

**BIGGEST TEAM TITLE IN BADMINTON**

Team India scales the peak with first ever Thomas Cup

Sen, Satwik-Chirag duo & Srikanth stun Indonesia in final

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, MAY 15

THE VAGUE whiff of a dream turned to reality as the week wore on, and India inched closer to the impossible — Thomas Cup, the ultimate team title in badminton. A dozen players in Bangkok and their coaches, there and in India, believed through-out. It's a little secret that they've known for a month now: they were going to win the Thomas Cup. This was a date with destiny, meticulously envisioned and executed by India's most underrated and talented sportspersons — the men's badminton players. Kidambi Srikanth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, Lakshya Sen and H S Prannoy. They have travelled

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Kidambi Srikanth (centre) celebrates with teammates after winning his decisive Thomas Cup match against Indonesia's Jonatan Christie on Sunday. *AP*

FULL COVERAGE, [PAGE 11](#)

‘This is the real World Cup... proud of this team win’



PULLELA GOPICHAND
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS

THE MOST heartening aspect of India's Thomas Cup team today was watching Chirag Shetty-Satwiksairaj Rankireddy beat Mohammad Ahsan-Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo. All the previous times that our boys faced

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Gautam Adani with Holcim CEO Jan Jenisch in Ahmedabad, Sunday. *PTI*

Biggest infra materials deal: Holcim's India biz is Adani's for \$10.5 billion

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 15

THE ADANI group has acquired Zurich-based Holcim's cement business in India for \$10.5 billion (about Rs 81,000 crore) in India's largest ever M&A transaction in the infrastructure and materials space.

Through its subsidiaries, Holcim holds 63.19% in Ambuja Cements Ltd and 54.53% in ACC Ltd (of which 50.05% is held through Ambuja Cements). This is the largest ever acquisition by Adani, which beat the JSW and Aditya Birla groups to the deal.

Holcim's exit from India follows several high-profile departures of multinational companies, including Ford, General Motors, Harley Davidson, MAN Truck,

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WORLD**U.S.: GUNMAN KILLS 10 IN LIVESTREAMED RACIST ATTACK****PAKISTAN: TWO SIKH BUSINESSMEN SHOT DEAD** [PAGE 9](#)**CONG BRAINSTORMING SESSION ENDS**

Rahul admits people connect lost, Sonia announces all-India yatra

MANOJ CG
UDAIPUR, MAY 15

HAVING SUFFERED staggering election defeats since 2014 under his leadership and that of his mother Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi on Sunday admitted that the Congress's "connection" with the people is "broken", and needs to be repaired urgently.

To reestablish that connection, Sonia announced the party will undertake a Bharat yatra from October 2 this year. The party also announced a series of organisational reforms at the end of its three-day chintan

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNNY



shivir here to bring new and young faces into leadership roles.

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EXPLAINED **E** Action remains to be seen

ADMISSION OF a "broken connection" and announcement of a Kanyakumari-to-Kashmir Yatra is acknowledgment of the need to go back to the people. But as always, the question of implementation remains.

CHINTAN SHIVIR: MORE REPORTS [PAGE 4](#)**WEST BENGAL****BENGALI TV ACTOR FOUND DEAD IN HER FLAT, KIN SUSPECT MURDER**, [PAGE 3](#)

‘The only way out is to fight for the cause of the people; a leader then emerges automatically’

BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA
CONGRESS LEADER

[PAGE 8](#)**PM VISITS LUMBINI TODAY**

With Buddhist centre, India looks to bolster cultural ties to Nepal

YUBRAJ GHIMIRE & DIVYAA
KATHMANDU, NEW DELHI, MAY 15

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will Monday travel to Lumbini in Nepal to participate in a ceremony to lay the foundation stone for a Buddhist cultural centre to coincide with Buddha Purnima.

Sources said PM Modi's brief visit to Lumbini — he is expected to be here between 10.30 am and 3.30 pm — is focused on bringing soft power to the centre stage of India-Nepal relations while also marking India's formal presence at the holy site that's barely 10 km away from the border.

The construction of the 'India



The site for India's Buddhist cultural centre. *Yubraj Ghimire*

International Centre for Buddhist Culture & Heritage' — to be undertaken by the International

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Entertainer & enigma, life was so much more than cricket for this reluctant star

PAGE 1
ANCHOR**SANDIP G**
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

TWO DAYS before the 2009 World Cup, Andrew Symonds, after months of abstinence from the bottle, snuck out of the hotel room and drank deep into the night. The next morning, Australia's then captain Ricky Ponting confronted him and conveyed the message that he was flying back home.

Symonds was far from being hurt. "Once I had got home from England, and everything had settled down, it was a relief," he



ANDREW SYMONDS
1975-2022

would later say. By that time, playing for his country had become a burden. "I felt like I was

in a cage. Always under the microscope. I wasn't having fun anymore. I wasn't enjoying it,"

he had admitted.

However, world cricket could never get enough of the entertaining all-rounder who was the spine of the Aussie team that intimidated every side they played in the late 90s and early 2000.

Late on Saturday night, Symonds, 46, died in a car crash outside of Townsville in his home state of Queensland. He played 26 Tests and featured in 198 ODIs, scoring six centuries, while also contributing 133 wickets. The ultimate all-purpose player, the IPL champion was on the wish list of all T20 teams.

For Symonds, an unabashed hitter of the cricket ball, playing the game was all about finding joy. But somewhere in his time,

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WEB EXCLUSIVE

'I ASKED SHAHID KAPOOR, TUM NAACHTE HO KI UDTE HO?' SUKHWINDER SINGH ON THE GOOSEBUMP-INDUCING HAIDER SONG | SCENE STEALER

In this edition of Scene Stealer, we speak to acclaimed singer Sukhwinder Singh, who won a national Award for his work in Haider song Bismil.

ENTERTAINMENT

MARVEL AND THE MADNESS OF CAMEOS

Doctor Strange is like a badly done SNL sketch multiverse

TECH

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EXPRESS AUDIO

Estimating India's real Covid death toll, with Dr Bhramar Mukherjee

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In this episode, host Sandip Roy talks to data scientist Bhramar Mukherjee, a professor of epidemiology, biostatistics, and global public health at the University of Michigan



Stranded passengers being evacuated from the railway station in Dima Hasao.

Northeast Frontier Railways

3 killed as heavy rain, landslides wreak havoc in Assam

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, MAY 15

AT LEAST three people have died and thousands have been affected as heavy rainfall continued to lash parts of Assam since Friday. On Sunday, as rail connectivity in the hill district of Dima Hasao snapped, the Air Force was called in to rescue stranded passengers.

According to a bulletin from the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (AS-DMA), 56,000 people across seven districts (Cachar, Dhemaji, Hojai, Karbi Anglong West, Nagaon, Nalbari and Kamrup) have been affected. More than 41,000 people have been affected in Cachar alone, followed by 13,523 in Hojai district.

The ASDMA release said that landslides, erosion and infra-structural damage, including those to bridges, were reported in Hojai, Dima Hasao, and Karimganj, among others. A landslide in Dima Hasao's Haflong revenue circle led to the death of a family of three.

Three more went missing on Sunday in Cachar district.

Earlier on Sunday, as Silchar-Guwahati Express and Guwahati-Silchar Express remained stranded at Ditokcherra and New Haflong stations in Dima Hasao, respectively, the Air Force airlifted 100-odd passengers from Ditokcherra.

Monsoon to hit Andaman Sea today

Pune: The southwest monsoon is most likely to hit the South Andaman Sea, Nicobar islands and Southeast Bay of Bengal on Monday, the India Meteorological Department said. Once realised, the monsoon will arrive over the islands nearly a week ahead of its normal schedule.

Mercury breaches 49 deg Celsius mark in North India

New Delhi: An intense heatwave scorched parts of north India on Sunday with places in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh recording 49 degrees Celsius and above while the weather office has warned of heavy rainfall across Kerala and sounded a red alert for five districts.

In Delhi, the Safdarjung observatory recorded 45.6 degrees Celsius while two weather stations in Mungeshpur in north-west Delhi and Najafgarh in southwest Delhi reported 49.2 and 49.1 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Banda district in Uttar Pradesh's Bundelkhand region recorded the maximum day temperature of 49 degrees Celsius, the highest in the state.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, this was the highest-ever temperature recorded in Banda in May. PTI

FROM PAGE ONE

Thomas Cup

to different outposts of the world, collecting experiences like globe-trotters collect magnets for the fridge door. Thomas Cup 2022 was within reach. They knew, they said as much, they hoped the country would believe, they didn't mind if it didn't. They were due this date — no matter what others reckoned.

On Sunday, India invited history for an elegant cup of tea, demolishing Thomas Cup royalty, Indonesia 3-0 in the finals. Denying them their 15th crown, while winning their first ever. Against all expectations. The reason why India's badminton fraternity read the tea leaves right was because it has closely watched and shepherded India's bunch of excellently proficient singles players, and built from scratch the doubles pairing of Chirag and Satwik.

There are parallels in India's sporting history. India's myriad gold-winning hockey teams. The 1983 World Cup cricket team. The 1971 men from West Indies who copped bouncers on helmet grilles. The 2001 Kolkata Test side that beat back a follow-on. It would be wrong to say the country, busy in getting by, was waiting for these. If anything, a minority of two dozen at best nurtured and believed in these dreams.

Lakshya Sen shrugged off a week of being pumelled by a host of top names, to rally from a set down to beat Anthony Ginting 8-21, 21-17, 21-16 on the back of resolute confidence in his defence that ballooned into attacking swagger in the kills.

Then, the Satwik-Chirag doubles duo pulled out the most audacious win of the tie, beating the hallowed Md Ahsan-Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo combo 18-21, 23-21, 21-19. Guilty through this season of flubbing 20-18 leads, Satwik-Chirag reversed the trend, winning from four match points away from defeat. This was patiently fought back, as big man Satwiksairaj brought on his big powergame, to support the hopping energiser bunny Chirag Shetty, who has believed more than anyone else. Keeping their nerve, playing fearless badminton, backing their incredible talent, the young Indians gave India the 2-0 lead.

Nothing oozes more class than Kidambi Srikanth playing the match of his lifetime though he would later wisely refuse to compare his various wins ever since he beat Lin Dan in China. This time, he stamped his sheer class against Jonatan Christie, winning 21-15, 23-21. There were audacious reflex returns at the net. There was resistance from Christie in the second. And then there was the signature Srikanth shot, an NFT that will stay priceless in traditional currency or bitcoin: the set-up smash and then the charging follow-up as he ran to the net for the matchpoint.

There have been fewer things more inevitable in Indian sport than the Srikanth crosscourt smash that sealed the deal, though this one will get tattooed in millions of memories. It wasn't just a smash, it was a crosscourt smash, a dipping, history demanding, dominating, crosscourt, jump smash as he leapt in the air, and time stopped, to bring India its unforgettable Thomas Cup triumph. No one could stop jumping thereafter. No one could stop tears from flowing down.

Srikanth was asked why it mattered in a day and age when the Thomas Cup didn't carry any prize money. "Today after people watched us, they said 'India won the Thomas Cup'. Not that Srikanth won or Prannoy won. But India won. Not everyone has the privilege to experience this feeling," said the man with solid old-world ethics, unblemished by the pulls-and-pushes of commerce all around him.

Both Lakshya Sen in this tour-

nament, and Satwik-Chirag over the last few months have copped some narrow losses that can break spirits. But on this day, all three fought from the brink, trailing a set each, clawing back from the valley of doom, to scale an ascent unprecedented in India's history. "Our record against the Indonesians was poor. But when it mattered, Satwik-Chirag delivered," coach Vimal Kumar said.

This was true of young Lakshya Sen, too. He braved a storm of losses — literally copping some big bruising losses, and then flew fast enough for the sand to fill up his nostrils against Ginting. Ginting is the circuit's fastest. Sen out-blitzed him.

India. Thomas Cup champs. Who'd've thunk? The players and their coaches sure did.

'Proud of team'

Kevin Sanjaya, they lost 11-0. It was as individuals. Today, they had Team India backing their efforts, planning and rooting for them. It made a difference, and this was a first where India played as a unit. Earlier, if Saina was playing, Sindhu wouldn't be there. And if Sindhu played, Saina wasn't around. If the doubles team played, the singles players weren't really invested. This was truly Team India's victory and I was so happy that Satwik-Chirag gave it back to the Indonesians.

In my mind, I knew this was possible, when you do the calculations. But whether it would actually be possible depended on the individual players, and today they pulled it off perfectly, which was wonderful to watch. When we speak of Indian team sport at the highest level, this is the real World Cup that India has won in a game spread globally and with fancied powerhouses. I am proud of being a badminton player today. This was coming for years, but things fell into place now. I might even believe in the magic of our players.

Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Denmark will be in shock tonight, wondering how India won. This will be reported for years. In Malaysia, they still recall stories of how they won a title in 1991 with the Siedek brothers, and they earned Datukhoods (similar to knighthoods) and acres of land. Legends were born. Mind you, the Indonesian and Malaysian teams, the moment they lost, are going to be wondering "Can I go back home?". You'll hear 'change the coach, change the association' calls in the aftermath. That's how much the Thomas Cup means to those badminton-crazy nations. Coaches fear for their jobs, and players get shredded. If you had told half the guys in my association the day before that India is winning the Thomas Cup, even they wouldn't believe it. But the players did.

In my time, we've lost 1-5 to Sri Lanka and 2-5 to Pakistan even. For us to qualify for the 16-team elite event used to be mighty, and when we beat Korea and Japan to qualify for that Thomas Cup and Uber Cup (for women) in 1999 Delhi, we thought that's great. Both Prakash (Padukone) sir and I used to play both singles and doubles, we didn't even have doubles specialists then. We would be given two Yonex T-shirts and we would be on our way to these events. So you can understand where we started and the enormity of this.

India's depth has been outstanding. And if there were five more singles, India would have still won. You shouldn't keep fretting about the big gold medal not coming in the Olympics, instead keep pushing in team events. Badminton Association of India, Sports Authority of India and the Government helped us in plans to push 10 players in Top 25 to build more depth. We didn't build this depth in the women's team. The women players would play their own matches and not care for the rest of the team. Saina and Sindhu

didn't take the team along, we should have built that culture in the Uber Cup. That's the difference between bronze and gold.

This win comes from H S Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth not taking their places for granted, also Srikanth and Lakshya Sen fighting for that one spot. But credit to the boys, they competed while helping each other. That's a huge generous quality. They've each had debacles -- lost at Olympics, not qualified for Olympics, not been centrestage, lost big matches. That fire to prove a point has baked them a little more, which showed in their grit.

Opponents have begun to read Lakshya, and make life difficult for him. He was struggling at the corners, but he stood there and fought like a gladiator. That's character. Srikanth put incredible pressure on Jonatan Christie. It was the same in doubles. Our guys were fighting to be heroes; they were avoiding being labelled as "villains" in their countries.

It's been tough for India's male players with unfair comparisons with Saina and Sindhu. The Indian women raised the bar so much that a Super 500 win for the men barely registers now — getting into the Top 10, semis, quarters will never be big headlines. If they had lost the final today, all the excitement would have subsided. Lakshya made the All-England finals, but only winning it will put him on the same pedestal as Sindhu or Saina. So it's been tough.

There are players who get the chance and pounce on it, like Saina, Sindhu, Jwala (Gutta), and there are those that are not brave enough to make the most of the opportunity. Prannoy, Satwik Chirag, Srikanth, Lajshya proved they are brave enough to take that chance. Winning a final is being brave.

I will celebrate this win with my family tonight, but the real party will be at the academy tomorrow. But I'm going to wake up, and wonder 'What next?' These boys showing they can win the biggest title means I have to start thinking about the next difficult target.

I remember, Satwik's mother had come to me when he was young, she spoke of how she always dreamt of playing singles. Convincing the likes of Satwik, Dhruv, Krishna or even Gayatri that you can be a decent player in singles but a great one in doubles took effort. This title is validation that big things can happen in doubles. If these men don't clutter their minds with thoughts of money or count medals or becoming celebrities on social media, stay in the moment, play smart and aggressive, then great things will happen. It's not a dream India dreamt actively, but now the country will live the dream with these amazing players.

(The writer is a Sydney Games Olympian, All England champion and national badminton head coach. He spoke to Shivani Naik)

Reluctant star

as cricket stepped into a more cut-throat, professional realm, he became a misfit.

Along with the sport, the culture around Australian cricket was rapidly changing. Gone was the matey-ship of the Mark Taylor-Steve Waugh era, replaced by a regimented and structured environment of gnarled pros, wherein he felt as imprisoned as suffocated.

He belonged to that in-between generation of cricket, wherein the game had not shed its rustic charm yet not fully embraced modernism. He felt vulnerable.

Former captain Mark Taylor summed up Symonds perfectly. "In a way he was a bit of an old-fashioned cricketer, who would not have been out of place playing in the '70s or '80s. He just wanted to entertain."

He was a cavalier in an era of confused roundheads. "I'm pas-

sionate about cricket, but it is not the be all and end all of my life. I like the outdoors, and I like having a good time," he once told the press.

As the calendar got busier and restrictions tighter, he craved that me-time. He hated all that new-age jazz -- advertisements, sponsors, interview requests, endless team meetings -- and in the rare time he got, he ravenously took to the bottle. "I would let nothing get in the way of it, and drank as though alcohol were to disappear from the face of the earth," said the cricketer whose only dream in cricket was to share a drink with his hero Keith Miller, who was as charismatic as he was colourful.

Inevitably, Symonds got branded a rebel, worse a trouble-maker.

Another era, another time, his rogue fishing trip to Darwin would have embellished his cult; the Brendon McCullum rant would have been applauded as a show of Aussie vigour; and him punching someone at the bar or shoulder-charging a streaker would have the world affectionately calling him "one of those characters".

Even the monkeygate incident, which would follow him everywhere, would have been perceived differently, or at least would not have spiralled into the melodrama it turned out to be. "I didn't realise the politics, the power, the money until this moment in my career. I didn't realise how powerful one player, one incident could be, how much money was at stake and the ramifications," he said, referring to the incident during India's tour of Australia in 2008.

Between January 2008 and 2009, he was at the heart of almost every cricketing scandal that brewed in Australia. He was projected as the metaphor of the decadence that had crept into Australia's cricket culture. He was fined and sacked several times, made to apologise and made to sign an agreement that if found drunk, he would immediately be axed from the team, before the 2009 T20 World Cup. As it turned out, he did, and was axed forever.

But Symonds, typically, had no regrets. "The only regret I have in cricket was signing that contract. If I had my time again I would have said, 'You know what?' There is no way I'm signing that," he later said.

Here, as well in the past, Symonds was just being Symonds. True to himself, his instincts and values, those that would have endeared him to the masses in a different era, he found himself judged by an era that was at odds with his spirit, like a bird imprisoned in a golden cage. He loved cricket, but perhaps he loved himself even more.

The crux of Symonds the cricketer was his own tussle with the changing times, a battle he was doomed to lose.

Rahul

As curtains came down on the brainstorming session, there were indications that Rahul is likely to return as Congress president later this year. While Sonia delivered a short speech, Rahul spoke at length.

The former Congress president attacked the BJP government at the Centre, accusing it of spreading hatred, pressuring the judiciary, arm-twisting the Election Commission, destroying institutions, and muzzling the media.

But his focus was more on preparing the party to "go back to the people"; he told the chintan shivir there were no "shortcuts" to revival.

The party will have to accept that its "connection" with the people has been snapped, and it should work towards reestablishing that connection, Rahul said. The entire focus of the Congress currently is on "internal matters" such as who is getting what post,

he said, and asked the leaders to turn their attention towards the people.

"It is a complaint. Our entire discussion, our conversation...is about our internal matters...who is getting which post. Internally that is our focus. In today's time this internal focus will not work. Our focus should be external. We will have to turn our gaze to the people and we will have to go to the people. Not just for us...for the country...Be it our senior leaders, junior leaders, or workers, we should go to the people and sit with them without thinking about anything..." Rahul said.

"Their (the people's) issues...we should understand. And the connection that we used to have with the people...jo Congress party ka connection janta se toota hai usko hame accept karna padega... We will have to reestablish that connection...the people want that... They understand that only the Congress can take the country forward..."

The party will take out a yatra in October to strengthen the connection with the people, Rahul said. "That is the only way... Shortcuts will not help. It cannot be done through any shortcuts. It can only happen by shedding sweat. We can do it. You can do it. We have the ability and that is our DNA. This organisation has come out of the people and we will have to go to the people again," he said.

Sonia announced a "national Kanyakumari to Kashmir Bharat Jodo Yatra beginning on Gandhi Jayanti this year". "All of us will participate in it," she said. "The Yatra is to strengthen the bonds of social harmony that are under stress, to preserve the foundational values of our Constitution that are under assault and to highlight the day-to-day concerns of crores of our people."

Concluding her short address, Sonia said the party would surely overcome the challenges it faces. "We will overcome. We will overcome. We will overcome. That is our determination. That is our nav sankalp (new resolve). The Congress will have a new upad (rise). That is our nav sankalp," she said.

Rahul said his fight was against the ideology of the RSS-BJP and the "hatred and violence that they spread".

"For me it is the fight for my life... I cannot accept that hatred, violence and anger can be spread in our dear nation. We are up against some big forces. RSS and the BJP organisation, all the institutions... Don't think we are fighting against a political party. We are not fighting against a political party...the political party is just a part. We are fighting against every institution of India. We are fighting against the biggest crony capitalists... That is the fact," he said.

He was not afraid, Rahul said. "I am not scared of these forces. I don't care. I have not done corruption in my entire life. I haven't taken a single penny from Bharat mata. I am not scared of speaking the truth... Together we will defeat the BJP and the RSS organisation and their ideology," he said.

Some senior leaders and workers of the party sometimes felt depressed, Rahul said. "It is normal. The fight is not easy. Don't think the fight is easy." Regional parties cannot take on the RSS-BJP, he said, "because this is a battle of ideologies". "You have seen the ideology of the RSS is fighting against the ideology of the Congress. BJP will talk about the Congress, its leaders and workers but will not talk about regional parties. Because they know that regional parties have a space but they cannot defeat the BJP. Because they don't have an ideology. They have different approaches. We have a centralized approach. And our fight is about ideology."

"This is not a political fight.

This is a fight for the future of the country and to save the country... It is our responsibility to go to the people and say you are being divided...and the country will be weakened because of that. No one will benefit. The country will suffer because of that," he said.

Nepal

Buddhist Confederation (IBC), India, with financial support from the Ministry of Culture -- comes decades after most foreign nations, including US, China, Canada, France, Germany and Thailand, among others, built their centres in Lumbini as an instrument of promoting Buddhist philosophy.

Officials in India's Ministry of Culture said that the PM, besides offering prayers at the Mayadevi temple in Lumbini, will also deliver an address at a Buddha Jayanti event organised by the Lumbini Development Trust.

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office on Sunday said the PM will be visiting Lumbini at the invitation of Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. "I am honoured to follow in the footsteps of millions of Indians to pay reverence at the sacred site of Lord Buddha's birth. I also look forward to meeting Prime Minister Deuba again after our productive discussions during his visit to India last month. We will continue to build on our shared understanding to expand cooperation in multiple areas, including in hydropower, development and connectivity."

The PM's visit to Lumbini comes amidst China's evident interest in Lumbini. Almost a decade ago, China had offered to build Lumbini as a world peace centre at a cost of three billion dollars, besides holding talks on bringing China's railway right up to Lumbini.

Modi's visit and his laying the foundation stone for the Buddhist Culture Centre -- estimated to cost INR 1 billion and take three years to complete -- will mark India's first attempt to develop strong linkages with Nepal's Buddhist heritage sites.

Modi's helicopter ride from Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh, where Buddha is said to have attained Nirvana, will terminate at a newly built helipad in Lumbini, from where he is expected to go to the Maya Devi temple, before laying the foundation stone for the Buddhist centre.

PM Modi and PM Deuba are also scheduled to jointly address a congregation of people, including lamas.

Though there has been no official word yet, indications are that "developmental issues" are likely to be discussed when the two prime ministers, joined by officials from two sides, hold a meeting before Deuba hosts a lunch in Modi's honour. India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra recently stated that the two countries will pick up from where they left during Deuba's three-day visit to India last month.

The two sides had discussed the need to sort out border disputes, especially the Lipulekh dispute that flared up in 2018-19, but Deuba's three-day visit had ended without a joint communiqué.

Sources in Kathmandu said the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) will sign two Memoranda of Understanding with authorities in Nepal -- one on setting up the Dr B R Ambedkar Chair for Studies on Buddhism at Lumbini University and another on a Chair Professor at Kathmandu University.

India's Ministry of Tourism has collaborated with Nepal to build a trans-national Buddhist Tourist Circuit to trace the footsteps of Buddha, starting from Lumbini and concluding at Kushinagar. An international airport was recently inaugurated at Kushinagar.

Sources said the two PMs will discuss the proposed Buddhist circuit linking Lumbini with Kushinagar, Bodhgaya, Rajgir,

Nalanda and Sarnath, among other centres linked to Buddha's legacy. This will be in addition to the project to build the Ramayana circuit linking various sites in the two countries.

"It's likely that the two PMs will also discuss ways to explore harnessing of the West Seti River that flows through western Nepal," a senior government official in Kathmandu said.

Adani

Hutchison, Etisalat, Fidelity, and Citibank, which sold its retail business recently, and some investment banks.

Holcim said the corresponding offer share prices of Rs 385 for Ambuja Cement and Rs 2,300 for ACC translate into cash proceeds of CHF 6.4 billion.

Ambuja Cements and ACC currently have a combined installed production capacity of 70 MTPA. "The two companies are among the strongest brands in India with immense depth of manufacturing and supply chain infrastructure, represented by their 23 cement plants, 14 grinding stations, 80 ready-mix concrete plants and over 50,000 channel partners across India," Adani said.

With this acquisition, Adani is now India's second largest cement manufacturer after Ultratech Cement of the Aditya Birla group.

Gautam Adani, chairman, Adani group, said: "With Holcim's global leadership in sustainability, we are acquiring some of the most efficient building materials operations in India, powered with clean technologies like heat recovery systems."

The Adani group last year set up two cement subsidiaries -- Adani Cementation Ltd, which was planning to set up two cement units at Dahaj in Gujarat and Raigarh in Maharashtra; and Adani Cement Ltd.

"We recognize that Ambuja and ACC operations are energy-intensive and therefore when combined with our renewable power generation capabilities we gain a big head start in the decarbonisation journey that is a must for Indian industry," Adani said.

Shares of Ambuja Cements which has a market capitalisation of Rs 71,244 crore, closed 3.79% down at Rs 358.80 on Friday. ACC closed with a loss of 3.02% at Rs 2,113.70 and a market capitalisation of Rs 39,692 crore.

Holcim CEO Jan Jenisch said: "In the last twelve months, we have invested CHF 5 billion in Solutions & Products as a new growth engine for the company, while continuously pursuing bolt-ons in aggregates and ready-mix concrete. Holcim is ready to seize further opportunities, in line with our 'Strategy 2025 -- Accelerating Green Growth', to become the global leader in innovative and sustainable building solutions."

Holcim bought Ambuja Cement for \$800 million in 2005. ACC was bought by Ambuja in three tranches from the Tata group for Rs 370 per share between 1999 and 2001.

With India's cement consumption at just 242 kg per capita, compared to the global average of 525 kg per capita, there is significant potential for the growth of the cement sector in the country.

While India continues to be the world's second largest cement market, it has less than half the global average per capita cement consumption, Adani said.

"In statistical comparison, China's cement consumption is over seven times that of India's. When these factors are combined with the several adjacencies of our existing businesses that include the Adani Group's ports and logistics business, energy business, and real estate business, we believe that we will be able to build a uniquely integrated and differentiated business model and set ourselves up for significant capacity expansion," Adani said.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, MAY 16, 2022

3 WEST BENGAL

Fake call centre racket: Woman associate of 'kingpin' held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 15

IN ITS ongoing probe into a fake call centre racket, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Kolkata Police on Sunday arrested a woman.

"The arrested woman is one of the main associates of Sandip Biswas, the kingpin of the racket. She has been sent to 12 days of police custody," said Meeraj Khalid, DIG (CID Operations).

Twenty people, including Biswas, have been arrested in connection with the racket since the CID began conducting raids on May 12.

"A large number of fake documents, registers, diaries, rent/lease agreement papers, mobile phones, SIM cards, laptops, a Renault Kwid car and Rs 30 lakhs in cash have been seized. The 20 accused people operating from the three call centres – Hare Street, Bowbazar, and Shakespeare Sarani – have been arrested," said Khalid.

"The accused were involved in cheating people by luring them to invest in fake insurance policies, promising huge returns and arranging quick bank loans. This racket, which was being run by Sandip Biswas of Rajarhat, was actively involved in cheating people with false promises. All the three call centers have been sealed," said a senior officer.

MET: RAIN IN SOUTH BENGAL THIS WEEK

Kolkata The weather department on Sunday predicted rain or thunder-shower over next five days in south Bengal districts, including Kolkata.

Kolkata experienced 23.8 mm rainfall in 24 hours till Sunday morning and recorded a maximum temperature of 34.7 degree Celsius on Sunday, the department said. **PTI**

Rahim re-elected DYFI chief, Himagnharaj new gen secy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 15

THE CPI(M)'s youth wing DYFI on Sunday re-elected AA Rahim, a Rajya Sabha member from Kerala, as its national president and made Himagnharaj Bhattacharya of West Bengal its new general secretary.

On the concluding day of 11th national conference at Salt Lake in Kolkata, a DYFI functionary said the youth organi-

sation elected its new central committee comprising 77 persons, including 15 women, and an 18-member secretariat.

Of the 77 seats, 17 will be filled by representatives of states to which these are allotted to, he added. The 77-member committee includes Sanjeev Kumar (treasurer), Meenakshi Mukherjee (state president), Dhruvajyoti Saha, Kaltan Dasgupta, Bikash Jha, Ibrahim Ali, Parmita Ghosh Chowdhury, Ayanangshu Sarkar and

Himagnharaj, who replaced Abhoy Mukhopadhyay, started with CPIM's student wing in South 24 Parganas

Sachin Khanti.

Himagnharaj, who replaced Abhoy Mukhopadhyay, started with the CPIM's student organi-

sation in South 24 Parganas.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, he said, "We have to intensify our movement against unemployment and to save our Constitution and secularism which are in danger under the BJP-RSS. We know the fight will not be easy but we have to fight it."

Despite being elected as DYFI general secretary, he is yet to be named in the CPM's state committee.

Rahim, who has journalism and law, is currently conducting

research on print and Islamic media. He had also contested the Kerala Assembly elections before becoming a Rajya Sabha member.

While being secretary of the Kerala youth wing, he also did work in the field of environmental protection and had been seen leading the 'Recycle Kerala' movement in the state. Himagnaraj is also at the forefront of the campaign to save mangrove forests in the Sunderbans.

Compulsory fire safety audit at all workplaces in Kolkata: Mayor

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 15

IN THE wake of fire tragedy in Delhi's Mundka that left 27 people dead, Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim has ordered a compulsory fire safety audit at all the workplaces in the city.

"A high power committee, which was formed with the fire brigade, municipality and police officials to look into the firefighting system in the city, has been working regularly," said Hakim.

Hakim, who also holds the portfolio of Transport Department in the state Cabinet, said that he has urged his counterpart in the Fire & Emergency Services Department, Sujit Bose, to make fire audit compulsory in Kolkata firefighting system.

"I will suggest the minister to check the commercial buildings or the areas concerned before issuing a fire licence. This will reduce incidents of fires. I will appeal to Sujit Bose to issue a fire safety licence after examining all the aspects of the firefighting system," Hakim added.

Meanwhile, Bose assured that the state has all sophisticated equipment for fire fighting.

West Bengal has seen some massive fire incidents in the past. At present, there are 130 fire Stations in the state and over 5,500 fire personnel are engaged in tackling emergencies.

PRIMA FACIE SUICIDE: POLICE

Bengali TV actor Dey found dead in her flat, family suspects murder

25-year-old found hanging from ceiling fan, police question her live-in partner

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 15

BENGALI TELEVISION actor Pallavi Dey was found dead in her rented flat in Kolkata's Garfa area on Sunday morning, police said. Dey (25), who was playing the female lead in the TV show '*Mon Mane Na*', was found hanging from a ceiling fan, with the investigators claiming that prima facie it appeared to be a case of suicide.

Dey's family, however, raised the suspicion that she may have been murdered.

An official said, "Dey was rushed to the MR Bangur Hospital where she was declared dead. We are investigating the circumstances that led to her death. The actor's body has been sent for post-mortem examination."

The police in an official statement said, "The actor was found hanging from a ceiling fan with the help of a bedsheet. The incident took place at about 9:30am. A case of unnatural death has been registered."

Dey was reportedly in a live-in relationship with her boyfriend Shagnik Chakraborty, officials said, adding that he was being questioned at the Garfa police station. Shagnik, who wanted in a private company, told the police that he found the door locked from inside when he returned after going out for a smoke in the morning. He broke open the door and found Pallavi's body hanging, he claimed, adding that he informed the police.

Sources said she shifted to a



Pallavi Dey was playing the female lead in the TV show '*Mon Mane Na*'

rented flat only last month. Her father Nilu Dey said, "Her partner had a registered marriage with someone else two years ago and we came to know about this six months back. There was another girl who he was close to and it would often create trouble in their relationship. We don't know who saw her hanging."

Shagnik's mother Sandhya Chakraborty said, "We were not happy with the live-in concept but they are adults and the girl side had no issue. We wanted them to stay together after marriage only. She was short-tempered and would talk rudely to us. So we did not speak to her very often."

Born and brought up in Bengal, Dey was first selected for a lead role in the Bengali show '*Ami Sirajer Begum*'. Her other TV shows include '*Reshma Japni*', '*Kunjo Chhaya*' and '*Saraswati Prem*'. Over the years, she has portrayed a wide range of characters in several television serials. Dey's colleagues from the TV industry said people were waiting for her at the set as she was likely to report for shooting on Sunday.

Centre relaxes procurement norms for shrivelled, broken wheat grains

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

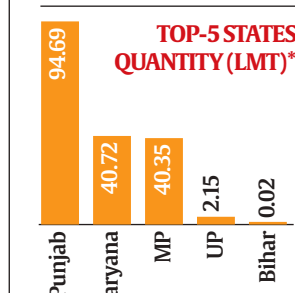
THE CENTRE on Sunday announced a major relaxation in the Fair and Average Quality (FAQ) norms of wheat by raising the maximum permissible limit of "shrivelled and broken grains" to 18 per cent from the existing 6 per cent. The move is aimed at providing relief to Punjab and Haryana farmers during the ongoing rabi marketing season.

A statement issued by the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said: "The Centre has decided to allow FCI to procure wheat in Punjab and Haryana, including UT of Chandigarh, for central pool by relaxing the FAQ of shrivelled and broken grains up to 18 per cent without any value cut. This decision will reduce the hardships of farmers and avoid distress sale of wheat."

The move comes after the two states wrote to the Centre, seeking relaxation in the Uniform Specifications of Wheat for RMS 2022-23. They had urged the Centre to raise the maximum permissible limit of shrivelled and broken grains to 20 per cent.

According to the Food Ministry, Central teams were de-

WHEAT PROCURED (2022-23)



*Figures till May 10, 2022

REFRACTIONS IN FAQ NORMS

Category	Max permissible limit
Foreign matter	0.75%
Other food grains	2%
Damaged grains	2%
Slightly damaged grains	4%
Moisture	14%

Source: Food Corporation of India



A grain market in Patiala, Sunday. Harmeet Sodhi

CENTRE REVISES CLOSING DATE FOR PROCUREMENT

May 31: Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, J&K
June 10: Rajasthan
June 15: UP, MP, Gujarat, HP
June 30: Uttarakhand
July 15: Bihar

puted in Punjab and Haryana in April-May to collect samples from mandis, which were later analysed in FCI labs. "The results indicated presence of shrivelled and broken grains beyond FAQ norms," the statement said.

"The emergence of shrivelled grains is a natural phenomenon appearing as a result of extreme heat wave in March. These adverse weather conditions are beyond the control of farmers and hence, they should not be pe-

nalised for such natural occurrence," it said, adding: "Accordingly, the change in texture of the grain deserves to be sympathetically considered. Thus, relaxation in FAQ norms would protect farmers' interests."

In \$60-mn UN scam, \$2.5-mn housing investment in Goa, and no house to show

KRISHN KAUSHIK & MAYURA JANWALKAR
NEW DELHI, PANAJI, MAY 15

A \$60-MILLION scandal involving loans and grants by a little-known UN agency also included a \$2.5 million investment to build affordable houses in India in 2019 — none of which have materialised yet.

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which deals with operational projects, had entrusted the entire sum to a single British businessman and now faces \$22 million in bad debts, as per a New York Times Report earlier this month.

A Singapore-based firm, owned by the businessman, David Kendrick, was in charge of getting at least 50,000 houses built in Goa for \$2.5 million, UN documents show.

A couple in Delhi, Amit Gupta and Arti Jain, are the directors of this firm — Sustainable Housing Solutions (SHS) Holdings Pvt Ltd — that has little to show in its books, registering zero revenue and Rs 27,289 in losses in 2020-21. The project was under the Sustainable Infrastructure Impact Investments (S3I) initiative, launched in 2018, which is now being probed by the UN for allo-

cating all its funding to companies linked to Kendrick. The head of UNOPS, Grete Faremo, also stepped down earlier this month over the issue that has embarrassed the world body.

Gupta, who is the CEO of SHS, told *The Indian Express* that the project had been shelved.

A senior Goa government official confirmed to *The Indian Express* that a presentation was made to officials by SHS Holdings for the construction of the proposed housing units in Goa.

However, officials had questioned how supporting infrastructure like power and roads would be made available for the housing units also. They also had reservations about how the government could award such a large housing project to a private firm without a tendering project, said this official, requesting anonymity.

"No land was identified for the project. In fact, the discussions did not even reach the stage where the fund-sharing pattern for the project was discussed," the official said. Gupta claimed that it was the Goa government that had approached UNOPS.

"There was an agreement with the Goa government in February 2019 and then there was a supplementary agreement

signed in March 2019. We sent some follow-up mails after that because the state was supposed to allot land to us. We followed up till August-September 2019. When we did not get a response, we were told by UNOPS that it was Goa that wanted these houses to be built and that if they don't want to follow up, we don't have to either. Whenever they want to come in, they can. We left it there at that point in time."

State government officials, however, said no such proposal had been made to UNOPS and had that been the case, the project would not have been shelved.

Sources said that discussions last took place with SHS Holdings in February 2019, and that the file was shelved after the death of then Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar the same year. At least a couple of meetings were held with SHS India officials but nobody from UNOPS had met government officials, they said.

While the former chief of UNOPS, Faremo, had said in 2019 that 50,000 affordable houses would be built in India, a 2020-2021 internal UN audit document put that number at 100,000.

Asked if houses are being built by SHS in other states, Gupta admitted that none had been made, but said it was due to the pan-

demie and added that discussions are still ongoing with some governments. "There were other projects as well that we have been discussing, we have been working out with the UN. But there is no press release on them. It all depends upon the UN, when they want to declare the other projects that we have been working on."

He claimed that all information regarding expenditure for the UNOPS projects is shared with the agency "on a monthly basis", and that the UN investigation regarding the loans "has not come to him".

Asked about the firm's lack of business, Gupta said: "When we formed SHS India, there were a lot of matters with regards to compliances and everything, so all the expenditure we have been doing in SHS India has all been done through our holding company. No expense has been done through SHS Projects so far... because the project wasn't complete on this company."

UNOPS gave nearly US\$60 million to Kendrick, and his daughter, Daisy Kendrick for wind farms, sustainable housing projects and a video for the agency by a pop star. An internal investigation into the transactions was completed on May 10.

Cops booked for murder as woman 'shot dead' during raid in UP's Siddharthnagar

Lucknow: A murder FIR was registered Sunday against unidentified policemen after a 53-year-old woman was allegedly shot dead following a police raid in Siddharthnagar's Kodara Grant village in connection with a suspected case of cow slaughter on Saturday night.

Roshni was allegedly shot dead while her son was being taken for questioning, said police. "The residents of the area attacked the police team and opened fire. The woman suffered a bullet injury during the attack

and died during treatment at a hospital," said the police.

The woman's family and neighbours alleged that cops had opened fire — a charge denied by police. A video-graphed autopsy was conducted, after which the body was handed over to her family. "The autopsy stated there is an exit and entry wound. We are investigating how the woman was shot," said SP Yesh Veer Singh. Heavy police force was deployed in the village. Police said raid came after four persons from Kodara Grant were arrested in a

case of cow slaughter four days ago.

"The accused told us the names of residents involved in cow slaughtering," said police.

Circle Officer Pradeep Yadav said, "A team reached village and decided to take Roshni's son for questioning. But villagers surrounded them. The situation took an ugly turn when they attacked the police team and started pelting stones. In the meantime, Abdul managed to escape. The residents then opened fire at police," he said. **ENS**

Civilian killed in J&K crossfire, probe ordered

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, MAY 15

POLICE ON Sunday said a civilian was killed in crossfire between militants and a joint team of police and Central Reserve Police Force in south Kashmir. The relatives of the civilian, however, contested police's claim. The Shopian administration has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the killing. Shoiab Ahmad Ganie (22), a resident of Turkwagam village, Shopian, was killed in crossfire during the "chance encounter",

police said.

"Terrorists fired upon joint patrol party of RPF 182 Bn (and) SOG of Pulwama near the bridge connecting Litter (village of) Pulwama with Turkwagam, Shopian. During the exchange of fire, 01 civilian namely Shoiab Ah Ganie of Turkwagam in Shopian got injured... He (the civilian) was referred to District Hospital Pulwama for treatment where he succumbed to injuries. Terrorists after brief chance encounter managed to slip into nearby orchards... A case has been registered and investigations taken up," Kashmir

Zone Police tweeted.

However, the relatives of Shoiab contested police's claims. "He was in his shop wearing an olive shirt. When the forces reached there, he came down from his shop. The forces asked him to put his hands up and then, fired at him. They are now making up the stories to save the personnel behind the cold-blooded murder," said a relative.

A senior police officer said: "It will be clear in police investigation and magisterial inquiry". Later in the day, Shopian DC Sachin Kumar ordered a magisterial inquiry into the killing. **ENS**

PAGD seeks safe working environment for Pandits

Srinagar: The leaders of People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration and a BJP delegation on Sunday met Lt Governor Manoj Sinha to seek safe working environment for the Kashmiri Pandit employees posted in the Valley.

On Sunday morning, PAGD leaders led by its president Farooq Abdullah called on Lt Governor Sinha at Raj Bhawan in Srinagar. Abdullah was accom-

panied by ex-CM and Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti, Communist Party leader M Y Tarigami, Awami National Conference senior vice-president Muzaffar Shah and National Conference parliamentary Hasnain Masoodi.

"The meeting was positive. We met him (Sinha). We had only one issue to discuss and that was of Kashmiri Pandits. **ENS**

4 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI **CONFIDENTIAL**



KASHMIR TRIP

CHIEF JUSTICE of India NV Ramana was in Srinagar this week-end to lay the foundation stone for the new court complex in the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. He began his address invoking Urdu poet Ali Jawad Zaidi and read out a couplet in Urdu. The CJ said that although he has visited Kashmir several times, he is always moved by the hospitality and kindness of the people there. Incidentally, the petitions challenging the dilution of special status to Kashmir is pending before a bench headed by CJI Ramana.

MISSING OUT

BY NOW it is evident that the BJP's decision to appoint Manik Saha as Biplab Deb's successor in Tripura has not gone down well with a section of the party's state leadership. On Sunday, as Saha took oath as the new CM, Union minister Pratima Bhoumik made a cryptic remark while speaking to reporters. Bhoumik said she became emotional on Saturday as "I am not mechanical". Pressed further, she said she would leave it to the interpretation of others on whether she let her emotions show out of joy or sadness. "Apko jo samajhna hai aap samajhlo," she said. It is believed that Bhoumik was among the names the BJP considered before picking Saha.

LANGUAGE GAP

THAT THE Congress has to regain lost ground in the Hindi heartland to give a challenge to the BJP is accepted by party leaders across the country. But the absence of an English version of the declaration adopted at the end of the three-day Udaipur chintan shivir has annoyed leaders from other regions, especially the delegates from the South and North-East. The declaration in Hindi was read out by Ajay Maken but no English version was circulated to the delegates. Many leaders said it was a departure from the past and wondered what the reason was. Incidentally, out of the 53 Lok Sabha MPs of the party, half are from the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana. The party has as many as 15 MPs from Kerala alone.

DISCORDANT NOTE

THE STATEMENT by Rahul Gandhi that regional parties don't have an ideology, that they belong to some caste and that have different approaches was interesting given the fact that the Congress is part of the JMM-led government in Jharkhand and a partner in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra of which the NCP and Shiv Sena are partners. Moreover, the Congress fought the Lok Sabha elections and Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu in alliance with the DMK and the 2020 Assembly elections in Bihar in alliance with the RJD. The UDF mechanism in Kerala has always been projected as a shining example of the party's coalition skills. Wonder what all these parties would make out of Rahul's statement.

Khargone Collector, SP transferred

Bhopal: More than a month after violence during Ram Navami celebration in Khargone, the Madhya Pradesh government has transferred the district's collector and superintendent of police. Stone-pelting had taken place during the Ram Navami procession in Khargone city on April 10, leading to clashes and arson. The district administration also imposed curfew partially. **ENS**

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KOLKATA METRO RAIL CORPORATION LIMITED

75
Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Notice is hereby given to all concerned to note that 33KV AC & 750V DC supply at Mahakaran Metro Station and 3rd Rail Ch: 15.729 to Ch: 11.613 (East Bound) will be energized on or after 16/5/2022 and to be treated as live.

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e-Tender Notice No. 01/EE(Design)/2022-23

Online e-Tenders in two parts are invited from manufacturers or accredited representatives for Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 02 No. 132 KV SF6 Circuit Breaker at Obra Hydro-electric Project, Obra, Sonbhadra (U.P.) as detailed below.

- Cost of Tender inclusive of GST @ 18% (Rs.): Rs. 3540/-
- Earnest Money (Rs.): Rs. 21,000/-
- Date of Opening (Part-I): 13.06.2022 (at 14.30 hrs.)
- Last date for submission of e-bids online : 10.06.2022 (upto 14.00 hrs.)

Part-I of the e-bid shall contain uploaded techno-commercial bid along with documents in support of deposition of tender fee & earnest money (EMD). If EMD is submitted in form of BG then the original copy of same shall be submitted along with hard copy of techno-commercial bid documents. Part-II shall contain price bid. Tender can be downloaded from and uploaded on e-procurement website: www.etender.up.nic.in. Last date for submission of hard copy of techno-commercial bids shall be 13.06.2022 (upto 12.00 hrs.). Date of opening of price bid shall be intimated later. Undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the bids without assigning any reason thereof. Bidders should keep themselves updated in regard to publication of corrigendum (if any) by visiting e-procurement portal regularly. If the date of opening will be a holiday, the tender shall be opened on next working day at the same time.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (DESIGN)

Website : www.upjvn.org "Save Electricity in the interest of Nation"

CONGRESS CHINTAN SHIVIR

Task force to drive party reforms, advisory body of seniors soon: Sonia

MANOJ CG
UDAIPUR, MAY 15

AT THE end of the three-day chintan shivir here, the Congress on Sunday announced a raft of organisational reform measures to bring in new and young faces to leadership levels at all levels. Buried in the Udaipur declaration adopted by the shivir was a suggestion by the youth panel that a "retirement age" should be fixed for all "elected posts" and in Parliament, assemblies and legislative councils.

All the other proposals which the party had been talking about over the past three days – one family, one ticket rule with a caveat; one person, one post; 50 per cent representation for those below 50 years of age at all levels, including the CWC; and five-year term limit for those holding positions at all levels – were also announced.

Party president Sonia Gandhi announced that a "Compact Task Force" will be set up to drive the process of internal reforms "that are essential and that have been discussed in different groups over the last three days".

"These reforms with a focus on the 2024 Lok Sabha polls will cover all aspects of the organisation, including structure, rules for appointments to party posts, communications and publicity, outreach, finances and election management. The composition of the task force will be notified in



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at the 'Nav Sankalp Shivir' in Udaipur on Sunday. **PTI**

the next two-three days," she said.

Besides, Sonia said she has decided to set up an "advisory group" drawn from the CWC that would meet regularly to deliberate upon political issues and challenges before the party.

Sonia said the new group will not be a collective decision-making body "but will help me get the benefit of the vast experience of senior colleagues". Her stress was interesting as the G 23 leaders of the party had been seeking a revival of the parliamentary board mechanism for collective thinking and decision making. The proposal was not accepted by the CWC.

Asked about enforcing an age-ceiling, a veteran leader told *The Indian Express* "that will also come". Age ceiling, he said, was suggested in the meeting of the CWC, which approved the declaration "but not announced in def-

erence to the elders sitting there".

The declaration also includes a suggestion by the youth panel that in the future, 50 per cent of all posts in Congress governments will be reserved for those aged under 50 and the same criteria will be applied while selecting candidates from the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

In his speech, Rahul Gandhi said the idea that certain number of positions should be for younger people is a very important. "I am not saying there should be no older people. But I am saying when it comes to PCCs, block Congress committees... when it comes to our leadership we should have a healthy mix of youngsters and seniors," he said. Importantly, he said, "We must ensure the idea that one person per family should get one ticket."

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com



NEW CEC TAKES CHARGE

Rajiv Kumar takes charge as the 25th CEC at the Election Commission office in New Delhi on Sunday. Kumar will oversee the upcoming Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and J&K, and the 2024 general elections during his tenure. PTI

Split in BKU, leaders of new outfit say it will be apolitical

LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, MAY 15

THE BHARATIYA Kisan Union, which had spearheaded the 13-month-long farmers' protest against the Centre's three farm laws, on Sunday witnessed a split as a section of its leaders formed a separate outfit – BKU (Apolitical), led by Rajesh Singh Chauhan. The BKU, later, said that it has dismissed seven leaders of its outfit, calling them "anti-farmers".

Announcing the new outfit at Ganna Sansthan in Lucknow on the death anniversary of BKU founder Chaudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait, the leaders of BKU



BKU
spokesperson
Rakesh Tikait

(Apolitical) alleged that they were upset with the "political" statements made by BKU spokesperson Rakesh Tikait during the farm law protests and the recent Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh.

"BKU (Apolitical) has been formed because of the disagreements with BKU... Mahendra Singh Tikait was of the view that when we go to the government with 10 demands and even if four of them are accepted, the

agitation should be withdrawn. But what is the situation today? The agitation continued for 13 months (against the three farm laws) and the laws were repealed after that. And yet people are not satisfied. It is a big issue," Harinam Singh, the UP chief of the newly formed outfit, said.

A couple of days ago, Rakesh Tikait had met the rebel leaders in Lucknow and tried to convince them to stay with the BKU.

In the evening, BKU said that it has dismissed seven leaders, including Rajesh Singh Chauhan, Anil Talan, Harinam Verma, Dharmendra Mallik (all office bearers in the new outfit). It accused them of indulging in fake propaganda against the outfit.

‘Centre not consulting states on policies of national significance’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 15

THE CENTRE is not taking state governments into confidence or holding consultations with them while drafting policies of national significance, Maharashtra Industries Minister Subhash Desai has said. The "constant friction and political turf war" between the BJP and states ruled by opposition parties has had a detrimental effect on the federal structure of the country, he added.

"The government of India needs to take states into confidence while drafting new policies



Maharashtra
Industries
Minister
Subhash
Desai

of national significance. It must hear the views of the states. That is what is lacking at this point of time. The dialogue that is needed between the two is not happening. If you take our views, we are not going to mislead you. We may, however, protect our state's interest. This exchange of ideas that is needed is not taking place," Desai said at an Express Townhall here.

Desai further said that despite Maharashtra's importance as a leading industrial state in the country, he has, since the formation of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in 2019, not got a chance to physically hold a one-on-one meeting with either the central industries minister or the finance minister.

He also said that the Centre was not taking into consideration the views of states while planning important infrastructure projects such as the bullet train. "While creating infrastructure which is important for the entire country, you need to connect with all stakeholders...," Desai said.

Regional parties have no ideology, can't fight BJP: Rahul

MANOJ CG
UDAIPUR, MAY 15

FORMER CONGRESS president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said his party alone can fight the BJP as regional parties neither have an ideology nor a centralised approach. The declaration adopted at the end of the three-day chintan shivir of the party, on the other hand, said the party will keep the doors open for alliances depending on the political situation.

Arguing that the political battle in India is between the ideologies of the Congress and BJP/RSS, he said this battle cannot be fought by a regional party.

Rahul said it was the Congress's responsibility to protect the institutions and restart the conversation between different religions and castes and between the states which the BJP government is trying to subvert and break. "No regional party will do this. The BJP or the RSS will not do it," he said.

"Regional parties belong to some caste. They don't represent

everyone. This battle cannot be fought by a regional party. Because this is a battle of ideology. The ideology of the RSS is fighting against the ideology of the Congress. The BJP will talk about the Congress, its leaders and workers but will not talk about regional parties. Because they know that regional parties have a space but they cannot defeat the BJP because they don't have an ideology. They have different approaches. We have a centralised approach..." he said.

The Udaipur declaration adopted by the party, at the same time, said while the party on its own and through its organisational strength can make inroads, it was "committed to establish contact and have dialogue with all like-minded parties in the national interest and to save democracy... and keep the options open for alliances wherever necessary according to the political situation". It also said the party will engage with all social, cultural, NGOs, trade unions, think-tanks and civil society groups.



Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu meets new UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. **PTI**

In UAE, V-P offers India's condolences over death of president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ABU DHABI, MAY 15

VICE PRESIDENT M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday visited the UAE and offered condolences to the UAE leadership on the demise of late President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and reaffirmed that India and its people stand by the UAE at this difficult time.

Sheikh Khalifa passed away on Friday after battling illness for several years. He was 73.

Vice President Naidu, on landing here at noon, went straight to Mushrif Palace and offered his condolences to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, newly-elected President of the UAE, the royal family and the entire leadership of the UAE, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

He conveyed the condolences of President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and reiterated that India and its people stand by the UAE at this difficult time.

Saha takes oath as CM, says law & order, development top priority

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, MAY 15

MANIK SAHA on Sunday said his main focus as Tripura's new Chief Minister would be to further developmental activities started by the BJP-led state government and strengthen the law and order situation in the state.

Saha made the comments after being administered the oath of office by Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya at Raj Bhavan. The 69-year-old was named as the chief minister by the BJP in a surprise turn of events on Saturday after Biplab Kumar Deb was made to step down from the top post in the state just a year ahead of the Tripura Assembly elections.

While not explaining why he felt the law and order situation in Tripura needed strengthening, especially when his predecessor Deb boasted of reducing severe and political crimes, the new Chief Minister said he would work under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to develop the state. "Our government under Biplab Deb ji has taken the state ahead. We shall work to con-



Newly sworn-in Tripura CM Manik Saha with former CM Biplab Kumar Deb in Agartala on Sunday. **Abhishek Saha**

tinue this work and bring in development under the leadership of Modi... Development, development, development. I shall take these works ahead. I shall work to ensure a strong law and order situation," said Saha. The dental surgeon-turned-politician also said his experience of running the BJP's party organisation would help him in his role as the CM.

The appointment of Saha, the state party president and a Rajya Sabha member, as the CM came as a surprise to everyone, including state ministers and leaders in

the BJP. There were a series of protests against Deb during his four-year stint as the CM, including the 'Biplab Hatao, Tripura Bachao' slogan and rebellions from his cabinet colleague Sudip Roy Barman, who after being dropped from the cabinet exited the party.

Union Minister of State for Social Empowerment and Justice Pratima Bhoumik on Sunday said the decision to replace Deb was taken by the BJP's central leadership "to strengthen the party and win in 2023".

AAP, Twenty20 announce new political front in Kerala

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 15

AAM AADMI Party and Kerala-based Twenty20, the CSR wing of garment major KITEX Group, on Sunday announced a new political front, People's Welfare Alliance (PWA), in Kerala.

The announcement was jointly made by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Twenty20 chief co-ordinator Sabu M Jacob, who is also MD of KITEX, at a mass convention held at Kizhakkambalam near Kochi.

Addressing the convention, Kejriwal said there are two options for the people of Kerala to select – "political parties which indulge in criminal activities and riots or honest parties such as AAP and Twenty20, which work for the welfare of the people"

"It is your duty to make the correct choice. If you want development and a better standard of living, you select the parties like AAP and Twenty20," the AAP leader said. Narrating the achievements and welfare measures of the AAP government in Delhi, Kejriwal said such work is possi-



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal and Twenty20 party coordinator Sabu M Jacob in Kochi on Sunday. **PTI**

ble in Kerala as well. "We have to make an alliance of 130 crore people in the country," he said.

He said political parties, which are filled with criminals, have made life miserable for the ordinary people. These parties and their leaders have become a liability for the people, he said.

He also said that the developmental work undertaken by Twenty20 in Kerala are inspiring. Twenty20, which is AAP's partner in the newly formed al-

liance PWA, is ruling four village panchayats in Ernakulam district. Twenty20 coordinator Sabu M Jacob said the PWA would make a situation conducive for peaceful life of people.

Targeting the CPI(M) government in Kerala, Jacob said the proposed K-Rail project would kill Kerala. "The state has a governance, which does not run a transport bus profitably. How can such a government run the Rs 62,000-crore K-Rail project," he said.



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EXPLAINED HEALTH

How to protect yourself from heat-related illness

EXPERT EXPLAINS



DR SURANJIT CHATTERJEE

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight

WITH TEMPERATURES crossing 40°C in several parts of the country, and states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra experiencing a heat wave, doctors have been treating a number of patients with complaints of heat exhaustion and other heat-related illnesses.

What is heat-related illness and how can one protect oneself from it?

We mostly see cases of heat exhaustion,

in which people feel extremely lethargic after stepping out during the day. But the high temperatures may also lead to a heat stroke, where the body overheats to more than 104°F, resulting in damage to the organs and neurological dysfunctions. It can result in fainting, rashes etc.

The most important thing is to stay well hydrated, especially when out in the heat. Hydration can be in the form of water or something with electrolytes, such as shikanji. Also, thirst is not the only good indicator of whether you need to have more fluids. So, people must keep track of how much water they are consuming. The thing that one should keep an eye on is the urine output, which goes down when a person is dehydrated.

Other than that, people must not wear dark-coloured, tight fitting, synthetic clothes when it is as hot as this. Light-coloured, cotton clothes are the best. Covering the head also helps.

As much as possible, people should stay indoors during extremely hot hours.



Protection from the heat in Delhi on Sunday. Shivam Kumar Jha

How much water or fluids should one consume? Can people overdo it?

Yes, people can certainly overdo it. I have heard people talking about drinking water every 20 minutes. That's not how it works. The amount of water intake depends on a

person's health.

An apparently healthy, young person should drink between 2.5 to 3 litres of water a day. Perhaps, an additional 0.5 to 1 litre of water can be had if they are out in the sun. Anything more may overload the kidneys, which have to work harder to flush out the extra water. Excess water may also lead to electrolyte imbalance, which can cause its own set of problems.

Then, there are persons living with a kidney or a heart disease, and they should not overload themselves with water as it may result in accumulation of fluid in the legs, abdomen, and chest, which can in turn lead to breathing difficulties. People with such chronic conditions have to drink between 1 to 1.5 litres of water throughout the day. However, this would depend on the condition of their organs. Anyone who is on fluid restriction should definitely get in touch with their physician to check how much water they should have.

Having electrolyte-rich fluids is a better option when people are out in the sun. Around

two to three glasses of shikanji wouldn't be a problem for a healthy person. Again, those with any comorbidities should keep an eye on what they are having; for example, diabetics should avoid ORS solutions because they are high in sugar content.

Which section is most vulnerable in this season?

Children below the age of 5 and people above 65 are more vulnerable to the impact of heat. They must avoid stepping out during the hot hours, and if they have to, they must be extremely careful and stay well hydrated. However, young healthy people are not completely safe either. They mostly constitute the working population and are more likely to step out in the sun.

THE EXPERT

Dr SURANJIT CHATTERJEE is Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine, at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi. He has worked in the field of general medicine for over 25 years, treating both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Also, anyone living with comorbidities such as cardiac diseases, diabetes, or thyroid is likely to feel the effect of sun exposure more.

Should people exercise in this season?

Exercising is not a problem; exercising when it is hot is. If people want to go out for a walk or a jog, they should either do it early in the morning between 5-6

am or in the evening after 7 pm. People should not do any physical activity between 10 am and 6 pm when it is this hot.

And, if people can exercise indoors – at home if they have enough space, or at the gym – then that is better than outdoor exercise.

Dr Chatterjee spoke to Anonna Dutt

SIMPLY PUT

The impact of price volatility

Normal food inflation does not hurt as much as sudden price increases, as has been the case with edible oils in the last few years. This is not good either for consumers or for producers.

HARISH DAMODARAN

NEW DELHI, MAY 15

BETWEEN MAY 13, 2014 and May 13, 2022, the average "modal" (most-quoted) retail price of palm oil in India rose over 2.3 times, from Rs 68.5 to Rs 160 per kg. So did the consumer prices of packed sunflower (2.1 times; from Rs 90 to Rs 190.75/kg) and soyabean (2.2 times; from Rs 77 to Rs 170/kg) oil.

Assessing the hikes

These are massive hikes, aren't they?

Well, not quite. It can be seen from *Table 1* that more than 90% of the price increases in palm, sunflower, soyabean and even mustard oil over the eight-year period – roughly coinciding with the Narendra Modi government assuming office – has happened just during the last three years. In vanaspathi (hydrogenated vegetable oil), the entire increase has taken place within the last three years, while well over two-thirds for groundnut oil.

Simply put, edible oil is a commodity that actually saw very little inflation during the first five years of the Modi government – in fact, going back further to 2011. Plentiful supplies of cheap imported oil – palm from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyabean from Argentina and Brazil, and sunflower from Ukraine and Russia – ensured access to a product that virtually defied food inflation.

It is only the period after mid- to late-2019 – the Modi government's second term – that has witnessed a doubling of consumer prices of imported vegetable oils. That includes vanaspathi, which is largely made from imported palm oil (the process involves hydrogenation or adding hydrogen to harden and raise the melting point of the oil, yielding a product mimicking desi ghee). Prices of indigenous oils, especially mustard and groundnut, have also gone up disproportionately only in the last three years.

When inflation is low, people think of other things. That was precisely the case with edible oils for an extended period from 2011 till mid-/late-2019. It's when prices suddenly shoot up that they take notice and the government, too, starts talking about the need for achieving "atmanirbharta" (self-reliance)". India consumes 22.5-23 million tonnes (mt) of vegetable oils annually, out of which 13.5-

TABLE 1

ALL-INDIA MODAL RETAIL PRICE OF EDIBLE OILS (Rs/kg)

	Palm	Vanaspathi	Mustard	Groundnut	Soyabean	Sunflower
2014	68.5	70	91.5	116.5	77	90
2015	60	75	87	121.25	81	100
2016	67	71.33	90	135	80	92
2017	67	75	100	130	80	92.5
2018	75	70	100	115	85	91
2019	76	70	100	140	85	100
2020	90	100	120	142.5	90	110
2021	140	140	160	180	155	145
2022	160	170	187.5	188.5	170	190.75

All prices as on May 13 in that year.

Source: Department of Consumer Affairs

TABLE 2

MRP OF AMUL POUCH MILK IN DELHI-NCR (Rs/litre)

	Full cream	Toned	Cow
May 9, 2014	48	38	-
June 3, 2016	50	40	42
March 11, 2017	52	42	44
May 21, 2019	54	44	46
Dec 15, 2019	56	46	48
July 1, 2021	58	48	50
March 1, 2022	60	50	52

Full cream: 6% fat, 9% SNF; Toned: 3% Fat, 8.5% SNF; Cow milk: 3.5% Fat, 8.5% SNF

Source: Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation.

14.5 mt is imported and the balance 8.5-9.0 mt produced from domestic sources.

A sudden spurt in prices (volatility) is different from normal inflation. Steep price increases within short periods hurts consumers more than when the same is spread over time. Take vanaspathi. Had retail prices risen by Rs 12.5/kg every year after 2014, consumers would have felt it less than the average annual increase of Rs 33.33 over the last three years and almost nil during the previous five years. Volatility – both prices crashing and excessively soaring – isn't good for producers either. These create distortions, leading to their sharply slashing or expanding acreages, further augmenting volatility.

Milk vs oil

The contrast between volatility and normal inflation is clearer when one looks at another essential item of consumption: branded liquid milk. The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation has been raising the maximum retail price of its Amul milk by Rs 2 per litre every two years or so, with other brands mostly following the market leader. The cumulative price increase over the last eight years has been Rs 12 per litre (*Table 2*). It translates into a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.83% for full-cream milk with 6% fat and 9% SNF or solids-not-fat content. Paying Rs 1.5/litre more every year for milk wouldn't have pinched

the way the sudden Rs 40-60/kg rise in mustard, palm or soyabean oil price in a single year has.

It isn't milk alone. Inflation has been low for sugar and rice, too. According to data from the department of consumer affairs, between May 13, 2014 and May 13, 2022, the modal retail price of sugar has gone up from Rs 36 to Rs 42 per kg (CAGR of 1.95%) and from Rs 24 to Rs 31.5 per kg (3.46%) for rice. Even wheat and *atta* (whole flour) have recorded relatively low inflation during this period – from Rs 18.5 to Rs 22/kg and Rs 20 to Rs 28/kg, respectively, corresponding to CAGRs of 2.19% and 4.3%.

The wheat effect

The situation could, of course, change for wheat in the coming months. A poor crop (courtesy of the post mid-March heat wave), depleted public stocks (due to 15-year-low government procurement) and skyrocketing global prices (following the Russian invasion of Ukraine) can well do to wheat what the last three years have done for edible oils.

The impact of price volatility is already being felt, especially in products where both wheat and vegetable fats are key ingredients: bread, biscuit, cookies, cakes and noodles. Biscuit typically contains up to 58% maida (refined wheat flour), 12% fat and 15% sugar. Ordinary white bread will have 85-

90% maida and 4-5% fats, which act as a lubricant and impart necessary softness, texture and mouth-feel. Vegetable oil and wheat getting simultaneously expensive – sugar hasn't so far – would make it difficult for a whole host of food and bakery product industries.

To sum up, food inflation is a problem when concentrated within a relatively short period (such as in edible oils) and spread across commodities (wheat is the latest addition). Also, the probability of price volatility is more in commodities with high import dependence. Indian consumers benefited when global edible oil prices were low through much of the last decade. The tide turned first with drought in Ukraine in 2020 and Covid-19-induced shortages of migrant labourers in Malaysia's oil palm plantations. The Russia-Ukraine war, Indonesia's palm oil export ban and dry weather in South America's soyabean-growing belts have worsened matters.

In wheat, where prices at the Chicago Board of Trade futures exchange are ruling around 62% higher than a year ago, the likelihood of volatility would still be lower in India. The only reason is the country's *atmanirbharta* in the cereal, making it less vulnerable to international price fluctuations. The ban on exports – similar to what Indonesia did in palm oil – will provide further insulation.

Who is Devasahayam Pillai, first Indian layman to be declared a saint by Vatican?

DEVASAHAYAM PILLAI, who was born a Hindu in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu and converted to Christianity in the 18th century, became the first Indian layman to be declared a saint by the Vatican on Sunday.

Pope Francis canonised Blessed Devasahayam during the Canonisation Mass in St Peter's Basilica, which was attended by over 50,000 faithful from all over the world, as well as government delegations honouring him and nine other new saints, PTI reported.

Besides Devasahayam, the Pope proclaimed five other men – Titus Brandsma, Cesar de Bus, Luigi Maria Palazzolo, Giustino Maria Russolillo, and Charles de Foucauld – and four women – Maria Rivier, Maria Francesca of Jesus Rubatto, Maria of Jesus Santocanale, and Maria Domenica Mantovani – as saints.

Life and death

Devasahayam was born on April 23, 1712 in Nattalam village in Kanyakumari district, and went on to serve in the court of Marthanda Varma of Travancore. After meeting a Dutch naval commander at the court, Devasahayam was baptised in 1745, and assumed the name 'Lazarus', meaning 'God is my help'.

"His conversion did not go well with the heads of his native religion. False charges of treason and espionage were brought against him and he was divested of his post in the royal administration," the Vatican said in a note in February 2020. According to the Vatican, "while preaching, he particularly insisted on the equality of all people, despite caste differences", which "aroused the hatred of the higher classes, and he was arrested in 1749".

On January 14, 1752, Devasahayam was shot dead in the Aralvaimozhy forest. He is widely considered a martyr, and his mortal remains were interred inside what is now Saint Francis Xavier's Cathedral in Kottar, Nagercoil.

Sainthood road

In 2004, the diocese of Kottar along with Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council and Conference of Catholic Bishops of India recommended Devasahayam for beatifi-



The tapestry depicting Titus Brandsma (1881-1942; top), and Lazarus a.k.a. Devasahayam (1712-1752) at the Vatican on Sunday, during their canonisation mass, AP

cation. He was declared blessed by the Kottar diocese in 2012, 300 years after his birth.

During the midday 'Angelus' prayer in the Vatican that day, Pope Benedict XVI described Devasahayam as a "faithful layman", and urged Christians to "join in the joy of the Church in India and pray that the new Blessed may sustain the faith of the Christians of that large and noble country", the note from the Vatican said.

In 2014, Pope Francis recognised a miracle attributed to Devasahayam, clearing the path to his canonisation. He was approved for sainthood in February 2020 for "enduring increasing hardships" after he decided to embrace Christianity, according to the Vatican, which last November announced May 15, 2022 as the date for the ceremony.

While clearing Devasahayam for sainthood in 2020, the Vatican dropped 'Pillai' from his name, and referred to him as "Blessed Devasahayam".

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Vaccine against 3 encephalitis viruses found safe, effective

A VACCINE for eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV), western equine encephalitis virus (WEEV), and Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus (VEEV) was found to be safe, well-tolerated and induced a neutralising antibody response in adult volunteers, according to results from a phase 1 clinical trial, published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

EEEV, WEEV and VEEV are spread to humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes. Horses are also susceptible to infection, but horses cannot transmit the viruses directly to humans. Infections in humans are rare but can lead to flu-like symp-



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

toms and, in some cases, severe neurological damage or death.

Researchers designed a virus-like particle (VLP) vaccine candidate that uses proteins from the outer shells of the viruses, the US National Institutes of Health said in a media release. VLPs do not contain the genetic material that the viruses need to replicate in-

side cells, so VLPs cannot cause infection. In trials on 30 candidates, the vaccine was safe, well-tolerated and induced durable immune responses against all three viruses, the release said.

SOURCE: NIH, US

THIS WORD MEANS: MONK SKIN TONE SCALE

Google's innovation aimed at inclusiveness

SRIDHAR V

NEW DELHI, MAY 15

AMONG THE various artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) initiatives announced by Google last week at its annual I/O developer conference, one was a 10-shade Monk Skin Tone (MST) Scale – something that could have a broader sociological significance. In Google's words, the MST Scale will "support inclusive product and research across the industry".

What is the MST Scale?

Developed in partnership with Dr Ellis Monk, associate professor of sociology at Harvard University, the MST Scale is a tool that will be primarily incorporated by Google into computer vision, which is a type of AI that allows computers to see and understand images. It has been found that computer vision systems often do not function as efficiently for people with darker skin as they do for those with fairer skin. Using the MST Scale, Google and the tech industry

are aiming to build more representative datasets so that such AI models can be trained to identify a wider range of skin tones in images.

How will it work?

According to Google, the scale will "make it easier for people of all backgrounds to find more relevant and helpful" search results. For instance, users who search for makeup or beauty tutorials in Google Images will see an option to refine search results further by their skin tone. Going ahead, Google will utilise the MST Scale to better detect and categorise images to give a larger range of results.

The tech giant plans to expand the use of this database created based on different skin tones, so that creators and online businesses may label their content or products based on other attributes, such as hair colour and hair texture. Google has openly released the scale so that anyone can use it for research and product development.

Why such a scale?

According to Dr Courtney Heldreth, a so-

cial psychologist and user experience (UX) researcher at Google's Responsible AI Human-Centered Technology UX department, "persistent inequities exist globally due to prejudice or discrimination against individuals with darker skin tones, also known as colourism".

And AI not accurately seeing skin tone, which could further lead to existing inequities, is a type of colourism.

To bridge this gap, a Google research team including Heldreth and Xango Eyeé, a product manager working on Responsible AI, focused on bringing more skin tone equity to AI development. The team last year partnered with Monk, whose research has centred on how factors like skin tone, race and ethnicity affect inequality.

The MST scale builds on the foundation of the existing Fitzpatrick scale, developed by American dermatologist Thomas B Fitzpatrick in 1975, which classified human skin type into seven broad colours. The Google team and Monk arrived at a scale composed of 10 shades – a range pegged to be not too limiting but also not too complex

– and surveyed thousands of adults in the US who felt more represented with the new methodology.

Are there similar projects elsewhere?

Several large corporations stepped up their efforts towards colour-based inclusiveness in light of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, which had happened in aftermath of police brutality and the killing of African American George Floyd. In 2020, Johnson & Johnson-owned Band-Aid launched a new range of adhesive bandages in different shades of black and brown to make its products more inclusive for people of colour.

In India, amid a backlash and strong public feedback over discrimination against people with darker skin tones, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) in 2014 released guidelines for the advertising of skin lightening and fairness products. More recently, in 2020, Hindustan Unilever-owned cosmetic brand Fair & Lovely was renamed Glow & Lovely, after criticism for promoting colourism in its advertisements and marketing campaigns.



Kolkata



7 THE IDEAS PAGE

Steering the ship

To ensure quick induction of submarines, India should seek a foreign collaborator to make necessary adjustments, conduct collaborative trials



ARUN PRAKASH

A DAY BEFORE Prime Minister Narendra Modi was due to visit Paris to meet President Macron, the French defence major, Naval Group, announced its inability to participate in India's Project 75-I, under which conventional (non-nuclear or diesel-electric) submarines are to be built domestically. Coming on the heels of similar withdrawals from this competition by Russian and German submarine builders, this is bad news for the crucial project. Some also see it as a coercive tactic by the group to persuade India to buy more of its Scorpene class subs, of which six have been built under licence by Mazagon Docks Ltd (MDL).

A major issue of contention in Project 75-I appears to be the installation of an air independent propulsion system (AIP) on these vessels. Since conventional submarines are propelled underwater by electric-power, battery endurance remains a major limitation. The submarine has to periodically expose itself to draw air for running generators that charge their battery-banks. It was to overcome this major vulnerability that several types of propulsion systems were evolved in Europe using "air independent," closed-cycle diesel or steam engines which would endow conventional submarines with much longer underwater endurance.

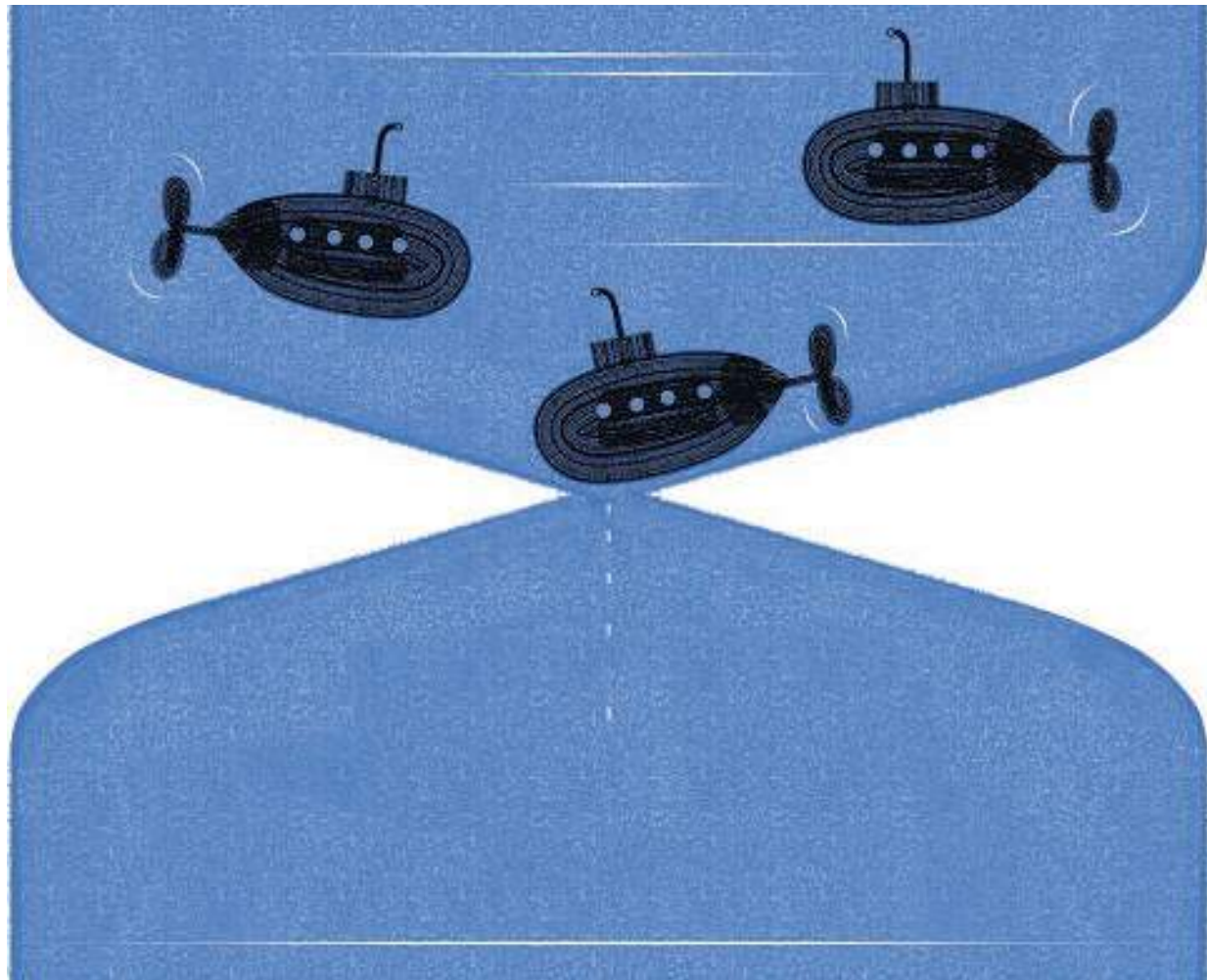
While protracted negotiations between the MoD and the French Naval Group were underway, none of the AIP systems had been fully proven. The contract for license-production of six Scorpenes was thus signed in 2005 without including this system. The Pakistan Navy (PN), obviously less risk-averse, acquired an untried French AIP system and installed it on three Agosta 90B submarines in 2008. What invests the P-75I programme with urgency is the fact that with the addition of eight Yuan Class Chinese submarines, the PN may field up to 11 AIP-equipped boats by 2028.

Project 75-I is also the first programme to be progressed under the MoD's new Strategic Partnership concept which ostensibly offers a "level-playing field" to the private sector. In this model, MDL and Larsen & Toubro will choose a foreign submarine-builder for collaboration and offer competing bids to build six modern conventional submarines.

Here a quick look at the genesis and growth of our young submarine arm is useful. While Pakistan had acquired its first submarine from the US in 1963, it was only two years later that the Naval HQ revived an old proposal for creating a submarine arm. Since the USA and UK were offering only surplus WWII vintage submarines, we turned to the Soviets and between 1967 and 1974 acquired eight Foxtrok class boats of contemporary design along with a submarine depot ship.

The Foxtrots, having trained a whole generation of Indian submariners, a timely step for upgradation of capabilities was initiated by contracting for the modern Type-209 hunter-killer submarines built by HDW of Germany. Between 1986 and 1994, four of the Type 209 boats entered service; two built in Germany and two in MDL.

Unfortunately, allegations of corruption



C R Sasikumar

in this deal scuttled plans for further indigenous construction. MDL closed its production line, representing a huge loss in terms of wasted skills/expertise and delays in capability accretion for the Indian Navy. However, concurrent negotiations with the USSR had resulted in the induction of 10 improved boats of the Kilo Class between 1986 and 2000.

By now, the Naval HQ had projected the need for a standing force of 24 subs in order to meet the growing threats to India's maritime interests. In 1999, the government accorded approval to a "30-Year Submarine Building Plan," which envisaged the simultaneous serial production of two types of submarines in separate shipyards. One of the two types was to be an advanced submarine of imported design, and it was hoped that the second line would, in due course, deliver a home-grown product, designed by our own naval architects with foreign assistance.

Delays in decision-making stalled the 30-year plan, and since 1999, the navy's submarine fleet has been seeing rapid obsolescence and steady depletion of force-levels. The 2005 contract for building six French Scorpene Class submarines under license from MDL served merely as a palliative measure, but even this programme saw huge delays over contractual issues. The sixth and last submarine was launched in April 2022, a full 17 years after signing of the contract.

With force-levels down to 17 ageing conventional submarines, the Indian Navy looked with hope at the Rs 43,000 crore Project 75-I. Commenced on time, this would have been the seamless follow-on to the Scorpene project; ensuring serial-production, and eventual indigenisation of this vital weapon-platform.

However, policy flip-flops and sluggish

This long-neglected project brooks no further delay, and is important enough to attract the time and attention of our highest decision-makers. A practical way forward is for one of the strategic partners and DRDO to jointly seek a foreign collaborator for P-75I who will install the indigenous AIP on the selected submarine and conduct collaborative trials. Once proven at sea, the indigenous AIP could be installed in all new subs and retro-fitted in the old ones. There will certainly be a price to pay, but the alternative is too bleak to contemplate.

decision-making have kept this project in limbo for over a decade. MDL, having launched the last of the Scorpenes, will start running down its state-of-the-art submarine-building facility, losing expertise and highly-skilled workers.

An added complication has arisen from the otherwise welcome development by DRDO of an indigenous AIP system. Based on electrolytic fuel cells, this system produces energy by combining hydrogen and oxygen with only water as the waste product. It has no moving parts and is safer and more efficient than others.

The drawback, however, is that the 8-10 metre-long AIP module has to be installed on a submarine and subjected to stringent underwater trials before the Indian Navy can accept it as "operationally proven" for induction into service. Since installation and trials of this module will be a complex and time-consuming process, three major issues are likely to arise: (a) Who will provide a submarine for trials? (b) who will undertake installation and conduct trials? (c) and most crucially, (d) who in our system will take such crucial decisions in a timely manner?

This long-neglected project brooks no further delay and is important enough to attract the time and attention of our highest decision-makers. A practical way forward is for one of the strategic partners and DRDO to jointly seek a foreign collaborator for P-75I who will install the indigenous AIP on the selected submarine and conduct collaborative trials. Once proven at sea, the indigenous AIP could be installed in all new subs and retro-fitted in the old ones.

There will certainly be a price to pay, but the alternative is too bleak to contemplate.

The writer is a retired Chief of Naval Staff

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Support for membership in Finland and Sweden shows the Russian president's assault on Ukraine has only strengthened the alliance (NATO) Support for NATO membership in Sweden and Finland shows Putin's assault on Ukraine has only strengthened the alliance."

— THE GUARDIAN

Gods aren't crazy, mobs are

Listening to self-appointed interpreters of divine moods will lead us back to the Dark Ages



G N DEVY

IN THE 5TH century BC, the Greek dramatist Euripides understood that there was much at the heart of Tragedy that was comic in essence and much in Comedy that was close to Tragedy. He demonstrated this in *Cyclops*, a satyr-play, "satyrs" being a kind of second-class gods with the ears and tails of horses. One of the characters Euripides created was Polyphemus, a *Cyclops*, known for his shrill songs, weird stories and fondness for younger men. However, in Greek mythology, Polyphemus was the son of Poseidon, the god of the seas. Three centuries before Euripides, the poet Homer had shown Poseidon getting violently angry when the epic hero Odysseus makes the one-eyed Polyphemus blind.

Poseidon's rage, which makes Odysseus' voyage home dangerous, raises some intriguing questions: One, do the gods ever get angry? And two, how do mortals know when the gods are angry? The answer, as provided in the Greek myths, was that Hermes, the interpreter, alone knows when the gods are angry. Hermes is the herald of the gods as well as a trickster — somewhat like the Narada figure in Indian myths. He is also considered the god of travellers, thieves, orators and merchants. The institution of interpreters of gods' moods was not an original Greek fancy. In the 33rd century BCE, the Egyptian dynasts known as pharaohs had founded their authority on the claim of their ability to interpret the gods' moods.

A similar echo of "theological hermeneutics" can be seen in India's history in the institution of the Vedic purohit, phonetically close to the Egyptian pharaoh (pronounced "phe-ro-aa"). Not much is known about how the Indus Valley people thought about the gods' wrath. Though their civilisation disintegrated around the 19th century BCE, the Harappans have not left behind archaeological signs about this. Perhaps, the Indus Valley civilisation had no interpreters, no orators and no figure that anticipated Hermes or the Vedic purohit. In sharp contrast to the Vedic purohit, Buddhism had no concept of an interpreter of the gods. Homer was a near-contemporary of Gautama Buddha. The Buddha located misery and grief in the minds of human beings, in their inadequate understanding of reality, and not in the whims of the gods.

Sadly, the purohits managed to oust Buddhism, and soon after, metaphysics rife with superstition came to be seen as "knowledge". The nobler parts of the Vedic and Upanishadic traditions describe anger as a self-destructive emotion. The Bhagavad Gita speaks of anger as a cause of delusion, memory loss and destruction. Yet, when the interpreters of God's mind assume the form of a coercive social institution, God himself becomes the loser. During the second millennium, the Bhakti

movement rebelled against the self-assumed role of the purohits as God's interpreters. During the 19th century, the resurgence of Hinduism rested on widening access to the divine for all sections of society. The greatest among our national leaders, Tagore, Aurobindo and Gandhi, accepted the idea of God but made humans the centre of spirituality. B R Ambedkar bravely rebelled against the social domination of the purohits and, in works like *Annihilation of Caste* and *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India*, tried to establish how repressive the idea of the superiority of purohits has been in India's social history. In Europe, Friedrich Nietzsche could speak of the death of God, and after Stalin's coercive policies started hurting people, Louis Fischer, Andre Gide, Arthur Koestler and Stephen Spender used the bold phrase "the God that failed" as the title of a book. In the light of this history of gods and their interpreters, it is absurd in the 21st century to invoke the gods to justify anger among humans.

The ethnography of the interpreters of God's anger should be of interest to those of us who believe in the ideas of justice and the rule of law as upheld by the Constitution. There is a small town called Madhi in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. Every year, thousands of people from nomadic communities get together there and express their devotion to the deity at the shrine. In recent years, the advocates of purohit raj have been gradually blocking the devotees' access to the shrine. When asked if this would make their God angry, many of those nomads replied, "No, our God is not angry, we are angry". They were honest and had not surrendered their ability to think.

Some four decades ago, I used to teach at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. There was a small temple inside the campus. When communal riots broke out in the 1990s, one of my colleagues remarked that if the faculty does not side with the majority community, the God on the campus would feel betrayed and angry. This reminded me of a poem by Aurobindo. Eight decades before my time, he had taught on the same campus. Explaining a sudden and unjustified burst of anger, he wrote, apologetically, "It was not me, but my belly's hungry god that was angry."

One knows that it is humans who get angry when there are no jobs and prices continue to go up, or bulldozers raze their houses. In an attempt to divert the people's attention from the hunger in their bellies, clever interpreters point to some trivial gesture or expression as an insult to the gods. Credulous mobs take the cue and attack the misconstrued expression in the work of painters, artists, singers, writers, cartoonists, protesters, critics, opponents, minorities, meek and mild people — all in the name of the gods. Hermes wins; the journey home for Odysseus gets longer; Buddha has to remain in exile. If we continue to be led by the interpreters of the gods' moods, we may as well find ourselves sliding back to the eras before science replaced myth. Historians describe those eras as the Dark Ages.

The writer is a cultural activist



N S GUNDUR

A rasa yatra

Rajshekhar Mansur saw himself as a 'saadhak', in music and literature

PANDIT RAJSHEKHAR MANSUR (1942-2022), son and disciple of legendary vocalist Pt. Mallikarjun Mansur, passed away in Bengaluru on May 1. He embodied in himself the spirit of the 20th-century Dharwad, which was home to Hindustani classical music and modern Kannada literary culture.

Born in a musical family, Rajshekhar grew up in North Karnataka, the region which boasts a great tradition of Hindustani classical music — Savai Gandharva, Mallikarjun Mansur, Kumar Gandharva, Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi, Basavaraj Rajguru and others. Rajshekhar, the only son of the Mansur family, was brought up with seven sisters. Because of the hardships he himself had experienced as a professional musician, Mallikarjun Mansur did not want his son to pursue a career in music. But the musical milieu was so strong at home and in Dharwad that Rajshekhar was destined to be a maestro. It came as a surprise to senior Mansur when he heard of 16-year-old Rajshekhar singing Malkauns at an annual class day in college. His father started teaching him formally when he turned 19, and before that, a lot of informal training had gone into the making of a musician in Rajshekhar by way of his familiarity with ragas as tunes and listening to his father's *riyaz* at home. Thus, Mallikarjun Mansur became a father-Guru.

As Rajshekhar mentions in a write up that is posted on his website, "There was no fa-

ther in this Guru when he began teaching a particular raga. There was neither a son when I was learning from him. It would be a purely guru-shishya relationship." The musical journey of the father and the son contributed immensely to the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana, pioneered by the late Ustad Alladiya Khan (1855-1946) also known as Bade Khan Saheb, and his two illustrious sons — Ustad Manji Khan (1888-1937) and Ustad Burji Khan (1890-1950). The Mansurs, following the tradition of the Khans, kept the Gharana alive by refashioning its core values.

For 30 years, Rajshekhar accompanied his father in several concerts and committed himself to the Jaipur-Atrauli tradition of *aprachalith* (not familiar) and *durlabh* (rare) ragas. Later, he trained several disciples in India and abroad. His student, both in English literature and music, Mithun once said, "Sir was a true classicist in the pedagogy of music, and he was averse to superficially mixing certain ragas." In his interview with eminent cultural critic Manu Chakravathy, Rajshekhar said that the *jod* raga was not simply putting any two ragas together, and the notion of a *jod* raga had a deep philosophical conception and a profound sense of harmony. For him, music was vidya, something to be learnt by hard work and discipline under the direct tutelage of a Guru.

Like any other children born to celebrities, junior Mansur had to struggle with the

larger than life personality of his father. It enabled him to grow as a musician as much as it constrained him by putting him under pressure, both socially and professionally. In his memoir, *Nanna Rasayatre* (1983), Mallikarjun Mansur candidly mentions the conflict between the son and the father. As the memoir describes, Rajshekhar, who preferred to be all alone at home, was an introvert, moody and emotional. As a student, he was bright, and his father wanted him to be a doctor, but he chose to teach English literature. The late bilingual critic G S Amur, who was his teacher at Karnatak University, used to recall that Rajshekhar was a brilliant student. He did especially well in European Classics, the course Amur taught. Later, he studied Linguistics at the University of Wales.

As his literature student at Karnatak University, I saw Rajshekhar struggling to strike a balance between being a professor of English and a musician. When he joined the department, he was cautioned by his scholar-teacher and the then head of the department about riding the two horses, music and literature. But for Rajshekhar music was not a horse to ride but a unicorn to be understood and explored, and thus he always saw himself as *saadhak*, a seeker.

Though Rajshekhar could not carve a niche for himself as a litterateur in Dharwad, he composed some poems and short stories in Kannada. Moreover, he was a great teacher

of literature and influenced generations of students like me to pursue literary studies seriously. While he looked thoroughly Indian in his music concerts, in our class his British RP marvelled us. The way he taught us Aristotle's *Poetics* made us inquisitive scholars; he was so erudite that he presented different translations of Aristotle and a variety of commentaries. And the way he read literary texts, for example, G B Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1924) enthralled us; he brought music into the dialogues he read aloud. When he taught American Literature, especially Emily Dickinson and Eugene O'Neill, he moved us to tears. He was a charming teacher and we boys were jealous of him as girls admired his personality. He also had the possibility of being a great critic, and his article on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), published in a research journal, is one of the best critical pieces I have ever read.

Rajshekhar could also have been a musicologist. Apart from demonstrating ragas as a pedagogue, he deeply reflected on the practice of music. He used to advocate that when we learn any art form, we should keep in mind three components — *manan*, *chintan* and *manthan*. A great takeaway from the teacher who taught us music and literature.

The writer is professor, Department of Studies and Research in English, Tumkur University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE RIGHT CODE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'How to frame the Uniform Civil Code' (IE, May 14). India is a country with people practising many different religions. The framing of the UCC falls within the purview of Article 44, which is a directive principle. As the writer aptly said, before framing UCC, there is a need to make a preliminary review of all the existing acts. The loopholes in the existing acts should be removed first.

Aditi Pangarkar, Pune

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'How to frame the Uniform Civil Code' (IE, May 14). Modern democracy is established through a social contract between the state and citizens. The UCC would make civil rights equal for every citizen irrespective of religion, caste, gender, or region. The author has rightly pointed out the need to shun all regressive laws in the formation of UCC. According to the Constitution, UCC should be country-wide. State-level UCCs, as recently debated in the country, would create more discrepancies among citizens. The government law department needs to study various norms followed by different religious communities in India and outside and bring out the best suited for its citizens in matters of civil rights just like the Constitution was tailor-made for Indians.

H Upadhyay, via email

CHANGE THE LAW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A question of consent' (IE, 14th May). The debate around marital rape has indeed led to questioning the "foundation" of marriages. There are often two issues around the subject of marital rape — first, it will challenge the institution of marriage. To this, the pillars of marriage should be mutual respect and not the submission of the wife's authority over her body to her husband. Second is the concern of proving "fake" marital rape cases. While the matter might be a little complex, we have a robust system to make and implement laws.

Saumya Shukla, Munger

SECURITY CONCERNS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Soft target' (IE, May 13). It is painful that the Kashmiri pandits continue to be an easy target for terrorists. That our security forces are failing to gain the upper hand in their fight against them shows that there are flaws and gaps in our strategy put in place for this purpose. It is not out of place to mention that targeted killings are not possible without local support. While we must hit our targets the hardest, we must also be accommodative and flexible to those caught in the crossfire. We must not be seen to be caught in a cleft stick.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

8

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

We should make a law that makes purchasing less than MSP punishable. If you don't give the farmer remunerative price, and allow private players to have their own way, he will go for distress sale

Manraj Grewal Sharma: How is Congress preparing for the 2024 elections? As a veteran leader, what do you think the Congress needs to do to give BJP a good fight?

As far as policies are concerned, the Congress is for the poor, farmers and labourers. But the present NDA government has made a shift in its policies, and the result you can see — the rich are getting richer and the poor are becoming poorer. As for me, I'll talk about farmers and farm workers. What is the need of the hour? The farmer gets minimum support price (MSP), not maximum retail price, but sometimes he doesn't get even that. Before these three farm laws were passed, there were three ordinances. At that time, I had said that the government should come forth with a fourth ordinance. In these ordinances, they were going for private mandis. I have no problem with private mandis but in private mandis, MSP was not mandatory. In APMCs, MSP is mandatory. So I said there should be a fourth ordinance so that if anybody, private or government, purchases less than MSP, it is punishable by law. So the farmer will get his due. Till now, farmers are not getting their due.

Manraj Grewal Sharma: Experts feel that market forces will help not only in diversification but also in giving the farmer better remuneration. For instance, this year, some farmers managed to sell their wheat for more than the MSP in Haryana as well.

Sometimes it happens. This time, due to the Russia-Ukraine war, even farmers in Punjab got Rs 5-10 more (than the MSP) for wheat, but that is not a remunerative price. The NDA government promised to double the income of farmers. It is 2022 and their income has actually fallen due to the rising cost of inputs such as diesel and fertilisers. During the 10 years of the UPA government, the average increase in MSP was 12-22 per cent. In the last seven years, MSP has increased by only 5.5-7.5 per cent. There is no problem in privatisation, but anybody purchasing less than MSP, whether private or APMC, should be punishable by law.

Harish Damodaran: Won't this drive away the private players?

Fifty per cent of the total employment is given by the agriculture sector. People from rural areas are migrating to cities because of unemployment. If you don't give them remunerative price, and allow private players to have their own way, the farmer will go for distress sale. You can't strangle farmers like that. You have to balance things so both farmers and private players earn.

Manraj Grewal Sharma: You mentioned that the shrinking land holdings are making farming unsustainable. Shouldn't we think out of the box instead of just focussing on MSP?

Unless MSP is there, farming won't be sustainable. There are other things also that need an increase in income, for example, dairy, fisheries and poultry. There are not only farmers but landless farm workers too who don't get finance from the banking sector. They should be given finance for piggery and poultry etc. The farm agitation took place because farmers thought the government was abolishing the MSP.

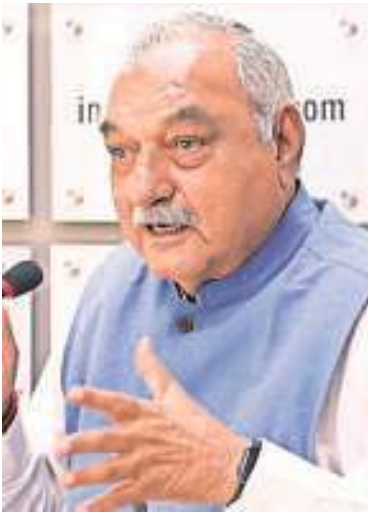
Manoj CG: You were one of the signatories of the letter that 23 partymen wrote to Sonia Gandhi in 2020. Recently, you said the party should introduce collective and inclusive decision-making at all levels. After that, Uday Bhan, considered close to you, was made Haryana Congress president. Are you still miffed with the party?

I was never miffed with the party. Every Congressman is close to me. But, we had some suggestions. And in future also, if I think it is in the interest of the party, I'll keep on suggesting. That was the basis of the letter. It was not against or in favour of anybody. Those were some suggestions on how to turn the party around, because Sonia Gandhi said that the base of the party was weakening.

Manoj CG: What was Kumari Selja not doing that Uday Bhan will be doing?

She did good work too. But this is a process. I was also PCC president. What I did or didn't do isn't the question, but I was changed.

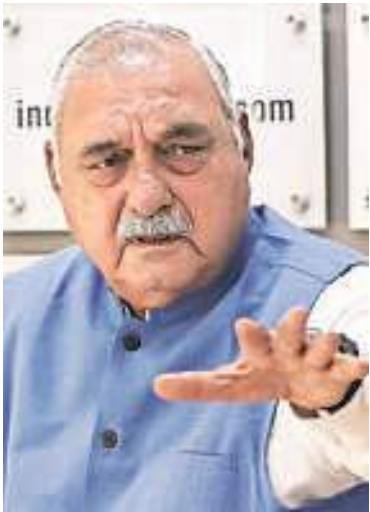
Manraj Grewal Sharma: Uday Bhan reportedly said Congress will do away with the quota system in ticket distribution.



WHY **BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA**

One of the tallest Congress leaders, and leader of Opposition in the Haryana Assembly, Bhupinder Singh Hooda was chief minister of Haryana from 2005 to 2014. With the recent revamp of the party unit in the state, and the appointment of his loyalist as the Haryana Congress chief, the former CM has cut through the party

factions to emerge the undisputed leader in the run-up to the assembly elections in 2024 when the state will face a new contestant in the Aam Aadmi Party. Hooda, who has considerable support among farmers, was also recently entrusted with preparing an agenda paper on farmers and agriculture for the Congress' Chintan Shivir



Everybody has said that there cannot be any alliance without Congress. Which party leads depends on the nature of the alliance — if it is a state or Central alliance. For 2024, we will decide accordingly

‘The only way out is to fight for the cause of the people; a leader then emerges automatically’

Bhupinder Singh Hooda talks about what the Congress needs to do to give a good fight to the BJP, preparing for the 2024 elections and giving farmers their due. This session was moderated by Manraj Grewal Sharma, Resident Editor (Chandigarh), *The Indian Express*



Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda in conversation with Manraj Grewal Sharma at the Idea Exchange. *Renuka Puri*

Tickets should be decided on winnability. In a democracy, the number of seats you can win depends on the candidate, as now, along with the party, the face also matters. So priority has to be given to the person's winnability regardless of his affiliation.

Liz Mathew: Everyone feels that this is one of the worst times the Congress is facing. What do you think the Congress should do immediately to make itself a formidable alternative to BJP, at least in some states?

Any party in a democracy should fight for the aspiration of the people; they should go with what the people aspire for, and what people expect from them. So, we should fight for their causes. Today, in Haryana, whether it is farmer, labourer, trader or government servant, nobody is satisfied with the present government. We have to take up their cause.

Liz Mathew: BJP has emerged as the ultimate ruling party without any major opposing forces. We are also seeing the emergence of AAP. What should Congress have done from 2004 to 2014 to prevent this oblivion?

Democracy comprises a ruling party and an Opposition. The Opposition comes to power only when it is able to give the promise or power to people. We failed in that. In 2009, LK Advani was a stalwart but he was not able to promise the people that he'll form the government. But in 2014, Narendra Modi gave this promise and he won. In politics, even one event can change the whole story. Let's see what happens.

Liz Mathew: We have seen AAP recently taking up the nationalism cause, in line with BJP. They took some steps to please the majority, while keeping a distance from certain issues hurting a minority community. We have read in history that Congress leaders, be it Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi, had taken certain steps that were seen as pleasing a particular community. What is your view on this kind of politics?

In a democracy, every party has the right to do that. So AAP is also doing it. The reason it succeeded in Punjab is obvious; it was the main Opposition party. If the Congress would have made some changes some two years ago, it would have been better. But leave that aside. AAP has no presence in Haryana. In Haryana, people look at only Congress as an alternative.

Manraj Grewal Sharma: Do you think the AAP sweep in Punjab will have an impact on Haryana?

Haryana has Delhi on three sides and despite being in power for so many years in Delhi, AAP couldn't make their presence felt in Haryana. Punjab is different. Every state has got different political situations.

Harikishan Sharma: You said Haryana is looking towards Congress for an alternative but trends show that your vote share has been steadily falling since 2005 when you were the CM even though Congress' slide nationally began in 2014. Your vote share in Haryana fell from 43 per cent in 2005 to 35 per cent in 2009 to 24-25 per cent in the 2019 assembly polls. How can you convince people to view your party as an alternative when your base is steadily eroding?

What was the result in 1996? The Congress had only six-seven seats out of 90. In Lok Sabha, we got only two seats — one was mine, the other was of Kumari Selja. But slowly, in 2000, we got 24 seats. These things happen and will continue to happen. The present government in Haryana has failed completely. It has proved to be a non-performing government, just an event-management government. People have realised this and that's why, they are looking towards Congress.

Shyam Lal Yadav: We have seen how BJP made parivarvaad (nepotism) a big issue in UP and succeeded. In Haryana, your third generation is in politics. You became the CM with 81 seats and now you're at 31 seats. To safeguard yourself from this BJP attack, don't you think Congress should give an opportunity to new people?

It's not the third but fourth generation; my grandfather contested in 1923, he was a towering leader. My father was a member of seven different Houses. Nobody in the world is a member of seven different Houses, except my father. I have been to the Lok Sabha four times and five times to Vidhan Sabha. Deepender has also been



in the Lok Sabha thrice, and is now in the Rajya Sabha. The question is how you behave with people — whether they accept you or not. There is no such thing that is you are a politician your son can't go into politics. Or if you are a journalist, your son can't become a journalist. If he's a good journalist, he will carve his own position.

Manoj CG: You're a grassroots leader. What is the political counter to this aggressive Hindutva run by the BJP and RSS?

Follow Mahatma Gandhi's policy and his thoughts. He was a staunch Hindu but had respect for every religion. The Congress has always followed Gandhi's policies.

Liz Mathew: During his trial on Babri Masjid, LK Advani said he had learnt to use religion in politics from Mahatma Gandhi.

This is what I'm saying. We will always follow Mahatma Gandhi. What is bad about it, when he was able to take everyone along with him. Be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian, everybody took part in the freedom struggle under his leadership. The idea should be how to use it to build our nation. If you make a road, can you make a road for a particular religion or a caste? It has to be for all.

Shyam Lal Yadav: Your government was in power for 10 years from 2004 to 2014. Since then, it seems Congress has done little for the party even though Rahul and Sonia Gandhi were free. You too must be wondering why Congress is shrinking.

This is why we have organised the Chintan Shivir. We are holding party elections. We will start from the block level. In Haryana, there were no ground-level block Congress committees or district Congress committees for the last seven years. For any organisation to be strong, the subordinate organisations are a must. So, this time we are having elections for

Follow Mahatma Gandhi's policy and his thoughts. He was a staunch Hindu but had respect for every religion. The Congress has always followed Gandhi's policies

block, district and state Congress committees. We will build a strong organisation.

Shubhajit Roy: Gandhi was in favour of prohibition (of alcohol). Haryana has one of the most liberal policies.

Gandhi's disciple Nitish Kumar is enforcing prohibition, right? What's the result? You have to realise what social changes are happening. Bansi Lal had tried prohibition, but what is its result today? There were several shortcomings in that. In Nitish Kumar's Bihar, so many people are locked up in jails.

Shubhajit Roy: There's a debate at the national level that UPA allies should take the lead and Congress should take the backseat. What is your take?

Everybody has issued statements that there cannot be any alliance without Congress. Which party leads depends on the nature of the alliance — if it is a state or Central alliance. For 2024, we will decide accordingly. In the state elections, the major party that should take the lead has to be accommodated by everyone.

Congress has to be in the mainstream in the national alliance. In 1977, when the Janata Party was formed, who was leading? Even Morarji Desai's name was not declared for the Prime Minister's post. So, that depends upon the political situation. If everybody in the alliance thinks about the interest of the country, they will decide accordingly.

Manoj CG: What has changed since 2014 in the relationship between Hindus and Muslims? What should be the political response to communal tension?

In Haryana, the government, to hide its failures, distracts the people. These are not real issues. We have been living together for so many years. Everybody knows that everybody has to live together. We have respect for every religion. We carry everyone along with us. We don't get involved in hate politics. The Congress is highlighting the real issues. People will realise slowly. It takes time in a democracy.

Manraj Grewal Sharma: Recently, both the Akali Dal and the Congress celebrated their centenaries. Both parties are on the decline. And one grouse against both is nepotism; there, they ask to change Badal, here, they talk of replacing Rahul.

If someone says in a democracy that their party will never decline, that is not true. I have seen when there were only two members of Parliament from BJP. I've seen more than two-thirds majority of Congress. It happens. And it is good for

democracy. Nobody should monopolise power. Nobody should think they are immune. People see everything, they are very intelligent. They decide at the right time.

Manoj CG: Congress president elections will happen in August-September and Lok Sabha elections in two years. Do you think Sonia Gandhi should continue till the LS elections are over?

The party is holding elections, and whoever is elected should be the president. The party holds democratic elections. If Sonia Gandhi is accepted by all, she'll be there.

Varinder Bhatia: In the current scenario when your party is sliding, do you think a change of face can revive it?

Nowadays, along with the party, the face also matters — whether it is the Congress or the BJP. Can you ask any BJP person, what will be your position minus Narendra Modi? In 2004, we assisted Sonia Gandhi (to become the Prime Minister), I was in Parliament, but she refused. In our party, we think about the people. The only way out is to fight for the cause of the people, for their problems. A leader then emerges automatically.

Sourav Roy Barman: Over the next few months, Arvind Kejriwal is going to travel to Haryana and hammer home the point that all parties are tried and tested, give us a chance. With Haryana sandwiched between two AAP-ruled states, can you afford to dismiss AAP? Also, why do you think the talks fell through with Prashant Kishor?

I can't say anything about him (Kishor), but as far as AAP is concerned, every party has got to come and convince the people. But in Haryana people see an alternative only in the Congress. And I am saying this because I know the ground realities.

Varinder Bhatia: You've been holding Vipaksh Aapke Samaksh programmes but we never saw the state Congress President participate. But the newly appointed president was there with you at the recent programme. Is it an attempt to present a unified face?

There's no question of factionalism. Our next programme is in Fatehabad and the Congress state president will be there too. These programmes are organised by the legislature party. Because the MLAs have to know (the problems), they have to be on the ground so that they can raise these issues in the Assembly. That was the idea of that programme.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Macron with UAE's Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. AP

THE GULF

World leaders descend on UAE to pay respects to late ruler

AN ARRAY of presidents and prime ministers continued to descend on the UAE on Sunday to pay their respects to the federation's late ruler. They also came to praise his successor, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan — a vivid sign of Abu Dhabi's influence in Western and Arab capitals. The first Western leader to jet to the oil-rich emirate was French President Emmanuel Macron. He met Sunday with Sheikh Mohammed to pay tribute to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the long-ailing ruler who died Friday at the age of 73. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was expected to arrive later, along with other leaders including Israel's president after the two countries opened formal relations in 2020. A US delegation led by Vice President Kamala Harris is due to visit the UAE on Monday. **AP**

USA

US to remove 5 from foreign terror blacklist

THE US is poised to remove five extremist groups, all believed to be defunct, from its list of foreign terrorist organisations, including several that once posed significant threats. Although the groups are inactive, the decision is politically sensitive for the Biden administration and the countries in which the organisations operated. The organisations include the Basque separatist group ETA, the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo, the radical Jewish group Kahane Kach and two Islamic groups that were active in Israel, the Palestinian territories and Egypt. **AP**

LEBANON

Mired in collapse, country to choose new parliament

THE PEOPLE of Lebanon voted for a new parliament Sunday against the backdrop of an economic meltdown that is transforming the country and low expectations that the election would significantly alter the political landscape. A new crop of candidates from the 2019 protest movement are running against the country's entrenched ruling class that is blamed for the collapse, hoping to unseat them. But they are divided and lack the money, experience and other advantages held by traditional political rulers with a decades-long grip on power. **AP**

IRAN

Filmmaker: Many movie industry workers arrested

AN AWARD-WINNING Iranian filmmaker said authorities raided the offices and homes of several filmmakers and other industry professionals and arrested some of them. Mohammad Rasoulof said in a statement signed by dozens of movie industry professionals on Instagram late Saturday that security forces made some arrests and confiscated film production equipment during some recent raids. **AP**

18-YR-OLD GUNMAN DROVE HOURS TO BLACK-MAJORITY AREA: POLICE

10 shot dead in live-streamed 'racially motivated' attack at US supermarket

Suspect surrenders to cops; 'manifesto' reportedly written by him says attack inspired by 2019 Christchurch shooting

REUTERS

BUFFALO (NEW YORK), MAY 15

AN 18-YEAR-OLD white gunman shot 10 people to death and wounded three on Saturday at a grocery store in a Black neighbourhood of upstate New York, before surrendering after what authorities called an act of "racially motivated violent extremism".

Authorities said the suspect, who was armed with an assault-style rifle and appeared to have acted alone, drove to Buffalo from his home several hours away to launch the afternoon attack that he broadcast in real time on social media platform Twitch, a live video service owned by Amazon.com.

Eleven of the 13 people struck by gunfire were Black, officials said. The two others were white. The racial breakdown of the dead was not made clear.

Court papers named the suspect as Payton Gendron of Conklin in New York state.

He was arraigned hours after the shooting in state court on first-degree murder charges, which carry a maximum penalty of life in prison without parole, said Erie County District Attorney John Flynn. New York has no capital punishment.

According to local media reports, the teenager was a student at State University of New York's Broome Community College near Binghamton.

When confronted by officers at the store, the suspect held a gun to his own neck, but they talked him into dropping the weapon and surrendering, Buffalo police commissioner Joseph Gramaglia told a news briefing.

Gramaglia said the gunman shot and killed three people in the parking lot of the Tops Friendly Markets outlet before exchanging fire with a retired police officer working as a security guard for the store, but the suspect was protected by his body armour.

Stephen Belongia, the FBI special agent in charge of the bureau's Buffalo field office, said the attack would be investigated both as a hate crime and as an act of "racially motivated violent extremism" under federal law.

Erie County Sheriff John Garcia said: "It was a straight-up racially motivated hate crime from somebody outside of our community."

US President Biden decried the shooting as "abhorrent to the very fabric of this nation" in a statement issued late Saturday. "Hate must have no safe harbour. We must do everything in our power to end hate-fuelled domestic terrorism."

New York Governor Kathy Hochul told a late-evening news conference she was dismayed that the killer managed to live-stream his attack on social media, which she blamed for hosting a "feeding frenzy" of violent extremist ideology.

Twitch said in a statement that it removed the livestream less than two minutes after it started.

In addition, a 180-page manifesto outlining 'The Great Replacement Theory' — the idea that white people are being replaced by minorities — also circulated online, reportedly authored by Gendron. It said he drew inspiration from the man who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019. Police declined to comment on the document.



Near the site of the shooting in Buffalo, New York, on Saturday. AP

A grisly inspiration for racist attacks

A gunman who had professed racist views attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, killing 51. This seems to have inspired several others to commit similar acts, including the Buffalo gunman. A look at some of them:

APRIL 2019: Prosecutors said a man who killed one person and injured three in an attack on a synagogue near San Diego during the Jewish holiday of Passover was inspired by the shootings in New Zealand.

AUGUST 2019: A gunman who killed 23 people in a crowded shopping centre in El Paso, Texas, posted a long note minutes before the



The suspect is detained after Saturday's shooting in Buffalo, New York. Reuters

attack. In it, he wrote, 'In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.'

AUGUST 2019: A 22-year-old Norwegian man who was sentenced to 21 years in prison for killing his stepsister and opening fire on a mosque said during his trial that he was inspired by the New Zealand massacre.

The New York Times

N Korea taking 'swift measures', reports more Covid deaths

REUTERS

SEOUL, MAY 15

NORTH KOREA said on Sunday a total of 42 people had died as the country began its fourth day under a nationwide lockdown aimed at stopping the impoverished country's first confirmed Covid-19 outbreak.

North Korea's admission on Thursday that it is battling an "explosive" Covid-19 outbreak has raised concerns that the virus could devastate a country with an under-resourced health system, limited testing capabilities and no vaccine programme.

State news agency KCNA said the country was taking "swift state emergency measures" to control the epidemic.

"All provinces, cities and counties of the country have been totally locked down and working units, production units and residential units closed from each other since the morning of May 12 and strict and intensive examination of all the people is being conducted," KCNA reported on Sunday.

Small wins buoy Ukraine; West says Russians losing momentum

Finland, Sweden take a step closer to joining NATO

OLEKSANDR

STASHEVSKIY & CIARAN MCQUILLAN

KYIV, MAY 15

ALMOST THREE months after Russia shocked the world by invading Ukraine, its military faced a bogged-down war, the prospect of a bigger NATO and an opponent buoyed Sunday by its wins on and off the battlefield.

Finland decided to seek NATO membership as top diplomats from the Western alliance met in Berlin. The leaders of the militarily neutral country said the invasion had changed Europe's security landscape — though NATO's chief declared that "Russia's war in Ukraine is not going as Moscow had planned."

"Ukraine can win this war," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, adding that the alliance must continue to give the country military support.

Several hours later, Sweden's governing party also endorsed joining NATO, a move that could lead to the country's application within days.



Ukrainian servicemen walk amidst rubble at a damaged area in Kharkiv. Reuters

The two nonaligned Nordic nations becoming part of the alliance would represent an affront to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has cited NATO's post-Cold War expansion in Eastern Europe as a threat to Russia. NATO says it is a purely defensive alliance.

While Moscow lost ground on the diplomatic front, Russian forces failed to make territorial gains in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine said it held off Russian offensives Sunday in the

country's east, and Western military officials said the campaign Moscow launched there after its forces failed to seize Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, had slowed to a snail's pace.

Ukraine, meanwhile, celebrated a morale-boosting victory in the Eurovision Song Contest. The folk-rap ensemble Kalush Orchestra won the glitzy pan-European competition with its song "Stefania," which has become a popular anthem among Ukrainians during the war. **AP**

THE KALUSH ORCHESTRA WON EUROVISION WITH THEIR ENTRY 'STEFANIA'

For Ukrainian fighters, Eurovision heralds coming victory over Russia

SERGIY KARAZY

MAY 15

GATHERED IN a basement used as safe quarters north of Kyiv a small group of Ukrainian soldiers joyfully watched their country win the Eurovision Song Contest, saying it heralded their coming victory in the war to evict Russian forces from Ukraine.

The Kalush Orchestra won the Eurovision with their entry *Stefania*, surfing a wave of popular support from all around Europe to claim an emotional victory that was welcomed by the country's president.

"We had a victory: today in



Reuters

Ukrainian service members celebrate (left) the victory of the Kalush Orchestra (right), a band from Ukraine, during the final of the 2022 Eurovision Song Contest. Reuters

Eurovision, but soon we will have a victory in Ukraine—

Russian war," said Tetyana, a military medic, standing in the

basement decorated with children's paintings of Ukraine flag

and "Glory to Ukraine" signs on them.



AP

The tired-looking but happy servicemen had sat around a screen, some tapping rhythmically on their knees when Kalush performed, and when the winner was announced they clapped and cheered with delight.

"We will also win," said Vitaliy, a soldier. "We have shown that we can not only fight, but we can also sing very nice."

The Russian invasion, now in its third month, has claimed thousands of civilian lives, sent millions of Ukrainians fleeing and reduced cities to rubble.

Moscow calls its actions a "special military operation" to disarm Ukraine and protect it from fascists. Ukraine and the

West say the fascist allegation is baseless and that the war is an unprovoked act of aggression.

The southern port city of Mariupol has suffered the heaviest fighting, and while it is now in Russian hands there hundreds of Ukrainian fighters still holding out at the Azovstal steel works despite weeks of heavy bombardment.

Stationed far to the north, closer to the border with Belarus, soldiers in the basement paid homage to the bravery of their comrades in the south.

"The next Eurovision we will host in liberated Mariupol," Vitaliy, the serviceman, said. **REUTERS**

10 ECONOMY

SECTOR WATCH INSURANCE

Irdai douses 'Burning Cost', premiums may fall for India Inc

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MAY 15

WHAT IS THIS COST

■ **Burning Cost** is defined as a kind of break-even cost where the higher claims in the portfolio will automatically lead to higher premiums to be collected in the subsequent year

PAVING THE way for lower insurance premiums for India Inc, insurance regulator Irdai has said that 'Burning Cost' can't be quoted by general insurers as a 'mandated minimum rate' to charge premiums to customers.

The new notification by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) on the role of 'Burning Cost' — which is a reversal of its earlier stand — will now help insurers to lower the premiums for customers, insurance sources said. However, whether it will lead to under-cutting of prices leading to cut-throat competition and under-writing losses remains to be seen. The new situation will be detrimental for the reinsurers who had seen their fire premium going up in the last two years, industry analysts said.

Burning Cost is defined as a kind of break-even cost where the higher claims in the portfolio will automatically lead to higher premiums to be collected in the subsequent year. In a bid to bring in underwriting discipline and checking rampant under-pricing, leading to large underwriting losses in the Indian general insurance industry, Irdai had earlier asked the general insurers to stick to the 'Burning Cost' as prepared by the Insurance Information Bureau of India (IIBI), a data mining body for the Indian insurance industry set up by Irdai, to price any product. The regulator said it has been receiving several complaints from policyholders, both directly and through various platforms such as industry associations, that insurers are referring to the 'Burning Cost' as a 'mandated minimum rate'.

As a result, in FY2019-20, state-owned GIC Re and other reinsurers, foreign reinsurance

branches (FRBs), had increased its fire premium by almost 30 per cent on the basis of higher 'Burning Cost', which, in turn, was passed on to India Inc by the general insurers.

However, the latest Irdai move will allow general insurers to extend appropriate discounts once again. "The objective of the IIBI publishing details of Burning Costs occupancy-wise is only to give information to insurers with regard to industry-level experience for appropriate use while rating risks. By no means does this even remotely imply that this is a 'mandated minimum rate,' Irdai said.

The regulator said it expects insurers to consider all applicable risk factors for rating a risk and give appropriate discounts or charge loading as warranted. The rating approach shall be part of the technical note filed under the Use and File/File and Use procedure as the case may be, Irdai said. Insurance sources said burning cost itself was a fallacy as it ignores all kinds of exposures for the insurers and always the price needs to be greater than burning cost for long-term viability. If this can't be followed either driven by reinsurers or underwriting discipline of insurers, we will be returning to the anarchic days of pricing and be back soon to the difficult days of pre-2019," said a reinsurance official.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

EXPLORATORY TALKS WITH SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Vistara could merge with AI, decision likely by end of 2023

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

TATA SONS has held exploratory talks with Singapore Airlines (SIA), its joint-venture partner in Vistara, for a potential merger of the airline with Air India, multiple sources told *The Indian Express*.

SIA is learnt to have asked for time until the end of next year to decide whether it wants to go ahead. Tata Sons is the holding company of the Tata Group, which took over Air India from the government earlier this year. Vistara is the only other full-service carrier in India.

"The Tatas and Singapore Airlines have discussed the merger possibility earlier this year. SIA had even agreed to join the Tata bid for Air India but because of the pandemic, it decided to back out given its poor financial condition," one of the persons aware of the development said on condition of anonymity.

SIA had waived the non-compete clause in Vistara's contract to allow the Tata Group to bid for the national carrier. Air India is now fully owned by the Tata Group, while Vistara is a 51:49 joint venture between the Tatas and SIA. "SIA has asked for time till the end of 2023 to decide whether it wants to go ahead with the merger or not. What they're looking for is some stability in their financial condition, and that of Air India's operations post the disinvestment," the source said.

"Discussions on how much equity Singapore Airlines will hold in Air India will be held once it has fi-



An Air India aircraft at Chandigarh airport. File

nalised its intention to merge," the source added.

According to this person, the appointment of Air India's new chief executive is a step in the direction of the possible merger. The Tata Group on Thursday announced the onboarding of Campbell Wilson, a Singapore Airlines veteran and CEO of its low-cost unit Scoot.

Wilson's appointment as Air India's CEO & MD was made with the "full blessings" of Singapore Airlines. "The two groups sat together and took the call to appoint Wilson at Air India. The decision has been taken with a long-term perspective. Wilson has global aviation experience and comes with long-term commitment to lead Air India's turnaround," another source said. Singapore Airlines CEO Goh Chooong Phong had said on Thursday: "Campbell is one of our most experienced senior executives who has made many important contributions in key management roles within the SIA Group. While we are sad to lose him, he goes to Air India with our full blessings."

On Friday, in his farewell note to Scoot employees, Wilson wrote:

"...There are other mountains to climb, and I am humbled to have been selected by Air India's board as the airline's new CEO. It is a fantastic opportunity to lead a historic airline, now owned by the Tata Group, to new heights, and I am grateful to embark on that exciting challenge with the full blessings of the SIA management team." The Tata Group won the bid to acquire Air India in October 2021, and the airline was transferred to its new owner in January. Vistara was launched in 2015.

Responding to a question from *The Indian Express* on the possible merger of Air India and Vistara, a Singapore Airlines spokesperson said: "We do not comment on any confidential discussions that we may or may not be having with our partners".

Tata Sons had not responded to an email seeking comments by the time of publication of this report on Sunday.

The Singapore Airlines Group reported a loss of SGD 4.3 billion (approximately Rs 23,851 crore) for the financial year ended March 2021 as passenger volumes fell 97.9% during the period. The group posted its first quarterly profit

since the onset of the pandemic during October-December 2021.

Air India posted a net loss of Rs 5,422.60 crore for the first half of 2021-22. The Tata Group has laid out a roadmap for the recovery of Air India, and to turn it around financially and operationally.

In Vistara, the JV partners have built a premium airline brand. During the January-March period, the two airlines together had a domestic passenger traffic market share of 18.7%.

The Tata Group also owns a majority stake in the low-cost airline AirAsia India, which could be merged with Air India's budget subsidiary Air India Express. Last month, Air India sought approval from the antitrust regulator Competition Commission of India to acquire AirAsia India.

A merger of Air India and Vistara would articulate Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran's philosophy of "synergise", given that the two airlines complement each other in some ways.

They have identical fleets with Airbus A320 family aircraft in the narrow-bodied fleet meant for domestic and short-haul international routes, and Boeing 787 aircraft for medium to long-haul international routes. Air India also has Boeing 777 aircraft for its flights to the United States.

While Vistara has been established as a premium airline brand in the domestic segment, Air India's strength lies in the international markets, especially the US and Europe. Currently, Air India is the only Indian carrier that flies to the US; Air India and Vistara are the only ones that fly to Europe.

'84% of staff feel organisation culture improved since Covid'

Around 84 per cent of employees globally say the organisation's culture has improved since the start of the pandemic, an EY Survey said



As employers shifted gears providing more flexible work options, there is more that they will need to invest in — that includes higher pay and overall brand building of the organisation

Methodology

The survey canvassed the views of over 1,500 business leaders and more than 17,000 employees across 22 countries and 26 industry sectors. In India, the responses are captured by more than 100 business leaders and more than 500 employees

36% OF EMPLOYER RESPONDENTS SAY THEY WANT EMPLOYEES TO COME BACK TO THE OFFICE FIVE DAYS A WEEK

As many countries emerge from the pandemic, employees have gained significant influence over their employers and that their 'wish list' from potential employers is changing

Source: EY/PTI

SBI hikes MCLR again, second in 1 month

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 15

STATE BANK of India (SBI), India's largest bank, has hiked its marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) by 10 basis points across tenures with effect from May 15.



SBI branch, New Delhi. File

This is SBI's second hike in MCLR in the last one month.

SBI's overnight, one-month, three-month MCLR now stands at 6.85 per cent as against 6.75 per cent earlier. Similarly, the six-month MCLR stands at 7.15 per cent, one-year MCLR stands at 7.2 per cent, two-year MCLR stands at

7.4 per cent, and three-year MCLR stands at 7.5 per cent.

SBI's hike follows the Monetary Policy Committee decision to jack up repo rate by 40 basis points to 4.4 per cent. In April, SBI had increased its MCLR by 10 bps before the MPC hiked its benchmark rate by 40 basis points.

RBI to review asset quality of PSBs tomorrow

BANIKINKAR PATTANAYAK
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

DAYS AFTER the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) hiked the repo rate for the first time in almost four years, governor Shaktikanta Das will meet chiefs of public sector banks (PSBs) on May 17 to review credit flow and assess the outlook on asset quality, sources told FE.

Das may also take stock of state-run banks' strategy to deal with the rising interest rate sce-

Ashima Goyal on rate hikes

New Delhi: The RBI is not "behind the curve" in hiking interest rate to tackle rising inflation, Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Ashima Goyal has said.

nario without upsetting growth dynamics, they added.

The Governor will also review

Frauds in PSBs dip 51% to ₹40,295 cr

New Delhi: Public sector banks reported over 51 per cent dip in the amount involved in frauds to Rs 40,295.25 crore during the fiscal ended March 2022, the RBI has said. **PTI**

PSBs' collection efficiencies, consumer grievance redress mechanism, digital banking units, lend-

ing to government entities, IT infrastructure and cyber security framework and any issue that the lenders may like to present, said sources.

"PSBs are preparing presentations on various aspects of their operations. The governor would probably like to have bankers' feedback as to how they are planning to cope with the new reality of elevated rates and tight liquidity conditions, and what could be the impact on banks' lending, asset quality and the broader operating environment," a source said. **FE**

'RIL to buy dozens of brands in \$6.5-bn play'

Mumbai: Reliance will acquire dozens of small grocery and non-food brands as it targets building its own \$6.5 billion consumer goods business, sources said.

Reliance plans to build a portfolio of 50 to 60 grocery, household and personal care brands within six months and is hiring distributors to take them to mom-and-pop stores and bigger retail outlets across the nation.

The consumer goods push under a vertical named Reliance Retail Consumer Brands will come on top of the brick-and-mortar store network of more than 2,000



A superstore of RIL, Mumbai. Reuters

grocery outlets and ongoing expansion of "JioMart" e-commerce operations in India's nearly \$900 billion retail market, one of world's biggest. Reliance did not respond to request for comment. **REUTERS**

IMF lifts weighting of dollar, Chinese yuan in SDR basket

REUTERS
BEIJING, MAY 15

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund said on Saturday it has increased the weighting of the dollar and Chinese yuan in its review of the currencies that make up the valuation of its Special Drawing Rights (SDR), an international reserve asset.

The review is the first since the yuan, also known as the renminbi, joined the basket of currencies in 2016 in what was a milestone in

FIRST SINCE 2016

■ **The review is the first since the yuan, also known as the renminbi, joined the basket of currencies in 2016**

Beijing's efforts to internationalise its currency. The IMF raised the US currency's weighting to 43.38 per cent from 41.73 per cent and the yuan to 12.28 per cent from 10.92 per cent. The euro's weighting de-

clined to 29.31 per cent from 30.93 per cent, the yen's fell to 7.59 per cent from 8.33 per cent and the British pound fell to 7.44 per cent from 8.09 per cent.

The IMF said in a statement its executive board had determined the weighting based on trade and financial market developments from 2017 to 2021.

"Directors concurred that neither the COVID-19 pandemic nor advances in Fintech have had any major impact on the relative role of currencies in the SDR basket so far," the IMF said.

Govt: Constraints in availability of domestic coal

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

THE COUNTRY is facing constraints in the domestic coal availability and the rest of the dry fuel demand needs to be met with imports, according to the Coal Ministry.

The ministry has also emphasised that coal block holders — both captive and commercial — have a major role to play in mitigating the coal shortfall situation. Domestic coal production is about 800 million tonnes, according to the coal additional secretary, who is also the chairperson of an inter-ministerial panel on coal linkages for the power sector.

The inter-ministerial panel



A thermal plant, Punjab. File

met recently to consider the requests for coal linkages to central/state sector power plants and to review the status of existing coal linkages. "...rest of the coal demand has to be met through imports from other countries", according to the minutes of the meeting on fuel linkages. **WITHPTI**

RBI OFFICIALS TO PARLIAMENTARY PANEL

'Cryptos can lead to dollarisation of economy'

JATIN TAKKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

CRYPTOCURRENCIES CAN lead to "dollarisation" of a part of the economy which would be against India's sovereign interest, top officials of the RBI have told a parliamentary panel, according to sources.

Briefing the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance chaired by former minister of state for finance Jayant Sinha, top officials of the RBI, including Governor

Shaktikanta Das, clearly expressed their apprehensions about cryptocurrencies and said these pose challenges to the stability of the financial system, sources told PTI.

"It will seriously undermine the RBI's capacity to determine monetary policy and regulate the monetary system of the country," a member of the panel quoted RBI officials as saying. Central bank officials said these currencies "can replace a part of monetary system it will also undermine the RBI's capacity to regulate the flow of money in the system". **PTI**

Imports are likely to be impacted significantly by the rupee's depreciation, with India's import requirements growing rapidly.

Imports, on the other hand, are likely to be impacted significantly by the rupee's depreciation, with India's import requirements growing rapidly — including increased demand for imported coal despite high international prices as thermal power plants are facing low coal inventories.

India's merchandise trade deficit hit an all-time high of \$192.4 billion in FY22 on the back of record high imports worth \$610.2 billion and exports worth \$417.8 billion. High growth in exports and imports has continued in this fiscal, with inbound shipments growing about 31 per cent year-on-year in April, boosted by high prices of commodities such as crude oil and coal.

The depreciation of the rupee is also set to make outward remittances, including those to students in the US, more expensive. Experts said the depreciation might impact the decision of students planning to study in the US going forward.

Experts noted that the rupee was unlikely to see further depreciation against the dollar for a sustained period in the first half of this fiscal. "As far as the rupee is concerned, we believe that with foreign exchange reserves still being large, it's unlikely to be a situation of disorderly depreciation. So, we now feel that for the rest of this half would be Rs 75-79 (against the dollar)," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist at Icria, adding that she expected that the rupee might fall below its recent low but was unlikely to remain there for a long period.

India adds 8.8 mn jobs in Apr: CMIE

Kolkata: As many as 8.8 million people joined the workforce in April, as per data provided by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).

However, the jobs that became available were inadequate compared to the demand, it said.

India's labour force increased by 8.8 million to 437.2 million in April, one of the largest monthly increases since the beginning of the pandemic, CMIE managing director and CEO Mahesh Vyas said.

The country's labour market was at 428.4 million in March, he added. In 2021-22, the average monthly increase in the country's labour force was 0.2 million, as per the data. The report said that an 8.8 million increase in labour force participation was only possible if some working-age people who were out of jobs joined the working population in April. **PTI**

Royals' big stride forward

Rajasthan beat Lucknow by 24 runs to move to second, inch closer to play-offs

SYNOPSIS: Rajasthan Royals move to 16 points, second only to Lucknow Super Giants, after their strong attack comfortably defends what appeared to be a par total.

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
MUMBAI, MAY 15

IT WAS a strange sort of Powerplay from Lucknow Super Giants. Even if the ball was coming on to the bat, the Brabourne Stadium pitch wasn't an outright belter. Still, Quinton de Kock tried to force Trent Boult on the up through a cordon of backward point, point and cover, and found the middle fielder. Ayush Badoni was sent at No.3 for some quick runs but Boult trapped him plumb in front first ball with an inswinger.

After seeing two wickets falling in two deliveries, KL Rahul went into a shell for a couple of overs, even leaving regulation length balls outside off.

Was it because Yashasvi Jaiswal had taken 20 off the last over of RR's Powerplay, or was it because LSG were 23 for 2 after five overs? Suddenly, Rahul, on 4 off 16, switched to hyper-attack mode; he lofted Prasidh Krishna for a gorgeous six over extra cover, but then sliced a short ball into point's hands two balls later.

From 29 for 3, it was going to take some chasing against the likes of Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin. Chahal went for a few, unlike the unhitatable Ashwin, but also had Deepak Hooda stumped for 59 off 39 in the 16th.

If the spin duo wasn't enough, left-arm seamer Obed McCoy, in just his third IPL game, was hard to get away with his slower-ball variations, from dipping full deliveries to sticky bouncers.

Padikkal presses on

Since he almost messed up RR's chase against Punjab Kings with a 32-ball 31 last week at Wankhede Stadium – where he was mis hitting even wide balls to fielders – Devdutt Padikkal has been a transformed batsman. On a difficult DY Patil Stadium surface where the ball was holding up, he began to play attacking strokes as soon as he came in against Delhi Capitals. It was not a pitch where he would get everything off the middle of the blade, but the intent was unmistakable. To that 48 off 30, he added 39 off 18 at the Cricket Club of India on Sunday.

These were much better batting conditions, of course, but Padikkal is usually someone who likes to get at least some feel of the wicket before opening up. Here he timed two lovely straight hits off Marcus Stoinis off



Trent Boult struck early to remove Quinton de Kock and Ayush Badoni. *sportszpics*

IPL TABLE

TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR
GT	13	10	3	20	0.391
RR	13	8	5	16	0.304
LSG	13	8	5	16	0.262
RCB	13	7	6	14	-0.323
DC	12	6	6	12	0.210
KKR	13	6	7	12	0.160
PK	12	6	6	12	0.023
SRH	12	5	7	10	-0.270
CSK	13	4	9	8	-0.206
MI	12	3	9	6	-0.613

Gujarat Titans secure top-2 finish

Mumbai: Wriddhiman Saha's solid 67 not out after a top-class bowling performance set up Gujarat Titans' seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in the IPL securing a top-two finish in the team standings. Gujarat bowlers put up a clinical show to restrict CSK to a below-par 133/5 despite a fine half-century by Ruturaj Gaikwad. Saha, who struck eight boundaries and asix in his 57-ball knock, anchored the chase nicely to get Gujarat home. While CSK were already out of the play-off race, the win for Gujarat guarantees them a top-two finish on the points table in their debut season, providing them with two opportunities to reach the final. Saha first added 59 runs in just 7.1 overs with Shubman Gill (18; 3x4) to lay the foundation of the win. CSK tried to make a mini comeback by grabbing two quick wickets in the middle overs. **BRIEF SCORES:** CSK 133 for 5 in 20 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 53, N Jagadeesan 39 not out; Mohammad Shami 2/19, Rashid Khan 1/31) lost to GT 137/3 in 19.1 overs (Wriddhiman Saha 67 not out; Matheesha Pathirana 2/24).

the second and third deliveries he faced, the latter of which zoomed into the sight screen. When Stoinis pulled the length back, Padikkal stood tall and creamed it through the covers. Later, even if he was a bit late on the ball, he made sure he hacked it safely over midwicket. However, he would become one of three RR batters who failed to clear the long CCI square boundaries. **BRIEF SCORES: Rajasthan Royals:** 178 for 6 in 20 overs (Yashasvi Jaiswal 41, Devdutt Padikkal 39; Ravi Bishnoi 2/31) bt Lucknow Super Giants: 154 for 8 in 20 overs (Deepak Hooda 59; Trent Boult 2/18, Obed McCoy 2/35, Prasidh Krishna 2/32)

Villain or Victim?: The world couldn't make up its mind about Symonds

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
MUMBAI, MAY 15

THE INITIAL reaction was a wrenchingly hollow sense of an emptiness that felt like it had been coming for a while – the gnawing feeling that some lives are almost destined to remain unfulfilled.

Former Australia allrounder Andrew Symonds, who died following a single vehicle car crash in Townsville, was both brutal and beautiful in a manner that was almost primal, and even if you were rooting for the opposition and willing him to get out every next ball, you just couldn't take your eyes off him. The bat always appeared too small in his massive gloves. It was as if the casual, rapid tapping of the bat in the crease was telling the bowler to just get on with it, as he did not have too much time for the frivolity of a long run-up.

For he just wanted to uncoil in deceptively quick fashion from that ungainly stance and bash the ball as hard as he could before he could wind down in the evening.

He was ahead of the curve in the limited-overs game, and way ahead of his time in T20, where even today, more than a decade after he played his last game, his international strike-rate of almost 170 remains eye-popping. It won't be unfair to say that for most Indian cricket fans in 2008, Symonds was one of the starring villains of the Monkeygate controversy, if not the most central figure at the heart of one of the game's biggest scandals. And yet, as it turned out, he became, more and more, the central victim of its fallout.

A few years later, Ricky Ponting would say that the incident and its aftermath had finished Symonds' career.

He lost trust in those who were supposed to stand by him, and no matter how strong you may appear to the world from the outside, being let down when you are at your most vulnerable can break the very best.

Villain or victim? That could well be the question that defined Symonds, and how the world perceived him.

It was hard to remain perched on the fence when it came to him. Out fishing when he was supposed to be at a team meeting. Drinking in public during a T20 World Cup, that too in England, when he had promised he wouldn't. Calling Brendon McCullum a lump of shit in a radio interview.

And then he would walk in at 84 for 5 in a Boxing Day Ashes Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and bash an immortal 156



After the Monkeygate scandal, Andrew Symonds felt let down and his career went into decline.

He was ahead of the curve in the limited-overs game, and way ahead of his time in T20, where even today, more than a decade after he played his last game, his international strike-rate of almost 170 remains eye-popping.

against the country of his birth. Or come in at 86 for 4 in a World Cup and crack 143 not out in 125 balls against Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Shoaib Akhtar.

It gives you a sense of what he was capable of if he could play almost 200 ODIs and still the consensus would remain that justice hadn't been fully done to the rare talent he possessed.

On the other hand, the bar brawls and the binge drinking would never quite go away. "I go out and drink hard all in one hit. Too fast, too much," he'd said once.

He was right. The rollercoaster he was on was going too fast, too much. All along, it had felt like something had to give. That it did at the age of just 46 adds the final full stop to a lifetime of sudden starts-and-stops. And it is probably fitting that he played his last match in India for an Indian team, Mumbai Indians, against an Australian team, New South Wales, in the 2011 Champions League. The villain and victim were both somehow conjoined to this land.

BRIEFLY

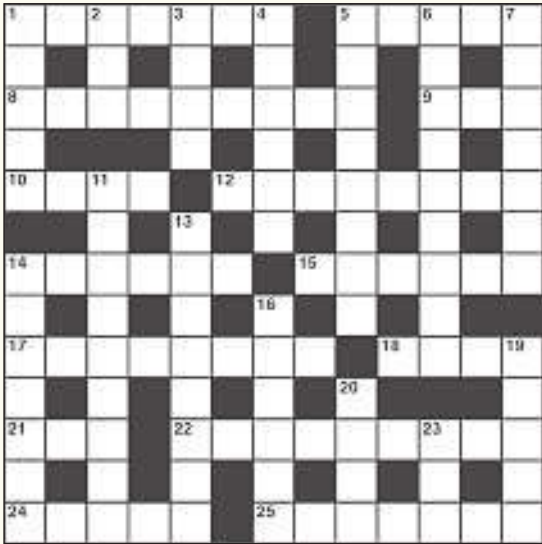
Zareen, Anamika, Parveen enter quarterfinals

New Delhi: Asian Championships bronze medallist Nikhat Zareen (52kg) continued her splendid run as she stormed into the quarterfinals alongside Anamika (50kg) and Parveen (63kg) in the World Boxing Championships in Istanbul on Sunday. Nikhat made light work of Mongolia's Lutsaikhan Altantsetseg to win by a 5-0 unanimous verdict. Parveen then displayed her attacking prowess to out-punch former Youth Olympic champion Jajaira Gonzalez of USA 5-0, while Anamika dispatched world championships bronze medallist Kristy Lee Harris of Australia with a similar margin. But, it was curtains for Shiksha (54kg), who went down by a 2-3 split decision to Youth Asian bronze medallist Yesugen Oyuntsetseg of Mongolia. Nikhat was the first Indian in action on Sunday and she completely dominated from start to finish in her round of 16 bout. The Telangana boxer used her quick hands to great effect and landed a flurry of straight punches on her rival's face in all the three rounds. The highlight of Nikhat's display was her immaculate footwork and speed, which the Mongolian found difficult to handle. **PTI**

Djokovic beats Tsitsipas for first title of the year

Rome: Novak Djokovic raised his first trophy of the year at the Italian Open on Sunday and showed that he's back in top form exactly a week before the French Open starts. After missing a large portion of the season because he wasn't vaccinated against the coronavirus, the top-ranked Djokovic beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-0, 7-6(5) for his sixth Rome title. "I've been building my form the last few weeks," Djokovic said. "It couldn't be better timing coming into Roland Garros." "Perfect scenario for me," Djokovic added later. Earlier on the red clay, Iga Swiatek defended the women's title by overwhelming Ons Jabeur 6-2, 6-2 to extend her winning streak to 28 matches. Djokovic didn't drop a set all week, having won his 1,000th career match over Casper Ruud in the semifinals. Djokovic, who was deported because of his un-vaccinated status ahead of the Australian Open, hadn't won a tournament since raising the Paris Masters trophy in November. **AP**

CROSSWORD 4741



ACROSS

- Punishment for lying in the sun? (7)
- A question of choice (5)
- New net cord starts tight (8)
- In traffic a repeatedly seen vehicle (3)
- Every one in teaching (4)
- Such a net may become loose (8)
- Many admit to being inexperienced (6)
- Sarah's crazy to worry (6)
- Mention a new name (8)
- Cause a storm in a teacup (4)
- Not conscious one is in error? (3)
- Gave effortless recital and staggered away (6,3)
- Entertained without a thought (5)
- Gleeman's new medley (7)

DOWN

- Give an oral test (5)
- This man invaded England (3)
- In extremities they can be accommodating (4)
- They're for putting on vegetables (6)
- He's paid to mind someone else's business (8)
- An insect's uninterrupted development (9)
- Gear to make use of horsepower (7)
- They will spend their time together (9)
- Rounded up but not rounded off (8)
- Many on past record seem to agree (7)
- Master switch for the current (6)
- Strip a firearm (5)
- Close up of a swimmer (4)
- Have something to confess (3)

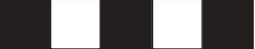
Solutions Crossword 4740: Across: 1 Tropical, 5 Stop, 9 Unfit, 10 Crouton, 11 Cool customer, 13 Remain, 14 Bedlam, 17 Maiden speech, 20 Officer, 21 Trice, 22 Earl, 23 Hydrogen. Down: 1 Taut, 2 Off form, 3 Intelligence, 4 Accrue, 6 Totem, 7 Panorama, 8 For the better, 12 Primrose, 15 Licking, 16 Osprey, 18 Infer, 19 Seen.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

A somebody was once a nobody who _____ - John Burroughs (6,2,3,3)

NRAAE



EOTDNN



DIOTT



EEDDDW

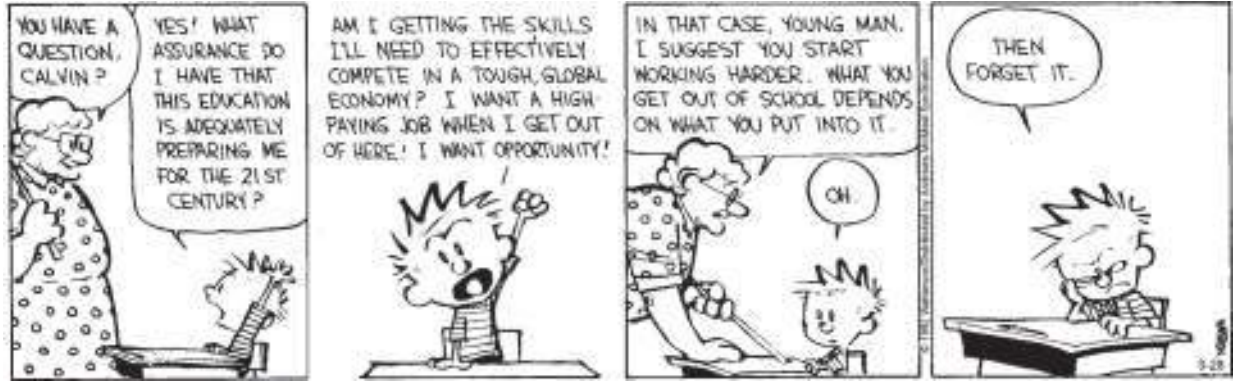


SOLUTION: ARENA, DITTO, TENDON, WEDED

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

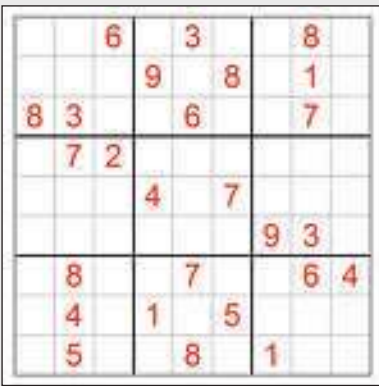


Difficulty Level 4s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level

1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4835



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

No matter how relaxed the pace of life today, the end of the week could be rather hectic. There will also be a certain amount of emotional tension. You may therefore come to be grateful for your foresight and refusal to put off tasks that should be done as soon as possible.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

You may have a conservative reputation but, if allowed to express yourself, you have a wonderfully understated eccentric way of working. Now that Venus is aligned with a publicity-minded region of your chart, partners and associates will begin to notice your qualities.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

The Moon makes a number of very sharp moves today, which means that domestic affairs should now be sorted out and family relationships resolved, at least until the end of the week. Older relations could be the most helpful, you know who you can rely on.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Everything that has happened recently has conspired to change the rules of the game. Don't blame other people though, after all it's you who has moved the goal posts, possibly for the very good reason that it seemed the right thing to do at the time.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

The Moon eases its way through a private sector of your chart, inspiring dreams, strange imaginings and mysteries of the most colourful kind. You will relish any intrigues or uncertainty that cloud your vision today. After all, a mystery could be the cause of much more pleasure.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Nobody can really put you on the spot or undermine your confidence. You are so full of self-doubt that you are skilled at sabotaging your own interests. Make it your goal to boost your self-esteem and inspire respect. But don't feel that you need to rush into anything hasty.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Your personal affairs will be highlighted in a rather special and even spectacular way this week. Yet another full seven days may pass before you can genuinely get to grips with outstanding domestic differences and family hopes. That gives you every reason to wait until your mind is made up.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

Pluto is a volatile planet, though often a force for good. This week you can be fully confident that this wonderful planet's healing and restorative powers will be used utterly in your favour, even if at first it looks as if the opposite is true. Things are not always what they seem.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

Because Jupiter, your planetary ruler, is still so powerful, you have all the protection you need. However, I would not say that this is a time for taking risks. On the contrary, great presence is required. You see, if you're to be a proper gambler you have to know the outcome before you start.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Even though you may be convinced that some kind of major career or professional change is unavoidable, you may hold things up for a while if you wish. However, it is certain that you can trust partners' generosity. Think now about what you might offer in return.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

Even the most dedicated Aquarians shouldn't keep their noses pressed to the grindstone all week. After all, you need a rest and a chance to get on with your own intensely personal interests. A word of advice, treat all amazing financial offers with a huge pinch of salt.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Mercury is moving through your chart at a fair old pace, an indication that you only have a limited period of time, probably about two weeks, to arrange interviews, attend meetings and make proposals. What is most important today, though, is the Moon, which is reinforcing and stiffening your emotions.

INDIAN BADMINTON TAKES GIANT LEAP: FROM THE SEMI-FINAL SPOT IN 1979 TO TOP OF THE WORLD IN 2022

Feather floats in the sky



Indian players and coaching staff with their medals and trophy after winning the Thomas Cup in Bangkok on Sunday. AP

Dreamy day of drama for Indian badminton, great depth takes team to new high at Thomas Cup

SHIVANI NAIK
MAY 15

WHEN WAS India last able to boast about 'killer instinct' in its sportspersons while simultaneously triggering meltdowns and chokes in three massive powerhouses? India's Thomas Cup final triumph was all about comebacks - Lakshya Sen and Satwik-Chirag's in their matches, and Kidambi Srikanth's from three years in the oblivion. Also, HS Prannoy's from wondering whether all his big scalps without titles amounted to much.

Like the World Championships in December, young Lakshya Sen led the way.

India's not too familiar with the American collegiate idea of sophomore blues, but various versions of impending doom have been buzzing about Lakshya Sen, and his imminent struggles after being figured out on the international circuit. An unprecedented Thomas Cup final, where he had been battered in quarters and semis, was to test his mettle when he took to the court. Losing the opener 21-8 against Anthony Ginting, the damning prophecy began buffering. Then, Sen snapped.

Taking a 7-3 and 11-7 lead playing at a faster clip, Sen would parry Ginting's attempts at pinning him to the deep forehand corner by retrieving relentlessly. Sen's defense is an addictive watch, an assured pulse-metre spike as he scurries around the court chasing down the bird from all manners of balanced and imbalanced positions. It's vertiginous from an eye level because the quality big his strokes rises as the rally goes on. Ginting had him trapped in the corners in the opener, but lost confidence in his masterstroke the moment Sen sent back the shuttle.

He then played into Sen's hands. Rather into his body, frustrated at being retrieved at the far lines. Anyone who knows Sen knows that is an invitation in bold and underlined to trouble. Any shuttle close to his body with his torquing torso is Sen's strength and he happily started winning the longer rallies - including a 46-shot one, which annoyed Ginting even more.

The Indonesian is a speed fiend, and does-

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

FIRST RUBBER: LAKSHYA'S SENSATIONAL COMEBACK

Sen beats Ginting 8-21, 21-17, 21-16

Game 1: Sen struggles with the drift as the Indonesian dictates play to open up a four-point lead at the interval. After restart, Ginting wins 12 straight points. Game 2: A stunning 46-shot rally is the highlight of the game, with the Indian retrieving everything that Ginting throws at him to win the point. Sen grows in confidence and levels the tie with a brilliant cross-court winner. Game 3: A subdued Sen trails by four points behind at the interval. After the change of sides, Sen drags Ginting into longer rallies, tests his patience and begins to claw his way back to win the match rather comfortably in the end.

SECOND RUBBER: DOUBLES DELIGHT TO GO 2-0 UP

Satwik-Chirag beat Ahsan-Sukamuljo 18-21, 23-21, 21-19

Game 1: The Indonesians race to a 17-11 lead with consistent attacking play. Chirag-Satwik try to stage a fightback with some attacking play but service errors cost them dear.

Game 2: After taking a five-point lead, Chirag-Satwik make uncharacteristic errors and are unable to deal with their opponent's tempo. Ahsan-Sukamuljo get four match points but the Indian duo saves all four to force a decider. Game 3: Nothing separates the two pairs throughout the decider but Chirag-Satwik play fearlessly throughout to earn two match points. The Indonesians save the first. Then, Chirag produces a cross-court smash to convert the other and give India a 2-0 lead.

THIRD RUBBER: SEALING IT WITH A STRAIGHT-GAMES WIN

Srikanth beats Christie 21-15 23-22

Game 1: Srikanth wastes little time in getting into the groove. He constructs his points beautifully to stay ahead despite Christie constantly finding ways to fight back. But Srikanth controls the pace of the game and pockets the game. Game 2: The Indian begins sharply but makes three back-to-back errors, which gives his opponent some confidence. Tense exchanges followed the change of ends, with momentum swinging both ways right till the end. But Srikanth shows no nerves to win the match.

had dialled back his days of romping across the All England and World Championships courts. India took a 1-0 lead laced with hope.

Doubles magnifique

Satwik-Chirag were alert and moving well, but had still gone down 0-1 on set score to Indonesia's legendary Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo and Mohd Ahsan. They took a 12-8 lead in the second, but then allowed the Indonesians to pick 12 of 14 points to hike up to 14-19. At 17-20, the Indians were staring at 3 match points.

But through the course of the second set, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy had roused from his strictly steady zone to begin to put a lot of shoulder on his downward strokes. Chirag Shetty has been pulling this team like a yellow headband-rimmed steam engine all week. But the gentle giant Satwiksairaj had woken up. He would muscle up the smashes with such a rip, that Ahsan and Kevin were

beginning to get rattled. At 20-18, Ahsan dumped a nervous smash into the net.

The Indians had taken more than giant-killing reputation into this tie after disposing of Malaysia and Denmark. In winning all doubles against the top nations, Satwik Chirag had announced their whistling return to winning ways. The two can bully on the court, and the fact that they don't often make it even more menacing when they do. Kevin-Ahsan flubbed four match points. It was surreal, as the Indians went 20-all, 20-21, 21-all, 22-21 to finally have Satwik bisect the Indonesians with his steep smash to level 23-21.

The Indians have lost so many from 20-18, it was a delicious sight to watch them turn the tables on opponents. In the decider, leafs were traded, but 13-16 didn't look dire. Piling on the pressure with Satwik belting away his smashes, the Indians easily turned 17-19 to 20-19. Their audacity in not giving too much respect to Indonesia's big names, brought India 2-0 up.

Comeback 2. Check. Srikanth's case has been a protracted period of three long years in the wilderness, hearing broken tape of how he had wasted his talent from random strangers on Twitter to coming into contention again. The World Championship silver medallist had waited for his body to patch up all the niggles so he could freely express his game. Yet the December event had ended in a lost final against Loh Kean Yew. In Bangkok, Srikanth's comeback was 6 out of 6 matches played and won. He had been parrying off second singles till quarters, but in Anders Antonsen and Jonatan Christie, he had two bonafide Top Tens. He made mincemeat of the rankings, of all history, of their gnashing resistance on the day, with mere great shot selection and an error-free game.

All he touched was marked gold, though Christie attempted comebacks and stayed calm. But Srikanth's class was far too much for the Asian Games gold medallist to find any rhythm when he was left scrambling to return the Indian's delectable bouquet of racquet work.

Reflexive backhand returns in response to tight spinning net dribbles, saw him sticking his hand out for the most defensive of winners at 8-7 in the second. The iconic net charging follow-up to a smash brought him match point, and the crosscourt smash set fire to the curtains of the dramatic day.

3-0 ain't dramatic as a whole. But every moment was for a pulsating nation back home, giddy with anticipation of a historic Sunday.

PM INVITES TEAM, AWARDS POUR IN

Calling India's Thomas Cup triumph as one of the country's finest sporting wins, Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the shuttlers to his residence on returning from Bangkok.

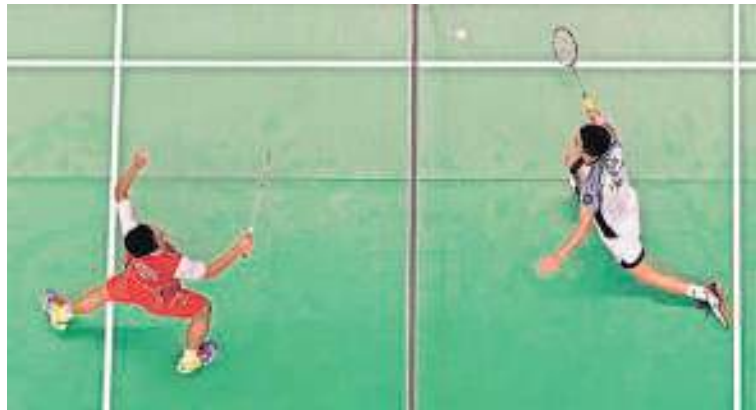
\$1 million: Prize money for winning the tournament.

Rs 1 cr: Amount the Indian players to get from BAI

Rs 1 cr: Cash award announced by Sports Minister Anurag Thakur.

Three shot stories

Lakshya Sen's relentless retrieving abilities, Srikanth's silken strokes and Chirag-Satwik flexing their muscles: the points that defined the matches



Lakshya Sen (R) in action against Indonesia's Anthony Ginting. AP

AT 14-13, LAKSHYA SMASH THAT HELPED HIM NOSE AHEAD

The shuttle clipped the tape and fell on Anthony Ginting's side to give Lakshya Sen a slight edge at 14-13 in the decider. Luck ought to favour the brave, goes the saying. Sen had earned his luck with a relentless defense that prolonged rallies and punctured Ginting's hopes in a way the defending champion wasn't prepared for. Sen had done the hard work of defending from four corners, and for a player like Ginting, this cancelling of

his attack with such bullheadedness was beginning to grate.

Sen started again the next point, maintaining a medium rhythm in his retrieves before he let rip the kill against the run of play. It was an accelerated down smash that hurried the pace mid-rally and gave him the 15-13 to nose ahead. The explosive attack on the back of a harp of defense was too much for the speed at top gear Ginting.

SRIKANTH'S DUBSTEP AT 22-21

Asked his favourite shot, aside of the winning point that is, Srikanth picked the penultimate one. "Because that brought me match point," he would say.

But 22-21 in the second had indeed been the signature Srikanth Dubstep. In a sparse rally, Srikanth amped up the pace for a near-kill which could've sufficed on its own. But the likes of Jojo Christie get under the smash invariably. It's in the follow up charge to the net that the opponent is far too spent to raise arms for yet another incoming bamboozler. It is Srikanth's confidence shot, it's regal in its execution, and stomping in its aftereffect.

On the day, it brought Srikanth the match point after being 19-20 down and a decider looming. A third set is always fraught with energy reserves



dipping and in a team event. Srikanth has never been a dawdler, and finishing in 2, asserting his class is his nature. Jonatan Christie doesn't get frazzled much. But the setup that fetched him the championship point left him deflated. A crosscourt smash that followed didn't need even the driving in of the knife. A poke drew blood, and India had a maiden Thomas Cup travelling on a flight back home.

DOWN 4 MATCH POINTS, CHIRAG-SATWIK UNLEASH POWER GAME

Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo, half of the legendary Minions, losing a Thomas Cup final rubber from four match points is unheard of.

That the Indians, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty chipped away at Indonesian confidence, at their self-image even, at what is at the core of their strength, and superbly executed with the building of pressure by the Indians, was the turning point of the final which ended in a disbelieving 3-0 result. The clutch of points were all about finding the right nuanced placement and not bullying speed as such.



At 17-18 Kevin Sanjaya had the most confident smash grazing the line pointing to accuracy and control. In the next few minutes, Indians incited anarchy. Satwik left shyness behind, and uncoiled his powergame.

Coach Boe basks in reflected glory after guiding Indian doubles pair

SHIVANI NAIK
MAY 15

MATHIAS BOE had been going through withdrawal symptoms. His chosen poison turned ailment: top-grade badminton. The former Thomas Cup winner and Olympic silver medallist, who retired two seasons ago, had not really come to grips with being away from the circuit. He immersed himself in his business, and his personal life. "But I missed winning like this at the top events. I'm happy India gave me the chance to experience this once again," said India's doubles coach (**inpic**), who helped the newly-minted Thomas Cup champions pull off a sensational 3-0 win against all-time leaders Indonesia in the final.

Boe has always shared a great equation with Chirag Shetty. And was guiding him along with video analysis online at the All England even when he wasn't formally the India coach. India's efforts to bring Malaysian Tan Kim Her as specialist doubles coach had fallen through, and India's top pairing was looking and feeling rudderless. Playing at the



topmost level, but without an experienced brain ticking behind on the coach's chair.

"The Malaysian appointment almost came through and then it didn't. And Chirag contacted me and asked if I was available for a short term. I've always had a good equation with Gopi, so we spoke. But these things need higher-ups involved. It was also a good offer for them to sign me. And now here I am in Bangkok, having won the Thomas Cup again," Boe said, happy and amazed.

He would guide the Indians through wins against Malaysia and his home nation Denmark - two highly-tactical battles against mercurial opponents that needed clarity of strategy. And his typically belief-inducing pep talks. At the Tokyo Olympics, the Indians beat the eventual champions, but went out in the group stage - leaving a whiff of unfinished business.

"Since the Olympics, it's really something I've missed doing. It's what I like. But my body grew old, and I couldn't play on the circuit any longer. I missed competing deeply. So, I was happy to be back and help in this capacity. It comes naturally to me to inspire others to win," Boe said.

Second coming

He would return to Mumbai and imme-



Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (L) and Chirag Shetty celebrate after their win. AP

diately change a few things in the training regimen. "As players, they need sparring partners. But I also changed a bit of their style of play and how they communicate." The Indians had gotten into a rut, losing narrow

matches, and flubbing 20-18 advantages on match points. "As a recent player, I had an idea of what's running through their minds. They also needed someone to scream at them," he added.

It was an unreal team effort. And India will now realise how big this result is given only 6-7 countries have won Thomas Cup before. This will count as one of the biggest moments of Indian sport... I hope India really move away from the underdog tag and push forward and defend this crown like favourites."

MATHIAS BOE

DOUBLES COACH, INDIA

While the group games ended with India going down to the Chinese Taipei pair a day before the quarters, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag had the last laugh. Their belief in the process never dipped. "Quarters was tremendous pressure because losing would mean no medal," he says. India pipped Malaysia 3-2.

Denmark was a challenge not because Boe had to plot against his former teammates. But because Indians needed the confidence bolstered in their gameplan. "Finals was also that one sole shot at glory. And I didn't want us to miss it. I'm happy for myself and I'm happy I got the chance to feel this," he reiterated.

He would watch in awe as the team spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for 10 minutes. "It was an unreal team effort. And India will now realise how big this result is given only 6-7 countries have won the Thomas Cup before. This will count as one of the biggest moments of Indian sport," Boe said, adding his favourite moment will always be "the Srikanth projectile coming down." "Lakshya and my boys also fought, of course."

His day-after wish? "I hope India really move away from the underdog tag and push forward and defend this crown like favourites."

Vimal refers to 1983 moment

PTI adds: Coach Vimal Kumar on Sunday hoped the triumph would do the same to the country's shuttle sport what the 1983 World Cup win did to cricket. "We always had hopes but the way the players played, they just put up a performance out of the blue," Kumar said. "In 1983, when India won the cricket World Cup, the euphoria was something else but cricket was always a very popular sport and I hope with this performance, now badminton can also become so popular. It has always been about individual achievements but this was a team performance and I hope the popularity of the sports goes up from here on."