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● Ukrainian mayor: Russian strikes kill at least 7 in Lviv

● Lankan Prez Gotabaya appoints new Cabinet, PM Mahinda only member....

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● Peace prevails in Hubballi, 89 arrested in connection with Sunday's violence

● Dejected opposition parties taking refuge in vote bank, divisive politics: Nadda

HT BRIEFS

KAAC poll expenses fixed

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 18: The maximum limit of Election expenses of each candidate for Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Election, 2022 is fixed at ₹ 4,50,000 for each constituency. It is declared by the Governor of Assam under the Rule 176 of Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 (as amended).

LGBIA adds more connectivity to Bengaluru

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 18: Number of passengers and air traffic movements showing a sharp rise at Guwahati. Within a span of weeks' time, air travelers' number has gone up two fold. In terms of flights, one of the latest additions is the SpiceJet airline. SpiceJet is one of the largest airlines by number of domestic passengers. Recently the airline has launched a new connectivity from Guwahati to Bengaluru on all weekdays. This is one of the latest additions of connectivity at Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport. The passengers from Guwahati to Bengaluru expressed satisfaction over the enhancement of the flight connecting to Bengaluru. SpiceJet is deploying a narrow-body Boeing aircraft with single class configuration offering 144 seats in economy class. It will be operated on all weekly days. The inward sector Flight SG- 328 departs Guwahati at 09:45 hours in the morning to Bengaluru and SG- 327 departs Bengaluru at 06:05 hours to Guwahati on every day. However, SpiceJet started to operate the route effective from 11th April, 2022.

One held for possessing suspected heroin

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, April 18: One person identified as Dip Das, a resident of Tarajan Sonari Gaon under Jorhat police station was arrested on Monday and 7.5 gm's of suspected heroin, a smartphone and a two-wheeler was seized from his possession. A police source said that based on specific information Dip Das was nabbed by a team of policemen led by the OC, Jorhat police station.

Doctors' stir affects health services in Nagaland

KOHIMA, April 18 (PTI): Health services in government hospitals of Nagaland were affected on Monday as doctors started a three-day agitation demanding that their retirement age be increased by two years.

Members of the Nagaland in-Service Doctors' Association (NIDA) have taken mass casual leaves to press their demand for increase in the superannuation age of government medical practitioners from 60 to 62 years.

The NIDA's demand is under consideration by the state government but no final decision could be arrived at as there are oppositions to it from certain quarters, chief secretary J Alam told PTI.

The agitation has affected services in the Out Patients' Department (OPD) in government hospitals and health centres across the state, but the emergency department and ICUs were open, NIDA said in a

statement. Senior doctors will be available round the clock to attend to any emergency during the period of agitation, it said adding that Covid-19 vaccination and tests were not affected.

The demand is in line with the promise Prime Minister Narendra Modi made in 2016, the NIDA said.

The organisation said it is forced to take this step as the state government has failed to solve the issue in a year. Doctors in Dimapur district hospital said they attended to emergency cases but not OPD patients.

The state government had earlier cautioned the agitating doctors that action would be taken against them. On the first day of the agitation, administrations of Kohima and Dimapur districts sought help of private practitioners for the treatment of patients, official sources said.

The chief secretary said that the state (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

ASDC delegation submits memo to CM

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 18: During chief minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma's visit to Diphu, a three-member delegation of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) comprising its president Chandra Kanta Terang, general secretary Jotson Bey and propaganda secretary Daniel Teron on April 16 submitted a memorandum to Dr. Sarma on three main points - autonomous state, eco-sensitive zone and interstate border issue.

This was informed to the media by party president Chandra Kanta Terang during a press conference held here at ASDC central committee office on Monday.

Terang said a memorandum was submitted to CM Dr. Sarma during his visit to Diphu on April 16, on three main points i.e. the issue of Autonomous State as per article 244(A) of the Indian constitution, solution on the border issue with Meghalaya (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



lowest level of 0.8 per cent during the pandemic-hit 2020.

"We find that extreme poverty in India has declined by 12.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2019 but at a rate that is significantly lower than observed over the 2004-

2011 period. "Poverty reduction rates in rural areas are higher than in urban areas," said the paper titled 'Poverty in India Has Declined over the Last Decade But Not As Much As Previously Thought'. The authors further said urban

Lakhimpur Kheri case: SC cancels bail granted to Ashish Mishra

'Tearing hurry' shown by Allahabad HC with a 'myopic view' of evidence

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Monday cancelled the bail granted to Union minister Ajay Mishra's son Ashish Mishra in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence case and asked him to surrender in a week, observing the Allahabad High Court had shown "tearing hurry" in giving relief and adopted a "myopic view of the evidence".

The top court also said the 'victims' were denied "a fair and effective hearing" in the high court, noting that a 'victim' has unbridled participatory rights from the stage of investigation till the culmination of the proceedings in an appeal or revision.

Holding that the high court order cannot be sustained and deserved to be set aside, the top court termed the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, if true as per allegations, as "an awakening call" to the state authorities to reinforce adequate protec-

tion for the life, liberty, and properties of the eye/injured witnesses, as well as for the families of the deceased. While the Congress attacked the government after the verdict and asked when will Prime Minister Narendra Modi sack Ajay Mishra, the Union minister of state for Home, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said the court decision has given hope of justice to farmers.

On October 3 last year, eight people were killed in Lakhimpur Kheri during the violence that erupted when farmers were protesting against Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's visit to the area.

Four farmers were mowed down by an SUV, in which Ashish Mishra was seated, according to the UP Police FIR. Following the incident, the driver and two BJP workers were allegedly lynched by angry farmers. A journalist also



died in the violence that had triggered outrage among opposition parties and farmer groups agitating over the Centre's now-repealed agricultural reform laws ahead of the Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh and four other states.

Family members of the deceased farmers had challenged the Febru-

ary 10 order of a single-judge bench of the high court giving bail to Ashish Mishra, who had spent four months in custody. Ashish Mishra is the main accused in the case. The top court dealt in detail with the rights of victims in criminal cases and said they are "totally independent, incomparable, and

are not accessory or auxiliary to those of the state" under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

"We are, thus, of the view that this court on account of the factors like (i) irrelevant considerations having impacted the impugned order granting bail; (ii) the High Court exceeding its jurisdiction by touching upon the merits of the case; (iii) denial of victims' right to participate in the proceedings; and (iv) the tearing hurry shown by the High Court in entertaining or granting bail to the respondent/accused; can rightfully cancel the bail, without depriving the Respondent-Accused (Mishra) of his legitimate right to seek enlargement on bail on relevant considerations," said a bench of Chief Justice N V Ramana and justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli.

Writing the 24-page judgement, Justice Surya Kant asked the high court to decide (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Hailstorm claims one in Titabar

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 18: A woman of Kesaikhati village of Titabar Civil Sub-division of Jorhat district died when her kaccha house collapsed reportedly due to a severe hailstorm passing over the area late on Sunday night.

A DDMA official said that the woman was identified as Maikon Mura (aged about 62 years). The official said that altogether 324 houses (Mostly kaccha) were partially damaged and some badly damaged in the storm under Titabar Revenue Circle. The official added that few electricity posts too were hit by the storm.

Meanwhile, the villagers of Kesaikhati have urged the government authorities to build a house for the family of the deceased and provide relief as the family was impoverished.

Pakistan court sentences 6 people to death for lynching Sri Lankan national

LAHORE, April 18 (PTI): An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan's Punjab province on Monday sentenced six people to death and nine others to life imprisonment for their involvement in the lynching of a Sri Lankan national over alleged blasphemy.

Anti-Terrorism Court Lahore Judge Natasha Nasim also handed down two-year rigorous imprisonment each to 72 accused persons, including nine juveniles.

The judge, who held the trial proceedings in-camera inside the high-security Kot Lakhpat Jail here on a day-to-day basis, sentenced one accused - Ali Asghar - to 5 years in jail while acquitted another suspect - identified as Bilal.

A mob of over 800 men including supporters of radical Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan allegedly attacked a garment fac-

tory and lynched its general manager Priyantha Kumara, 47, and burned his body over allegations of blasphemy on December 3, in Sialkot district, some 100 kms from provincial capital Lahore.

The incident saw widespread outrage and condemnation across Pakistan with politicians, scholars and civil society members calling for swift punishment to be meted out to the perpetrators.

"Of the total 89 suspects, the ATC today announced its verdict handing down death sentence to six, life imprisonment to nine and two years jail term each to remaining 72 accused for their involvement in lynching and burning the Sri Lankan national," a court official said in a statement issued to the media. The judge also instructed the six prime suspects, who were (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

ED attaches assets worth over ₹ 757 cr of Amway India in money-laundering probe

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth over ₹ 757 crore of one of the country's most known multi-level marketing (MLM) and direct-selling companies, Amway India, as part of a money-laundering investigation. The federal agency issued a statement on Monday, alleging that the company was perpetrating a "scam" by running a pyramid "fraud" in the guise of direct-selling MLM network.

"The entire focus of the company is about propagating how members can become rich by becoming members. There is no focus on the products."

"Products are used to masquerade this MLM pyramid fraud as a direct-selling company," the ED alleged. An Amway spokesperson said they are cooperating with the



authorities "towards a fair legal, and logical conclusion of the outstanding issues".

The ED issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for attachment of assets worth ₹ 757.77 crore belonging to Amway India Enterprises Private Limited.

It said the company is accused of "running a multi-level market-

ing scam". The attached properties include land and factory buildings of Amway located in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, plant and machineries, vehicles, bank accounts and fixed deposits.

Of the total attachment value, immovable and movable properties are worth ₹ 411.83 crore, while the remaining amount of ₹ 345.94 crore is deposited in 36 bank ac-

counts "belonging" to Amway, the agency said.

Amway said the ED action was with regard to an investigation dating back to 2011 and since then, the company has been cooperating with the agency and has shared all the information sought by it from time to time. "Amway has a rich history of maintaining the highest levels of probity, integrity, corporate governance and consumer protection, which are much ahead of time in the interest of the consumers at large," the spokesperson said. Officials involved in the probe said the company had been operating in the country for years and many people were linked to its MLM scheme.

The agency said the company collected a total amount of ₹ 27,562 crore from its business operations (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Extreme poverty in India declined by 12.3 percentage points during 2011-19: WB paper

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): Extreme poverty in India declined by 12.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2019, with rural areas doing better than urban centres, according to a working paper of the World Bank.

India has not released a new household consumption survey since the NSS from 2011. By extension, the country has not released any official estimates of poverty and inequality for over a decade now, added the paper co-authored by economists Sushanta Sinha Roy and Roy van der Weide.

Earlier, a working paper of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had said the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKAY), which provides free foodgrains to the poor, played a key role in keeping extreme poverty in India at the

poverty rose by 2 percentage points in 2016 during the demonetisation event and fell sharply thereafter. Rural poverty rose by 10 basis points in 2019 likely due to a growth slowdown.

"Our estimates of poverty for recent periods are more conservative than earlier projections based on consumption growth in national accounts and other survey data," the paper said.

The paper further said the extent of poverty reduction during 2015-2019 is estimated to be notably lower than earlier projections based on growth in private final consumption expenditure reported in national account statistics. The authors also said there was no evidence of rising consumption inequality in their analysis. The paper noted (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

MISSING!

RS. 10000/- reward to the informer, Missing from Rongtheang A, Diphu

A Labrador dog gone missing from Rongpi hem residence of Rongtheang A, Diphu. If you find contact: 7002542879

Sensex sinks 1,172 pts as Infosys, HDFC Bank tumble post Q4 show



MUMBAI, April 18 (PTI): The Sensex plunged 1,172 points while the Nifty crashed below the 17,200-level on Monday, hammered by robust selling in market heavyweights Infosys and HDFC Bank following their below-estimate results.

A weakening rupee and lacklustre macroeconomic data added to the woes, traders said.

Resuming trade after a two-day holiday last week, the BSE Sensex tumbled 1,172.19 points or 2.01 per cent to settle at 57,166.74 -- marking its fourth straight session of loss.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty plunged 302 points or 1.73 per cent to 17,173.65.

Infosys was the top loser in the Sensex pack, plummeting 7.27 per cent, after the country's second-largest software services company posted a 12 per cent rise in its March quarter net profit, missing market estimates.

HDFC Bank lost 4.74 per cent after the largest private sector lender on Saturday reported a 23 per cent jump in Q4 standalone net profit, led by lower provisions, even as other metrics like net interest income came in below expectations.

HDFC, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, TCS and HCL Tech were the other major laggards. In contrast, NTPC, Tata Steel, Maruti, Titan, HUL, M&M and Nestle India were among the gainers, spurring as much as 6.11 per cent.

The market breadth was negative, with 20 of the 30 Sensex constituents closing in the red.

"After a long weekend, we witnessed a huge fall of 2 per cent in the benchmark index. The fall was mainly on account of below estimated results of Infosys and HDFC Bank and the rising tension between Russia and Ukraine.

"We expect further fall in markets in coming days considering the recent rise of Covid cases in

WPI inflation hits 4-month high of 14.55 pc in Mar as crude, commodity prices spike

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): The wholesale price-based inflation spiked to a four-month high of 14.55 per cent in March on rising prices of crude oil and other commodities due to disruption in global supply chain in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, a development that may prompt the RBI to raise interest rates to contain price rise.

In February, WPI Inflation was at 13.11 per cent, while in March last year, it was 7.89 per cent.

WPI inflation has remained in double digits for the 12th consecutive month since April 2021.

In November 2021, it had touched a high of 14.87 per cent.

The data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry on Monday, showed that crude oil prices were the biggest contributor to the rise in WPI inflation in March 2022, relative to February, followed by fuels and core items.

Food articles witnessed some softening month-on-month led by vegetables and pulses, even though wheat, paddy, potato, milk, egg, meat and the fish basket saw moderate increases during March.

During March, inflation in food articles eased to 8.06 per cent, from 8.19 per cent in February. Vegetable inflation was 19.88 per



cent in the month under review, as against 26.93 per cent in February.

"The high rate of inflation in March, 2022 is primarily due to rise in prices of crude petroleum and natural gas, mineral oils, basic metals, etc., owing to disruption in the global supply chain caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

Inflation in manufactured items was 10.71 per cent in March, as against 9.84 per cent in February.

In the fuel and power basket, the rate of price rise was 34.52 per

cent during the month under review, against 31.50 per cent in February. Oil companies had begun to pass on the high import cost of global crude oil prices by hiking domestic petrol and diesel prices from March 22 -- ending a four-and-half-month long hiatus. Besides, domestic cooking gas (LPG) prices were hiked during the month. India is dependent on imports to meet 85 per cent of its oil needs and so retail rates adjust accordingly to the global movement. In March, inflation in crude petroleum spiked to 83.56 per cent, from 55.17 per

cent during February. Crude oil prices had mostly been on rise in March, after Russia started the invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said even a normal monsoon may not be enough to douse the retail prices of items which are pushing up food inflation, such as edible oils. ICRA expects the WPI inflation to remain in the range of 13.5-15 per cent in the current month, partly depending on where crude oil prices settle in the rest of April 2022 and how much petrol and diesel prices are revised further.

"The broad-based nature of the rise in WPI inflation is likely to be of particular concern to the Monetary Policy Committee. We see a growing probability of the first repo hike being postponed to June 2022," Nayar said.

Acuité Ratings & Research chief analytics officer, Suman Chowdhury said the WPI data reinforces the presence of stronger inflationary pressures in the manufacturing and the services sector.

"Amidst increasing pressures on the profit margins of manufacturing companies and a pickup in consumption demand, Acuité expects a further pass through of input costs. We expect persistent

supply side bottlenecks and high commodity prices to hold the core inflation at double-digit levels in the near-term," Chowdhury said.

Retail inflation, which is monitored by the RBI to fix interest rates, spiked to 6.95 per cent in March -- the third consecutive month that the consumer price index has breached the RBI's tolerance limit of 6 per cent, data released last week showed.

The Reserve Bank earlier this month kept its key repo rate - at which it lends short-term money to banks - unchanged for the 11th time in a row at 4 per cent, to support growth.

CRCL LLP, CEO and Managing Partner, D R E Reddy said, faster growth in prices is bound to harden inflation expectations going forward. This has the potential of creating a vicious cycle of inflation and inflationary expectations feeding into and off each other, he said.

Earlier this month, the RBI raised the retail inflation projection for the current financial year to 5.7 per cent, from earlier forecast of 4.5 per cent. In wake of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the prices of crude oil as well as edible oil will likely remain elevated.

MediaTek set to enable enhanced 5G experiences across devices

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 18: MediaTek is enabling enhanced 5G experiences across the smart device ecosystem in India including smartphones, smart devices, gaming, and connectivity solutions. The company is geared up to facilitate a rise to the incredible, with its array of flagship 5G chips under the MediaTek Dimensity family, including Dimensity 9000, 8000, and 8100. To further expand customer outreach in the premium smartphone category, MediaTek has collaborated with almost all the popular OEMs in India. MediaTek also reiterated its commitment to deliver customized, power-efficient, and innovative 5G experiences, powered by the innovative Dimensity 5G Open Resource Architecture, which offers OEMs closer-to-metal access on 5G chips. The company is also keen on enabling disruptive technologies and boosting R&D capabilities to further expand its India footprint over the next few years. With 5G likely to be deployed soon, MediaTek is upbeat on 5G prospects in India and is offering solutions aimed at enabling the entire smart device ecosystem. The streamlined vision was announced on the sidelines of the 10th Chapter of MediaTek Technology Diaries - "Rise to Incredible with MediaTek Flagship".

"Auto-connectivity & 5G is driving new-age technology adoption across the eco-system. This is not only making electronic devices more interesting but also enabling seamless experiences for customers. With a comprehensive portfolio including gaming, automobiles, connectivity, smartphones, tablets, optical drives, AR/VR solutions, Chromebooks, and cloud computing, India is one of the biggest growth markets today. We are collaborating closely with our OEMs to create incredible experiences and flagship solutions based on the diverse and changing customer demands and requirements," said Anku Jain, managing director, MediaTek India. Rituparna Mandal, general manager, MediaTek Bangalore added, "MediaTek Dimensity 5G chips are leading the global technology domain and MediaTek Dimensity 9000 is the world's first 4nm TSMC 5G Mobile SoC, taking 5G experiences to the next level.

Mahindra Lifespace buys 11.5 acres of land in Pune

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): Realty firm Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd on Monday said it has acquired 11.5 acres of land in Pune to develop a residential project, which is projected to generate sales value of ₹ 1,700 crore.

The land has been acquired in the developing micro market of Pimpri in Pune.

"The land is estimated to have a developable potential of approximately 2 million square feet of saleable area and a Gross Development Value of around Rs 1,700 crore," it said in a regulatory filing.

Pimpri is one of the thriving hubs of Pune with a growing demand for high-quality residential and commercial spaces, Arvind Subramanian, managing director & CEO of Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd, said.

"This latest land acquisition will be our fifth project in the micro-market. It comes on the heels of the acquisition of 3.26 acres that we concluded in March 2022 and signals our intent to deepen our presence in the locality," he said.



Mahindra Lifespace expects to launch the first phase of the project within the next 12 months.

Established in 1994, Mahindra Lifespace's development footprint spans 28.2 million square feet of completed, ongoing and forthcoming residential projects across 7 Indian cities. It has over 5,000 acres of ongoing and forthcoming projects under development/management at its integrated developments/industrial clusters

across 4 locations. Last week, Mahindra Lifespace, the realty arm of Mahindra Group, announced an investment of ₹ 500 crore to develop the country's first net-zero energy housing project, comprising around 550 units, in Bengaluru. The company expects revenue of ₹ 600-650 crore from this project.

The company had also announced that it will develop only net-zero housing projects from 2030 onwards.

UK India Business Council meets M'laya minister James Sangma

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 18: The UK India Business Council met with the Government of Meghalaya Cabinet minister James Sangma and several UK businesses to discuss the online gaming and sports betting landscape in the state. It also launched the UKIBC's industry report: Gaming for Growth -- India's Sports and Gaming Market Potential.

The UKIBC's Gaming Industry Index reveals Meghalaya to be the most gaming-friendly State in India. The Index measures the extent to which each state has legalised gaming and betting based on their stance on seven different games: lottery, horse racing, sports betting, poker, rummy, casino, and fantasy sports. Meghalaya scored 92.85 (on a scale of 0 to 100 where 100 is fully legalized) with licenses applicable in all seven games in both states.

UK India Business Council, through its report, reveals how a clearer approach to regulation would attract FDI; create jobs and growth; combat corruption; enhance the integrity of sport; increase the tax revenue in the state, and support the state's wider tourism sector. The report further proposes a series of recommendations to capture the large and growing opportunities for India to benefit from the sector's growth.

UKIBC managing director, Kevin McCole, said,

"We applaud the Government of Meghalaya on its forward-thinking approach to the license of games of chance in the state, which will help to contribute greater revenues and bring jobs to the state. A regulated market also provides safeguards and protection for players, safeguards that are not available in the unregulated sector. Both the unregulated and regulated gaming sectors in India will continue to grow significantly. There are therefore strong reasons to work towards this growth taking place under regulations. To do so, we recommend the Government of India adopt the Law Commission's 2018 recommendation that sports betting be regulated. Not least because it will attract FDI, stimulate domestic investment, create jobs, generate government revenue, tackle corruption, and enable responsible playing."

In its report, the UKIBC makes several recommendations regarding the legalization and regulation of the gaming market across India in line with the Law Commission's 2018 recommendations. It also contends that the gaming market is regulated centrally to bring uniformity to the sector.

Each state can then decide whether it wants to be a state to allow gaming and to what extent, therefore retaining a suitable degree of autonomy.

Yamaha launches YZF-R15M World GP 60th anniversary edition

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 18: India Yamaha Motor (IYM) Pvt Ltd launched the World GP 60th Anniversary Edition of its flagship 155cc supersport motorcycle, the YZF-R15M. With the launch of this edition, the already desirable YZF-R15M has got even more enticing with the iconic white and red 'speed block' colour scheme which includes the gold Alloy wheels, Yamaha factory race-bike gold Tuning Fork emblems, black levers, and special commemorative badging on the Fuel Tank.

Notably, this YZF-R15M World GP 60th Anniversary Edition has been launched at ₹ 1,88,300 (ex-showroom, Delhi) and marks the company's association with the premier series of motorcycle road racing since 1961. It offers a tribute to Yamaha's passion for racing and honours the challenging spirit of Yamaha riders over the past 60 years. It stands as a reminder of Yamaha's first-ever Grand Prix race along with the company's commitment to take on challenges going forward. The YZF-R15M World GP 60th Anniversary Edition is powered by a 155cc, 4-stroke, liquid-cooled, SOHC, 4-valve engine that produces a maximum power of 18.4 PS at 10,000rpm, with a torque output of 14.2 Nm at 7,500rpm. The fuel-injected motor with Variable Valve Actuation (VVA) is mated to a 6-speed gearbox. Speaking on the occasion, Eishin Chihana, chairman, Yamaha Motor India Group of Companies said, "The YZF-R15M in the WGP 60th anniversary livery is more than just a reminder of our racing legacy, it's a milestone showcasing more than 500 World Grand Prix wins that Yamaha has achieved since 1961. It's a symbol of our unrivaled passion for racing, our belief in the power of the sport, and our commitment to support, safeguard and encourage the motorsports culture as a member of the Grand Prix paddock.

Maruti Suzuki hikes vehicle prices by up to 1.9 pc to offset impact of rising input costs

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Monday said it has increased prices of its entire model range, between 0.9 per cent to 1.9 per cent, with immediate effect. The company, which currently sells a range of vehicles from Alto to S-Cross, said it has taken the decision to hike prices due to an increase in input costs.

The weighted average price rise, with effect from April 18, in ex-showroom prices (New Delhi) across models is 1.3 per cent, it added. MSI has already hiked vehicle prices by around 8.8 per cent from January 2021 to March 2022, owing to constant increase in input costs. Over the past year, the cost of the company's vehicles continues to be adversely impacted due to increase in various input costs, the auto major had stated in regulatory filing earlier this month.

With prices of various essential commodities like steel, copper, aluminium and precious metals going up, automakers have been hiking prices on a regular basis to offset the impact. Last week Mahindra & Mahindra hiked vehicle prices by 2.5 per cent, entailing an increase of up to ₹ 63,000.

NAME CHANGE

I, Mr. Kishor Kumar Chetry, S/o Dil Bahadur Chetry, residence of Bagisadubi, P.O. Dayangmukh and P.S., Kheroni, district West Karbi Anglong, do hereby declare that I have change my name from Keshab Kumar Kharka Chetry to Kishor Kumar Chetry and my date of birth from 17/01/1984 to 20/08/1984.

This will be in use for all occasions and official purposes.

LOST

I have lost my original documents which include Admit cards, Mark Sheets of Matric and Higher Secondary, Caste Certificate and pass certificates were lost at Chutianala Complex on 23rd February, when I was there to appear for my physical test for Police interview.

If any person finding the same may kindly contact at the address mentioned below. Sanjib Deka Dharamnala, Diphu, Karbi Anglong. Contact No. 91 8472086629.

NAME CHANGE

I, Mr. Sanjib Chetry, S/o Durga Bahadur Chetry, residence of 1 No. Belbari, P.O. Malloo & P.S., Kheroni, district West Karbi Anglong, do hereby declare that I have change my name from Sanjib Adhikari to Sanjib Chetry and my date of birth i.e. 10/02/1990 to 27/01/1993.

This will be in use for all official purposes.

LOST

I have lost my original registration certificate and Admit Card of Higher Secondary final year of 2020 batch of Don Bosco Junior College, Manja 6th Miles. The documents were lost somewhere around at Doloni in West Karbi Anglong on 15th April, 2022.

If any person or persons finding the same may kindly contact at the address mentioned below.

Name: Sarsing Bey S/o Robi Bey Village: Doloni Teron Village, District West Karbi Anglong. P.O. Juljuri, P.S., Baithalangso, West Karbi Anglong. Contact No. 60011-85467/60003-54595.

Actor Debashree Gogoi launches OPPO F21 Pro

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 18: OPPO launched the all-new OPPO F21 Pro mobile in the Guwahati market with special guest actor Debashree Gogoi unboxing the smartphone at OPPO Exclusive Showroom at City Center. Company official Anishuz Zaman Zonal sales manager; Sandeep Choudhury Showroom & LFR Head and the OPPO showroom team were also present during the launch. Speaking on the occasion, Gogoi said, "OPPO has always been one of the most preferable, loved, innovative and stylish brands in the smartphone and IoT products category. Also, it boasts of super after-sale service. It comes with Flagship IMX709 Ultra-Sensing Selfie with AI Portrait Enhancement, Flat-edged Fiberglass-Leather Design, also First Microleds with Orbit Light, and Up-to 13GB RAM+128GB ROM. This is a perfect combination for youngsters and women alike. I hope people of Assam and North-East will like this phone."

Growth opportunities will result Indian renewable companies highly leveraged: S&P Global Ratings

CHENNAI, April 18 (IANS): Global credit rating agency S&P Global Ratings on Monday said the Indian renewable energy sector will be highly leveraged owing to the growth opportunities.

In its new report "India Renewables: Growth Trumps Deleveraging" S&P Global Ratings said the multi-decade growth opportunities for renewable energy in India will result in persistently high leverage across the sector.

"Weaker operating performance, delayed receivables collections and high capital expenditure will weigh on credit profiles for Indian renewables," said S&P Global Ratings analyst Abhishek Dangra.

"This is despite good industry fundamentals. Renewables are economically competitive with



traditional fuels and benefit from ambitious energy-transition targets in India," Dangra added.

According to S&P Global Ratings, its report also addresses a number of myths that persist for Indian renewable projects. For example, wind and solar power gen-

eration can be unreliable, if weather conditions are not conducive.

Assumptions on output can be too optimistic, leading to misses on cash flow.

"Even the most conservative generation-probabilities were

missed more than 40 per cent of the time, based on our analysis of operating performance for individual projects of rated companies from 2016 to 2021. As a result, cash flows can be 10 per cent-17 per cent lower than management estimates," the rating agency said. Receivables will remain stretched for the industry. This is because the sector is reliant on state distribution companies, which frequently delay payments due to weak financial health.

"Strong financial sponsors and equity-financing opportunities have led some investors to assume that this sector will be able to improve their ratios of income to debt," said Dangra.

"However, in our view, fresh equity will be spent on growth not deleveraging," he added.

Former Assam CM Bhumidhar Barman remembered



HT Correspondent
NALBARI, April 18: Tributes were paid to Bhumidhar Barman, former chief minister of Assam on his first death anniversary on Monday at Belsor village in Nalbari district. On the occasion, while inaugurating the statue of Bhumidhar Barman installed at Bhakratram Sishu Udyan, famous educationist and writer Dr. Dayananda Pathak explained that Barman was a friend of poor people and was very famous among the masses. In the meeting, a souvenir namely 'Dinabandhu' was inaugurated by noted senior journalist Haidar Hussain.

Hussain explained about the colourful life of Barman. Speaking in the meeting, Naresh Kalita,

editor Niomiya Barta said that Barman was not only a political figure but he was also a popular name in work culture. Abdul Khalek, veteran member of Lok Sabha said that the lifestyle of Barman was in itself a lesson in how to remain true to one's roots. Opposition leader Debabrata Saikia also added that Barman was a very faithful person and he was determined in the rules of his own political party's idea though he faced many obstacles in life but progressed by solving public grievances smoothly. In the meeting, Ramani Barman, former education minister; Dr Pramod Haloi, president district senior citizen organisation spoke about the life of Bhumidhar Barman.

163rd birth anniversary of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma observed

Contributions of the social and religious reformer towards the Bodo society remembered

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 18: The 163rd birth anniversary of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was celebrated with a day-long programme by the Bodoland Territorial Council in collaboration with Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Trust here at the premises of Bodoland University on Monday. The programme started with the offering of Yogya Ahuti by Simen Basumatary, secretary of All Brahma Dharma Prasar Sansad followed by unveiling of statue of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma installed at Bodoland University, Kokrajhar by CEM Pramod Boro, who attended the programme as the chief guest. He paid rich floral tributes to Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the presence of priests, trustees of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Trust, devotees of Brahma Dharma and dignitaries of BTC and Bodoland University. During his speech in the open session, CEM Pramod Boro expressed his gratitude to Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Trust for installing Gurudev's statue at Bodoland University as he hoped with the installation of the statue of such great human being in such a pre-



miere location, the upcoming generation would know about him well and get inspired. He asked all trustees of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and authorities of Bodoland University in order to arrange some source of information in form of booklets about Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma at the statue site so that people could learn about his life history and his contribution towards the Bodo society.

"We are very lucky to have such a great spiritual leader like Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in our Bodo society, because without

his teaching we wouldn't be able to imagine today's transformed Bodo society," Boro said. Boro further stressed for creating literature on the deeds and contribution of all spiritual leaders of Bodo society.

He also informed about the decision taken by his BTC government for construction of Bodoland Digital Literature Archive and Bodoland Digital Cultural Archive to keep records of great personalities and cultural activities at Bodofa Cultural Complex, Kokrajhar within this year, along with Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Digital Archive at Kaji-gaon. The Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Biswajit Daimary, who also attended the programme as appointed speaker said that the present condition of Bodo society was because of the sacrifice and contribution made by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the preacher of Brahma Dharma among the Bodo people. He taught how to live life through the teachings of Brahma Dharma and the importance of a good society.

Recalling the life histories, sacrifices and contributions of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma

and Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, he called them 'Mahapurush' for the Bodo community. He called upon all religious groups of the Bodo community to unite with each other by ignoring differences of faith and belief in the interest of their community. He also requested the BTC government to give importance to the development of Kaji-gaon Brahma Dharma Sevashram, Rawmari Brahma Dharma Sevashram and Goalpara Brahma Dharma Sevashram and to make a documentary film on Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. On the occasion, Manaranjan Brahma was presented Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Award 2022 with a citation and a cash amount of ₹ 50,000 by Pramod Boro. The programme inaugurated by Urkhao Gwra Brahma, minister of Handloom and Textiles, Soil Conservation was also attended by MLA Lawrence Isary, Mihiniswar Brahma, chief executive member of Bodo Kochary Welfare Development Council, BTC executive member Ranjit Basumatary, MCLAs Bijit Gwra Narzary and Ranen Basumatary, prof Laishram Ladusingh, VC of Bodoland University and a host of dignitaries.

MP Rajdeep Roy demands IB office in Silchar to thwart illegal activities

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, April 18: During the recently-held budget session of Parliament, Silchar MP Rajdeep Roy spoke on various ongoing illegal activities along the India-Bangladesh border and placed a demand before the Centre for the setting up of an Intelligence Bureau (IB) office in Silchar. Elaborating on the issue, Rajdeep convened a media conference in Silchar on Saturday in which he told media persons about the demand and its importance. Rajdeep claimed that Barak Valley has turned into a 'breeding ground' of Maoists and necessary action needs to be taken for a crackdown on the seditious activities. Setting up of an IB office under the supervision of an IPS officer will immensely help in reducing the activities and other crimes, Rajdeep said.

He said, "There are international borders in Barak Valley. Along the bordering areas, anti-national/seditious activities and smuggling take place from time to time. Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Modiji and Home minister Amit Shah ji, I am certain that such anti-national activities will be put to rest for good." The MP spoke about the Greenfield airport and



said, "A particular group has been constantly trying to derail this project for their own vested interests." He, however, made it clear that his government would not compromise with the development of this region.

It needs to be mentioned here that in the last state cabinet meeting, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that the process of acquisition of land for the new airport (in Silchar) in Dolu had been completed and the land would be handed over to the civil aviation ministry by May 10. Dr Roy during the press briefing also highlighted the various germane issues raised by

him during the recently concluded Budget Session of the Parliament. He informed that he has raised the issue of construction of flyovers in areas where there are still unmanned railway crossings. He stated that the Railway minister has given a positive assurance in this matter.

As regards the uncompleted portion of the Mahasadak, MP Dr Rajdeep Roy said that in response to his letter written to Union minister Nitin Gadkari seeking his intervention into the completion of this project, the minister took the matter on a war footing and sanctioned the required amount for this. He said, "I have received a letter from Nitin Gadkari ji in response to my letter dt 21.12.2021 letting me know that the LoA has been issued on 10.3.2022 for construction of 4-lane between Harangajoi to Narimbunglo via Jatinga (50 km approx) under NHAI at an estimated cost of 1,674 crore. This is a major forward development for the completion of the last remaining part of the MAHASADAK (4-lane Expressway) connecting Silchar to Guwahati. I wholeheartedly thank Nitin ji for his visionary leadership in developing infrastructure in this land-locked Barak Valley."

Senior citizens honoured on 'Nijor Din'

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, April 18: Rangpur Sahitya Sabha felicitated Makonprabha Singha, Chandraprabha Dutta, Nilmoni Mahanta, Ganga Pd Borgohain, Ajit Borpujari, Bulu Baruah, Gukul Bora and Nira Barua on Sahitya Sabha's 'Nijor din' programme on the day of Pratham Bohag (April 14) by a team consisting of Mukul Nath, Kalpona Kotoky, Janam Khanikar, Uzzal Thakur, Jintu Saikia and Snigdha Barua Thakur. Srijoni Sahitya Sabha honoured Amulya Saikia, Putola Begum, Sadori Begum, Hamida Khatun and Hiramani Begum. Ranggha Sahitya Sabha felicitated Sayd Kabir Ahmed, Newton Benet, Nazrul Islam Hazarika, Firzuddin Ahmed, Hasna Begum, Abdus Jaman, Rajak Islam Hazarika and Ibrahim Ali. Sivasagar Rupohi Sahitya Sabha felicitated Sarbeswar Gogoi, Puwal Gogoi, Pulin Rajkhowa, Srikant Gogoi, Pulin Das, Deben Dutta, Niren Saikia, Govinda Das, Fuleswar Das and Bud-dheswar Kalita. Jaysagar Sahitya Sabha felicitated Naren Gogoi, Bhogeswar Neog, Bhugeshwar Barua, Dipti Bhunya and Nayantra Saikia.

Sarat Kr Jain nominated as ICC chairman of Assam state council

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 18: Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the leading and only national chamber of commerce operating from Eastern India. Headquartered in Kolkata, it is one of the most pro-active and forward-looking chambers in the country today. Its membership spans some of the most prominent and major industrial groups in India. Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has initiated the formation of ICC North-East Level State Committees and ICC Regional level Sectoral Committees. As the pioneers for promotion of trade, commerce, industry & economy in North East, ICC North East Committee provides its members with an opportunity to continue to shape the industry in North East India, breaking new grounds while deriving value from the traditional territory to contribute in the plan of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar North East'. Sarat Kr Jain, group chief managing director- SM Group has been nominated as the chairman of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Assam State Council. Jain is also the managing director of S M Corporation Ltd., chairman-SM- JDB (Novotel, Guwahati), chairman-Aura Hospitality (Taj Vivanta Shillong), chairman-SM Infrastructure- Real Estate, chairman-Bitech, Asphalt Technologies Ltd and director-Excel Care Hospital and Apollo Hospital, Guwahati. Sarat Kr Jain, the doyen of North East's business community, has been instrumental in enabling SM Group to emerge as one of the best-managed business houses in the East, having a strong focus on corporate governance, hospital management, human capital development and process-oriented management. He has been involved in development and growth of International Hospital, a leading hospital in the North-East heading the institution's finance, human resource division and infrastructure development committees. Since 2015, Jain has been spearheading management of Marwari Hospitals as president. In his tenure, he positioned the health institution as one of the leading brands in healthcare in the North Eastern Region. Along with his acumen the hospital played a crucial role in Covid management during the 1st and 2nd wave of the pandemic. With business experience of over 48 years, S K Jain has managed to develop SM Corporation Ltd with his leadership quality with the establishment being nominated in the Assam Excellence Award under the category of 'Best Place to Work'. His untiring quality of leadership has also enabled SM Developers to be nominated in the Assam Excellence Award under the category of 'Most Trusted Brand'. S K Jain has joined ICC Assam State Council to contribute towards the various initiatives aimed at reforms, policy advocacy, ease of doing business, market linkages and promotion of sustainable business practices, etc., in Assam and linking the region with the wider pragmatic perspective of India.

Youth Cong leader from Tinsukia joins ULFA-I

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 18: The vice president of the Tinsukia district youth Congress Janardan Gogoi has reportedly joined the militant outfit ULFA-I. This was revealed by the youth Congress leader himself through a Facebook post on Sunday addressed to his wife Reema who is currently pregnant. Gogoi is a resident of Uday Nagar area of Sadiya in Tinsukia district. In the long Facebook post Gogoi explained the reasons behind joining the ULFA-I. In recent times, there has been a surge in the number of youths from across the state who have left their homes to join the militant group. DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta had also recently mentioned that the state police is aware of reports of many youths, both male and female going missing and were 'suspected' to have joined the militant outfit.

Naat Samaroh to be held at Jorhat Theatre

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 18: Coinciding with the concluding ceremony of 125 years celebration of Jorhat Theatre, a state level Naat Samaroh (drama conclave) will be organised from April 20 to 24.

This was informed by the 125th celebration organising committee on Monday.

The dramas that will be presented in the five day samaroh are Chanakya, story by Janardan Thakur, directed by Dr Arup Borthakur and to be presented by Jorhat Theatre on the first day; Trahi Dev Damodar, the story and direction is by Nabajyoti Borah and staged by Jyoti Shilpa of Nagaon on the second day; Uchhata, original story by Jean Paul Sartre, drama adaptation and direction by Baharul Islam and to be staged by Seagull, Guwahati on the third day; Bonsai, story by Amar Sharma, directed by Ratul Phukan and to be staged by Naibya Natya Karmi, Bokakhat on the fourth day and Ekanta Enisha (Enixa), original story by Anuradha Sharma Pujari, drama adaptation and direction by Abinash Sharma, and to be staged by JB Production, Tezpur on the fifth day.

On April 20, a cultural procession will be taken out and on April 24, a Shilpi Samaroh and book release function will be organised in which chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is expected to attend.

NFR observes 131st birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 18: The 131st birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was observed on Monday at Dr Bhupen Hazarika Sabha Griha in NF Railway headquarters complex. Anshul Gupta, general manager of NF Railway and other officials paid homage by lighting the lamp and offering floral tribute to the portrait of BR Ambedkar, well known as the Father of the Indian Constitution. The officers, staff of NF Railway headquarters and representatives of various associations and unions were also present on the occasion.

Dr BR Ambedkar was independent India's first minister of Law and Justice, and considered as the chief architect of the Constitution of India. He was also an eminent Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer. The author of the Indian Constitution, born in a simple family, had achieved achievements in the field of education amidst many difficulties. His fame was not only in the country but also abroad.



Speaking on this occasion, Anshul Gupta mentioned Dr BR Ambedkar's contribution towards framing of the Constitution, providing justice & equality to all classes of the society and development of the under-privileged section of the society. He also praised the role of Dr BR Ambedkar in women empowerment. His whole life is an inspiration for all classes of the society, the general manager added.

The DC will receive the award on April 21 Bongaigaon bags PM's prize for excellence in public administration



HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, April 18: In a grand achievement, Bongaigaon district has been selected for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration, 2021 for its initiative 'Samporna' in the category 'Innovation-District'.

The project is aimed at reducing malnutrition among children in Bongaigaon district. It employs a decentralised, technology-based model using community participation and women empowerment as positive deviance factor to achieve the result and has successfully brought 95.6 percent malnourished children to normal state in just one year and the results are sustainable by way of empowerment of the mothers of the children.

There are some key aspects of Project Samporna. It assessed and identified 2,416 malnourished children and mothers. 95.6 percent of malnourished children became normal in just one year. Google live sheets and Whatsapp were used to update and monitor data captured. A simplified 6x6 vinyl printed WHO Colour coated Growth Chart (weight/height) for boys and girls was put up in each Anganwadi Centre. These centres assessed and identified Severe Acute Malnourished (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnourished (MAM) children using WHO growth chart as compared to less effective underweight children being identified using the weight for age growth chart used all over the country. Mothers

of these children were also identified. Each of them was tagged with the mother of a healthy child and each healthy mother was called Buddy Mother.

Buddy pairs were given questionnaires before the project started to assess their knowledge. The mothers were then given training on best practices including best indigenous food practices. The same questionnaire was given after six months to assess their present knowledge. To ensure children don't relapse into malnutrition again, a convergence between ICDS and National Rural Livelihood Mission was done by involving all mothers in Self-Help Groups. They ensured regular income through livelihood activities for empowerment of the mothers and sustenance of the efforts to avoid and manage malnutrition.

After three months of active intervention using protein supplements, 88 percent of SAM children became healthy and 96 percent MAM children became healthy. By this 2,416 pairs of Buddy Mothers were created. Only 1,178 children were newly identified to be malnourished in September, 2021 as compared to 2,416 in September, 2020.

Dr MS Lakshmi Priya, IAS, district collector of Bongaigaon, will be presented the award for the above project by the Prime Minister of India on the Civil Services Day to be held in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on April 21 on behalf of the district.



অসম লোকসেৱা আয়োগ
 ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

No. 159PSC/DR-28/1/2019-20

Dated Guwahati the 18th April/2022

NOTIFICATION

In continuation of this office Notification no. 59PSC/CON/Exam-08/2020-2021, dated 7th March, 2022, it is for information to all concerned candidates that the Assam Public Service Commission will hold the Interview/Viva-Voce for the post of **Assistant Engineer (Civil) under Irrigation Department, Assam** as per programme given below at its office at Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22 (Advt. No.06/2020, dated Guwahati, the 19th August/2020). The detailed programme for the Interview/Viva-Voce is given below:

Sl. No	Name of the Post & Department	Date of Interview/ Viva - Voce	Reporting Time
1	Assistant Engineer (Civil) under Irrigation Department, Assam	25 th , 26 th , 27 th , 28 th , 29 th , 30 th April, 2022 & 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th May 2022	9:00 AM

Kindly note that the candidates appearing the interview/ viva-voce must bring the following testimonials in original with self attested photocopies thereof for verification/scrutiny on the day of the interview.

- Permanent Residential Certificate / Employment Exchange Certificate.
- H.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
- H.S.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
- Engineering Degree Marksheet and Pass Certificate in respective branch.
- Caste/PWD/EWS certificate (if applicable).

No intimation letter to the eligible candidates shall be sent separately by post. **The intimation letters shall be uploaded on 19-04-2022 in the APSC's website (www.apsc.nic.in).** The candidates shall have to download their own intimation letter from the aforesaid website.

Sd/-

Under Secretary,

Assam Public Service Commission

Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

Janasanyog/D/739/22

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The hardest thing to understand in the world is the income tax. - Albert Einstein

India in US strategy against China

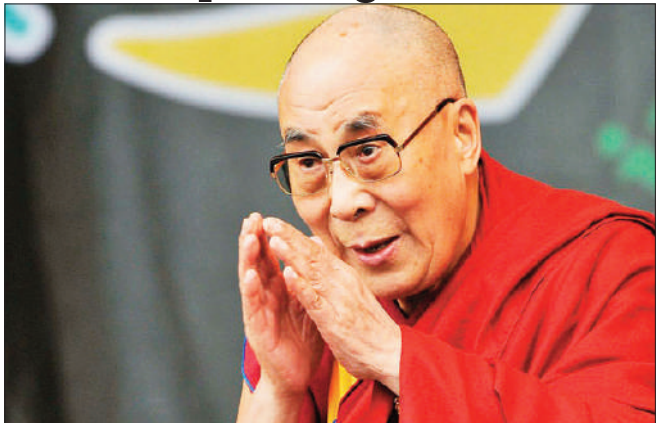
Some political commentators have argued that the stand taken by the Modi government on the conflict in Ukraine shows that it is wrong to consider India a subordinate ally of the United States. The fact that India has abstained on resolutions in the United Nations condemning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and the decision of the government to buy small quantities of crude oil from Russia, notwithstanding the US stand that countries should not buy Russian oil or gas, is seen as an illustration of India's independent foreign policy and strategic autonomy. This is a superficial reading of the situation. India has over the last one and a half decades entered into a strategic alliance with the United States with the defense co-operation agreement as the centrepiece of this partnership. Under the Modi government, the military and strategic cooperation got cemented with the signing of the three so-called foundational agreements such as the logistics agreements (LEMOA) in 2016, the integration of communication network (COMCASA) in 2018, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020. The nature of these agreements is such as those the United States has signed with its closest military allies.

India also became part of the quadrilateral alliance forged by the United States to advance its Indo-Pacific strategy which consists also of Japan and Australia. It should be noted that the QUAD came into being much before the incidents on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh in June 2020. The 2+2 ministerial forum which consists of the defense and foreign ministers of both sides was institutionalised and began its regular meetings in September 2018. It is in such a situation of growing proximity to the United States that the Indian stand on the Ukrainian conflict should be viewed. The United States is unhappy that India, a major non-NATO ally, has not joined the anti-Russia bandwagon. President Biden had remarked that the QUAD partners, Australia and Japan are fully on board but India is "somewhat shaky" on the Ukraine issue. Since then, the United States has piled pressure on India to follow the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and the European Union and to stop buying oil. The United States is particularly incensed at the talk of a rupee-rouble exchange of payments for the trading in oil.

In the meeting between Defence minister Rajnath Singh and US secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, they discussed ways to strengthen defense partnerships and advance the scope of bilateral defense cooperation. The statement issued after the meeting also stated that there would be closer collaboration between the defense industries. The United States will utilize this occasion, when India is asking for understanding for its continued reliance on Russian military supplies and spares, to commit India to buy more US weapons and defense equipment. The aggressive US stand against Russia in the Ukrainian conflict and the Indo-Pacific strategy are connected. They are both part of the US efforts to retain global hegemony in the face of its declining power to exercise such hegemony. India is important for this project especially as China is the ultimate US target. The quest to maintain India as a subordinate partner will not be given up, despite the friction over how to deal with Russia in the Ukrainian conflict. In the overall grand scheme of the United States, this is only a minor irritant.

Talking Points

Dalai Lama says happiness is the prime goal of life



By: Narvijay Yadav

When I saw a journalist friend's Facebook post recently, I started thinking. His wife had written in the post something like this: "A nice family photo, because we often don't spend time together and on a wedding occasion we are so happy today as never before. Bengali marriages are like this, they make you very happy." Friend is a journalist, so obviously he would not be able to give enough time to his family. Such is the life of most of the journalists. They attend hundreds of happy and sad events as a part of their professional life; must be travelling to faraway places in the country and abroad, but mostly they travel alone, not with their family. Many of the journalists cannot afford to go on family vacations, because time and money both are in short supply. Journalism is a profession which requires army-like dedication with hardly any free time. When they manage to go out, still the office phone keeps on ringing for this or that. Their evenings are spent in their office and when they return home late in the night; most of the world is gone into sleep. Such is the routine of a typical journalist.

The line that made me think was that 'we have never been so happy till today'. It is really worrying that a family waits to attend a wedding in order to be happy. I personally don't like to attend wedding parties. I am very happy when I am alone. I chose to be happy all the time. It requires no money to be happy,

neither does anyone's permission is needed for this. This is just a decision, a choice, that you want to be happy. Those who have decided to be unhappy will remain sad even if you make them live in a 5-star hotel, in a palace or in a luxurious car. There is one country in the world where most of the citizens are happy, that is Bhutan. Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama says that the highest goal of human life is to be happy. Bhikkhu Sanghasena, the founding president of Mahabodhi International Meditation Center, Leh, also preaches to 'live in the present moment and be happy'.

Recently an old friend of mine visited my place. Our friendship is four decades old, but for the last many years we were unable to meet or talk properly. Often friendships take a backseat after one gets married or starts working somewhere. The family equations do change and people get too busy in their lives. We took photos together before leaving. In the evening I sent a message that said, "Your happiness is visible, stay blessed." This I wrote after seeing the smiles in the photos. Quickly I got a reply - "Do you think I am happy?" This response made me think deeply. Obviously all is not going well in my friend's life. However it was not evident from the facial expression and smile. This is what happens. People keep showing fake smiles. Still, I believe that whatever be the circumstances in life, we always have a choice to be happy." (The writer is a senior journalist & columnist)

Tough days ahead for India?

The regional economic and political developments may have near-immediate affect on the Indian economy, apart from the internal pressures

The recent regional economic and political crises in south Asia, most of them immediate neighbours of India, have raised concern amongst the Indian establishment. The economic turbulence in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives and the political turmoil in Pakistan may affect India manifold.

The economic impact of the various crises is expected to begin manifesting themselves soon, if governments of those countries fail to address the crises quickly.

To accord priority to India's neighbours in their international activities, programmes and projects, was stressed at the first ever Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group (IMCG) meeting organised on April 12 in New Delhi.

Sri Lanka's economic woes

The economic turmoil in Sri Lanka is currently viewed as the most pressing foreign challenge by the MEA with diplomatic and trade ramifications.

Over the years the Sri Lankan economy has failed to attract much foreign direct investment or spread its export basket, though it has transitioned into an upper-middle income country.

For most part, Sri Lankan growth was sustained through international sovereign bonds and expensive short-term external borrowing. These funds were channelled into education, infrastructure, and healthcare, besides maintaining financial liquidity and promoting better macroeconomic policy.

However, by April 2021, Sri Lanka's external debt had touched \$35 billion. In March, inflation zoomed to 17.5%, the highest since 2015, and forex reserves dwindled to \$1.9 billion, enough only for a month's imports.

Its debt-to-GDP ratio stands at an alarming 120%. Not surprisingly, on April 12, the government defaulted on all its outstanding foreign dues. The country has to repay \$4 billion in debt this year.

Deep political and economic mayhem has followed, as there is no money to pay for food and fuel imports. Protests have broken out countrywide.

While India is under pressure to continue supporting the island country through a series of lines of credit, political dialogue with the administration of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has not yielded results. While protests rock Sri Lanka demanding Rajapaksa's resignation, he has resisted both political as well as economic change by spurring plans of urgent economic reforms.

Nepal's economy falters

Nepalese finance minister Jannardan Sharma on 16 April asked fellow Nepalese citizens living abroad to deposit funds in domestic banks as part of efforts to ensure the financial system has enough liquidity and to preserve foreign exchange reserves.

By depositing their savings in Nepal, overseas Nepalese would continue to "maintain their link as well as benefit from 6 to 7 per cent interest" offered by Nepali banks, Sharma said.

Though Sharma maintained that the Nepalese economy did not face a crisis and Nepal's situation could not be compared with Sri Lanka, the fact is that the Himalayan kingdom is facing its worst economic crisis in decades and increasing anti-government protests.

In Nepal, remittances by overseas workers, which constitute nearly a quarter of the economy are crucial for external payments, they fell 3 per cent to US\$5.3 billion between mid-July to mid-March, compared with a 5 per cent increase in the same period

a year earlier.

Pakistan politics

The political turmoil in Pakistan has caused a stir in India's MEA, yet many believe that it may prove to be a positive development. The country's new prime minister, like his elder brother and former prime minister, is essentially a businessman and he may try to salvage the ties between the two countries by boosting trade amongst them, as his brother tried in the past. Reports speak of a large section of the traders favouring reopening bilateral trade ties with India.

Pakistani importers, especially of cotton, textiles, pharmaceuticals and chemicals and exporters of dry fruits and handicrafts are keen on the border being open once more, officials said. They added that the government expects the thaw in bilateral relations to begin from this if they happen at all.

Is China to be blamed?

Currently many theorists have blamed Sri Lanka's economic relations with China as the main driver behind the crisis. This has been called "debt-trap diplomacy" by the United States.

However, in reality loans from China accounted for only about 10 per cent of Sri Lanka's total foreign debt in 2020. In addition defaults over China's infrastructure-related loans to Sri Lanka, especially the financing of the Hambantota port, are being cited as factors contributing to the crisis.

But the facts don't add up. The Chinese Exim Bank financed the construction of the Hambantota port. As it was running in losses, the Sri Lankan government leased out the port for 99 years to the Chinese Merchant's Group, which paid Sri Lanka US\$1.12 billion. So in reality it actually bolstered Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves

by US\$1.12 billion.

The situation turned bad due to two economic shocks in 2019. First, there was a series of bomb blasts in churches and luxury hotels in Colombo in April 2019. These led to a steep decline in tourist arrivals, a major source of foreign exchange earnings for the country.

Second, the new Gotabaya government carried out irrational tax reforms. About 2 per cent of the gross domestic product was lost in revenues because of these tax cuts.

Thirdly, ill thought out agricultural policies led to a drastic fall in agricultural production making more imports necessary. Due to lower export incomes, there was less money available to import food and food shortages arose.

Lastly, Sri Lanka might be forced to follow a deflationary fiscal policy, which may further limit the prospects of economic revival.

Though the situation in every country may seem different, yet they may have a cumulative bearing on India in the near future. It might be looked up to, to act as a big brother by Sri Lanka and Nepal. As regards to Pakistan it may prove to be a case for caution both militarily and politically, but indeed the times ahead seem to be challenging for the Indian foreign policy deliverers.

Though the Indian economy overall seems resilient to the external forces, yet a word of caution to some Indian states. Some of these states may have the makings of a crisis, due to their populist policies. A recent report states that most of the non-BJP ruled states, such as Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal may end up wrecking their economies, which are under strain due to the populist policies being implemented there.

So, in the near future Indian government may have to deal with both external and internal financial woes. (The author is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He was also associated with BBC Urdu Service and Khaleej Times of Dubai. He can be reached at www.asad-mirza.blogspot.com)

Sinking of Russian ship Moskva is a dangerous turning point in Ukraine war

By: Anjan Roy

The sinking of the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Flotilla Moskva is a significant turning point in the Ukraine war and also a lesson for military planners across the world. Russia does not yield the point that Ukrainian missiles would have downed the ship and maintains that an accidental fire on board had damaged the structural balance of the ship which had tilted as a result in rough seas. The battleship now sunk was utilised for ill purposes by the Russians and had played a critical role in several piquant situations.

Maybe, in future the sinking of such a ship will be compared with the sinking of The Bismarck in course of the Second World War. "The Bismarck" was the vaunted emblem of German naval strength in the Sound War.

Close on eighty-one years, the Bismarck was sunk on May 27, 1941, by the British Navy which was driven to desperation by the depreciations of the Bismarck in association with another feared member of the German Navy, the Prince of Oregon.

The Bismarck was able to dominate the north Atlantic sea routes which brought essential supplies to a beleaguered Britain. From food to munitions, the British was bringing their provisions from across the Empire and United States in convoys of

ships which were hunted down by German U-boats and the Bismarck being present to guard their operations.

What the Bismarck was able to do was to besmirch then reputation of the British Navy as the ultimate protector on the high seas for all allied vessels. So serious was the situation that from Winston Churchill to the first lord of the admiralty the top priority of the British was to track down the Bismarck in the vast north Atlantic waters and put her down.

Then in May, the British had despatched a series of reconnoitring missions to find out the exact locations of the Bismarck. British Navy's most prestigious ship, HMS Hood, had come far to face with Bismarck along with HMS Norfolk. For the British it was a shattering blow that the Hood, the invincible, received fire from the Bismarck and just split into two. However, Bismarck also was hit and its oil tank began to lose. That left a trail of Bismarck.

On the fateful day, the Bismarck met with HMS Rodney, an old battleship and the HMS King George Five, a brand new ship, which began pounding the Bismarck. They were soon joined by HMS Victoria, an aircraft carrier. The last did the ultimate trick and dropped bombs on the vulnerable upper decks which led to severe damages leading to the sinking of the Bismarck.

Such was the importance of the event that the Royal Navy celebrated the event and the first lord of the admiralty had immediately addressed the Navy fighters, admitting how powerful and great a ship Bismarck was. With the sinking of the Bismarck, the North Atlantic sea routes were again available to the Allied Forces.

The sudden sinking of the Black Sea fleet's flagship, Moskva, had dismayed the Russians. Moskva was so important that it could be deployed only on orders of the Russian President. Picking up the strands after the sinking of the ship, the official Russian TV channels have stated that the Third World War has already begun.

Ukraine President, Vladimir Zelenskyy had stated in formal interviews that he did not discount a possible Russian pre-emptive nuclear strike. He urged the world to take note of the threat of nuclear attack.

Russia has resumed hitting areas around Kyiv with missiles. Ukraine expects Russia to substantially step up its attacks on Ukraine targets in the wake of the sinking of the flagship of Black Sea command.

No doubt, the loss of the ship is a deep dent on Russia's prestige and personally that of Vladimir Putin. The Russian autocrat will now try to seek revenge with redoubled attacks on Ukrainian positions.

Moskva, the 12,500 tonnes guided

missiles cruiser was a power statement for the Russian navy. The ship was earlier deployed during Russia's Syrian campaign for overseeing its security needs on the coast and for missiles use inland.

Later, an irate Vladimir Putin has sent the ship to Black Sea areas when Turkey had downed several Russian military aircraft. It moved along with a flotilla of other ships which together made a real presence in an area and capable of multifarious tasks.

Moskva was fitted with anti-ship, anti-aircraft missiles pads, apart from torpedoes for use against submarines. It had a speed of 32 miles and it was 600 feet long. A ship of this class last destroyed was during the Falkland war off the coast of Argentina when HMS Destroyer had sunk the General Belgrade on May 2, 1982.

The ship had 510 crew onboard, and so far it is not clear how many might have perished along with the ship. Given the firepower of the ship, it would have a very large stockpile of explosives on board and the fire from a missiles strike could have ignited the anger part of the explosives. This could have altogether destroyed the ship.

To have sunk such a immensely costly military hardware, a floating fort, is a feather on Ukraine's operational capabilities. The ship was reportedly struck by a Neptune

anti-ship missile of Ukraine. The ship had directed the missiles strikes on the coastal cities of Ukraine and had delivered heavy damages.

Neptune class missiles have not so far been regarded as having adequate firepower. However, the sudden sinking of the massive ship really shot up the effective of the Neptune class missiles. Ironically enough, Moskva was built in Ukraine during the days of Soviet Union and entered service in early 1980s.

In their triumph, he Ukrainians have said the sinking of this ship is a small retribution to Putin for killing Ukrainian children and women.

Questions are being raised that despite air defence and missiles defence systems on board how could the ship have been struck by a missile from the Ukrainians. These issues raise questions about deployment of such larger ships in war conditions.

Apparently, USA had moved some of their ships away from the Chinese coasts where they come under the firing range of on shore anti-ship missiles bases of China. The reverberations of the Ukraine war are already been seen across the war. China is sending its latest jet fighters all over the disputed waters in the South China Sea. China is seeing its opportunity of asserting its authority when apparently USA and western allies are deeply engaged in meeting the threat from Russia. (IPA Service)

Fire of hatred spreading faster dividing the nation

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

What has been happening in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand now is a clear indication that the fire of hatred is spreading faster than we can cause. It has become a political tool and the major beneficiary is the BJP which is not only ruling these states but also the country. Action is seldom taken against the hate mongers. Inaction on the part of the police and administration has become the general characteristics until they are compelled to take action after general condemnation of the incidents from across the country. What proof one need to believe that some sort of structural changes based on hatred have already been carried out in governance?

Hatred is one of the basic human emotions that have always been exploited for political purposes, especially to establish hegemony of one community over the other, which is politically translated into support for remaining in power or gaining it. In the meantime thousands of innocent people just perish in the fire of hatred. The history of the world is full of such incidents, and hence many people believe that it should not be allowed in India.

The Supreme Court of India is

hearing a number of petitions seeking investigation and action in hate speech cases, particularly in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. On April 13, the Supreme Court has even asked the Uttarakhand government to file a status report by April 22 in the case registered against hate speech in Haridwar. Appearing for the petitioners, the senior advocate Kapil Sibal has informed the Supreme Court that a similar event is going to be held in Himachal Pradesh on April 17. It is a matter of serious concern that over the last few months some Hindu hate mongers including some religious personalities have made outrageous hate speeches and even given open call to take arms against Muslims, rape Muslim women, and commit genocide against them. In majority of the cases, such hate speeches were delivered during such events where police and administrative officers were present, and no actions were taken against the violators committing such crimes against a community. Who is responsible if not the ruling establishment? If these blatant incidents cannot be stopped then who is going to stop the whisper campaign against a community.

Take the example of the Haridwar incident. In the so called religious congregation several saffron clad personalities claiming to be Hindu

saints, called Hindus to take arms against Muslims and resort to their genocide. No action was initially taken by the ruling establishment, which took action only after five former chiefs of staff of the armed forces and over a hundred other people including bureaucrats and prominent citizens wrote to the President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling upon them to protect the integrity and security of India. Yati Narasinghanand was made prime accused and arrested. However, he got out of jail on bail more than a month ago. The accused did not stop here. He again delivered a hate speech in Delhi reiterating the call for use of weapons against Muslims. The latest example is from Uttar Pradesh. This incident also involved a saffron clad so called saint. The head of Mahharshi Shri Lakshman Das of Udasin Ashram in Khairabad, Sitapur, 100 km from state capital Lucknow, made a hate speech on April 2 threatening Muslim women with rape. The speech was made at an event, a religious procession, where police and administrative officials were present. No action was initially taken. Then a two-minute video of his speech went viral six days after on April 8. It drew sharp comment from the people and even from the National Commission of Women. The Com-

mission sought his arrest and said the police cannot be mute spectators to such comments. Only after that an FIR was registered against the accused under various sections of IPC related to making hate speech, making derogatory statements and sexual harassment.

These are only the much publicized examples of hate speeches made in public. There are numerous whisper campaigns doing rounds, in which Muslims as a community are demonized and dehumanized, as if there are no innocent or good people among them including their children and women. It is sheer madness of certain Hindus who have been running their hate campaigns only to consolidate Hindu votes in favour of the BJP. Such activities are being carried out and institutionalized through certain organizations who have nothing to do with religion but are primarily interested in establishing Hindu hegemony against all other religious communities. This is camouflaged under the name of patriotism, falsely implying that no one other than a Hindu can be patriotic in India. Even nationalism for them means nothing less than 'Hindu Nationalism'. They are no more talking 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the whole world is our kith and kin) which was one of the fundamental

thoughts of Hinduism. Of late, democratic institutions are weakened, their spines are broken, and only a handful of officers have left with courage to take action against the mongers who go on encouraging violence of one community against the other. Branding any community "enemy of the people" is wrong, since these activities are carried out either with a wish to harm the community in the grab of protecting other communities or with a wish to get political support for gaining or remaining in power. Unsuspecting Hindus must not allow themselves to be exploited by such Hindu hate mongers. There are also anti-Hindu hate mongers in the contemporary politics and people should equally beware of them.

India needs peace and development, not hatred and violence. Love among the communities is far more valuable than hatred among them, since nobody will be safe in the fire of hatred that breeds only violence, though some of us may temporarily become political beneficiaries. Keep in mind that hate is normalized when people are told by their leaders that some among us are a threat. They also are encouraging violence against the seculars, and even the Hindus who oppose their design of hate campaigns. (IPA Service)

Has online education changed your kids?

By: Ramesh Menon

During the pandemic, students found their otherwise vibrant world crumbling as they found themselves limited to studying from home. Many lost the art of conversation. Many found it difficult to adjust to others as their tolerance limit reduced. Teachers noticed a new lethargy in their students.

Even after offline classes started, the attention span continued to be thin and short. Students found it difficult to comply with the set routine of school. Lack of physical activity, binge eating and watching television had resulted in obesity, muscle spasms and rigidity. Children were also suffering from Vitamin D and calcium deficiency as they were almost constantly indoors for nearly two years.

The sense of isolation and lack of physical interaction with friends has resulted in mental health issues among many youngsters.

An astrologer from the National Capital Region told me that he was increasingly having worried parents asking him about the future of their children who were showing serious behavioural changes like lack of tolerance towards others, shunning social interaction, and even violent behaviour. They were worried because they had never ever seen such traits in their children before the pandemic. He said that very small children who had never seen a school and had only experienced online education were uncomfortable going to schools when they reopened recently.

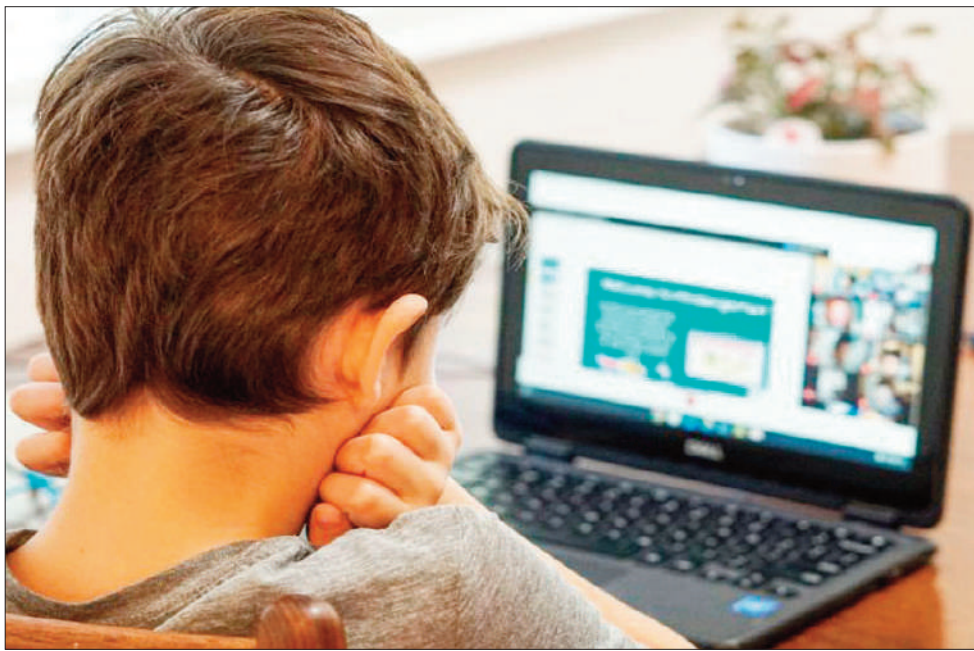
Online education has neither been authentic nor wholesome. Students found they gained little in terms of learning as attention spans plummeted.

They pined for offline classes where they could interact with their peers, have meaningful discussions and debates and get their teachers to guide them at every step.

Online teaching, with all its technological advantages, could not compete with traditional offline teaching as the sense of sharing and camaraderie that is crucial to the children's mental and emotional development was missing.

During offline classes, the students also soaked in varied experiences in the classroom. Their peers contributed to the broadening of their perspective and helped them see other points of view.

Teachers also got a real deal. They felt they were talking to tiles as students switched off their cameras. There was a distinct disconnect between students and the teacher. There were few ques-



tions and discussions were rare.

Sometimes, when the teacher questioned a particular student, there was no answer as the student was not physically present. He or she had logged in to meet the attendance requirement and was then doing other things.

One cannot blame the students as staring at a laptop for six to seven hours a day can be torturous. The screen time was taxing their eyes. Sitting all the time was resulting in bad ergonomics, leading to backache and fibromyalgia pain.

An education ministry report released late last year indicated that between 40 to 70 per cent of school-going children in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam and Jharkhand did not have access to digital devices. As a result, they have been denied an education. It is frightening to estimate how much they have lost in these two years.

Many poor families invested in one phone as education went digital. But, with multiple children in the household, the others – mainly girls – were left out as the male child got the phone.

While there is no formal report yet, there are fears that many girls have permanently dropped out of school. Many of the children who had digital devices suffered because of power cuts and

poor Internet connections. It is quite possible that many of them were sucked into doing jobs to keep kitchen fires burning.

Surveys by the Hindustan Times showed that child labour had increased. So had underage marriages, trafficking of children and marginalisation of migrant child workers.

E-learning definitely has its advantages. It makes it possible to reach out to faculty abroad for virtual masterclasses and workshops.

A creative writing course conducted in Delhi for the last 10 years by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication suddenly found global appeal after it went online.

Teachers quickly tried to adapt to the new technology so that they could continue to teach and evaluate their students as exams were also held online. A 2020 study by the Azim Premji University found that more than 90 per cent of the teachers felt no meaningful assessment of children's learning was possible through online classes.

Its 2021 study showed that 92 per cent of the students from Classes 2-6 had lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year. This included reading familiar words and writing simple sentences based on a picture.

The study found that more than 80 per cent had

lost at least one mathematical ability.

In these circumstances, how are they going to make up for lost learning?

There is, clearly, cause for worry. Many fear they may never be able to catch up. It is only in the coming years that we will know what damage the pandemic has done to education.

For now, look at the damage the last two years have done to students and teachers.

Exams were a farce. Institutions conducted them just for the sake of compliance. Everyone passed. Many of them with flying colours. No prizes for guessing why.

There were instances where students got 100 percent marks in Multiple Choice Questions, thanks to the Internet. All they had to do was to tick the right answer out of the alternatives suggested. Actually, there was no exam in the real sense as the unrealistic marks eloquently show.

Teachers will tell you how students did extremely well as they just copied the right answers without understanding them.

Offline exams are a must as it reduces the unethical practices that were rampant during online exams, where many did not think twice before copying from textbooks or using the Internet to find the right answers.

The whole point of learning holistically and gaining an in-depth understanding of concepts and ideas was lost. It is definitely going to impact post-graduate and management school students when they start looking for jobs as employers will find them wanting. And, while many have found employment in recent weeks as the economy has started opening up, the real challenge will be retaining those jobs.

Imagine the plight of an engineering or medical student who has studied online for the last two years. Or is doing a course where practicals are crucial to understanding concepts.

There has been a definite loss of learning. Any teacher will tell you that. Students agree as well.

The offline mode will restore the sanctity of education but we cannot pretend that all is well now. Much needs to be done to repair the damage caused in the last two years.

The United Nations kept repeating during the pandemic that schools should be the last to shut and the first to open.

But, in India, different state governments acted differently depending on the political exigencies of the moment. They ignored the fact that education needs to be above political considerations.

A UNESCO report prepared during the pandemic made the following recommendations:

- Improve terms of employment of teachers in both public and private schools.
- Increase the number of teachers and improve their working conditions.
- Recognise teachers as frontline workers.
- Provide teachers with meaningful information and communication technology training.

The report also revealed that most teachers felt integrating technology with education during the pandemic was time-consuming and they lacked professional skills required to do so effectively.

The Economic Survey 2021-2022 said that rural children had shifted from private schools to government schools during the pandemic as it is mostly free. This is a clear signal that the government needs to help government schools with additional financial resources, teachers, classrooms and learning materials so that they can effectively teach the new students they now have.

The survey also said that the academic disruption since the last two years, and the switch to the online mode of education, had aggravated the existing digital divide and access to education.

The pandemic has given us a great opportunity to improve our battered education system that is already wanting in many ways.

It is a wake-up call.

Ideally, the government needs to:

- Recognise that education -- just like the economy and health infrastructure -- has been seriously impacted and needs immediate attention.
- When the government talks about how opening up the economy is a crucial part of the process of getting back on track, it must also talk about education.

- Track down dropouts and cajole them back.
- Evolve methods to make up for lost time.
- Find a way to reinforce concepts, which are not strong due to online education.
- Strengthen the digital reach as hybrid systems will continue.

- Get education to become a part of the national conversation so that efforts are made to fix gaps.
- Create a strategy to recover the two years of learning that has been lost.

Unless this is done systematically by every state, students will lose the opportunity to learn, maybe forever.

At the moment, very little is happening on this front. We cannot let our children be victims of this tragedy. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

Law, break, and patch up in a pre-marital relationship

By: Pooja Jha

In India, the interaction between a boy and a girl is forbidden. Indian youth have friendships and premarital relationships. I have observed that couples living in big metro cities and have the privilege prefer live-in relationships.

It's not only the most intimate form of a relationship, but it also gives the sense of marital experience because couples living together are doing all sorts of tasks that a married couple will be doing.

These will include sorting out bills, taking care of groceries, laundry, cleaning, etc. Every individual can't afford to live together. There are so many chishti couples who might be the first generation to go to college or get a job coming from a socio-economically oppressed or a DBA (Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi) community.

So many of them might have their first love relationship. Adolescents engaging in a premarital relationship and sexual activity are at the same risk of violence as any married couple. Intimate partner violence between premarital couples is something no one wants to talk about, not even the victim themselves.

Why is intimate partner violence happening between these couples? They are young. They are in love, they have chosen their partner, they are the new generation with more accessibility to information.

The answer is deep-rooted, invisible patriarchy, but it's everywhere from our home to society, to State and Nation. Younger people, especially men and boys, fail to recognize the privilege given by society. They are raised in a way where they have seen themselves as superior, as a saviour, not only because of their parents. The media has equally participated in this.

Role of media in intimate partner violence in premarital relationships

Media is the most harmless-looking influencer we have had for many years. Especially Indian cinema, which glorifies intimate partner violence. It's not only to glorify it, but it's also to justify the violence. Young boys and girls also see these types of violent relationships in their homes, in society, and in cinema. The latest example of a very popular movie "Kabir Singh" (2019), where the cast had done an excellent job, the actors acted brilliantly, and this is the problem with these types of movies that from cinematography to acting perspective it's perfect but what is not perfect is the glorification of violence. The director of Kabir Singh has justified the relationship he had shown in the movie. His justification shows his patriarchal mindset.

The more dangerous part was the after-effects of this movie. Men cherish rowdiness and violence.



Women accept their role as victims, and society urges them to be like that. I am not saying that every movie has the same effect on society, but this is the point that "Thappad" didn't get the recognition and appreciation that "Kabir Singh" got.

Then why don't they just break up?

So, in a premarital relationship, why does a male partner think he now has the right to her female partner. We have seen so many relationships where suddenly there is a power dynamic as soon as a couple enters a premarital relationship. The relationship which was supposed to be equal, where did the idea of this power dynamics come from?

This comes from their family, where they have seen their male family members have control over the female family members. Their parents' relationship is the first love relationship they encounter in their life. They see the power dynamic, abuse (physical, emotional, economic), and how the mother tolerates everything without complaint.

This is what they learn, and suddenly the boy thinks that he is the saviour in this relationship and needs to take care of his partner. So in taking care of everything, he justifies his acts like checking her phone, 24 hours surveillance of her activity, slapping, kicking, emotional manipulation, gaslighting, etc. This is not a marriage where two families are involved, and the girl is living under pressure to live with the husband. This is the premarital relationship where the family is not involved. Still, girls choose to stay in the relationship. Even if they break up, it takes a longer time. Why can't they just break up and go?

This is the premarital relationship where the family is not involved. Still, girls choose to stay in the relationship. They can't just break up because, for the first time, they have chosen someone to be with. They are in love. They have seen married couples in their life, and they think that if everyone is going through the same trauma and violence, then why not spend the time with someone you chose.

There are multiple reasons why a girl can't just leave an abusive relationship. One of them is a lack of emotional support from their fam-

ily. They start to find emotional stability from another person. That person becomes extremely important because now they are emotionally dependent on them, and even the imagination of losing them just shook them from the core.

We often think that sex has nothing to do with the breakup factor, but the emotional and sexual intimacy make the other person so vulnerable that the situation becomes worse. We see the hook-up and one-night-stand culture everywhere in our society, but it is still a very elitist concept. You can mostly see these cultures in big metro cities among upper-class people.

It becomes challenging for women who come from the oppressed class and cast. They have the pressure to prove themselves. There is also morality attached to sex. When you are having sex before marriage, it is a massive thing for so many girls. They think they had sex, so they have to be with this person. Women live in a constant loop of what will people (who know about their relationship) say if she breaks up. What if he leaves her. The fear is uncontrollable.

It becomes challenging for women who come from the oppressed class and cast. They have the pressure to prove themselves.

It is not easy to fight with your family and society for your freedom and rights. The constitution already gives the rights to every individual, but women can't practice them because the family becomes more powerful than the State. Family is the first and most influential institution, so we first need to sensitize them. If a family will support their children and make a healthy environment for them, then there is a chance that the women will not hide their relationship and intimate partner violence. They will not be afraid of taking legal help. Right now, they are afraid of what their parents will find out. We don't have a law and data on premarital relationships.

This is when we must accept that these relationships exist and need law. There is limited data that tells us the existence of violence in these relationships. Women need protection and rights, and the government needs to start acting on this issue. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Why do people behave so badly on dating apps? An answer from psychology

By: Martin Graff

There is no doubt that online dating and dating apps have transformed the way we initiate, form and end romantic relationships. We might also question whether the convenience of these apps has encouraged us to behave differently than we would in "real life". More specifically, do mobile dating apps breed bad or antisocial behaviour?

If you use dating apps, you have probably been "ghosted" on occasion (where someone withdraws all contact) – or maybe you have ghosted somebody yourself. Perhaps you have found out that someone you have been chatting to on an app was in a relationship. Or if you do not use these apps, you might have heard horror stories from friends.

Let us take a look at some of the bad behaviours that we see most commonly – and how psychology can explain them.

One of the main themes is how common it is for people to be using dating apps while in relationships. Data from the US has shown some 42% of people with a Tinder profile were either in a relationship or married.

What research says

In a study of American undergraduate students, around two-thirds revealed that they had seen someone on Tinder who they knew to be in a relationship. Further, 17% of participants said they had messaged someone on Tinder while in a committed relationship, with 7% engaging in a sexual relationship with someone they had met on Tinder while in a committed relationship. There is also evidence that people are using dating apps to keep up what we call "backburner" relationships. This is when someone on a dating app maintains contact with another person in the hope of some day pursuing something romantic or sexual.

Surprisingly, the authors of a 2018 study involving 658 undergraduate college students found that the number of backburners reported did not differ significantly between those who were single, casually dating or in a committed relationship. Around 73% of all respondents reported they had at least one backburner.

Online communication, of course, makes keeping in contact much easier. Researchers have suggested that relationship maintenance in a backburner relationship involves positivity (being compassionate to the other person and ensuring that interactions with them are fun and enjoyable), openness (disclosing personal information to them, maybe even sharing secrets) and assurances (demonstrating a wish for the relationship to be sustained over time).

Online dating has also made ghosting much easier. A 2019 study found that respondents had ghosted 29% of the people they had dated and had been ghosted by 25% of dates themselves. In addition, 74% of respondents said they believed that ghosting was an appropriate way to end a relationship. Participants in this study reported both instances of sudden ghosting (abruptly ceasing contact) and gradual ghosting (slowing down contact before disappearing altogether). Gradual ghosting increased the degree of uncertainty for the person being ghosted. Ghosting probably occurs so frequently because of the ease of ending a relationship in this way, particularly if the couple is yet to meet in person. The authors of the same study also highlight that online dating offers an abundance of possible partners and that people who "ghost" one partner may do so because they have moved on to someone new.

Gordon Allport, a pioneer of personality psychology and who taught at Harvard University, was the first to publish research on the psychology of hate speech and dehumanisation in his celebrated work *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). He argued that prejudice against a group of people can be transmitted through language and proposed that hate speech, which he called "antilocution", results in extreme hostility that in turn gives rise to violence.

In 2015, Gail and Richard Murrow, of the departments of neurology and neurosurgery, University of North Carolina, argued similarly: that hate speech results in dehumanisation, which in turn leads to unthinking acceptance of atrocities against the target group. "Dehumanization automatically reduces the pain empathy that emotionally underpins rights-based attitudes and behavior," they

wondered if we can locate regions

in the brain that contribute to hate towards and dehumanisation of a group of people in a manner that can be measured, and if we can elucidate its mechanism to the extent that we can ameliorate or even eliminate it before it goes overboard.

Now, a question arises: could the dehumanisation of one group of people have a neurobiological basis? Might some part of the brain be responsible for controlling this behaviour?

In fact, it is an established fact in neuroscience that different functions – motor or sensory – are associated with particular regions within the brain. In 2006, Lasana Harris and Susan Fiske of the psychology department at Princeton University studied brain activity of humans when encountered with different social groups. They observed the blood-oxygen level dependent signals through MRI scans to understand which particular regions of the brain were associated with dehumanisation. The study found that emotions like pride, envy and pity were controlled by the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) in the brain.

In 2015, Murrow and Murrow proposed that "neural simulation mechanisms, whether in the form of mirror neurons or other neural mechanisms, do exist in the human brain, and that such neural simulation is the source of the pain empathy theorized to motivate prosocial and helping behavior".

They further argued that this human mirror neural system responds only to actions performed by other members of the same species, i.e. humans.

So if a group is dehumanised, our brains may not be able to empathise with its members.

As war, war crimes, extremism and terrorism demand our attention, neuroscientists around the world must start devoting more of their time and resources to understand the neurobiological basis of hate better, with support from governments and other stakeholders. Glaser himself had an optimistic vision in mind:

"If the hate center(s) is (are) inhibited, as by some yet-unknown medication targeting hate neurons, hate would be suppressed or removed, and the brain and the person would continue hate-free until the drug is discontinued. One might also suggest that there are other centers in the brain that connect to the hate center and are capable of reducing or inhibiting its activity. By modifying the activity of these centers, therefore, one could also increase or decrease the level of hatred."

(Courtesy: The Wire)

Sitapur hate speech: Where Does Hate Reside in the Human Brain?

By: Mahino Fatima

The recent news of Bajrang Muni Udasin of Sitapur issuing rape threats to Muslim women is one of several such speeches delivered by members of different communities against people they perceive to be "others". History is replete with anecdotes in which hate expressed against a particular group subsequently avalanched to violence against them.

Hateful speeches, literature and media reports often paint a picture of "other" groups in an effort to dehumanise their members. The targeted group is equated in language with "animal" or subhuman behaviour. Using terms like "termites", "rats" and "bed bugs" for a community undermines their agency and paves the way for violence against their people to the extent that it won't provoke the sort of empathy that violence against other groups might. Adolf Hitler's campaign against Jews during World War II is the most well-known example of such a campaign.

As a neurobiologist, I have often wondered if we can locate regions

in the brain that contribute to hate towards and dehumanisation of a group of people in a manner that can be measured, and if we can elucidate its mechanism to the extent that we can ameliorate or even eliminate it before it goes overboard.

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"If the hate center(s) is (are) inhibited, as by some yet-unknown medication targeting hate neurons, hate would be suppressed or removed, and the brain and the person would continue hate-free until the drug is discontinued. One might also suggest that there are other centers in the brain that connect to the hate center and are capable of reducing or inhibiting its activity. By modifying the activity of these centers, therefore, one could also increase or decrease the level of hatred."

(Courtesy: The Wire)

Ukrainian mayor: Russian strikes kill at least 7 in Lviv

The overnight missile strike hits 3 military infrastructure facilities and a tire shop

LVIV, April 18 (AP): Russian missiles hit Lviv in western Ukraine on Monday, killing at least seven people, Ukrainian officials said, as Moscow's troops stepped up strikes on infrastructure in preparation for an all-out assault on the east.

Plumes of thick, black smoke rose over the city after a series of explosions shattered windows and started fires. Lviv and the rest of western Ukraine have seen only sporadic strikes during almost two months of war and have become a relative refuge for people from parts of the country where fighting has been more intense.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, meanwhile, vowed to "fight absolutely to the end" in strategically vital Mariupol, where the last known pocket of resistance in a seven-week siege was holed up in a sprawling steel plant laced with tunnels. Russia has repeatedly urged forces there to lay down their arms, but those remaining ignored a surrender-or-die ultimatum on Sunday.

Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy said seven people were killed and 12 wounded in overnight missile strikes. Lviv's regional governor, Maksym Kozyskyi, said the Russian strikes hit three military infrastructure facilities and a tire shop. He said the wounded included a child, and emergency teams were battling fires caused by the strikes.

A hotel sheltering Ukrainians who had fled fighting farther east was among the buildings badly damaged in the attack, the mayor said. "The nightmare of war has caught up with us even in Lviv,"



said Lyudmila Turchak, 47, who fled with two children from the eastern city Kharkiv. "There is no longer anywhere in Ukraine where we can feel safe."

Military analysts say Russia is increasing its strikes on weapons factories, railways and other infrastructure targets across Ukraine to wear down the country's ability to resist a major ground offensive in the Donbas, Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking eastern industrial heartland.

The Russian military said missiles struck more than 20 military targets in eastern and central Ukraine in the past day — including ammunition depots, command headquarters and groups of troops and vehicles. Meanwhile, it said artillery hit another 315 Ukrainian targets, and warplanes conducted 108 strikes on Ukrainian troops and military equipment. The claims couldn't be independently verified.

Gen. Richard Dannatt, a former head of the British Army, told Sky

News the strikes were part of a "softening-up" campaign by Russia ahead of a planned ground offensive in the Donbas.

Ukraine's government halted civilian evacuations for a second day on Monday, saying Russian forces were shelling and blocking the humanitarian corridors.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Ukraine had been negotiating passage from cities and towns in eastern and southeastern Ukraine, including Mariupol and other areas in the Donbas. The government of the Luhansk region in the Donbas said four civilians trying to flee were shot dead by Russian forces. Russia is bent on capturing the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists already control some territory, after its attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, failed. "We are doing everything to ensure the defense" of eastern Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly address to the nation on Sunday.

The looming offensive in the

east, if successful, would give Russian President Vladimir Putin a badly needed victory to sell to the Russian people amid the war's mounting casualties and the economic hardship caused by Western sanctions.

The capture of Mariupol is seen as a key step in preparations for any eastern assault since it would free Russian troops up. The fall of the city on the Sea of Azov would hand Russia its biggest military victory of the war, giving it full control of a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized in 2014, and depriving Ukraine of a major port and prized industrial assets. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar has described Mariupol as a "shield defending Ukraine."

The city has been reduced to rubble in the siege, but a few thousand fighters, by Russia's estimate, held on to the giant, 11-square-kilometer (4-square-mile) Azovstal steel mill.

"We will fight absolutely to the end, to the win, in this war," Shmyhal, Ukraine's prime minister, vowed Sunday on ABC's "This Week." He said Ukraine is prepared to end the war through diplomacy if possible, "but we do not have intention to surrender."

Many Mariupol civilians, including children, are also sheltering at the Azovstal plant, Mikhail Vershinin, head of the city's patrol police, told Mariupol television.

An estimated 100,000 people remained in the city out of a prewar population of 450,000, trapped without food, water, heat or electricity.

Lankan Prez appoints new Cabinet, PM Mahinda only member from powerful Rajapaksa clan



COLOMBO, April 18 (PTT): Be-leaguered Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Monday appointed a new 17-member Cabinet that excluded his close relatives except Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, as he called for a "system change" amidst growing demand for his resignation over the worst economic crisis faced by the island nation.

Sri Lanka is grappling with unprecedented economic turmoil since independence from Britain in 1948. The crisis is caused in part by a lack of foreign currency, which has meant that the country cannot afford to pay for imports of staple foods and fuel, leading to acute shortages and very high prices.

Earlier this month, Sri Lanka's entire Cabinet — aside from President Gotabaya and his elder brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa — resigned from their posts after thousands of people defied a countrywide state of emergency and curfew and joined street protests denouncing the government.

The previous Cabinet had to make way for the president to form a unity cabinet with the Opposition members. The Opposition, how-

ever, has rejected the offer.

Rajapaksa, 72, swore in a 17-member Cabinet on Monday in addition to the three ministers he had earlier appointed.

That meant no place for the oldest member of the family Chamal Rajapaksa, Mahinda's son Namal Rajapaksa, both of whom were Cabinet ministers and the nephew Shasheendra who was a state minister.

Both Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Mahinda Rajapaksa have separately addressed the nation in an apparent bid to placate the protesters. But calls for the president to resign have only grown louder.

Speaking to the new ministers, President Rajapaksa sought their support for an efficient, clean government.

He said that he expects honest, efficient, and untainted governance from the new Cabinet.

"Today, most of the government institutions are under serious economic difficulties and it is absolutely essential to rectify it," Rajapaksa said, calling the crisis "an opportunity to bring about the system change that the people expected."

The President's Media Division said that there were no changes to

the ministerial positions held by the President, Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris, and Finance Minister Ali Sabry.

The Cabinet appointment came as the island-wide protests continued on Monday to force the resignation of the president and his powerful family for mishandling the economy, already hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The economic crisis also triggered a political turmoil in the island nation with citizens holding nationwide street protests for weeks over lengthy power cuts and shortage of fuel, food and other daily essentials and demanding the ouster of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

People continued to be in fuel and gas queues while the power cuts which were not imposed during the weekend on account of the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year returned on Monday.

Last week, Sri Lanka said it would temporarily default on its foreign debts. A payment on some of those bond debts was due to be made on Monday, the day on which the government is to begin bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund.

The stock exchange has also been suspended for a week with effect from Monday.

The state power entity said there will be four and a half-hour power cuts on Monday.

Adding to public woes is the Lanka Indian oil company (LIOC) announcement of further price hikes for petrol and diesel with effect from Sunday midnight.

The LIOC raised fuel prices for the fourth time since February.

A spokesman for the LIOC said the price hike was necessary due to the depreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee.

UK PM Johnson facing new 'partygate' claims ahead of India visit

LONDON, April 18 (PTT): British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is facing new allegations on Monday around "partygate", the scandal surrounding government officials breaching coronavirus rules with illegal lockdown gatherings, and will be hoping to escape some of the heat when he leaves for India on Thursday.

Johnson has already been fined for one such party, for his birthday in June 2020, when his wife Carrie brought a cake to the Cabinet Room and has also been fined along with UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

However, according to UK media reports, Johnson is believed to have been linked with around six out of the 12 lockdown parties under police investigation.

"The Sunday Times" quoted a source as saying that a leaving drinks gathering for Number 10 Downing Street's outgoing director of communications, Lee Cain, in November 2020 was allegedly "instigated" by Johnson.

"He said he wanted to say a few words for Lee and started pouring drinks for people and drinking himself. He toasted him," the source was quoted as saying.

It has led to renewed Opposition calls for Johnson, 57, to step down. Labour Party Deputy Leader Angela Rayner said that "if the latest reports are true", it means "not only did the Prime Minister attend parties, but he had a hand in instigating at least one of them".

Rayner accused him of deliberately misleading the British people "at every turn".

She added: "While the British public was making huge sacrifices,



Boris Johnson was breaking the law.

"The Prime Minister has demeaned his office. The British people deserve better. While Labour has a plan for tackling the cost-of-living crisis, Tory MPs are too busy defending the indefensible actions of Boris Johnson."

While Downing Street has maintained it would not comment on the issue until Scotland Yard's investigation into the matter is concluded, Johnson will be hoping to deflect attention from the issue when Parliament returns after its Easter recess on Tuesday with other pressing matters.

The conflict in Ukraine and his scheduled two-day visit to India, starting with Gujarat on Thursday, will be among the issues he is expected to focus on in Parliament.

"As we face threats to our peace and prosperity from autocratic states, it is vital that democracies and friends stick together. India, as a major economic power and the

world's largest democracy, is a highly valued strategic partner for the UK in these uncertain times," Johnson said, ahead of his visit from April 21 to 22.

"My visit to India will deliver on the things that really matter to the people of both our nations — from job creation and economic growth, to energy security and defence," he said.

The visit this week, Johnson's first as UK Prime Minister, will begin in Ahmedabad on Thursday with investment announcements in key industries in both the UK and India.

He will then proceed to New Delhi to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, when the focus will be on India-UK strategic defence and diplomatic and economic partnership. According to officials on both sides, Johnson will also use his India visit to drive progress in the ongoing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations launched earlier this year.

Turkey launches new ground, air offensive in northern Iraq

ANKARA, April 18 (AP): Turkey has launched a new ground and air cross-border offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, Turkey's defense minister announced early Monday.

Turkish jets and artillery struck targets belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and commando troops — supported by helicopters and drones — then crossed into the region by land or were airlifted by helicopters, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said in a video posted on the ministry's website.

Akar said the jets successfully struck shelters, bunkers, caves, tunnels, ammunition depots and headquarters belonging to the PKK. The group maintains bases in northern Iraq and has used the territory for attacks on Turkey. Turkey has conducted numerous cross-border aerial and ground operations against the PKK over the past decades. The latest offensive was centered in northern Iraq's Metina, Zap and Avashin-Basyan regions, Akar said.

"Our operation is continuing successfully, as planned. The targets that were set for the first phase have been achieved," Akar said. There was no information on the number of troops and jets involved in the latest incursion. "We are determined to save our noble nation from the terror misfortune that has plagued our country for 40 years," Akar said. "Our struggle will continue until the last terrorist is neutralized."

The Defense Ministry said later that the offensive, named "Operation Claw Lock," was launched after it was determined that the militants were regrouping and preparing for a "large-scale attack."

The offensive was carried out in coordination with Turkey's "friends and allies," the ministry added, but did not elaborate. Last week, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Masrour Barzani, the prime minister of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region which controls the areas that were attacked.

Shanghai reports first Covid deaths as China rules out relaxing measures

BEIJING, April 18 (PTT): Shanghai reported three deaths due to Covid-19, the first in the financial hub after it was hit by the Omicron variant last month, while a top official ruled out relaxing the curbs until the ruling Communist Party Congress met later this year to elect Chinese President Xi Jinping for a record 3rd term in power.

On Sunday, three Covid-19 deaths were reported in Shanghai.

The deceased were two females and one male, aged between 89 and 91. They suffered from comorbidities including coronary heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, the city's municipal health commission reported.

None of them was vaccinated against Covid-19 and was in severe condition after being admitted to the hospital and every effort was made to save their lives, it said. These are the first officially admitted fatalities after the city went into lockdown towards the end of last month.

According to China's National Health Commission, the Chinese mainland on Sunday reported 2,723 locally-transmitted confirmed Covid-19 cases, of which 2,417 were in Shanghai.

Shanghai also reported 19,831 locally-transmitted asymptomatic infections of the novel coronavirus Sunday, out of a total of 20,639 local asymptomatic carriers newly identified on the mainland, the Commission report said.

By the end of Sunday, Shanghai had 16 Covid-19 patients in severe condition receiving treatment in designated hospitals.

As the cases continued to spiral, health officials announced more Covid tests amid reports of growing anger and frustration of people about the continued lockdown for the third week.

Shanghai has seen a continuous decline of newly-reported cases in some areas while those under closed-off management will undergo nucleic acid testing once every day from Monday to Thursday, the local health commission said.

Meanwhile, as the Omicron continued to spread, China's health minister Ma Xiaowei on Monday pledged the toughest measures yet to prevent a major outbreak of Covid-19, ruling out any relaxations ahead of this year's 20th Communist Party Congress.



The once-in-five-year Congress of the CPC which is due to be held later this year has assumed significance as Xi, 68, is expected to get its endorsement for a third five-year tenure as the head of the Party, the military and the presidency.

The 3rd term is unprecedented as all his predecessors retired following the two-term norm for leaders. However, Xi is expected to continue power for life as he is conferred the title of a "core leader" like the Party founder Mao Zedong.

Vowing to continue the much-criticised Zero Covid policy, Ma in a front-page article published on Monday in party journal Study Times, urged the country to stick to the dynamic zero policy and take a clear-cut stand against "erroneous" thoughts of "coexisting with the virus".

The bottom line is to prevent a large-scale rebound in cases and consolidate the hard-won results of pandemic control to welcome the opening of the CPC Congress, he said.

Ma's article comes as domestic concerns have been raised over whether China's headline dynamic zero policy is sustainable in the face of more transmissible but milder variants like Omicron, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. The handling of the pandemic is widely seen as the political legacy of the party and Xi, who is expected to secure a third term at the Congress, the Post report said.

But discontent has been mounting in Shanghai, which is largely in lockdown as China grapples with its worst outbreak of the pandemic.

Children with severe UAI are at risk of cardiac arrest from rapid-onset upper airway obstruction Omicron more likely to cause upper airway infections among children: Study

WASHINGTON, April 18 (PTT): Omicron is more likely than other coronavirus variants to cause upper airway infection (UAI) among children, putting them at risk of heart attack and other severe complications, according to a study.

The researchers from the University of Colorado, Northwestern University, and Stony Brook University in the US analysed data from the National Covid Cohort Collaborative pertaining to 18,849 children under age 19 who were hospitalised with Covid-19.

The study, published last week in the journal JAMA Pediatrics, also found that Omicron causes UAI in younger children with the mean age of hospitalised children falling from about four years and five months during the pre-Omicron pe-

riod to about two years and one month during the Omicron period.

The researchers conducted the study to determine if cases of UAI among children increased when Omicron became the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant in the US.

The proportion of children with a pediatric complex chronic condition was not significantly different in the pre-Omicron period compared with the Omicron period, they said. Overall, 21.1 per cent of children hospitalised with both Covid-19 and UAI developed severe disease requiring measures like inserting a tube into the lungs to assist with breathing, known as intubation. "Children with severe UAI are at risk of cardiac arrest from rapid-onset upper airway obstruction. They may require thera-



pies typically provided in intensive care units, including frequent administration of nebulised racemic epinephrine, helium-oxygen mixtures, and intubation," the authors of the study study noted.

Nebulised racemic epinephrine

is typically reserved for patients in the hospital setting with moderate-to-severe respiratory distress.

"While the rate of SARS-CoV-2 paediatric UAI is not overwhelmingly high, understanding this new clinical phenotype and the potential

for acute upper airway obstruction may help guide therapeutic decision-making," they said.

The Omicron strain of SARS-CoV-2 became dominant in the US the week ending December 25, 2021. The highly transmissible variant is known to cause lower severity disease than the Delta variant, the researchers noted.

This may be because Omicron replicates less efficiently in lung cells and more efficiently in the conducting airways, they said.

The researchers acknowledged some limitation of this analysis, including that children who are still hospitalised are not represented in the study, and the frequency of severe disease observed in the Omicron period may be an underestimate.

Shehbaz Sharif says his 'speedy work' will frighten Imran

ISLAMABAD, April 18 (IANS): Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday inaugurated the Orange Line Metro Bus service, just days after taking charge as the new premier, media reports said.

Sharif had ordered to resume work on this project right after assuming the office of Prime Minister, Geo TV reported.

"The former Prime Minister is panicking because I have been elected as the representative. I will work on a pace I am used to," Sharif said while addressing the inauguration ceremony here.

"You [Imran Khan] may be panicked due to my speed of work, but the people have stopped panicking," he said.

The Prime Minister regretted the four years of delay in making the project, launched by the PML-N government under Nawaz Sharif in 2017, operational.

He said that the project was started in 2017 and it had to be

made operational by 2018, but the work on it came to a halt when the PML-N's rule ended.

Taking a jibe at the erstwhile PTI government, the premier said that the lawyers of the then ruling party caused the delay, but couldn't prove a single penny of corruption in court.

Sharif said that earlier, the country's defence expenditures used to be met by the national income, but during PTI's rule, these expenses were met through loans.

"We meet the expenses of welfare and development projects with loans," he said, Geo News reported.

"The expenditure of this project was brought down to Rs 12 billion from Rs 16 billion," Sharif said, adding that everything was available, including funds, and that the only thing lacking was the spirit to work and there was no other reason for the delay in completion of the project.

NE's apex student body urge Amit Shah to revoke decision on Hindi

SHILLONG, April 18 (IANS): The North East Students' Organisation (NESO), an apex body of eight influential students' organisations of the region, has urged Union Home minister Amit Shah to revoke the decision to make Hindi a compulsory subject in all the northeastern states up to Class 10 as "the move in the region would be detrimental".

The NESO told the Home minister that imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject in the north-eastern region would be detrimental not only for the propagation and dissemination of the indigenous languages but also to students who will be compelled to add another compulsory subject to their already vast syllabus.

NESO chairman Samuel B. Jyrwa and secretary general Sinam Prakash Singh in their letters to Shah said that in the region each state bears its own unique and diversified languages spoken by different ethnic groups ranging from Indo-Aryan to Tibeto-Burman to Austro-Asiatic families.

"In the region, a native or indigenous language or a mother tongue is an important marker for a community. Native or indigenous languages are being further enriched in terms of all aspects such as in literature, academics and arts."

The NESO, of which powerful All Assam Students' Union



(AASU) is one of the constituents, urged the home Minister to withdraw the "unfavourable policy and focus on how to further uplift the indigenous languages of the region by incorporating them in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution and facilitating more schemes for their development and progress.

"Such a move would not usher in unity but will be a tool to create apprehensions and disharmony. Also, a move to make one of the Modern Indian Language (MIL) subjects as compulsory is more or less like belittling the indigenous language spoken and written by a particular community."

The NESO said that the Hindi

language accounts for approximately 40-43 per cent of native speakers in India.

It is, however, worth noting that there is a plethora of other native languages in India which are rich, thriving and vibrant in their own perspectives giving India an image of a diverse and multi-lingual nation, it said.

The NESO, a conglomerate of eight students' bodies representing the seven states of the north eastern region, suggested that indigenous languages should be made compulsory in their native states till the 10th standard and Hindi should remain as an optional or elective subject, said the conglomerate student body.

On April 10, while chairing the 37th meeting of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee, Union minister Shah had said that Hindi should be accepted as an alternate language to English but not to local languages.

"The nine tribal communities of the Northeast have converted their dialects' scripts to Devanagari while all the eight states of the Northeast have agreed to make Hindi compulsory in schools up to Class 10. There is a need to give elementary knowledge of Hindi to students up to Class 9, and pay more attention to Hindi teaching examinations," the Home minister had reportedly said in the meeting.

While the political parties in the northeastern region are divided on the Hindi learning issue, the linguistic experts and political commentators said that while teaching in English and Hindi, local and indigenous languages must be given equal priority for their promotion and practical use.

Assam's influential apex literary body, Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS) has opposed the move to make Hindi a compulsory subject till Class 10 in the Northeastern states.

ASS secretary general Jadav Chandra Sharma said making Hindi a mandatory language will endanger the indigenous language.

Sixteen more pigs die of African Swine Fever in Mizoram

AIZAWL, April 18 (PTI): At least 16 more pigs died of African Swine Fever in Mizoram with the toll due to the disease rising to 770 in the state in a little over two months, an official said.

At least 124 pigs have been culled to prevent the spread of the infection since February this year, he said.

"Besides, 205 pigs have died due to suspected African Swine Fever. At least 17 villages in Aizawl, Champhai, Lunglei and Saitual districts have been affected due to the outbreak," animal husbandry and veterinary department joint director Dr Lalhmingthanga said.

The state government is making efforts to prevent the spread of the pig disease as per the 'National



Action Plan for Control, Containment and Eradication of African Swine Fever", he said.

Mizoram has already banned the import of pigs and pork products from other states after ASF cases broke out this year.

Altogether 33,417 pigs had died due to the outbreak of ASF last year, causing monetary losses to the tune of ₹ 60.82 crore.

The infectious disease was reported for the first time in the state in March last year.

Mizoram: Over 200 houses damaged in violent storm

AIZAWL, April 18 (PTI): A massive storm accompanied by heavy rain and hail damaged over 200 houses, including a church building in Mizoram's Kolasib and Mamit districts, an official said on Sunday.

No fatalities have so far been reported in the storm that hit the two districts late on Saturday, he said.

According to a preliminary report, at least 220 houses and the church building were damaged in Kolasib district, and about 18 houses in Mamit district near the Assam border, the official said.

No. MHRB/34/Faculty/2022/1225

NOTICE

In continuation of the notice no. MHRB/34/Faculty/2022/1216 Dated 12th April, 2022, it is for information of all concerned that the following Departments are also added for recruitment to the posts of Registrar/Demonstrator/Resident Physician etc. in the Government Medical Colleges of Assam under Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Assam.

1. Medical Oncology – 2 posts (UR)
2. Nuclear Medicine – 2 posts (UR)

Candidates are requested to visit the website <https://nhm.assam.gov.in>.

Sd/-
Secretary i/c
Medical and Health Recruitment Board, Assam
Janasanyog /D/712/22

Mizoram reports 61 new Covid-19 cases

AIZAWL, April 18 (PTI): Mizoram on Monday reported 61 fresh Covid-19 cases, including 25 children, pushing the tally to 2,26,172, a health department official said.

The northeastern state for the sixth consecutive day on Monday had reported below 100 fresh cases. It had reported 96 Covid-19 cases and one death on Sunday.

The Covid-19 death toll remained at 692 as no new fatality was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The single-day positivity rate increased to 35.26 per cent from 15.56 per cent the previous day, he said.

Mizoram now has 589 active Covid-19 cases, while 2,24,891 people have recovered from the infection so far, he said.

The northeastern state has so far tested more than 19.09 lakh samples for Covid-19 including 173 on Sunday.

Over 8.41 lakh people have been inoculated with Covid-19 vaccine till Saturday, according to the health department.

AMSU observes Realisation Day



IMPHAL, April 18 (NNN): Indigenous people are still facing the threat of extinction even though Inner Line Permit System (ILPS) prevails in Manipur, said student leaders who spoke on the 'Realisation Day' observance held in Imphal on Sunday.

Like each year, All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) observed the Realisation Day or Meekap Thokpa Nimit to remember the sacrifices made by two students during the 'go back foreigners' movement in 1980.

On April 16 and 17, 1980, two students were killed in the firing by security force personnel in their efforts to control an uprising of the students demanding putting in place a mechanism

to regulate entry of migrants into the state. On the occasion, the student body renewed its pledge to fight against any policy infringing the rights, cultures, traditions, heritages and languages of the indigenous people of the region.

After offering floral tributes to the memorial site of the two students at Pishum Chinga in Imphal by a large number of students to mark the occasion. The slogan shouting rally converged at Imphal College campus where a public meeting was held with addresses of the present and yesteryear leaders of the students' body.

AMSU president Haobijam Chal-

amba said that the threat of the existence of the indigenous people of the region still persists. He said that people of mainland India continued to migrate into the region even after the extension of the ILP system in the state. He also said that the ILP has been reduced to a 'toothless tiger' as its provisions of the regulation are not translated into action effectively. "The situation will be more dangerous when the train reaches Imphal," he also said.

Recalling students' movement against migrants, he said that AMSU has been struggling for the protection of the indigenous people of the region for the last more than four decades and will continue to do so.

Tripura woman beaten up by husband, others; forced to marry 'lover'

AGARTALA, April 18 (PTI): A middle-aged woman suspected of having an extramarital relationship has been allegedly beaten up and forced to marry her 'lover' in Tripura's Khowai district, police said on Monday.

The alleged incident took place at Madhya Krishnapur in Teliamura police station area on Saturday night, following which the woman has been hospitalised, an officer said.

"We will send a team to meet the victim to know the actual incident. The police has not received any written complaint yet, but there will be an inquiry into the alleged incident," Teliamura sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Sonacharan Jamatia told PTI.

The woman told reporters that on



Saturday night, 15 people led by her husband took her to a paddy field on suspicion of her having an extra-marital affair and thrashed her mercilessly following which she lost consciousness.

Her alleged lover was also roughed up.

A purported video that went viral on social media showed the woman, after regaining consciousness, being forced by villagers to exchange garlands with her alleged lover amid ululation.

It also showed some youths compelling the man to apply vermilion on

the woman's forehead.

The woman's husband confessed before the media that he and his family members beat her up for her alleged relationship with a man of the same village.

"After the incident, I took her to Teliamura hospital for treatment, and I spent the whole night there. The police visited my residence," he said without sounding repentant.

Tripura Commission for Women (TCW) chairperson Barnali Goswami condemned the alleged incident.

"In a civilised society, we can't tolerate such gruesome torture on a woman. Forceful marriage between a married woman and a man is not a natural practice. We will send a team to meet the victim to know the actual sequence of events," she said.

Block health mela organised at Kashiabari

HT Correspondent

TURA, April 18: The office of the District Medical and Health Officer (DM&HO), West Garo Hills, organised a one-day Block Health Mela at Kashiabari in Rajabala under Selsella C&RD Block on Monday where people from all walks of life participated and availed the facilities provided by the Govt of India through the Health Department.

Speaking at length, the chief guest of the day, West Garo Hills DM&HO, Dr. Bijoy Debbarma, highlighted the schemes and facilities being provided by the health department and informed that the block health melas in the district are being organised at different blocks from April 18 to 22 to create awareness among the rural masses. He also stressed on the need to have nutritious foods to stay healthy and strong.

Dr. Debbarma also urged the people of the area to take Covid-19 vaccines and to avail the facilities being provided through the MHIS.

On the day, Dr. Pritam Das, Medical and Health officer, Bhaibari PHC, while delivering the key-note address, highlighted the benefits and facilities provided by the block health mela.

The others, who spoke on the occasion in-



cluded, the additional DM&HO, Dr. Jakrambal A Sangma and CDPO, Selsella, Madonna T Sangma.

The welcome address was delivered by Dr. Crislin Sangma, Medical and Health officer,

Bhaibari and the function was presided over by Ameliya Raisa R Momin, adolescent counsellor, Selsella CHC. The vote of thanks on the day was proposed by the Ayush Medical officer, Bhaibari PHC, Dr. Abu Taiob Akond.

No. TE(Ex) Admn-2/2022/246

Dated Guwahati, the 18/04/2022

EDUCATIONAL NOTICE POLYTECHNIC ADMISSION TEST [PAT] -2022, ASSAM FOR ADMISSION INTO 3-YEARS DIPLOMA COURSES FOR THE SESSION-2022-23

Online applications are invited from the candidates who are Permanent Resident of Assam (except Central Govt. Employees quota) for registration to appear in the Polytechnic Admission Test [PAT]-2022 for admission into Diploma Courses in State Government Polytechnics of Assam and Polytechnics outside Assam (against seat allotted by the Govt. of India) for the session 2022-23.

How to apply:- Candidates are to apply online by opening the www.dte.assam.gov.in and click on "Online Application for PAT-2022". The online application portal will open w.e.f. 1st May, 2022 to 10th June, 2022. No other mode of application will be accepted.

Eligibility and Age limit:-

Candidate must pass the H.S.L.C. or its equivalent examination in single sitting with Mathematics and Science as compulsory subjects. Candidates also must have passed individually in both Theory and Practical examinations in Mathematics and Science.

Caste/Category	Required minimum average % in Mathematics and Science	Maximum Age
General & OBC/MOBC	40%	20 years 6 months on 31-12-2022
Schedule Caste	35%	23 years 6 months on 31-12-2022
Schedule Tribe	33%	23 years 6 months on 31-12-2022
For Institutions outside Assam [against Govt. of India allotted seats]		20 years 6 months on 31-12-2022

Polytechnic Admission Test Centers:-

Admission Test will be held Govt. Polytechnics/ Institutions of Assam under Directorate of Technical Education, Assam and in selected centers at Mangaldoi and Tezpur.

Please Note:

1. Candidates are requested to read the instructions carefully in the Information Brochure available in the link www.dte.assam.gov.in before filling the Online Application form.
2. In case of difficulty for applying online, candidates may take help / assistance from their nearest Polytechnic/ Institution under Directorate of Technical Education, Assam.

Application Fee:- "For Polytechnic Admission Test-2022 and Counselling for Admission": An application fee of Rs.500/- [plus bank charges as applicable] is to be paid using "State Bank Collect" which facilitates payment through Debit Card/Credit Card/Net Banking. Payment may also be made which facilitates payment through Debit Card/Credit Card/Net Banking. Payment may also be made in cash at any branch State Bank of India after generating the Cash Deposit form from "State Bank Collect" in final step of Online Application. Further instructions will be available during the online application process.

Candidates are required to carefully follow the steps while applying online.

IMPORTANT DATES	
On line form fill up starts on	: 1st May, 2022
Online form fill up closes on	: 10th June, 2022
Issue of online Admit Card	: Will be declared later on.
Date of Admission Test	: 17th July, 2022.

Schedule for Polytechnic Admission Test- 2022

Date	Time	Subject	Full Marks	Types of Question paper
17/07/2022	10 am to 12 noon [Sunday]	Mathematics & Science	100	Multiple choice questions

Please Note:-

1. Candidates will not be permitted to take admission without Permanent Resident Certificate [PRC] /Caste Certificate / for OBC (Non Creamy Layer Certificate after clearing Polytechnic Admission Test-2022. Therefore, the candidates are requested to keep the PRC and above mentioned documents ready well in advance for admission into the State Govt. Polytechnics of Assam.
2. For further details candidates are advised to go through the website: www.dte.assam.gov.in.

Sd/-
Director of Technical Education, Assam,
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19.

Janasanyog/D/725/22

Peace prevails in Hubballi, 89 arrested in connection with Sunday's violence

BENGALURU/HUBBALLI, April 18 (PTI): Peace prevailed in Karnataka's Hubballi town on Monday, a day after a mob went on the rampage over a social media post that saw a police station and a Hanuman temple coming under attack, as police arrested 89 persons in connection with the incident.

Police sources said the violence was triggered following a social media post of a digitally altered image of a saffron flag flying over a mosque. The man who allegedly put out the post has been remanded to police custody.

State chief minister Basavaraj Bommai warned of action against those guilty in connection with the violence.

According to police, the situation in Hubballi was peaceful on Monday.

"Arrests have been made and investigation is on. All those behind it, also leaders behind it, will face investigation and action will be taken against those guilty in accordance with law," Bommai told reporters in



Bengaluru in response to a question regarding the violence in Hubballi, about 410 km from the state capital, in the early hours of Sunday.

Police have arrested 89 people who were allegedly involved in the violence in the Old Town in the wee hours of Sunday while four are absconding.

The violence broke out over the contentious social media post. Despite persuading the leaders of a community twice, the mob went on

the rampage, police sources said.

According to police, the arrests were made on the basis of the CCTV camera footage when they were setting the police vehicles on fire, pelting stones on police personnel and damaging the Old Town police station in Hubballi.

Additional director general of police Dr C H Pratap Reddy, appointed by the government to monitor the investigation into the riots, visited the Hubballi-Dharwad police Com-

missioner Labhu Ram's office and held a detailed discussion with him, police sources said.

Meanwhile, Abhishek Hiremath, whose alleged social media post triggered the riot was remanded to police custody till April 30.

Speaking to reporters, his lawyer Sanju Badaskar said the Old Town police produced Hiremath before the Fourth Judicial Magistrate First Class and additional session's judge from where he was sent to the Hubballi sub-jail.

"The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Hindu Vakeelara Vedike presented the case in favour of Abhishek Hiremath. Tomorrow, the government is going to plead in the court and we will argue on behalf of Hiremath," Badaskar said.

He said a petition will also be filed before the court to grant Hiremath permission to appear for the Pre-University Examination.

Meanwhile, police said the prohibitory orders clamped in Hubballi, under Section 144 of the CrPC will remain in effect till April 20.

40 Chinese booked by Mumbai EOW for fraudulently becoming directors of Indian firms

MUMBAI, April 18 (PTI): The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai Police has registered 34 FIRs against 150 people, including 60 foreigners - 40 of them from China - for allegedly violating laws regarding the registration of new companies and for fraudulently becoming directors of Indian companies, a police official said on Monday.

The official said the FIRs were registered between April 1 to 15 and added that four more First Information Reports will be registered till Tuesday.

Among the 60 foreigners against whom the cases are filed, 40 are from China and the rest from Singapore, the UK, Taiwan, the USA, Cyprus, the UAE, and South Korea.

As per the preliminary investigation, the accused had given false statements to the ROC (Registrar of Companies), Mumbai, an EOW official said.

In some cases, the communication addresses of the companies were found changed.



The 34 FIRs also name more than 30 Chartered Accountants (CAs), 30 Company Secretaries (CSs) and directors of companies. As per the complaints filed by the ROC, Mumbai, the foreign nationals became directors and owners in Indian incorporated companies fraudulently.

The FIRs have invoked various sections of the Indian Penal Code

(IPC) for cheating, criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust along with section 447 (fraud) of the Companies Act.

These complaints were registered at the Marine Drive police station.

The first FIR was registered in February. The EOW has now taken over the probe, the official added.

Dejected opposition parties taking refuge in vote bank, divisive politics: Nadda



NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): BJP president J P Nadda on Monday accused the Opposition of waging a "direct onslaught on the spirit of our nation and casting aspersions on our hardworking citizens", in a reaction to the rival parties' joint statement attacking the Modi government over incidents of hate speech and communal violence.

In a letter to fellow Indians, Nadda said the Opposition parties "tried, tested, or I should say dusted and rusted approach of vote bank politics, divisive politics, and selective politics is no longer working" as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas' has seen Indians being empowered and getting the wings to rise further.

Unfortunately, this thrust towards development politics is being bitterly resisted by the rejected and dejected parties which are once again taking refuge in vote bank and divisive politics, he said.

"Today, India is seeing two distinctive styles of politics - the NDA's efforts which are seen in their work and the petty politics of a group of parties, which is seen in their acerbic words," he said.

"In the last few days, we have seen these parties come together yet again in letter (whether in spirit too, time will tell) in which they have waged a direct onslaught on the spirit of our nation and cast aspersions on our hardworking citizens," the BJP president said.

The youth of India want opportunities not obstacles, they want development not divisions, he said, adding people across all faiths, age groups and different walks of life have come together to defeat poverty and take India to new heights of progress.

"I would urge the opposition to change track and embrace the politics of development. We owe this to our coming generations," he

said. The results of the recently held assembly elections, in which the BJP won power in four of the five states, should be an eye opener for those who thrive on vote bank politics, he said.

India's largest state on the electoral map (Uttar Pradesh), a coastal state (Goa), a state in the Northeast (Manipur) and a hill state (Uttarakhand) have given a resounding mandate to the BJP, he said, asserting India is seeing a pro-incumbency sentiment where developmental politics is being resoundingly rewarded.

The BJP also became the first party in many years to cross the 100 figure in the Rajya Sabha and got an absolute majority in the Uttar Pradesh legislative council, he added.

"The Opposition should introspect why the parties that ruled the nation for so many decades have been confined to the margins of history now," Nadda said.

In his context, he noted the communal violence during a religious procession in Karauli in the Congress-ruled Rajasthan and took a swipe at opposition parties, asking what are the compulsions driving their haunting silence on the issue.

He also referred to a number of riots when the opposition, mostly the Congress, was in power and various incidents in opposition-ruled states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra besides political violence in West Bengal and Kerala to hit out at them.

He referred to the firing on 'sadhus' demanding ban on cow slaughter in a protest outside Parliament in 1966 when Indira Gandhi was prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi's justification of anti-Sikh pogrom with "when a big tree falls, the earth shakes" remarks and communal riots in Gujarat in 1969, Moradabad in 1980, Bhiwandi in 1984 and Bhagalpur in 1989 among others to target the Opposition.

Coins worth ₹ 11 crore missing from SBI vaults; CBI takes over investigation

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): The CBI has taken over the probe into the case of coins worth ₹ 11 crore going missing from the vaults of the SBI branch in Mehandipur Balaji in Rajasthan, officials said on Monday.

State Bank of India (SBI) had approached the Rajasthan High Court seeking a CBI probe into the matter as the missing amount was higher than ₹ 3 crore, the threshold for seeking a probe by the agency.

On the high court's directions, the CBI has taken over the FIR earlier registered by the Rajasthan Police.

The matter came to light after the SBI branch decided to carry out counting of money after a preliminary enquiry indicated discrep-

ancy in the cash reserve at the bank. A Jaipur-based private vendor was roped in to carry out the counting of coins worth ₹ 13 crore, according to branch account books.

The counting revealed that over Rs 11 crore worth of coins were missing from the branch.

Only 3,000 coin bags carrying about ₹ 2 crore could be accounted for and were transferred to the RBI's coin holding branch.

It is also alleged that the employees of the private vendor who was doing the counting were threatened in the night on August 10, 2021 at the guesthouse where they were staying and were asked to refrain from the counting, the FIR has alleged.

Men carried weapons during Hanuman Jayanti procession at Delhi's Jahangirpuri: CPI(M) leaders

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): CPI(M) Politburo member Brinda Karat and the party's Delhi state committee secretary K M Tewari have alleged that the Hanuman Jayanti procession taken out in Delhi's Jahangirpuri was armed, with several men carrying "swords, lathis and firearms", days after communal violence broke out in the area.

In a letter to the Delhi police commissioner, the duo have also raised questions over the role of the force in the incident.

"Video evidence aired on several television channels, along with eyewitness reports to our fact-finding team, is conclusive evidence that the procession taken out by members of the youth wing of the Bajrang Dal was armed, with several men carrying naked swords, lathis and also, shockingly, firearms."

"These weapons were openly flaunted and brandished during the procession. The police have stated that the procession had police permission. Did the police give permission to carry arms? In fact, the processionists who carried arms had clearly violated the Arms Act, which has stringent provisions of imprisonment for such violations," the letter read.

It also said from the police commissioner's statements to the media, it is unclear whether

those carrying arms during the procession were identified or not. "If so, whether they have been arrested under the relevant provisions of law, including the Arms Act. It is also unclear from your statement whether there is any investigation into the role of the police."

"Who is accountable for allowing an armed procession to stop in front of a mosque, shouting provocative and aggressive slogans at the exact time when the prayers to break the Roza fast were scheduled to begin? Such deliberate acts of omission and commission by the police have directly resulted in the ensuing incidents," the letter written by the Left leaders read. While both the leaders raised the issue of injuries suffered by police personnel during the violence, they also asked if senior officers had followed due diligence in the matter.

"...if adequate police arrangements had been made, if action had been taken against weapon-carrying processionists, if the procession had not been allowed to stop in front of the mosque -- the incidents would not have taken place. It should be noted that there have never been incidents of a communal nature in this area earlier. Two communities have lived together in harmony. This is further evidence that the events were manufactured by out-



siders in the procession in the name of shobha yatra," the letter read. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders also said they have information that male police personnel raided houses in C block at night and "manhandled and beat up women".

"This is against all norms and rules laid down, which forbid male police personnel to touch a woman. Further, on the 17th (April), when our members along with others had met additional DCP Kishen Kumar at the Jahangirpuri police station, they were shocked to find that leaders of the BJP were holding a press conference within the compound of the thana. This is highly irregular and strengthens the apprehension of an entirely partisan and

biased police role in the present case," the letter read. The leaders appealed to the commissioner to take action against the police personnel who allowed weapons to be carried during the procession, who were responsible for the lack of adequate arrangements, who allowed the procession to stop in front of a mosque and those conducting a "one-sided, biased" investigation.

"You have stated that people from both communities have been arrested. We stand for the arrest and punishment of all those guilty. However, the overwhelming majority of arrests is from the minority community, whereas the course of events shows that the main provocations and planning for the incidents were done by the organisation which held the procession - an affiliate of the Bajrang Dal as stated by the police."

"The Crime Branch, to whom the investigation has been handed over, is under the overall jurisdiction of the very police force which in the case of the Jahangirpuri incident is responsible. It is for this reason that the CPI(M) has demanded a time-bound judicial inquiry or an impartial investigation. In the meanwhile, we request you to take action against the police responsible," the letter read.

Haryana makes wearing of mask compulsory in 4 NCR districts

CHANDIGARH, April 18 (PTI): The Haryana government on Monday made the wearing of a face mask mandatory in four districts falling in the National Capital region.

Haryana Health minister Anil Vij said in view of the rise in Covid cases over the past few days in Gurugram, the wearing of a mask has been made compulsory there and three other districts of Faridabad, Sonapat and Jhajjar.

Of 234 cases reported in Haryana on Monday, 198 surfaced in Gurugram alone while 21 were from Faridabad, he said.

"But in more than half of the districts, cases are nil or very less," Vij told reporters here.

Vij said a team led by additional chief secretary (Health) Rajeev Arora has been asked to study why cases are increasing in Gurugram. Its report is yet to come, he said.

"However, as a precautionary measure in the districts which lie close to the national capital, we have



made the wearing of a mask compulsory," he said.

The wearing of masks will be mandatory with immediate effect. Those not wearing a mask will be fined, he said.

"We are studying which areas in Gurugram are seeing a surge," said Vij while replying to a question.

To another question, he said some samples have been sent to Rohtak to see which variant is in circulation in

Gurugram. He said the Health Department is fully prepared to tackle any situation.

"We are ready, our staff is ready, we have adequate beds, equipment, oxygen," he said.

The decision by the Haryana government has come on the day Uttar Pradesh made it compulsory for people to wear a face mask in public places in Lucknow and six NCR districts.

Clashes near TMC MP's residence in Kolkata leave eight injured; six arrested

KOLKATA, April 18 (PTI): Clashes broke out on Monday between two groups of people over control of a construction site in the southern part of the city, leaving at least eight injured, a senior police officer said.

Six people were arrested in connection with the "brawl that took place in two-to three phases" near TMC MP Sougata Roy's residence in the Lake Gardens area, he said.

"We are looking for others involved in the incident. A huge team of Kolkata Police's Anti Rowdy Section (ARS) are currently monitoring the situation in the area," the officer said.

"There is a new construction happening in the area. An old house is being demolished. The two groups engaged in scuffles to exert control of the construction site. Members from both the groups have suffered injuries," he said.

According to police sources, members of the two groups or syndicates allegedly bore allegiance to

the ruling TMC.

In West Bengal, syndicates, allegedly under the patronage of the ruling party, control the construction business. These syndicates apparently force promoters and contractors to buy construction materials, often of inferior quality, at high prices.

The senior officer told reporters that some of those who have sustained injuries have admitted to the fact that they were part of syndicates.

The TMC MP, when approached, said, "I have not seen such clashes in this area before. Such incidents were unheard of (in this area) even during the Railway Colony movement or the Naxalite period. I have been a resident of this area for more than 60 years. I had to call the local police and seek their intervention."

"Disagreements over distribution of dividends have led to the clash," he said, adding that the incident left locals, mostly aged people, rattled.

All 100 smart cities to have integrated command-control centre by August 15: Puri

SURAT, April 18 (PTI): Union Housing and Urban Affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said 80 of the 100 'Smart Cities' in the country have Integrated Command and Control Centres and the remaining will get it by August 15. Puri was here to inaugurate the 3-day 'Smart Cities, Smart Urbanization' conference organised by Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in association with Surat Smart City Corporation Development Ltd as part of the Centre's Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.

"Work has started in almost all government-funded projects in the Smart City Mission (SCM) and projects under SCM will be completed by next year. A total of 80 of the 100 Smart Cities have Integrated Command and Control Centres, and the remaining 20 will be operational by August 15 this year," he said in his inaugural address.

Smart cities were selected after stakeholder consultations and work on them have been the fastest among government schemes despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Puri said, adding that the experience gained will help make SCM a people's movement.

The Smart Cities Mission was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June



2015 and it was designed as part of a multi-layer strategy to meet the aspirations of 40 per cent of India's population living in cities, said a PIB release.

Of the total investment of Rs 2,05,018 crore under SCM, projects worth Rs 93,552 crore were proposed to be developed by Centre and state funds, and almost 100 per

cent of these government funded projects have seen work ordered, said the release.

On the first day of the conference, award winners of the India Smart Cities Awards Contest (ISAC) 2020 were felicitated. These awards were earlier announced through a virtual conference in 2021 due to the pandemic.

Surat and Indore were given the Best City award, while Uttar Pradesh was awarded the Best State, said the release.

Union minister of state for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaulash Kishore, Union MoS Railways Darshana Jardosh along with principal secretaries of states and Union Territories, municipal commissioners, MDs and CEOs of 100 Smart Cities, Mission Directorates and professionals attended the event, said the release.

During the event, several new schemes were also launched, including a "virtual hub for collaborations on urban transformation" in partnership between SCM and the World Economic Forum.

The hub will leverage emerging technologies and innovations to transform Indian cities into centres of sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth, said the release.

Pak terrorists using Aadhaar card to camouflage identity

Jammu and Kashmir Police for stronger safety features

SRINAGAR, April 18 (PTI): With terror groups misusing Aadhaar card to camouflage the identity of their Pakistani cadres, the Jammu and Kashmir Police will request the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to strengthen safety features of the biometric ID, officials have said.

The police force will also pitch for devising a mechanism for getting real-time information on an Aadhaar card being misused by terrorists.

The misuse of the biometric ID came to light following the recent killing of two Pakistani terrorists in Bishambhar Nagar, adjacent to the Dal Lake, in Srinagar.

The terrorists, who had been involved in the killing of CRPF jawans earlier this month, were identified as Mohammed Bhali alias Abu Qasim, who had been active in Kashmir Valley since 2019, and Abu Arsalan alias Khalid, who was present since 2021.

However, the recoveries from the encounter site included two Aadhaar cards bearing an address in Jammu.



Subsequently, the police carried out a thorough search and found that the Aadhaar numbers were genuine but the cards had their passport-sized pictures superimposed on them, an official said.

A genuine Aadhaar card contains picture taken on webcam, he added.

Such camouflaging attempts by the Pakistan-

based terror groups and their masters in the ISI are aimed at painting the terrorism in Kashmir Valley as an indigenous movement, the officials said.

Alarmed by the blatant misuse of Aadhaar cards, the Jammu and Kashmir Police has decided to write to UIDAI requesting it to include more safety features, the officials said.

Privacy guidelines of Aadhaar are very stringent, thereby preventing the law enforcement agencies from verifying any particular card. A basic check can only provide the age bracket of the card holder without revealing the exact identity, the officials said.

The police will also cite the case of Mohammed Ismail Alvi alias Lambu, one of the masterminds of the 2019 attack on the CRPF convoy that left 40 personnel dead. A forged Aadhaar card was recovered from the site of the encounter in which he was killed.

Several forged Aadhaar cards have also been found from various hideouts of terror groups in the past few months, the officials said.

Police confirm first death in Khargone riots after man's body found in Indore hospital



KHARGONE (MP), April 18 (PTI): A 30-year-old man who went missing during communal clashes in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone city on Ram Navami has become the first fatality of the violence but his death has raised allegations of a cover-up with his kin on Monday accusing the police of keeping his body under wraps for eight days.

The body of Ibresh Khan was kept at a government hospital in Indore, around 100km from here, for eight days after it was found in Khargone's Anand Nagar area as freezer facility was not available in the riot-hit city, police said. The state government, however, has claimed a case of murder was registered on April 11 itself, a day after the riots broke out in Khargone during Ram Navami celebrations, following a postmortem on the body.

A police officer said that Ibresh Khan died due to serious injuries to his head caused by stones. Communal clashes had broken out in Khargone city on April 10 during a Ram Navami procession, leading to arson and stone-pelting, and imposition of a curfew. Superintendent of Police Siddharth Choudhary had received a bullet injury during the violence.

"An unidentified body was found in the night of communal violence in the Anand Nagar area of Khargone," In-charge Superintendent of Police (SP) Rohit Kashwani told reporters. He said since there was no freezer facility available in Khargone, the body was kept at the Indore government hospital after a postmortem. Kashwani said the family members of Ibresh Khan registered a missing person complaint on April 14.

"Ibresh Khan's body was handed over to his family members on Sunday after they identified him", he said, adding further investigation was underway.

Kashwani said that Ibresh Khan died due to serious injuries to his head caused by stones.

However, a kin of Ibresh Khan, a resident of the Islampur area, alleged a cover-up by the police. Ibresh Khan's brother Ikhlak Khan claimed that the deceased was seen in the custody of the police by some people on April 12. He alleged that the police informed him about Ibresh Khan's death and the whereabouts of his body only after he threatened to go to the media. Ikhlak Khan alleged that Ibresh Khan had gone to provide food for 'Ifar' (evening meal eaten by Muslims during Ramadan fast-

ing) in the Anand Nagar area when he was hit by a stone. "The people in Anand Nagar attacked my brother with weapons and crushed his head with a stone," he alleged while speaking to reporters.

Ikhlak Khan also claimed that Ibresh Khan was seen in the custody of the police by some people on April 12 but these witnesses were not ready to depose.

"A policeman came to me on Sunday night and told me that Ibresh's body is kept in Indore," he said.

Ikhlak Khan claimed that the condition of Ibresh Khan's body indicates that he was brutally attacked. "While his one eye was broken there were cuts on his face and legs," he said.

Ikhlak Khan alleged that the police kept the family members in the dark about the whereabouts of his brother for eight days.

"They didn't disclose the whereabouts of my brother even after registering a missing person complaint. The police informed me about my brother's body only after I threatened to go to the media," he claimed.

Meanwhile, state Home minister Narottam Mishra said following the postmortem report, a case of murder was registered on April 11.

The body was unidentified at that time and later a missing complaint was lodged and subsequently the deceased was identified, he said and added further investigation was underway.

In reply to a question about some organisations threatening to go to courts against administrative actions post-violence, including demolition of "illegal" homes and shops of alleged riot accused in the city, Mishra said the state government has acted against rioters as per the law and those aggrieved are free to go to courts.

Meanwhile, the curfew was relaxed for four hours on Monday - from 12 pm to 2 pm and from 3 pm to 5 pm - following improvement in the situation in Khargone, officials said.

Stores selling milk, vegetables, provisions and medicines, among others, were allowed to remain open during the curfew relaxation hours. Local residents were allowed to make purchases of essential items without using their vehicles, they said.

In a related development, a delegation of Muslim clerics on Monday called on Madhya Pradesh chief secretary Iqbal Singh Bains and submitted a memorandum demanding setting up of a high-level committee to look into alleged selective actions of the police and the district administration after the riots. The memorandum claimed some of about 200 people of the Muslim community, who were arrested in connection with the violence, have sustained fractures and their cause should be probed. The delegation claimed a local resident, who died "several years" ago, figures in one of the FIRs registered against the rioters.

This raises questions over the police action, it added.

Law on poll promises: Vice-Prez calls for debate

MACHILIPATNAM (AP), April 18 (PTI): Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu on Monday called for a nation-wide debate on the need for enacting a law on implementation of poll promises (by political parties).

"Political parties should be responsible while making promises (on the eve of elections). They should weigh the pros and cons and promise only those that could be implemented. What is promised should be for the good of the people," the Vice-President observed.

Venkaiah Naidu was addressing a public meeting after unveiling a life-size bronze statue of Pinnamaneni Koteswara Rao, former Chairman of Krishna Zilla Parishad, at the ZP office here.

"There is a demand for a law...one that keeps a tab on poll promises and enables necessary action in case of failure to honour the promises. There is a need for a nation-wide debate, at all levels, on such law," the Vice-President said.

He lamented that (some) political parties were making not only unlimited number of promises but also those that were impractical to implement.

"People should keep a watchful eye on the political representatives they elect. You should constantly observe the conduct of your elected representatives," Venkaiah Naidu said.

The Vice-President regretted that caste, community, cash and criminality were replacing character, calibre, capacity and conduct.

"This is dangerous for democracy. The system gets weakened by this," he warned.

He expressed also anguish over the degeneration of political discourse right from Parliament to the local bodies. "The level of debates is falling and dignity is lacking. Everyone should review their language, behaviour and conduct," Venkaiah Naidu added. Recalling the leadership of Pinnamaneni Koteswara Rao, who served as Chairman of Krishna Zilla Parishad for over two-and-a-half decades, the Vice-President noted that the late leader made an ever-lasting impression in the minds of the people.

"He stood by what he believed in. Though belonging to Congress, he exercised his authority in an apolitical manner and provided an inspirational leadership for generations," Venkaiah Naidu observed. As ZP chairman, Koteswara Rao focused on education, development of schools and creation of better infrastructure for students.

State minister J Ramesh, Krishna ZP chairperson U Harika, Vijayawada Lok Sabha member Kesineni Srinivas, Machilipatnam MLA Perni Venkataramaiah, former Chief Vigilance commissioner K V Chowdhary and others attended the event. Later, the Vice-President attended an event at his family's Swarna Bharat Trust at Atukuru wherein he released a book "Nayudamma Essays, Speeches, Notes and Others" on the late scientist Y Nayudamma.

Mizoram Governor Kambhampati Haribabu, former minister Kamineni Srinivas and others attended the event. Special chief secretary (Revenue) Rajat Bhargava saw off the Vice-President at the Vijayawada airport as he left for Visakhapatnam.

Contd. from Page 1...

Lakhimpur Kheri case: SC cancels

the bail plea of the accused within a period of three months and held the presence of 'state' in the bail proceedings "does not tantamount to according a hearing to a 'victim' of the crime". It took note of the submissions of victims that they were not heard in the high court as the video connection of their lawyer was lost and said, "we are constrained to express our disappointment with the manner in which the high court failed to acknowledge the right of the victims." The verdict considered questions including whether a 'victim', as defined in the CrPC, is entitled to be heard at the stage of adjudication of bail application of an accused.

It also dealt with the issue whether high court overlooked relevant considerations while granting bail to Mishra and if so, should the apex court interfere. Analysing the submissions, the court said until recently, criminal law had been viewed on a dimensional plane in which courts were required to adjudicate between the accused and the state and the 'victim' had no participation in adjudicatory process and "was made to sit outside the Court as a mute spectator". The verdict then noted the evolution in law and said, "a 'victim' within the meaning of CrPC cannot be asked to wait the commencement of trial for asserting his/her right to participate in the proceedings. "The victim has a legally vested right to be heard at every step post the occurrence of an offence."

On the first issue, it answered in the affirmative, and held that in the present case, the 'victims' have been denied a fair and effective hearing at the time of granting bail to the accused. "It cannot be gainsaid that the right of a victim under the amended Cr.P.C. are substantive, enforceable, and are another facet of human rights. The victim's right, therefore, cannot be termed or construed restrictively like a brutum fulmen (empty threat)," it said, adding such rights are "totally independent" of the State. The verdict said that while deciding the bail plea, a court "should refrain from evaluating or undertaking a detailed assessment of evidence, as the same is not a relevant consideration at the threshold stage."

A court may examine prima facie issues, including any reasonable grounds whether the accused committed an offence or the severity of the offence itself, an extensive consideration of merits which has the potential to prejudice either the case of the prosecution or the defence, is undesirable, it added. "Instead of looking into aspects such as the nature and gravity of the offence; severity of the punishment in the event of conviction; circumstances which are peculiar to the accused or victims; likelihood of the accused fleeing; likelihood of tampering with the evidence and witnesses and the impact that his release may have on the trial and the society at large; the high court has adopted a myopic view of the evidence on the record and proceeded to decide the case on merits."

The high court had granted bail to Mishra after taking note of the submissions including that the FIR, which alleged fire arm injuries caused by the accused, was not corroborated by the forensic evidence and the post-mortem report. "The High Court has taken into account several irrelevant considerations, whilst simultaneously ignoring judicial precedents and established parameters for grant of bail. It has been ruled on numerous occasions that a FIR cannot be treated as an encyclopaedia of events....," the top court said. While allegations in the FIR that the accused used his firearm and the subsequent post mortem and injury reports may have some limited bearing, there was no legal necessity to give undue weightage to the same, it said, adding that observations of high court may have bearings on the trial. It referred to the court's job to ensure that neither the right of an accused to seek bail pending trial is expropriated, nor the 'victim' or the state are denied of their right to oppose such a prayer. The top court then remanded the bail plea of the accused for fresh consideration "in a fair, impartial and dispassionate manner, and keeping in view the settled parameters".

Tripura hands over 3 arrested

the police officer said more details will be known after interrogating them. Eleven suspected 'jihadists' have been arrested in Barpeta district since March, including six on Friday. A Bangladeshi national was also among those arrested in March.

Extreme poverty in India declined

that farmers with small landholding sizes have experienced higher income growth. Real incomes for farmers with the smallest landholdings have grown by 10 per cent in annualised terms between the two survey rounds, compared to a 2 per cent growth for farmers with the largest landholding, it said. Rural households owning smaller pieces of land are more likely to be poorer than others, it added.

ASDC delegation submits memo

and declaration of eco sensitive zone and elephant corridor in the adjoining areas close to Kaziranga National Park. Quoting from the press statement the party president said, the ASDC has been demanding Autonomous State since 1986. The present BJP party in its election manifesto in 2019 Parliamentary election, in the by-election to Baithalangso LA in 2016 and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council election in 2017 has promised to create an Autonomous State and even stated that the issue is a national agenda, but it has not fulfilled its commitment. The ASDC therefore strongly believed that a spell of democratic mass is necessary to pressurise the Government on the issue. He also said that CM has assured the delegation that no unilateral decision will be taken and that all concerned parties will be taken into confidence. On the eco-sensitive zone and animal corridor affecting the two member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituencies of Socheng Dhenta and Duabagori, the CM has directed the chief executive member of KAAC to depute a good lawyer to represent the views of the KAAC as a case is going on in the Supreme Court, the delegation members informed.

Lt Gen Manoj Pande

command and staff assignments in conventional as well as counter-insurgency operations in all types of terrain. He commanded an engineer regiment along the Line of Control during the Operation Parakram in Jammu and Kashmir, an engineer brigade in the western sector, an infantry brigade along LoC and a mountain division in high-altitude area of western Ladakh and a corps in the Northeast.

His staff exposures include Brigade Major of a Mountain Brigade in the Northeast, Assistant Military Secretary (AMS) in the Military Secretary's Branch and Brigadier General Staff (Operations) at the Eastern Command headquarters. He has served as chief engineer in the United Nations mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

He has also served as the additional director general in the military operations directorate at the Army headquarters and as the chief of staff at the headquarters of the Southern Command. For his illustrious service, he has been conferred Param Vishisht Seva Medal, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, Vishisht Seva Medal, the Chief of Army Staff Commendation and the GOC-in-C Commendation.

ED attaches assets worth over

during 2002-03 to 2021-22 and of this, "paid" a commission of ₹ 7,588 crore to its distributors and members in India and the United States from 2002-03 to 2020-21. "A money-laundering investigation by the ED revealed that Amway is running a pyramid fraud in the guise of direct-selling multi-level marketing network. "Without knowing the real facts, the common gullible public is induced to join as members of the company and purchase products at exorbitant prices and are thus, losing their hard earned money," the federal agency said. The new members, it said, are not buying the products to use those, but to become rich by becoming members as showcased by the upline members. "The reality is that the commissions received by the upline members contribute enormously in hike of prices of the products," it said. The money-laundering probe found out that Amway brought ₹ 21.39 crore as share capital in India during 1996-97 and till the financial year 2020-21, it remitted a "huge" amount of ₹ 2,859.1 crore in the name of dividend, royalty and other payments to their investors and parent entities. Companies like Brit Worldwide India Private Limited and Network Twenty One Private Limited also played a "major role" in promoting Amway's pyramid scheme by conducting seminars for joining members under the guise of sale of goods by enrolment of members in the chain system, it alleged. "The promoters are conducting mega conventions and flaunted their lavish lifestyle and used social media to lure gullible investors," the ED said. The company spokesperson said the recent inclusion of direct selling under the Consumer Protection Act (Direct Selling) Rules, 2021 has brought in the much-needed legal and regulatory clarity for the industry, while again confirming Amway India's continuous compliance with the spirit and letter of all laws and regulations in India. "As the matter is sub-judice, we do not wish to comment further," the spokesperson said. The Centre had, in December 2021, banned direct-selling companies from promoting pyramid and money-circulation schemes as it notified new rules for the direct-selling industry.

Pakistan court sentences 6 people to

sentenced to death, to pay ₹ 2,00,000 as compensation to the legal heirs of the deceased. The nine accused who were given life imprisonment will have to pay a fine of ₹ 2,00,000/- each and ₹ 2,00,000/- compensation to the legal heirs of the deceased. The court official said that total 46 prosecution witnesses had recorded their statements against the suspects. The prosecution had sought death penalty for 80 suspects.

The suspects had denied the charges of their involvement in the crime. Kumara was working as general manager in the Rajko industries (dealing in garments - sportswear) in Sialkot district for the last seven years or so. Some factory employees had accused Kumara of tearing a poster of TLP inscribed with Islamic verses during his inspection of machines in the factory after which the mob dragged him out of the factory, brutally beat him and killed him before setting the body on fire. After Kumara's murder, some 200 suspects were taken into custody. However, over 100 of them were subsequently released after no evidence of their involvement in the incident was found. The local business community had handed over a donation of USD 100,000 to Kumara's wife and the factory owner had promised to give the victim's salary of USD 1,650 to his family every month. Kumara had gone to Pakistan in 2011 after he got a job as a mechanical engineer at an apparel factory in Faisalabad. After a year, he joined Sialkot's Rajko Industries as its general manager and was the only Sri Lankan national working in the factory. The Sri Lankan Parliament, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had condemned the brutal killing and expressed hope that the Pakistan government would bring the guilty to justice. Pakistan has extremely strict blasphemy laws against defaming Islam, including the death penalty, and rights campaigners say they are often used to settle scores in the Muslim majority country.

Doctors' stir affects health

government has a sizeable number of contractual doctors and others working in Central Schemes, who would cater to the need of the patients during this period. The Nagaland government has said the PM's statement was made in a political rally and no directive has been given to states. The chief secretary said that the state Cabinet will have a meeting soon to deliberate on the NIDA's demand. Alam said that all the districts have not been affected by the doctors' agitation. The government has not sanctioned their application for casual leave, he said. Several organisations, especially the influential Naga Students Federation, are opposed to the demand of the NIDA saying increasing the retirement age of doctors would create stagnancy in employment opportunities.

UNSC needs to be reformed, it plays limited role in maintaining global peace: Foreign secy

KOLKATA, April 18 (PTI): Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Monday called for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), claiming that it had not been able to fulfill responsibilities in maintaining global peace and security.

Shringla, speaking at a webinar organised by Bharat Chamber of Commerce here, also said that UNSC, formed after the World War-II, has always played a restricted role globally due to limited representation.

"UNSC has not been able to fulfill its responsibilities... Unless the United Nations (UN), particularly the UNSC, is reformed, the global body's role in maintaining peace and security will be limited due to lack of representation," Shringla said.

"Deadlock in the UNSC has surfaced in the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. The issue had to be taken to the UN General Assembly," he pointed out.

Currently, UNSC has five permanent members - China, France, Russia, the UK and the US. India



is among the ten non-permanent members of the body. Only a permanent member has the power to veto any substantive resolution.

India has been at the forefront of the years-long efforts to reform the security council, saying it rightly deserved a place as a permanent member.

Shringla, during the session, said

that unilateral sanctions imposed by the West on Russia will have an impact on Indian trade and investments in that country.

The foreign secretary, however, did not elaborate further on the matter.

Referring to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, he said that the COVID-19 pandemic hit hard the

island country's tourism sector.

Tourism is the main source of revenue for Sri Lanka, he noted.

India had extended two lines of credit to Sri Lanka, while the island country also approached the IMF for a bail-out, he said.

Talking about the recovery of the pandemic-hit economy in India, he said the country received USD 81 billion as FDI during 2020-21, while its GDP is expected to touch eight per cent this financial year.

According to Shringla, accelerated pace of reforms, stimulus packages and a massive vaccination drive have helped the country recover from the crisis caused by the pandemic.

"India is boosting its economic ties with immediate neighbours like Bangladesh and Nepal, and both the countries have become its major trading partners."

"In fact, India is discussing a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with Bangladesh. It will graduate out of the list of 'least developed countries' in 2026," he added.

ALIA BHATT'S MEHENDI LEHENGA BY MANISH MALHOTRA TOOK 3,000 HOURS TO MAKE!

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Celebrated fashion designer Manish Malhotra has revealed on social media that the fuchsia pink lehenga for actress Alia Bhatt's mehendi ceremony took 3,000 hours to make and that it featured 180 textile patches.

Reminiscing about the work that went into creating this masterpiece, Manish wrote: "A treasure of traceability and trust. The very beautiful #ManishMalhotraBride. The very beautiful #ManishMalhotraBride @aliabhatt chose to personalise her Mehendi ensemble with a sustainable approach, where approximately 180 textiles patches come together to mark her momentous occa-

sion, the most special one indeed."

Malhotra said that the "custom touches reminisce about her journey and depict symbolic elements of her memories. Inscribed through Kashmiri and Chikankari threads, the passionate 3,000-hour intricate handwork of #Mijwan women features a fuchsia pink Lehenga and a blouse embellished in real gold and silver nakshi and kora flowers, and vintage gold metal sequins from kutch."

Talking about the technique, the designer shared: "The patches are woven together using a couture technique of cross-stitches with three tar and six tar anchors. Edged in real gold zari and

appliques, this handwoven silk ensemble also carries Banarasi brocades, jacquard, bandhani, Kachha Resham knots, and some scraps from brides' earlier outfits and detailing from #ManishMalhotraArchives."

"Every love story is unique, and @manishmalhotra05 beautifully narrates her beginning tale of a joyous forever," added Manish.

Ranbir and Alia got married in an intimate wedding on April 14.



PRINCE NARULA IS ALL SET TO ENTER 'LOCK UPP'

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Actor and model Prince Narula, who has won several reality shows, is all set to enter Kanganana Ranaut-hosted 'Lock Upp'.

His entry for sure is going to make the show more interesting and spice up the game.

Prince talked about his entry and shared: "I am very excited. 'Lock Upp' is a different show and I am entering the show as a troublemaker and not a contestant. More than anything, this is Ekta maam's show which makes the concept undoubtedly amazing."

He added on the success of the show: "'Lock Upp' is a reality show that was a big hit in its first year. Even during the IPL season, the ratings are increasing, and it's a huge thing."

"The show is amazing. My main reason to enter this show is that it is judgment-free. People are often judged when they reveal their secrets on a show, but 'Lock Upp's' concept is badass in itself. Moreover, it asks you to be badass as well. And this makes the show one of a kind," he

said while sharing the reason behind saying 'yes' to the show.

Prince is sentenced to 3 weeks in 'Lock Upp'.

'Lock Upp' streams on ALTBalaji and MX Player.



'KGF: Chapter 2' mints magic at BO over weekend with record ₹ 193.99 cr gross in Hindi belt



MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): After a flying start at the box office in the Hindi markets, 'KGF: Chapter 2' continued to dominate the weekend with record collections.

After emerging as the highest Day 2 grosser, the film successfully collected Rs 228 crore gross in the Hindi belt on its fourth day.

Film trade analyst Taran Adarsh noted that the movie is making the fastest entry into the Rs 200 crore club beating 'Baahubali' in the process.

"R#KGF2 CREATES HISTORY AGAIN... FASTEST TO ENTER ?

200 CR CLUB...? #KGFChapter2: Will cross 200 cr today [Mon, Day 5]? #Baahubali2: Day 6 #KGF2 is REWRITING RECORD BOOKS... Thu 53.95 cr, Fri 46.79 cr, Sat 42.90 cr, Sun 50.35 cr. Total: 193.99 cr. #India biz. #Hindi," he tweeted.

Released nationwide on April 14, in Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam, 'KGF 2' is written and directed by Prashanth Neel, and produced by Vijay Kira-

gandur, under the Hom-bale Films banner.

One of the emerging pan-India production houses, Hom-bale Films is set to showcase some of the biggest films in Indian cinema over the next two years, including the much-awaited film 'Salaar' starring Prabhas.

The film is being presented in north Indian markets by Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment and AA Films.



Mandana Karimi eliminated from 'Lock Upp'

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Actress and model Mandana Karimi has been evicted from reality show 'Lock Upp'. Mandana was getting the limelight for her fights with the contestants. She was also criticised by Kanganana for body shaming beauty blogger Azma Fallah. Zeeshan Khan called her bipolar. While Azma said she is a flop heroine. Recently, she also got into a huge fight with Ali Merchant when he took her name after finding hair strands in the breakfast. Mandana also revealed her secret on the show about her relationship with a renowned filmmaker. Now in the Saturday episode when Ekta Kapoor advised Mandana to improve her game and play better. Mandana said that she is playing well and was satisfied with her game. She finally opted out of the show. 'Lock Upp' streams on ALTBalaji and MX Player.

Hansika wraps up shooting for web series 'MY3'

CHENNAI, April 18 (IANS): Hansika Motwani has wrapped up shooting her portions for her first web series 'MY3'.

The actress, who distributed sweets to everybody in her unit on her last day of shooting, took to Instagram to pen a post about working on the series. She wrote, "It's a wrap-up for 'MY3'! A journey to cherish forever! Emotionally gleeful to have got such a wonderfully talented team, who made me feel like a princess on the sets every moment. It's been wonderful yet again to work with director Rajesh sir after 'Oru Kal Oru Kannadi'. He has been so generous, by giving me so much space to do whatever with both my characters. I am truly elated to have got an opportunity to work with him again. "The entire direction team comprising Karthick, Rozar Shekar, Maddy, and everyone has been great. I thank my producer Sanjay sir (Trendcloud) for being so supportive. It's been an immense pleasure working with them. "The entire cast and crew have been awesome. Mugen is a wonderful actor. I wish him all the very best. Shanthanu, Janani, Shakthi, Abhishek, and others have been friendly on the sets. It was a lovely experience to work with them."

"The roles of Mythri and MY3 are so special to me. I have never been emotional about my roles, but this one is close to my heart. I thank the entire crew, the directorial team, my co-stars, and producer Sanjay sir for endowing me. I can't wait for the audience, who will love the show and characters as I love them. I thank Pradeep sir for being a perfect curator."



Actor Park Hae-soo says global boom of Korean content has led to popularity of 'Yaksha'

SEOUL, April 18 (IANS): Actor Park Hae-soo has credited the rising popularity of his latest Netflix film 'Yaksha: Ruthless Operations' to the recent worldwide reception of Korean pop culture led by 'Squid Game' and BTS. 'Yaksha' is an action-packed spy thriller, revolving around Kang-in (Sul Kyung-ku), a notorious leader of a secret operation team, dubbed Black Ops team, in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang, and Ji-hoon (Park), an ambitious prosecutor assigned to inspect the Shenyang team.

According to Yonhap, released on April 8, the Netflix movie debuted at No. 3 on the streamer's official weekly

viewership chart for non-English films for the week of April 4-10.

"It is a unique spy movie made in Korea and set in the Chinese city of Shenyang," Park said in an online media interview.

"Many Korean pieces have well met demand of global audiences and 'Yaksha' benefited from it, I think."

Park plays Ji-hoon who seeks ways to complete his inspection as soon as possible. But he is forced to be deeply involved in a covert intelligence battle involving a high-profile North Korean official.

"He is a high-principled character who does not tolerate any illegal things



or injustice," he said.

"But he helplessly falls into the heart of the battle without even realising it. I tried to express the unintended consequences."

He said 'Yaksha', his fourth Netflix project following 'Persona', 'Time to Hunt' and 'Squid Game', has helped broaden his acting horizons once more as he had to act in foreign languages. Some foreign actors, including Hiroyuki Ikeuchi from Japan, were cast in the film, and Ji-hoon plays a role in dealing with foreign spies as he is good at Chinese and Japanese. "It is difficult to speak foreign languages, and much more difficult to act in foreign lan-

guages. I practiced them a lot," he said.

"I could express emotions better in foreign languages if I were given another chance."

The actor, 40, who gained international fame for his role in the global TV sensation 'Squid Game', said the recent few months were extraordinary for him, as he has spent most of his acting career on South Korean soil.

As 'Squid Game' has been nominated for and won prestigious US awards, including the Screen Actors Guild Awards, he participated in many of them as a cast member and met many big-name Hollywood stars.

Umran Malik is knocking at Team India doors, say cricket greats

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Sunrisers Hyderabad fast bowling sensation Umran Malik is leaving everyone impressed with his express pace and accuracy in the IPL 2022.

Cricket greats like Ian Bishop, Sunil Gavaskar and Dale Steyn are excited to watch this seamer from Jammu and Kashmir do so well in the tournament, and everyone is of the view that he has a bright future ahead.

Umran started his IPL stint as a net bowler for Sunrisers Hyderabad is now a vital cog in the team's pace

attack.

While giving a peek at his formative years, the right-arm quick revealed that he earned a reputation in his neighbourhood with his natural ability to bowl at a genuine pace.

"I always got the support from my family to play cricket. My father is a vegetable vendor in Jammu and he's worked very hard in our upbringing. I grew up playing in the neighbourhood at Tawi Ground and impressed the seniors there with my fast bowling. The clubs used to call me to play for

them whenever a big team was visiting, and I would win matches for them. So it all started from there," the 22-year-old Malik narrated how his family supported him on Cricket Live on Star Sport.

While speaking about how he came in the eyes of state selectors, Malik said, "I used to get scared thinking about trials as I hadn't even played at district level so, I never went for the trials. But I made up my mind and went for J&K U-19 trials. The selectors were surprised after I bowled the first delivery. They asked me who

I was and how I could bowl so fast. From then on, my journey in professional cricket began."

Former West Indies cricketer Ian Bishop has been watching Umran Malik since his IPL debut last year and the legendary pacer believes if he keeps himself fit, he'll play for India. "I've been excited about this guy since I saw him bowl last year. Genuine pace, you cannot go to a supermarket and buy that. You can train someone to master line and length but can't teach someone how to bowl fast. He's bowling with hostility which means even the best

of batters will be uncomfortable facing him. He scares you the same way Lockie Ferguson and Jofra Archer do, and Dale Steyn loves him. It's just fascinating to me what Umran Malik can become. If he stays fit, he's going to play for India and international cricket. I would also repeat how many Umran Malik's around this vast nation are yet to be discovered," Bishop said on Cricket Live on Star Sports.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar is impressed with Umran's pace and accuracy. The batting great claimed the right-arm

quick is going to play for India.

"Umran Malik has been very impressive with his speed but more than his speed, it's his accuracy (that's impressed). A lot of guys who bowl at that speed tend to spray the ball around but Umran bowls very few wide deliveries. If he can control the wides down the leg side, he will be a tremendous bowler because that will mean he'll be attacking the stumps all the time, and with his pace, it's not easy to hit straight. If he bowls wicket-to-wicket, he's going to be pretty much an unplayable bowler. He's

going to play for India," he said.

Legendary South Africa pacer Dale Steyn, who has intimidated even the best of batters with his fiery bowling, is mentoring Umran in the SRH.

"My job with Umran is to ensure he runs fast and make players play differently. My job is to try and make him forward-thinking as to what the batters are planning on doing. It's exciting for us to sit back and watch what a genius he is. I don't want to turn him into what I was, all I want is his genius to come out," Steyn said.

CHELSEA VS LIVERPOOL IN FA CUP FINAL

ARSENAL, TOTTENHAM GIVE MAN UTD TOP-FOUR HOPES

LONDON, April 18 (IANS): Chelsea will play Liverpool in the FA Cup final after a deserved 2-0 win against Crystal Palace on Sunday night.

Ruben Loftus-Cheek's impressive 65th minute shot, which took a slight deflection on its way to goal, and Mason Mount's effort following a pass from Timo Werner with 15 minutes left to play, were a fair reward for Thomas Tuchel's side against a rival that tried to soak up the pressure to play on the break.

Liverpool booked their place with a 3-2 win against Manchester City, who paid for first-half mistakes on Saturday afternoon.

In the Premier League, Tottenham missed a chance to strengthen their grip on fourth place when Leandro Trossard's last-minute goal condemned them to a 1-0 defeat at home to Brighton, who had last weekend won away to Arsenal.

Arsenal slipped to sixth in the table after Jan Bednarek's 44th-minute goal and a series of excellent saves from Fraser Forster condemned them to a 1-0 defeat away to Southampton.

Manchester United leapfrogged Arsenal thanks to Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick in a 3-2 win at home to bottom side Norwich



City, Xinhua reports. Ronaldo opened the scoring in the seventh minute and doubled his side's advantage just after the half-hour, but United still lacked cohesion and Kieran Dowell and Teemu Pukki drew

Norwich level before Ronaldo struck a 76th minute free kick through their defensive wall. Burnley's first game since Sean Dyche's surprise sacking on Friday ended in a 1-1 draw away to West Ham, which does

little to help their battle against relegation. Wout Weghorst's second goal since joining in January put Burnley in front, and it should have been 2-0, only for Maxwell Cornet to miss the chance to

double the lead from the penalty spot.

Tomas Soucek levelled for West Ham in the 74th minute and the home side would have gone on to claim all three points but for some excellent saves from Burnley keeper, Nick Pope.

The game will also be remembered for a horrible ankle injury suffered by Burnley midfielder Ashley Westwood, which saw the game stopped for several minutes before the break.

Bruno Guimaraes' 95th-minute header sealed Newcastle's fightback after conceding an Ademola Lookman opener at home to Leicester City.

Guimaraes had levelled the score from close range in the 30th minute against a rival that rotated their side considerably after Thursday's UEFA Conference League match.

Pontus Jansson's 95th-minute winner gave Brentford a 2-1 win at Vicarage Road that secures their top-flight future, but is a hammer blow to Watford, who have lost their last 10 home matches. Christian Norgaard put Brentford ahead in the 15th minute, and although Emilio Bonaventura equalized 10 minutes into the second half, Jansson decided an entertaining game for the visitors.

Captaincy comes naturally to Shreyas Iyer, says Ravi Shastri



MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Former India cricketer and head coach Ravi Shastri believes captaincy comes naturally to Kolkata Knight Riders' aggressive skipper Shreyas Iyer, adding that the clarity of thoughts in the right-handed batter's mind has impressed him a lot.

Iyer was given the responsibility of leading Kolkata after the franchise acquired his services for INR 12.25 crores in a fierce bidding battle during the IPL Mega Auction earlier this year.

After having captained Delhi from mid-2018 to 2020 season, Iyer has had a mixed bag as captain as Kolkata have won three and lost as many games in IPL 2022.

Iyer will be getting a chance to get Kolkata's campaign back on track when they face Rajasthan Royals at the Brabourne Stadium on Monday.

"Captaincy comes naturally to Shreyas (Iyer). Look at his aggressive captaincy, you don't feel like he's leading KKR for the first time. Looks like he's been captaining them for the last 3 to 4 seasons and it is visible through his clarity of thoughts. His mindset is clear about what brand of cricket he needs to play as a batter," said Shastri on Cricket Live show on Star Sports.

"At the same time, he's aware of what he as a captain needs to do to take his team to the playoffs and win the title. I've liked the way he's spoken during the pre and post-match conferences and that shows he's clear with his plans. I am convinced he'll go a long way," added Shastri.

Former West Indies pacer Ian Bishop has backed Iyer to lead Kolkata into coming back stronger in IPL 2022 after the side suffered back-to-back defeats. "I think despite suffering back-to-back defeats, it is possible for Shreyas to regather his troops and bounce back. When he became captain of the Delhi Capitals, he just got them better and better with every season," Bishop further felt that Iyer will take time to settle in as Kolkata's skipper but thinks that with help from experienced players like all-rounder Andre Russell and off-spinner Sunil Narine along with head coach Brendon McCullum, he would get going in no time. "It will take him a little settling period here (at KKR) but he's got some seasoned campaigners around him. Andre Russell and Sunil Narine are experienced players. Coach Brendon McCullum is also very experienced. So I have no doubt that Shreyas will get the guys going."

Chess: India's Gukesh wins La Roda Open; Pragg, Sadhwani among top 5

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): India's D Gukesh, the third youngest Grandmaster in the world, has won the 48th Open Ajedrez La Roda chess tournament at La Roda in Spain, overcoming the challenge of Israeli GM Victor Mikhalevski in the final round.

Gukesh, 15, who went into the final round with seven points, defeated Mikhalevski with white pieces to finish with 8.0 points from nine rounds to top a field comprising 193 players.

Armenian GM Haik M. Martirosyan finished second with 7.5 points while Indian GMs R Praggnanandhaa and Raunak Sadhwani finished joint third with three other players -- all five ending their campaigns with 7.0 points from nine rounds. Pragg finished third on tiebreak and Sadhwani was fourth.

This is the first Open title for the 15-year-old Gukesh and comes soon after he had lost to compatriot Praggnanandhaa in the final round of Reykjavik Open a few days back.

"Thanks @48OpenLaRoda for inviting me to the wonderfully organised event!! Enjoyed the stay & hospitality in La Roda and more importantly clinching my 1st open title of the year especially coming after very near misses and heartbreaks," Gukesh tweeted on Monday, a few hours after clinching his maiden title in open chess.

"Relieved and Thanks to all my supporters," he added.

Indian chess legend Viswanathan Anand tweeted his appreciation for Gukesh's victory.

"@DGukesh wins La Roda. Sad. Convincing win at the back of his great performance! Congrats to @pragchess too Waca boys to the fore," Anand tweeted on Monday.

Gukesh was in a tough fight with a group of players including compatriot Praggnanandhaa and Sadhwani. But in the end he claimed the title in convincing manner, winning his last round game as Pragg was held to draw by Martirosyan.

I-league: Sudeva Delhi aim to bounce back against struggling Kenkre FC

KOLKATA, April 18 (IANS): After a heavy loss against Gokulam Kerala in the last game, Sudeva Delhi FC will take on bottom side Kenkre FC with an aim to bounce back, at the Naihati stadium on Tuesday.

Sudeva head coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo acknowledged that his side fell considerably short against league leaders Gokulam. "It was a bad game all over the field for us. We did not stick to the plan and that affected our performance. We have lost games earlier this season but never by a margin like this so there are learnings to be had but we look forward to the next game," he said.

Wadoo could not have picked a better opponent than Kenkre FC to bounce back against as the Mumbai-based side are yet to win this season but he is not



taking anything for granted.

"They have some good players who can hurt so we need to respect them and put in our best. We will have a balanced approach as they have the ability to get at us if we go all-out attack," he said.

Kenkre FC also lost their pre-

vious game against Indian Arrows, a late goal condemning them to a 0-1 loss. But head coach Akhil Kothari believes his side deserved something from the game.

"We should have asserted more control in the first half and taken our chances when we

were presented them. It was a disappointing defeat and we hope to rectify those mistakes in the next game," he said.

"As the season has gone on, we have created more and more chances and scored some goals as well so I see that as a big positive. We will continue playing our game and aim for the three points in the next one," added Kothari.

Midfielder Siddharth Colaco wants to right the previous game's wrongs and look ahead to the crucial game against Sudeva Delhi.

"The players are obviously disappointed with the result of the previous game and looking to bounce back. We need to minimize our mistakes on the field, work hard in training and try to win the next game," he said.

IPL 2022: Kolkata need combination of Narine, Chakravarthy to get going, says Graeme Smith

MUMBAI, April 18 (IANS): Former South Africa skipper Graeme Smith feels that Kolkata Knight Riders will need the spin combination of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy to get going against Rajasthan Royals at Brabourne Stadium on Monday.

A large chunk of Kolkata's success has been provided by the off-spin and mystery spin combination of Narine and Chakravarty stifling the opposition's batters and stemming the run-flow.

But in IPL 2022, the duo are yet to set the stage on fire. While Narine has picked four wickets with an average of 30 and economy rate of just five, Chakravarty hasn't been at his controlling best, picking four scalps at a high average of 47.75 and economy rate of 8.30.

With the second half of IPL 2022 approaching, Kolkata hoping that Narine and Chakravarty coming into their



top form will be key for the two-time champions.

"Now we are moving into the second half the wickets are

going to be a bit worn. So, the spin combination are going to be key in the second half. So, they need Chakravarty bowling

well. They need that combination of Narine and Chakravarty to get going," Smith was quoted as saying by cricket.com.

"Spin is going to start playing a bigger and bigger role now as the tournament goes on. As the wickets get worn, more and more games, we are going to see spin come to the fore. That combination is going to be key to their success," added Smith, who won IPL 2008 with Rajasthan Royals.

Smith pointed out that both Kolkata and Rajasthan have fared badly in death overs in the tournament, making the final five overs phase with the ball a concern for sides led by Shreyas Iyer and Sanju Samson respectively. Kolkata have the third worst economy rate for teams at death overs in IPL 2022 with 12.97 while Rajasthan are fourth-worst with an economy rate of 12.78.

"Closing the game down is important. Having a clear mind, not getting caught up in the pressure, having a clear plan with your captain so that you're bowl-

ing to your fields, you know what you're going to do."

In the light of death bowling concerns, Smith thinks that role of Narine and Chakravarty becomes even more crucial in middle overs for Kolkata. "That's why we talk about the spin options. Can a Narine, can a Chakravarty pick up one or two wickets in the middle and take the pressure off the death overs? They have got enough experience with Russell, Cummins, Narine, Umesh Yadav. Coming into these final over, there should be more control in the KKR side."

Smith signed off by saying that he is more worried for Rajasthan in death overs bowling owing to the lack of experienced bowlers operating in that phase. "What worries me is that the Royals really don't have that experience in their side. That could be the change in this game between the two teams."

Benzema rallies Madrid past Sevilla, closer to league title

MADRID, April 18 (AP): Karim Benzema came up big yet again.

He scored in second-half stoppage time on Sunday as Real Madrid rallied to a 3-2 win at Sevilla and moved closer to winning the Spanish league title for the second time in three seasons.

Madrid conceded two goals four minutes apart in the first half but came back after halftime to win and open a 15-point lead at the top of the standings with six rounds to go.

"Everyone is waiting for Madrid to stumble but Madrid doesn't stumble," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Madrid has heart, character and quality. It was a deserved win. The league is not over yet, there are several matches left, but it was a big push for us today."

Madrid's closest challenger is Barcelona, which has two games in hand, including against relegation-threatened Cádiz on Monday.

Third-place Sevilla could have cut Madrid's gap to nine points with a win at its Ramón Sánchez-Pizjuán Stadium but instead saw its 15-game unbeaten streak at home this season come to an end.

Benzema scored his 15th goal in the last 10 matches with a shot from close range after a pass by Rodrygo two minutes into stoppage time.

The France striker is the Spanish league's leading scorer with 25 goals and is having one of his best seasons yet with Madrid. He had already been decisive in recent Champions League matches against Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea, being crucial in Madrid's run to the semifinals.

Sevilla looked on its way to a comfortable victory after opening the scoring with Ivan Rakitic's low free kick in the 21st and adding to the lead with Erik Lamela's goal from inside the area in a breakaway in the 25th.

But Madrid dominated after that and pulled closer with Rodrygo's goal from



close range after a pass by Dani Carvajal in the 50th. Carvajal then set up Nacho Fernández's equalizer from inside the area in the 82nd, a few moments after Nacho had entered the match.

Madrid forward Vinicius Júnior had a goal disallowed in the 74th for hand ball after a video review that lasted several minutes.

Sevilla has been hit hard by injuries and has won only one of its last six league games. It stayed tied on points with both Barcelona and fourth-place Atlético Madrid.

ATLÉTICO WINS AGAIN

Yannick Carrasco converted a penalty kick 10 minutes into stoppage time as Atlético beat Espanyol 2-1 to end its three-match winless streak and strengthen its hold on fourth place.

Carrasco scored from the penalty spot in the final play of the game at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium to give Atlético a three-point cushion over fifth-place Real Betis, which was held at sixth-place Real Sociedad on Friday.

The penalty for Atlético was awarded following a lengthy video review to determine whether the ball touched the hand of Espanyol striker Raúl de Tomás inside the area.

Carrasco had already scored to put Atlético ahead in the 52nd, while De Tomás equalized for the visitors in the 74th.

Atlético played a man down from the 71st after midfielder Geoffrey Kondogbia was sent off for a handball that earned him a second yellow card. Espanyol equalized in the ensuing free kick with De Tomás' shot getting past Atlético goalkeeper Jan Oblak.

Atlético hadn't won in three matches. It also hadn't scored goal during that streak, including in the 0-0 home draw against Manchester City on Wednesday in the second leg of the Champions League quarterfinals, when it was eliminated 1-0 on aggregate after losing the first leg in England.

Espanyol had won three of its last five games, with one loss and a draw. It sits in 11th place.

ATHLETIC STALLS

Athletic Bilbao lost 2-0 at home to Celta Vigo to lose ground in the fight for a place in a European competition next season.

Iago Aspas and Fran Beltrán scored first-half goals for 11th-place Celta, which was winless in four matches.

Athletic hadn't lost in three matches. It stayed in eighth place, four points behind Villarreal in seventh.

LEVANTE NOT LAST

Levante moved out of last place with a 4-1 rout against Granada, which played with 10 men from the 54th after Germán Sánchez Barahona was sent off with a second yellow card.

It was the second win in the last three matches for Levante, which has won 14 points from its last nine league matches, with four victories, two draws and three losses. It next hosts Sevilla.

Granada had its second straight loss and stayed in 16th place, one point outside the relegation zone. It next visits Atlético.

Bayern takes another step closer to 32nd German league title



BERLIN, April 18 (AP): Bayern Munich won 3-0 at struggling Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday to take another step toward a record-extending 32nd German league title, moving nine points ahead of second-place Borussia Dortmund with four games left.

The Bundesliga race could be decided when the teams meet in Munich next Saturday.

It was an expected but welcome win for Bayern after a surprise elimination by Spanish side Villarreal in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"In the end, the first 20 minutes were a good indicator of how we came out of this week," Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said. "It was a deserved win and important that we got the chance to seal the title against Dortmund."

Bayern led after 11 minutes when Danish defender Jacob Barrett Laursen scored an own-goal under pressure from league top scorer Robert Lewandowski. The goal was awarded following a video replay which confirmed Lewandowski was not offside when he went to meet Joshua Kimmich's pass.

Serge Gnabry scored the second goal — also awarded following a VAR review — in the eighth minute of first-half stoppage time from another pass by Kimmich.

The first half was delayed near the end when Arminia's Fabian Kunze was stretched off injured after taking an elbow during an aerial challenge.

Bayern was rarely troubled by a side which has scored only 23 goals, nine less than Lewandowski has managed him-

self. Lewandowski, who has netted nearly 350 goals for the club overall, is in talks over a new contract, with his current deal expiring at the end of next season.

He set up Jamal Musiala for the third goal in the 85th.

Arminia said that about 10 minutes from the end of the match a fan had to be "resuscitated" in the stands and was taken to the hospital after being stabilized.

OTHER RESULTS

Leipzig leapfrogged Bayer Leverkusen for third place with a 1-0 win in Leverkusen.

Dominik Szoboszlai scored the winner in the 69th to give Leipzig its third straight win in all competitions. The club is unbeaten in nine consecutive league games.

Leverkusen was coming off two wins and a draw in its last three games.

Sixth-place Union Berlin built on its derby win over Hertha Berlin with a 2-0 victory against Eintracht Frankfurt.

Eintracht, coming off a win over Barcelona in the quarterfinals of the Europa League, was one of only two Bundesliga teams that Union had failed to beat at home since it earned promotion in 2019. Bayern is the other.

Last-place Greuther Fürth drew 0-0 at eighth-place Hoffenheim. Fürth is 12 points from safety and only has a mathematical chance of avoiding relegation.

On Saturday, striker Erling Haaland scored twice as Dortmund routed Wolfsburg 6-1 to maintain its very thin chances of catching Bayern.

It is nice to play every game: David Miller

PUNE, April 18 (PTI): David Miller, who was not a sure starter in the playing eleven for his previous two IPL teams, is loving being "100 percent backed" by Gujarat Titans.

Miller smashed a 51-ball 94 to help Gujarat Titans pull off an incredible come-from-behind three-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on Sunday night.

The South African played a game-changing knock in the IPL after a long time.

The last two-three-four years I have been playing really nice cricket, feeling positive and I have been scoring nice personally, back at home, overseas, and so on, unfortunately the last four-five years, I haven't really played as much IPL cricket as I would have liked to," he said at the post-match media interaction.

"... the nature of the game, tournament (is such that) there are only four overseas (players) and other overseas players are always going to miss out and I sort of found myself in between a place where I have been in and out of Kings XI (Punjab Kings) and then Rajasthan.

"I played some decent games there but I felt like I couldn't get going and it has been encouraging to be part of Gujarat Titans and just know I am 100 per cent backed, and have a really nice environment, enjoy each other's success, that goes a long way in doing well, but more importantly it is nice to play every game."

He started the innings pretty well and did not want to stop after that.

"Yes, I mean we were obviously in a little bit of trouble, but I still thought, if we batted 20 overs, we still had some sort of chance and you never know if you were sitting on the sideline."

"So, I just wanted to try and play my game, the way I started my innings, I thought I started pretty well and I didn't want to stop, I wanted to keep going," Miller said. Gujarat were reeling at 87/5 in pursuit of 170, but then Miller and stand-in-captain Rashid Khan joined forces as they added match-winning 70 runs for the sixth wicket.

"The (run) rate was already at 9 or 10 when I came in; it had gone up pretty quickly. I mean at the end of the day, I cannot control what sort of the other batters do and at that time, whoever was batting with me, I just wanted to try and build something with him and see where it goes," added Miller, when asked what his mindset was when the team was five down.

Miller said that the plan to attack CSK spinners worked and they were forced to bowl the pacers.

"They had three spinners and I thought if they bowl well, they are definitely bowl all the overs towards me, and then try and change up the pace bowlers and work it around, but the fact that we took them (spinners) on early on, they were forced to bowl the pace bowlers and that was pretty much the plan," he added.

PSG beats Marseille 2-1 to close in on title; Nice wins

PARIS, April 18 (AP): Runaway leader Paris Saint-Germain took a step closer to reclaiming the French league title after beating rival Marseille 2-1 on Sunday in a game lacking the intensity befitting their bitter rivalry and featuring two controversial decisions that went PSG's way.

Having lost the title to Lille last season, PSG is 15 points clear of second-place Marseille with six games left. Victory at Angers on Wednesday will seal the title for PSG if Marseille draws at home to Nantes; and a draw is enough if Marseille loses.

Neymar and Kylian Mbappe scored in a subdued atmosphere at Parc des Princes, but Mbappe's penalty awarded deep into first-half injury time for 2-1 was questionable.

A video review gave hand ball against Valentin Rogier after the ball hit his elbow, even though it appeared to hit his thigh first. Mbappe scored with a low shot to the left for his league-leading 21st goal.

Marseille's players were angry when central defender William Saliba's goal in the 85th from Dimitri Payet's excellent free kick was ruled out for a very thin offside. The VAR call appeared to show Saliba's shoulder was just ahead of PSG's Danilo Pereira.

Marseille's defeat leaves it in second place — three points ahead of Rennes — and automatic Champions League qualification.

PSG is out of the Champions League and the players were fully rested to take on a Marseille side which played in Greece on Thursday to reach the Europa Conference League semifinals.

The visitors were comfortable until Italy midfielder Marco Ver-



ratti lofted a 12th-minute pass over the defense and Neymar was at full stretch to lob goalkeeper Pau Lopez, who misread the pass.

It was Neymar's seventh goal in the five games since PSG was knocked out of the Champions League by Real Madrid in the last 16.

But PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma made a mistake on a corner and, from the scramble, Croatia center half Duje Caleta-Car poked home in the 31st.

Record seven-time Golden Ball winner Lionel Messi had a goal ruled out for offside close to halftime.

PSG fans insulted Marseille's players throughout but did not back their own team, exasperated by another collapse from a strong position in the Champions League

against Madrid last month.

"I wasn't expecting this atmosphere. It wasn't the right time to do this," PSG captain Marquinhos said. "We understand they (the fans) have their reasons, maybe they're not getting answers. But as a player I don't agree."

Earlier, Andy Delort's late goal gave Nice a hard-fought 2-1 home win against Lorient and kept it in contention for a Champions League spot.

Delort's second goal of the game saw him head in Denmark striker Kasper Dolberg's cross in the 88th minute.

The win moved fourth-place Nice two points behind Rennes in third and a Champions League playoff spot. Nice currently holds the automatic Europa League place, one point ahead of Stras-

bourg and Monaco with six games left. Fifth-place Strasbourg drew 1-1 at Troyes on Sunday.

Monaco hosts Nice in the Riviera derby on Wednesday.

Delort netted from the penalty spot in the 54th after midfielder Khephren Thuram was fouled. Left winger Armand Lauriente equalized in the 61st.

Elsewhere, striker Moussa Dembele scored a hat trick as Lyon routed Bordeaux 6-1 to go some way to appeasing its disgruntled supporters.

Dembele, forward Karl Toko Ekambi and midfielder Lucas Paqueta scored in the first half.

Midfielder Romain Faivre and Toko Ekambi netted after the break for Lyon, before Sekou Mara grabbed a late consolation with a penalty and Dembele scored again in stoppage time.

Lyon is eighth and only has an outside chance of qualifying for Europe next season, much to the disappointment of its fans. Two prominent groups — Bad Gones and Lyon 1950 — did not attend the game.

Lyon's fans are generally unhappy with the players and how the club is being run. Fans deployed an insulting banner toward the players during Thursday's home defeat to West Ham in the quarterfinals of the Europa League, and tried to invade the field afterward.

Bordeaux has conceded a league-high 77 goals and remains deep in relegation trouble in 19th. It hosts fellow struggler Saint-Etienne on Wednesday.

OTHER MATCHES

Elsewhere Sunday, last-place Metz and relegation rival Clermont drew 1-1. In matches between mid-table teams, it was: Montpellier 0, Reims 0; and Nantes 1, Angers 1.

Working to shave off a second from personal best ahead of CWG and Asiad: Sajjan Prakash

NEW DELHI, April 18 (PTI): Peaking at the right time twice over will be a massive challenge in the Commonwealth Games and Asiad, feels leading Indian swimmer Sajjan Prakash, who is trying to shave off a second from his personal best timing.

Sajjan began his international season with a gold medal finish in the 200m butterfly event at the Danish Open last week.

The Kerala swimmer, whose personal best in the event is 1:56.48, is gearing up for a hectic year which includes big-ticket events like the CWG, Asian Games and the World Championships.

"I'm picking the important meets this year. I will try to peak for the big events which are the CWG and Asian Games. I'll be tapering for those two events. I'll take all other meets also seriously. However,

main target is CWG Asian," Sajjan told PTI.

The 28-year-old wrote a new chapter in Indian swimming by becoming the first swimmer from the country to qualify for the Olympics by breaching the 'A' standard in June last year. A day later, Srihari Nataraj replicated the feat to seal his berth at the Tokyo Games. However, the duo was unable to peak at the Tokyo Games a month later.

With the Commonwealth Games scheduled from July 28 to August 8 and Asian Games from September 10 to 25, it will be a tall order for the swimmers to peak twice at such short notice.

"We have some competitions coming up this month. They are preparation meets. The aim is to slowly try and peak towards the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games."

Lucknow Super Giants and Royal Challengers Bangalore battle for supremacy

NAVI MUMBAI, April 18 (PTI): KL Rahul's elegance and Quinton de Kock's flamboyance will be pitted against the finishing skills of Dinesh Karthik and Glenn Maxwell when Lucknow Super Giants and Royal Challengers Bangalore clash in the IPL here on Tuesday.

LSG and RCB head into the match after wins over Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals, respectively and both teams, who have eight points from six outings, would be keen to continue their winning streak.

Up against the second-placed Super Giants, RCB will need to address their top-order woes. While skipper Faf du Plessis has failed to fire since the opening game, opener Anuj Rawat has looked scratchy.

Virat Kohli continues to have a frustrating season. Despite looking in good form, the former RCB captain has failed to get the big runs.

However, the arrival of Maxwell has strengthened the side. The Australian all-rounder blasted 55 of 34 balls to get the momentum going in the chase against DC.

Meanwhile, Karthik is reveling in his role as a finisher, single-handedly winning matches for his new side.

The seasoned wicketkeeper batter has



not put a foot wrong in the ongoing season, playing some of the finest knocks as

he bids to make a comeback for the national team. He has been instrumental in

RCB's rise into the top four of the league table.

Engineer-turned cricketer Shabbaz Ahmed too has impressed with his batting so far.

On the bowling front, Josh Hazlewood bowled an exceptional spell against DC that swayed the match in RCB's favour and the Australian pacer would be eager to continue in the same vein.

Alongside Hazlewood, Sri Lankan leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga will be key in stopping Rahul and Co while death overs specialist Harshal Patel will also have to play his role to perfection if RCB aim to contain a powerful LSG batting unit.

On the other hand, Rahul (235 runs) has led the new entrants admirably. The skipper himself is in sublime form. He registered his maiden century of the season against Mumbai and sits only behind Rajasthan Royals' Jos Buttler (272 runs) in the leading run-scorer chart.

LSG also have enough fire power in de Kock, who has displayed imperious form in recent games, young Ayush Badoni, the big-hitting Deepak Hooda and Krunal Pandya to name a few.

The new-entrants have further been bol-

stered by the addition of the multi-talented duo of Jason Holder and Marcus Stoinis. The two adding more depth in both bowling and batting.

The pace-spin duo of Avesh Khan and Ravi Bishnoi have managed to hold their own against some of the most established names in T20 cricket.

Teams (From):

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Manan Vohra, Evin Lewis, Manish Pandey, Quinton De Kock, Ravi Bishnoi, Dushmantha Chameera, Shabbaz Nadeem, Mohsin Khan, Mayank Yadav, Ankit Rajput, Avesh Khan, Andrew Tye, Marcus Stoinis, Kyle Mayers, Karan Sharma, Krishnappa Gowtham, Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, Krunal Pandya, Jason Holder.

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell, Mohammed Siraj, Faf du Plessis, Harshal Patel, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dinesh Karthik, Josh Hazlewood, Shabbaz Ahmed, Anuj Rawat, Akash Deep, Mahipal Lomror, Finn Allen, Sherfane Rutherford, Jason Behrendorff, Suyash Prabhudesai, Chama Milind, Aneeshwar Gautam, Karn Sharma, David Willey, Rajat Patidar, Siddharth Kaul.

Match starts at 7.30 pm.