will continue to get fertilizers at a low price, so they don't bother to improve the efficiency of use. The manufacturers and importers know that excess of the cost of supply-



THE FOREMENTIONED LAWS HAVE THE POTENTIAL OF ATTRACTING INVESTMENT INCLUDING BY GLOBAL FERTILIZER MAJORS IN THE MINING AND PROCESSING OF POTASH RESERVES PARTICULARLY IN RAJASTHAN

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

ing fertilizers over the price paid by farmers would be reimbursed as a subsidy, so they don't mind incurring higher costs. And, global suppliers know that even if they charge high prices, they won't face demand resistance as the Union Government is there to pick up the tab.

Above all, there is no incentive (in fact, no compulsion) to even look for the possibility of finding raw material resources within the territorial bounds of India. When the Centre is more than willing to pay 'any price' for their imports however high (all coming from taxpayers' kitty) thereby immunizing both the suppliers and the farmers from its consequences, why would anyone make efforts to look for them within India?

Another flaw in the policy approach deserves mention.

Before 1991 when a major economic crisis engulfed India, all fertilizer types (apart from urea, there are 22 grades of fertilizers being the source of 'P' and 'K', diammonium phosphate or DAP and muriate of potash or MOP are the most widely used) were meted out similar treatment in as much as all suppliers got subsidy on 'firm specific' basis. In 1991, when we sought the help of the IMF/World Bank, the latter insisted on the elimination of fertilizer subsidies within three years - as one of the reform conditions.

The then PV Narasimha Rao-led government settled for the removal of subsidy on 'P' and 'K' (call them non-urea fertilizers) even while retaining control and subsidy on urea. Those deci-

sions were made effective from August 25, 1992.

But, within a little over one month i.e. from October 1, 1992, subsidy was restored on the former. Under its new incarnation, all suppliers of non-urea fertilizers were given a 'uniform' subsidy even as subsidy on Urea continued to be 'firm-specific'.

Today, all fertilizer types receive subsidies. But, thanks to the control tab on urea it remains the darling of all political bosses whereas non-urea fertilizers are at the receiving end most of the time; courtesy of the de-control tab they got post-1992. Unlike the former, where increasing subsidies help keep MRP immune to cost hikes, the government generally does not adjust subsidies on the latter. This leads to an increase in prices of non-urea stuff as costs escalate.

Together with a step-motherly treatment non-urea fertilizers receive in other areas (for instance, they get reimbursement of freight cost only for movement from the factory/port to the rail-head, on urea, the entire freight cost for movement up to the retail point is given), this has led to an imbalance in fertilizer use. Thus, there is excessive use of 'N' vis-à-vis 'P' and 'K' even as the present NPK use ratio at 6.7:2.4:1 (against the desired 4:2:1) is tilted in favour of 'N'. This, in turn, has led to a decline in crop yield, deterioration in soil health and adverse impact on the environment. Why can't demand resistance for 'P' & 'K' fertilizers propel their suppliers to rethink their strategies?

This won't happen as long as there is government intervention. For instance, even if a supplier brings MOP at a lower cost, the government can reduce subsidy; hence no incentive. That apart, since 2021-22, Modi has substantially hiked subsidies on non-urea fertilizers also to offset the steep increase in their cost triggered by the Ukraine war, as is the case with urea. During 2022-23, of the total subsidy bill Rs 255,000 crore, it spent Rs 86,000 crore on these fertilizers. This has only strengthened complacency amongst all stakeholders.

The aforementioned laws have the potential of attracting investment including by global fertilizer majors in the mining and processing of potash reserves particularly in Rajasthan (the state also offers good prospects for rock phosphate - the raw material for 'P' nutrient where also India's import dependence is a high of 80-90 per cent) besides exploring these from under the sea.

The government must pursue indigenous sources of supplying fertilizer raw materials to minimize India's vulnerabilities to total reliance on imports (with Russia and Belarus alone contributing 50 per cent of our potash imports, the Ukraine war has made us even more vulnerable). It should also overhaul the eco-system for fertilizers by dismantling the extant controls, giving suppliers pricing freedom and subsidies directly to farmers. It can use the money saved by stopping misuse - inherent in existing systems - to give incentives to firms engaged in mining,

Politics has no place in the houses of gods

The politicians should refrain from provoking the believers and poking fun at their beliefs

It is unfortunate and sad-denying to note that a particular religion in Kerala has come under attack from all political parties that swear by secularism, tolerance and pluralism. Onam, portrayed as the "national festival" of Kerala is an occasion when Mahabali is portrayed as a buffoon and comedian. Though this mythological character is described as the former ruler of the State, his image as a monarch evokes laughter and fun from the people. Add to this the flippant dialogues delivered by him in TV programs and plays!

Days before Onam, Speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly A N Shamsheer, who had declared his aversion for anything associated with Sanatana Dharma, made fun



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

of Lord Ganapathi which hurt the devotees of the God with an elephant's head. Shamsheer was propagating the virtues of scientific temper and he chose Lord Ganapathi as the mascot of reactionary forces. Addressing school students, the CPI-M leader with his open proclivity for Islamists, asked them not to worship such false icons because plastic surgery was unknown in the era of Ganapathi and Lord Shiva. It cannot be that Shamsheer is unaware of Charaka and Susrutha, the founding fathers of Ayurveda and who wrote Charaka Samhitha and Susrutha Samhitha, the compendiums of Ayurveda which are widely referred to by medical scientists and physicians across the world. It was Dr M S



Valiathan, the national professor of India who translated Charaka Samhitha to English. Scientific temper has to be appreciated and made a com-

pulsory course in schools and colleges alike. But justifying the scientific temper should not be done by ridiculing the age-old Indian traditions. Super Brain

Yoga, (popularly known as Thoppukaranam in Tamil) has been found to boost brain power as well as strengthen memory by scientists and

physical therapists like Annie Pilates. Moreover, Lord Ganesha does not belong to the Hindus alone. It was the Sarvajani Ganesh Festivals in Maharashtra organized by LokManya Tilak that integrated the people to fight for freedom from the colonial masters.

The Sanatan Dharma pontificates that all religions are equal while the Semitic religions shun that teaching. While obscurantist and reactionary rituals should be banned by law, the same should be made applicable to miracle crusades and wonder healings which are practised across India with impunity. Religions and Gods should be left to the personal business of devotees. While Hindus are ridiculed for their beliefs and

Gods, one should not forget what happened in the editorial office of Charlie Hebdo, a political satirical magazine in France that published cartoons of Prophet Mohammed. On 7 January 2015, two gunmen gatecrashed into the magazine's office and massacred 12 editorial staff as retaliation. The likes of Shamsheer should understand that the Hindus do not hurt the religious sentiments of anybody and their response to the insults meted out to the God who removes all obstacles should not be seen as a weakness. The latest development coming from Kochi is a cause for worry. There is substance to the demand by Hindus that the temples be left at the hands of devotees and believers. Politics has no place in the Houses of Gods.

Pope gives 'noble' Chinese people shout-out in bid to warm ties

Pope Francis sent a special greeting to China's 'noble' people on Sunday...



Pope Francis on a wheelchair leaves at the end of a meeting with religious leaders...

only time that Francis has publicly mentioned China during his four-day visit... groups was indirectly apparent as Francis highlighted, by contrast, Mongolia's long tradition of religious tolerance...

Russia attacks Ukrainian port before Putin, Erdogan talks

Two people were hospitalised following a 3½-hour Russian drone barrage against port infrastructure in Ukraine's Odesa region on Sunday...



A Ukrainian soldier carries a shell towards a howitzer on the front line in the outskirts of Lyman, Ukraine, Tuesday, Aug. 15, 2023...

Biden assures Florida victims support



President Joe Biden on Saturday saw from the sky Hurricane Idalia's impact across a swath of Florida before he set out on a walking tour of a city recovering from the storm...

What's at stake in Erdogan & Putin meeting?

Istanbul (AP): Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet with Vladimir Putin on Monday, hoping to persuade the Russian leader to rejoin the Black Sea grain deal...

Queen Elizabeth II memorial plans to be unveiled in 2026

The plans for a permanent memorial to the late Queen Elizabeth II will be unveiled by an independent body chaired by her former Private Secretary in 2026...

Aus woman suspended over sending racist email to Indian

Melbourne (PTI): A real estate agent in Australia has been suspended for sending a former Indian tenant a racist email in May 2021 after he disputed a cleaning bill deduction...

Taiwan suspends work, transport as Typhoon Haikui slams into island

Taiwan suspended flights, rail transport and ferry services along with classes and outdoor events and urged workers to stay home on Sunday as Typhoon Haikui churned across the southern part of the island...

Louisiana school shooting kills student, hurts woman

Louisiana (US): Gunfire broke out during a high school football game on a warm late-summer evening in Louisiana, killing a 16-year old student and wounding a woman in the arm...



Queen Elizabeth II in a blue dress.

Hearing of post-arrest bail pleas by Imran Khan, Qureshi deferred

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A special Pakistani court has postponed the hearing of post-arrest bail applications of former prime minister Imran Khan and his close aide Shah Mahmood Qureshi in a case related to the alleged disclosure of state secrets till the Islamabad High Court decides a plea challenging the court's jurisdiction.

The purported cipher (secret diplomatic cable) contained an account of a meeting between US State Department officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu, and Pakistani envoy Asad Majeed Khan last year.

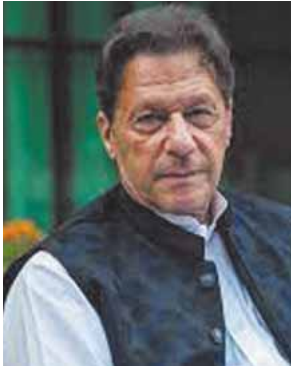
Of late, Khan has come under increased scrutiny following the publication of a purported copy of the secret cable by the US media outlet The Intercept, with many in the previous government led by Shehbaz Sharif pointing fingers at the PTI chief for being the source of the leak.

Qureshi, 67-year-old former foreign minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's Vice Chairman was arrested on August 19 under the Official Secrets Act for violating the secrecy of the official cable sent by the Pakistani embassy in the US to the foreign office when he was the foreign minister.

A special court here has postponed the hearing of post-arrest bail applications submitted by Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan and his close aide Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the diplomatic cipher case till the IHC decides a plea challenging the court's jurisdiction, the Express Tribune reported.

Meanwhile, the Lahore High Court (LHC) will address petitions on Monday filed by 70-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Khan against the rejection of his pre-arrest bail applications in seven different cases.

Khan, who served as the country's prime minister until April last year, currently faces around 180 cases. These cases primarily stem from incidents that occurred following the sacking of the Lahore corps commander's house on May 9.



ed by Barrister Salman Safdar, Khan has also named the Attock jail superintendent as a respondent. He argues that his bail applications were dismissed due to his non-appearance in court after being convicted in the Toshakhana case on August 5. The cricketer-turned-politician seeks a fair consideration of his bail applications on their merits.

During an in-camera hearing, Judge Abul Hasanat Muhammad Zulqarnain of the Islamabad ATC-1, who was recently appointed as a judge of a special court handling cases under the Official Secrets Act, 1923, was informed by the prosecution that Khan had challenged both the special court's jurisdiction and his jail trial in the IHC.

The court advised PTI lawyers to await the IHC's decision and consider bail matters thereafter. It further recommended withdrawing the bail applications and re-filing them after the IHC's ruling. A hearing on both defendants' bail requests is scheduled for Monday.

Additionally, an ATC in Lahore has directed authorities to include Khan's sisters, Aleema Khan and Uzma Khan, in an investigation into four different cases filed against them following incidents on May 9.

Aleema and Uzma appeared in the ATC of Judge Abher Gul after their interim bail expired. They had been requesting inclusion in the investigation for three months, and the judge ordered the investigating officers to do so promptly, expressing a desire to conclude the case and receive the investigation report.

Kakar terms May 9 violence 'attempted coup', 'civil war'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has termed the May 9 violence by supporters of former premier Imran Khan "an attempted coup and civil war" that targeted Army chief Gen Asim Munir and his team, a media report said on Sunday.

Kakar, however, denied that revenge was a motive behind taking legal action against the perpetrators of the violence. Dozens of military installations and government buildings, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, were attacked during the May 9 violence following the arrest of 70-year-old Khan by paramilitary Rangers.

"The vandalism and arson on May 9 were witnessed by the whole world and international newspapers reported the tragedy. This kind of manipulation is not acceptable in any form of government," Kakar said in an interview with Geo news channel.

The May 9 violence was "an attempted coup and civil war, the target of which was the serving army chief and his



team in the military," he said. Kakar said the government does not want to create an impression that revenge is being taken against the accused of May 9 violence.

However, he added, if legal action is not taken against those who violated the country's laws and resorted to violence, then "we will be seen as a party to the matter."

The interim premier maintained no political party had the right to throw stones at others, abuse them, and burn buildings. Hundreds of Khan's supporters have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the May 9 violence. Khan, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chairman, is also facing numerous

cases related to attacks on military installations.

Currently, he is facing over 150 cases related to terrorism, murder and blasphemy. He is currently lodged in Attock jail. His party claims that its members were not involved in the attacks, but the government and military say they have "irrefutable evidence" of their involvement.

Speaking about the new role that he has been chosen to perform, Kakar said: "I had no idea that I would ever sit on the prime minister's chair." Commenting on the relations between India and Pakistan and the role of trade between the two sides, Kakar said the final decision on bilateral trade has to be taken by Indian politicians. Ties between India and Pakistan nose-dived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in the neighbouring country.

The relations deteriorated further after India announced the withdrawal of the special powers of Jammu and Kashmir and the bifurcation of the state into two union territories in August 2019.

'Imran willing to talk to all but only on elections'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's jailed prime minister Imran Khan is willing to talk to any political party or institution only on matters related to holding elections in the country, his lawyers have said. Khan, the Chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, has been demanding early elections since he was ousted from power after he lost a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly in April last year.

Subsequently, the 70-year-old cricketer-turned-politician launched an aggressive campaign under the slogan of 'Haqueeqi Azadi', calling for elections and blaming the incumbent government led by Shehbaz Sharif and the army leadership for his ouster.

Taking to X on Saturday after meeting Khan in Punjab's Attock jail, his lawyer, Barrister Gohar Khan said that the PTI chief "is willing to talk to all BUT about election".

"Finally met Khan sab at Attock Jail with other colleagues. Alhamdulillah, he is in great spirit but concern about ongoing uncertainty, inflation, and terrorism," he said.

Another of Khan's lawyers Nadeem Haider Panjutha said the former premier has a clear message that unless there is political stability, there will be no economic stability in Pakistan. The PTI chief said "we are ready to talk to everyone, but only on election," Panjutha tweeted in Urdu.

Another of Khan's lawyers, Intazar Hussain Panjutha, said the former prime minister "will talk to any political party or institution on the matter of holding elections".

The National Assembly was dissolved on August 9 which makes it mandatory for the Election Commission of Pakistan to hold polls within 90 days after the dissolution. However, the ECP is set to delay the election in order to carry out delimitation in the light of the new census, which is also a constitutional requirement. Khan has been kept in jail since August 5 after his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case. His sentence was suspended by the Islamabad High Court on August 29, but he continues to remain in prison in the cipher case in which he is accused of leaking sensitive national security matters.

Mobile internet services suspended in Gilgit-Baltistan amid sectarian tensions

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's interim Information Minister Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that the situation in Gilgit-Baltistan was "completely peaceful", amid reports of sectarian tensions in the region that forced authorities to indefinitely suspend mobile inter-net services.

"The situation in Gilgit-Baltistan is completely peaceful and the news and speculations circulating in media regarding the deployment of Pakistan Army are completely baseless," Solangi said in a post on platform X, citing a statement released by the region's home department.

He said all roads, trade centres, business activities and educational institutions are open as usual in the region, which has a history of rivalry between the Sunni and Shia Muslims. The minister said that services of the Pakistan Army and the civil armed forces had been requisitioned "only to maintain law and order" on the eve of the chehlum or Arbaen (that marks the anniversary of

the 40th day of mourning following the seventh-century killing of the Prophet's grandson Imam Hussain in the battle of Karbala in Iraq).

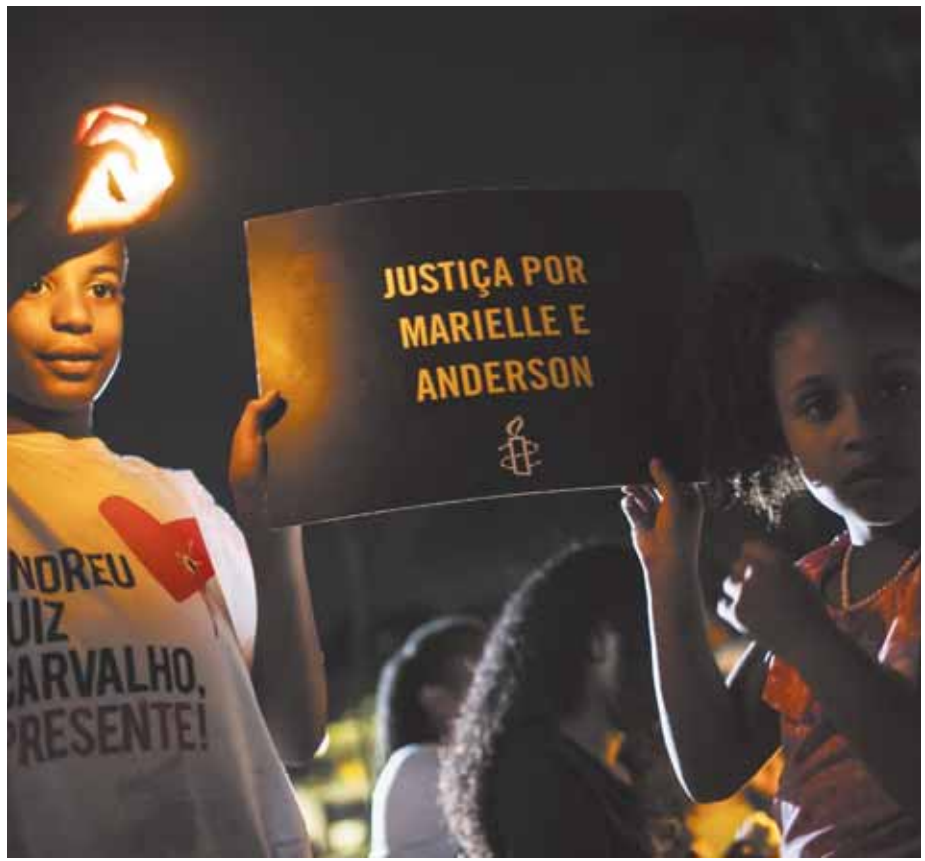
He added that special measures have been taken for the security of the procession routes and Imambargahs as per the past practice and section 144 has been imposed across the region to maintain law and order, protect lives and avoid any untoward incident.

"Peaceful protests do occur at times in reaction to some religious and sectarian concerns but the law-and-order situation is calm," he said, dismissing the reports of unrest as "baseless".

The situation in the region turned tense on Friday when protests were held in the Gilgit city and surrounding areas on the call of a Shia group, hours after a prominent Sunni cleric allegedly made derogatory remarks during a protest in Gilgit. The protesters were demanding action against the cleric. The authorities have been dealing with a tense situation for over a week, due to the alleged derogatory statements by both sides, the Dawn news-

paper reported. Meanwhile, mobile internet services have been suspended across the region until further orders. An official said an FIR had been registered against the Sunni cleric at the City Police Station Gilgit for his comments, while another FIR against a prominent Shia cleric had already been registered in Skardu, the newspaper reported. The authorities in the area have suspended two police personnel and a school-teacher on allegations of sharing sectarian posts on social media. Over 12 persons have been detained for posting controversial posts.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom joined Canada and the US on Saturday in advising its citizens to avoid visiting the northern areas. The US embassy statement said that American citizens should exercise heightened caution in Gilgit-Baltistan due to recent protests in Skardu and Diamer and the potential for additional demonstrations, road closures, and associated disruptions to local mobile and internet networks in the region.



Children take part in an act to mark the 2000th day since the murder of Councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver, Anderson Gomes, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Saturday

Security situation deteriorates in Pak as terrorist attacks rise

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's security situation has further deteriorated as the country fights a relentless rise in terrorist attacks by militant groups, active in the volatile northwestern and southwestern regions, according to a media report citing data from a prominent think tank. The number of attacks in August was the highest tally for monthly strikes in almost nine years, Dawn newspaper reported, quoting data from the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS). The think tank stated that there were 99 attacks across the country, the highest in a month since November 2014.

The numbers released by the Islamabad-based think tank were lower than the 147 attacks claimed by the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), most of which couldn't be verified through independent sources, PICSS said, adding it only recorded verified terrorism attacks.

The attacks resulted in the deaths of 112 civilians and security forces personnel while 87 were injured. The data showed a month-on-month increase of 83 per cent, compared to 54 attacks reported in July. There were four suicide attacks in August, three in tribal districts and one in mainland Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Overall, the country witnessed 22 suicide attacks in the first eight months of 2023, in which 227 people were killed and 497 injured. Balochistan and erstwhile Fata were the regions most affected by violence in August. The former witnessed a 65 per cent increase in attacks, from 17 in July to 28 in August, while there were 37 attacks in the latter, up by 106 per cent from 18 in July. However, both regions recorded a decrease in fatalities, by 19 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively.

The attacks also increased in mainland KP, up by 83 per cent from 15 in July to 29 in August. The deaths and injuries

also increased by 188 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively.

The province was mainly targeted by the outlawed TTP and its splinter groups, who claimed responsibility for several attacks. Sindh witnessed a slight increase in militant attacks, from three in July to five in August. The deaths also increased from one to four.

Punjab remained relatively peaceful, with no militant attack reported in August. The only attack reported in July was a low-intensity blast near a police station in Lahore, which caused one injury. The data also revealed that security forces remained the primary target of violence, accounting for 50 per cent of the total deaths and 63 per cent of the total injured.

There was a 51 per cent rise in military fatalities in August compared to July 2023. The security forces also responded to the militancy threat and killed at least 24 alleged militants and arrested 69 in operations across the country, according to the report.

Woman stoned to death in Pakistan's Punjab province for 'adultery'

PTI ■ LAHORE

Lahore (PTI): A woman was stoned to death in Pakistan's Punjab province for allegedly committing adultery, police said on Sunday. The incident took place in Rajanpur district of Punjab, some 500 km from Lahore, on Friday. According to police, the husband of the woman, who is in her 20s, accused her of adultery. On Friday, the man along with his two brothers tied the woman against a tree and stoned her to death. Before stoning her, they also brutally tortured her.

The brothers fled after committing the crime and are believed to be hiding at the border region between Punjab and Balochistan, police said.

The woman belonged to the Alkani tribe of Rajanpur. A number of women are killed in Pakistan every year in the name of honour. According to human rights activists, around

1,000 women are killed in the name of honour every year in Pakistan. The victims are widely perceived to have brought shame and dishonour to their families either by marrying against their will or having an affair. Most often the family members are behind such killings. A few days ago, a young lady doctor was shot dead in the name of honour in Punjab's Mianwali district.

According to police, the 25-year-old doctor wanted to marry her colleague but her father disapproved of it.

"Over a week ago, the doctor's father came to her clinic in Mianwali city and argued with her over the matter. During the argument, he pulled out a gun and opened fire on her leaving her critically injured. She was rushed to a nearby hospital where she succumbed to her wounds," police said.

Indian-origin ministers in S'pore sue PM's kin over bungalow rental issue

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore's two Indian-origin cabinet ministers have sued Lee Hsien Yang, the younger brother of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, for defamation over allegations relating to their rental of two state-owned bungalows. The case conference will take place on Tuesday (September 5) at 9 am, according to a hearing list on the Singapore Courts' website, Channel News Asia reported on Saturday.

The two ministers - Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam and Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan - had sent lawyers' letters to Lee Hsien Yang in July, saying they would sue unless he apologises, withdraws his allegations and pays damages relating to the colonial-era bungalows in Ridout Road.

In a Facebook post on July 27, Shanmugam said Lee Hsien Yang had accused him and

Balakrishnan of "acting corruptly and for personal gain by having Singapore Land Authority (SLA) give us preferential treatment by illegally felling trees without approval, and also having SLA pay for renovations to 26 and 31 Ridout Road".

These allegations are false, Shanmugam added. Lee Hsien Yang and his wife left the country after declining to attend a police interview in July 2022 that relates to lying in judicial proceedings about the will of his late father and founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Shanmugam says he rented Ridout Road property to prepare for sale of family home, not profiting from rental.

The issue surrounding the rental of the two Ridout Road state properties surfaced in early May when opposition politician and Reform Party chief Kenneth Jeyaretnam questioned if the ministers were "paying less than the fair

market value" for the bungalows. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) was tasked to investigate whether there was any misconduct related to the transactions and found no wrongdoing.

The CPIB report, released on June 28, said the two ministers did not benefit from getting any privileged information. They were not given preferential treatment and their rental rates were comparable to that of neighbouring properties, the report stated.

The issue was debated in parliament on July 3. Lee Hsien Yang has made at least eight Facebook posts on Ridout Road before and after CPIB's report and the parliament debate, according to the channel report. A Facebook post on July 23 resulted in a correction direction under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), with the Law Ministry saying that it contained untrue statements.

Entrance to Burning Man fest in Nevada closed due to flooding

Nevada (AP): The entrance to the Burning Man counterculture festival in the Nevada desert was closed on Saturday and thousands of attendees were urged to stay at the site as flooding from storms swept through the area.

The entrance will be closed for the remainder of the event, which began on August 27 and was scheduled to end on Monday, according to the US Bureau of Land Management, which oversees the Black Rock Desert where the festival is being held. More than one-half inch of rain is believed to have fallen on Friday at the festival site, located about 110 miles



(177 kilometers) north of Reno, the National Weather Service in Reno said. At least another quarter of an inch of rain is expected Sunday. Organisers urged festival-

goers to conserve their food, water and fuel. Officials haven't yet said when the entrance was expected to be opened again.

Messages left Saturday afternoon by The Associated Press for both the Bureau of Land Management and the Pershing County Sheriff's Office, the agencies that closed the entrance, weren't immediately returned. Photos published by the Reno Gazette Journal showed festivalgoers with garbage bags wrapped around their legs as they walked through mud. The newspaper reported that organisers had started rationing ice sales.

Netanyahu seeks deportation of Eritrean migrants involved in violence

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday he wants Eritrean migrants involved in a violent clash in Tel Aviv to be deported immediately and has ordered a plan to remove all of the country's African migrants.

The remarks came a day after bloody protests by rival groups of Eritreans in south Tel Aviv left dozens of people injured. Eritreans, supporters and opponents of Eritrea's government, faced off with construction lumber, pieces of metal and rocks, smashing shop windows and police cars.

Israeli police in riot gear shot tear gas, stun grenades and live rounds while officers on horseback tried to control the protesters. The violence on

Saturday returned to the fore the issue of migrants, which has long divided Israel.

Its resurgence comes as Israel is torn over Netanyahu's judicial overhaul plan, and supporters cite the migrant issue as a reason why the courts should be reined in, saying they have stood in the way of pushing the migrants out.

"We want harsh measures against the rioters, including the immediate deportation of those who took part," Netanyahu said in a special ministerial meeting called to deal with the aftermath of the violence. He requested that the ministers present him with plans "for the removal of all the other illegal infiltrators" and noted in his remarks that the Supreme Court struck down some measures meant to coerce



the migrants to leave. About 25,000 African migrants live in Israel, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea, who say they fled conflict or repression. Israel recognizes very few as asylum seekers, seeing them overwhelmingly as economic migrants, and says it has no legal obligation to keep them.

The country has tried a variety of tactics to force them

out, including sending some to a remote prison, holding part of their wages until after they agree to leave the country or offering cash payments to those who agree to move to another country, somewhere in Africa.

Critics accuse the government of trying to coerce the migrants into leaving. Under international law, Israel cannot forcibly send migrants back to a country where their life or liberty may be at risk. Netanyahu said Sunday he didn't think deporting supporters of the Eritrean government would be a problem.

Migrants' supporters say Israel, a country founded upon the ashes of the Holocaust and built up by Jewish refugees, should welcome those seeking asylum. Opponents claim migrants have brought crime to

the low-income southern Tel Aviv neighbourhoods where they have settled.

The clashes came as Eritrean government supporters marked the 30th anniversary of the current ruler's rise to power, an event held near the Eritrean embassy in south Tel Aviv. Eritrea has one of the world's worst human rights records and migrants in Israel and elsewhere say they fear death if they were to return. Critics see Netanyahu's judicial overhaul plan as a power grab meant to weaken the courts and limit judicial oversight on government decisions and legislation. Supporters say it is meant to restore power to elected legislators and rein in what they say is an interventionist and liberal-leaning justice system.

'G20 Presidency boosting India's trade ties with member nations'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The G20 Presidency with India is helping New Delhi to strengthen trade ties with member nations and provides an opportunity to attract investments from those countries in sectors like infrastructure, experts say.

They said that the G20 (Group of 20) holds a strategic role in securing future global economic growth and prosperity, as its members represent about 85 per cent of the global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), 75 per cent of global trade and two-thirds of the world's population.

Presiding over this multilateral forum is an opportunity for India as it can showcase its strength and achievements for attracting investment and deepen its trade relation with these large economies, the experts added.

Fast-tracking negotiations for free trade agreement, ease of doing business, development of modern infrastructure, skilled manpower, large population with growing income are some of the positives which help India to enhance trade realisations with these member countries.

The G20 has 43 members and not 20 countries. These include 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, UK and US) and the European Union (27-member group). Three EU countries — France, Germany, Italy — are counted among the 19 countries.

Trade experts suggested the government to fast-track ongoing negotiations for free trade agreement (FTA) with countries like the UK and EU as it would help India in better market access to these countries.



As well as facilitate investment. However, they also asked not to use trade platforms to achieve climate aspirations as that could harm progress in both trade and climate discussions.

The largest trade block of G20, the EU, will set in motion the carbon border adjustment mechanism from October 1 this year, making exports expensive from countries like India.

"In the first eight months of 2023, the EU introduced five regulations on climate change and trade. The G20 nations should not ignore this elephant in the room and discuss before individual countries rush to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) (WTO). This may soon unravel world trade," think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Shardul S Shroff, Executive Chairman, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, said that India should find a common ground with G20 countries to emerge as a global norm setter for the digital economy and use that global stature to boost IT and IT-enabled services exports.

India should position itself as the global norm-setter for various aspects of the digital economy, such as data protection, international contracting, digital assets, and international taxation, as it would help expand India's footprint in

the global services exports market, Shroff said. Gaurav Dani, Founding Partner, INDUSLAW, said that India has the largest growing middle-income population offering a last consumer base for both goods and services and due to this global firms will continue to invest in India.

Sharing similar views, Rumki Majumdar, Economist, Deloitte India, said that many multinational firms are looking for alternate destinations for investment and diversifying supply chains, and the G20 Presidency will help India attract many such companies.

Massive improvement in infrastructure, ease of doing business, skilled labour force and growing market with large middle class consumer base are some of the key indicators that make India one of the most attractive places to invest and import quality goods, Hi-Tech Group Chairman Deep Kapuria said.

Mumbai-based exporter and Chairman of Technocraft Industries Sharad Kumar Saraf said India's trade with G20 countries will grow at an accelerated rate because of the comfort and confidence created in the members due to the multiple events organised by India in different cities.

"This helped in showcasing the country as a whole. The G20 Presidency has thrown up many opportunities in diverse sectors for India. It is now for India to grab

this opportunity. India should consider converting G20 in an economic block, a shade lower than free trade, maybe, reduced custom duties among the group members," Saraf said.

Among the G20 members, India holds ninth position in terms of total trade (USD 1,662 billion) in goods and services in 2022. The EU (17,151 billion), China (USD 7,183 billion) and USA (6,933 billion) hold top three spots. Share of G20 nations in India's merchandise export in 2022 stood at 64 per cent and import at 52.4 per cent.

India's leading export destinations among G20 nations are USA (USD 91 billion), EU (USD 87 billion), China (USD 17.5 billion), UK (USD 14.4 billion), Turkey (USD 10.7 billion) and Saudi Arabia (USD 10 billion). The country's suppliers include China (USD 118.5 billion), EU (USD 59.1 billion), Saudi Arabia (USD 43.3 billion), USA (USD 38.4 billion), Russia (USD 34 billion), Australia (USD 19.2 billion), Korea (USD 18.9 billion), and Japan (USD 13.9 billion) during the last year.

Sector wise, India's top exports to these member countries in 2022 included electronics and machinery (USD 41.3 billion), petroleum products (USD 30 billion), cut and polished diamonds and gold jewellery (USD 25.9 billion), organic chemicals (USD 20.5 billion), medicines (USD 16.4 billion), automobiles parts (USD 11.8 billion).

The main import items included electronics (USD 46.6 billion), machinery (USD 42.5 billion), petroleum products (USD 40.6 billion), organic chemicals, APIs (USD 18.9 billion), rough diamonds and gold (USD 17.6 billion), plastics raw materials (USD 13.0 billion), and iron and steel (USD 12.8 billion).

Tata Steel in advanced talks to get funds for UK plant: Reports

PTI ■ LONDON

Tata Steel is in advanced talks with the UK government to agree around GBP 500 million in state-backed funding to secure the future of its Port Talbot plant in South Wales, according to UK media reports this weekend.

The Indian steel major has been in long-drawn discussions related to the critical green transition of the UK's largest steelworks, involving thousands of jobs in the country's steel industry.

According to a 'Sky News' report on Saturday, both sides are now close to agreeing a deal that would commit millions to the future of the Port Talbot steelworks.

"Tata Steel is continuing to discuss with the UK government a framework for continuity and decarbonisation of steel making in the UK amidst very challenging underlying business conditions given that several of its heavy end assets are approaching end of life," a Tata Steel spokesperson told



PTI, when asked about the development.

"Given the financially constrained position of our UK business, any significant change is only possible with government investment and support, as also seen in other steel making countries in Europe where governments are actively supporting companies in decarbonisation initiatives," the spokesperson said.

According to UK media reports, the draft plans close to being finalised include the UK government committing around GBP 500 million of funding and the Tata Group

agreeing GBP 700 million of capital expenditure to help pay for a switch away from polluting coal-fired blast furnaces. The Indian steel major would reportedly commit to building electric arc furnaces, which offer greener, less labour-intensive ways of producing steel than traditional blast furnaces.

Opposition Labour's Stephen Kinlock, the local MP for Aberavon which covers Port Talbot, stressed that unions "must be fully involved and workforce must support the plan".

"Steel is a strategic industry that underpins our entire

economy. It provides tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs, it's vital for our national security, and it's key to achieving net zero. Failure to invest in our steel industry would be the very definition of a false economy," he tweeted.

The unions, meanwhile, have expressed concerns over reports that a few thousand jobs are expected as part of the negotiations at the Tata-owned Port Talbot steelworks, which employs around 4,000 workers.

"We continue to support a solution that will maintain blast furnace production and safeguard the future for all the UK plants. We are ready to use all means at our disposal to protect jobs and our vital strategic industry," said the Community steelworkers union.

The UK Government has not commented on the latest reports, but any support package is expected to be dependent on pledges of investment into the future from the Indian steel giant.

Bank credit outstanding to real estate reaches ₹28L cr in July: RBI

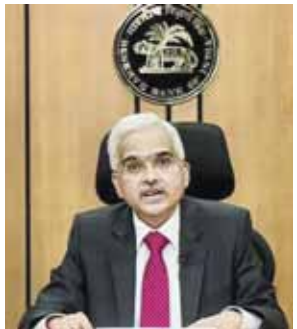
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Bank credit to housing as well as commercial real estate witnessed nearly 38 per cent annual growth in July, taking the loan outstanding to the realty sector to a record Rs 28 lakh crore, as per the latest RBI data.

It is evident from the Reserve Bank's loan outstanding data as well as property consultants data on housing sales and new launches across major cities that activities in the real estate sector are moving at a fast pace.

The credit outstanding in housing (including priority sector housing) rose 37.4 per cent annually in July crossing Rs 24.28 lakh crore, showed the RBI's data on 'Sectoral Deployment of Bank Credit - July 2023'.

The credit outstanding to the commercial real estate increased by 38.1 per cent to Rs 4.07 lakh crore. Commenting on the RBI data, Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said the impressive loan growth in the real estate sector is a function of a large-scale demand revival across the board. "The commercial office segment was reeling under the pandemic's



pressure last year as employers were contemplating strategies around complete work from the office, work from home, or a hybrid model. However, as the situation gained normalcy, employees returned to offices and the demand for good quality commercial offices is high this year," he said.

Another set of RBI data showed that All India HPI growth (y-o-y) inched up to 5.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2023-24 from 4.6 per cent in the previous quarter and 3.4 per cent a year ago.

In 2022, Puri said housing sales across top 7 cities were 54 per cent higher than the previous year. In January-June 2023, sales have already reached 63 per cent of the previous year, indicating the sus-

tained demand. The demand remained undeterred despite a steady rise in home loan interest rates, he added. Samantak Das, Executive Director and Head of Research, JLL India, said the RBI's latest sectoral credit data showed a remarkably high growth in bank lending to the real estate sector in July 2023.

"This is the impact of the merger of a non-banking financial company with a bank. On excluding the impact of the merger, lending to commercial real estate in July 2023 increased by ~12 per cent y-o-y and housing loans increased by ~13 per cent y-o-y during the same time frame," he added.

Das said this double digit growth is considered quite robust given the challenging economic scenario globally.

"The double-digit growth can be attributed to the rising demand for housing which is reflected in the robust sales volume recorded till June 2023," he added.

Aman Sarin, Director & CEO, Anant Raj Ltd, said the growth in credit indicates that the real estate sector is growing and people are investing in the sector.

Solar installations see 3.2 per cent growth at 872 MW in Jan-June, says Mercom



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rooftop solar installations in the country grew by 3.2 per cent to 872 megawatt (MW) during January-June period of 2023, Mercom India said. In H1 or first half of 2022, 845 MW of rooftop solar capacities were installed in India, the research firm said.

India's cumulative rooftop solar capacity reached 9.6 gigawatts (GW) at the end June 2023, the 'Mercom India Rooftop Solar Market Report' said. In the second quarter, 387 megawatts (MW) of rooftop solar capacity was added, which is 20 per cent higher compared to January-March 2023, and marginally down by 0.5 per cent over April-June 2022.

"Rooftop solar did not meet expectations in H1, even with falling component prices and growing demand."

Sebi to curb finfluencers to help investors get accurate, unbiased info

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rise of financial influencers or finfluencers, who charge as high as Rs 7.5 lakh for a post on social media, introduced a new way for people to access and interpret financial information, and now they will soon come under the regulatory purview as Sebi proposed measures to curb their mushrooming numbers.

The proposed move by Sebi not only ensures that investors receive accurate and unbiased information but also helps in preserving authenticity and reducing fraud, Anand Rathil Wealth Deputy CEO Feroz Azeez told PTI.

Under the proposal, finfluencers need to be registered with Sebi and adhere to specific guidelines. Also, it has been proposed to ban unregistered finfluencers from partnering with mutual funds and stockbrokers for promotional activities.

While many finfluencers provide valuable insights, there has been a growing concern over the potential risks associated with unregulated influencers who might offer biased or misleading advice. They usually work on a commission-based model. "Finfluencers charge as little as Rs 10,000 to



as much as Rs 7.5 lakh for an individual post, excluding tax. Influencer marketing agencies quote as much as Rs 20 lakh for a campaign, plus taxes, to entice their followers," Azeez said.

In addition, many of them make money from referral fees or profit sharing for promoting the product, channel, platform, or services or get compensation directly from social media and other platforms.

To address the risk associated with finfluencers, Sebi floated a consultation paper late last month proposing to restrict the association of registered intermediaries or regulated entities with unregistered influencers.

In an era where financial advice is increasingly disseminated through social media, the line between credible advice and misleading information can become blurred.

India's imports of Russian oil plunged to 7-month low in Aug

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's import of cheap Russian oil plunged to lowest in seven months in August as monsoon rains dampened demand, industry data showed.

The world's third largest oil consumer reduced imports from Russia for a third consecutive month in August. It took 1.46 million barrels a day from Russia in August, down from 1.91 million barrels purchased in the previous month, according to data from energy cargo tracker Vortexa.

Indian refiners also cut imports from Iraq, another top supplier, to 866,000 barrels per day from 891,000 bpd. Some of those volumes were replaced by a short surge in imports from Saudi Arabia, which jumped to 820,000 bpd from 484,000 bpd in July, the data showed.

From a market share of less than 1 per cent in India's import basket before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February last year, Russia's share in India's imports hit a peak of about 2 million bpd in May, as refiners vied for heavily discounted shipments.

Following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February last year, Russian oil was sanctioned and shunned by European buyers and some in



Asia, such as Japan. This led to Russian Urals crude being traded at a discount to Brent crude (the global benchmark). The discount on Russian Urals grade has however narrowed from levels of around USD 30 a barrel in the middle of last year to less than USD 10 per barrel.

Indian refiners, who convert crude oil extracted from below ground into finished products such as petrol and diesel, are now the biggest buyers of Russian oil as Chinese imports have maxed out due to a massive electrification of vehicles and demand issues in a shaky economy.

Indian refiners ramped up purchases from less than 2 per cent of their entire buys in pre-Ukraine war times to 33 per cent to capture discounted oil. India's oil imports from UAE also dropped to 273,000 bpd in August from 290,000 bpd in previous month.

Indoor saffron cultivation technology introduced in Jammu & Kashmir's Kishtwar

Jammu: An indoor saffron cultivation technology was introduced in Kishtwar region of Jammu and Kashmir to promote agricultural innovation and enhance the livelihoods of the saffron farming community, an official said.

Deputy Commissioner, Kishtwar Devansh Yadav unveiled modern indoor saffron cultivation technology, which holds the potential to revolutionise saffron cultivation practices in the region, the official said.

Under the skill development programme, the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Kishtwar has realised project with an estimated cost of ₹1.35 lakh, under SANKALP scheme. PTI

Punjab & Sind Bank looks to raise ₹250 cr via QIP in Q3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Punjab & Sind Bank plans to raise Rs 250 crore through share sale to institutional investors in the third quarter of the current fiscal.

"The bank has got approvals for capital raising of Rs 250 crore via Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) in the next quarter," Punjab & Sind Bank managing director Swarup Kumar Saha told PTI.

It will help achieve the twin objective of capital raising and dilution of the government's holding in the bank, he said. Government of India holds a 98.25 per cent stake in the bank which was listed on the stock exchanges in 2010. He said that the government's nod



is also in place for the capital raising. The bank had written to the Centre seeking its approval for capital raising in May this year. As part of a strategy to increase touch points and brand visibility, Saha said the bank is aiming for 2,000 branches and as many ATMs in the country in the

next three years. The addition of branches would help mobilise low-cost deposits and also increase penetration of loan products, he said.

"We are trying to build operational efficiency more so that I can reduce my cost and increase my fee income. We are moving to very granular areas like increasing ATM network, improving digital banking experience," Saha said.

He said the ATM network can itself be a profit centre because an outside customer pays about Rs 17 per transaction for the use of an ATM.

The bank is in the process of upgrading its core banking solution (CBS) which would help the digital journey much better and also bring in efficiency, he said.

Go First can not use 'G8' designator code

New Delhi/ Mumbai: Bankrupt Go First is not eligible for the two-letter designator code 'G8', with global airlines' grouping IATA blocking the code as the airline has not been flying for the past few months.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), which provides two-letter designator and numeric codes to airlines, has blocked the 'G8' for Go First for a 12-month period, according to an official.

IATA assigns the airline designator code to companies to use for reservations, schedules, timetables, telecommunications, ticketing, cargo documentation, legal, tariffs and/or other commercial/traffic purposes, according to IATA website. "One of the requirements for a company to be eligible for an IATA two-letter designator is that the airline needs to be operating. As Go First



ceased to operate commercial flights since early May 2023, it is currently not eligible for the IATA two-letter designator," Albert Tjoeng, Head of Corporate Communications at IATA, said in a statement.

He said the two-letter designator and numeric codes will remain blocked for 12 months, during which Go First can ask for the reinstatement of the designator if the requirements are met. PTI

Walmart pays \$3.5 billion to raise stake in Flipkart

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

US retail giant Walmart has increased its stake in Indian e-commerce subsidiary Flipkart as it paid USD 3.5 billion (around Rs 28,953 crore) to acquire shares from its non-controlling interest holders in six months to July 31, 2023.

Additionally, during the six months ended July 31, 2023, the company received USD 700 million related to new rounds of equity funding for the company's majority-owned PhonePe subsidiary, said the Bentonville-based retailer in a US Securities & Exchange Commission (US SEC) filing.

"During the six months ended July 31, 2023, the com-



pany paid USD 3.5 billion to acquire shares from certain Flipkart noncontrolling interest holders and settle the liability to former noncontrolling interest holders of PhonePe,

said Walmart filing. After this, Walmart's total holding in the Indian e-commerce player Flipkart would increase to 80.5 per cent, some reports said. Walmart has bought a stake

from hedge fund Tiger Global and Accel Partners.

Besides, the US retail major also acquired the residual stake of Binny Bansal, Flipkart cofounder. PhonePe is a digital payments company, in which Walmart has a majority stake following the takeover of parent outfit Flipkart, which had shifted its headquarters from Singapore to India.

US-based Bentonville in 2018 completed the acquisition of a 77 per cent stake in Flipkart and became the majority owner of the Indian e-commerce company.

Walmart plans for the public listing of Flipkart. Last month, in an investor call, Walmart said Flipkart's GMV

was strong and eCommerce grew 26 per cent in the June quarter. Flipkart's Mynta is the country's largest e-commerce marketplace for fashion and lifestyle products, offering top brands to customers across India. Mynta now provides access to more than 6,000 brands on its marketplace.

"Both our businesses in India, Flipkart and PhonePe, had strong quarters as well. A lot of that is driven from just really being close to customer in those markets and combination of value and convenience that we're now able to offer," Walmart International President & Chief Executive Officer Judith McKenna had said.

ALCARAZ PRODUCES HIGHLIGHTS, SMILES DURING A US OPEN VICTORY OVER EVANS

AP ■ NEW YORK

Even if Carlos Alcaraz was by no means perfect during a victory in the U.S. Open's third round on Saturday - he dropped a set, after all - the defending champion produced enough bits of brilliance to keep himself smiling and prompt his opponent, Dan Evans, to chuck his racket a couple of times.

Less than 12 hours after the man he's expected to meet next weekend for the title, Novak Djokovic, needed to fashion a comeback from a two-set deficit to win, Alcaraz progressed to the fourth round at Flushing Meadows for the third consecutive year by beating the 26th-seeded Evans 6-2, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

Alcaraz, the No. 1 seed, showed off a variety of his considerable collection of skills, generating the sorts of highlights that both he and his fans have come to expect.

"We play to make the people happy, as well, to entertain them and try to make the match fun," said Alcaraz, who won his second Grand Slam title by edging Djokovic in the Wimbledon final in July.



"It's great to have those kind of points, as well, and to feel the energy that they enjoy."

The 20-year-old from Spain is trying to become the first man to win two titles in a row in New York since Roger Federer took five straight from 2004-08.

"I would love to be part of tournament history with Roger," Alcaraz said.

"That's my main goal right now and I'm looking for that."

Next for Alcaraz is a matchup against Matteo Arnaldi, a 22-year-old from Italy who is ranked 61st.

Arnaldi, who had won a grand total of one Grand Slam match before this tournament, reached the fourth round by eliminating No. 16 seed Cameron Norrie of Britain 6-3, 6-4, 6-3.

In another early result Saturday, Jack Draper, a 21-year-old left-hander from Britain ranked 123rd, made the round of 16 at a major for the first time with a 6-4, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 win over American wildcard entry Michael Mmoh.

No. 2 seed Aryna Sabalenka - who has a chance to overtake Iga Swiatek at No. 1 in the rankings depending on their results the rest of the way at the U.S. Open - continued her smooth march through the bracket by defeating Clara Burel of France 6-1, 6-1.

Sabalenka, the Australian Open champion in January, has dropped a total of just 12 games through three matches so far.

Sabalenka now takes on No. 13 Daria Kasatkina, a 2022 French Open semifinalist, who returns to the fourth round in New York for the first time in six years after getting past Greet Minnen of Belgium 6-3, 6-4.

No. 17 Madison Keys, the 2017 runner-up at Flushing Meadows, came back to defeat No. 14 Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 6-2, 6-2, and will play No.



Pegula outlasts Svitolina at US Open, will next face fellow American Keys

AP ■ NEW YORK

Jessica Pegula and Madison Keys kept noticing their names near each other in tournament draws this summer.

"We were like, I think the world just wants us to play," Pegula said.

At the U.S. Open, they finally will.

Pegula beat Elina Svitolina 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 on Saturday, setting up a fourth-round matchup against the No. 17-seeded Keys.

Pegula, the No. 3 seed, is still trying to advance beyond the quarterfinals of a Grand Slam tournament. First, she'll have to get by the 2017 runner-up in Flushing Meadows who also needed three sets to move on.

Keys came back to eliminate No. 14 Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 6-2, 6-2.

Ons Jabeur, the No. 5 seed who lost in the finals last year, also reached the fourth round by outlasting No. 31 Marie Bouzkova 5-7, 7-6 (5), 6-3 in a match that took 2 hours, 56 minutes. Jabeur will face No. 23 Zheng Qinwen of China, who edged Lucia Bronzetti 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

Pegula and Keys could have met early in both Montreal and Cincinnati, but Keys had to withdraw with a hip injury in Canada - where Pegula won the title - and lost her opening match in Ohio.

So they've still played only once, a victory for Pegula last year in San Diego, though do hit together sometimes.

"Every time I practice with her, she just has the ability to just hit aces and rip forehands and backhands, play a really big power game," Pegula said.

"It will be interesting to see how smart I can play and what I can do to combat that."

Other winners on the women's side Saturday included No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, who routed Clara Burel 6-1, 6-1, and No. 13 Daria Kasatkina, who topped Greet Minnen 6-3, 6-4 and will face the Australian Open champion Monday.

Pegula then found herself in a tough test with Svitolina, the No. 26 seed from Ukraine who reached the U.S. Open semifinals in 2019. It was tied 2-2 in the third set before the 29-year-old from Florida broke serve to start a run of four straight games to win the match.

That put her in the fourth round of the U.S. Open for the second time. Pegula had her best result at the tournament in 2022, falling to eventual champion Iga Swiatek in the quarterfinals. She's done that far in each Grand Slam tournament but is still seeking to reach the final four.

"She's been showing great results," Svitolina said.



Bellingham's fifth goal in four games seals Real Madrid comeback

AP ■ BARCELONA

Jude Bellingham appears to be blessed since joining Real Madrid.

The England midfielder had already won over Madrid's faithful with four goals in three away wins to start the season after joining the club this summer. But on Saturday the 20-year-old Bellingham was gifted a fumbled save by Getafe's goalkeeper right in front of the goal, allowing him to tap home a stoppage-time winner and save the hosts from a stumble in their home debut at a newly renovated Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The 2-1 comeback kept Madrid at the top of the Spanish league with a perfect record.

Bellingham said the celebration by Madrid's supporters, which included singing The Beatles classic "Hey Jude," made him tremble with emotion.

"That is the loudest moment I have been in at a stadium and happily it was after my goal," Bellingham said.

"I can't believe it to be honest. When they were singing Hey Jude, I just wanted to turn and listen - my legs were shaking."

"I know that I was brought in for these kinds of moments, and I've just got to keep doing it and making sure the fans go home happy." Madrid lost veteran top scorer Karim Benzema to the emerging Saudi Arabian league this offseason and was able to bring in Joselu Mato only when Kylian Mbappé stayed put at Paris Saint-Germain.

Joselu, whose Espanyol was relegated last season, and Bellingham provided the goals to fight back against a Getafe that went ahead in the 11th when Borja Mayoral poached a bad pass by new Madrid left back Fran Garcia.

Joselu made his first start in place of the injured Vinicius Junior. While Vinicius is a world-class winger with superb dribbling skills, Joselu is a pure striker of the classic mold: A big body who likes to score with his head and prattle the area for a rebound.

That loose ball fell to the Spain striker in the 47th. Getafe held firm until the final minutes when Bellingham took advantage of a spilled save by David Soria to snatch the three points.

Bellingham's five goals in four games, including a double in a 3-1 comeback at Almeria

two weeks ago, lead the league scoring list. That is compared to his eight goals in 31 Bundesliga appearances last season.

Madrid hit the woodwork three times, and Soria kept Getafe in the game with several saves until his error in the final moments cost his team a point.

"We are not surprised by the talent of (Bellingham), but I am surprised that he is scoring so many goals," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Everyone is surprised, even him."

HAIL THE CHAMPIONS
Madrid and Getafe lined up to provide an honor guard for four of Spain's Women's World Cup winners before the game.

Olga Carmona, the scorer in Spain's 1-0 victory over England in the Aug. 20 final, key midfielder Teresa Abelleira, captain Ivana Andrés, and goalkeeper Misa Rodríguez, paraded the Women's World Cup trophy to the center of the field. All four play for Real Madrid.

The victory has been overshadowed by the kiss forced by the president of the Spanish Football Federation on a Spain player during the celebrations.

GREENWOOD AT GETAFE

Getafe is being scrutinized for having acquired forward Mason Greenwood on loan from Manchester United after the English player left his old club following a criminal investigation into a possible attempted rape that was closed by prosecutors.

The deal was announced just before the summer market closed on Friday. The 21-year-old England forward has not played for United since January 2022. Getafe coach José Bordalás said in the post-game news conference, "It is a very delicate situation that is not to be made light of. ... Everyone knows what happened and the measures that were taken. We can only talk about soccer. He is motivated to be here and we will help him recover his best level."

OTHER RESULTS

Japan forward Take Kubo scored twice to help Real Sociedad beat Granada 5-3 and get its first win of the campaign.

William José fired in a free kick for Real Betis to beat Rayo Vallecano 1-0, while Alaves edged Valencia 1-0 thanks to an own goal by defender Cenk Özkaçar.

Monaco routs Lens to move 2 points clear atop French league

AP ■ PARIS

Monaco did not even need goals from its forwards to beat Lens 3-0 at home and move to the top of the French league.

Wissam Ben Yedder failed to add to his league-leading tally of four goals and Takumi Minamino stayed on three, and it hardly mattered on Saturday.

Coach Adi Hütter's free-scoring side has 10 points from four games and was two points clear of second-placed Marseille, which drew at Nantes 1-1 on Friday.

Lens, which finished second last season to qualify for the Champions League, has picked up only one point and club-record signing Elye Wahi was kept quiet up front by Monaco's defense.

Two of Monaco's defenders scored, too, as it reached a healthy 13 goals from four matches.

Wilfried Songo headed in from Caio Henrique's corner in the 24th minute and, after midfielder Aleksandr Golovin turned in a pass from Minamino in the 36th, it was Guillermo Maripan's turn to



head home another pinpoint Henrique corner in the 59th.

In the other match, Brest kept the visiting Rennes attack quiet as the Brittany derby finished 0-0. It was the third straight draw for Rennes, which recruited former Manchester United and Chelsea midfielder Nemanja Matic during the transfer window.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain is at struggling Lyon on Sunday without new signing Randal Kolo Muani, who is nursing a sprained ankle.

Harmanpreet only Indian player to get picked in WBBL overseas draft

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Women's team captain Harmanpreet Kaur was the only Indian player to get picked in the Women's Big Bash League overseas draft, being retained by Melbourne Renegades here on Sunday.

A total of 18 Indian players, including Yastika Bhatia, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma, among others figured in

the inaugural WBBL overseas draft but just one -- Harmanpreet -- got picked.

Placed in the platinum category, Harmanpreet was retained by the Renegades along with Hayley Matthews of the West Indies.

Harmanpreet performed remarkably for the Renegades during the 2021-22 season, scoring 406 runs in 12 innings at an average of 58.00 and a

strike rate of 130.96, including three half-centuries and a top score of 81 not out.

She was also effective with the ball, taking 15 wickets at an economy of 7.45, with best figures of 3 for 22.

Harmanpreet had made her WBBL debut with Sydney Thunder in 2016-17.

Speaking on Harmanpreet's retention, Renegades head coach Simon Helmut stated,

"I'm so pleased we got both of them (Harmanpreet and Hayley) and I'm looking forward to them working with us again this year. It was a tough decision -- do we go Harmanpreet at pick three, or do we go Hayley? Fortunately, it worked out for us that Harmanpreet was still available in the second round, so we could still get her as a Platinum pick."

Harmanpreet's long list of domestic franchise T20 teams include Lancashire Thunder, Supernovas, Manchester Originals and Trent Rockets (The Hundred) and Mumbai Indians (Women's Premier League). The WBBL overseas draft also included Indian players such as Harleen Deol, Hurley Gala, Richa Ghosh, Mannat Kashyap, Amanjot Kaur, Veda Krishnamurthy, Shikha Pandey.

With Mirabai not in race, Worlds set to be underwhelming affair for India

PTI ■ IYADH

Ejected from the Asian Games squad, N Ajith and Achinta Sheuli will have a point to prove while Mirabai Chanu will merely mark her presence by attending the weigh-in at the World Championships, which is a compulsory Paris Olympic qualifier.

Chanu (49kg) has removed herself from medal contention at the marquee event starting here on Monday as the former champion will not be lifting the barbell in order to save her best for the Asian Games, starting later this month.

She will only complete the necessary formalities to remain eligible for the Paris Games.

With Chanu not lifting, the Worlds are set to be an underwhelming affair for her country. No Indian lifter will be in medal contention as none of them have entered a starting weight worthy of Group A classification.

The lifters who register the highest entry weight are placed in group A, followed by B and so on.

Ajith and Sheuli were



unceremoniously dumped from the Asiad squad last month as they didn't meet the Sports Ministry's selection criteria. The two, who compete in the 73kg category, will want to put their best foot forward here.

Ajith, the reigning national champion, has logged in an entry weight of 305kg and has been assigned Group C.

The Commonwealth Championships gold medalist has some niggles but has recovered and will be aiming to close in on the 320kg mark.

"I have been lifting 318kg in training. I want to reach 320kg," Ajith told PTI.

Meanwhile, Sheuli has struggled with injuries since

being crowned the CWG champion last year. His previous Worlds campaign ended in heartbreak as he pulled his hamstring during the warm-ups last year.

The Kolkata lifter is still struggling with a backache and perhaps that's why has registered an entry weight of just 280kg, which is a far cry from his personal best of 313kg, for a place in Group D.

Shubham Todkar (61kg) is the third male lifter from India. The Maharashtra lifter hasn't been at his best in the two international tournaments he has competed in and will be keen to give a better account of himself.

Gukesh aims to keep improving after becoming India No 1 without sponsorship support

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A day after D Gukesh ended his idol Viswanathan Anand's 37-year reign as India's No. 1 chess player, the 17-year-old looked committed and keen as ever to keep "improving" his game.

Gukesh, who is here for the Asian Games camp and an invitational tournament, added on Saturday that he has overcome the disappointment of losing to Norway's Magnus Carlsen in the World Cup quarterfinals recently.

Sounding practical and looking forward to the upcoming events, Gukesh told PTI in an exclusive interaction here that, "It's (loss) already quite some time back, it's fine there are things ahead and I'm focussing on that." For someone, who is without a sponsor and manages his finances through prize money and crowd-funding, Gukesh says the WestBridge Anand Chess Academy has played a huge role in his success ever since he came on board in 2021.

The teenager from Anand's home city Chennai now sits at No. 8 in world rankings with the duo being the only two Indians inside the world's top-10. R Praggnanandhaa, with 2727 points, is No. 3 in India and ranked No. 19 in the world.

The recently-held World Cup in Baku saw an unprecedented four Indians making the quarterfinals out of which Praggnanandhaa grabbed the Candidates spot en route to becoming the youngest runner-up in the history of the tournament at 18 years.

in my career. He has been my biggest hero and idol. I hope he is happy with my achievement.

"I feel good, it's a good achievement and I'm happy about it," he said about becoming India No 1, leapfrogging Anand (Elo 2754) by four points in the latest FIDE rating list that came out on Friday.

"My trainers and WACA (WestBridge Anand Chess Academy) played a huge role in shaping me up for this," added Gukesh, who was the youngest chess player to cross an Elo 2750 surpassing Norway's Carlsen.

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Diksha fights back on back nine but slips to T-3 in Irish Open

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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"(Viswanathan) Anand sir congratulated me; undoubtedly he has played a huge role in my career. He has been my biggest hero and idol. I hope he is happy with my achievement."

"I feel good, it's a good achievement and I'm happy about it," he said about becoming India No 1, leapfrogging Anand (Elo 2754) by four points in the latest FIDE rating list that came out on Friday.

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KL RAHUL IN, SAMSON OUT OF INDIA'S WORLD CUP SQUAD

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Having received a clearance certificate on his fitness from the NCA, KL Rahul is set to be included in India's 15-member provisional World Cup squad, which will be announced by Tuesday. Rahul has been recuperating at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru post a thigh surgery, and he will have one final round of fitness drills before flying out to Sri Lanka to join the Indian team for the ongoing Asia Cup. It is understood that the NCA trainers and the team management have been left with little doubt after Rahul batted extensively at nets and in the match simulation process. India is expected to announce their World Cup-bound 15 within the September 5 cut off date. But the selectors decided to go ahead with the announcement after Rahul received the fitness clearance. He can be expected to keep wickets too in the World Cup. Chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar had reached Pallekele on Saturday, and it is understood that he held discussions with captain Rohit

Sharma and head coach Rahul Dravid post India's match against Pakistan, which was abandoned due to rain.

Ishan Kishan will be the second wicketkeeper in the side and his composed 81 against Pakistan on Saturday was the clincher.

It means that Sanju Samson will miss out on an India berth. Samson is in Sri Lanka with the Indian team as a travelling reserve. Suryakumar Yadav too has found a place in the squad despite his less than satisfactory outings in the ODIs.

Suryakumar could not get going in the ODIs against West Indies (July-August), making just 78 runs from three matches averaging 26.

However, the team management felt that the Mumbaikar can add further meat to the middle-order.

In batting apart from skipper Rohit, players like Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer were automatic picks. Hence, Tilak Varma will have to sit out for the moment.

Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and Mohammed Shami will handle the pace department along with all-rounders Hardik



Pandya and Shardul Thakur. So, Prasidh Krishna, who is part of the India squad for the Asia Cup, will not be featured in the World Cup squad. The spin unit will be led by left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who has been in fine fettle this year. Kuldeep is India's highest wicket-taker in ODIs in

2023, taking 22 wickets in 11 matches. Kuldeep and Ravindra Jadeja will be India's two first-choice spinners. This will be the second World Cup for Kuldeep as he had played 7 matches for India in the 2019 World Cup, picking up 6 wickets in England. The selectors and the man-

agement thought deeply about the third spinner and zeroed in on left-arm spinner Axar Patel, whom they thought will also give a bit more depth in batting if needed. In that context, veterans R Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal, who had plucked 12 wickets from 8 matches in the 2019

World Cup, will miss the cut. India's provisional squad for World Cup 2023: Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (vice-captain), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Kuldeep

Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Axar Patel, Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav. Had Rohit or Virat scored would you have debated KL's inclusion? asks Gambhir. Mumbai, Sep 3 (PTI) Ishan Kishan has "done everything" to earn a place ahead of KL Rahul for the World Cup and the Karnataka batter would not even have been considered if he was competing with Rohit Sharma or Virat Kohli, says Gautam Gambhir.

Kishan scored a crucial 82 to arrest India's slide in their Asia Cup opener against Pakistan on Saturday, a game which was washed out but witnessed the wicketkeeper-batter recording his fourth consecutive ODI fifty.

At No 5, Kishan's knock against Pakistan not only rescued India but made him a firm favourite for the wicket-keeper-batter position ahead of Rahul, who is missing the starting stages of the continental tournament due to an injury. Gambhir said India should prefer "form over name" for the World Cup with the host country's squad expected to be announced by Tuesday. "Tell me something, what is

more important to win a championship - name or form? If Rohit (Sharma) or Virat (Kohli) had scored something similar (four consecutive fifties), would you still say that KL Rahul would replace them?" Gambhir told Disney-Hotstar. "The point is, when you're gearing up to win the World Cup, you don't see the name, you judge by their form. You choose the player who can perform and win you the World Cup," Gambhir said.

The 2007 and 2011 World Cup winner Gambhir said Kishan has done enough to earn a spot in the Indian side. "I feel Ishan Kishan has done everything he needs to do to be a frontrunner," he said.

Just because he is Ishan Kishan and hasn't played a lot of international cricket, you're saying that KL Rahul should play before him," he said. "But if Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma were in place of Ishan Kishan, would KL Rahul be able to replace them? The answer is 'no'," Gambhir added.

Gambhir emphasised on having Kishan ahead of Rahul at No 5, saying their selections could have been debated if the former's runs against Pakistan

Eyeing Super Four berth, India face greenhorns Nepal

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Coming off a washout, India would hope they only have greenhorns Nepal to tackle and not rain as the heavyweights eye a berth in the Super Four of the Asia Cup here on Monday. From Group A, Pakistan have already qualified to the Super Four with 3 points, and India have one point from the washed-out game against their arch-rivals on Saturday. Even in the event of another rain-marred match on the morning, India can advance to the Super Four with two points, but Rohit Sharma's men will certainly not want it that way. India received some encouraging signals from their match against Pakistan, and they would want to build on them ahead of the business end of this tournament and much sterner assays in the waiting. Pakistan pacers Shaheem Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf had reduced India to 66 for 4 by the 15th over. At that point, India's worries might have been accentuated by the fact that they have a jelly middle-order. Ishan Kishan was playing the first match of his career at No. 5 in ODIs and Hardik Pandya never really fitted the bill of a firefighter. However, both Kishan and Pandya overcame their personal predicaments to amass 138 runs for the fifth wicket, cornerstone of India's eventual 266. Kishan was particularly impressive, as his forte is being a dashing top-order batsman. So, there was that hint of doubt whether Kishan would be able to make the necessary adjustments to his batting and approach to suit the No. 5 slot. He excelled on both the counts. As a top-order batter



Kishan was susceptible to pacers who could move the ball around. Instead of trusting his defence, Kishan's method to get out of the cage was being aggressive. But here he had to be defensive. Rauf, Afridi and Naseem Shah tested his fortitude but for once Kishan showed that he can offer a scratch. Nepal do not have the quality of Pakistan, but Kishan would like to have a go at them and add some more runs under his belt to boost his new profile. Similarly, the management will also welcome the composure Pandya showed while playing second fiddle to Kishan, and the seamless shifting of gears the all-rounder did after the left-hander's dismissal. The adaptability and the no-egotistical methods of Pandya would have pleased the think-tank no end. Even though the stuttering effort of their top four - Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer - against Pakistan pacers could be treated as an aberration, the management would want them to get into ODI mode at the earliest.

Rohit and Kohli were rested for the ODIs against the West Indies, while Shreyas Iyer is making his return after an injury lay-off. Nepal might just give the trio the perfect opposition to earn some valuable game time and runs. However, the team top brass might be a tad disappointed because the bowlers never got a chance to test their skills against a quality opponent in Pakistan. They would have been eager to see how Jasprit Bumrah responded to the task of bowling 10 overs and fielding the length of 50 overs. Hence, his performance will be keenly monitored against Nepal. Nepal, who lost to Pakistan by 238 runs in the tournament opener, would be eager to mask their lack of cricketing pedigree with their enthusiasm. Their biggest hope to make some impact in the match will be leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane and captain Rohit Paudel. But in the real world, they will be more than happy to limit the damage to the minimum against a cricketing powerhouse like India.

Bangladesh post 334/5 against Afghanistan in Asia Cup

PTI ■ LAHORE

Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mehidy Hasan Miraz struck centuries to take Bangladesh to 334 for five in their Asia Cup Group B match against Afghanistan here on Sunday. Mehidy, promoted to open the innings, retired hurt at 112 from 119 balls, while Shanto made 104 off 105 balls before he was run out.

Mehidy and Shanto added 194 runs off 190 balls for the third wicket before the former suffered an injury to his hand and had to leave the field. Afghanistan bowlers struggled to make inroads on a flat pitch, with Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Gulbadin Naib taking one wicket each.



Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan won the toss and elected to bat in their Group B match of the Asia Cup against Afghanistan here on Sunday.

Bangladesh made three changes to their playing XI which lost to Sri Lanka in the opening match. They brought in Shamim Hossain, Afif Hossain and Hasan Mahmud in place of Tanzid Hasan, Mahedi Hasan and Mustafizur Rahman. Shakib said the decision to bat first was taken keeping in mind the wicket and the weather conditions. "It looks a good wicket and keeping the weather in mind, it is very hot. We have three changes." On the loss to Sri Lanka in the opening game, he said, "We didn't execute (our

plans) with the bat and that was our downfall, but today is a new day and a good wicket, hopefully we (will) put up a good score on the board." TEAMS: Afghanistan: Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmat Shah, Hashmatullah Shahidi (capt), Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Rashid Khan, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Mujeeb Ur Rahman. Bangladesh: Mohammad Naim, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Shakib Al Hasan (capt), Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Mushfiqur Rahim (wk), Afif Hossain, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Tashfin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud.

Had Rohit or Virat scored would you have debated KL's inclusion? asks Gambhir

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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The 2007 and 2011 World Cup winner Gambhir said Kishan has done enough to earn a spot in the Indian side. "I feel Ishan Kishan has done everything he needs to do to be a frontrunner," he said. "Just because he is Ishan Kishan and hasn't played a lot of international cricket, you're saying that KL Rahul should play before him," he said. "But if Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma were in place of Ishan Kishan, would KL Rahul be able to replace them? The answer is 'no'," Gambhir added. Gambhir emphasised on having Kishan ahead of Rahul at No 5, saying their selections could have been debated if the former's runs against Pakistan had come at the top of the order.

Najam Sethi slams Asia Cup scheduling after Pallekele washout

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Former Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Najam Sethi has slammed the Asia Cup scheduling after the Indo-Pak match washout at Pallekele, saying his suggestion to play in the UAE was turned down and "poor excuses" were made to accommodate Sri Lanka. Sethi, who took over on an interim basis after Ramiz Raja was sacked as PCB chairman last year, expressed his frustration after the much-anticipated game between India and Pakistan was abandoned due to rain on Saturday. Taking a dig at the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), Sethi wrote on X, "How disappointing! Rain mars the greatest contest in cricket. But this was forecast. As PCB Chair, I urged the ACC to play in UAE but poor excuses were made to accommodate Sri Lanka. Too hot in Dubai, they said. But it was as hot when the Asia Cup was played there last time in Sep 2022 or when IPL was played there in April 2014 and Sep 2020. Politics over sport. Unforgivable!" Sri Lanka was added as co-



hosts alongside original tournament hosts Pakistan under a hybrid model after India refused to play their Asia Cup matches across their western border owing to geopolitical tension between the two countries. Under the hybrid model, four games are scheduled in Pakistan, and the rest in Sri Lanka. Last year's Asia Cup was held in the UAE around the same window, but was played

in the T20 format, with matches scheduled in the evening. The Indian Premier League, too, was played in the UAE in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the match on Saturday, only one innings was possible and India were bowled out for 266 in 48.5 overs. There were a couple of stoppages in the Indian innings too, and the toss was also delayed. for the players. In April 2021, Streak was handed an eight-year ban by the International Cricket Council after he was charged with and admitted to breaching five codes of the ICC anti-corruption code, which included payment in bitcoins from a potential corruptor. Streak accepted "full responsibility" of breaching the ICC code but said he was not involved in fixing any matches.

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak passes away

PTI ■ HARARE

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak died on Sunday at the age of 49, his family confirmed on social media. Streak, who played 65 Tests and 189 ODIs for Zimbabwe from 1993-2005, was battling liver cancer for a long time. "In the early hours of this morning, Sunday the 3rd of September 2023, the greatest love of my life and the father of my beautiful children, was carried to be with the Angels from his home where he wished to spend his last days surrounded by his family and closest loved ones," wrote Streak's wife Nadine on Facebook. "He was covered in love and peace and did not walk off the Park alone. Our souls are joined for eternity Streaky. Till I hold you again," Nadine added. A few days ago, former Zimbabwe fast bowler Henry Olonga announced the demise of Streak on social media, only to deny it hours later after a message from his captain, but by then condolence messages by several former cricketers had surfaced. "RIP Streaky," Olonga wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Sunday. In Test cricket, Streak claimed 216 wickets and scored one century - against West Indies - and 11 half-centuries for Zimbabwe. In 189 ODIs, he bagged 239 wickets and made 2,943 runs with 13 fifties. He is the highest wicket-taker for Zimbabwe by a long margin in both Tests and ODIs. In 68 ODIs as captain, he led Zimbabwe to win in 18 and lost 47 while three finished without any result. In 21 Tests, Streak captained Zimbabwe to wins in four while they lost 11 and drew six. When Zimbabwe was under dictator Robert Mugabe's rule, Streak was criticised for not taking a firm political stand like Olonga Flower, and in April 2004 he left the captaincy role as the team went under a challenging phase. He went on to coach several teams including Zimbabwe after his playing days were over and became bowling coach of the national side, followed by a similar role with Bangladesh. Streak was also associated with Indian domestic cricket team Uttar Pradesh and he also worked with Kolkata Knight Riders and Gujarat Lions. He also became Zimbabwe's head coach in October 2016 after replacing Dav Whatmore, tasked to help his national team qualify for the 2019 World Cup in England, which they failed to do. Streak and his coaching staff, including former South Africa cricketer and batting coach Lance Klusener, voluntarily gave up one year's salaries for helping the Zimbabwean cricketers to face the challenge of pay cuts

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