

WORLD
NATION

- Zelenskyy visits area flooded by destroyed dam as five reported dead
- Russia says top UN court should dismiss Ukraine's case
- 36 people arrested so far for violence: Police
- India hits out at Canada for giving space to separatists elements

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HT BRIEFS

Illegal timber seized

KOILAMATI: Forest staff of the North Eastern Silonijan Range seized illegal timber along with a pickup truck bearing registration number AS05AC3172 at 5 am from the Upper Deopani area. Forest staff were informed about the felling of trees in the Upper Deopani area. Led by deputy ranger Sonasing Timung, his team went to the area at night and managed to seize one pickup truck loaded with illegal timber. The vehicle, along with the timber, was brought to the Silonijan Range office. The illegal timber was to be sold in Golaghat. The market value of the timber is worth ₹ 20,000, forest officials said.

Schoolgirl killed

GUWAHATI: A schoolgirl was killed in Guwahati's Ganeshguri area on Thursday morning after the two-wheeler on which she was travelling was hit by the bus of another school, police said. Priya Kumari, a class 11 student of Little Flower School, was riding pillion on the scooter of her elder sister when the accident happened near the state secretariat, they said. Kumari died on the spot, and her sister was injured, they added. Locals claimed that the bus was trying to avoid a ditch dug recently in the area when the accident happened.

Guv, CM attend Amrit Plantation drive in Chandubi
● Govt to plant 1 cr saplings on Gandhi Jayanti

Govt working on to increase forest cover: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday advocated for a collective action to create a pro-planet impact for generating sustainable economic opportunities.

Speaking at the Amrit Plantation Programme launched at Chandubi in Kamrup district today, the chief minister said that a collective action on the part of everybody in the society is the need of the hour for the preservation of forests not only for individual and social needs but also for economic needs.

He said that contribution from all the stakeholders will create a conducive climate for generating sustainable economic opportunities.

He said that around 20 percent of the forest land in Assam is under encroachment and an adverse effect of it is being faced by all. He said that people are destroying hills to construct their dwelling houses. Stating the Prime Minister's call



to cut carbon emission to zero by 2070, Sarma said that the Assam government in response to this call is taking steps for generation of 5000 MW solar power in the state.

Spelling out the steps taken for the preservation of forest lands in the state, the chief minister said that in the last two years by launching

eviction drives in Lumding Reserve forests, Pabo Reserve forest, Burhachapori Wildlife sanctuary, Orang National Park, 61375 bigha

lands have been freed from encroachments.

The chief minister said that the State government is working to increase the total forest cover from the existing 36 per cent to 38 per cent.

The chief minister during his speech also announced that on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on October 2 this year, the State government would plant one crore saplings. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Security commences operations for illegal arms, ammunitions

IMPHAL, June 8 (NNN): Security forces in Manipur commenced combing operations to recover arms and ammunition including those looted from the police as well as armouries of Manipur security forces following the eruption of violence incidents that claimed nearly 100 lives and injured hundreds of people besides rendering homeless to thousands.

Official sources said that the combing operations were launched by the Army with police and paramilitary forces deployed in the state in the physical presence of the executive magistrates.

The sources said that the combined force of state police, Assam Rifles and CRPF conducted one such operation at Khoken village of Kangpokpi and bordering Sangaithe village of Imphal West district.

The security forces raided the houses in these two villages. There were no reports of recovery of arms and ammunition and also picking up any suspect in the operation.

The combing operations were conducted under the aegis of the Headquarters 3 Corp and the executive

magistrates were detailed at the places on the request from the Army side.

As sought by the Army, the Home department has detailed 19 executive magistrates who will be present physically while conducting the operations in Imphal West, Imphal East, Kangpokpi, Kakching, Bishnupur and Jiribam.

The official source said that four executive magistrates were detailed in Kangpokpi district where the operations are to be conducted Col Ankur CO 2/8 GR as nodal officer.

Ten executive magistrates were detailed for Imphal East and Imphal West where the operations are to be conducted with Col Amit Chaudhury Col GS IGAR (S) as nodal officer.

The Home department also detailed one executive magistrate for Kakching district, three executive magistrates for Bishnupur district and one for Jiribam district.

The sources said that the combing operations will be conducted across the sensitive areas in the hills and valley to recover illegal arms and ammunition in the possessions (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Secy of Koilamati Lamps in trouble after alleged rape



HT Correspondent

KOILAMATI, June 8: A woman accused the secretary of M/s Koilamati Lamps of rape in Karbi Anglong. The alleged rapist, Mohonsing Teron, secretary of M/s Koilamati Lamps, fled from his home in Vophong Asar village after the matter came to light.

The woman of Vophong Asar village said that she was forced to bring the matter before the villagers and the media because Mohonsing Teron has repeatedly raped her. She said one Lika Teronpi approached her on behalf of Mohonsing Teron. She and Mohonsing Teron have a telephone conversation, and for the first time, he enters her home at 11 pm and rapes her.

Her husband is working in Kerala. After the woman complained to the village elders, Mohonsing Teron, a father of three children, fled the village.

The complainant opted to approach the traditional tribal village court instead of the police. At the time of filing this report, no police complaint had been filed.

Diphu bids adieu to Gautam Terang

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 8: Former chairman of Diphu Town Committee (DTC) and former vice President of Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), Gautam Terang, who passed away on Tuesday, was cremated at public crematorium ground here as per Karbi rites.

Terang, a prominent citizen of Diphu, was an active sports person. He was the founding president of Greater Diphu Sports Association. He died of cardiac arrest here at Diphu Medical College & Hospital.

In the morning late Terang's mortal remains were taken in a procession from his home to KASA stadium where the general secretary, Dr. Pankaj Teron and others bid him adieu.

From there he was taken to Diphu Municipal Board (DMB) office. Here the Chairman, DMB, Rah Kro and Ward Commissioners offered prayers and their respects to the late Terang.

As a mark of respect to late Terang, Diphu market remained closed from 9 am to 12 noon. MLA Bidyasing (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Manipur situation peaceful, Centre okays ₹ 101 crore package for displaced people: State security advisor

IMPHAL, June 8 (PTI): The Centre has approved a ₹ 101.75 crore relief package for the displaced people in violence-hit Manipur following a directive of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, security advisor to the state government Kuldeep Singh said on Thursday.

He also said the situation in Manipur remained peaceful and under control and there has been no incident of violence in the state in the last 48 hours.

"To provide relief to the displaced people in Manipur, the Ministry of Home Affairs has approved ₹ 101.75 crore relief package. During his recent Manipur visit, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had directed the state government to send a request to MHA for a relief package for displaced people," Singh said.

In the last 24 hours, 27 arms, 245 ammunition and 41 bombs were recovered from the Porompat police station jurisdiction of Manipur's Imphal East district while one weapon and two bombs were seized in the state's Bishnupur district. A total of 896 arms, 11,763 ammunition and 200 bombs of different kinds have been recovered so far, the security advisor said.

Curfew relaxation for 12 hours has been announced in five valley districts and for 10 hours to 8 hours in neighbouring hill districts. There is no curfew in six other hill districts.

Singh said movement of essential items along National Highway-37 is ensured and 294 empty vehicles have left Imphal for Jiribam on Thursday. A total of 220 loaded vehicles have left Noney

and 198 loaded tankers and trucks have left Jiribam.

Senior officers have visited vulnerable areas and were camping there. Strict security measures have been ensured in all vulnerable areas. Further, combined teams of state and central forces have intensified combing operations in many parts of the state, the official said.

State ministers and MLAs are visiting different areas of Manipur and appealing for peace and normalcy by meeting the public and civil society organisations.

Security forces are also organising meetings with civil society organisations, and village heads and appealing for peace and normalcy besides carrying out their area domination and patrolling duties, Singh said. Violence broke out in the northeastern state after a Tribal Solidarity (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



People dressed in raincoats during a light drizzle of rain at Ambari, Guwahati on Thursday. HT photo

India test-fires new generation ballistic missile 'Agni Prime'



NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): India has successfully carried out a night launch of new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from the Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha, marking a boost to the country's strategic weaponry.

The first pre-induction night launch of the missile with a strike range of 1,000 to 2,000 km was carried out on Wednesday by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the elite strategic forces command, officials said.

The defence ministry said the test-firing met all the desired objectives and that it paved the way for induction of the system into the armed forces.

The test-firing of the missile came amid India's lingering border row with China.

"New generation ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' was successfully flight-tested by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha on June 7," the ministry said.

"This was the first pre-induction night launch conducted by the users after three successful developmental trials of the missile, validating the accuracy and reliability of the system," it said in a statement.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO and the armed forces for the success as well as the "copy-book" performance of the new generation ballistic missile.

The ministry said "range instrumentation like radar, telemetry and electro optical tracking systems were deployed at different locations, including two down-range ships, at the terminal point to capture flight data covering the entire trajectory of the vehicle".

"Senior officials from the DRDO and Strategic Forces Command witnessed the successful flight-test, which has paved the way for induction of the system into the Armed Forces," it said.

Chairman of the DRDO Samir V Kamat appreciated the efforts put in by the teams of DRDO laboratories and the users involved in the test launch. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Army rescues two abducted by armed men in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 8 (NNN): Two persons abducted by armed men were rescued by the Indian Army who responded quickly on receiving the news on Thursday, according to police.

The two persons rescued safely by the Army have been identified as Loitonjam Kuber (54) of Kanto Sabal and Louriyam Nilakanta @ Sanathoi (23) of the same village.

Reports said that the armed men abducted the two men from Premnagar, a village close to the Leimakhong Army Camp under Sekmai police station of Imphal West district bordering Kangpokpi district where they went to collect paddy this morning.

Nilakanta is an auto-rickshaw driver and his auto-rickshaw was hired by Kuber to transport paddy

from his abandoned house at Premnagar this morning, around 6.30 am.

As told by the two rescued persons to a local TV channel, two armed youths appeared all of a sudden and detained them while asking the reason behind their visit to the village.

After some minutes, a group of armed persons came down from

the hill after the two youths contacted them over phone.

The armed miscreants took them to a house in a neighboring village where they were kept there with hands tied in the back with ropes and blindfolding them.

After sometime a team of Army reportedly from Leimakhong Army arrived there and rescued them. They told the TV channel.

'Under PM Modi's leadership, yoga has already become a global movement'

Sonowal discusses Yoga Day preparation with MP Guv, CM

BHOPAL, June 8 (PTI): Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Thursday met Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel and chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan here to discuss preparations for the national level Yoga Day event to be held in Jabalpur on June 21.

The Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and AYUSH discussed with CM Chouhan various aspects related to preparations for the upcoming International Yoga Day event, an official release said.

The two leaders also discussed ways to strengthen healthcare services in the state by using India's traditional systems of medicine, it said.

Sonowal later also called on the governor at the Raj Bhavan here.

Referring to his meeting with governor Patel, the Union minister said they talked about the ways to popularise yoga among the people of Madhya Pradesh and other parts of the country as the nation has embarked on the 'Swastha Bharat' (healthy India) mission under the leadership of Prime Minister



Narendra Modi.

"We also discussed many development issues as well as our efforts to make the International Day of Yoga to be held at Jabalpur this year a grand success," he said.

"I had a very positive and fruitful meeting with the chief minister in this regard. We reviewed the reparations and various aspects of the Yoga Day celebration to make it a big success. PM Modi's vision of building a swastha Bharat will happen with yoga becoming a mass movement to make people

healthy and happy," Sonowal said.

The minister said that under PM Modi's leadership, yoga has already become a global movement as more and more people are becoming part of it.

"Our discussion was aimed at making this year's celebration of Yoga Day a landmark moment to make people aware about the rich heritage of yoga and its remarkable contribution towards enriching the quality of lives of people towards building a healthier and happier nation," he said.

ISRO not rushing to launch Gaganyaan: Somanath

BENGALURU, June 8 (PTI): Indian Space Research Organisation has decided not to rush its Gaganyaan project, the manned mission to space, as it wants to ensure that the country's first human space flight is a 'sure shot safe mission', said its chairman S Somanath here on Thursday.

Gaganyaan was set to launch in 2022 but due to covid-19 there was an inordinate delay. Somanath told reporters during the international conference on Spacecraft Mission Operations (SMOPS-2023).

"We have a different thinking now. Our thinking is like this that we don't want to rush. That decision we have taken. The primary objective of the human space flight is a sure shot safe mission," the ISRO chief said.

The space has enhanced the testing and demonstration mission substantially in recent times. These exercises involve additional abort missions to ensure the safety of the crew, he explained.

According to Somanath, the first exercise will probably happen in August, which was earlier planned in July.

"So, two abort missions have to take place this year followed by an unmanned mission possibly by the

beginning of next year," the ISRO chairman said.

The space scientist said all the engine test programmes have been completed within ISRO.

Stating that hectic activities are taking place, Somanath said every week at least some major tests are happening.

"For me, eight major tests are there and if all the tests successfully happen without any glitch, the launch will be between 2024 and 2025 time frame. But if I face problems and challenges, which are natural in this process, I have to discount for the schedule," he added.

About India's first solar mission, Aditya-L1, Somanath said the launch window is August this year to January next year.

"If we cannot launch it in August then we will go to next year January," he added.

Regarding Chandrayaan-3, ISRO's third moon mission, Somanath said it is due to be launched in mid July. ISRO will follow the same process that was adopted during the Chandrayaan-2 mission, he said.

"We are going in the same path of Chandrayaan-2 because we have already (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Markets snap 4-day rally amid profit-taking; auto, bank stocks fall

30-share BSE Sensex fell 294.32 points or 0.47 pc to settle at 62,848.64

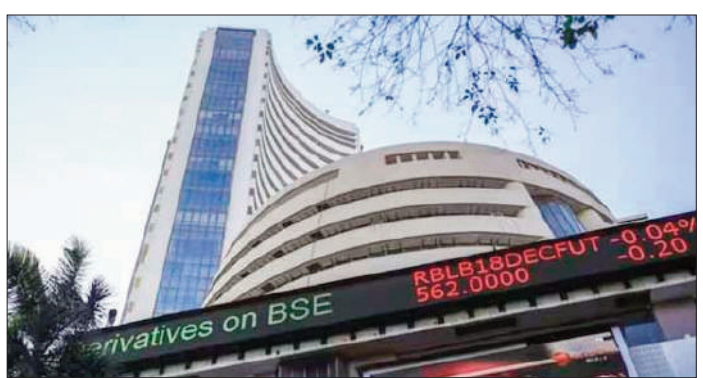
MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close with losses on Thursday, snapping their four-day winning streak as investors pared exposure to auto, bank and IT stocks after the RBI left its key interest rate unchanged.

After remaining in the positive territory for most of the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 294.32 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 62,848.64. During the day, it tumbled 353.23 points or 0.55 per cent to 62,789.73. The NSE Nifty declined 91.85 points or 0.49 per cent to end at 18,634.55.

"Investor sentiment took a downturn following the in-line monetary policy announcement by the RBI, as the market had higher expectations for a more optimistic revision in the inflation outlook, taking into account the recent easing of inflation data."

"The RBI's decision to lower the inflation rate by only 10 bps suggests a cautious stance due to geopolitical uncertainties, the potential impact of El Nino and the increase in Minimum Support Price, Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services, said."

Kotak Mahindra Bank was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack,



sliding 2.68 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Nestle and Titan.

In contrast, NTPC, Power Grid, Larsen & Toubro, HDFC, Reliance and HDFC Bank were the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge fell by 0.87 per cent and smallcap index declined by 0.47 per cent.

"Indian equities witnessed profit booking on the day of the RBI policy meeting outcome, which was on expected lines...post the RBI policy outcome, markets saw some profit booking in the interest rate-sensitive sectors, which dragged the in-

dices down...Except for Metals, all sectors ended in red," Siddhartha Khemka, head - of retail research, at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

Among the indices, realty tumbled by 1.51 per cent, telecommunication (1.06 per cent), auto (0.97 per cent), IT (0.88 per cent), FMCG (0.81 per cent), bankex (0.80 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.76 per cent) and commodities (0.66 per cent).

Industrials, utilities, capital goods and power were the gainers.

"Global markets were mixed on Thursday as negative sentiments arising out of expectations of further interest rate hikes by major central banks and the fact that Eurozone has entered recession after

its January-Mar GDP fell 0.1 per cent was offset by optimism over more Chinese stimulus measures," Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities, said.

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

Equity markets in Europe were trading mostly in positive territory. The US markets ended mostly lower on Wednesday.

The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday left its key interest rate unchanged for a second straight policy meeting but signalled that it wants to see inflation moderate more while preserving the growth momentum.

The monetary policy committee (MPC), which has three members from RBI and an equal number of external experts, voted unanimously to keep the benchmark repurchase, or repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent.

While consumer price inflation eased during March-April 2023 and moved into the tolerance band,

headline inflation is still above the target of 4 per cent and is expected to remain so during the rest of the current fiscal, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said announcing the monetary policy decision.

RBI keeps interest rate on pause

MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday left its key interest rate unchanged for a second straight policy meeting but signalled that it wants to see inflation moderate more while preserving the growth momentum. The monetary policy committee (MPC), which has three members from RBI and an equal number of external experts, voted unanimously to keep the benchmark repurchase, or repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent.

It decided 5:1 to retain the policy stance focused on "withdrawal of accommodation", which was introduced in April last year.

While consumer price inflation eased during March-April 2023 and moved into the tolerance band, headline inflation is still above the target of 4 per cent and is expected to remain so during the rest of the current fiscal, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said announcing the monetary policy decision.

"Therefore, close and continued vigil on the evolving inflation outlook is absolutely necessary, especially as the monsoon outlook and the impact of El Nino remain uncertain," he said. "Our goal is to achieve the inflation target of 4 per cent and keeping inflation within the comfort band of 2-6 per cent is not enough."

The central bank kept its GDP growth projections for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) unchanged at 6.5 per cent while marginally lowering the retail inflation expectation to 5.1 per cent from the previous 5.2 per cent. India grew by 7.2 per cent in the previous fiscal, making it one of the fastest-growing nations in the world.

The fuller impact of a cumulative 250 basis point increase in repo rate prior to the pause since April, will be evident in the coming months, Das said. While most global central banks have paused on rate hikes as commodity prices ease, Australia and Canada have surprised markets this week by resuming rate hikes to combat stubbornly high inflation.

The decision to keep the stance as withdrawal of accommodation was driven by liquidity conditions easing with daily system liquidity averaging at ₹ 2.3 lakh

crore in June. The improvement in liquidity was due to a significant rise in government expenditure and a decline in currency in circulation.

The RBI reiterated its "watchful stance" to emerging risks and a commitment to maintain price stability and provide ample liquidity for economic growth.

Most analysts believe rates are likely to be on pause for a long unless there is any dramatic shift in inflation, growth or global volatility.

The policy repo rate has been increased by 250 basis points since May 2022 and is still working its way through the system, he said.

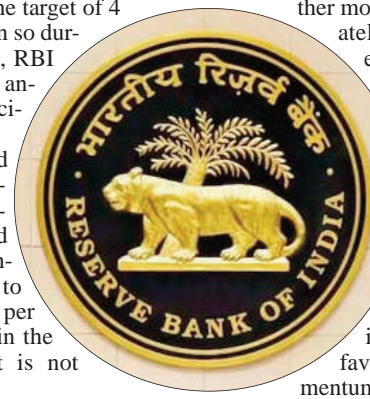
"The MPC will continue to remain vigilant on the evolving inflation and growth outlook. It will take further monetary actions promptly and appropriately as required to keep inflation expectations firmly anchored and bring down inflation to the target," he said.

On growth, Das said higher rabi crop production, expected normal monsoon, continued buoyancy in services and softening inflation should support household consumption. On the other hand, given the healthy twin balance sheets of banks and corporates, supply chain normalisation and declining uncertainty, conditions are favourable for the capex cycle to gain momentum. Robust government capital expenditure is also expected to nurture investment and manufacturing activity. The RBI governor said India's trade deficit has narrowed on the back of a sharper decline in imports vis-à-vis exports.

"We have made good progress in containing inflation, supporting growth and maintaining financial and external sector stability," he said. "Despite three years of global turmoil, India's growth has bounced back and headline CPI inflation is easing."

Stating that inflation needs to be brought down below 4 per cent, he said it is always the last leg of the journey which is the toughest.

"I wish to emphasise that we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that long-term inflation expectations remain firmly anchored," he said. "The Reserve Bank will remain watchful and proactive in dealing with emerging risks to price and financial stability."



IIFL to raise ₹ 1,500cr in bonds to fuel growth



KOLKATA, June 8 (PTI): Leading non-bank lender IIFL Finance is raising up to ₹ 1,500 crore through a public issue of secured redeemable non-convertible debentures (NCDs) to fuel credit growth and debt management, a senior company official said on Thursday.

The public issue of the IIFL NCDs will open on Friday and has a base offer of ₹ 300 crore. However, the company has a green shoe option to retain an over-subscription of up to ₹ 1,200 crore.

With the Reserve Bank of India pausing its rate hike cycle, IIFL remains optimistic about raising the entire ₹ 1,500 crore in this tranche of issues with an attractive 9 per cent coupon rate.

"We expect to raise the full subscription amount in this issue due to the attractive coupon rates. Credit growth is robust after the Covid-19 pandemic," IIFL director Gaurav Mishra said. The IIFL bonds offer a coupon rate starting at 8.35 per cent for 24 months and the highest effective yield of 9 per cent per annum for a tenor of 60 months. IIFL has kept the highest coupon rate at 9 per cent, the same as its last NCD issue in January, in which it announced raising up to ₹ 1,000

crore. The NCDs are available in tenors of 24 months, 36 months and 60 months. The face value of the NCDs is ₹ 1,000 each and the minimum application size is ₹ 10,000. The NCDs will be listed on the BSE and NSE.

The credit rating has been AA by CRISIL Ratings and ICRA. In Q4 FY23, Moody's upgraded IIFL Finance's rating from B2 to B1 (stable). IIFL Finance, through a strong physical presence of over 4,000 branches across India and a well-diversified retail portfolio, caters to the credit needs of underserved populations.

"Our current asset under management is nearly ₹ 65,000 crore and the gold loan remains our largest loan book with ₹ 27,000 crore, followed by home loan of ₹ 21,800 crore as on March 2023," Mishra said.

He said credit growth to micro and SMEs stood at 59 per cent in FY23 with an outstanding loan of ₹ 9,780 crore. The NBFC opened 700 branches to expand its reach in gold loans, which grew 28 per cent in FY'23 over the previous year. IIFL Finance has a 95 per cent retail book focused on small-ticket loans.

IIFL Finance's gross NPA was 1.8 per cent and its net NPA of 1.1 per cent. As on March 31, about 73.53 per cent of the company's consolidated loan book is secured with adequate collaterals, which helps mitigate risks further, the company said. In FY23, IIFL Finance reported a profit after tax of ₹ 1,607.5 crore, a 35 per cent year-on-year growth.

Beat the heat with Purabi Dairy's 80g curd cups

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: Purabi Dairy, Assam's well-loved dairy brand, has recently launched its new Purabi plain curd in 80g cup size, aiming to provide a refreshing and healthy option for consumers during the ongoing heatwave. Owned by the West Assam Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd. (WAMUL), the largest dairy cooperative in Assam, Purabi Dairy has made these delightful packs available at retail outlets in Guwahati city and its surrounding areas. With scorching temperatures soaring across the region, the introduction of the 80g cups of Purabi plain curd offers consumers a convenient and affordable way to beat the heat. Priced attractively at ₹15, this new product option is easily accessible to everyone during this unprecedented heatwave sweeping the region.

This expansion of Purabi's product line is expected to broaden the brand's reach and attract a growing base of customers. By offering smaller portion sizes, Purabi aims to tap into the evolving preferences of consumers who desire convenient and individually portioned food products. The introduction of the 80g cups of plain curd not only provides a refreshing treat but also creates new opportunities for the dairy farmers of Assam, contributing to their growth and sustainability.

In a statement, a representative from the cooperative said, "Purabi Dairy has always been committed to delivering high-quality dairy products to consumers while empowering local dairy farmers. By leveraging our expertise in dairy production and distribution, WAMUL continues to innovate and diversify its offerings to cater to the dynamic needs of the market."

₹ 2,000 notes worth ₹ 1.80 lakh crore have come back in banks so far: RBI Governor

MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): Reserve Bank governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said about 50 per cent of ₹ 2,000 notes in circulation has come back in the banking system since the RBI announced withdrawal of the highest denomination currency last month. As on March 31, 2023, he said, ₹ 2,000 notes worth ₹ 3.62 lakh crore were in circulation. "So far ₹ 1.80 lakh crore have come back after the announcement," he said during an interaction with media after releasing the

bi-monthly monetary policy here.

About 85 per cent of ₹ 2,000 notes are coming as deposits in bank accounts and this is in line with expectation, he said. On May 19, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the withdrawal of ₹ 2,000 denomination banknotes as part of its currency management and permitted the exchange of such notes (up to ₹ 20,000 in one go) from May 23 onwards. The exchange or deposit window is available till September 30, 2023.

ACHIEVEMENT



Angelus Terang has secured distinction marks in the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate examination 2023 from the Arts stream. Angelus is S/o Joysing Terang and Beena Kramsapi of Eragaon village, Bakalighat, Karbi Anglong.

He passed the AHSEC exam from Ajmal College, Hojai with a pass percentage of 90.4%. He is the topper in Ajmal College. He got 96 marks in Alternative English, 94 marks in Political Science, 92 marks in Education, 93 marks in Logic & Philosophy and 77 marks in English. Karbi Employees Association (KEA) Bakalia Zone president Dhonsing Hanse congratulated Angelus Terang for his success.

RBI retains FY24 GDP growth forecast at 6.5 pc

MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): The Reserve Bank on Thursday retained the GDP growth projection for current fiscal year at 6.5 per cent, on the back of supportive domestic demand conditions.

In April, the central bank had marginally revised upwards the 2023-24 GDP growth projection to 6.5 per cent, from its earlier forecast of 6.4 per cent.

Domestic demand condition remains supportive of growth and also the demand in rural areas is on the revival path, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said while announcing the 2nd bi-monthly policy for 2023-24.

Samsung Launches Galaxy F54 5G

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: Samsung has unveiled its latest smartphone, the Galaxy F54 5G, which promises to deliver a revolutionary experience to users with its cutting-edge features and sleek design. The device showcases Samsung's commitment to customer satisfaction, sustainability, and innovation. The Galaxy F54 5G showcases the premium signature Galaxy look, combining elegance and sophistication. With its premium metal camera deco and soft, rounded corners, the

smartphone provides a comfortable grip and a seamless user experience. It is available in two stunning colors, Meteor Blue and Stardust Silver, offering users a choice that matches their individual style.

The Galaxy F54 5G offers a host of exciting features aimed at enhancing user experience. The Voice Focus feature minimizes background noise during voice and video calls, ensuring crystal-clear conversations. Running on the latest One UI 5.1, the smartphone provides a user-friendly interface and

seamless navigation. Samsung's commitment to eco-consciousness and innovation is evident in the Galaxy F54 5G. By designing the Galaxy F54 5G with the planet in mind, Samsung demonstrates its dedication to both customers and the Earth's well-being.

The Galaxy F54 5G is available in an 8+256 GB storage variant and two stunning colors, Meteor Blue and Stardust Silver. Customers can purchase the smartphone through Flipkart, Samsung.com, and select retail stores.

We are only pausing on rates, too early to call on inflation fight: Das

Future policy actions will purely be data-dependent

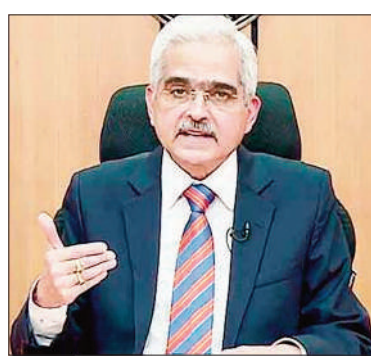
MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): After unanimously pausing for the second time in a row, the Reserve Bank on Thursday reiterated that leaving the key rates and the stance unchanged "is not a pivot but only a pause" and that future policy actions will purely be data-dependent as a durable fall in inflation is still a long way.

Earlier in the day, the RBI governor-led rate-setting panel MPC unanimously left the repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent and maintained that they will continue to work towards withdrawing policy accommodation.

The six-member panel also reiterated continuing measures to bring inflation under the target in a durable manner.

While consumer price index-based inflation eased in March and April and moved into the tolerance band, headline inflation is still above the mandated target of 4 per cent and is expected to remain so during the rest of the current fiscal, said governor Shaktikanta Das announcing the monetary policy.

"Therefore, close and continued vigil on the evolving inflation outlook is absolutely necessary, especially as the monsoon outlook and the impact of El Nino remain uncertain. Our goal is to achieve the inflation target of 4



per cent in a durable manner and not just keeping inflation within the comfort band of 2-6 per cent," Das told reporters at a post-policy presser.

The governor parried repeated questions from the media about what holds back the MPC and RBI from uttering the words 'end of rate hikes' or the beginning of a neutral or accommodative policy stance.

"It is not a pivot; I reiterate this is only a pause, which is the second one in two successive reviews. Our future policy actions will purely be dependent on evolving situations. Because even though the recent fall in headline inflation to within the target band (led mainly by the cooling core inflation), we need to ensure that it is durable, and therefore there is no room for

complacency on inflation," Das said.

Explaining that RBI is only on a pause and that there is no change to a neutral/accommodative stance, Das said, "our objective is to ensure that inflation aligns with the mandated target on a durable basis and not a one-off."

"I wish to emphasise that we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that long-term inflation expectations remain firmly anchored. The Reserve Bank will remain watchful and proactive in dealing with emerging risks to price and financial stability."

"Therefore, given the uncertainties, we need to maintain 'Arjuna's eye' on the evolving inflation scenario. Let me re-emphasise that headline inflation still remains above the target and being within the tolerance band is not enough. Our goal is to achieve the target of 4 per cent, going forward," the governor said, adding it is always the last leg of the journey that's the toughest.

His deputy and the head of the monetary policy department at the central bank, Michael Patra said the policy stance and inflation forecast for the year wherein they expect the prices index to hover around 5.1 per cent for the year, the impact of the MSP hike for paddy (10-12 bps) and

the likely impact of the El Nino on the monsoon are factored in.

This forecast, it can be noted is a marginal improvement from the April forecast, when it had projected the prices to average at 5.2 per cent during FY24. Retail inflation fell sharply to 4.7 per cent in April from 6.4 per cent in February, on the back of favourable base effects, with softening observed across all the three major groups. In March, it fell to 5.67 per cent from 7.79 per cent in February.

The MPC retained the growth projections for the fiscal at 6.5 per cent. The economy grew 7.2 per cent in the previous fiscal. On growth, Das said higher rabi crop production, expected normal monsoons, continued buoyancy in services and softening inflation should support household consumption. On the other hand, given the healthy twin balance sheets of banks and corporates, supply chain normalisation and declining uncertainty, conditions are favourable for the capex cycle to gain momentum.

Robust government capital expenditure is also expected to nurture investment and manufacturing activity. RBI had since May 2022, cumulatively raised the repo rate by 250 basis points.

SITUATION VACANT

In pursuance of SMDC Resolution No. 1 interested candidates are hereby invited For the various posts of Chitalmari Higher Secondary School (Adhoc). The posts are Purely adhoc basis and application will be received from 09-06-2023 to 20-06-2023 till 3 pm at School office.

Arts & Science stream posts are given below :

Sl. No.	Name of post	No. of Post	Qualification	Fixed Pay per month
1.	Bodo	1(One)	MA	16,200.00
2.	Economics	1(One)	MA	16,200.00
3.	Logic	1(One)	MA	16,200.00
4.	Physic	1(One)	M.Sc	16,200.00
5.	Chemistry	1(One)	M.Sc	16,200.00
6.	Mathematics	1(One)	M.Sc	16,200.00
7.	Zoology	1(One)	M.Sc	16,200.00
8.	Anthropology	1(One)	M.Sc	16,200.00
9.	Sociology	1(One)	MA	16,200.00
10.	Demonstrator Zoology	1(One)	B.Sc	14,000.00
11.	Bengali	2(Two)	MA	16,200.00

Sd/-
Principal i/c
Chitalmari H. S. School
Karbi Anglong 782481

Badungduppa Kalakendra pays tribute to founder Sukracharjya Rabha on 5th death anniv



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 8: Badungduppa Kalakendra, a renowned Assamese theatre group, commemorated the fifth death anniversary of their founder and acclaimed theatre personality, Sukracharjya Rabha, on Thursday. The day was dedicated to honouring his legacy and contributions.

The memorial event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, followed by Parkanti, a traditional Rabha ritual to pay homage to the departed. This was succeeded by Sangkritan, where religious songs and prayers were sung.

To honour Sukracharjya Rabha's memory, the society performed the play 'Madaiya Musi', originally written by HS Shivaprakash. The play was adapted and directed by the late Sukracharjya Rabha himself, who was also renowned for his unique open-air theatre festival, 'Under the Sal Tree.'

Madan Rabha, the Managing Director of Badungduppa Kalakendra, expressed, "The Badungduppa family has been observing this day each year since the passing of our founder, Sukracharjya Rabha, in 2018. While it is a day of profound sorrow for us, it also signifies unwavering determination, commitment, and introspection. This day anchors us to our purpose and serves as a reminder to

carry forward Sukracharjya Rabha's enduring legacy."

Sukracharjya Rabha, the pioneer of the avant-garde 'Hygiene Theatre' movement since its establishment in 2008, organised the 'Under the Sal Tree' theatre festival, which aimed to promote coexistence with nature and foster a symbiotic relationship. His contribution earned him recognition as one of the most respected theatre personalities in the region.

Rabha, who received the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar from Sangeet Natak Akademi, was celebrated nationwide for his distinctive approach to theatre. Tragically, he passed away at the age of 41 due to a cardiac arrest on June 8, 2018.

In 1998, he founded his theatre group, Badungduppa, a rural-based theatre center in his village, and quickly gained recognition as a young talent. In 2008, he launched the remarkable 'Under the Sal Tree' theatre movement, attracting global attention. The festival hosted theatre troupes from countries such as Brazil, Poland, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and from other countries who participated in this unique form of theatre which was organised at Rabha's native Rampur village of Goalpara. The plays were performed amidst the tall trees and under the open sky, without the use of any electronic devices.

New Child Welfare Committee assumes responsibility in Hojai



HT Correspondent
HOJAI, June 8: Advocate Samir Sarkar, in an interview with this correspondent, highlighted the unwavering dedication of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in safeguarding the well-being of children. Sarkar, recently appointed as the chairman of the CWC for Hojai district under the ministry of Social Welfare depart-

ment, expressed the committee's commitment to thoroughly investigate child-related cases and deliver decisions that prioritise the child's welfare while minimising physical, mental, and psychological impact. He further emphasised on the collaboration between the Child Welfare Committee and various civil societies and non-governmental organisations, which serve as essential rehabilitation centers for children in need. Sarkar underscored the meticulous and systematic procedure employed to determine the placement of a child in an NGO or civil society.

Joining Sarkar in the committee are Supriya Kaushik, Ripon Kr Das, and Sailendra Sarkar, said an official notification issued by the Governor on May 24, 2023.

Motorcyclist seriously injured in Desang Rajabari road collision

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, June 8: A collision on NH-37 Road at Desang Rajabari, under the jurisdiction of Demow police station, has left a motorcyclist with severe injuries. According to sources, a Tata Tiago car (AS 04 AA-6493) traveling from Sivasagar collided head-on with a Yamaha R-15 V-4 motorcycle on Wednesday. The motorcyclist, identified as Gaurav Mech, suffered significant injuries in the incident. Upon receiving the report, a prompt response from the Demow police led to the immediate transportation of the injured Gaurav Mech to Sui-Ka-Pha Multi-Specialty Hospital in Desang Rajabari for urgent medical treatment. The driver of the Tata Tiago Car, Papu Nandi, sustained minor injuries. The Demow police subsequently seized both vehicles and brought them to the police station for further investigation. This unfortunate accident serves as a stark reminder of the critical importance of road safety, urging all motorists to exercise caution, adhere to traffic regulations, and contribute to preventing such incidents in the future.

Rebuilding Hope: Group Legrand India reconstructs flood-ravaged school in Barpeta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 8: In a heart-warming display of societal dedication, Group Legrand India, the prominent purveyor of electrical and digital building infrastructure, has successfully undertaken the reconstruction of the flood-affected Kharballi LP School in Barpeta, Assam. This noble endeavour shines as a beacon of optimism, aiming to reinstate the shattered aspirations and dreams of the children impacted by the devastating floods of 2022.

Nestled on the tranquil banks of the Brahmaputra River near Barpeta, Assam, the Kharballi LP School formerly stood as an emblem of serenity, catering to 370 students hailing from three villages. However, in 2022, the region encountered unfathomable devastation when the floods ruthlessly washed away the school, leaving the students bereft of a means to pursue their education. The deluge's wrath extended beyond the educational institution, decimating countless homes and compounding the community's distress.

Working in close collaboration with the local community and United Way India, Group Legrand India embarked upon a comprehensive reconstruction endeavour to



breathe life back into the school. By involving the local villagers in the construction process, the company not only provided avenues for employment but also fostered a robust sense of community participation and resilience.

The recently reconstructed school now stands tall as an emblem of hope and fortitude. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities

and ample resources, it now offers a conducive educational milieu, nurturing the potential of each child. The objective is to empower the students of Barpeta, Assam, enabling them to excel in their academic journeys and fulfill their aspirations.

Mafida Khatoun, the head teacher of Kharballi LP School, shared her experience, stating, "Education holds paramount impor-

AJYCP demonstration against open fire incident by miscreants in Dhemaji

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, June 8: The district unit of Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) staged a three-hour-long sit-in protest on Thursday in front of the office of the Nagaon deputy commissioner, condemning the recent open fire incident by miscreants from Arunachal Pradesh near Jorampur Panbari, at the inter-state boundary of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The youth organisation demanded a high-level probe into the incident and urged for monetary compensation to be provided to the families of the victims. More than a hundred protesters from the organisation participated in the demonstration. During the protest, Pragjyotish Bonia, the president, and Debashish Das, the secretary of AJYCP, strongly condemned the



incident. They highlighted the negligence of the central government regarding the long-standing boundary disputes between Assam and other north-eastern states, which have cost the lives of many Assamese people over the years. The leaders of the organisation called upon the state government to

promptly ensure monetary compensation for the families of the deceased victims and those undergoing treatment in hospitals due to injuries sustained in the firing incident. In this regard, the organisation submitted a memorandum to the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma through the deputy commis-

sioner of Nagaon. Diganta Das, the central executive of AJYCP, also participated in the protest, as stated in a press release.

Our Jorhat correspondent adds: The Jorhat district unit of the Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) staged a powerful sit-in demonstration on Thurs-

day as part of a statewide agitation condemning the brutal killings of two individuals and the injuries sustained by several others at the hands of miscreants along the Assam-Arunachal border in Dhemaji district on Monday last.

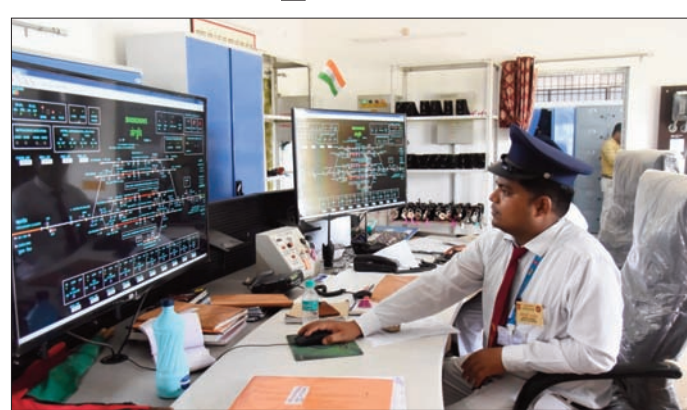
The protesters vehemently called for a judicial inquiry into the incident and demanded that strict action be taken against those responsible for perpetrating the heinous crime. Additionally, they urged the authorities to provide adequate compensation to the bereaved families of the deceased and the injured victims.

Highlighting the gravity of the situation, the demonstrators emphasised the need for the government to take decisive steps towards finding a permanent resolution to the longstanding border issue.

NFR implements measures for safe train operations

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 8: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is taking various measures to ensure the safe running of trains by continuously monitoring and improving rail safety parameters. Regular safety audits and inspections are conducted on railway infrastructures to identify areas that require maintenance and improvement. Safety procedures are strictly followed to prevent accidents, and periodic safety drives are launched to enhance safety awareness among staff and streamline safety practices, including asset maintenance.

To enhance safety and reliability in train operations, NFR is focusing on timely replacement of aging assets, adoption of suitable technologies for track, rolling stock, signalling, and interlocking system maintenance, safety drives, increased emphasis on training officials, and regular inspections to monitor and educate staff on safe



practices. Several safety devices and systems are employed to prevent accidents, such as Electronic Interlocking, track circuiting, Block Proving Axle Counters (BPAC), Colour Light LED Signals, Train Protection Warning Systems (TPWS), Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC), Dedicated Optical Fiber Cable (OFC)-based Acoustic Sensing Systems, Vigilance Control Device

(VCD), fog pass device, pre-stressed concrete sleepers, and digital Ultrasonic Flaw Detection (USFD) machines.

NFR has also implemented system monitoring and predictive maintenance centres at multiple locations. These centers remotely monitor and diagnose failures related to signal and telecommunication assets, enabling proactive maintenance measures.

AAU students sweep top three spots in Indigenous Agricultural Model Competition

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, June 8: Exceptional talent from Assam Agricultural University (AAU) shone brightly as its students secured the first, second, and third positions, along with corresponding cash prizes, in the UG/PG level model competition on the theme -- 'Showcasing Indigenous Agricultural Practices of Assam and North-East India'. The prestigious contest was held during the national conference on 'DHARA: Bharatiya Paramparik Krishi Mela', meticulously organised by Tezpur University on Monday last. An AAU official disclosed on Thursday that Saurav Jyoti Baishya and Saranga Pani Bora, both second year BSc (Honours) Agriculture students, claimed the coveted first prize, along with a cash award of ₹ 10,000. Their model on 'Zabo and Apatani Cropping Systems' meticulously demonstrated the scientific principles behind ancient farming practices. Bhaskar Jyoti Kalita and Anusmita Dutta, also second year BSc (Honours) Agriculture students, showcased their exceptional skills and secured the second prize, accompanied by a cash award of ₹ 5,000. Their model on the 'Bari Farming System of Assam' elegantly showcased the efficient utilisation of resources in a sustainable manner.

Displaying their brilliance in agricultural research, Pragya Permita Acharyya and Greeshma Varghese, first year MSc (Agriculture) students from the department of Plant Pathology, clinched the third prize, along with a cash award of ₹ 3,000. Their enlightening model on 'Unveiling Assam's Indigenous Farming Practices through Agro-ecotourism' shed light on the rich farming traditions of the region.

The commendable achievements of these students were made possible by the guidance and mentorship of esteemed faculty members, Dr Anurag Kashyap and Dr Bharat C Nath. These faculty members provided invaluable support and accompanied the students during their participation at the esteemed Tezpur University event.

Awareness programme raises alarm on parthenium at Biswanath



HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 8: The Biswanath branch of the Assam Science Society organised a series of awareness programmes in Jamugurihat, Sootea, and Biswanath on Thursday, shedding light on the detrimental effects of parthenium (parthenium hysterophorus), as informed by Ripunjoy Bordoloi, the joint secretary of the Biswanath branch. Previously, the

committee had visited several remote villages in Biswanath, spreading awareness among the local communities.

As part of these efforts, Ripunjoy Bordoloi, a science fiction writer and teacher at Chengamari HS, arranged an awareness programme at Chengamari Sub-Centre. During the gathering, Bordoloi discussed the harmful consequences of the parthenium weed. He highlighted its ori-

gin in Mexico, America, Trinidad, and Argentina, and the devastation it caused in Pune, Maharashtra, in 1955. The weed, known as Congress Grass in America, mistakenly entered India in 1955. While animals do not consume this weed, their contact with it can lead to illness. It causes allergic reactions, respiratory issues, diarrhoea, and indigestion in animals. The seeds of parthenium can remain viable in the soil for up to six years. Over 54 nations worldwide have been affected by this deadly weed, which produces allelochemicals that impede the growth of other grasses and plants, Bordoloi added.

Addressing the audience, Dr Himangshu Chakrabarty, medical officer of Chengamari Sub-Centre, explained the allergic symptoms that humans may experience, such as skin allergies, respiratory problems, eye swelling, runny nose, asthma, itching in the ears and nose, all caused by this dangerous weed. Following this, an awareness programme took place at Chengamari HS, chaired by Dhiren Bora. A plot of land infested with parthenium was incinerated. Similar awareness programmes were also conducted at Borpani Adarsha Vidyalaya, Sootea, Dakshin Nagsankar HS, and other locations throughout the day.

Biswanath AAGSU extends support to outstanding students

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 8: The Biswanath district branch of AAGSU (All Assam Gorkha Students' Union), in collaboration with regional committees, has extended a helping hand to economically disadvantaged yet highly accomplished students who have recently cleared the HSLC examination. These students have been granted free admission to various educational institutions in Biswanath, as mentioned in a press release issued by Prakash Khanal, secretary, and Nomal Bhattarai, education secretary of Biswanath AAGSU.

Jorhat DC instructs police and transport department to implement road safety measures

HT Correspondent
Jorhat, June 8: The deputy commissioner of Jorhat, Pulak Mahanta, chaired a meeting on Thursday with senior officials from the Transport, Police, Education, Forest, Power, PWD, Excise, and Health departments at the Conference Hall of Jorhat Circuit House. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and implement road safety measures aimed at preventing road accidents. A spokesperson from the district administration revealed that as part of the proposed road safety measures, Mahanta directed the Transport and Police authorities to identify

accident-prone areas within the district and take appropriate action.

Expressing concern over numerous incidents occurring on the National Highway, where four-lane construction work is currently underway by NHIDCL, the deputy commissioner instructed the involved parties to adopt adequate safety and protective measures. These measures include erecting barricades, installing warning signs, and street lights. Furthermore, the Education department was directed to raise awareness among school students about road safety guidelines.

Yogesvara Sansthan to lead International Yoga Day countdown programme in Gangtok

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, June 8: Yogesvara Sansthan, a renowned yoga organisation in the state, is set to conduct the International Yoga Day countdown programme in Gangtok, Sikkim, starting from June 10, 2023. This event is being organised in collaboration with the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) to commemorate the upcoming International Yoga Day.

Expressing his delight, Dibya Jyoti Deka, chairman of Yogesvara Sansthan, stated that the ministry of AYUSH, government of India, through the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, has entrusted them with the responsibility of conducting the International Yoga Day countdown programme in Gangtok.

The event will witness the participation of two esteemed organ-

isations from Assam -- Indian Yoga Culture and Yoga Therapy Center, Guwahati, and Jagati Nature Care, Guwahati. Deka added that their collaboration with the event will enhance the reach and impact of the programme.

The International Yoga Day countdown programme aims to raise awareness about the benefits of yoga and promote its practice among individuals from all walks of life. Following a yoga session led by Yogesvara Sansthan, a seminar on yoga will also be conducted.

Yogesvara Sansthan and its partner organisations are determined to make the International Yoga Day countdown programme in Gangtok a resounding success, spreading the message of health, harmony, and inner well-being through the practice of yoga, stated a press release.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

When the sun rises, it rises for everyone.
- Cuban Proverb

Balasore mishap an eye-opener

The recent horrific train crash in Balasore district, Odisha has sent shockwaves throughout the country and beyond. With 288 lives lost and over 1100 injured, the collision between a speeding train and a stationary goods train has highlighted the pressing need to address the safety concerns in India's railway system. While the government had been promoting Indian Railways as a smart and modern transport system, the Balasore incident has shattered this illusion, prompting a demand for a thorough investigation into the root causes of the tragedy. The Modi government's emphasis on transforming Indian Railways into a speedy and technologically advanced system, exemplified by the inauguration of Vande Bharat trains and a substantial budget allocation of over INR 2.4 lakh crore, has created an atmosphere of hype. However, the Balasore crash serves as a heart-rending wake-up call, exposing the reality that all is not well within this massive transportation network. This tragic incident is not an isolated occurrence but rather a symptom of systemic issues within Indian Railways. A recent Performance Audit report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reveals alarming deficiencies. Inspections conducted by track recording cars, which assess the structural and geometrical features of rail tracks, suffered from a shortfall of 30-100 percent. Of the 1129 derailments during the period of 2017-21, 422 were attributed to engineering problems, including inadequate track maintenance and deviation beyond permissible limits.

The CAG report also highlights a funding shortage for necessary safety measures. Since 2017-18, safety-related works were brought under the Rashtriya Rail Samraksha Kosh (RRSK), with the railways expected to generate 20 percent of the allocated funds from their internal resources. However, due to the government's cost-cutting policies, which require institutions to generate their own funds, the railways struggled to meet the financial burden. Consequently, the spending from RRSK declined, particularly for Priority 1 works addressing derailments and level crossings. Compounding these safety concerns is the severe shortage of manpower in the railways. The existence of nearly three lakh vacant non-gazetted posts has been acknowledged by the railway minister himself. The overworked loco staff, facing a shortage of 471 out of 5229 sanctioned positions in the south zone, are often forced to work for more than 12 hours consecutively. Such a critical shortage of personnel compromises the safety and well-being of both railway employees and passengers.

Prime Minister Modi and his government must demonstrate a commitment to accountability and responsible governance by holding themselves answerable for this devastating disaster. It is high time that the Modi government takes immediate action to address the deep-rooted safety concerns plaguing Indian Railways. A comprehensive assessment of the railway system's infrastructure, track maintenance, signaling systems, and human resource requirements is imperative. Adequate funding, strict adherence to safety protocols, and transparent decision-making processes must be prioritized to prevent such tragic accidents in the future. The Balasore train crash should serve as a wake-up call for the nation and a catalyst for transformative change within Indian Railways. The lives lost and the lessons learned from this tragedy must not be forgotten. The government, the railway authorities, and the public at large must unite in their efforts to rebuild and restore trust in the railway system, ensuring that the safety and well-being of passengers remain paramount. Only then can Indian Railways truly become a safe, efficient, and reliable mode of transportation for all.

TALKING POINTS

AI can avert train accidents

Railway safety can be improved by using Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has the ability to rapidly process large amounts of data and information, resulting in early warnings about critical equipment failures and potential outages

By: Narvijay Yadav

The drastic collision of three trains in Odisha's Balasore brought the issue of railway safety to the fore. With the tragic death of nearly 288 passengers, it is one of the biggest train accidents in India. The results of the detailed investigation will come later, but initially, it is feared that a wrong signal, technical fault, human error, or some 'manual tinkering' could be the possible reason for this unfortunate accident. In the mishap, the Chennai-bound Coromandel Express rammed into a goods train, following which the Howrah-bound Yesvantpur Express slammed into damaged compartments four minutes later. I have been keenly interested in rail technology since childhood. While studying at Govt Inter College, Budau (UP), I was rewarded by the Uttar Pradesh government for making a New Type of Rail Joint in the early 80s. I had proposed joining the ends of two rails, having a 45-degree angle cut, which was widely appreciated in the media and Bharatiya Rail as well. The innovative theory was examined by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) Lucknow, which works under the Ministry of Railways. Later, more advanced techniques came into practice for the rail joints.

What I feel now is that safety in railways can be improved to a great extent by applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the technical systems of the railway. AI has the ability to rapidly process large amounts of data and information, resulting in early warnings about critical equipment failures and potential outages. AI has introduced

several new dimensions to ensure safety in the railways. By analyzing data in real-time, the system can detect potential hazards, such as AI-powered cameras monitoring track conditions and alerting crews if anything unusual is detected, which could lead to a train derailment. Thus it can reduce the probability of accidents.

By analyzing passenger numbers, demand, schedules, and availability of tracks with the help of AI, efficient use of resources can be determined. This will reduce the problem of late running of trains and also improve the overall passenger experience. AI can predict passenger demand by analyzing passenger behavioural data. This will make it possible to optimize the train schedule and make sure that the trains are run on time. AI can improve operational efficiency in the rail industry by analyzing potential delays. These are just some of the ways AI is already benefiting the railways. Smart

technology can make train journeys safer, more efficient, and more comfortable.

Ever since the practice of digital payment and UPI payment has grown in India, each and every paisa is automatically calculated at a fraction of a second. Transactions worth millions of rupees are being done round the clock with absolute efficiency and trust. This development has ended the dependence on banks or calculators to a great extent. Be it the stock markets or the consumer markets, everywhere all the calculations are done in the blink of an eye. So why can't we use this magic of AI to enhance the level of safety and comfort in the trains? (The writer is a senior journalist and columnist)



More Russian oil is making backdoor entry into NATO nations via Saudi Arabia, UAE

The cat is out of the bag. India is not the only country using imported Russian oil to export processed petro-products. West Asian oil giants, led by Saudi Arabia, are buying millions of barrels of Russian diesel oil, which is banned in Europe, to sell the product to buyers in the European Union (EU). Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are importing low priced Russian oil to jack up oil exports at higher prices to Europe. Earlier, reports suggested that India, the world's third largest consumer and importer of crude oil, was exporting Russian oil, after refining, to countries in Europe and Asia.

These reports are only partly true as India has been exporting refined oil products for many years. India has been importing crude oil from a number of countries. Lately, India has substantially raised its crude oil imports from the US, with the country's share in India's crude basket hitting a record 14.3 percent in December. While Russia has become the top source of crude oil with a share of 21.2 percent in December, India reduced its dependence on Iraq (16.9 percent), UAE (6 percent) and Kuwait (4.2 percent) to accommodate more crude imports from the US. In December, crude oil imports from the US shot up 93 per cent to 3.9 million MT.

India hardly imported crude oil from Russia till 2021. Huge transportation costs made Russian crude oil very expensive compared to India's nearby import sources from West Asia. Incidentally, India's first greenfield private sector refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat, put up by Reliance Industries (RIL), was granted export-oriented status as early as in April, 2007. It used imported crude oil, mostly from West Asian suppliers, to make refined products for the purpose of export. The RIL refinery has an installed capacity of 1.24 million barrels per day, making it the world's largest refinery.

The situation changed after the Russia-Ukraine war began in February, last year. The western trade and financial embargo on Russia forced the latter to sell its oil and other products at large discounts. Oil imports suddenly became much cheaper from Russia. This made India go for Russian



crude oil as the country's energy market is 87 percent dependent on imported oil. Till 2020-21, India's purchase of crude oil from Russia was less than one percent of its total oil imports. India bought only 419,000 tonnes of crude oil from Russia in the first 10 months of 2020-21, which was 0.2 percent of the total import of 175.9 million tonnes. India exported refined petroleum products worth US\$49 billion in 2021, making the country the world's third largest refined petroleum exporter. The main export destinations were Singapore (\$4.59 billion), the US (\$3.56 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.89 billion) and Australia (\$2.62 billion). India's fastest growing export markets for refined petroleum during 2020 and 2021, well before the Russia-Ukraine war, were the US, Australia and Togo.

Thanks to cheaper Russian crude oil and higher export demand for refined products since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, India's refined petro-products exports are going up. However, it should be noted that India's total annual refined fuel exports in 2022-23 were actually lower than a year earlier as some refiners shut units for maintenance in the latter half of 2022. The country's domestic consumption of petro-products during the last financial year

rose over 10 percent year-on-year to a record 222.3 million tonnes. The value of India's crude oil imports in the last fiscal was estimated at \$158.3 billion, up from \$120.7 billion in the previous year. Last year, Russia became the top crude oil supplier to India, displacing Iraq for the first time. Interestingly, Russia has also overtaken Saudi Arabia as China's top oil supplier.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia, boasting one of the world's largest oil reserves and making billions of dollars from oil exports every year, has overnight become a big importer

of Russian oil to step up exports to NATO countries. Despite objections from the US, petroleum-rich Gulf countries are capitalising on cut-rate Russian oil prices. Saudi Arabia's annual crude petroleum exports would be worth \$140 billion. In addition, it has been exporting refined petroleum, ethylene and propylene polymers, and acyclic alcohols. It exports mostly to China, India, Japan, South Korea and the UAE. The only reason behind the Arab kingdom's sudden large imports from Russia is to capitalise on the price difference. Over the past several months, Saudi Arabia has been importing record volumes of oil from Russia. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are buying large quan-

ties of Russian oil at low prices to export at high prices to Europe with the US watching helplessly. Russian oil is getting a backdoor entry to the EU via Saudi Arabia and the UAE, America's two reliable West Asian allies.

According to reports, Saudi Arabia imported 174,000 barrels a day of diesel and gas-oil from Russia in April and even more during last month, as per data compiled by Bloomberg from analytics firm Kpler. The Saudi kingdom became Europe's top supplier. Record volumes of Russian diesel poured into West Asia in March as traders cashed in on low prices to stock up the fuel at the UAE's Fujairah hub and in Saudi Arabia. West Asia has quickly become a major supplier of the industrial fuel to Europe and Africa. Russian oil is helping higher output from Saudi and Kuwaiti refineries. The West Asian region took up over 10 percent of Russia's exports in February and March.

The backdoor trade of Russian oil to the EU by some of the diplomatic allies of the US in West Asia shows how futile and ill conceived the US and NATO sanctions on Russia, especially those covering the energy sector. Western nations are unsuccessfully trying to cut Russian income from oil and gas. The EU and G7 countries had set a maximum price of \$60 per barrel for Russian crude. Notably, the EU did not impose sanctions on Russian gas as Europe is heavily dependent on Russian supplies to meet around 40 percent of its gas needs. Overall, the US-led western trade and financial sanctions have hardly impacted Russia.

Thanks to its good friends such as China, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, Russia posted a record current account surplus of \$227 billion in 2022. As imports fell, Russia's trade balance swelled to \$282.3 billion, last year, from \$170.1 billion the previous year. Ironically, Russia seems to be enjoying the western trade sanctions. More than a year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European governments are now questioning the impact of sanctions on Russia. The NATO-backed Ukraine war is escalating with the time, putting increasing pressure on European economies. (IPA Service)

Uptick in Q4 GDP growth is positive but challenges remain in current fiscal

By: KR Sudhaman

There is jubilation in Indian government as uptick in last quarter lifted India's GDP growth in fiscal 2023 to 7.2 per cent belying expectations of less than 7 per cent growth this year. After slowing GDP growth of 4.5 per cent in third quarter, there were fears that fourth quarter performance will not be that good and growth will slide to 4.2 per cent in fourth quarter on the back of slowing world economy and monetary tightening by RBI due to stubborn domestic inflation.

India's real GDP growth rose sharply to 6.1% on-year in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023 compared with 4.5% in the third quarter. The growth surpassed the number factored in the National Statistics Office's (NSO) second advance estimate of February. Annual growth for fiscal 2023 was revised up to 7.2% (provisional estimate) from 7.0% in the second advance estimate. According to CRISIL, Fourth-quarter growth was primarily driven by investment and net exports, with the latter less of a drag given rising exports and slowing imports. Fixed investment turned in the strongest growth on the demand side while private consumption growth was more subdued on-quarter. Manufacturing and agriculture growth improved on-quarter on the supply side even as services growth remained strong, albeit slowing a tad relative to the previous quarter. The provisional estimate of 7.2% comes on top of 9.1% expansion in fiscal 2022. This suggests strong growth momentum, which was propelled by domestic demand through the year, both from investment and private consumption. Investment's share rose to an 11-year high of 34% of GDP, while that of private consumption rose to an 18-year high of 58.5% in fiscal 2023.

However, nominal GDP growth tapered to 10.4% on-year in the fourth quarter compared with 11.4% in the third. This was primarily due to the price-effect, since the GDP deflator slowed to 4.1% from 6.6%. The deflator is significantly influenced by inflation based on wholesale price index (WPI), which halved to 3.3% from 6.6%. The gap between nominal and real growth is likely to reduce further, with inflation expected falling this fiscal.

While the growth momentum was strong in fiscal 2023, the current 2023-24 fiscal will feel the lagged impact of rate hikes of central banks over the past 15 months. Crisil emphasised and said external demand is likely to be a bigger hindrance to growth with western advanced economies staring at a sharp slowdown in the coming quarters, whipping up a headwind for exports. While domestic demand will also

weaken, hit by rising lending rates, softening inflation and government capex will offer support. Monsoon and El Nino risks remain a swing factor. Overall, we expect India's real GDP growth to slow to 6.0% in this fiscal 2024 from 7.2% in the previous fiscal.

This detailed analysis indicate that India is not yet out of the woods despite the higher than expected growth in fourth quarter. The current year growth expected at 6 per cent is nothing to cheer India is yet nowhere near getting back to high growth trajectory of 8 per cent plus annually. Economists are still wary of India growing to its potential.

Construction and infrastructure have done well in the fourth quarter but there is still joblessness in the economy and demand is muted. Car sales have gone up but two-wheeler sales is still not back to the desired level. Even in car sales, the low end models pickup is muted. That means the middle class and lower middle class are still not comfortable in spending besides rural distress. These have to be fixed.

GDP growth at 7.2% for fiscal 2023 indicates the economy has done better than expected. Importantly, this growth comes on a higher base - due to upward revision of fiscal 2022 data.

According to CRISIL chief economist Dharmakirithi Joshi, "We expect the economy to slow to 6% this fiscal due to spill-over to exports from a slowing world and some impact of interest rate hikes on interest sensitive segments." Even at 6%, India will be the fastest growing G-20 economy this fiscal, but that is not enough to take advantage of the India's demographic dividend that government boosts off.

As for agriculture output and prices, the eyes are riveted on monsoon; Joshi said indicating we have to keep our fingers crossed over early pick up rural demand. Higher than expected growth in 2022-23 is no doubt a pleasant surprise, but analysts warned of an uneven terrain ahead. Government and private capital spending have improved but private consumption is still sluggish. There was decline in both exports and imports, which clouds economic outlook. Private consumption accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the economy and its growth was merely 2.8 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2022-23 and this is not encouraging.

Surprisingly high growth in the fourth quarter has brought about some optimism to India's growth story but there are still risks. In such a situation there is need to vigorously pursue structural reforms instead of indulging in only chest-thumping. More importantly jobless growth needed to be tackled to ensure private consumption picked up to the desired level. (IPA Service)

Amlo's party wins in Mexico's most populous state for the first time



By: Roger McKenzie

Mexico's most populous state turned its back on decades of single-party rule, deciding to move forward with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's ruling Morena party over the long-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Results from electoral authorities on Sunday night indicated a victory for Delfina Gomez in the State of Mexico that was confirmed a short time later by Alejandra del Moral's concession speech. The result was a new low for the PRI, which governed Mexico uninterrupted for 71 years until losing power in 2000 and had ruled the State of Mexico for even longer until its loss Sunday.

A representative sampling of voting stations just hours after polls closed indicated Ms Gomez was likely to win between 52.1 per cent and 54.2 per cent of the ballots, compared with 43 per cent to 45.2 per cent for del Moral, according to the National Electoral Institute.

"There is going to be a different governance," Gomez said late on Sunday night before cheering supporters in the state capital of Toluca. The state's first female governor elect stressed her commitment to the mothers of missing people and victims of femicide, and called for the public to denounce corruption.

However, the PRI-led coalition appears to have held onto the governorship in the sparsely populated northern border state of Coahuila. At the time of writing, with most votes counted, the PRI coalition candidate Manolo Jimenez led by a massive 35 points over the Morena challenger. But losing the State of Mexico was a heavy blow to the political fortunes of the PRI.

The contest was closely watched, too, because of its potential implications for next year's presidential elections. Even without having selected its nominee yet, Morena is considered the frontrunner in that national election, more so now with control of the State of Mexico.

The State of Mexico hugs Mexico City on three sides, encompassing urban sprawl and rural ranches, as well as stunning inequality, violence and corruption. For decades it has been the heart of the PRI. The loss of the State of Mexico is a stunning reversal for a party that ruled Mexico uninterrupted for seven decades even though turnout was only about half of eligible voters in the State of Mexico.

Adair Ortiz Herrera, an information systems student from Coyotepec, a rural area in the northern part of the state, said before the results were announced Sunday that he was sure

"a new direction" was coming.

The result was a new low for the PRI, which held Mexico's presidency uninterrupted for 71 years until losing power in the 2000 elections; the party had governed the State of Mexico and its 17 million inhabitants for 94 years until its loss Sunday.

The PRI managed to hold on to the governorship of the sparsely populated northern border state of Coahuila, and governs the neighbouring state of Durango in coalition with other opposition parties. But the PRI is now a shadow of the old days when it ruled Mexico with a combination of hand-out programs and corruption.

PRI party leader Alejandro Moreno said Monday that speculation about the PRI's demise was wrong and that the party would survive, but as part of a broad opposition coalition of left, right and centre groups that will seek to field an alliance candidate in the presidential elections a year from now.

"Elections are won with total votes across the country, not with governorships," Moreno said, although state governments in Mexico historically have been a base to mobilize power and cash that can play a key role in federal elections.

The Morena party now governs 22 of Mexico's 32 states, propelled by Lopez Obrador's personal popularity — and more generous payments to the elderly and students than the PRI offered. The conservative National Action party governs five states, the Morena-allied Green party governs one and the small Citizens Movement holds two large states.

Citizens Movement party leader Dante Delgado dashed any hopes Monday that his centrist group would join the PRI coalition, comparing it to a sinking ship, and calling Moreno, the PRI leader, "the one who dug the grave of the PRI."

Lopez Obrador said he was pleased with Sunday's election results, but struck a magnanimous tone Monday, saying his administration would deal fairly with governors from all parties. "We have to serve all citizens, whatever party they belong to, that is our responsibility," the president said.

Gomez celebrated her victory as the first woman to serve as governor in the State of Mexico. "This is a victory for working families, this is a victory for us women, who have fought for years for the recognition of our rights," Gomez said in a victory speech late Sunday. The state has been plagued by a bloody series of killings of women in recent years, and widespread poverty among female-headed households. (IPA Service)

Why the law fails to ensure politicians don't ask for votes in the name of religion

By: Rajesh Ranjan and Namrata Jeph

Most recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a public meeting during the election campaign in Karnataka asked voters to chant the slogans of 'Bajrang Bali' and teach a lesson to the Congress.

The significant blurring of the distinction between religion and politics in modern India not only raises the questions on the constitutional role of the institutions meant to maintain it but also the individuals governing it. Although these amount to egregious violations of the Model Code of Conduct, whether the Election Commission will take action is anybody's guess.

Elections in India are regulated under the Representation of People Act, 1951.

To ensure that people of high ethical values are elected as representatives of the people of India, the RPA has laid down certain rules of electoral morality and prohibited certain acts which denigrate the purity of the elections.

Part VII of the RPA classifies condemnable acts committed during elections into two categories: a) corrupt practices and b) electoral offences. The principal distinction between these two categories of prescribed acts is that while a wrong committed under corrupt practice can be brought before the courts only at the end of elections by way of an election petition filed in accordance with the provisions of Article 329(b) of the constitution of India and Part VI of the RPA, an electoral offence can be taken cognisance of and proceeded with as soon as the offence is committed as per the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973.

Further, while conviction for a corrupt practice entails civil disabilities like disqualification from voting and contesting elections for a certain period, conviction for electoral offence attracts criminal liability like imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or both.



In the realm of the religious electoral speech debate in India, the relevant provisions of the RPA are section 123(3) 123(3A) and 125.

As per 123 (3), appeal in the name of religion, caste, community or language is a corrupt practice. Further, promotion or attempt to promote enmity and hatred amongst different groups of people is both a corrupt practice under section 123(3A) and an electoral offence under section 125.

The necessity of the provision under section 123 (3) is explained by the apex court in the case of Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhu (Dr) v Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte. The court observed that it is necessary "to ensure that no candidate at an election gets votes only because of his religion and no candidate is denied any votes on the ground of his religion." This will keep the secular ethos of the Indian polity intact.

The Supreme Court further held that the restriction imposed in Section 123(3) is in the interest of decency in a secular polity is thus a reasonable restriction within the meaning of Article 19(2) and not violative of the fundamental right of speech and expression under Article 19 (1)(a).

The apex court in the case of Abhiram Singh vs CD Commachen held and reaffirmed this view that "seeking or asking votes in the name of the religion is a corrupt practice". An election is a secular exercise and an appeal made in the name of religion, caste, or race is not allowed under the law, it said.

Despite the court ruling and the legal remedy, the appeal in the name of religion has emerged as a challenge for both polity and law.

Constitutional and legal recourse

Democratic values are enshrined by the func-

tioning of constitutional and legal institutions.

The Election Commission of India is the designated body that controls the use of religious speech, symbols and invocations in elections. The model code of conduct lays down the guidelines on the behaviour of political parties during elections.

For the first four decades of its existence, the observance of MCC was largely left to the good sense of political parties. It remained a passive document providing general guidelines. The MCC was intended to be followed voluntarily by political parties so as to keep election campaigns on healthy lines to ensure peace and order during the campaign period.

As long as the MCC remained on paper and was not strictly enforced, there was no opposition.

However, when the EC vigorously asserted

its power to enforce the MCC by taking stringent action ranging from censuring candidates to canceling by-elections for violation of MCC provisions, it was met by stiff resistance. The validity of the MCC and the legitimacy of actions taken under it were questioned. In recent times, the role of the Election Commission in selectively choosing to enforce the rules has been questioned.

Several scholars like Tarunabh Khaitan and Mukulika Banerjee have argued that the EC has largely become what journalist Seema Chishti has called a "biased referee".

The limitations of legal recourse to this mixing of religion and politics, tell us that we need to look for a solution beyond the law.

The initial years of the Indian republic witnessed a constitutional vision that the state would be equidistant from religion.

India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had said in a radio address on December 1, 1947, "We must constantly remind ourselves that whatever our religion or creed, we are all people."

The country's second prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, had remarked, "The unique thing about our country is that we have Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, and people of all other religions. We have temples and mosques, gurdwaras and churches. But we do not bring all this into politics".

It is time we revive our political morality to uphold conventional and constitutional values. As Professor Cass R. Sunstein says, "Our imaginations, moral and otherwise are populated by identifiable types of people. Whether it's the subject of law, sports, politics or friendships, human beings are subjected to particular types."

It's time that our politicians shape our imaginations with the implicit understanding of separation of religion from politics which was the virtue of our early office holders in politics. (Courtesy: The Wire)

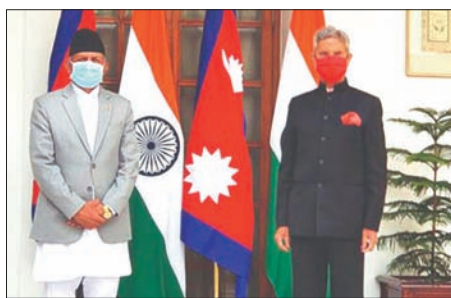
India-Nepal relations soar high

By: Harsh V. Pant Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy

By visiting China in 2008, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also called Prachanda, became the first Prime Minister to break the tradition of Nepalese premiers choosing India as their maiden destination of visit. Fast forward to June 2023, Mr Prachanda not only chose India to be his first destination but also expressed contentment with his four-day visit, dubbing it an "astounding success". The recent visit indicates that India and Nepal are moving beyond their fraught phase and taking this "hit" relationship to "Himalayan Heights." During these four days, both countries prioritised convergences over divergences – they signed five projects and six MoUs. Areas such as hydropower electricity, connectivity, and people-to-people relations remained the centre of this fruitful engagement.

Hydropower cooperation was at the top of the agenda. In recent years, India has taken the lead in accelerating this win-win partnership. In November 2021, India began to purchase Nepal's hydropower electricity and permitted it to export 452 MW. As a result, in 2022 alone, Nepal's hydropower electricity exports generated a revenue of ~12 billion. Building on this momentum, India and Nepal have now agreed to increase the latter's hydropower export quota to 10,000 MW over the next 10 years. They also signed new MoUs for Indian firms to develop Arun and Karnali hydropower projects and agreed to act swiftly on the detailed report of the Pancheswar Multipurpose Project. Additionally, India also agreed to facilitate Nepal's hydropower exports to Bangladesh.

Connectivity, trade, and people-to-people contacts also took precedence during the visit. Both countries signed MoUs for a cross-border petroleum pipeline, cross-border payments, infrastructure development for check posts, and cooperation between foreign service institutes. They also renewed the Transit Treaty, virtually inaugurated integrated check posts, and flagged the inaugural run of a cargo train from India to Nepal.



Throughout the visit, the two leaders focussed on areas of convergence that are mutually beneficial rather than attempting to resolve contentious and sensitive issues. Although both sides agreed to settle the border dispute, there was no in-depth engagement on the same. This finite focus on mutually beneficial areas is due to India's neighbourhood policy, Nepal's domestic developments, and geopolitics.

Following the alleged 2015 Nepal blockade, India has focussed on perception management and has shied away from commenting on Nepal's domestic developments. Its Neighbourhood First policy has prioritised accommodating its neighbours' interests, economic needs and aspirations through economic integration and connectivity. This is despite increasing criticism of India's foreign policy from Opposition parties. Domestically, Nepal continues to be politically unstable. The lack of a clear majority in parliament and the recent unveiling of the Bhutanese refugee scam have kept Mr Prachanda's fragile alliance on its toes. The domestic environment limits his ability to seek a non-partisan consensus on solving Nepal's major issues with India. It is also likely that Mr Prachanda focussed on mutually beneficial areas, as discussing contentious issues would have triggered criticism from different political parties based on their partisan policies.

Nepal's economy is in bad shape as well. It is facing food and fuel inflation, shortage of essential commodities, and depleting foreign reserves. Kathmandu is experiencing a recession with an increasing trade deficit, In-

flation, unemployment and declining foreign direct investments. Currently, Nepal is also seeking assistance from an Extended Credit Facility offered by the International Monetary Fund. Thereby, its immediate focus is on containing inflation, maintaining foreign exchange reserves, raising capital, and reducing the trade deficit, in which trade and economic integration with India is crucial.

Geopolitically, despite China's infrastructure and assistance, Beijing has fallen short of Kathmandu's expectations. Border infrastructure remains underdeveloped, and the trade deficit with China has grown disproportionately. Beijing has continued to turn a blind eye to Nepal's request for grants to proceed with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. As such, none of the nine projects have been implemented to date. China has also begun to intervene in Nepal's internal politics to further its interests. A desperate China is even propagating Pokhara International Airport as part of its BRI, though Nepal has denied the claim. China's limitations in being a viable alternative to Kathmandu have thus compelled the country to focus on beneficial Indian projects and partnerships.

That said, India-Nepal relations are not free from irritants. India continues to urge India to amend the 1950 treaty. It has requested India to open new air routes, reverse anti-dumping measures, and resolve boundary issues. Adding to Nepal's anxiety, India has also restricted its markets to Chinese-assisted Nepali infrastructure projects, hydropower plants, and airports. While both countries have no choice but to resolve these issues, engagements on such contentious matters require more trust and an opportune time.

The success of the recent visit, however, illustrates that both India and Nepal are increasingly realising the mutual benefits of their partnership and cooperation. They recognise the strategic importance of each other in the evolving global order and have maintained a positive momentum despite some political challenges and divergences. It is only through such sustained engagement that they will be able to address their mutual suspicions and build trust. (Courtesy: ORF)

Defence, dialogue, AI: The roadmap for India-US strategic ties



By: Manoj Joshi

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin was in India for two days beginning 4 June to discuss ways to further expand the bilateral strategic engagement with India. The visit came ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Washington two weeks later.

This is General Austin's second visit to India. His previous trip was in March 2021. The India-US defence and strategic ties have been on an upswing in the last few years. Following bilateral discussions on 5 June, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the US Defence Secretary concluded a roadmap for Indo-US "Defence Industrial Cooperation" which will provide policy guidance on the issues relating to the defence industrial collaboration between the two countries in the coming years. They also finalised a number of new defence cooperation projects that are set to be unveiled after Mr Modi's talks with US President Joe Biden in Washington. Among these, is the licensed production of the General Electric 414 turbofan engines for India's Tejas Mk 2 fighter which is under development.

Indo-US Defence Deal

A Defence Ministry statement was silent on the GE 414 issue, but noted that the two ministers "explored ways of building resilient supply chains." Adding that now both sides "will identify opportunities for co-development of new technologies and co-production of existing and new systems and facilitate increased collaboration between defence start-up ecosystems of the two countries."

These are likely to be under the rubric of the INDUS-X platform for start-ups and enterprises of both countries to identify collaborations for high-tech innovations within the ambit of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). The INDUS-X which will also be launched during the PM's visit to Washington is being helmed by the US-India Business Council.

iCET had been announced in May 2022 and its first round of talks took place between NSA Ajit Doval and his American counterpart Jake Sullivan in January this year. Its aim is to elevate and expand bilateral strategic technology partnership and industrial cooperation between the two countries involving governments, businesses, and academic institutions. The current round of talks between the ministers and officials of the two countries comes after they have signed key defence and security pacts over the last few years, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 that allows their militaries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies. They also signed the COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) in 2018, which provides for interoperability between the two militaries and the sale of high-end technology from the United States to India.

Space and AI Co-operation

In October 2020, India and the US sealed the BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement) to further boost bilateral defence ties. The

pact provides for the sharing of high-end military technology, logistics, and geospatial maps between the two countries.

In their talks on Monday, Austin and Singh also reviewed the ongoing bilateral defence cooperation activities and said they would maintain its momentum. They referred in particular to the recent dialogue focusing on cooperation in the areas of space and AI. On 23 May, the inaugural US-India Advanced Domains Defence Dialogue (AD3) was held in New Delhi with the US represented by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence and Space Policy, Vipin Narang, and Michael Horowitz, Director of the Emerging Capabilities Policy Office of the US. The dialogue which was agreed to in the last 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in 2022, was aimed at deepening collaboration on "evolving new defence domains with an emphasis on defence space and Artificial Intelligence."

Among other issues at play currently are India's plans to purchase 18 MQ-9B Predator armed drones from General Atomics. The US would also like India to consider buying its F-35 or FA18 Super Hornet fighters as well. Some discussions took place during the visit of US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall during his visit to India in March when he met NSA Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. At the time, Kendall had announced that the US was willing to go for the full transfer of jet engine technology to India.

Kendall had also spoken of the early discussions between the two sides on an Air Information Sharing Agreement whose details have not been revealed, but it is believed that it will involve the sharing of a wide range of data on weather, light plans, and other areas which can enhance aerial operations and situational awareness.

What Can Be Expected of Modi's US Visit in India's Defence Sector

At present, the focus is on the license manufacture of the GE-414 turbofan jet engine which will power India's LCA-Mk2 fighter. Its predecessor, the GE-404 powers the Mk 1 version of the aircraft. In January, the White House said that it had received an application from GE to jointly make engines here in India. The deal for the license manufacture of the GE 414 is now expected to be announced during the Modi visit.

China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region as well as along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and ways to combat the threat of terrorism also figured in the talks between Singh and Austin.

Austin had arrived in India following his participation at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore. The highlight of that event was that he was able to shake hands with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu who has refused to formally meet him because he is under a US embargo for arms sales to Russia since 2018.

In his speech to the Shangri La Dialogue, Austin had called for greater communication between the Chinese and American militaries, even as he warned China against "coercion and bullying" of its allies and partners. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Violence, aggression and onset of peace

By: Ravi Valluri

Aeons ago lived an overbearing and hubristic monarch. He scuttled all dissent and those opposed to his modus operandi were either exiled or obliterated. In order to escape his wrath, several of the denizens and vassal states decided to seek refuge in the sublime grace of Sakhyia Muni, Lord Buddha. This act of defiance incensed the zealot. In a maximal fit of rage, he marched with his army to wage war against the apostle of peace and non-violence.

The suzerain, in an act, that he clearly intended to intimidate and pique the Buddha, spat at him thrice. The benevolent and solicitous soul smiled and merely remarked, "I do not accept this."

This deceptively simple remark incensed, indeed rattled the querulous monarch. In the face of such dignity and equanimity, the monarch was forced to ask where the Buddha found the deep reserves of piety and composure. In reply, Lord Buddha invited him to eschew antipathetic thoughts and join the sangha.

Aggression Vs violence: Pre-

eminent psychologists distinguish aggression from violence. They postulate forceful destructive behaviour towards another individual or society as violence. Aggression, on the other hand, is based on the paradigm of an antipathetic intent. Psychologists deploy the word aggression to refer to the behaviour of an individual or a group that is intended to intentionally cause harm to other individuals or groups of persons.

Aggressive behaviour is based on the premise to torment or indulge in the defilement of a person or property. Violence is the perpetration of such an act.

Understanding the cause: The manic desire to achieve a certain goal, desire or objective leads to aggressive behaviour and could result in a wanton violent act. Do we recall the famous or rather infamous Bodyline Series (1932-33)?

Douglas Jardine, the English

captain deployed his fastest bowlers—Harold Larwood and Bill Voce to intimidate the batting machinery of Don Bradman, Bill Woodfull, Bill Ponsford and Allan Kippax. High-pitched deliveries were bowled on the leg stump incessantly and England won the series 4-1 against Australia.

Hostile aggression: It is interesting to note that hostile aggression and violent acts find root when an individual indulges in

criminality in order to be charge sheeted and aspires to "glory" via notoriety. The human mind often operates in repulsive and intriguing ways. Distinguished psychologists have identified cer-

tain underlying reasons for harbouring aggressive feelings and concomitant violence. This could be a certain inborn tendency, essentially in the DNA of the individual or agony and frustration.

Peace and the Art of Living

Way: There have been apostles of peace in both the occidental and oriental worlds who have given up their lives to maintain peace and harmony. The path chosen by Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi resonates in our minds.

In recent times, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has transformed the lives of several Maoists, Naxals and extremists, who have eschewed violence, given up arms and joined the mainstream once again. Their minds have been transformed by practising the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya.

Simultaneously their energies have been channelised to do sadhana, seva and satsang through the regular practice of yoga, pranayama and meditation. "Non-violence is an active force of the highest order. It is the soul-force or the power of the Godhead within us. Imperfect man cannot grasp the whole of that essence; he would not be able to bear its full blaze, but even an infinitesimal fraction of it, when it becomes active within us, can work wonders," wrote Gandhiji. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)



Ukrainian officials say Russian forces have shelled a southern Ukrainian city

Zelenskyy visits area flooded by destroyed dam as five reported dead in Russian-occupied city

KHERSON, June 8 (AP): Five residents of a Russian-occupied city next to a breached dam have died in massive flooding triggered by the catastrophe, its Kremlin-appointed mayor said on Thursday, the first official report of deaths from one of the largest environmental crises since Russia's invasion of Ukraine more than 15 months ago.

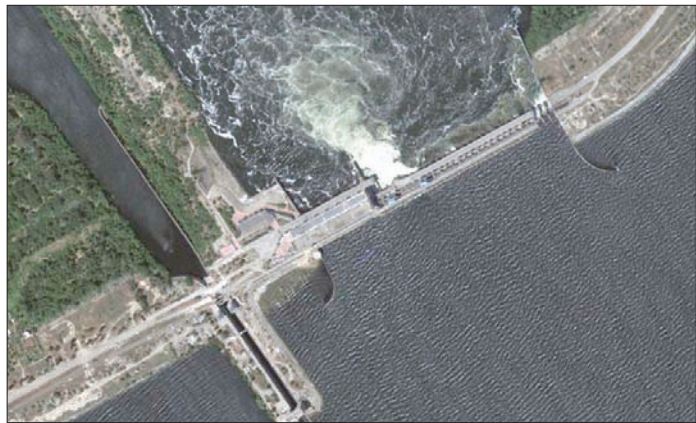
Vladimir Leontyev, the Russian-appointed mayor of Nova Kakhovka, told Russian state TV that two other people who had gone missing after Tuesday's dam breach had been found, and efforts were underway to evacuate them.

Officials say more than 6,000 people have been evacuated from dozens of inundated cities, towns and villages on both the Russian and Ukrainian-controlled sides of the Dnieper river, which has become part of the front line between the fighting forces.

The collapse of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam and emptying of its reservoir on the river have added to the misery that the region has suffered for more than a year from artillery and missile attacks.

Rescue workers fanned out to get drinking water to beleaguered locals, warning that contaminated water could cause illness.

Thousands of people have been left homeless, cropland has been



ruined, access to electricity and mobile phone networks has been limited or cut off entirely, and land mines have been displaced by the surging waters, officials say.

On the Ukrainian-controlled western bank, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived on Thursday to evaluate the response to damage caused by the dam breach, including efforts to evacuate civilians and provide them with drinking water and other support.

After visiting an aid distribution point and a medical facility, Zelenskyy ordered Ukrainian officials to provide a "fair valuation" of flood damages and develop a scheme to compensate residents whose property was damaged or whose businesses had to relocate, his office

said in an online update.

In areas that they administer, Russian-appointed authorities said nearly two dozen people have been hospitalised, 4,280 people have been evacuated and some 14,000 buildings have been flooded.

Russian officials say the destruction of the dam, which created a giant reservoir of water used for irrigation and drinking water, will eventually halt fresh water supplies to Russian-controlled Crimea, even though the peninsula has enough fresh water for now — with its reservoirs 80 per cent full.

Ukrainian authorities cut off fresh water supplies to Crimea after Moscow's illegal annexation of the peninsula in 2014, and Russian President Vladimir Putin cited the

need to restore them among the main reasons for his decision to invade Ukraine.

Regional Governor Oleksandr Prokudin said the average level of flooding on Thursday morning in the region was more than 5.6 metres (18 feet) and roughly 600 square kilometres (231 square miles) of the region were submerged — more than two-thirds of that on the Russian-controlled eastern bank.

He said nearly 2,000 people had been evacuated from Ukraine-controlled areas, and the operations were continuing despite constant shelling from Russian forces across the river. "People are tired... (they) have no desire to flee to other regions of Ukraine," Prokudin said.

The true scale of the disaster is yet to emerge in an affected area that was home to more than 60,000 people.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that the destruction of the dam was an "attack" and an "atrocious act," without saying who is to blame. Paris said it was rushing aid including water purifiers, 500,000 water purification tablets and hygiene kits to help people displaced by the disaster.

Ukrainian officials have accused Russia of purposely destroying the dam, which is located in an area controlled by Russian forces.

Russia says top UN court should dismiss Ukraine's case over Crimea and terrorism funding

THE HAGUE, June 8 (AP): Russia urged judges at the United Nations' highest court on Thursday to throw out a case brought by Ukraine against Moscow over the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the arming of rebels in eastern Ukraine before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. "We appear before you today in order to demonstrate that Ukraine's application must be dismissed because it is without any legal foundation. Nor does it have any factual evidence to back it," Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands Alexander Shulgin told judges at the International Court of Justice.

Lawyers for Ukraine said as hearings in the case opened on Tuesday that Russia bankrolled a "campaign of intimidation and terror" by rebels in eastern Ukraine starting in 2014 and sought to replace Crimea's multiethnic community with "discriminatory Russian nationalism."

Ukraine filed the case in 2017, asking the world court to order Moscow to pay reparations for attacks and crimes such as the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 by a Russian missile fired from territory controlled by Moscow-backed rebels on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 passengers and crew.

The Ukrainian government alleges that Russia breached two treaties: the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the International Convention on the



Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Addressing the terrorism funding allegation, Michael Swainston, a British lawyer representing Russia, said Ukraine's legal team failed to establish that actions by pro-Moscow rebels in eastern Ukraine could be considered terrorism.

"It is imperative to distinguish between terrorists who deliberately target civilians and soldiers who foresee that civilians will be killed as collateral damage while striking a military target," Swainston said. "The former is a war crime, while the latter represents lawful conduct. And of course, soldiers also make mistakes."

He also disputed that the downing of MH17 could be considered an act of terrorism and sought to undermine findings by a Dutch court that last year convicted two Russians and a pro-Moscow Ukrainian of multiple murders for

their roles in downing the Amsterdam-to-Kuala Lumpur flight.

The Hague District Court ruled after months of hearings and years of international investigations that the Boeing 777 was shot down by a Buk surface-to-air missile system brought into Ukraine from a Russian military base and later returned to the base.

"There was no Russian Buk. No Buk came from Russia. No crew for a Buk came from Russia," Swainston said, calling evidence that the Dutch court relied on in its verdicts "unsourced digital nonsense."

Another member of the Russian legal team, Kirill Udovichenko, told the court that it was "undisputed" that the conflict in Ukraine had "led to a loss of civilian life. However, none of these tragic events create a plausible case for terrorism or terrorism financing" as defined in the convention.

EU launches legal action against Poland over new Russian influence law



BRUSSELS, June 8 (AP): The European Union on Thursday launched legal action against member country Poland over a contentious new law that the nationalist government claims is meant to combat Russian influence but which critics say could be used to persecute opposition politicians. The European Commission said it believes that the new law "unduly interferes with the democratic process," and that it "violates the principle of democracy," and "rights to effective judicial protection." The EU's executive branch supervises respect of the bloc's laws.

The law was passed in May, ahead of expected general elections in autumn, and allows for the creation of a committee to investigate Russian influence in Poland. Critics argue that it would have unconstitutional powers, including the capacity to exclude officials from public life for a decade.

It appears to have galvanised public support for the opposition. Over the weekend, around 500,000 people took part in a huge anti-government protest, according to organisers. Citizens travelled from across the country to voice their anger at officials who they say have eroded democratic norms and created fears that the nation is following Hungary and Turkey down the path to autocracy. The protest was led by the main opposition leader, Donald Tusk, a former top EU official. It was possibly the largest demonstration in decades in Poland, although state television said there were no more than 150,000 people. The broadcaster, TVP, was accused of sorely underestimating the turnout.

The march was held on the anniversary of a crucial moment in Poland's history, the partly free election on June 4, 1989, which paved the way for the end of communist rule. It took place about five months before the elections, in which the ruling Law and Justice party is fighting for a third term. As a first step in its legal action, the EU commission has sent the government in Warsaw a "letter of formal notice" outlining its grievances. Poland has 21 days to respond to the letter, and after more exchanges, the government could face hefty fines if it fails to comply. Brussels is concerned that the law contains a broad and unspecified definition of "Russian influence" and "activities." It considers that the law "violates the principles of legality and non-retroactivity," because it could exclude officials from office for a decade for behaviour that was legal in the past.

Very young children among 3 people critically wounded in French Alps knife attack

PARIS, June 8 (AP): As bystanders screamed for help, a man with a knife stabbed several very young children, including at least one in a stroller, and also assaulted adults in a lakeside park in the French Alps on Thursday. The savagery left at least two children and one adult with life-threatening injuries, authorities said.

A suspect, identified by police as a 31-year-old Syrian asylum-seeker, was detained. Video appearing to show the attack in a children's play park in the Alpine and lakeside town of Annecy was posted on social media. The horrific scenes showed a man in dark glasses and with a blue scarf covering his head brandishing a knife, as people screamed for help.

The man appeared to shout "on name of Jesus Christ" as he waved his knife in the air, while people around could be screaming: "Police! Police!" He slashed at a man carrying rucksacks who tried to approach him, seemingly trying to stop the attack. Inside the enclosed play park itself, a panicked woman frantically pushed a stroller as the attacker approached, yelling "Help! Help!" and ramming the stroller into the park's barriers in her terror.

She tried to fend off the attacker but couldn't keep him from leaning over the stroller and stabbing downward repeatedly. The shrill cries of a child followed. The man strolled almost casually out of the park, letting himself out through a gate, with the man carrying two rucksacks still chasing after him.

French President Emmanuel Macron described the assault as an "attack of absolute cowardice."

Biden and Sunak to focus on Ukraine and economic security in British PM's 1st WH visit

WASHINGTON, June 8 (AP): President Joe Biden is welcoming Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for wide-ranging talks on Thursday as the British leader makes his first White House visit as premier.

The leaders' Oval Office talks are expected to cover the war in Ukraine, China, economic security, international cooperation on regulating the growing field of artificial intelligence, and more.

Biden and Sunak have already had four face-to-face meetings since Sunak became prime minister in October, but the talks in Washington will offer the two leaders a chance for their most sustained interaction to date.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the 15-month-old Russian invasion of Ukraine will be "top of mind."

The US and UK are the two biggest donors to the Ukraine war effort and play a central role in a long-term effort announced last month to train, and eventually



equip, Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets. Sunak also is looking to make the case to Biden for UK Defence Minister Ben Wallace to succeed outgoing NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who is set to end his term leading the 31-member alliance in September.

Stoltenberg is slated to meet with Biden in Washington on Monday, and leaders from the alliance are set to gather in Lithuania on July 11-12 for their annual summit. "The two leaders will review a range of global issues including our economic partnership or shared support of Ukraine as it de-

fends itself against Russia's war of aggression, as well as further action to accelerate the clean energy transition," Jean-Pierre said.

"The president and the prime minister will also discuss the joint US-UK leadership on critical emerging technologies as well as our work to strengthen our economic security." Sunak is keen to make the UK a key player in artificial intelligence, and announced that his government will gather politicians, scientists and tech executives for a summit on AI safety in the fall. He said it was vital to ensure that "paradigm-shifting new technologies" are harnessed for the good of humanity.

"No one country can do this alone," Sunak said. "This is going to take a global effort." Sunak's visit comes as US and British intelligence officials are still trying to sort out blame for the breaching of a major dam in southern Ukraine, which sent floodwaters gushing through towns and over farmland.

Pope in 'good general condition' after surgery

ROME, June 8 (AP): Pope Francis' was in "good general condition" on Thursday, alert and breathing on his own following a three-hour operation to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia in his abdominal wall, the Vatican said.

The 86-year-old Francis rested "extensively" during a peaceful night and was spending his first day after the surgery observing the "necessary post-operative rest," the Vatican said in a statement.

"The pope is informed of the messages of closeness and affection that have come in the last few hours and expresses his gratitude, while asking for continued prayers for him," the statement said.

Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Wednesday for his second major abdominal operation in two years, following a 2021 procedure to remove part of his colon.

Doctors revealed that in addition to that 2021 oper-

ation, Francis had undergone previous abdominal surgeries sometime before 2013 in his native Argentina, which had also caused intestinal scarring.

During the operation on Wednesday, doctors removed adhesions, or internal scarring, on the intestine that had caused a partial blockage. To repair a hernia that had formed over a previous scar, a prosthetic mesh was also placed in the abdominal wall.

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, director of abdominal and endocrine sciences who performed the surgery, said the operation was a success and that Francis was suffering from no other pathologies, that the tissue removed was benign and that after he recovers, he should be fine.

A feared protrusion, or bulging of the intestine through the hernia tear, was apparently not found.

Alfieri, who also removed part of Francis' colon in 2021, told an evening press conference that the pope was awake, alert and even joking.

Pak HC grants Imran protective bail in SC lawyer's murder case

ISLAMABAD, June 8 (PTI): A Pakistani high court on Thursday granted protective bail to former premier Imran Khan in a case registered against him for the murder of a senior lawyer and reserved its verdict on bail petitions filed by Khan in eight other cases.

Khan, 70, was named in the killing of Supreme Court lawyer Abdul Razzaq Shar, who was shot dead in Quetta on June 6 by unknown gunmen. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party chief filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), where a division bench comprising IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the case.

Shar's son accused his father was killed at Khan's behest as the lawyer had filed a case against the former premier in the Balochistan High Court.

The federal government and Khan's PTI party had traded blame over the incident, with both sides accusing the other of having a role in the killing.

After an initial argument, the bench granted Khan a two-week protective bail.

A video posted on his party's official Twitter account showed the PTI chief's black SUV entering the premises of the court as his security personnel stood guard with bulletproof shields.

Earlier, Khan travelled from Lahore to Islamabad, where the former cricketer-turned-politician was scheduled to appear for his bail petitions in over a dozen cases linked to violent protests after his arrest on May 9 and the Toshakhana graft case. The PTI chief also filed a petition in the IHC seeking bail in the case of Shar's murder.

Canada urges border agency to stop deporting Indian students caught in fake admission letter

TORONTO, June 8 (PTI): A Canadian parliamentary committee has voted unanimously to urge the border services agency to stop the deportation of nearly 700 Indian students who were duped by unscrupulous education consultants in India to enter the country with "fraudulent college admission letters."

The Indian students, mostly from Punjab, face deportation from Canada after the authorities here found their "admission offer letters" to educational institutions fake. The matter came to light in March when these students applied for permanent residency in Canada.

In a symbolic move, the all-party immigration committee voted unanimously on Wednesday to call on the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to waive the inadmissibility of the affected students. The Toronto Star newspaper reported. The committee also asked the CBSA to provide the students, as many as 700 from India, with an alternative pathway to permanent residence on humanitarian grounds or through a "regularisation" programme, the report said.

Calling the students victims of fraud, Jenny Kwan, a lawmaker who tabled the motion said, "So as a first step, this is absolutely essential and necessary. The students are victims of fraud and should not be penalised."

"These students, I've met with many of them, now are just in such a terrible state. They've lost money, and they are stuck in a terrible situation. And some of them have deportation orders. Others have pending meetings with CBSA," the newspaper quoted Kwan as saying.

"We need to have empathy for those students, and we should not exploit the situation and play politics on this issue of those innocent students," Liberal MP Shafiqat Ali said. The MP for Brampton Centre, where many affected students now reside, added that the students have "gone through and are going through a lot".

Taking to Twitter on Wednesday, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Sean Fraser said, "We are actively pursuing a solution for intl students who are facing uncertainty due to having been admitted to Canada with fraudulent college admission letters."

Smoky haze blanketing US and Canada could last into the weekend

The smoke has moved over Greenland and Iceland since June 1, and was expected to reach Norway

NEW YORK, June 8 (AP): On air quality maps, purple signifies the worst of it. In reality, it's a thick, hazardous haze that's disrupting daily life for millions of people across the U.S. and Canada, blotting out skylines and turning skies orange.

And with weather systems expected to hardly budge, the smoky blanket billowing from wildfires in Quebec and Nova Scotia and sending plumes of fine particulate matter as far away as North Carolina and northern Europe should persist into Thursday and possibly the weekend.

That means at least another day, or more, of a dystopian-style detour that's chased players from ballfields, actors from Broadway stages, delayed thousands of flights and sparked a resurgence in mask wearing and remote work — all while raising concerns about the health effects of prolonged exposure to such bad air. The weather system that's driving the great Canadian-American smoke out — a low-pressure system over Maine and Nova Scotia — "will probably be hanging around at least for the

next few days," U.S. National Weather Service meteorologist Bryan Ramsey said.

"Conditions are likely to remain unhealthy, at least until the wind direction changes or the fires get put out," Ramsey said. "Since the fires are raging — they're really large — they're probably going to continue for weeks. But it's really just going to be all about the wind shift."

Across the eastern U.S., officials warned residents to stay inside and limit or avoid outdoor activities again Thursday, extending "Code Red" air quality alerts in some places for a third-straight day as forecasts showed winds continuing to push smoke-filled air south.

The smoke has moved over Greenland and Iceland since June 1, and was expected to reach Norway on Thursday, the Norwegian Climate and Environmental Research Institute said, but wasn't expected to be a health concern.

In Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser ordered schools to cancel outdoor recess, sports and field trips Thursday. In suburban Philadelphia, officials set up an emergency shelter so people living



outside can take refuge from the haze. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state was making a million N95 masks — the kind prevalent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic — available at state facilities, including 400,000 in New York City. She also urged residents to stay put.

"You don't need to go out and take a walk. You don't need to push the baby in the stroller," Hochul said Wednesday night. "This is not a safe time to do that." The message may be getting through. So

far, officials said Wednesday, New York City has yet to see an uptick in 911 calls related to respiratory issues and cardiac arrests.

More than 400 blazes burning across Canada have left 20,000 people displaced. The U.S. has sent more than 600 firefighters and equipment to Canada. Other countries are also helping.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke to President Joe Biden by phone on Wednesday. Trudeau's office said he thanked Biden for his support and that both

Punjabi Lane residents agree to relocation: Meghalaya govt to HC

SHILLONG, June 8 (PTD): The Meghalaya government informed the high court that the residents of Punjabi Lane in Shillong have accepted in principle the blueprint prepared by the state government to relocate at least 342 families.

The government had come up with a blueprint after rejecting the Harijan Panchayat Committee demand that 200 square meters of land be provided to each of the 342 families of Punjabi Lane within the European ward besides bearing the cost of construction of their homes.

"Learned Advocate-General reports that Counsel for the Harijan Panchayat Committee has agreed, in principle, to the blueprint prepared by the government but has made some suggestions for modification in certain areas," a bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice W Diengdoh



said, while hearing the case on Wednesday.

"Since the state is looking at the suggestions for modification, let the matter come up three weeks hence. It is hoped that the parties

will now resolve the long pending issue and give a quietus to these matters," the bench stated.

The next hearing on the matter will be held on July 3, 2023.

Clashes had erupted in Shil-

long's Punjabi Lane in May 2018 between the people of the Khasi tribe and Sikhs living there.

Following the clashes, the Shillong Municipal Board had started an exercise to determine the legal residents of Punjabi Lane. There was a demand from various quarters to relocate the ethnic Punjabis from the area.

A high-level-committee was set up by the state government in June 2018 to solve the decades-old issue regarding the relocation of the residents of the Punjabi Lane after the clashes.

According to a report submitted by the Shillong Municipal Board, a total of 184 families have been identified as legal settlers.

They included families of 128 employees of the civic body and 56 others who are working in various government departments.

Security forces continue to recover weapons in Manipur



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: Security forces conducted Joint Combing Operations in sensitive areas both in hills and valley sector of Manipur on Wednesday. The combing

operations are aimed at de-escalating tensions amongst communities through physical domination besides recovery of snatched weapons that are still in the illegal custody of local population. Secu-

city forces are continuously working towards controlling violence and disarming the society through sustained confidence building measures amongst all sections of the society.

Prior to commencement of search of houses, forests and fields in both valley as also the hills, locals were urged to voluntarily surrender illegal/ snatched weapons.

In the ensuing search operations today, 29 weapons (all types - mostly automatic), mortar, hand grenades, small arms ammunition & warlike stores were recovered.

During the conduct of these operations, adequate measures were undertaken to ensure that the locals are not harassed.

UNC calls for peace amidst violence in Manipur



IMPHAL, June 8 (NNN): Even as communal violence continues in Manipur since May 3, the United Naga Council (UNC) has appealed to both the "warring communities" for paving a way forward in a peaceful manner.

The UNC recently stated that the Naga body "is perturbed to witness the continuous act of vengeance and the perpetual cycle of violence with no end in sight from the warring communities".

In a statement issued to Newmai News Network, the Naga body said that despite repeated appeals for the restoration of normalcy in the state, there are occurrences of gunfights in the peripheries of the hill districts and torching of villages in the foothills, leaving other communities at ransom. "It is easier said than done, and perhaps echoing for peace may be a hard thing for the affected people to take when so many lives were lost and properties destroyed beyond measure. However, the UNC, as an apex body representing more than 20 Naga tribes of the present Manipur state, feels the urgency to express our opinion that, coming to terms democratically for a peaceful settlement is the only solution", the UNC stated.

The Naga body then said that, any citizen, big or small, is vulnerable and can be a victim of the strife torn Manipur state due to the fact that all the ethnic communities in the state are living in close proximity to one another, both in the valley and the hills, and there are high chances of senseless violence as and when other communities are provoked or mishandled. As such, the Naga body reminded "both the communities for paving a way forward in a peaceful manner to ensure that the spark of this communal flare up is not ignited further to other communities as a consequence, as involving other communities will be too costly".

Coal miner dies in tragic incident at Ledo Colliery

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 8: A tragic incident occurred on Wednesday night at the rat-hole coal mining site of Ledo Colliery, resulting in the death of Nayan Phukan, a local youth. The deceased was involved in coal digging activities at Ledo Colliery, and was working under Kshitish Debnath of Rodgaon, Ledo. The coal-rich Patkai Hills of Margherita have gained notoriety as the "valley of death" due to frequent incidents of gas explosions and soil erosion leading to the loss of coal miners' lives. Unfortunately, these untimely deaths often go unnoticed, with limited media coverage attributed to political patronage.

The incident took place at Ledo Colliery on Wednesday night, falling under the Ledo police outpost of the 124th Margherita constituency within Tinsukia district. According to reliable sources, Nayan Phukan lost his life while working in a rat-hole mine at Ledo Colliery.

Meghalaya Govt launches book series 'Sanatan Wisdom'

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, June 8: Meghalaya Governor Phagu Chauhan recently launched an inspirational book series titled "Sanatan Wisdom" authored by renowned industrialist and philanthropist Dr Dinesh Shahra.

The book launch event was held in Meghalaya's capital city Shillong in the Durbar Hall of Raj Bhavan, the official residence of the Governor of Meghalaya.

Titled "Sanatan Wisdom," this thought-provoking book is a captivating literary masterpiece that delves into the depths of ancient teachings and offers profound insights into the Sanatan Wisdom. The book is published by the reputed Times of India group.

Authored by Dr Dinesh Shahra, this book explores the spiritual, philosophical, and ecological dimensions of Sanatan Wisdom, emphasising the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable practices in today's world. As part of series of book launched by Dr Shahra, all books under the Sanatan Living series, Sanatan Wisdom, Sanatan Leela and Sanatan Utsav are available in bookstores and on Amazon.

Speaking on the occasion, Dinesh Shahra said, "We are delighted to be launching our inspirational book series "Sanatan Wisdom" with the blessings of His Excellency - Phagu Chauhan - Honourable Governor of Meghalaya. In this book I have attempted to unravel the beauty and mystery of Sanatan scriptures, which I imbibed during my long association with his late Vedantic Guru, Swami Pragyanandji. The priceless and timeless wisdom of Sanatan scriptures has



significant relevance even now as it had in the past. Sanatan Wisdom will forever be a beacon for seekers of truth, regardless of differences."

Dinesh Shahra is one of the few industrialists who successfully made an indelible mark in the Indian agriculture sector. By spearheading the 'yellow revolution', Shahra played a pivotal role in transforming Madhya Pradesh into the 'soy bowl of India', providing millions of Indians access to quality nutrition. His vision for self-sufficiency, strategic food security & agri-reforms has enhanced the livelihood of millions of stakeholders, especially farmers.

The Dinesh Shahra Foundation has been founded out of gratitude for all the knowledge capital Dinesh Shahra has gained over the last 50 years. The foundation is built with an intention to 'Give Back' to the entities that are responsible for material and spiritual development of the society.

Cong party comes up with five-point agenda to restore normalcy in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 8 (NNN): The Congress party in Manipur on Thursday came up with a five-point agenda for restoration of peace and normalcy in the trouble-ridden Manipur. The five-point agenda included, among others, confinement of cadres of the militants under Suspension of Operation (SoO) truce at their designated camps, ensuring the protection of Manipur's territorial, administrative, and socio-economic integrity, taking immediate action against poppy planters, financiers and drug lords, implementing relief measures promptly and initiating the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants within a specified timeframe.

Speaking to reporters at Congress Bhavan here on Thursday, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) vice president Hareeshore Goshwami stated that the current scenario of the state is "full of terror and commotion" while terming it as the first time ever witnessed in the history of Manipur. He alleged that negligence on the part of chief minister N Biren Singh in dealing with the tensions in Churachandpur in the aftermath of torching of an open gym scheduled to be inaugurated by him and vandalism at the function venue on April 27 was the flash point for the eruption of the large scale violence in the state.

"The narco-terrorism and the presence of Myanmar-based People's Defence Force (PDF) militants who infiltrated into the state through the porous Indo-Myanmar border after the crackdown in Myanmar were the immediate factors contributing to the ongoing conflict," the Congress leader alleged. The drug cartel in the state is yet to be controlled as many of the drug-lords are holding powerful positions in the state while citing Lukhoisei Zou's case and the Loyangamba Ithocha International Drug cartel case as examples.

The vice president of MPCC also alleged that allowing the entry of Myanmar based PDF in Manipur is also one of the main reasons for this problem in Manipur. Alleging that there were signs of a large cadres of the Myanmar based insurgent group founded only in 2021 infiltrated into the state, the Congress leader asked how the security forces allowed penetration of such insurgents in Manipur. Goshwami observed that a separate state demand by the Kuki-Chin was another root cause of the present violent conflict in the state.

Nagaland Fire & Emergency Services Association celebrates Silver Jubilee

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: Nagaland Fire & Emergency Services Association, NFESA, celebrated its Silver Jubilee on Thursday. Speaking at the inaugural programme at the Capital Convention Centre Kohima, Advisor Fire & Emergency Services S Kiusumew Yimchunger, while congratulating the Association said it is a momentous occasion for them to be celebrating silver jubilee and acknowledged the pioneers for their vision. He noted that the members of the association should carry forward the legacy while standing for each other. Inspector General of Fire & Emergency Services Nagaland, Neilasa Sofü said, the role of firefighting has changed drastically over the years be it for any kind of disaster. He noted that among the various type of disasters, fire is the most common disaster. To this, Sofü said, following the government's notification, the department is not only working in fire fighting but in prevention and audit measures. The inspector general further informed that the state is losing approximately 1.04 crore rupees every month due to fire disaster.

Armed miscreants firing claims one in Manipur



IMPHAL, June 8 (NNN): A person was killed and another wounded as miscreants opened fire towards them at Ngarouthel village under Heirolk police station of Thoubal district in Manipur last night, official reports said on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as

Ningthoujam Ramesh alias Rishang Singh (65) of Heirolk Tourangbam Leikai. He had bullet injury marks on his right side of the belly. He succumbed to the bullet injuries on the way to a hospital in Imphal after first aid at Thoubal district hospital.

The injured person was iden-

tified as Ningthoujam Kala Singh (60) of the same village. With bullet injuries on his right thigh, he has been admitted at a hospital in Imphal, the report also said.

Local reports said that armed miscreants opened fire toward the village last night, around 9 pm.

Why is PM still silent on Manipur, asks Cong



NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTD): The Congress on Wednesday asked why Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "still silent" on the violence in Manipur and why he doesn't visit the state and make an appeal for reconciliation.

The Congress also alleged that Manipur was one of the biggest law and order failures in independent India and the situation was turning dangerous in the eastern border state which is surrounded by countries like China.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh asked why the prime minister does not encourage an all-party delega-

tion to visit Manipur. "There appears to be no letting up in the enormous disaster that has engulfed Manipur for the past seven weeks. The home minister visited belatedly after a month and the nation must be thankful for small mercies," Ramesh said on Twitter.

"But why is the Prime Minister still silent? Why doesn't he visit the state and make an appeal for reconciliation between communities? Why can't he at least encourage an all-party delegation to go to Manipur?" he also asked.

When sought a comment on the continuing violence in Manipur even after

Home Minister Amit Shah's visit, Congress spokesperson Ajay Kumar questioned Modi's silence.

He said, while the prime minister had all the time to tweet about the national days of other countries and birthdays of people, he had no words for the people of Manipur. "Not a tweet, not a word, not a regret," Kumar said.

"The prime minister has to answer why he has not even tweeted. The prime minister has not said a word on the death of hundreds of people in Manipur," he said.

Referring to the situation in Manipur, Kumar said, "It is a situation which is amounting to the most dangerous situation in this country. It is a border state and Modi Ji is brilliantly silent, not a tweet, not a word, not a regret, nothing." "Manipur is one of the biggest law and order failures in the history of Independent India, history of Independent India, mark my words," the Congress leader noted.

The Congress has blamed the BJP and its "divisive politics" for the current situation in Manipur and have demanded that steps be taken immediately to bring normalcy in the border state as the situation might turn out of control if such steps are not taken.

No. SSUHS/201/2010/Pt-II/3918

EDUCATIONAL NOTICE FOR ENTRANCE TEST

FOR Ph.D. PROGRAMME UNDER

SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

(SESSION 2021-22)

This is for information to all concerned that the written Entrance Test for Ph.D. Programme under Srимanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences for the session 2021-2022, will be held on **16th July, 2023 (Sunday), 10:00 AM onwards**, in the premises of **Institute of Pharmacy, Gauhati Medical College, Narakasur Hilltop, Bhangagarh, Guwahati-32. (Gauhati Medical College Building)**

The time-table for the Test is as follows:

Paper	Time	Duration
Paper – I (Research Methodology)	10:00 AM to 11:30 AM	1½ (one and half) hours
Paper – II (Subject specific to faculty of Master's Degree standard)	12:30 PM to 2:00 PM	1½ (one and half) hours

The list of eligible candidates is obtainable from the University website www.ssuhs.in. Candidates who have qualified UGC-NET (including JRF) /UGC-CSIR NET (including JRF) / SLET/GATE/Teacher Fellowship holder or have passed M.Phil. Programme, are exempted from the written Entrance Test.

Admit cards for the Test shall have to be collected from the University on **15th July, 2023, 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM**.

Sd/-

Registrar (Academic)
Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences.

Janasanyog/D/4630/23

India hits out at Canada for giving space to separatists elements

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): India on Thursday hit out at Canada for giving space to separatists and extremists elements after visuals surfaced on social media of a float in the Canadian city of Brampton that reportedly celebrated the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

At a media briefing, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said Canada allowing anti-India elements to operate from its soil is not good for the bilateral relationship as well as for itself.

"I think there is a bigger issue involved. And the bigger issue involved really is the space that Canada has continuously and frankly we are at a loss to understand other than the requirements of vote bank politics, why anybody would do this," he said.

"Because if you look at their history, you would imagine that they learn from history and they would not like to repeat that history. It is not only one incident, however, egregious it may be," Jaishankar said.

"I think there is a larger underlying issue about the space which is given to separatists, to extremists, to people who advocate violence and I think it is not good for relationships and not good for Canada," he added.

A video has emerged on social media that showed a float depicting the assassination of Indira Gandhi. It was reportedly part of a



parade that was organised by some Khalistani elements in Brampton. Canadian High Commissioner in India Cameron MacKay tweeted that there is no place in Canada for "hate or for the glorification of violence".

"I am appalled by reports of an event in Canada that celebrated the assassination of late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. There is no place in Canada for hate or for the glorification of violence. I categorically condemn these activities," he said.

On some Indian students facing difficulties in Canada over charges that they did not study in the colleges they applied for, Jaishankar said India has taken up the issue with Canadian authorities.

"If there were people who misled them (the students), the culpable parties should be acted upon. It is unfair to punish a student who undertook education in good faith," he said.

The external affairs minister said the Canadian prime minister has also made a statement in the House of Commons on the issue.

"We are in touch with Canada on the issue," he said.

Air India flight from Russia lands at San Francisco

MUMBAI/SAN FRANCISCO, June 8 (PTI): An Air India flight landed in San Francisco on Thursday carrying over 200 passengers stranded at Magadan in far east Russia for two days after the original aircraft had to be diverted there following a mid-air engine glitch. "All our passengers are being extended maximum on-ground assistance with clearance formalities and provided other necessary support," Air India said in a statement.

On Wednesday, Air India had sent a ferry flight to Magadan, in Russia to fly 216 stranded passengers and 16 crew members onwards to their original destination -- San Francisco. The Delhi-SFO flight of June 6 was diverted to the port city following a mid-air glitch in one of the Boeing 777-200LR engines, and its subsequent emergency landing there. "Flight AI173D landed safely in San Francisco (SFO) at 0007 Hours on 08 June 2023 (local time)," the carrier said. The ferry flight, which landed at Magadan at 06.14 am (local time) had got airborne at 1027 hours (local time) on June 8, for San Francisco. "Air India thanks government agencies, regulatory authorities, our staff and partners involved in supporting our endeavour to bring our passengers to SFO as soon as possible and in providing them care while they waited in Magadan, Russia," the carrier said.

Kolhapur returning to normalcy

36 people arrested so far for violence: Police



PUNE, June 8 (PTI): The situation in Maharashtra's Kolhapur is gradually returning to normal, a day after violence during a demonstration against the alleged use of Tipu Sultan's image along with an objectionable audio message as their social media "status".

At least 36 people have so far been arrested and cases registered in connection with the violence, he said.

Businessmen opened their establishments and people were seen buying items of daily

need from shops in Kolhapur city.

Tension gripped the city on Tuesday after two men allegedly put 18th-century Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan's image along with an offensive audio message as their social media "status".

Wielding lathis, police on Wednesday dispersed hundreds of protesters after they hurled stones during a demonstration at Shivaji Chowk against the alleged use of Tipu Sultan's image.

The situation was brought under control on Wednesday afternoon, and district guardian minister Deepak Kesarkar held a meeting of a

peace committee in the evening, Kolhapur Superintendent of Police Mahendra Pandit said.

Members from various organisations and communities pledged to maintain peace in the city, he said.

"Precautionary measures have been taken, with police deployment in sensitive areas of the city and district along with the ongoing patrolling," he said.

Asked about the situation in the city, Pandit said, "The situation is gradually returning to normal. Shops in the main market area have started reopening."

He said three cases have been registered in connection with the riots that took place on Wednesday. So far, 36 people have been arrested in connection with the violence, the official said. Additionally, five cases have been registered by police in the district pertaining to objectionable posts. Five persons, including juveniles, have been detained in two of these cases, the police said.

Minister Kesarkar has instructed the administration to set up separate peace committees comprising members of all communities to ensure peaceful celebration of all festivals in Kolhapur, as per a release of the district administration.

He has also directed for the formation of an independent committee to prevent any communal discord in the city, the release said.

ED questions TMC leader Abhishek's wife in coal case

ED's action was part of a political vendetta by the BJP: TMC



KOLKATA, June 8 (PTI): Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee's wife Rujira was grilled by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday for nearly four hours in connection with the coal pilferage case, officials said. The investigators had a three-page questionnaire for Rujira, who reached the ED office at CGO Complex around 12.40 pm.

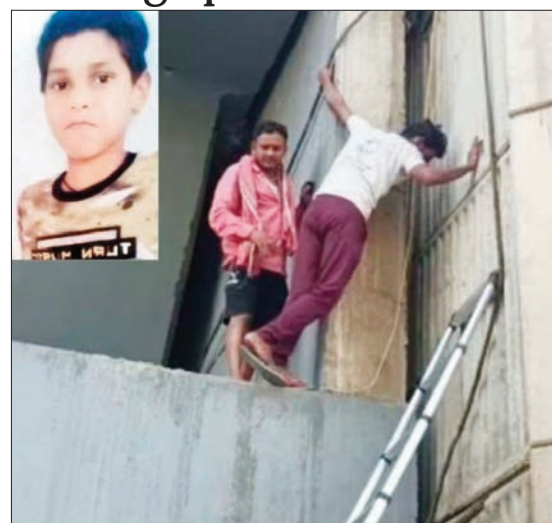
"She (Rujira) was asked questions about certain accounts in foreign banks. Her statements were recorded," an ED official told PTI. Asked about Rujira's questioning by the ED sleuths, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee declined to comment, stating that Rujira would speak in case she felt there was any need. "Please, (since) it's my family matter and I do not want to talk about it, Rujira is a mature girl. If needed she will talk about it," Banerjee told reporters at the state secretariat.

Rujira was stopped at the Kolkata airport on Monday when she attempted to board a flight to UAE with her two children. She was then served summons to appear before the agency at 11 am on June 8. However, she reached the CGO Complex around 12.40 pm along with her lawyer. She left the ED office around 4.20 pm following her questioning. Abhishek, the chief minister's nephew has alleged the questioning was an attempt at "harassing" his family and was aimed at halting his mass outreach campaign ahead of the panchayat elections in the state. Tight security arrangements were made around the CGO Complex to prevent any untoward incident, a senior police officer said. Both CBI and the ED have earlier questioned Rujira in the coal case.

The CBI is probing allegations of illegal-mining of coal from abandoned mines of Eastern Coalfields, estimated to be worth thousands of crores of rupees, officials said. The ED is probing the money trail related to the case. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) alleged that the ED's action was part of a political vendetta by the BJP. "Whenever Abhishek Banerjee was summoned, he cooperated. However, the way his family is being harassed is shameful. This is nothing but political vendetta by the BJP," TMC's state general secretary Kunal Ghosh said. "The BJP is afraid of the TMC's 'Nabojwar' campaign ahead of the panchayat polls, and also wants to divert the attention from the train accident," he claimed.

The state BJP said the CBI and ED were independent agencies, and no political influence has been brought on them. "The BJP has nothing to do with the investigation. The allegations are baseless, and if TMC has any complaints, let the party move court," state BJP president Sukanta Majumdar said.

Bihar: Efforts on to rescue boy trapped behind bridge pillar in Rohtas



ROHTAS (BIHAR), June 8 (PTI): Efforts are on to rescue an 11-year-old boy trapped behind a pillar and a slab of a bridge, built over the Son River, in Atimi village in Bihar's Rohtas district.

The boy, Ranjan Kumar, 11, is being given oxygen while attempts are being made by disaster relief workers to free him.

He was found trapped at the Nasriganj-Daudnagar bridge, on Wednesday. Shatrughan Prasad, the boy's father had earlier informed local authorities that his son who was mentally unsound had gone missing two days ago. Later the child was discovered trapped by a woman.

Talking to reporters, Jaffar Imam, Block Development Officer (BDO) of Nasriganj, said, "The incident took place yesterday when the boy somehow got trapped between the pillar and a slab of the Nasriganj-Daudnagar Bridge."

An expert team from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and state disaster response force were immediately called and they have "been busy in the rescue operation since yesterday evening", he added.

"Oxygen is being supplied to the trapped boy through pipes till he is pulled out," he added.

Live-in partner in police custody till June 16 after woman's chopped body found in flat

THANE, June 8 (PTI): A 56-year-old man was arrested after the chopped body parts of his live-in partner were recovered from a flat in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Thursday. A court has remanded the man, identified as Manoj Sane, in police custody till June 16, he said. Victim Saraswati Vaidya (36) was in a live-in relationship with Sane and the couple resided in a flat on the seventh floor of a building in the Mira-Bhayandar area for the past three years, the official said.

Police on Wednesday were alerted by local residents about a foul smell emanating from the flat, said an official from Naya Nagar police station.

A team rushed to the spot and found the decomposed body of the woman which was cut into several pieces, said the official. She was later identified as Vaidya. The crime also sparked a war of words between the Opposition and the BJP, a ruling partner in the state. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Supriya Sule described the murder as "extremely horrific and outrageous" and alleged that crimes against women were on the rise in the state as criminals have no fear of law.

"A woman was killed by her live-in partner in Mira Road area. The accused tried to dispose of the body by cutting it into pieces, which he crushed in a mixer and boiled in a pressure cooker. This incident is extremely horrific, inhuman and outrageous," tweeted the NCP Member of Parliament.

She also said that Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, who handles the home portfolio, should concentrate



on his department seriously. Chitra Wagh, state BJP women's wing chief, hit out at Sule saying she was shedding crocodile tears. "Fadnis is capable enough to take action in the Mira Road case. But you did not feel like speaking out when a minor girl at Manchar in Pune district was kidnapped by a Muslim boy, when the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) was in power, and was not found for two-and-a-half years. Had the MVA government intervened, then Shradha Walkar would not have been cut into pieces," she said.

"Even a chameleon will feel ashamed to see how you change colours," Wagh alleged. Shradha Walkar was allegedly strangled to death by her live-in partner Aaftab Poonawala on May 18 last year. The accused sawed her body into several pieces, which he kept in a refrigerator for almost three weeks at his residence in south Delhi's Mehrauli.

Court asks RS Secretariat to not evict Chadha from official bungalow

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): In an interim relief to AAP MP Raghav Chadha, a Delhi court has directed the Rajya Sabha secretariat to not dispossess him of a Type-7 bungalow in Lutyens' Delhi, which is usually allotted to lawmakers who are former ministers, chief ministers or governors, till the pendency of his application and without following the due process of law.

The court will now decide the maintainability of Chadha's application against the March 3, 2023 order of the Rajya Sabha secretariat cancelling the allotment of the bungalow to him on July 10.

Nobody from the Rajya Sabha secretariat was immediately available for comments on the judicial order and the MP's petition.

During the proceedings, the counsel for the RS secretariat objected to the maintainability of the application.

Additional district judge Sudhanshu Kaushik had on June 1, after hearing the arguments from both sides on the issue of maintainability, fixed the matter for July 10 for order.

The court had in April directed the secretariat not to dispossess Chadha of the bungalow till the pendency of the application "without due process of law".

"At this stage, I do not deem it expedient to comment on the arguments raised by the plaintiff that the allotment once made by the secretariat cannot be cancelled under any circumstances during the entire tenure of a Member of Parliament," the judge had said.

However, I do find force in the second limb of the argument advanced on behalf of the plaintiff that a person cannot be dispos-



sessed except by following the due process of law, the judge said.

"Since, the plaintiff (Chadha) is occupying an accommodation, which falls under the category of public premises, the defendant (Rajya Sabha Secretariat) is obligated to follow the due process of law," he said.

The judge noted Chadha's submission that the secretariat was acting in "haste" and there was a strong likelihood that he might be dispossessed without following the due process of law.

"In view of these circumstances, a prima-facie case is made out for issuing directions to the effect that the plaintiff shall not be dispossessed from the bungalow... without due process of law," the judge said. He observed that the balance of convenience also was in favour of Chadha as he was residing in the accommodation along with his parents.

"Plaintiff would indeed suffer irreparable injury, in case he is dispossessed without the due process of law. Accordingly, till the next date of hearing, the defendant is directed not to dispossess the plaintiff from bungalow... without due process of law," the judge said.

Cong asks Jaishankar to take up 'Indira assassination float' in Brampton parade

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): The Congress on Thursday urged external affairs minister S Jaishankar to take up strongly with Canadian authorities the issue of a float depicting the assassination of former prime minister Indira Gandhi in a parade in Brampton. Asked about it at a press conference, Jaishankar hit out at Canada, saying there was a larger underlying issue about the space which is given to separatists, extremists and people who advocate violence. Earlier, Canadian High Commissioner to India Cameron Mackay said he was "appalled" by the reports of the event in his country that "celebrated" the assassination of the Indian prime minister. "There is no place in Canada for hate or for the glorification of violence. I categorically condemn these activities," he said in a tweet. Congress leader and former Union minister Milind Deora shared a purported video, which is doing the

rounds on social media, of a float at a recent parade in Brampton depicting Gandhi's assassination.

"As an Indian, I'm appalled by the 5 km-long parade which took place in the city of Brampton, Canada, depicting the assassination of Indira Gandhi," he tweeted. "It's not about taking sides, it's about respect for a nation's history and the pain caused by its Prime Minister's assassination," Deora said. This extremism deserves universal condemnation and a united response, the Congress leader asserted. Tagging Deora's tweet, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "I entirely agree! This is despicable and Dr S Jaishankar should take it up strongly with the Canadian authorities." Responding to Deora's tweet, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, "You are completely right... There should be no politics in condemning this despicable act across party lines."

IMD declares monsoon onset over Kerala

Cyclone 'Biparjoy' had been impacting the intensity of the monsoon would be 'mild'

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): The southwest monsoon hit India on Thursday with its onset over Kerala, a week later than normal, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced.

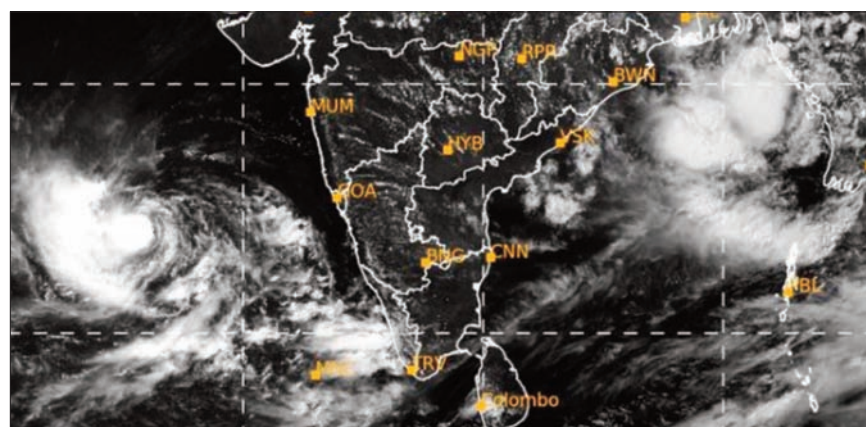
Meteorologists earlier said Cyclone 'Biparjoy' had been impacting the intensity of the monsoon and that its onset over Kerala would be "mild".

In a statement on Thursday, the IMD said, "The southwest monsoon has set in over Kerala today, June 8."

"The monsoon has advanced into remaining parts of south Arabian Sea and some parts of central Arabian Sea, entire Lakshadweep area, most parts of Kerala, most parts of south Tamil Nadu, remaining parts of Co-morin area, Gulf of Mannar and some more parts of southwest, central and northeast Bay of Bengal today," it added.

The southwest monsoon normally sets in over Kerala on June 1 with a standard deviation of about seven days. In mid-May, the IMD said the monsoon might arrive in Kerala by June 4.

Skymet had predicted the monsoon onset



over Kerala on June 7, with an error margin of three days. Over the last 150 years, the date of the monsoon onset over Kerala has varied widely, the earliest being May 11 in 1918 and the most delayed being June 18 in 1972, according to IMD data.

The southwest monsoon arrived in the southern state on May 29 last year, June 3 in 2021, June 1 in 2020, June 8 in 2019 and

May 29 in 2018.

Research shows a delay in the monsoon onset over Kerala (MOK) does not necessarily mean a delay in the monsoon onset over northwest India.

However, a delay in the MOK is generally associated with a delay in onset at least over the southern states and Mumbai.

Scientists say a delayed MOK also does

not impact the total rainfall over the country during the season. India is expected to get normal rainfall during the southwest monsoon season despite the evolving El Nino conditions, the IMD had earlier said.

Northwest India is expected to see normal to below-normal rainfall. East and northeast, central, and south peninsula are expected to receive normal rainfall at 94-106 per cent of the long-period average.

Rainfall less than 90 per cent of the long-period average is considered 'deficient', between 90 per cent and 95 per cent is 'below normal', between 105 per cent and 110 per cent is 'above normal' and more than 100 per cent is 'excess' precipitation.

Normal rainfall is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 per cent of the net cultivated area relying on it. It is also crucial for replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water, apart from power generation across the country.

Rain-fed agriculture accounts for about 40 per cent of the country's total food production, making it a crucial contributor to India's food security and economic stability.

The government is dedicated to women empowerment: Irani Oppn parties' wish for 2024 polls will wash away like Bihar bridge: BJP

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): The BJP on Thursday took a swipe at opposition parties over their meeting in Bihar on June 23, saying they may be looking for support in each other but their wish will wash away in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls like the ₹ 1,750-crore bridge which collapsed in the state recently.

Union minister and party leader Smriti Irani also targeted the Congress over Rahul Gandhi's claim of running "mohabbat ki dukan" (shop of love) and asked if this "mohabbat" meant denouncing the Hindu way of life, killing of Sikhs, partnering with those who wish ill for India and seeking outside intervention to harm India's democracy.

"What kind of love is this which is not for the country but for your politics. It does not say anything when 'Kerala Story' is shown," she said at a press conference.

Does this love not extend to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she asked, lauding his spirit of "service", and added that she will be surprised if the Congress has any kind word for him.

"It is incumbent upon the Congress to attack the image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 'mohabbat' of the Congress doesn't extend to him," the union minister for women and child development said.



Hitting back at Gandhi's charge that minorities were not being treated fairly by the government, she said the "Gandhi Khandan" calls itself "protector of minorities" but the expenditure on merit-cum-means scholarship was ₹ 860 crore under the Congress-led UPA government while it is ₹ 2,691 crore under the Modi government.

On another allocation under the minority affairs ministry, a portfolio she holds, she said it had risen to ₹ 31,450 crore now from ₹ 12,000 crore under the UPA. These statistics tell the truth about the Congress, Irani said.

With the ruling BJP often accusing the Congress of seeking outside intervention to attack the Modi government, Irani said such activities of the opposition party

leadership will increase as the 2024 national polls approach. It is determined to strike a blow to the country's democratic process in its lust for power, she said.

Asked about the opposition's meeting in Patna on June 23 in its efforts to forge unity, she hit back, "They are looking for support in each other as they are unable to stand on their own feet. They are coming together at a place where a ₹ 1,750-crore structure washed away. Their wishes will wash away in a similar way in 2024."

The bridge collapse has drawn a lot of flak and chief minister Nitish Kumar has ordered an inquiry.

Questioning the Congress' claim about crumbling relations between the Centre and states, she said two

chief ministers of the party had recently attended a NITI Aayog meeting in which Modi also participated.

To a question about the opposition party's attack on her, Irani said mockingly that the Sun will rise in the south if it stops targeting her.

Highlighting the successes of the women and child development ministry in the last nine years of the Modi government, Irani said a nutrition campaign involving 18 ministries was launched for the first time ever and measuring devices were made available in every anganwadi centre to constantly assess children's health.

Every anganwadi centre in the country was connected with smart phones and so far 11 lakh smart phones have been distributed among workers while over nine crore beneficiaries are availing benefits of the 'Poshan Tracker' scheme, she said.

As part of her ministry's endeavour to ensure police verification of those working at establishments catering to children, data of over 12 lakh alleged sexual offenders has been created, she said.

The government is dedicated to women empowerment, Irani said, noting that over 27 crore Jan Dhan bank accounts have been opened and 27.7 crore Mudra loans distributed among women so far.

Traders not facing any problem in exchanging, depositing ₹ 2,000 notes: Minister

INDORE, June 8 (PTI): Union minister Som Prakash on Thursday claimed businesspersons and traders were not facing any problem in depositing or exchanging ₹ 2,000 notes which were withdrawn from circulation by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last month.

He said enough time has been given to people to deposit or exchange the high-value currency, which was introduced in November 2016.

"I have spoken to a number of traders and industrialists over the decision to withdraw the ₹ 2,000 notes. Anyone can go to a bank and get them exchanged. None of them have a problem," the minister of state for commerce and industry told reporters here while responding to a question.

On May 19, the RBI announced the withdrawal of ₹ 2,000 notes and set September 30 as the deadline for exchanging and depositing them with banks.

On May 26, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said the RBI must put in place a standard operating procedure (SOP) for banks for deposit and exchange of the withdrawn bills.

CAIT president BC Bhartia had told reporters here, "Every bank has its own way to exchange or deposit ₹ 2,000 bills, which is causing hardship to housewives and traders. The RBI must have a common SOP for all banks."

Minister Prakash said the government is continuously taking action against the use of fake bills for



availing input tax credit under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) mechanism and people involved in such frauds were facing action and arrest.

Speaking about the achievements of the Narendra Modi government which completed nine years in office last month, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said India has emerged as the fastest growing major economy in the world.

Prakash is in Indore to attend a special public connect programme launched by the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, where Assembly polls are due by the year-end.

German defence minister visits Western Naval Command, Mazagon Dock in Mumbai



MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): A delegation from Germany led by its defence minister Boris Pistorius visited the Western Naval Command (WNC) and the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) here with an aim to strengthen defence ties between the two countries, the Navy said on Thursday.

Pistorius visited the WNC on

Wednesday, during which he interacted with top Indian Navy officials, including navy chief admiral R Hari Kumar and vice admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the WNC.

The minister was accompanied by Benedikt Zimmer (State Secretary, Ministry of Defence Ger-

many), Dr. Jasper Wiecek (director-general for security and defence policy, MoD Germany), Dr. Philipp Ackermann (German ambassador to India) and other delegation members.

The German delegation later visited the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, where they were apprised of the indigenous ship building capability of the MDL.

During the visit to Mumbai, Pistorius was given a tour of the latest indigenous warship, INS Mormugao.

Consequent to India and Germany signing an agreement on Bilateral Defence Cooperation in 2006, there has been a significant enhancement in military interactions. Cooperation in the maritime domain is the most enduring and key facet of engagement between India and Germany, which inter alia encompasses training and reciprocal bilateral visits by naval ships and delegations, the navy said.

Navies of both countries share converging views on maritime areas of concern, anti-piracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The current visit of Pistorius would further strengthen the relationship between the two countries, the navy statement added.

Contd. from Page 1...

Govt working on to increase forest

Participants on the occasion would get ₹ 100 as a token of gratitude to look after the saplings planted on the occasion. After three years if the plant survives, the person will get another ₹ 200. He said that to create a forest centric parallel economy, the State government has taken steps to encourage plantation of commercial timber like sal, teak etc.

Governor, Assam Gulab Chand Kataria who also graced the occasion also released two books titled 'Towards Natural Farming' and 'Rare and Threatened Plant Species of Assam' along with the chief minister.

First lady of Assam, wife of the Governor Anita Kataria, cabinet ministers, MPs, MLAs and a host of dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Security commences operations for

of the villagers as well as snatched from the police and state security forces. According to the sources, around 2000 weapons and over five lakh ammunition were looted by unruly mobs from armories and police stations and outposts both in hills and valley districts since violence broke out in the state on May 3 evening.

A total of 868 arms and 11,518 ammunition have been recovered till date, the source said. Earlier, Union Home minister Amit Shah, during his four-day visit in the violence-hit Manipur, had appealed to the people to return the weapons that were stolen, failing which a combing operation will begin and strict action will be initiated.

In response to the appeal, some arms and ammunition had already been surrendered to the police in the valley districts.

Manipur situation peaceful, Centre

March' was organised in the hill districts on May 3 to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. So far, nearly 100 people lost their lives and over 300 injured ever since the ethnic violence broke out over a month ago.

Diphu bids adieu to Gautam Terang

Engleng; Executive Members (EMs) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC); Member of Autonomous Councils (MACs), family members, relatives and well-wishers attended his cremation.

ISRO not rushing to launch

done that. We have experience to do it in that manner but it all depends on various other factors whether there are any other contingency conditions," Somanath said, adding, "The landing flight is just the same as previously. No change."

To a query on how indigenous Chandrayaan-3 is, the ISRO chairman said, "What we are doing in ISRO is 100 per cent indigenous. We are not buying anything from anybody to do it but of course we buy some components such as electronic chips, processors, some high-end devices, but we don't buy Chandrayaan lander from anybody."

India test-fires new generation ballistic

In December, India successfully test-fired Agni-V missile that can strike targets at ranges up to 5,000 km. Agni-V can bring almost the entire Asia including the northernmost part of China as well as some regions in Europe under its striking range.

The Agni 1 to 4 missiles have ranges from 700 km to 3,500 km and they have already been deployed.

In April, India successfully carried out the maiden flight trial of an endo-atmospheric interceptor missile from a ship off the coast of Odisha in the Bay of Bengal as part of its ambitious ballistic missile defence programme.

The purpose of the trial of the sea-based missile was to engage and neutralize a hostile ballistic missile threat thereby elevating India into an elite club of nations having such a capability.

India has been developing capabilities to intercept hostile ballistic missiles both inside and outside the earth's atmospheric limits.

Accused kept chopped body parts of his live-in partner in 3 buckets: Neighbours



MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): The man accused of brutally killing his 36-year-old woman live-in partner in Mira Road locality of Maharashtra's Thane district, kept her chopped body parts in three buckets in their flat and also tried to hide the stench by spraying room freshener, his neighbours said on Thursday.

Police have arrested the accused man, 56-year-old Manoj Sane, after the chopped body parts of the victim, Saraswati Vaidya, were recovered from their rented flat located on the seventh floor of a building in the Mira Road area, where they had been living for the past three years. A court remanded Sane in police custody till June 16, officials said.

Talking to reporters, Somesh Srivastav, his next-door neighbour, said a foul smell kept emanating from Sane's flat for the past couple of days.

Srivastav said himself decided to speak to Sane about the stink as the latter did not usually open his flat.

"On Wednesday, I planned to speak to him about the unbearable odour coming from his flat and knocked on his door. There was no response from inside initially, but he opened the door after some time. Before that, he sprayed room freshener in the house to suppress the stench. I heard the sound of spray," he said.

But as soon as he opened the door, he started

stepping out saying he has to go out for some urgent work and he will meet him after returning home around 10.30 pm, he said.

At that time, Srivastav's mother noticed that Sane's woman partner was not there to see him off as she used to do whenever he stepped out, he said.

After sensing that something was amiss, Srivastav informed the housing society's office-bearers, who in turn called the builder and the broker of the flat, he said.

After being alerted, a police team also reached the flat. The police broke open the door and entered the flat, Srivastav said, adding he also went inside the house.

The police found a wood cutter in the hall and a piece of plastic in the bedroom. They were shocked to see three buckets full of blood and chopped body parts kept in the kitchen, he said, adding that bones were also lying there.

Police also found parts of the victim's thighs, which were not completely chopped yet, and also the hair braid lying on the ground, he said.

After that, the police decided to nab Sane and waited for his return, he said.

Srivastav said although Sane had told him that he would return home by 10.30 pm, he came back around 8.30 pm. After spotting the police on the 7th floor, he tried to leave the place, but the flat's broker identified him and he was immediately caught.

"The way the accused had chopped the victim's body parts, he would have disposed of these pieces over the next two days," he said.

Another neighbour Vivek Srivastav said that he came to know about the murder after returning home from the office in the evening.

He said although the couple had been staying in the seventh floor flat for the last couple of years, they did not mix with anyone and did not speak with anybody, he said adding they also did not take part in any functions in the society.

Greenhouse gas emissions found to be at 'all-time high'

Warming continues at 'unprecedented rate'

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been found to be "at an all-time high", with human activity resulting in the equivalent of 54 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere on average every year over the last decade.

A group of 50 leading scientists have said in an analysis that human-caused global warming has continued to increase at an "unprecedented rate" since the last major assessment of the climate system published two years ago.

One of the researchers said the analysis was a "timely wake-up call" and it comes as climate experts meet in Bonn, Germany, to prepare the ground for the major COP28 climate conference in the UAE in December, which will take stock of progress towards keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2050.

The researchers wrote in the analysis that human-induced warming, largely caused by fossil fuel burning, reached an average of 1.14 degrees Celsius for the most recent decade (2013 to 2022) above pre-industrial levels, up from 1.07 degrees Celsius between 2010 and 2019. It is now increasing at a pace of over 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade, they wrote in the journal Earth System Science Data.

In an initiative being led by the University of Leeds, UK, the scientists have developed an open data, open science platform - the Indicators of Global Climate Change. Its website will update information on key climate indicators every year.

Arguing that policymakers, climate negotiators and civil society groups need to have access to the latest and robust scientific evidence for



decision-making, the scientists said that these key climate indicators have changed since the publication of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) Sixth Assessment Working Group 1 report in 2021, which produced the key data that fed into the subsequent IPCC Sixth Synthesis Report.

While there has been a positive move away from burning coal, it has, in fact, added to global warming by reducing particulate pollution in the air, which has a cooling effect, the analysis noted.

Coordinator of the initiative, Piers Forster, Director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures at Leeds, said, "Long-term warming rates are currently at a long-term high, caused by highest-ever levels of greenhouse gas emissions. But there is evidence that the rate of increase in greenhouse gas emissions has slowed."

"We need to be nimble footed in the face of climate change. We need to change policy and approaches in the light of the latest evidence about the state of the climate system. Time is

no longer on our side. Access to up-to-date information is vitally important."

Decline in remaining carbon budget, an estimate of how much carbon that can be released into the atmosphere to give a 50 per cent chance of keeping global temperature rise within 1.5 degrees Celsius, another major finding of the analysis, has been attributed to a combination of continued emissions since 2020 and updated estimates of human-induced warming.

The IPCC calculated in 2020 this budget to be around 500 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide.

By the start of 2023, the figure was roughly halved to 250 gigatonnes.

"Even though we are not yet at 1.5 degrees Celsius warming, the carbon budget will likely be exhausted in only a few years as we have a triple whammy of heating from very high CO2 emissions, heating from increases in other GHG emissions and heating from reductions in pollution."

"If we don't want to see the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal disappearing in our rearview mirror, the world must work much harder and urgently at bringing emissions down," said Forster.

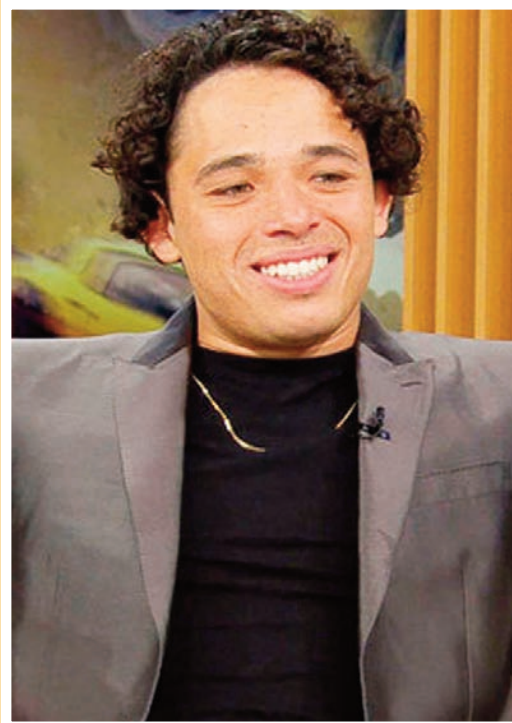
Maisa Rojas Corradi, Minister of the Environment in Chile, IPCC author and a scientist involved in this study, said, "An annual update of key indicators of global change is critical in helping the international community and countries to keep the urgency of addressing the climate crisis at the top of the agenda and for evidence-based decision-making."

He said that Chile had a climate change law aimed at aligning government-wide policies with climate action.

I was hoping to have a good time: Anthony Ramos on leading new 'Transformers' movie

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): It was all about having a "good time" on "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts", says actor Anthony Ramos, who is the new face of the sci-fi action franchise.

Ramos, who gained recognition as an actor through the acclaimed Broadway musical "Hamilton" before featuring in movies like "A Star Is Born" and "In The Heights," is following in the footsteps of former "Transformers" stars Shia LaBeouf and Mark Wahlberg. As an enthusiast of action movies, the actor said he was ready to give his 100 per cent for the film. "I was excited about getting in shape and training to do what was required in this movie. The biggest thing



I was hoping was to just have a good time. You never know with anything in life, but you just hope that you get a movie or TV show, whatever you decide to do, and you have a good time. And I had a blast," Ramos told PTI in a virtual interview. Also starring Dominique Fishback, "Rise of the Beasts" is the seventh chapter of the franchise, which has minted over USD 4.8 billion at the global box office. The film, directed by Steven Caple Jr of "Creed II" fame, is set in the 1990s and features Ramos as Noah Diaz, who embarks on a globetrotting adventure with the Autobots as they battle the deadly Terrorcons. In their fight, they are joined by the Maximals, a whole new faction of Transformers. Ramos, 31, said as a kid, he loved the original "Beast Wars: Transformers" animated series. "Beast Wars" was my favourite show on TV growing up. I love these characters -- Rattrap, Optimus Primal and Cheetor. And so I really had some toys as well," the actor said.

HOPE PEOPLE REALISE ACTORS CAN CHANGE SHAPE: GEETIKA VIDYA OHLYAN OPENS UP ON BEING STEREOTYPED

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): "Soni" star Geetika Vidya Ohlyan says she can "do more" if right kind of opportunities, like "School of Lies", come her way and hopes filmmakers see her as an actor who can change "shape and form". After her stellar debut in "Soni" as a police officer battling misogyny, a house help subjected to domestic violence in "Thappad", and a migrant worker stuck in COVID-19 induced lockdown in "Unpaused" anthology, Ohlyan said she felt stereotyped as she would get offers to play characters belonging to "a certain class".

"It is just about the right kind of opportunities being given to people. I believe I can do more and I would like to be given more opportunities, roles and responsibilities. "I'm hoping for more people to watch it and realise that an actor can change shape and form and (speak different) languages. That's what their job is," she said, crediting "School of Lies" director Avinash Arun Dhaware for trusting her with a role diametrically opposite to her perceived image.

In "School of Lies", the actor plays Trisha, an ambitious corporate woman from Gurgaon running pillar to post to search for her son, Shakti, who goes missing from his boarding school.

The series, streaming on Disney+ Hotstar, marks her second collaboration with Dhaware after "Vishnu" episode of "Unpaused", Prime Video's anthology. Ohlyan said she told Dhaware she would love to work with him again on the last day of shooting "Unpaused".

"I remember telling him that this is just the beginning and there's so much more to what we can do together. More than a year after that, I got a call from him saying this is a project ('School of Lies') that I'm thinking of. There's this part that I'm thinking, I think of you."

"I said, 'OK, I'd love to read everything'. And that is how it began. So it is his courage that after Seema in 'Unpaused', the migrant labourer from Rajasthan, he could see me as Trisha, this successful corporate woman from Gurgaon who speaks English fluently," the 31-year-old actor told PTI in an interview.

Netflix sets June 29 premiere for 'Lust Stories 2'



MUMBAI, June 8 (PTI): The second edition of Netflix's acclaimed film anthology "Lust Stories" will arrive on June 29, the streamer said Thursday.

Amruta Subhash, Angad Bedi, Kajol, Kumud Mishra, Mrunal Thakur, Neena Gupta, Tamannaah Bhatia, Tillotama Shome and Vijay Varma round out the ensemble cast of "Lust Stories 2".

Netflix India shared the premiere details of the upcoming title on its official Twitter page, along with a scene featuring Bhatia and Varma.

"Just one noteworthy scene from the vaults of love and lust. #LustStories2 premieres on June 29, only on Netflix!" the streaming service said in the tweet. According to Netflix, "Lust Stories 2" is billed as a collection of films that shed light on relationships from the female lens of women, stringing them together thematically.

It consists of four shorts, directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma, R Balki, Konkona Sen Sharma and Sujoy Ghosh.

The new edition of the anthology is produced by Ronnie Screwvala (RSVP) and Ashi Dua (Flying Unicorn Entertainment), who also backed the inaugural "Lust Stories" (2018).

of South Asian representation.

"I would love to always be a part of the show where the character is so three dimensional, but the show itself can start so many conversations... It is a dream as an actor to always be part of stuff that shifts the conversation," Jagannathan, 50, told PTI in an interview.

"And (it) expands how non-South Asians view us," added Moorjani, who plays Devi's cousin Kamala in the series.

Jagannathan said she loved the culture-specific details at the centre of "Never Have I Ever", whose fourth and final season premiered on Thursday.

"(It is) showing us eating with our hands and that we have dosas and idlis... and don't wear

WE NEED TO MAKE MORE FILMS FOR THEATRES: MANOJ BAJPAYEE

KOLKATA, June 8 (PTI): Actor Manoj Bajpayee, whose "Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai" is trending on OTT, believes there is a need to make more movies for the theatrical format.

The 54-year old Padma Shri recipient told PTI over phone from Mumbai on Thursday that while people can enjoy a film on a streaming platform in the comfort of their homes, films (theatrical releases) have "their own beauty".

"There has to be some kind of balance - between OTT and theatre which feed off each other. We need to make more movies for theatres," he said, observing movies last for longer terms.

The "Shool" actor said the viewing habit of people changed during the pandemic and people got used to watching shows and movies on streamers.

"We need to make more and more movies for theatres, more within the budget. So that people again get used to watch films in theatres and a greater loss can be avoided," Bajpayee said.

Asked the reason behind



gangster movies not doing well on big screen, Bajpayee said he did not entirely agree with the argument and called it "a temporary phase." "Be it gangster movies or any movie, there are so many subjects, so many films. Just because OTT is there does it mean all gangster movies will go to OTT? No. In fact, so many different kinds of films will be streamed and it is a passing phase," the "Gangs of Wasseypur" actor said.

Asked if he wanted to be part of any Bengali project, he said, "I look forward to being a part of any great project in any language, be it Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam. But my only handicap is I am not that much well-versed with the language (Bengali). It has to be a great project and I want to do complete justice to my role, to me being part of it."

About "Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai" on ZEE5, Bajpayee said, "This film belongs to the mainstream genre but it does not make anyone larger than life, including the protagonist... People keep watching it again and again as they find the characters believable."

Miss World 2023 competition returns to India after 27 years

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): India is set to host the Miss World 2023 competition, as the coveted international beauty pageant makes its return to the country after nearly three decades.

The much anticipated 71st edition of Miss World is expected to take place in November this year, the final dates of which are yet to be ascertained.

India had last hosted the international pageant in 1996. "I am delighted to announce India as the new home of the 71st Miss World Final... We cannot wait to share your unique and diverse culture, world class attractions and breathtaking locations with the rest of the world. The 71st Miss World 2023 will showcase the Achievements of 130 National champions in their one-month journey across 'In-

credible India' as we present the 71st and most spectacular Miss World final ever," said Julia Morley, chairperson and CEO of Miss World organization at a press conference on Thursday. The month-long event, which would witness contestants from over 130 countries, will feature a series of rigorous com-

petitions, including talent showcases, sports challenges, and charitable initiatives -- all aimed at highlighting the qualities that make them ambassadors of change. The reigning Miss World, Karolina Bielawska of Poland, who is currently in India spreading the word about the beauty competition, said she is excited to hand over her crown in this "beautiful country" which stands for the same values as Miss World.



"India has the greatest hospitality in the entire world. It is my second time here .. and you make me feel like home. You stand for the same values, diversity, unity... Your core values are family, respect, love, kindness and this is something that we would love to show to the world."

There is so much more to see here, and bringing the whole world here for a month and showing everything that India has to offer is the best idea," said the Miss World 2022. Equally excited and looking forward to India hosting the event was the current Miss India World Sini Shetty, who'll represent the country in the high-octane competition.

"I am so excited to meet all my sisters across the globe to welcome them to India to show them what India truly stands for, what India is, what is the diversity in India... I am really excited and looking forward to this journey. I hope you guys have the best time here in India," she said.

A dream to be part of stuff that shifts conversations: Poorna Jagannathan on 'Never Have I Ever' final season

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): Poorna Jagannathan loves three-dimensional characters and she got to play one in "Never Have I Ever", a series that the actor says has set the standard for South Asian representation in American shows.

The actor stars as Nalini Vishwakumar, a strict but affectionate mother to the protagonist Devi, played by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, in the Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher created Netflix series.

Jagannathan, who has also featured in Hindi films such as "Delhi Belly" and "Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani", and her co-star Richa Moorjani spoke to PTI about the show's contribution in pushing the envelope in terms

"I would love to always be a part of the show where the character is so three dimensional, but the show itself can start so many conversations... It is a dream as an actor to always be part of stuff that shifts the conversation," Jagannathan, 50, told PTI in an interview.

"And (it) expands how non-South Asians view us," added Moorjani, who plays Devi's cousin Kamala in the series.

Jagannathan said she loved the culture-specific details at the centre of "Never Have I Ever", whose fourth and final season premiered on Thursday.

"(It is) showing us eating with our hands and that we have dosas and idlis... and don't wear

shoes in the house and pray to gods... Everything is so specific... To know that it is being seen and conveyed to so many people, it is overwhelming and it's a show that just sets the standard on projects going forward," she said.

"Never Have I Ever" follows Devi (Ramakrishnan), an over-achieving Indian-American teenager growing up in Southern California, US, who is mourning the death of her father while navigating life as a high-school student.

On her recent visit to India, Moorjani, 34, said she was surprised to see the show resonate with people in different parts of the country.

"They told me how they feel

like this is the first time they've ever felt represented or relatable to a character in an American television show. It's very rare as an actor, especially as a brown actor in this country, to be a part of a show that can be so explosive in so many ways," she added.

With Ranjita Chakravarty's Nirmala 'Pati' (Devi's paternal grandmother), the show also gives a peek into how women don't need to stick to the narratives set by the society, Jagannathan said.

"The fact that Pati is so conservative and disapproving of Kamala's boyfriends but ends up being as horny as Devi, it is hilarious, but also groundbreaking."

"... As South Asian women, our narratives, a lot of times, are dictated... Like, my mother became a widow and her narrative was somehow dictated by society. This show picks up a pen where people usually put the period and starts a whole new chapter for each of our characters of South Asian women," she added.

"Never Have I Ever" also stars Darren Barnet, Jaren Lewison, Ramona Young, and Lee Rodriguez.

Fisher serves as showrunner on the series, which is produced by Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group, and executive produced by 3 Arts Entertainment's Howard Klein and David Miner.



Messi picks MLS's Inter Miami in a move that stuns soccer after exit from Paris Saint-Germain



MIAMI, June 8 (AP): Lionel Messi has pulled off his latest stunning feat: He is headed to Major League Soccer and joining Inter Miami. After months — years, even — of speculation, Messi on Wednesday finally revealed his decision to join a Miami franchise that has been led by another global soccer icon, David Beckham, since its inception but has yet to make any real splashes on the field.

That likely will soon change. One of Inter Miami's owners, Jorge Mas, tweeted out a photo of a darkly silhouetted Messi jersey shortly before the Argentinian great revealed his decision in interviews with Spanish news outlets Mundo Deportivo and Sport.

It was widely believed that Messi eventually would choose to play for Al-Hilal in Saudi Arabia, following longtime rival Cristiano Ronaldo to a nation where some clubs now are funded by the state's sovereign wealth fund. Going back to Barcelona, a storied franchise where he spent most of his career, was another possibility.

But in the end, he made the call that surprised many. Messi is joining MLS. He said in the interviews Wednesday that some final details still need to be worked out, but that he has made the call to "continue my path" in Miami.

"After winning the World Cup and not being able to return to Barcelona, it was my turn to go to the league of the United States to live football in another way," Messi said.

He didn't take the money. He didn't choose the memories. He picked Miami instead. Messi's next matches are likely to be exhibitions with Argentina against Australia on June 15 at Beijing and at Indonesia in Jakarta four days later — and then his Inter Miami debut figures to be sometime in July.

"We are pleased that Lionel Messi has stated that he intends to join Inter Miami and Major League Soccer this summer," read a statement from MLS. "Although work remains to finalize a formal agreement, we look forward to welcoming one of the greatest soccer players of all time to our league."

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner — the trophy given annually to the world's best player — makes his move after two years with Paris Saint-Germain. At 35, Messi has nothing left to prove in the game and filled the only significant unchecked box on his resume back in December by leading Argentina to the World Cup title.

Messi has more than 800 goals in his career for club and country, making him one of the greatest

scorers in the sport's history. In more than 17 years of representing Argentina on the international stage, he has scored 102 goals against 38 different national team opponents — 16 of those goals coming on U.S. soil. He scored twice in last year's World Cup final against France, a match that ended 3-3 with Argentina prevailing 4-2 on penalty kicks.

He has been to the absolute mountaintop of the game. He is a four-time Champions League winner and his 129 goals in the top club competition are second to Ronaldo's 140. Messi has won 10 La Liga titles and two Ligue 1 championships, seven Copa del Reys and three Club World Cups plus a Copa America and Olympic gold medal for Argentina.

And now he comes to MLS, and a team that is struggling — last place in the Eastern Conference, just a few days removed from the firing of coach Phil Neville (who was hand-picked by Beckham two years ago).

Messi's decision to play in the U.S. might be the biggest boost ever for American soccer on the pro stage. Some of the game's biggest names — Pelé, Franz Beckenbauer, Thierry Henry and Beckham himself — have come to the U.S. toward the end of their ca-

reers, but landing a player still no worse than near the pinnacle of his game and just a few months removed from hoisting a World Cup is simply huge.

"This is obviously the biggest signing that they've brought in," said Nashville defender Walker Zimmerman, a U.S. national team regular. "It's kind of reminiscent of Beckham when he came originally. You saw how the league has kind of changed in the 15 years since he arrived, and hopefully 15 years from now we're seeing all the growth from this addition to the league. I think it's a great thing."

"I think it'll be great for the sport in this country, especially ahead of the 2026 World Cup. And I'm excited to play against him."

It took months of negotiations with MLS, the Miami ownership, Adidas and even Apple getting involved in a creative pitch to bring Messi to Miami's pitch. Apple — which is a broadcast partner of MLS — announced Tuesday that it will show a still-untilted four-part documentary series "featuring exclusive behind-the-scenes access to global superstar Lionel Messi. ... In his own words, Messi tells the definitive story of his incredible career with the Argentina national football team, providing an intimate and unprecedented look at his quest for a legacy-defining World Cup victory."

And now, his story will have a Miami chapter. His move comes in a week when the NBA's Miami Heat and NHL's Florida Panthers are both at home in their respective title series — and the Heat, during Game 3 of the NBA Finals on Wednesday night, flashed a graphic on their scoreboard welcoming Messi to Miami.

The Heat trailed by 21 points at the time. A few people cheered anyway.

Inter Miami needed six years from inception to playing its first match, and its first four seasons have been less than stellar.

Messi is joining a team that sits last in the Eastern Conference and just fired its coach. It has made the playoffs in two of its first three seasons but has yet to finish a season with a winning record or even a positive goal differential.

Still, there have been hints for months that Miami remained very much in the Messi sweepstakes. Messi met with Inter Miami co-owner Beckham this spring, and that was shared publicly almost to ensure that everyone knew the sides were still talking. Messi and his family also own several pieces of luxury real estate in South Florida, and — almost as if to suggest something big was coming — the MLS club told fans the only way they could get tickets for the second half of this season was to purchase a season-ticket package.

He's an enormous draw everywhere on the globe, including Miami. Two days after Argentina won the World Cup, Miami Heat guard Kyle Lowry sat on his team's bench for a game unable to play because of injury. He wore a Messi jersey that night.

Inter Miami still plays home matches in a temporary home in Fort Lauderdale, about 45 minutes north of the site in Miami where the team wants to build a permanent complex.

And even in an area where the population has a serious Latin flavor, and where more people might actually call the sport fútbol than soccer, Inter Miami has struggled to generate the same attention as do the area's primary pro teams — basketball's Heat, baseball's Miami Marlins, football's Miami Dolphins and hockey's Panthers.

Messi could change that in an instant. In a flash, he becomes the biggest name in MLS and makes everything Miami does newsworthy. Barcelona released a statement saying Jorge Messi, the player's father, told the club president Joan Laporta of the decision to go to Miami and wished him well.

"President Laporta understood and respected Messi's decision to want to compete in a league with fewer demands, further away from the spotlight and the pressure he has been subject to in recent years," the statement from Barcelona said.

His decision ends what has been a wild saga. Barcelona made Messi a superstar, but the financial issues that forced the team to letting him go two years ago still remain an issue.

India suffer 1-4 loss to Netherlands in FIH Pro League



EINDHOVEN, June 8 (PTI): A profligate India squandered a one-goal lead to go down 1-4 to the hosts Netherlands in the FIH Hockey Pro League here.

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh (11') scored India's lone goal despite the visitors being awarded as many as five penalty corners and a penalty stroke. Pepijn Reyenga (17'), Boris Burkhardt (40') and Duco Telgenkamp (41', 58') scored in the home team's victory on Wednesday night. Riding on back-to-back wins in London last weekend, India got off the blocks in Eindhoven establishing an early 1-0 lead in the first quarter.

Though India took some time to shake off the nerves and settle into the game, they showed a good structure that helped them earn opportunities inside the Netherlands' D. India were awarded a penalty corner after a foot foul by the Netherlands defender in the 11th minute, a deliberate foul in PC defence saw them being awarded a penalty stroke.

The in-form Harmanpreet broke no sweat in converting the stroke, fetching India an early lead and also took his individual score to an impressive 17 goals this season.

Backed by a boisterous home crowd, the young Netherlands team bounced back in the second quarter with a fine equaliser through Pepijn Reyenga. He was skillful in his effort to pick up an aerial ball, and controlled it well enough to put it past the Indian defence in the 17th minute.

The equaliser put India on the backfoot, with the hosts enjoying most of the ball possession. It took India a few minutes to regain their rhythm and foray into the circle with a well-worked attack down the right flank but the hosts de-

fended well to keep the scoreline even. Only seconds before the hooter, the Netherlands found an opportunity to take the lead when they won a PC from a strong counter-attack. But a goal was averted by India's brave first rusher Amit Rohidas.

Starting the third quarter with a 1-1 stalemate, the match promised to keep the audience glued to their seats. The hosts dominated this quarter with improved ball possession backed by an aggressive attack. Only minutes into the quarter, Tjep Hoedemakers tested India's defence when he took a shot on goal from close range but India goalie Krishan Pathak was quick on his feet to make a fine save.

In the 35th minute, India created a good attack from the right flank with the ball being pushed across the face of the goal. Only a slight touch would have put the ball in, but Gurjant Singh's diving effort went in vain.

The deadlock finally ended in the 40th minute when the Netherlands managed a PC. Boris Burkhardt picked up a good injection to put it past Pathak. Seconds later, Duco Telgenkamp extended the lead to 3-1 with a well-timed field goal.

It didn't help that India were down to 10 men with Mandeep Singh being awarded a green card seconds before the Netherlands scored back-to-back goals.

Under pressure to score, India began the final quarter with a couple of PCs coming their way but failed to make much of them.

They won another PC about three minutes later but could not put it past the Dutch defence. The final few minutes remained tense for India, as they hunted for that elusive goal.

Declan Rice set to leave West Ham after winning Euro trophy

LONDON, June 8 (AP): England midfielder Declan Rice looks to have played his final match for West Ham.

Rice, who captained West Ham in its victory over Fiorentina in the Europa Conference League final on Wednesday, has been promised he can leave the club and wants to go, chairman David Sullivan said.

"You can't keep a player who doesn't want to be there," Sullivan told British radio station Talksport on Thursday.

Rice has been linked with some of Europe's top teams, including Arsenal and Bayern Munich.

"It's not something we want to happen," Sullivan said. "We offered him 200,000 pounds (\$250,000) a week 18 months ago. He turned it down."

The 24-year-old Rice has played for West Ham since 2017. He said after Wednesday's final that "it's not a goodbye yet."

"Obviously there's loads of speculation but nothing's happened," Rice said. "I'm a West Ham player, I've got two years left on my contract. I love every minute of it."

Sullivan said West Ham has yet to receive an offer.

"But I think the offers will start to come today," Sullivan said. "There are three or four clubs who have shown interest, but out of respect to West Ham, while we're still playing, you don't make offers for players."

Big clubs in Germany's second division taking attention away from Bundesliga

BERLIN, June 8 (AP): Germany's second division threatens to take attention away from the Bundesliga next season with several heavyweights competing at the lower level.

Hertha Berlin and Schalke were relegated from the top flight, joining the likes of Hamburger SV, Nuremberg, Kaiserslautern, Hannover and Fortuna Düsseldorf — all teams playing in stadiums with a capacity of at least 50,000.

Only five of 18 teams in the Bundesliga next season can boast such numbers. Promoted Heidenheim will play its first season in Germany's top flight at the 15,000-capacity Albstadt. Union Berlin plays at the 22,000-capacity Stadion An der Alten Försterei and may have to move for Champions League games after clinching a spot in Europe's top club competition.

When Hertha hosts Hamburg in its 75,000-capacity Olympiastadion, or Schalke hosts Kaiserslautern in front of 62,000 fans in Gelsenkirchen, the games will draw more attention than many first-division matches.

Here's a closer look at some of the clubs that will be competing in the second division next season:

HAMBURG (57,000 capacity)

Hamburg missed out on promotion after losing the playoff for the second successive season. Its fans were celebrating on the final day when they thought their team had finally returned to the Bundesliga after beating Sandhausen SV, but Heidenheim scored two goals in injury time to clinch promotion at Hamburg's expense.

KAISERSLAUTERN (49,000)

Four-time German champion Kaiser-

lautern sensationally won the Bundesliga as a promoted team in 1998, when Otto Rehhagel was coach. It had been an ever-present in the top division since its formation in 1963 until its first demotion in 1996.

NUREMBERG (50,000)

Nuremberg, another founding member of the Bundesliga, is a nine-time German champion and was Bayern Munich's biggest local rival despite its relegation troubles. Nuremberg has been demoted nine times from the top division — a record. It won its first Bundesliga title in 1968 and was relegated for the first time the following season.

FORTUNA DÜSSELDORF (55,000)

Düsseldorf came up with a novel way to fill its stadium last April when it announced its "Fortuna for all" scheme to give free tickets to fans for some games starting next season.

After a fourth-place finish last season, the club hopes the extra support can help propel it back to the Bundesliga, from which it was demoted in 2020 after two seasons.

SCHALKE (62,000)

Seven-time German champion Schalke was relegated again last month after just one season back in the Bundesliga. It was relegated in 2021 after 30 years in the top division, then bounced back as second division champion. However, the financial implications of that initial drop, the end of its sponsorship with Russian state-owned energy giant Gazprom, and the coronavirus pandemic all took their toll. Former chairman Clemens Tönnes, who had cultivated the Gazprom link, resigned from Schalke in 2020 after a coronavirus outbreak at one of his meat processing plants.

Man City, Inter Milan meet in Champions League final of contrasting club history

LONDON, June 8 (AP): Manchester City will enter the Champions League final on Saturday as a modern soccer and financial heavyweight compared to Inter Milan.

That is a new twist in the European history of two clubs who have rarely operated at the same level and whose respective status, on and off the field, flipped about 12 years ago.

Inter had the aristocratic, storied tradition and trophies while City was an English third-tier team when cross-town rival Manchester United lifted the iconic European Cup trophy in 1999.

"One is a kind of old nobility," European soccer consultant Olivier Jarosz told The Associated Press about Inter, "and one comes from a working-class family that has made a nice marriage with money."

Yet both City and Inter were teammates on the failed Super League project in 2021, albeit for different reasons. Loss-making Inter



was seeking to avoid being left behind by English Premier League dominance; financial juggernaut City, backed by Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth, didn't want to be left out.

Abu Dhabi's petrodollars have been spent wisely so debt-free City

goes to Istanbul for its second Champions League final in three years and fresh from sealing a seventh Premier League title in 12 seasons.

In the same era, Inter went through three owners, racked up record losses, won Serie A just once

and did not advance through any Champions League knockout round until this season. Inter failed even to qualify for six straight years.

City's sustained success now sees it with the highest overall and sponsorship revenue of any club in world soccer last year, and the most expensive squad costing about \$1.3 billion in total.

Inter earned less than half of City's income of about 730 million euros (\$784 million) in 2022 and ran up a loss of 140 million euros, according to UEFA's latest industry analysis.

The entire Inter lineup that started the second leg of its semifinal game against AC Milan cost less in total transfer fees than just one City player — 117.5 million euros (\$126 million) record signing Jack Grealish — in the team that dismantled Real Madrid one night later.

"(Inter) are in the Champions League final despite the ownership, and Manchester City are in the final

because of the ownership," Kieran Maguire, author of "The Price of Football," told The AP on Thursday.

It was very different for most of the 68-year history of what started as the European Cup and became the Champions League.

When Inter last won in 2010, the Nerazzurri had been European champion more often than City had played total games in the competition: three titles for Inter, two games for City.

Inter won back-to-back titles in 1964 and 1965 and reached two more finals in 1967 and 1972. Three UEFA Cup titles also were won in the 1990s when Serie A was still the best, richest and most fashionable league in Europe.

Owned for most of this era by the Moratti family, billionaires in the oil industry, Inter also broke the world record transfer fee four times, including when it signed Brazilian striker Ronaldo from Barcelona.

Trout, Moniak use bats and gloves to power Angels past Cubs, 6-2

ANAHEIM, Calif., June 8 (AP): Mickey Moniak realizes the Los Angeles Angels are loaded with quality outfielders at the moment, so he strived to stay sharp in the cage and with video study during five straight days without playing in a game recently.

When he got another chance to contribute Wednesday night, Moniak delivered with his bat and his glove in another solid win.

Mike Trout homered, Moniak had a three-run double and Luis Rengifo hit a tying homer and a tiebreaking RBI single in Los Angeles' 6-2 victory over the Chicago Cubs.

Trout and Moniak also made stellar defensive plays for the Halos, who are on their first three-game winning streak in two weeks after taking the first two from the Cubs to open their homestand.

Despite posting an OPS of 1.038 in 13 games after his initial callup in May, Moniak was on the bench for five of the Angels' last six games on the road last week behind Trout, Taylor Ward and Hunter Renfroe. The inactivity didn't shake Moniak, who's finally getting a real chance to stick in the majors.

"I've got the confidence to be able to know I'll be in the right spot, even without seeing pitching for a few days," Moniak said. "The outfield depth in this organization right now is crazy. ... It's just a testament to the talent we've got. If one man goes down, the next guy is ready to go. It's not like there's a hole in the lineup."

Moniak came up with the bases loaded in the sixth and delivered a double to right on a hanging splitter from Mark Leiter Jr., one of the Cubs' top leverage relievers. Moniak knew Leiter's tendencies from their time as teammates in the Phillies organization, and he had studied the scouting reports on Chicago's bullpen.

India lose openers after Australia amass 469

LONDON, June 8 (PTI): India found themselves in a difficult situation with the early loss of their openers after Australia posted a commendable 469 in their first innings of the World Test Championship final, here on Thursday.

Australia added 142 runs to their overnight total with the loss of seven wickets before being bowled out one hour into the afternoon session. Mohammed Siraj cleaned up the tail and was the pick of India's bowlers with four wickets.

India batted for 10 overs before the tea break and were dealt a twin blow as skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill fell to Pat Cummins and Scott Boland respectively.

They were at 37 for two at tea with Virat Kohli (4 batting) and Cheteshwar Pujara (3 batting) in the middle, trailing Australia by 432 runs.

Both Rohit (15 off 26) and Gill (13 off 15) looked in good touch before flatter to deceive. Rohit missed a ball from Cummins that was angled in before Gill inexplicably decided to leave a delivery from Boland on length only to see his stumps being uprooted in the



following over.

The conditions are good for batting but India have a massive challenge at

hand.

After the lunch break, Alex Carey pushed Australia past 450 with a 48 off

69 balls.

His innings included a six off Ravindra Jadeja but an attempted reverse

sweep the following ball led to his downfall, trapping him in front of the stumps.

India got themselves back in the game with four wickets in the morning session on day two but Australia maintained their upper hand by reaching 422 for seven at lunch, following Steve Smith's 31st hundred.

Resuming the day at 327 for three, Travis Head (163 off 174) and Steve Smith (121 off 268) walked into the middle under bright sunshine at The Oval.

Smith, who was on 95 overnight, got two freebies on the pads from Mohammed Siraj in the first over of the day and he happily put them away for consecutive boundaries to complete his seventh hundred in England and third at the venue.

India were guilty of not using the short ball tactic early enough on the opening day but Siraj went for that from the get on Thursday.

Mohammed Shami too tried to mix it up with an odd bouncer but was not able to get the same zip from the surface as much as Siraj did.

While Smith was not bothered by India's tactic, Head looked in a bit of discomfort.

Siraj banged one short into his body in the sixth over of the day and Head walked across the stumps to pull it but ended up edging it to wicketkeeper K S Bharat.

Cameron Green was the next to go as he went for an expansive drive off a full ball from Shami but ended up being caught at second slip by an alert Shubman Gill.

The prized wicket of Smith came out of nowhere as he dragged an innocuous ball from Shardul Thakur back to his stumps. It was Thakur's first ball of the day, highlight his uncanny ability to provide a breakthrough out of the blue.

A brilliant piece of fielding from substitute Axar Patel got India their fourth wicket of the day as his one handed direct hit from mid off left Mitchell Starc well short of his ground. Though the sunny weather has made the pitch easier for batting, there is enough help for the fast bowlers.

Priyanshu, Arjun-Kapila duo exit Singapore Masters

SINGAPORE, June 8 (PTI): Upcoming Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat's dream run in the Singapore Masters Super 750 tournament ended with a pre-quarterfinal loss to third seed Kodai Naraoka, here on Thursday.

The unseeded Rajawat, who had stunned world No. 15 Kanta Tsuneyama of Japan in the opening round, lost to Naraoka 17-21 16-21 in straight games.

Having ousted HS Prannoy in the first round, the world No. 4 Naraoka of Japan maintained his lead as the world No. 37 Indian played a catching-up game throughout to go down in a 47-minute battle.

In the men's doubles, MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila lost to England's Ben Lane and Sean Vandy 15-21, 19-21 in a 41-minute affair.

Former India number one Kidambi Srikanth is now the lone Indian in the fray. He will take on Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee in the round of 16. The 2021 world championships silver medalist, Srikanth beat Thailand's Kantaphon Wangcharoen 21-15 21-19 in the opening round. Chia Hao Lee on the other hand beat Japan's Kenta Nishimoto in his opening match after being promoted to the main draw from the reserve. Earlier, double Olympic medalist Sindhu, who was the defending champion of



the event, had lost to world number 1 Akane Yamaguchi of Japan in the opening round.

Former World Championship bronze medalist Lakshya Sen and London Olympics bronze medalist Saina Nehwal too have exited in the first round itself.

World No 11 doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty and Commonwealth women's doubles bronze medalists, Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also have crashed out in their respective opening round matches.

India will return with best-ever medal haul from Asian Games, says Thakur

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday predicted that Indian athletes will return with the country's best-ever medal haul from the Asian Games later this year.

India are expected to send one of the largest contingents to the Asian Games this year with athletes competing in non-traditional sports like kurash, jujitsu, and chess.

A total of 600 athletes are expected to represent India across various sports, compared to 570 in the last edition and 541 in 2014.

"The improvement in facilities by the government has resulted in India's best-ever performance at the last Olympics, Paralympics, Deaflympics and Commonwealth Games. We won a record number of medals and we will do similarly in the Asian Games.

"I think India will have the best-ever performance in the Asian Games," Thakur told reporters on the occasion of Mission Olympic Cell's (MOC) 100th meeting here. India returned with a best-ever haul of 69 medals, including 15 gold, 24 silver and 30 bronze from the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang, Indonesia.

The minister informed that over 350 proposals of TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) group athletes worth ₹ 45 crore have also been approved in this Olympic cycle.

"For the preparation for Asian Games the government has till now sanctioned over ₹ 220 crore.



The government has spent Rs 450 crore in the current Olympic cycle on training and equipment. We have approved proposals of TOPS group athletes worth ₹ 45 crore," Thakur said.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has set July 15 as the deadline for sending final entries for the postponed Asian Games set to take place in Hangzhou, China from September 23 to October 8.

Selection trials for more than half of the Asian Games disciplines have already been conducted by the respective federations and rest would be finished by June 30.

"All associations are aiming to finalise their teams and finish the Asian Games selection trials till June 30 which is well before the July 15 deadline," Thakur said.

The government has also revised assistance to National Sports Federations with an outlay of Rs 1575 in the current Finance Commission cycle (2021-2025).

Furthermore, to attract the best talent and minds to handle operational aspects of TOPS scheme such as research work and management of athletes, the government has upgraded salary structure of TOPS for various posts by about 35 per cent.

Will the daughters get justice in this atmosphere of fear and intimidation: Phogat

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): Asian Games gold medalist and one of the prominent faces of the wrestlers' protest against WFI chief, Vinesh Phogat on Thursday wondered if the country's daughters would get justice in this "atmosphere of fear and intimidation".

Phogat's tweet came days after the 'minor', whose complaint had formed basis of FIR against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh under the POCSO Act withdrew her sexual harassment allegations against the outgoing WFI president.

"Will the daughters get justice in the atmosphere of fear and intimidation???" Vinesh wrote on her Twitter handle.

In another tweet, she said, "May these daughters not lose courage one by one because of the delay in this fight for justice??? God give courage to all."

The minor wrestler's father told PTI that they levelled sexual ha-



arrassment charges against Singh because he wanted to settle score with the WFI chief, who he held responsible for his daughter's defeat in trials for the Under 17 Asian Championships.

Vinesh, along with Olympic medalist grapplers Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Punia, had accused Brij Bhushan of carrying out sexual exploitation against female grapplers, including a minor.

On Wednesday, the aggrieved wrestlers agreed to suspend their protest for a week after the government asked them to wait till police completes its probe into the sexual harassment allegations against Brij Bhushan by June 15.

The wrestlers, after a nearly five-hour meeting with Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, said the government also assured them that the police would withdraw the FIRs filed against them.

The protesting wrestlers on Wednesday agreed to suspend their protest till June 15 after the government asked them to wait till police completes its probe into sexual harassment allegations against Singh by then.

The wrestlers were booked for violation of law and order on May 28 when they marched towards the new Parliament building without permission to hold 'Mahila Samman Mahapachayat'.

India storm into semifinals with 11-0 thrashing of Chinese Taipei

KAKAMIGAHARA (JAPAN), June 8 (PTI): The Indian junior women's hockey team confirmed its spot in the semi-finals of the Asia Cup by mauling Chinese Taipei 11-0 in its last pool match here on Thursday.

The win also cemented India's position atop Pool A. India finished the group stage of the tournament unbeaten, having won three games and drawn one.

The scorers for India were Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke (1'), Deepika (3'), Annu (10', 52'), Rutuja Dadaso Pisal (12'), Neelam (19'), Manju Chorsiya (33'), Sunelita Toppo (43', 57'), Deepika Soreng (46') and Mumtaz Khan (55').

India displayed their dominance from the word go, launching consistent attacks against Chinese Taipei.

Vaishnavi opened the scoring for India with a field goal, followed by Deepika who converted a penalty

corner to double the team's lead. Also, Annu and Rutuja scored a goal each before the end of the first quarter, giving India a comfortable 4-0 advantage.

The second quarter continued in a similar fashion, with India maintaining control of the game through ball possession and relentless attacks. Notably, Neelam found the back of the net, allowing India to enter half time with a commanding 5-0 lead.

India continued their dominance as Manju and Toppo scored field goals to make sure that the third quarter ended with India leading 7-0.

The Indian team showed no signs of slowing down in the final quarter, as Deepika Soreng, Annu, Mumtaz Khan and Toppo each scored a goal to help them win the match by a massive margin.

India will play Japan or Kazakhstan in the semifinal on Saturday.

NEW DELHI, June 8 (PTI): A day after calling off their protest against outgoing WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh having received assurance from the government, the wrestlers on Thursday expressed intent to take part in the Asian Games selection trials scheduled to be held later this month.

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday said that all national federations are aiming to finalise the squads for the Asian Games, well before the July 15 deadline set by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

The Games are set to take place in Hangzhou, China from September 23 to October 8.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) had on April 27 announced that a three-member ad-hoc committee

A two-member ad hoc committee of Bhupender Singh Bajwa and Suma Shirur, which is running the day-to-day affairs of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) since May 4 will be conducting the selection trials most likely in the last week of June.

However, the wrestlers want some more time to get ready for the trials.

"We want to take part in the selection trial but to prepare for it, we need at least a month



and a half of training," international wrestler Satyawart Kadian, who is also Sakshi Malik's husband, told PTI on Thursday.

Getting back into competition mode will be a tough task for the wrestlers as some haven't competed since the World Championships in September last year while some

of others last hit the mat even earlier, during the Commonwealth Games in August, 2022.

The grapplers had pulled out of a slew of international events recently while Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia also opted out of their international training camps in April due to the protest.



Miyu Kato strikes back with mixed doubles title at French Open

PARIS, June 8 (AP): Miyu Kato left behind the disappointment of her controversial disqualification in doubles by claiming the mixed doubles title at the French Open on Thursday. Playing with Tim Puetz of Germany, the pair defeated 2019 U.S. Open singles champion Bianca Andreescu of Canada and Michael Venus of New Zealand 4-6, 6-4, 10-6. Kato, a 28-year-old player from Japan, and her women's doubles partner were defaulted during their third-round match last week after Kato accidentally hit a ball girl in the neck after a point. Kato also forfeited all of her 21,500 euros (about \$23,000) in prize money and rankings points from women's doubles but was allowed to keep participating in mixed doubles. "It has been really challenging for me for the past few days," Kato said. "I want to thank all the players, coaches, everyone for their heartfelt messages of support."

While the two central figure of the protest -- Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Bajrang and world championship medalist Vinesh - figure in the long list, the same cannot be said about Rio Olympics bronze medalist Malik.

The wrestlers have been demanding the arrest of outgoing WFI chief Singh, who they have accused of sexually exploiting women wrestlers, including a minor.

However after a marathon meeting with Thakur on Wednesday where they were assured that a chargesheet will be filed by against Singh, the wrestlers suspended the protest till June 15 as a resolution seems to be round the corner.

On Thursday, Thakur reiterated that the wrestlers' demands, including the formation of a WFI Internal Complaints Committee headed by a female, will be met.

"I said yesterday as well, we had a very positive meeting with the protesting wrestlers. All the issues that they raise we discussed and we have said that the chargesheet will be filed till June 15 and the WFI elections will take place by June 30. "We want the wrestlers to return to the mat and take part in competitions," Thakur said.