

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNNY



JAHANGIRPURI

Court: Cops accompanied illegal rally, probe if any complicity

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

NOTING THAT there was "utter failure" on the part of Delhi Police in stopping the unauthorised Hanuman Jayanti procession in Jahangirpuri last month that triggered communal clashes in the locality, a local court said the issue "seems to have been simply brushed aside" by senior officers — and complicity "if any" of police personnel needs to be investigated.

"The liability on the part of the concerned officials needs to be fixed so that in future no such incident takes place and the police is not complacent in preventing the illegal activities," said Additional Sessions Judge Gagandeep Singh in an order, while referring to the third procession in the area on April 16.

A copy of the order, which was issued on May 7 rejecting a clutch of bail pleas, has been directed to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Worried India rating may turn junk, govt pushed 'narrative management' strategy

ANISHA DUTTA
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

AS THE country fought the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in mid-2020, the Ministry of Finance's economic division was drafting a strategy to counter the "negative commentary" on India by global think-tanks, indices, and media, amidst worries that this could lead to downgrading of sovereign rating to "junk".

SOVEREIGN RATINGS: DOWN AND UP

MOODY'S

Nov '19: Sovereign rating affirmed at Baa2; outlook changed to negative from stable

June '20: Rating down to Baa3, negative outlook

Oct '21: Affirms Baa3 rating; outlook changed to stable

FITCH RATINGS

Dec '19: BBB-, stable outlook

June '20: BBB-, negative outlook

Nov '21: BBB-, negative outlook, but notes "rating balances still-strong medium-term growth outlook and external resilience"

In June 2020, then Principal Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance, Sanjeev Sanyal, prepared a presentation — "Subjective Factors that impact India's Sovereign Ratings: What can we do about it?" — for internal circulation within the government. Sanyal is now a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.

The 36-page presentation, seen by *The Indian Express*, noted

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Security outside the entrance to Kashi Vishwanath temple and Gyanvapi mosque on Sunday. Anand Singh

IndiGo 'denies' boarding to child with special needs

PRANAV MUKUL
& ABHISHEK ANGAD
NEW DELHI, RANCHI, MAY 8

IN AN incident that raises questions over the handling of air travellers with special needs, budget airline IndiGo allegedly denied boarding to a specially abled child on a Hyderabad-bound flight at the Ranchi airport on Saturday.

A senior official of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) told *The Indian Express* that the aviation safety regulator is probing the incident, and that a report has been sought from the airline. IndiGo said in a statement that the child "could not board the flight... as he was in a state of panic".

The incident was brought to light in a Facebook post by a passenger at the airport who was waiting to board another flight. The author of the post, Manisha Gupta, told *The Indian Express* that the IndiGo staff "did not show any compassion".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

AT HIGHEST LEVEL SINCE JAN 2010

Demand up, output down: Atta prices at record high

Bakery bread prices up as well with 8.39% inflation in Mar

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

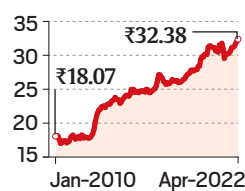
THE ALL-INDIA monthly average retail price of wheat flour (atta) was Rs 32.38 per kg in April, the highest since January 2010, the earliest month for which data are available.

Atta prices have been rising as both production and stocks of wheat have fallen in India, and demand has risen outside the country.

Data reported by State Civil Supplies Departments to the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution show the all-India average retail price of wheat flour was Rs 32.78/ kg on Saturday (May 7) — 9.15 per cent higher than the price (Rs 30.03

FLOUR PRICE RISE

Retail prices of wheat flour (₹/kg)



Note: All-India monthly avg

per kg) a year ago.

Among the 156 centres for which data are available, the price on Saturday was the highest in Port Blair (Rs 59/ kg) and lowest (Rs 22/ kg) in West Bengal's Purulia.

Among the four metros, the

average wheat flour retail price was the highest in Mumbai (Rs 49/ per), followed by Chennai (Rs 34/ kg), Kolkata (Rs 29/ kg) and Delhi (Rs 27/ kg).

All-India average daily retail prices of wheat flour have been rising since the beginning of the calendar year, having increased by 5.81 per cent since January 1, the data show. The record high in April was significantly higher than the average retail price of Rs 31/ kg recorded in April 2021.

Sources said that the steady increase in the price of flour is due to the rise in wheat prices amid the fall in production due to the war in Ukraine, and a higher overseas demand for Indian wheat. The high domestic price of diesel has added to the logistics cost of both wheat and flour.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

US moves can push Indo-Pacific over edge of abyss, warns China

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

PUSHING FORWARD Chinese President Xi Jinping's concept of a "Global Security Initiative", an important Chinese official has said that the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States, "if left unchecked", would bring "horrible consequences and push the Asia-Pacific over the edge of an abyss".

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng, who is one of the top

EXPLAINED The Chinese point of view

BEIJING IS trying to clear the air on its intent on the Indo-Pacific, Russia, and possible consequences for the region. Le is an influential official — his words carry the weight of the party and government.

contenders to succeed Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also said, "Rather than learning the painful lessons of conflict and suffering in Europe, they seek to create a "second theatre" and bring the conflict to the Asia-Pacific."

Beijing refers to the Indo-Pacific as Asia-Pacific, and Vice Foreign Minister Le has been one of the voices presenting the Chinese government's view on developments in the region. Le, a former Chinese ambassador to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WORLD



JILL BIDEN, TRUDEAU MAKE SURPRISE VISIT TO UKRAINE

RUSSIA BOMBS UKRAINE SCHOOL, MANY FEARED DEAD

PAGE 9

TOREX



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3 WEST BENGAL

Amid slide, Shah’s tough luck message for BJP: End old whine for new battle

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, MAY 8

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah wrapped up his first visit to West Bengal after the 2021 Assembly election results, where the BJP’s hopes were badly dashed, with a tough reality check for the party’s floundering unit. The Bengal BJP leaders needed to give up their pipedream of President’s Rule in the state, as well as looking at the CBI to fight its political battles, Shah said.

The state BJP unit has been feeling somewhat orphaned by the central leadership in its fight against the aggressive Trinamool Congress. Shah’s blunt remarks did not just indicate that Delhi was done with a sympathetic ear, but also a realisation at the top that, as its electoral slide in Bengal accelerates, the BJP needs to go down to the grass-roots to lift itself up, rather than wait for a helping hand.

Shah made the remarks at a meeting with state BJP leaders, including MPs and MLAs. “The Trinamool Congress came back to power for a third straight term after receiving a huge mandate. It has been just a few months since it won the election. Now, an elected government cannot be overthrown by imposing Article 356. We cannot do such things... It is a political fight which needs to be fought politically with the help of our workers,” Shah is learnt to have said.

The BJP is given to frequent calls for President’s Rule in the state, amidst incidents of political violence in the state and a ppliant Governor in Jagdeep Dhankhar in Raj Bhavan.

Shah did not just discourage the repetitive calls for Article 356 but also for CBI investigation against TMC leaders.

The message was that the BJP should play its part of the Opposition, taking the cases or attacks against it as things which will happen.

After its fantastic 2019 Lok Sabha poll performance in West Bengal with 18 seats, and the commendable Assembly results last year, where it and the TMC mopped up all the constituencies wiping out the Left and



Amit Shah with Leader of Opposition and BJP MLA Suwendu Adhikari at Cossipore where he met the family of a dead BJP worker last Friday. *Express File*

Congress, the BJP has been struggling to hold on to both leaders as well as public support.

It has not won a single election since the May 2021 results, despite measures such as bringing in young blood by appointing MP Sukanta Majumdar as state unit president. More than on the streets, the BJP has been in the courts filing petitions against the government, or knocking on Dhankhar’s doors.

Not to say that it has been entirely unsuccessful, with the High Court in August last year ordering a CBI inquiry into incidents of crime and murder in days after the poll results, on the BJP’s petition. The Bogtui incident in March, in which eight people were burnt alive in retaliation to the murder of a local TMC leader, putting the ruling party on the backfoot, was also a boost for the BJP.

The CBI is now investigating apart from the above case, a State Level Selection Test recruitment scam, an SSC recruitment scam, the murders of Congress councillor Tapan Kandu and an eyewitness in the case, and the rape and death of a minor in Nadia district.

However, for the central BJP, what has been an eyepener is that all this is not turning into any poll gains. On April 16, for example, after the Bogtui horror, TMC candidate Shatrughan Sinha had won the Asansol Lok Sabha seat by a margin of over 3 lakh votes, helping the TMC snatch the seat from the BJP. Former BJP-turned-TMC leader

Babul Supriyo had won the Ballygunge Assembly bypoll by a huge margin, with the BJP candidate losing his deposit.

The thinking now is that without a strong organisational strength, the BJP cannot hope to defeat the TMC, a party that is firmly entrenched at all levels of the administration in its third straight term in power.

Ironically, the fact that there is no substitute for legwork is a lesson that its rivals usually take from the BJP’s electoral successes.

BJP Bengal spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said: “Amit Shah made it very clear that our political fight against the TMC government will continue and we will do it politically. For that we have to strengthen the organisation and create booth-level committees across the state. Our workers will be our strength and we will not give an inch of space to the TMC.”

TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh said the BJP appears to have learnt its lesson. “There is a BJP of old-timers and a BJP of newcomers. The two factions are fighting among each other in the state. Amit Shah is making attempts to unite the party. The call for President’s Rule was always a jumla. If they wanted, they could have easily done it as their party is in power and their agent sits in Raj Bhavan. Why didn’t they do it? Because it is not possible to dethrone a political party from power like this. Good sense has finally prevailed.”

Mother of dead BJP worker says he had received death threats

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 8

TWO DAYS after a 26-year-old BJP worker was found hanging in Cossipore in north Kolkata, his mother on Sunday said that her son had received death threats hours before his death.

“I had heard someone saying, ‘we will kill you and no one will even find your body’. Someone was heard saying so outside our house but I don’t know who the person was,” Arjun Chaurasia’s mother Laxmi told mediapersons on Sunday.

Arjun’s brother, Anand, said that an unidentified car was parked in the vicinity of the house on the night of the incident. “The car was seen at 4 am on Friday. No one knows whose vehicle it was. I have told the police about it. They have assured

us that they are examining the CCTV footage of the nearby area and would let us know if any substantial thing is found,” Anand said.

Arjun’s body was found hanging on Friday inside an abandoned railway quarters building, nearly 100 metres away from his home. He worked at a Burrabazar factory.

Police, meanwhile, have not confirmed whether Arjun died by suicide or was killed.

A team of the homicide section of the Kolkata Police examined the spot from where his body was found using a 3D laser scanner.

A forensic team has already collected samples from the spot. “It is too early to ascertain the cause of death,” said an official of Kolkata Police.

Police have installed CCTV cameras in and around

Chaurasia’s house and set up a police outpost to keep a check on the movement of people, prevent tampering of evidence and provide security to his family members.

Following the Calcutta High Court’s order, a postmortem was conducted at the Eastern Command Hospital here on Saturday in the presence of Chief Judicial Magistrate of South 24 Parganas district and Chaurasia’s family members. The entire process was videographed.

The BJP’s youth wing has been holding rallies over the past two days in various parts of the state over Chaurasia’s deaths. On Sunday, BJP’s Asansol South MLA Agnimitra Paul and around 200 BJYM workers assembled outside a police outpost in Hirapur area and demanded immediate punishment for those responsible for Chaurasia’s death.

FRESH CONTROVERSY

Salim compares ‘state police with dog’, draws flak from Trinamool

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 8

PARTICIPATING IN a protest march organised by Left parties in Birbhum’s Rampurhat, demanding punishment for the accused in the Bogtui-killings, Anis Khan’s death, Hanskhali and Bolpur rape incidents, CPI(M) state secretary Md Salim on Sunday compared the state police with “dog”, drawing flak from the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Salim made the controversial remarks at a public meeting in Bankura on Saturday and followed it up with similar comments at another rally in Arambagh in



CPI(M) state secretary Md Salim

Birbhum district earlier in the day. “I apologise that my comparison of the ability of police to catch culprits with that of trained canines used by the force was an insult to the dogs, as they would return the trust posed in them through their performance,” he said in Arambagh, where at least 10 people died in an arson last month at Bogtui. “They (canines) will work objectively and not register cases at the behest of the likes of (TMC

Birbhum district president) Anubrata Mondal,” Salim added.

Reacting to Salim’s remarks, TMC general secretary Kunal Ghosh said, “Those who used to call Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose a ‘Tojo’s dog’ will have this culture. It’s their genetic problem. In their time, police were turned into slaves. We should strongly condemn this (Salim’s statement) because our family members work in the police. Salim forgot how they used police during their regime.”

BJP state spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said several such incidents in the recent past may have spurred Salim to make the comments.

— WITH PTI INPUTS

CM POSTPONES DISTRICT REVIEW MEETS

Govt alerts coastal districts as cyclone Asani approaches

Disaster management teams, police and KMC employees put on alert

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 8

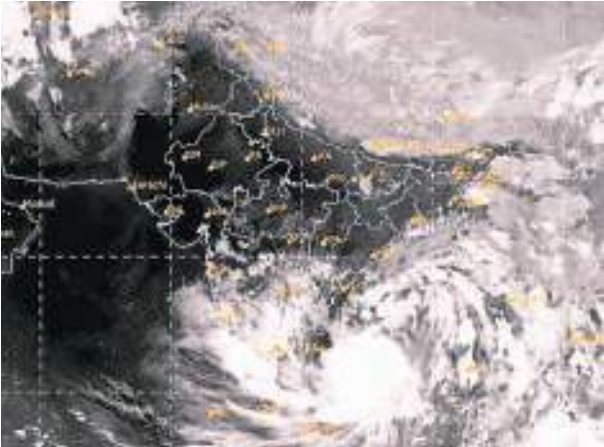
CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee on Sunday postponed her administrative meetings in view of the advancing cyclonic storm Asani. According to the meteorological department, Asani upon reaching west-central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal off north Andhra-Odisha coasts on Tuesday, is very likely to recurve north-northeast wards and move towards the northwest Bay of Bengal off Odisha coast.

Banerjee was scheduled to visit Medinipur and Jhargram districts on May 10-12, but the meetings have now been rescheduled to May 17-19.

“Since cyclone Asani is advancing, coastal districts need to prepare for it, and hence, came the deferment,” said an official.

“It is very likely to move northwestwards and intensify further into a severe cyclonic storm over the east-central Bay of Bengal during the next 12 hours. It is very likely to continue to move northwestwards till the evening of May 10 and reach west-central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal off north Andhra Pradesh and Odisha coasts. Thereafter, it is very likely to recurve north-northeast wards and move towards the northwest Bay of Bengal off Odisha coast,” said Dr G K Das, a scientist at the Regional Meteorological Centre, Kolkata.

The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has, meanwhile, cancelled the leaves of its employees. Disaster management teams, police and KMC employees have been asked to stay prepared.



Cyclone Asani over the Bay of Bengal on Sunday 10 pm. *IMD*

while, cancelled the leaves of its employees. Disaster management teams, police and KMC employees have been asked to stay prepared.

“We are preparing ourselves to deal with any situation if the cyclone hits the city, and thereafter, bringing the city back to normal,” said mayor Firhad Hakim.

The KMC is keeping cranes, electric saws, long stairs and earthmovers on standby. “All preparations are being done based on our lessons from the devastating effects of the Amphan cyclone in May 2020,” said Hakim.

Meanwhile, the regional meteorological department on Sunday warned fishermen not to venture into central parts of the Bay of Bengal on May 9 and 10 and into the northwest Bay of Bengal from May 10-12.

The cyclonic storm is 400 km west of Port Blair (Andaman Islands), 940 km southeast of Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) and 1,000 km south-southeast of Puri (Odisha). The cyclonic storm over Southeast Bay of Bengal has moved northwards with a speed of 13 kmph and lay centred at 08:30 hours on Sunday, said the weatherman.

According to the weather department, light to moderate rainfall is likely between May 10 and 12 at a few places over coastal areas of the Gangetic West Bengal while isolated heavy rainfall is likely over Paschim Medinipur, North & South 24 Parganas districts between May 11 and 12.

“Fishermen are advised not to venture into the sea from May 10. Fishermen out at sea are advised to return to the coast by the

BRIEFLY

STF arrests ‘mastermind’ of drug racket

Kolkata: A Special Task Force (STF) of the Kolkata Police on Saturday arrested the alleged mastermind of a drug racket in Bhubaneswar. The accused, identified as Deversh More (24), has been evading arrest since February, said the STF. According to the STF, More is the mastermind of the drug racket in which three persons have been arrested, so far. A case was registered on February 19 under the NDPS Act after two of the accused were arrested with drugs, said the STF. The accused used to procure drugs through Darknet using cryptocurrency, said the STF. More was produced in a court, which remanded him in police custody till May 11. **ENS**

Leopard rescued in Jalpaiguri

Jalpaiguri: A full-grown leopard strayed into Binnaguri Cantonment in Jalpaiguri district on Sunday, triggering panic among the residents, said forest officials. The forest department was soon informed about the leopard by the cantonment authorities, they said. Forest personnel rescued the animal and took it to the Lataguri Environmental Observatory for treatment, said the officials. After treatment, it will be released into the wilds of north Bengal, they said. **PTI**

The IndianEXPRESS e.AQDA

WHERE NEWSMAKERS DROP IN FOR A CANDID CHAT.

Express e.Adda hosts Prashant Kishor
Indian Political Strategist

in conversation with

Anant Goenka
Executive Director
Indian Express Group

Vandita Mishra
National Opinion Editor
The Indian Express

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Khalistan flags spring up at Assembly gate, Himachal seals state borders

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, MAY 8

HOURS AFTER Khalistan flags were found tied on the main gate and slogans crawled on the walls of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly complex in Dharamshala, where usually only winter session is held, the state police Saturday ordered to seal all interstate borders and barriers.

The flags, which were removed by the administration, were put up on the outer side of the gate number one of the Assembly complex. While state Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur condemned the “cowardly” act, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is making inroads in the poll-bound state, termed the incident a “complete security failure” on the part of the BJP-led governments in state and at Centre.

In a late evening order, DGP Sanjay Kundu directed all senior police officers “to seal all inter-



Khalistan flags outside the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in Dharamshala, Kangra, on Sunday. Pradeep Kumar

state borders and keep strict vigil at the places of probable hide-outs” of the miscreants. The senior officials were also directed to keep the special security units, bomb disposal squads and quick reaction teams on high alert and “strengthen the security of dams, railway stations, bus stands, government buildings

and vital installations”.

The DGP also issued directions to all field formations to “remain on high alert from today”, keeping in view “the incidents of Khalistan elements in neighboring states, the “incident of tying of a Khalistan banner in Una” on April 11, and “hoisting of banners and graffiti of Khalistan

on the outer boundary of Vidhan Saba in Dharamshala”. He also cited the threat posed by the outlawed Sikhs for Justice announcing June 6 as voting date for Khalistan Referendum in Himachal Pradesh.

An FIR under Sections 153-A, 153-B of IPC, Section 3 of HP Open Places (Prevention of Disfigurement) Act, 1985, and Section 13 of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) has been registered at Dharamshala police station against Gurpant Singh Pannu of the SFJ and others. Earlier, Kangra SP Khushal Sharma said the banners might have been put late in night or early morning on Saturday.

“We have removed the Khalistani flags. Investigation is going on,” the SP said. Condemning the incident, Chief Minister Thakur said the culprits will be caught soon.

“Only the winter session of the Assembly is held at Dharamshala, and hence it requires tighter security arrangements during that time only.

Taking advantage of this, the cowardly incident was carried out, but the government will not tolerate it. The culprits will be caught soon. Action will be taken,” Thakur said.

SDM, Dharamshala, Shilpi Beakta said, “It is an alert call for us. We received information around 7.30am. We removed the flags and walls have been repainted. We are going to register a case under relevant sections of the Himachal Pradesh Open Places (Prevention of Disfigurement Act), 1985.”

Meanwhile, the AAP slammed the BJP, asking how will its government save the people of the country when it failed in ensuring national security.

On Twitter, Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia said the putting up of the Khalistan flags outside the gate of Assembly building in Dharamshala was a “complete” failure of the BJP government in dealing with the matter pertaining to national security and keeping the respect of the people of the hill state. **WITHPTI**

BJP-RSS turning Ram into Rambo, Hanuman into a symbol of anger: Baghel

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

CHHATTISGARH Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday hit out at the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), accusing them of turning “gentle and benign Lord Ram” into a Rambo-like figure and Hanuman into a symbol of anger.

In an interview, the Congress leader told *The Indian Express* that India was passing through a phase of “provocative and aggressive nationalism” — communal strife was reported from across India in April — with no space for “dissent and disagreement”. He added that this would pass and the Congress would make a comeback.

Ram is embedded in our culture, Ram is both saakar and nirakaar (form and formless)... We have accepted Ram in various manifestations. We know Kabir's Ram, Tulsi's Ram and Shabari's Ram...,” Baghel said. He went on to add, “Mahatma Gandhi also saw Ram. His last words were ‘Hey Ram’ and he used to recite Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram. But today, the way the BJP and the RSS see Ram and the agenda they are setting, the Ram who was ‘Maryada Purushottam’... they have turned him into a fighter. *Rambo bana diya ja raha hain* (They are turning him into Rambo). *Akramak* (aggressive). Hanuman is the epitome of humility, devotion and knowledge. But the posters of him today. If you look at Hanuman's old pictures, the Lord was so beautiful, *bhakti se dhyam mudra main* (meditative and devotional). And today, angry and aggressive. The way they are setting the mindset of the society... they did it with



Chhattisgarh CM said India is going through a phase of ‘aggressive nationalism’, and it would pass

Ram earlier and are doing it with Hanuman now...”

One of the Baghel government's ambitious projects is the Ram Van Gaman Paryatan Paripath or a tourism circuit envisaged to map the route that devotees believe the deity took during his exile from Ayodhya.

The CM also took a dig at the BJP, saying that its idea of nationalism was imported. “Who met Mussolini? It was BS Moonje ... the drums, caps, everything is imported. Their model of nationalism has no place for dissent and disagreement. Our nationalism is different. Ours is rooted in traditions from the beginning, evolved by the likes of Shankaracharya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Ramakrishna Paramahansa ...”

Asked why his party had not been able to convey this message to the electorate, Baghel said that it took the RSS 75 years to make the country understand its version of nationalism. “Remember, it was rejected during Gandhi's time. (VD) Savarkar and his ideas were rejected. But it is like bubbles in the water. A time will come when they will burst. This period will also end.”

Asked what, in his view, the

Pakistani among 2 LeT militants killed in gunfight in south Kashmir

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, MAY 8

TWO LASHKAR-E-TAIBA militants, one of them a Pakistani national, were killed in a gunfight in south Kashmir's Kulgam district on Sunday, police said.

The foreign militant, Haider, was involved in multiple attacks in north Kashmir, including the killing of policemen. The other, Shahbaz Shah, was behind a recent civilian killing in the district, police said. A joint team of Jammu and Kashmir Police and the Army cordoned off Cheyan village in Devsar area in the morning. The firefight that followed lasted several hours, said police. “Both the trapped militants were killed,” said a police tweet. “Incriminating materials including arms and ammunition recovered.”

Police said Shah, a Kulgam resident, was involved in killing civilian Satish Kumar Singh in the district's Kakran village in April.

Quoting Kashmir Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar, police said the Pakistani militant was active in north Kashmir for over two years before shifting base to south Kashmir.

“Pakistani terrorist Haider was involved in two recent terror crimes in Bandipore,” they said, adding that he was behind the killing of two policemen, Mohammad Sulan and Fayaz Ahmad. Police added that in February, Haider killed a special police officer, Zubair Ahmad, in Bandipora. Two policemen and a BSF officer were injured in that attack. Police said the slain militants belonged to Lashkar-e-Taiba.

This is the second major gunfight in south Kashmir in the past three days.

NFHS-5: Total fertility rate dips, sharpest decline among Muslims

At 2.3, it's still highest among all, followed by Hindus at 1.94

ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

THE FERTILITY rate in the Muslim community has seen the sharpest decline over the past two decades, shows a comparison of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data.

Keeping in trend with the pattern over the years, the fertility dipped further in the community to 2.3 in 2019-21 from 2.6 in 2015-16.

The overall total fertility rate (TFR) has reached replacement levels in the NFHS-5 at two children per woman in the community, declining from 2.2 in the NFHS-4, therefore showing below the replacement level of fertility at 2.1.

While all religious communities have shown a decline in the fertility rate, thus contributing to a decline in the nation's TFR, the decline has been sharpest in the Muslim community from 4.4 in NFHS-1 (1992-93) to 2.3 at present.

The Muslim community's fertility rate, however, remains the highest among all religious communities with Hindus following at 1.94 in NFHS-5, down from 2.1 in 2015-16. The Hindu community had a fertility rate of 3.3 in 1992-93.

The NFHS-5 has found that the Christian community has a fertility rate of 1.88, Sikhs 1.61, Jains 1.6 and Buddhists and neo-Buddhists 1.39, the lowest in the country. An accelerated decline in the fertility rate in Muslims has taken place twice — between 1992-93 and 1998-99 as well as between 2005-06 and 2015-16, when it dropped by 0.8 points in

these rounds of the NFHS.

“The fertility gap between Hindus and Muslims is narrowing. High fertility is mostly a result of non-religious factors such as levels of literacy, employment, income and access to health services. The current gap between the two communities is because of Muslims' disadvantage on these parameters. Over the last few decades, an emerging Muslim middle class has been realising the value of girls' education and family planning,” says Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director, Population Foundation of India.

The percentage of Muslim women who have had no schooling reduced from 32 per cent in NFHS-4 (2015-16) to 21.9 per cent in NFHS-5 (2019-21). In contrast, for Hindus, it saw marginal change — from 31.4 per cent in NFHS-4 to 28.5 per cent in NFHS-5.

The NFHS-5 report said the number of children per woman declines with women's level of schooling. Women with no schooling have an average of 2.8 children, compared with 1.8 children for women with 12 or more years of schooling. Women in the lowest wealth quintile have an average of 1.0 more children than women in the highest wealth quintile, and economic betterment organically leads to lower fertility rates, the report has found.

“The data also shows that Muslims are increasingly conscious of family planning. The use of modern contraception among Muslims increased from 37.9 per cent in NFHS-4 to 47.4 per cent in NFHS-5,” adds Muttreja.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

38% men, 9% women above 15 years use tobacco products

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, MAY 8

OVERALL, 38 per cent men and 9 per cent women above 15 years of age use tobacco products, as per the National Family Health Survey 5 (2019-21) released recently. The report also shows that only 1 per cent of women drink alcohol, compared with 19 per cent of men above the age of 15 years.

The NFHS-5 survey has been conducted in an approximate 6.37 lakh sample households across 707 districts in 28 states and 8 Union Territories. At least 7.24 lakh women and 1.01 lakh men have been covered to provide disaggregated estimates up to district level.

Women (19 per cent) and men (51 per cent) belonging to Scheduled Tribes are more likely to use tobacco than those from any other caste/tribe groups. Among men as well as women, the use of tobacco is higher in rural areas (43 per cent for men and 11 per cent for women) than in urban areas (29 per cent for men and 6 per cent for women). Nearly three-fifths of men (58 per cent) and 15 per cent of women with no schooling or less than 5 years of schooling use tobacco.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

BJP MP Navneet Rana challenges Uddhav to contest against her

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 8

PARLIAMENTARIAN NAVNEET Rana on Sunday challenged chief minister Uddhav Thackeray to contest elections from “anywhere in Maharashtra”, adding she was “willing to contest against him and show him the empowerment of women in electoral politics.”

After being discharged from Lilavati hospital, where she was admitted for treatment of spondylosis, the Amaravati MP, who was arrested last month, alleged that she was harassed and tortured in the lockup. Stating that she was jailed along with her husband for “taking lord Ram's name”, Rana said the “people of the state will give a befitting reply to them as they have misused their power”.

Addressing CM Thackeray, she said, “If you have guts, then contest election from any of the districts in state. I will contest against you and then see who the people of the state choose. You have got the CM's position because of your forefathers' name. I challenge you to enter the electoral process, contest and win the elections. I will contest against you.” Rana said she would come up against Shiv Sena in the upcoming city body election, accusing the party of “massive corruption in the BMC in the past few decades”. “If reciting Hanuman Chalisa is a crime then I am willing to stay in jail not only for 14 days but for 14 years too...The Shiv Sena-led government will pay the price for victimising me,” MP said. Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana were arrested under sedition charges after they had announced that they will recite Hanuman Chalisa in front of the personal residence of CM.

J&K LG take part in pooja in ruins of ASI-protected temple

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
CHENNAI, MAY 8

JAMMU AND Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha participated Sunday in a religious ceremony held in the ruins of the 8th century Martand Sun temple, a protected monument under the charge of the central government's Archaeological Survey of India.

This is the second religious ceremony in three days at the site, which the ASI has tagged as a “site of national importance”. The ASI does not permit prayers at a protected site unless it was a functioning place of worship at the time the body took charge of it.

A press release issued by Sinha's office said he took part in a “navagraha ashatamangalm pooja” at the temple, which was “held in the presence of saints, members of Kashmiri Pandit community and local residents”.

It is unclear if the administration took permission from the ASI for the event. The press release did not mention if ASI clearance was



J&K LG Manoj Sinha

obtained for the pooja. ASI officials were unavailable for comment.

The leader of the group that conducted a pooja on May 6 told *The Indian Express* they had not taken permission from the ASI, as it was a Hindu temple and worshippers should be allowed to conduct religious ceremonies and offer prayers.

According to the press release, the LG “reiterated the government's commitment to protect and develop ancient sites of cultural and spiritual significance”. He was quoted as saying that the administration was “making dedicated efforts to transform histor-

ical spiritual places of J&K into vibrant centres that will guide us on the path of righteousness...”

The priests for the ceremony were flown in from Kerala, *The Indian Express* has learnt. As the LG took part in the rituals, several of his security personnel ringed the area where the pooja was being held. The site was turned into a fortress for most part of the day.

A contingent of Kashmiri Pandits affiliated to the Panun Kashmir group were in attendance, as was the former BJP Assembly member Surinder Ambardar. Kashmir Divisional Commissioner Pandurang K Pole, IGP K Vijay Kumar, Deputy Commissioner Piyush Singla and other officials accompanied Sinha.

There have been periodic demands by Hindu groups for opening the temple for worship, but no religious ceremonies have been previously allowed at the site, although individual worshippers have not been prevented from offering prayers, local sources said. Mostly, it has been a picnic site for people of the area.

Excavation at Rakhigarhi in Haryana reveals drainage system, jewellery, toys

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

THE LATEST round of excavations at the 5,000-years-old Harappan site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana's Hisar district have revealed the structure of some houses, lanes and drainage system, and what could possibly be a jewellery-making unit, say officials from the Archaeological Survey of India

(ASI), while announcing the completion of the three-month-long phase of excavations.

The digging, which has been going on at three of the seven mounds, has also revealed pieces of copper and gold jewellery, terracotta toys, besides thousands of earthen pots and seals. “The idea of this phase of excavation is to make the archaeological site of Rakhigarhi accessible to people by exposing the structural remains



An excavation site at Rakhigarhi in Haryana's Hisar district. PTI

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her Budget Speech in February 2020. The other sites are Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Sivasagar in Assam, Dholavira in Gujarat and Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu. The site was first excavated by the ASI in 1998-2001. Later, Deccan College, Pune, excavated the site from 2013 to 2016.

Manjul added that this is the first time excavations have been done on Mound No. 3, which has revealed “an aristocratic settlement”, but said that more rounds of excavation will be needed to ascertain the structure and nature of this elite settlement.

A total 13 trenches are open across three mounds, five at Mound No. 1, seven in Mound No. 3 and one trench in Mound No. 7. At Mound 1, a huge quantity of debris/ waste of semi-precious stones such as agate and carnelian have been found, along with evidence of street planning with a general width of 2.6m.

At Mound 3, a burnt-brick wall has been traced, conveying the possibility of a walled settlement. The noteworthy antiquity found at both the mounds include steatite seals, terracotta unbaked sealing with relief of elephants and Harappan script.

Significantly, Mound 7 yielded around 60 burials in the previous excavations.

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e-Procurement Notice
e-Tender for & on behalf of IRCON are invited from bidders meeting qualifying requirements for the following works in connection with the Construction of Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Project (MAHSR T2):-
e-Tender no. **IRCON/3026/MAHSR-T2/e-Tender/Vehicle/1 Dt. 09.05.2022**
Hiring of Light vehicles for IRCON's officers & Staff in connection to the project of 'Design, Supply and Construction of Track and Track related Works including Testing and Commissioning on Design-Build-Lump Sum Price basis for Double Line High Speed Railway between Zoroli Village at Maharashtra-Gujarat Border (MAHSR km 156.600) and Vadodara (MAHSR km 393.700) in the State of Gujarat and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli in connection with the Construction of Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Project' (MAHSR T2 Project)
Estimated Cost of the work ₹ 23.67,540.00
Last Date & Time of e-bid Submission 23.05.2022 up to 15.00 Hrs.
For further details and updates, please visit website: www.etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app. Amendments/Corrigendum, if any, would be hosted on the website only. **General Manager /C/IVT/2**

GUJARAT URJA VIKAS NIGAM LIMITED
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PBX: 0265-2310582, www.guvnl.com

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
GUVNL invites Tender for procurement of power through Competitive Bidding (followed by reverse auction) from 500 MW grid connected Wind Power Projects (Phase III) with an additional 500 MW capacity under 'Greenshoo Option'. For tender documents (RfS and PPA) and further details please visit www.guvnl.com and <http://www.bharat-electronictender.com>. The last date of bid submission is 15/06/2022.
Date: 09/05/2022 General Manager (RE & IPP)

भारतीय कंटेनर निगम लिमिटेड
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NOTICE INVITING E - TENDER
CONCOR invites E-Tender in Single Packet System of tendering for the following work:-
Tender No. CONE/PI/Area-I/Zonal (NCR) 2022-23
Name of Work Annual Maintenance Contract for Day to Day Civil Works at ICD Badli, ICD/Moradabad, ICD/Agra, ICD/Kanpur, ICD/Kota & ICD/Malpur.
Estimated Cost Rs.167.63 Lakhs
Completion Period 24 Months from the 15th day after date of issue of Letter of Acceptance
Earnest Money Deposit Rs.23,815/- (through e-payment)
Cost of Tender Document Nil
Tender Processing Fee Rs. 4000/- plus GST as applicable (through e-payment)
Date of Sale of Tender (online) 09/05/2022 (11:00 hrs) to 30/05/2022 (up to 17:00 hrs)
Date & Time of Submission of Tender 31/05/2022 (up to 17:00 hrs.)
Date & Time of Opening of Tender 01/06/2022 at 11:30 hrs.
For financial eligibility criteria, experience with respect to similar nature of work, etc, please refer to detailed tender notice available on website www.concorindia.com, but the complete tender document can be downloaded from website www.tenderwizd.com/CCIL only. Further, Corrigendum / Addendum to this Tender, if any, will be published on website www.concorindia.co.in, www.tenderwizd.com/CCIL and Central Procurement Portal (CPP) only. Newspaper press advertisement shall not be issued for the same.
Group General Manager (Engg.)

SALUTE THE SOLDIER
Martyrs on 09th May 1997

Shri A. C. Kumar,
Deputy Inspector General

Naik/GD L. Ranjan Singh

Sashastra Seema Bal fondly remembers with gratitude and cherishes the valiant sacrifice of its brave hearts Shri A. C. Kumar, Deputy Inspector General and Naik/GD L. Ranjan Singh who made supreme sacrifice of their lives in the line of duty for Nation on 09th May, 1997. Shri A. C. Kumar, Deputy Inspector General and Naik/GD L. Ranjan Singh were posted at Divisional Headquarters of Manipur and Nagaland Division in Imphal, when they were attacked by unidentified assailants in the Divisional Headquarter campus and they attained martyrdom. We salute the supreme sacrifice of our brave soldiers.
SASHASTRA SEEMA BAL

KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(A Government of Karnataka Enterprise)
CIN: U85110KA1970SG001919

No. A1M1B3/Imported Coal/May 2022 Dated: 09.05.2022
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(Two part system) (Through GoK e-Procurement Portal Only)
Name of Work: IMPORT AND SUPPLY OF 6.36 LAKH MT OF COAL FOR YERMARUS TPS OF RAICHUR POWER CORPORATION LIMITED AND FOR BELLARY TPS AND RAICHUR TPS OF KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED OVER A PERIOD OF ONE YEAR, ON FIRM PRICE BASIS. Tenderers are invited from reputed mine owners and/or traders of imported coal meeting the Pre-Qualifying Requirements stipulated for Import and Supply of 6.36 lakh Metric Tonnes of Coal for Yermarus Thermal Power Station (YTPS) of Raichur Power Corporation Limited (RPCL), located at Chikkasugur, Raichur district, Karnataka, and for Bellary Thermal Power Station (BTPS) located at Kuditali, Bellary district & Raichur Thermal Power Station (RTPS) located at Shakthinagar, Raichur district, Karnataka, of Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) over a period of One year as per the terms and conditions detailed in the tender document. The tender processing fee and EMD payment through GoK e-procurement portal modes only. The tender document can be downloaded from the website <http://www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in>. Last date for receipt of completed bids: **17:00 Hrs on 07.06.2022**. Further details can be had from **The Superintending Engineer (Mines)**, KPCL, No. 82, Shakti Bhavan, 11th Floor, Race Course Road, Bengaluru-560 001. Mobile: 94495 98901. Telefax: 080-22203894. E-mail: sfeuels@gmail.com/cefuelskpc@karnataka.gov.in Website: <http://kpcil.karnataka.gov.in>

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No.: **08/2022-23/SE/PHC/PKD**. CWSS to Perumatty, Pattanchery, Elappully, Nalleppilly Panchayaths in Palakkad district - Phase V - Supplying and laying balance distribution network and providing balance FHTCs (2140 nos.) in Elappully Grama Panchayath (Zone - I part II). EMD: **₹2,00,000**. Tender fee: **₹11,800**. Last date for submitting tender: **27-05-2022 03:00 pm**. Phone: **0491 2544927**. Website: www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in
KWA-JB-GL-6-162-2022-23 Superintending Engineer, PH Circle, Palakkad

THE TAMILNADU CO-OPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS' FEDERATION LTD
29 & 30, Industrial Estate, AMBATTUR, CHENNAI - 600 098. Telephone No. 044-23464528-32. Fax No.: 044-23464536. Email ID: jmdaavin@gmail.com & aavinpt@gmail.com
Ref. No: 18977/TA/TP/2019 **TENDER NOTICE** Dt: 06.05.2022
The TCMFP Ltd., invite Two Part Tenders by way of OFF-LINE / E-SUBMISSION from the Private tanker providers / contractors for following contract works:

Sl. No	Name of the Work	Pre-bid Meeting	Tender Submission	Technical bid opening
1.	Supply of 375 nos. of Various capacities Road Milk Tankers on hire for transportation of milk from/to DCMPU dairies/chilling centers / bulk milk collectors of Tamilnadu / Andhrapradesh / Karnataka / Kerala / Telengana states and other dairies for the period of 3 years (2022-2025)	25.05.2022 at 03.00 P.M.	09.06.2022 up to 01.00 P.M.	09.06.2022 03.05 P.M.

(Wednesday) (Thursday) (Thursday)

Document sale between **11.05.2022 to 08.06.2022 from 10.00 A.M. to 3.00 P.M.** and On **09.06.2022 from 10.00 A.M to 12.00 Noon**. The Tender Form cost of Rs.2000 + 18% GST and Rs. 100.00 extra by post. For downloading tender documents, EMD and other details, refer website www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.aavinmilk.com for off line/ www.tntenders.gov.in for E-submissions. Tender documents can be downloaded at free of cost.

DIPRI 2182 /TENDER/2022 **DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER (Engg)**

சென்னை மத்திய பால் தானிய கூட்டுறவு நிறுவனத்தின் மூலமாக



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THIS WORD MEANS

MONKEYPOX

A zoonotic cousin of smallpox, found in Central and West Africa

HEALTH AUTHORITIES in the United Kingdom have confirmed a case of monkeypox, a rare viral infection similar to smallpox, in an individual who recently travelled to that country from Nigeria.

Monkeypox virus

The monkeypox virus is an orthopoxvirus, which is a genus of viruses that also includes the variola virus, which causes smallpox, and vaccinia virus, which was used in the smallpox vaccine. Monkeypox causes symptoms similar to smallpox, although they are less severe.

While vaccination eradicated smallpox worldwide in 1980, monkeypox continues to occur in a swathe of countries in Central and West Africa, and has on occasion showed up elsewhere. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), two distinct clade are identified: the West African clade and the Congo Basin clade, also known as the Central African clade.

Zoonotic disease

Monkeypox is a zoonosis: It is transmitted from animals to humans. According to the WHO, cases occur close to tropical rainforests inhabited by animals that carry the virus. Monkeypox virus infection has been detected in squirrels, Gambian poached rats, dormice, and some species of monkeys.

Human-to-human transmission is limited — the longest documented chain of transmission is six generations, the WHO says. “It is important to emphasise that monkeypox does not spread easily between people and the overall risk to the general public is very low,” Dr Colin Brown, Director of Clinical and Emerging Infections at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said on Saturday.

Transmission can be through contact with bodily fluids, lesions on the skin or on internal mucosal surfaces, such as in the mouth or throat, respiratory droplets and contaminated objects, the WHO says.



Monkeypox's symptoms are similar to smallpox's, but less severe. WHO

Symptoms and treatment

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), monkeypox begins with a fever, headache, muscle aches, back ache, and exhaustion. It also causes the lymph nodes to swell, which smallpox does not. The WHO underlines that it is not to be confused with chickenpox, measles, bacterial skin infections, scabies, syphilis and medication-associated allergies.

The incubation period (from infection to symptoms) for monkeypox is usually 7-14 days but can range from 5-21 days. Usually within a day to 3 days of the onset of fever, the patient develops a rash that begins on the face and spreads to other parts of the body. The skin eruption stage can last between 2 and 4 weeks, during which the lesions harden and become painful, fill up with a clear fluid and then pus, and develop scabs or crusts.

According to the WHO, the proportion of deaths has varied between 0 and 11%, and been higher among young children.

There is no safe, proven treatment for monkeypox yet. The WHO recommends supportive treatment depending on the symptoms. Awareness is important for prevention and control of the infection.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, MAY 8

THE WORLD Health Organization (WHO) report on excess mortality due to Covid-19 is the latest in a series of exercises in the last over a year that tend to suggest India's official death toll is an undercount. The WHO report has pegged India's excess mortality (people who probably would not have died if there was no pandemic) for 2020 and 2021 at 47.4 lakh. Several other studies have shown India's Covid-related death count at anywhere between 25 lakh to 60 lakh. In fact, the upper bound for the WHO study is even higher.

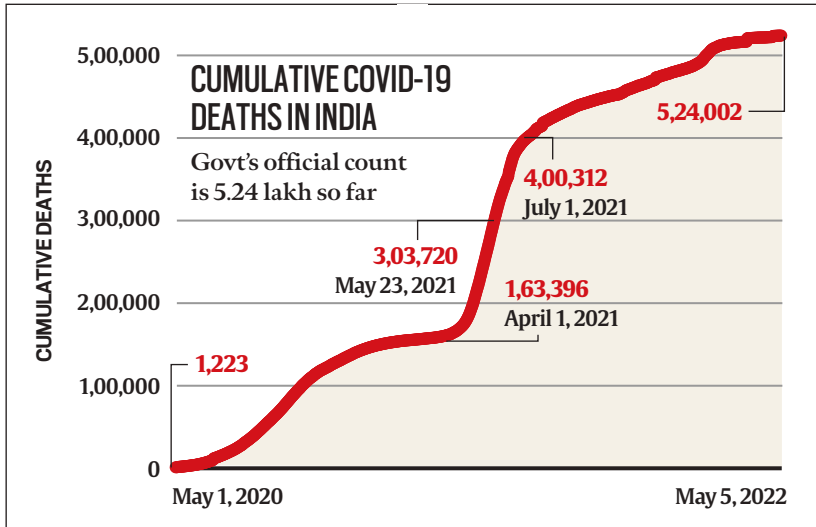
While these figures are being debated, many important nuances are being missed.

The official count

Any discussion on the undercount as of now is premature because India has not yet stopped counting its Covid deaths. The 5.24 lakh deaths counted until now is not the final official toll. The number is under constant revision, almost daily, and is likely to remain so for several months, if not years. Kerala, for example, is updating its death toll almost every day, and many other states have been doing it periodically. Last week, Assam added 1,300 deaths on a single day. Other states have made similar adjustments in the past.

Even the death numbers reported in 2020 and 2021 are not final. The more than 21,000 deaths Kerala has reported in the last four months have not all happened this year. Most of them pertain to last year. The 1,300 deaths Assam added on April 25 did not all happen that day, or that month, or this year. They most likely happened the previous year. Several hundreds, possibly thousands, of deaths that states adjusted in 2021 would have actually happened in 2020. The additions to the overall tally are being made on the day these deaths are being confirmed, and not the day these might have happened.

That would mean that even though the death count for 2020 still shows up as 1.49 lakh, chances are that it has already been substantially corrected, and may be revised even further at a later stage. Many of the deaths that would have happened in 2020 but are not included in the 1.49 lakh tally would have been accounted for at a later stage. Those deaths have not been missed; they will reflect in the



statistics. The same is true for 2021.

It is difficult to measure the scale of the undercount in a situation like this, particularly when the counting exercise is still on. A physical count, and verification, of the dead in a country as vast as India during such chaotic times is bound to take a little more time than running some equations in a computer model.

The WHO report does not get into calculating the scale of the undercount, for India or any other country. It has done a more straightforward exercise of calculating excess mortality. It has estimated the total number of people who likely died in India in 2020 due to all causes and, from that, has subtracted the expected number of all-cause deaths if there was no Covid. These 'excess' deaths are considered to be a direct or indirect result of Covid-19.

Multiple studies and estimates

It is often argued that, because multiple studies have been pointing to similar estimates, they must be reflective of the true death toll in the country. What is being overlooked is that these studies have been throwing up similar estimates probably because they have all been using similar mathematical models and statistical methods. The researchers, and those doing peer reviews, belong to an overlapping set of people.

What these studies certainly show is that there is a general agreement in academic circles on the usefulness of these models in the

current situation, possibly based on their ability to simulate the reality in some earlier situations. That, however, is no guarantee that these models have an unquestionable capability to accurately mimic the dynamics of the current pandemic, whose nature and behaviour is far from fully understood.

Computer modelling is routinely used by academics to simulate real-life situations. The accuracy of their results depend on the underlying quality of data and assumptions. Because of multiple layers of extrapolations involved, slight changes in assumptions or input data can significantly alter results.

To estimate India's Covid toll, the WHO study has relied, among various sources, on death registration data from the Civil Registration System (CRS). Several media houses had published monthly CRS data for a few states last year, and these numbers did not always match. Depending on which publication was selected to pick these numbers from, the output of the mathematical model would have been different.

Also, the monthly CRS death data, even if obtained through an RTI applications, was only 'provisional' and subject to change. Only the numbers mentioned in the annual CRS report, released last week, are final.

The quality of assumptions can also induce large uncertainties in the final result. In March 2020, a widely quoted computer modelling study led by Ramanan Laxminarayan had pre-

dicted 1 to 3 million Covid-related deaths in India by the middle of April, roughly three weeks from that time. When nothing like that happened, Laxminarayan acknowledged that the risk of dying from Covid was actually a lot lower than he had originally assumed.

Scientists admit that they still do not fully understand the nature and behaviour of this virus. It is thus difficult to assume that these processes and behaviours that epidemiologists have not fully understood have somehow found accurate description in modelling or machine learning algorithms.

CRS and SRS

As discussed in The Indian Express earlier, the CRS data released last week do not throw any fresh light on this debate on their own. That is because CRS only has death registration data, and not every death in the country is registered. The actual death data is revealed by the Sample Registration Survey (SRS) whose report for 2020 has not yet been released.

CRS and SRS are annual exercises that complement each other. The SRS uses a door-to-door survey in a few thousand sample towns and villages to produce an estimate of the total number of births and deaths in the country every year. This exercise is repeated after a few months to avoid duplication.

The CRS is a database of all births and deaths that get registered. The CRS database is therefore a subset of the SRS. Over the last few years, as more and more people are registering their births and deaths, the CRS numbers are converging closer to the SRS estimates.

These two systems might still not be perfect, but they are extremely robust sources of birth and death data. These data are consistent with the findings of the Census and a vast array of other data-collection exercises that together make up all the demographic, social and economic indicators that everyone agrees on.

SRS numbers from the past 15 years have established that about 83 lakh people die in India every year on an average. If the SRS for 2020, whenever it comes out, reveals that 90 lakh or more people died in the country in that year, instead of the expected 82 to 84 lakh, then it would suggest that the computer models used by WHO or other studies were accurate in estimating 8 lakh excess deaths due to Covid-19 in India in 2020. If the SRS numbers are not close to that, it can be inferred that those many never died.

Working away from office does not affect productivity: study

A STUDY in the United States has suggested that working remotely does not affect productivity. The study was published in *IOS Press* back in February, and was described on Friday in a press release from Texas A&M University.

The team has found that employee and company resiliency may be enhanced through the opportunity for employees to work remotely during natural disasters and other events that cause workplace displacement. The researchers worked with a large oil and gas company in Houston, Texas, to analyse software data from 264 employees. During the study period, the company was forced to close its offices because

of flooding from Hurricane Harvey, which required employees to work remotely for an extended period. Employee data before, during and after Hurricane Harvey showed that although total computer use declined



PAPER CLIP
NEW RESEARCH

during the hurricane, employees' work behaviours during the seven-month period of working remotely returned to pre-hurricane levels. “This is a huge message right now for employers because we're having national debates about whether or not employees should be able to work remotely or in a hybrid schedule,” the release quoted researcher Mark Benden as saying.

Source: Texas A&M University

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EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

IN ALL the Mother's Day WhatsApp forwards and social media posts that you sent or were sent on Sunday, the name Anna Jarvis probably never figured. Jarvis founded Mother's Day in the US and worked to have it officially recognised — but eventually came to hate its commercialisation, and spent the last of her energies and money to campaign against it.

Memory of her mother

Jarvis (1864-1948) was an American activist who founded Mother's Day to honour her mother and “all mothers” in 1908.

Her mother had spent her life working for causes centred on motherhood, and a young Anna once heard her say that she hoped a mothers' day would be founded to commemorate mothers “matchless service”. After Mrs Jarvis died in 1905, Anna wrote to



Jarvis founded Mother's Day in 1908

politicians, businessmen, and church leaders to enlist their support, proposing the second Sunday of May be dedicated to celebrating mothers, with a white carnation — her mother's favourite flower — as its emblem.

In 1908, two Mother's Day events were held in the US; and on May 8, 1914 President Woodrow Wilson signed into law an Act to recognise Mother' Day.

Definition, celebration

There were others before Jarvis — including author and suffragist Julia Ward Howe, who had started a Mothers' Day (note the placement of the apostrophe) celebration in June 1873. Historians note that Jarvis narrowed the definition of ‘mother’ to one who puts her children's needs first — in choosing the singular over Howe's “Mothers' Day”, she wanted people to honour their own mothers who cared for them at home.

Jarvis' version was eagerly taken up by the greeting card industry, the flower industry, etc, and Mother's Day was heavily commercialised. A report in *The New York Times* from 1964, said: “According to the National Committee on the Observance of Mother's Day, Inc., the day has become a gift-giving occasion second only to Christmas.”

Jarvis' disillusionment

Jarvis hated it. She threw her energies into arresting this commercialisation through

campaigns, litigation, and direct action. She had copyrighted the phrase “Second Sunday in May, Mother's Day” early on, and sued people for using it for marketing campaigns.

In a press release, she demanded, “What will you do to rout charlatans, bandits, pirates, racketeers, kidnappers and other termites that would undermine with their greed one of the finest, noblest and truest movements and celebrations?” according to a BBC report.

She attacked First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for using Mother's Day to raise funds for charity, and was arrested in 1925 after crashing a convention of American War Mothers, who sold carnations on Mother's Day to raise funds.

In 1948, Jarvis died, almost penniless and alone. According to the BBC, one of her final public activities before being admitted to a sanatorium was “to go door-to-door in Philadelphia asking for signatures to back an appeal for Mother's Day to be rescinded”.

LONGER VERSION
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EXPLAINED CLIMATE

Heatwaves and the role humidity plays in making them deadly

EXPERT EXPLAINS

JOY MERWIN MONTEIRO



THE CONSECUTIVE heatwaves over South Asia since March 2022 have continued the disturbing tradition of breaking historical temperature records. Mercifully, these record temperatures were not accompanied by the high mortality burden observed in previous heatwaves such as the one during 2015. Why those heatwaves were so deadly is a puzzle that we are yet to resolve.

The recent IPCC report AR6 has emphasised that humidity is also very important while estimating the physiological stress that extreme heat puts on the human body. Instead of the “dry bulb” temperature that is usually measured using a regular thermometer, an alternative metric known as the “wet bulb temperature” has been used to measure exposure to extreme heat. The report men-

tions that sustained exposures to wet bulb temperatures above 35°C are fatal, while sustained exposures to wet bulb temperatures above 32°C are dangerous for intense physical activity. The critical word here is “sustained”, which we will come back to later.

These projections are very welcome and are the outcome of more than a decade of work put in by the climate science community. The public health community was, of course, aware of the implications of humidity for a much longer time. Furthermore, a number of recent articles in the media have helped make the public aware of this. However, there has been a growing concern about the 35°C threshold and whether parts of South Asia will become “unsurvivable” in the coming years.

Humidity and temperature

Why is humidity such a critical factor while measuring heat exposure? Humans lose heat generated within their body by producing sweat that evaporates on the skin. The cooling effect of this evaporation is essential in maintaining a stable body temperature. As humidity rises, sweat does not evaporate — just like clothes take a long time to dry in hu-

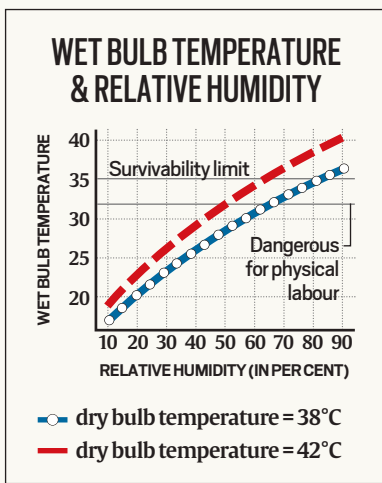
mid locations — and makes it difficult to regulate body temperature. This is why we feel more discomfort in humid places.

The wet bulb temperature is usually lower than the dry bulb temperature, and the difference between the two increases dramatically as the air becomes dry. The variation of wet bulb temperature for a fixed dry bulb temperature is shown in the figure.

The humidity required to reach wet bulb temperatures in excess of 35°C over land is exceedingly difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons, which this article will not go into. This is the reason the AR6 says that such conditions are rarely observed nowadays. Wet bulb temperatures in excess of 35°C have been observed in Sindh in Pakistan, but such conditions occur once every three to four years, and probably for a few hours. This fails to meet the criteria of “sustained exposure”.

Just because we don't observe such conditions in the current climate does not mean that they will be as rare in future climates. However, the research that backs the AR6 also suggests we are unlikely to experience sustained exposure to wet bulb temperatures beyond the threshold of survivability.

The hype around survivability thresholds



and wet bulb temperatures obscures deeper issues, both physiological and political. Firstly, the inability of the body to stabilise its core temperature can have multiple reasons. For instance, increased strain on the heart during periods of elevated temperature could be fatal for those with pre-existing cardiac conditions and is in fact the leading cause of deaths

during heatwaves. Pre-existing respiratory problems and diabetes too are potential causes of death. Such conditions impair the body's ability to efficiently transfer heat to the environment.

A less obvious issue is that of dehydration. Many labourers, especially women, intentionally keep themselves dehydrated due to the lack of toilets in workplaces. Dehydration can lead to decreased sweat production and therefore increased vulnerability to heat stroke during heatwaves. Such public health factors can dramatically reduce the survivability thresholds and underestimate the actual vulnerability of the population.

Global and local

There is also a political issue here that often goes unnoticed. A singular focus on increasing wet bulb temperatures subtly shifts the responsibility of action from the local to the transnational arena. Increasing wet bulb temperatures are the byproduct of global climate change, and therefore keeping our population safe becomes the responsibility of international negotiators at conferences such as COP26. Very little can be done at the local level to keep wet bulb temperatures from ris-

ing if the factors controlling them are global. On the other hand, understanding the factors that increase vulnerability to heatwaves puts the onus on local actors, who have to provide better sanitation facilities, protect the elderly and those with cardiac conditions, and reduce the incidence of diabetes in the population. Such a focus will increase the pressure to improve our national health infrastructure, whose fragility has become increasingly clear to everyone over the past two years.

In summary, the recent focus on increasing temperature and humidity is a welcome step in building awareness about the impacts of climate change. However, it is important to realise that our vulnerability to heatwaves is a systemic problem that has existed for a very long time, and is not dependent only on increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Refocusing our priorities to highlight critical gaps in our urban and health infrastructure that repeatedly fail to protect the most vulnerable among us will allow us to build a more climate-resilient nation.

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Kolkata



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, MAY 9, 2022

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Who's COUNTING

WHO's excess mortality data stretches credulity. Yet, there's no need to be prickly, India has its task cut out

THE WORLD HEALTH Organisation's (WHO) report on excess mortality due to Covid-19 has pegged the India figure at nearly 10 times the official toll at 47.4 lakh. As an analysis in this newspaper showed, this raises several questions. India's death toll of 5.23 lakh so far is, most possibly an undercount, but the WHO's data suggests that over 90 per cent of deaths in India have gone unreported. Even the base number of expected deaths (in a no-Covid scenario) for the year 2020 which the WHO has used in its report is almost nine lakh more than the average number of deaths recorded each year in India for the last 15 years. Still, the WHO estimates reflect similar numbers by many other agencies and are based on well-established mathematical models. How effective are these in getting close to what actually happened, capturing the several variables of a pandemic given India's size and diversity — from high urban population-density Kerala to rural settings in other states — will always be open to question.

Counting the Covid dead is not a mere academic exercise. This effort is crucial to addressing the shortcomings of public health facilities and framing responses to future medical emergencies. It is also a vital part of the endeavour to heal the wounds of those who have suffered in the past two years. The Covid compensation exercise, under the watchful gaze of the Supreme Court, will, hopefully, encourage families to report their loss. Accurate information is paramount to the process, especially when, in a sharply polarised discourse, even science is contested. In the first month of the first pandemic year, an oft-quoted study said up to three million Indians could die by mid-April 2020. The author has since then back-tracked and acknowledged that his assumption of mortality rate was a little off the mark. The WHO's record on Covid hasn't been much to write home about. Its own study concluded that crucial time was lost in the fight against the virus because the global health agency delayed the announcement of an international emergency. It spent weeks persuading China to allow a team of international scientists to visit Wuhan after the outbreak. It then swung to the other extreme late last year after the relatively-less virulent Omicron began to infect people worldwide. Instead of educating the world about the nature of this new variant, it rang needless alarm bells.

That said, it would be, well, unscientific, to be prickly and attribute sinister motives to the WHO. Barely days ago, its Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar, that will play a key role as a "global repository" of traditional medicine practices across the world. What the WHO's Covid death estimates underline is the need for India to further strengthen its death recording system, finetune its accuracy and transparency. In fact, the success of India's vaccination programme has been facilitated by distribution and supply-chain processes on the ground, from the shop-floor to the primary health care centre, backed by a robust digital architecture of reporting and recording. Given the rapid digitalisation of social systems, this should translate to strengthening the Civil Registration System and Sample Registration System as well, the two main tools for recording births and deaths. Let the WHO and experts do their job, the Centre and state governments should do theirs.

EYE ON THE PLATE

Food inflation has not started to hurt India yet. Stepping up domestic production can help country duck global trend

A CONSIDERABLE PART of the RBI's statement accompanying its last week's exceptional monetary tightening measures focused on the challenges arising from food inflation. That problem, till recently, was largely confined to edible oils (from soaring international prices even prior to the Russia-Ukraine war) and the likes of onion and tomato (due to unseasonal heavy rains). But now there is fear of food inflation getting "generalised". The Food and Agriculture Organisation's food price index has shown a 29.8 per cent year-on-year increase for April. Moreover, all commodity group price indices have posted huge jumps: Cereals (34.3 per cent), vegetable oils (46.5 per cent), dairy (23.5 per cent), sugar (21.8 per cent) and meat (16.8 per cent). Simply put, food inflation is already rising across-the-board globally — because of supply disruptions from the war, dry weather in South America, high crude prices inducing greater diversion of corn, sugar, palm and soyabean oil for bio-fuel, and so on.

The transmission of the above global inflation to domestic food prices basically depends on how much of a country's consumption/production is imported/exported. Such transmission is evident in edible oils and cotton, where up to two-thirds of India's consumption and a fifth of its production are imported and exported, respectively. The same is starting to happen in wheat. Till two months ago, the country seemed set to harvest a bumper crop and also surpass last year's all-time-high exports. But with the heat wave from mid-March severely impacting yields, both public stocks and overall domestic availability are under pressure, even as open market prices have risen to export parity levels. Not surprisingly, the Centre has decided to slash wheat allocations and offer more rice under its flagship free-grains scheme. Export demand is, likewise, helping maize trade well above its minimum support price (MSP). But that, alongside higher oil meal prices, will also push up livestock feed costs and, in turn, translate into inflation in milk, egg and meat.

For now, though, the consolation is that there is little to no inflation in pulses, sugar, onion, potato and most summer vegetables. To that extent, food inflation isn't yet "generalised" in India. Sugar is one commodity where retail prices haven't gone up much, despite record exports by mills. The reason for it is production also hitting a historic high. In short, while global food inflation is a reality, the only way to contain the effects of it getting "imported" is to step up domestic production. That would call for early announcement of kharif MSPs with credible procurement plans for oilseeds and pulses; ensuring timely availability of seed, fertiliser, crop protection chemicals and credit by actively engaging the industry; and not resorting to knee-jerk export bans or stocking controls, which will only disincentivise producers.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

THE RESERVE BANK of India normally makes policy announcements in line with a well-defined schedule. But on May 4, it unexpectedly tightened monetary policy, increasing its policy interest rate and reducing liquidity in the banking system. Markets were taken aback by the announcement with the 10-year government bond yield jumping by 25 basis points to reach 7.38 per cent. Why did the RBI do this? Even after the governor's careful explanations, the answers remain unclear.

At one level, the answer is obvious: Inflation pressures are rising. Since the last MPC meeting of April 8, headline CPI (consumer price index) inflation has gone up from 6.1 per cent to 7 per cent, and the forthcoming inflation numbers are expected to be even worse. Clearly, the RBI had to respond. So, it raised the policy repo rate by 40 basis points to 4.4 per cent and increased the cash reserve ratio by 50 basis points to 4.5 per cent.

This explanation, however, does not seem entirely adequate because nothing fundamental has changed since the last policy meeting. Even back then, it was obvious that inflation pressures were rising — the wholesale price index (WPI) was already in double digits, inflation in the US and Europe was increasing, commodity prices were spiking due to the Russia-Ukraine war, and supply chain constraints were tightening as China imposed severe lockdowns to deal with a resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic. But the RBI did not think that these pressures warranted policy tightening.

What made the RBI change its mind? Under the inflation-targeting framework, the central bank's thinking is typically revealed by its inflation forecast. If it projects that inflation will be above target for some time, it implies that the central bank is concerned about rising prices and will be taking action to bring inflation down. In the last policy review, the RBI projected that inflation would



AAKASH JOSHI

JUST FOR A minute, let's forget about his name. A leader of the Congress went to a party as part of a friend's wedding celebration. The BJP — which has six times the number of Lok Sabha MPs than the Congress, and rules in several more states — and its social media warriors went into overdrive. The wedding guest's morality was questioned, and many accused him of working against the national interest by attending a social function with the Chinese envoy. The latter accusation, like much of what is said on the internet, turned out to be false.

The reason for the overreaction is not just that a politician went to a nightclub. It makes sense only because that politician is Rahul Gandhi.

The images from the club came at a bad time for the Congress: The party's eight-year-long crisis was underlined once more with Prashant Kishor deciding not to help with its revival late last month. And at pivotal political moments in recent times — when the Punjab Assembly election campaign kicked off in December 2021 or when the Congress took out a peace march during the 2020 Delhi riots — Rahul Gandhi has been missing in action, often on trips abroad.

Yet, his style of working is not, in essence, the business of either the BJP or the government. Rahul holds no public office of concern to anyone but the voters of Wayanad constituency. Why, then, has India's most dominant political force been obsessed with a diminished leader from the Opposition?

For the Hindutva Right's political juggernaut, the obsessive demonisation of Rahul Gandhi yields dividends. Yet, this constant targeting isn't just a matter of tactics and political convenience. For all his faults, the



Question of timing

Surprise interest rate hike raises questions over RBI's aims. Its mandate is to target inflation, not shore up rupee

So what made the RBI change its mind? Under the inflation-targeting framework, the central bank's thinking is typically revealed by its inflation forecast. If it projects that inflation will be above target for some time, it implies that the central bank is concerned about rising prices and will be taking action to bring inflation down. In the last policy review, the RBI projected that inflation would moderate to 5 per cent by the end of the fiscal year, somewhat higher than the 4 per cent objective, but not unduly so, thereby explaining why the central bank saw no need to tighten at that time.

moderate at 5 per cent by the end of the fiscal year, somewhat higher than the 4 per cent objective, but not unduly so, thereby explaining why it saw no need to tighten at that time.

Presumably, the RBI now thinks that the inflation pressures will either be more intense or more durable than it had earlier expected. And the RBI felt that its policy stance was now "behind the curve", meaning that urgent action was needed to quell these pressures. Otherwise, it would have waited till the next MPC meeting on June 8 to increase the repo rate. But it is impossible to know whether this was really the motivation as the RBI didn't release a revised inflation forecast — and because other explanations are also possible.

One possibility relates to the exchange rate. The US Federal Reserve was expected to announce a 50 basis point increase in interest rates later that day. So, it is possible that the RBI wanted to jump ahead of this announcement by announcing its own 40 basis point rate increase, maintaining (more or less) the interest differential against the US dollar and thereby keeping the dollar-rupee exchange rate relatively stable.

It's not obvious why exchange rate stability would be a priority for the RBI. After all, its legal mandate is to achieve an inflation target, not an exchange rate. But the RBI does seem determined to limit the rupee's depreciation. The April 8 statement highlighted that India's foreign exchange reserves had increased to \$607 billion at the end of 2021-22. In contrast, the May 4 statement mentioned that India's foreign exchange reserves now amount to \$600 billion — a decline of \$7 billion. Clearly, the RBI has been intervening in the foreign exchange market to stem the rupee depreciation. So, it appears plausible that the unexpected increase in the policy rate was done to defend the currency against further depreciation pressures.

There are, then, two potential explanations

for the RBI's sudden move. Both have rationales, but both also have costs. Consider the first possibility that the RBI has now radically revised its inflation forecast (without, of course, releasing the same). Inflation targeting works best if monetary policy is predictable, with interest rate actions being announced on a regular schedule, based on clearly-explained inflation forecasts. On the contrary, sudden moves convey the message that the RBI is getting worried that it is no longer in control of the inflation situation, which is hardly a reassuring signal to send to the markets.

Next, consider the possibility that the RBI wanted to keep the exchange rate stable. The problem is that India is facing an adverse terms of trade shock in the form of rising oil prices, which is putting pressure on the current account deficit. If the RBI allowed the exchange rate to depreciate in response, this would alleviate the current account deficit. Perhaps more importantly, depreciation would help the nascent recovery by ensuring that exports can continue to grow, despite the difficult international circumstances. And there is the additional problem that targeting the exchange rate violates the RBI's legal mandate.

The RBI now faces a difficult task in the months ahead. At the broadest level, it needs to address the costs of its surprise announcement by reinforcing the credibility of the inflation-targeting framework. Specifically, it will need to focus — and be seen to be doing so — squarely on its inflation target, rather than the exchange rate or any other objectives. And it will need to convince the public that it is actually trying to get inflation under control.

To do this, it will need to continue to tighten policy, but in a gradual, predictable and transparent manner.

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WHY BJP NEEDS RAHUL GANDHI

A wedding function to a party adrift, shrinking him suits its politics

leader represents — in however shrunk a manner — a significant ideological and political challenge to the RSS-BJP.

Rahul Gandhi's denigration taps into popular discontent. That many political leaders — including a substantial number from the BJP — are dynasts does not detract from the fact that the descendants of Nehru appear to have a stranglehold on the party of the freedom struggle. Just as the House of Windsor is the lynchpin of Britain's ossified, regressive class structure, the Nehru-Gandhis have come to signify a lack of social mobility for the youth — the fact that descent, not achievement is enough to guarantee a career in politics.

For the BJP, especially since the ascent of Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi provides the most convenient juxtaposition to further a cult of personality. The PM is self-made, hard-working, openly and almost militantly Hindu, always present, a nationalist. Rahul (in the Right's view) is a dilettante politician, a descendant, eschews responsibility, is of mixed heritage, holds up "pseudo-secularism". Despite the fall in Rahul Gandhi's popularity, it is useful for the BJP to present him as the alternative on the national stage to strengthen the TINA factor. Would the BJP leadership compare as favourably with Mamata Banerjee — a politician risen from the streets — or even M K Stalin or Jagan Reddy, who are both sons of leaders but do not have either the 'elite' or 'outsider' tag? Rahul Gandhi's demonisation by the ruling forces has as much, if not more, to do with his background as it does with his political failures.

And that background — and Rahul himself — still carries with it an alternative idea that can challenge the BJP's "New India".

On the ideological front, it appears at first glance that the RSS-BJP's dominance is verging on the hegemonic. Regional parties and leaders that challenge the BJP electorally in the states have competing interests and lack coherence at the level of ideas. The Congress too appears ill-equipped to battle the BJP. After all, senior leaders have jumped ship, and its "soft Hindutva" tactics show a poverty of ideas. Yet, the Congress remains — in however vestigial a form — the only party with a national presence that can rival the BJP. As Suhas Palshikar argued (IE, April 30), the "Congress space" is still relevant, even if the Congress seems to be less so. It is the centrism of the "Congress space" that can act as an ideological glue to sustain a national coalition of non-BJP parties.

Unfortunately, that space — a liberal, federal idea of India — seems to be of no concern to many Congress leaders. Too many are willing to back the BJP line on issues like the Ram Mandir and J&K's constitutional status. Not enough have either national name recognition or a mass base. It is in this regard that Rahul Gandhi presents a potent challenge.

Unlike, say, a Jyotiraditya Scindia, he cannot be poached. He cannot abandon the Congress and the ideals it once represented — Rahul cannot abandon Nehru's secularism or Indira Gandhi's "garibi hatao" because to do so would be to deny his *raison d'être* as a politician. In that sense, he is perhaps one of the few significant implacable foes for the BJP that stands in the way of a "Congress-mukt Bharat". Best, then, to keep the focus on the name.

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MAY 9, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ATTACKS CPM

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi ended her two-day election tour of West Bengal with an attack on the Marxist idea of "one-party rule" to the exclusion of other non-communist parties. Addressing rallies in North Bengal, she said the CPM-led government's highhanded approach should be seen from this perspective. The Marxist Party branded her as "authoritarian" only to hide its "anti-democratic character". In which communist country was there in existence a multiparty system as in India, she asked and then observed: "Marxism and democracy cannot go together." The Prime Minister said that the

Marxists commended certain countries as models for India. But, now these very nations were beset with insoluble problems providing the relevance of the "Congress pattern of development", free from communist and capitalist systems. She accused the CPM of "wrecking democracy in West Bengal under the guise of protecting it".

BRITAIN'S MESSAGE

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER to India, Sir John Thomson, met Foreign Secretary M K Rasgotra in New Delhi on Saturday and delivered to him a message from the British Government on the Falkland Islands crisis. In

the message, Britain is believed to have underscored its stand that implementation of any ceasefire must be unambiguously linked to Argentine withdrawal from the Islands.

ZIA'S OFFER

PAKISTAN PRESIDENT GENERAL Ziaul Haq on Saturday offered to lift the nearly three-year-old curbs on political activities if the number of political parties was reduced to two or three major ones, Radio Pakistan reported. Speaking to journalists at Rawalpindi, General Zia said the future political setup of the country would be based on Islamic tenets.



THE IDEAS PAGE

The cereal wonder

Fear mongering over wheat production must not push government towards an export ban, especially on cereals, the prices of which are at an all-time high



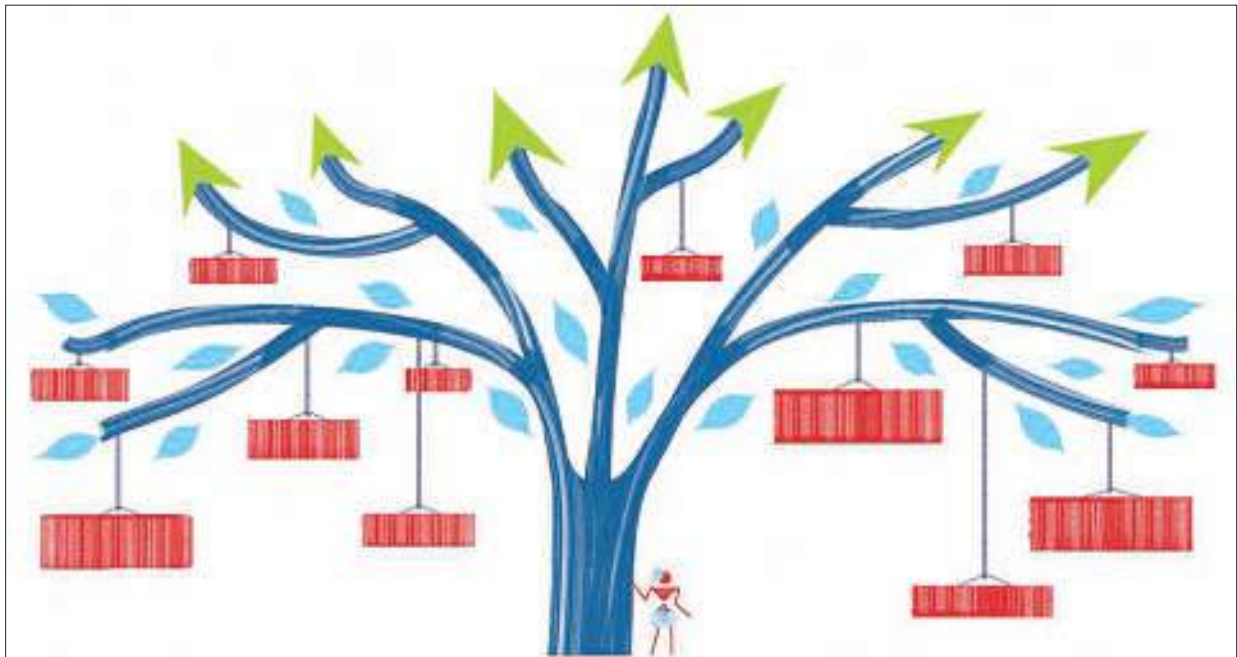
FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI AND RITIKA JUNEJA

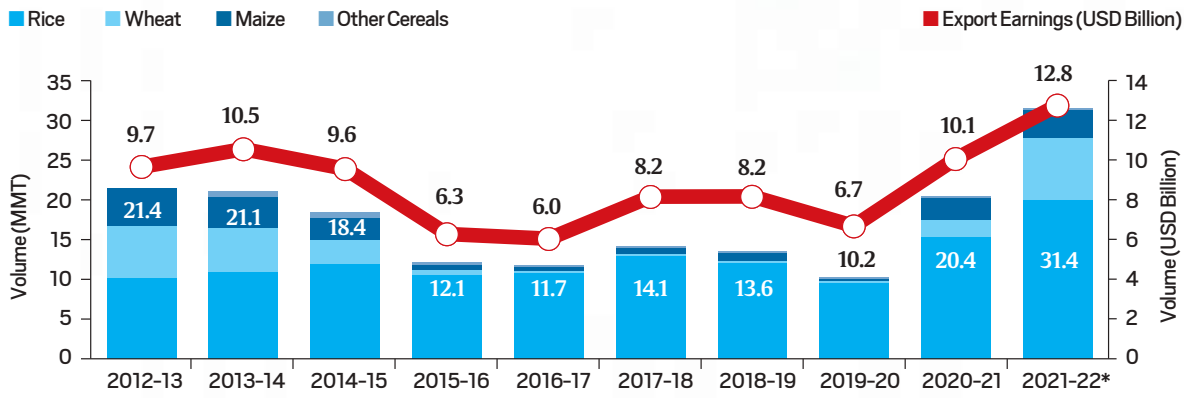
THE RBI TEAM led by Governor Shaktikanta Das must be complimented for raising the repo rate by 40 basis points (bps) and the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 bps with a view to tame inflation. High inflation is always an implicit tax on the poor and those who keep their savings in banks. The real value of their savings gets depreciated with every round of inflation as interest on deposits is often far below the inflation rate. So, controlling inflation is an important mandate of the RBI. The question that arises is: Will the increases in the repo rate and CRR control inflation, especially food inflation? The short answer is, "not yet". Our assessment of the situation is that the RBI has been behind the curve by at least 4 to 5 months, and its optimism in controlling inflation in the earlier meetings of the Monetary Policy Committee was somewhat misplaced. If the RBI has to make up for lost time, it will have to repeat this feat of raising repo rates and CRR by at least three more times in this fiscal year (FY23) to mop up excess liquidity in the system. Even then, it may be difficult to rein in food inflation, which is surging faster than the overall consumer price index (CPI).

The reason for this is simple. Food prices globally are scaling new peaks as per the FAO's food price index. The disruptions caused by the pandemic and now the Russia-Ukraine war are contributing to this escalation in food prices. India cannot remain insulated from this phenomenon. While on the one hand, it has opened opportunities for Indian farm exports, on the other hand, it has posed challenges as import prices of edible oils and fertilisers surge.

Let us focus here on cereals, which have the greatest weight in India's food CPI. For the first time in the history of Indian agriculture, cereal exports have already crossed a record high of 31 million metric tonnes (MMT) at \$13 billion (FY22), and the same cereal wonder may be repeated this fiscal (FY23). Among cereals, wheat exports have witnessed an unprecedented growth of more than 273 per cent, jumping nearly four-fold from \$0.56 billion (or 2 MMT) in FY21 to \$2.1 billion (or 7.8 MMT) in FY22 (see figure). Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is upbeat on agri-farm exports, which overall have crossed \$50 billion for the first time in FY22. On wheat, while the government has set a target of 10 MMT for exports in FY23, Goyal in a recent interview said that it may go even up to 15 MMT. This has raised fears amongst many about whether India can export 10 to 15 MMT in the face of the scaling down of the production estimate of the current crop from 111 MMT to 105 MMT due to the heatwave, and the massive drop in procurement in the ongoing season due to higher market rates compared to MSP. However, there is very little talk about rice exports, which have crossed 20 MMT in FY22 in a global market of 50 MMT. That's a much



INDIA'S CEREAL WONDER



*Provisional Source: DGCI, 2022

bigger wonder than wheat. (See figure)

Some of the concerns on the wheat front are genuine, and we need to realise that climate change is already knocking on our doors. With every one degree Celsius rise in temperatures, wheat yields are likely to suffer by about 5 MMT, as per earlier IPCC reports. This calls for massive investments in agri-R&D to find heat-resistant varieties of wheat and also create models for "climate-smart" agriculture. We are way behind the curve on this. But we are way ahead of the curve in distributing free food to 800 million Indians, with a food subsidy bill that is likely to cross Rs 2.8 lakh crore this fiscal out of the Centre's net tax revenue of about Rs 20 lakh crore in FY23. Can Goyal, who is rightly upbeat on agri-exports also rationalise the public distribution system and PMGKAY, as food minister, targeting only those below the poverty line for free or subsidised food and charging a reasonable price, say 90 per cent of MSP, from those who are above the poverty line. The bottom line is: He has to effectively target the massive food subsidy and save resources for the higher import bill on edible oils and fertilisers. Inflation in edible oils has been running amok — to double digits — for a long time, and there has been no relief for consumers on that front.

In the wake of likely lower production

In the wake of likely lower production and procurement of wheat this year, Goyal has done well to substitute more rice in the PMGKAY, and may also do so in NFSA allocations. We would suggest giving an option to beneficiaries to receive cash in their Jan Dhan accounts (equivalent to MSP plus 20 per cent) in lieu of grains. This is permitted under NFSA and by doing so, he can save on the burgeoning food subsidy bill.

Illustration: C R Sasikumar; Graphics: Ritesh Kumar and procurement of wheat this year, Goyal has done well to substitute more rice in the PMGKAY, and may also do so in NFSA allocations. We would suggest giving an option to beneficiaries to receive cash in their Jan Dhan accounts (equivalent to MSP plus 20 per cent) in lieu of grains. This is permitted under NFSA and by doing so, he can save on the burgeoning food subsidy bill.

Goyal also needs to ward off any fear-mongering over wheat that can push him towards an export ban. That would be the worst thing he could do. It would be an anti-farmer move. The problem with our earlier policymaking has been that it is heavily biased towards protecting the consumers in the name of the poor by suppressing prices for farmers through choking markets — through imposing stock limits on traders, putting minimum export prices or outright bans on exports. He must avoid that route, and let agri-exports flourish. Indian farmers need access to global markets to augment their incomes, and the government must facilitate Indian farmers to develop more efficient export value chains by minimising marketing costs and investing in efficient logistics for exports.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Ukraine crisis and the geopolitical tragedy it has triggered are not enough to kill the hunger of the US and some Western countries to reap political profits from the situation." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Welfare that changed lives

A pro-poor thrust in government programmes that involved building trust through community mobilisation led to a decline in rural poverty



AMARJEET SINHA

A RECENT WORLD Bank Report has shown that extreme poverty in India more than halved between 2011 and 2019 — from 22.5 per cent to 10.2 per cent. The reduction was higher in rural areas, from 26.3 per cent to 11.6 per cent. The rate of poverty decline between 2015 and 2019 was faster compared to 2011-2015.

In an earlier article ('A greater ease of living', IE, November 20, 2019), I had argued that poverty has reduced significantly because of the current government's thrust on improving the ease of living of ordinary Indians through schemes such as the Ujjwala Yojana, PM Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Jan Dhan and Mission Indradhanush in addition to the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission and improved coverage under the National Food Security Act.

While debates on the World Bank's methodology continue to rage, it is important to understand how poverty in rural areas was reduced at a faster pace. Much of the success can be credited to all government departments, especially their *janbhagidari*-based thrust on pro-poor public welfare that ensured social support for the endeavour. It will nevertheless be useful to delineate the key factors that contributed to the success.

First, the identification of deprived households on the basis of the Socioeconomic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 across welfare programmes helped in creating a constituency for the well-being of the poor, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The much-delayed SECC 2011 data was released in July 2015. This was critical in accomplishing the objectives of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas". Since deprivation was the key criterion in identifying beneficiaries, SC and ST communities got higher coverage and the erstwhile backward regions in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Rajasthan and rural Maharashtra got a larger share of the benefits. This was a game-changer in the efforts to ensure balanced development, socially as well as across regions. Social groups that often used to be left out of government programmes were included and gram sabha validation was taken to ensure that the project reached these groups.

Second, the coverage of women under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana and Self Help Groups (SHG) increased from 2.5 crore in 2014 to over 8 crore in 2018 as a result of more than 75 lakh SHGs working closely with over 31 lakh elected panchayati raj representatives, 40 per cent of whom are women. This provided a robust framework to connect with communities and created a social capital that helped every programme. The PRI-SHG partnership catalysed changes that increased the pace of poverty reduction and the use of Aadhaar cleaned up corruption at several levels and ensured that the funds reached those whom it was meant for.

Third, Finance Commission transfers were made directly to gram panchayats leading to the creation of basic infrastructure like pucca village roads and drains at a much faster pace in rural areas. The high speed of road construction under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadhak Yojana created greater opportunities for employment in nearby larger villages/census towns/kasbas by improving connectivity and enhancing mobility.

Fourth, the social capital of SHGs ensured the availability of credit through banks, micro-finance institutions and MUDRA loans. The NRLM prioritised livelihood diversification and implemented detailed plans for credit disbursement. New businesses, both farm and non-farm livelihoods, were taken up by women's collectives on a large scale with community resource persons playing crucial handholding roles, especially with respect to skill development. Fifth, in the two phases of the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan in 2018, benefits such as gas and electricity connections, LED bulbs, accident insurance, life insurance, bank accounts and immunisation were provided to 6,39,74 villages that were selected because of their high SC and ST populations. The implementation of these schemes was monitored assiduously. The performance of line departments went up manifold due to community-led action. The gains are reflected in the findings of the National Family Health Survey V, 2019-2021.

Sixth, the thrust on universal coverage for individual household latrines, LPG connections and pucca houses for those who lived in kuccha houses ensured that no one was left behind. This created the Labarthi Varg. Seventh, this was also a period in which a high amount of public funds were transferred to rural areas, including from the share of states and, in some programmes, through extra-budgetary resources.

Eighth, the thrust on a people's plan campaign, "Sabka Yojana Sabka Vikas" for preparing the Gram Panchayat Development Plans and for ranking villages and panchayats on human development, economic activity and infrastructure, from 2017-18 onwards, laid the foundation for robust community participation involving panchayats and SHGs, especially in ensuring accountability.

Ninth, through processes like social and concurrent audits, efforts were made to ensure that resources were fully utilised. Several changes were brought about in programmes like the MGNREGS to create durable and productive assets. This helped marginal and small farmers in improving their homesteads, and diversifying livelihoods.

Tenth, the competition among states to improve performance on rural development helped. Irrespective of the party in power, nearly all states and UTs focussed on improving livelihood diversification in rural areas and on improving infrastructure significantly.

All these factors contributed to improved ease of living of deprived households and improving their asset base. A lot has been achieved, much remains to be done. The pandemic and the negative terms of trade shock from the Ukraine crisis pose challenges to the gains made in poverty reduction up to 2019.

The writer is a retired civil servant with 38 years in the social sector. Views are personal



M Y TARIGAMI

Dividing lines

Delimitation Commission's recommendations will deepen divides in J&K

THE DELIMITATION COMMISSION formed to remap the electoral constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir submitted its final report after two years. The Commission's recommendations clearly reflect that the panel has gerrymandered the territorial constituencies to advance the electoral aspirations of the ruling party.

In the first place, the exercise was carried out under the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 and not in accordance with the Delimitation Act, 2002, which called for the 2001 census to be used as the basis for remapping poll constituencies.

This is not the only anomaly. In 2002, the Constitution of India was amended, deferring the delimitation of the constituencies until the first population Census is undertaken after 2026. Accordingly, the J&K Assembly amended the state constitution through the 29th Amendment deferring the delimitation process till 2026. The Delimitation Commission was set up under the Delimitation Act of 2002 — however, it has redrawn the constituencies in accordance with the provisions of the J&K Reorganisation Act 2019, which increased the number of seats by seven without any basis and criteria.

The Commission considered the 2011 Census for delimiting the territorial constituencies. However, there was scant regard for the population, a cardinal parameter for any delimitation process.

According to the 2011 Census, the population of the Kashmir region is 68,88,475; Jammu

has a population of 53,78,538; and Ladakh, which is now a separate Union territory, has 2,74,289 people. The Commission has allocated six extra seats to Jammu and only one to Kashmir. With this, Jammu will have 43 seats and Kashmir 47 in the assembly of 116 seats.

In effect, this means that with 44 per cent of the population, Jammu will get 48 per cent of the seat share, while Kashmir, with 56 per cent of the population, will get only 52 per cent share in seats. This arrangement is designed to create a disparity in regional representation.

The people as well as the political leaders in the region are unable to comprehend what, if any, objective criteria were employed by the Commission for this bizarre apportioning of seats. Despite the objections of various political parties, including the associate members, the panel went ahead with its pre-determined plans, riding roughshod over the aspirations of the people.

In 2002, when the J&K government placed a moratorium on the delimitation of assembly constituencies until 2026, it was accepted that the process must take place in step with the rest of the country. The freeze was also upheld by the Supreme Court. But the BJP, which toms that it has "integrated" J&K with India, has done the opposite by using a different yardstick for the delimitation of seats in J&K.

Thus, a malodour hangs over the entire exercise. Ever since the central dispensation read down the special constitutional provisions of J&K and broke the region into two Union territories, it has been making unceasing efforts to

change the electoral demography of the region.

The BJP government went ahead with the delimitation process despite a clutch of writ petitions challenging the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, pending before the Supreme Court, under which the entire delimitation exercise was carried out.

The BJP's dismal electoral performance in the region has spurred it to go for an early readjustment of poll boundaries. Despite fielding its candidates on multiple seats, the party has never been able to bag a single seat from the Valley. During the 2020 district development elections, the party took a drubbing in the Valley.

The recommendations of the Delimitation Commission are completely in line with the BJP's policy of creating an electoral autocracy in J&K as most of the seats were carved out in Hindu-dominated areas. The overhauling of the existing territorial boundaries of the constituencies has significantly brought down the electoral representation of Muslims in the Jammu region. For example, Doda was allotted an additional seat, taking the number of total assembly segments in this Chenab Valley district to three. But of them, two seats are carved out of Hindu-dominated areas despite the district having a Muslim population of over 53 per cent.

The Commission's assertions that it had taken the topography terrain and accessibility into account are without reason. The panel has recommended the merging of the Jammu division's Rajouri and Poonch districts with the

Anantnag Lok Sabha seat, thus carving out an Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency. But there is almost no geographical connectivity between the two regions as they are separated by the Pir Panjal mountains.

The historic Mughal road, which is the shortest route connecting Poonch and Rajouri districts via Shopian to the Valley, remains shut for at least six months a year. Shopian, on the other hand, which is comparatively nearer Rajouri has been made part of the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency. Moreover, these separate regions do not share common aspirations, as they are culturally and linguistically distinct. This peculiar readjustment of poll boundaries is beyond comprehension.

The BJP government has pursued divisive politics in J&K by pitting one region against the other and creating cleavages between communities. It has been manipulating and manoeuvring the situation to its advantage since August 5, 2019. The J&K Reorganisation Act modified the law of enfranchisement of J&K. Voting rights for the state assembly, which were restricted to only permanent residents, have been extended to non-state subjects. The redrawing of poll constituencies is of a piece with all this. It will deepen the communal and regional divide in J&K and is bound to disempower the people and will have deleterious effects on the political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir.

The writer is the former CPI(M) MLA from J&K. He is the Convenor and Spokesperson of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAGGA BAGGAGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Driving Mr Bagga' (IE, May 7). The arrest, interception and now subsequent release of Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga had all the ludicrous action, straight out of a comic Bollywood scene. On a serious note, the police, doing the bidding of their political bosses was again on display. It is unfortunate that political vendetta, which the BJP as a dominant force in the country seems to be associated with, is now being picked up by fledgling parties like the AAP. The bottom line is that no matter how different their ideology, the police-political nexus is the common denominator binding all the political parties.

Kamna Chhabra, Gurgaon

BAD DECISION

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Lanka govt defends move, as Opp envoys criticise it over emergency declaration' (IE, May 8). Hit hard by the pandemic, rising oil prices and government tax cuts, Sri Lanka has been left with as little as \$50 million in usable foreign reserves. There is a grave shortage of food, fuel and electricity. The government's declaration of a state of emergency that gives greater powers to the president to deploy the military, detain people without charge and break up protests seems to be imprudent.

SS Paul, Nadia

PROUD MOMENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Right man at the right place' (IE, May 8). The Bombay Engineering Group & Centre (BEG&C), better known as the Bombay Sappers, the Indian Army's youngest sappers after Madras and Bengal sappers of the Corps of Engineers, could have celebrated the success of its officer reaching the top rank in the Army way back in 1973. However, it had to wait for almost five decades for the moment, which came when the Central government announced that General Manoj Pande will be the next Chief of Army Staff. Pande's appointment should be a proud moment for the defence forces and particularly for engineers across the country.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



BRAZIL

AMAZON DEFORESTATION HITS APRIL RECORD

Deforestation detected in the Brazilian Amazon broke all records for the month of April, and that followed similar new records set in January and February, reflecting a worrisome uptick in destruction in a state deep within the rainforest. Satellite alerts of deforestation for April corresponded to more than 1,000 square km, the highest figure for that month in seven years of record-keeping.

TOPOF THE WORLD



Bashar Assad with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran on Sunday. *AP*

WEST ASIA

Syria's Assad in Iran for meetings in rare foreign trip

SYRIAN PRESIDENT Bashar Assad met Iranian leaders in Tehran on Sunday, Iranian and Syrian media reported, marking his second trip to major wartime ally Iran since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011. Nour News, a website close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, reported that Assad met Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi. It said the leaders praised the strong ties between their nations and vowed to boost relations further. "Everybody now looks at Syria as a power," Khamenei told Assad in the meeting, according to Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency. *AP*

THE GULF

Saudi king admitted to hospital

SAUDI ARABIA'S octogenarian monarch underwent medical tests on Sunday, state-run media reported, just weeks after he had the battery of his pacemaker changed. The report in the official Saudi Press Agency did not provide further details about King Salman's condition or the nature of the medical examinations. It said that the king, 86, was admitted to King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the Saudi port city of Jiddah. The monarch's health is closely watched because he holds absolute power in the kingdom. *AP*

CUBA

Search on as hotel blast toll rises to 30

SEARCH CREWS with dogs hunted through the ruins of a luxury hotel in Cuba's capital Sunday for survivors of an apparent gas explosion and officials raised the number of known dead to 30. The Hotel Saratoga, a five-star 96-room hotel in Old Havana, was preparing to reopen after being closed for two years when an apparent gas leak caused a massive explosion on Friday. Cuban officials on Sunday raised the known death toll to 30 from 27 even as crews continued to search for dozens still believed to be trapped under the rubble. *AP*

Dozens feared dead after Russian bomb levels school sheltering 90 in Ukraine

ELENA BECATOROS & JONG GAMBRELL
ZAPORIZHZHIA (UKRAINE), MAY 8

DOZENS OF Ukrainians were feared dead Sunday after a Russian bomb flattened a school sheltering about 90 people in its basement, while Ukrainian troops refused to surrender at a besieged steel plant that Moscow's invading forces sped to seize before Russia's Victory Day holiday.

The governor of Luhansk province, one of two areas that make up the eastern industrial heartland known as the Donbas, said the school in the village of Bilohorivka caught fire after Saturday's bombing. Emergency crews found two bodies and rescued 30 people, he said.

"Most likely, all 60 people who remain under the rubble are now dead," Gov. Serhiy Haidai wrote on the Telegram messaging app. Russian shelling also killed two boys, ages 11 and 14, in the nearby town of Pryvillia, he said.

The largest European conflict since World War II has developed into a punishing war of attrition due to the Ukrainian military's unexpectedly effective defense. Since failing to capture Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, Moscow's forces have attacked cities, towns and villages in eastern and southern Ukraine but not gained much ground, according to Western military analysts.

To demonstrate success in time for Victory Day on Monday, the Russian military worked to complete its takeover of Mariupol, which has been under relentless assault since the start of the war. The sprawling seaside steel mill where an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters made a last stand is the only part of the city not under Russian control.

All the remaining women, children and older civilians who were sheltering with the fighters in the Azovstal plant were evacuated Saturday. The Ukrainian troops rejected deadlines given by the Russians who said the defenders could leave with their lives if they laid down their arms. *AP*



US First Lady Jill Biden with Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenskyy outside a school in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, Sunday. *AP*

Jill Biden pays surprise visit to Ukraine, meets First Lady Canada's Trudeau makes unannounced visit to Irpin

ASSOCIATED PRESS
UZHGOROD, MAY 8

JILL BIDEN made an unannounced visit to western Ukraine on Sunday, holding a surprise Mother's Day meeting with First Lady Olena Zelenska to show US support for the embattled nation as Russia presses its punishing war in the eastern regions.

She travelled under the cloak of secrecy, becoming the latest high-profile American to enter Ukraine during its 10-week-old conflict with Russia.

"I wanted to come on Mother's Day," the US First Lady told Zelenska. "I thought it was important to show the Ukrainian people that this war has to stop and this war has been brutal and that the people of the United States stand with the people of Ukraine."

Biden spent about two hours in Ukraine, travelling by vehicle to the town of Uzhhorod, about a 10-minute drive from a Slovakian border village where she had toured

Bono performs in Kyiv metro

IRISH ROCK group U2's frontman Bono and his bandmate The Edge performed a 40-minute concert in a metro station in Ukraine's capital of Kyiv on Sunday and praised Ukrainians fighting for their freedom from Russia. "Your President leads the world in the cause of freedom right now... The people of Ukraine are not just fighting for your own free-



Bono with a Ukrainian soldier in Kyiv, Sunday. *Reuters*

dom, you're fighting for all of us who love freedom," Bono said. *REUTERS*

a border processing facility.

Zelenska thanked Biden for her "courageous act" and said, "We understand what it takes for the US First Lady to come here during a war when military actions are taking place every day, where the air sirens are happening every day — even today."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also made a surprise visit to Ukraine on Sunday. He was in Irpin, which had been

damaged by Russia's attempt to take Kyiv at the start of the war.

Canadian officials said the PM would meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and "reaffirm Canada's unwavering support for the Ukrainian people."

Zelenskyy also met on Sunday with the German Parliament Speaker, Bärbel Bas, in Kyiv to discuss further defence assistance, according to Zelenskyy's press office.

Beijing loyalist John Lee elected as Hong Kong's next leader

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HONG KONG, MAY 8

JOHN LEE, a hard-line security chief who oversaw a crackdown on Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, was elected as the city's next leader on Sunday in a vote cast by a largely pro-Beijing committee.

Lee was the only candidate and won with over 99% of the vote in which nearly all 1,500 committee members were carefully vetted by the central government in Beijing.

He will replace current leader Carrie Lam on July 1. Her five-term was marked by huge pro-democracy protests calling for her resignation, a security crackdown that has quashed virtually all dissent, the recent Covid-19 wave that had overwhelmed the health system — events that



John Lee with his wife after winning the vote to be Hong Kong leader. He, however, was the only candidate in the fray. *AP*

have undermined Hong Kong's reputation as an international business hub with Western-style freedoms.

"I look forward to all of us starting a new chapter together, building a Hong Kong that is caring, open and vibrant, and a Hong Kong that is full of oppor-

tunities and harmony," Lee said in his victory speech.

The election followed major changes to Hong Kong's electoral laws last year to ensure that only "patriots" loyal to Beijing can hold office. The legislature was also reorganised to all but eliminate opposition voices.

Sri Lanka Opp rejects President's offer to form interim govt Leaves of security personnel cancelled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, MAY 8

SRI LANKA'S main Opposition party, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), said on Sunday that it rejected an offer by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to its leader Sajith Premadasa to head an interim government, amid continued political uncertainty in the country which is now under a state of emergency.

The Gotabaya-led government has come under massive pressure amid mass protests triggered by an unprecedented economic crisis in the country. The Defence Ministry has requested the public to assist the government in dealing with the crisis with "utmost intelligence and patience". The ministry also cancelled the leaves of all security personnel.

Regarding Gotabaya's offer for an interim government, SJB national organiser Tissa Attanayake said: "Our leader refused to accept the President's offer."

Gotabaya had talked over the telephone with both Premadasa and Harsha de Silva, the SJB's economic guru, on the prospect of forming an interim government which had been a demand endorsed by the powerful Buddhist clergy as well as the group which had broken away from the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) coalition.

The SJB announced on Saturday that they would back the proposal from the lawyers' body, BASL, which had called for the setting up of an interim government for a period of 18 months with a

move to abolish the presidential system of government.

They had also called for the repeal of the 20th Amendment of the Constitution, which conferred sweeping powers to Gotabaya in 2020.

Former Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena also met Premadasa on Saturday to ask the SJB to take over the interim government.

Premadasa, 55, has already announced that he would not be a party to any government headed by the two Rajapaksas — Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda.

The SJB, which has moved motions of no-confidence against the SLPP coalition government and Gotabaya, is putting pressure on Parliament Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena to advance the date of debate on the no-trust motions.

The government, hemmed in by a month of street protests, has imposed a state of emergency, which gives the security forces sweeping powers to crack down on dissent.

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence on Saturday announced that due to the declaration of emergency, the leaves of security forces personnel are cancelled, the *Daily Mirror* reported.

All military personnel are to report to duty with immediate effect, the ministry said.

In a separate statement, the ministry requested all citizens to "assist in managing the current economic and social crisis and unrest in the country with the utmost intelligence and patience".



Sri Lankans demanding cooking gas sit with their empty gas cylinders blocking a busy intersection for a second day, in Colombo on Sunday. *AP*

Senior Pak lawmaker: China's faith in Pak security system shaken

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MAY 8

CHINA'S CONFIDENCE in Pakistan's security system's ability to protect its citizens and projects is seriously shaken after the Karachi University attack last month, a senior lawmaker said.

Three Chinese teachers were killed when a blast triggered by a woman suicide bomber from the Baluchistan Liberation Army ripped through a van of the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi on April 26.

This was the latest targeted attack against Chinese citizens in Pakistan.

Sharing the mood of the Chinese side after the attack to *Dawn* newspaper on Friday,

Senator Mushahid Hussain, who is also the chairman of the Senate Defence Committee, said: "It has caused serious concern and understandable indignation in China."

Hussain led a Senate delegation to the Chinese embassy last week to express his condolences over the loss of Chinese lives.

"The Chinese confidence in Pakistan's security system's ability to protect their citizens and their projects is seriously shaken," said Hussain.

"The pattern of attacks is recurring and it's clear that Pakistani promises of 'foolproof security' are mere words...," he said. "If such attacks continue, not just Chinese but other foreign investors will also be forced to review their role in Pakistan," he said. *PTI*

FOR MANY AFGHANS, THE HOLIDAY SERVED AS A REMINDER OF DISSONANCE BETWEEN PROMISE OF PEACE AND REALITIES OF THE WAR'S END

Marking Eid under Taliban rule shows a changed Afghanistan

CHRISTINA GOLDBAUM, YAQOOB AKBARY & SAFIULLAH PADSHAH
KABUL, MAY 8

THOUSANDS OF Afghans had piled into buses and set out down the country's once perilous highways bound for relatives they had not seen in years. Afghanistan's only national park was filled with tourists who had only dreamed of travelling to its intensely blue lakes and jagged mountains when fighting raged across the country. And Zulhijjah Mirzadah, a mother of five, packed a small picnic of dried fruit, gathered her family in a minibus and wove for

two hours through the congested streets of the capital, Kabul, to a bustling amusement park.

From the entrance, she could hear the low whoosh of a roller coaster and the chorus of joyous screams from Afghans inside celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. But she could not go further. Women, she was told at the gate, were barred by the Taliban from entering the park on Eid.

"We're facing economic problems, things are expensive, we can't find work, our daughters can't go to school — but we hoped to have a picnic in the park today," said Mirzadah, 25.

As Afghans endured the constant and random violence of the last two decades of war, many held hopes that when peace finally came to the country, Eid al-Fitr would be its high-water mark, a day where families long separated by fighting would finally be able to celebrate together.

Now that war is over. People can travel freely down highways devoid of gunfire, roadside bombs and attempts at extortion. The terrifying drone of warplanes overhead is long gone. But for many, the holiday that began last Sunday in Afghanistan served as a reminder of the dissonance between the promise of peace many Afghans had imagined and



On the day of Eid, many chose to pray outside of the Shir Shah Mina Mosque in Kabul, fearing another attack. *NYT*

the realities of the end of the war. A crippling economic crisis that has slashed incomes and sent the prices of basic goods soaring forced many families to

forgo for the first time the Eid traditions of new clothes or dried fruit. Mosques were emptier than usual after a recent string of explosions stoked fears of the re-

turn of terrorist attacks.

And many women in urban areas, who have been devastated by the Taliban government's restrictions, found little reason to celebrate. On Saturday, the Taliban decreed that Afghan women must cover themselves from head to toe, expanding a series of onerous restrictions on women that dictate nearly every aspect of public life.

"To be honest, we don't have Eid this year," said Mirzadah, who spent the afternoon with her family sitting across the street from the park on a strip of grass.

Most people in Kabul learned that the Taliban had announced the start of the holiday after a roar

of celebratory gunfire thundered across the city last Saturday night. Afghanistan was the first Muslim country to officially declare a sighting of a full crescent Moon, kicking off the start of the holiday.

The following morning, hundreds of men with prayer rugs tucked under their arms filed into the Sher Shah Suri Mosque, a large Sunni mosque in the west of Kabul. Across the courtyard, they laid out the rugs in the shade of twisted tree branches while armed Taliban intelligence agents clad in camouflage pants and bulletproof vests patrolled the mosque's grounds for threats — a stark reminder of the threat of violence that persists despite

the end of 20 years of war.

In the two weeks leading up to the start of Eid this year, a bloody spate of terrorist attacks on mosques, schools and public gatherings killed at least 100 people, mostly Afghan Shiites, and stirred fears that the large prayers on the first day of Eid would be the next target.

At the Seyyed Abad Mosque, the largest Shiite mosque in the city of Kunduz in the country's north, only around 50 worshippers arrived for prayers on Sunday morning — compared to 400 to 500 people in previous years, attendees said. Many people, terrified of another blast, steered clear of the mosque altogether. *NYT*

10 ECONOMY

DIESEL ENGINES' SHARE IN PVs DOWN, BUT ACCOUNT FOR 50% OF SUV SALES

In the SUV sweepstakes, a petrol vs diesel face-off

Korean cos relying on 'engine downsizing' in petrol segment; Japanese counter focussed on petrol-only

PRANAV MUKUL & ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

THE MID-RANGE sports utility vehicle (SUV) space, the fastest growing segment in the country's car market, is bracing for a technological face-off. The South Koreans currently dominate this space, with Hyundai Motor — India's second largest carmaker — and its sister concern Kia Motor, between them, packing in multiple models that run on both diesel and petrol mills.

The Japanese counter, led by passenger vehicle (PV) market leader Maruti Suzuki India and Toyota Motor, is focussed on a petrol-only strategy, riding purely on petrol-powered engines mated with hybrid systems. Two new Suzuki-Toyota SUVs, both powered by petrol engines with hybrid drive units, promise to deliver higher power and considerably better fuel economy to stay in the fight with the diesel options offered by the others.

Both the Maruti-Toyota SUVs — code named 'D22' for the Toyota version and 'YFC' for the Suzuki version — are likely off the blocks later this year and could take on the diesel advantage that the South Korean duo, and others like homegrown carmakers Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors and the Europeans including Germany's Volkswagens and it's Czech sister concern Skoda alongside France's Renault enjoy.

While the share of diesel engines in India's PV segment has dropped from over 60 per cent in FY14 to around 16 per cent, the diesel option still accounts for 50 per cent of the sales in the SUV segment, where Maruti Suzuki and Toyota are intent on cancelling out the diesel advantage enjoyed by others with their petrol-hybrid offerings.

The Japanese strategy is focussed on jettisoning the diesel option for this segment by overcoming the obvious advantages of the diesel mill through their focus on petrol engines combined with hybrid powertrains. What helps

SOUTH KOREAN, JAPANESE PLAYERS LAYING OUT PLANS

■ South Koreans currently dominate this space, with Hyundai Motor — India's second largest carmaker — and its sister concern Kia Motor, between them, packing in multiple models that run on both diesel and petrol mills

■ The Japanese strategy, led by Maruti Suzuki and Toyota, is focussed on jettisoning the diesel option for this segment by overcoming the obvious advantages of the diesel mill through their focus on petrol engines combined with hybrid powertrains



File

in this game plan is that Toyota is a global leader in hybrid technology, with Maruti Suzuki expected to pitch in with its supplier base to increase localisation and thereby make the hybrid offerings more cost-effective.

The localisation effort is being seen as a counter to the tax relief on hybrids, which Toyota has been lobbying hard for, albeit unsuccessfully so far. The bet is also that as the BS-VI emission norms get tighter, the diesel mill will progressively get even priced out.

Both the Japanese players are in the process of attempting to bring hybrids down from the pricier, more premium segments of the car market to lower down the price points. For Maruti Suzuki, this comes at a time when it has seen its market share drop to around 43 per cent in FY22 from nearly 48 per cent in FY21, and well over 50 per cent in the previous two years. The plan to bring in multiple petrol-powered SUV products mated to hybrid powertrains in order to enhance fuel efficiency heralds the clear intent of not making a comeback in the diesel segment. The company is also focussing on increasing its play in the CNG segment to bring in additional volumes. Incidentally, in the non-SUV segment, Maruti Suzuki's market share continues to be at over 65 per cent, with leadership positions in both the hatchback and MPV (multi-pur-

pose vehicle) segments. The lack of products in the fast growing SUV segment, however, had impacted its overall market share.

The extent of reversal of the Maruti stance is evident from the fact that its two primary offerings in the SUV segment — the Vitara Brezza and the S-Cross — were only offered with diesel engines for over four years into their launch, without a petrol option. The automaker's plan to wean away from diesel came after the new BS-VI emission norms were rolled out two years ago and the company has ruled out getting back into the diesel segment as it feels the sale of such vehicles would further come down with the onset of the next phase of emission norms in 2023 that would further jack up the cost of diesel vehicles.

Incidentally, carmakers such as the Koreans, alongside their diesel push, are also increasingly relying on "engine downsizing" in the petrol segment, with a turbocharged petrol engine option among the variants.

These engines use a turbine that is powered by the engine's exhaust gas to subsequently force that extra compressed air into the combustion chamber, leading to more efficient combustion of the air-fuel mixture.

The result is these smaller turbocharged engines produce more power than a bigger engine, while consuming less fuel.

The primary difference be-

tween the petrol and diesel engines is that petrol engines use spark plugs to ignite the air-fuel mixture, while diesel engines rely on heavily compressed air without any spark plugs.

Diesel engines are thereby more efficient and use 15-20 per cent less fuel translating into lower running costs, and also boast of higher low-end torque that provides for a better driving experience with higher loads or on inclines, thereby making them the primary choice for SUVs.

However, they usually cost more than petrol vehicles as diesel technology is more expensive and their servicing and maintenance costs are higher.

A hybrid system typically comprises a petrol engine that is paired to an electric motor and a NiMH (Nickel-metal Hydride) battery pack that enables the vehicle to be driven on a pure electric mode for short distances. The battery pack is recharged by the engine or through regenerative braking. Cars with the hybrid system can be driven for stretches on electric power alone, using the internal combustion engine to top up the battery while running. With this hybrid set-up, the powertrain can deliver a 40-80 per cent jump in fuel efficiency over its non-electrified counterpart, thereby obviating range anxiety typically associated with EVs. But this comes at a higher price, given that they incorporate the electric motor and

battery pack, alongside the combustion engine. This hybrid system being deployed by the Maruti Suzuki-Toyota combine would be similar to the one used in the recently unveiled Honda City e:HEV hybrid or the Toyota Camry, but will come in at a lower price point.

Alongside the hybrid powertrain partnership, Maruti Suzuki and Toyota are already working on a pure-play battery electric vehicle (EV). Suzuki Motor Corp, the parent of Maruti Suzuki, has said it would invest Rs 10,440 crore to build a new EV factory and a battery facility in India.

The announcement by Suzuki marked the first concrete commitment on electrification by Maruti, which has maintained that the Indian car market is not yet prepared for a mass shift towards BEVs (battery electric vehicles) and that the pace of development of the supporting infrastructure such as charging points is less than adequate.

Tata Motors and Hyundai Motor have taken a lead in this segment, with strong plans for an electrification of their product offering, at a time when passenger EVs have seen a sharp jump of well over 50 per cent in sales in 2020-21, albeit over a relatively small base.

While Maruti Suzuki has been treading cautiously on the EV track, there was an expectation that the EV version of the WagonR would have been the company's first battery-electric model for India. A prototype of the WagonR EV was showcased in September 2018 and road testing of some 40-odd prototypes was also underway. But pricing seems to have been a deciding factor in the WagonR EV project being put on the backburner.

Instead, an SUV is being readied in partnership with Toyota, which with Suzuki has a global partnership agreement, and the product is targeted to hit the markets in three years from now. The vehicle is likely to be produced under both the Suzuki and Toyota badging, with the Maruti Suzuki version reported to be code-named 'YY8'.

MARKET WATCH

TOP-10 VALUED COS' M-CAP DIVES

New Delhi: The top-10 most valued firms suffered a combined erosion of Rs 2,85,251.65 crore from their market capitalisation (m-cap) last week, mirroring an overall weak broader market trend, with Reliance Industries emerging as the worst-hit. **PTI**

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL TRADE, AMAZON

'Mission is to help transform buying & selling; look forward to engaging with ONDC'

FOR DOMESTIC exporters enrolled with Amazon's worldwide selling programme Global Selling, the opportunity to cash in on festive sales comes more than just from Diwali. It is one of the reasons why the e-commerce conglomerate has doubled its target of exports from India to \$20 billion instead of \$10 billion by 2025, said ABHIJIT KAMRA, the Director of Global Trade at Amazon in an interview with AASHISH ARYAN. Edited excerpts:

Amazon has doubled its export target from India. Are you not worried that the target could put pressure and lead to fall in quality?

\$20 billion is a very large number. It will have to be all the categories adding up and then the new categories that entrepreneurs are experimenting with. On the geography side, what we do is that the moment a new marketplace opens, we open that for Indian exporters also so that they can benefit from it.

The seller community has evolved significantly over the last few years and now they understand the value of good customer experience. It is also linked to the brand identity. If you put a good product in the customers' hands, they are going to reward you with good sales. The second thing is that there are very transparent mechanisms which encourage good behaviour. And one of the simplest examples of that is customer reviews. If you are doing bad quality product, the customer is going to give you a bad review so the next buyer knows not to buy from you.



Abhijit Kamra via LinkedIn

That is a very transparent way to encourage natural selection, and encourage sellers to up their customer satisfaction game. We are seeing a lot of people respond to that because they now understand that this is a long-term game and they are building long-term brands. The sellers are responding constructively.

How much of a challenge will the Open Network for Digital Commerce prove to be?

Our mission is to help transform buying and selling in India and digitise local mom-and-pop stores, micro, small & medium enterprises, and small & medium enterprises. Any initiative which helps in digitising these stores across India, either by simplifying technology adoption or otherwise, is an important initiative. We look forward to engaging with the ONDC to see what role we can play in serving Indian customers.

What are the key product categories and cities that have seen growth since the Global Selling programme began?

We are on track this year to hit \$5 billion cumulative exports from India. In 2020, when Jeff Bezos was here, we had taken a pledge of \$10 billion by 2025 and are now doubling it to \$20 billion in the same time frame.

So if you think about north India, we have Delhi which is doing well. But we also have Jaipur, Noida, Jodhpur where a lot of exporters are coming from. And the typical categories include pet products, toys, office products and accessories, and leather bags.

In southern India, again the usual Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad are there. But then there is also a lot of action from Coimbatore, Trichy, and Madurai. The products that are doing well here are home apparel, kitchen products and others. Home entertainment and sports products are also starting to do well.

Poonawalla woos Musk to invest in making Tesla cars locally

New Delhi: Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Sunday wooed Elon Musk to invest in India to manufacture Tesla electric cars, saying it will be the best investment he would have ever made. Musk, who has made a successful \$44 billion acquisition bid for Twitter, had in the past asked India to reduce import duties to sell Tesla electric cars but the government has insisted on local manufacturing.

In a post on Twitter, tagging Musk, Poonawalla said, "... just in case you don't end up buying @Twitter, do look at investing some of that capital in INDIA for high-quality large-scale manufacturing of @Tesla cars." He further said, "I assure you this will be the best investment you'll ever make." Last month, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari had said if Tesla was ready to manufacture its electric vehicles in India then there was 'no problem' but the company must not import cars from China.

Last August, Musk had said that American electric vehicle maker Tesla may set up manufacturing unit in India if it first succeeds with imported vehicles in the country. He had said Tesla wanted to launch its vehicles her "but import duties are the highest in the world by far of any large country!" **PTI**

DoT axes NOCC levy for telecom licence holders; satellite broadband cos to benefit

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

THE DEPARTMENT of Telecommunications (DoT) has abolished the network operation and control centre (NOCC) charges that are levied on use of space segments by telecom service providers for satellite telephony, broadband, etc. This is expected to provide a fillip to upcoming satellite broadband companies.

The NOCC levy regime was introduced in 2003, and the DoT levied Rs 21 lakh per transponder every year for 36 MHz of spectrum on a pro-rata basis. Additionally, the government also

EXPLAINED

Sector to be more viable

WITH THE removal of the NOCC charges for telecom service providers, the Indian satellite broadband space — which is attracting foreign entrants as well as established domestic players — could increase in viability.

charged Rs 6,000 for every trial of antenna that is used for receiving and transmitting signals.

"There shall be no NOCC charges for use of space segment for all DoT licensees for commercial and captive VSAT services, GMPCS (satellite phone service), NLD (national long distance) and other telecom licensees having unified licence or standalone licence. This order shall be effective from April 1, 2022," DoT said in an order dated May 6.

The Network Operations & Control Center was created under the DoT to control the transmissions from ground segment, or satellite earth stations, along with the master control facility under Department of Space to manage the operation of satellites in orbit.

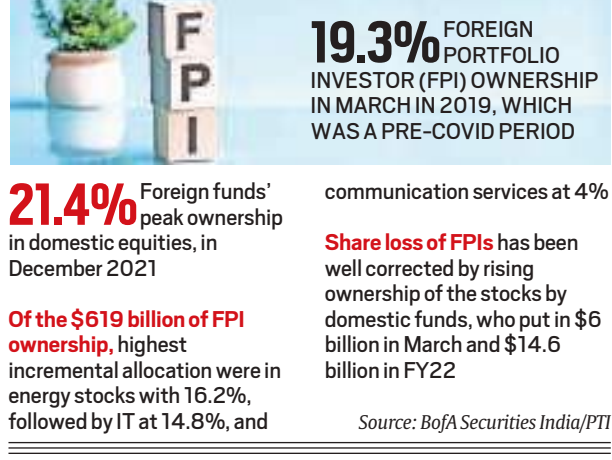
Responding to the move, AK Bhatt, Director General, Indian

Space Association, said: "We believe that these progressive policy steps are in the right direction and showcase the government's commitment in supporting the growth of digital communication by leveraging the potential and capability of satellite communication industry".

Currently, Sunil Bharti Mittal's OneWeb and Elon Musk's Starlink are the providers planning to launch satellite broadband services in India using low-earth orbit satellites. In February, Reliance Jio had announced that it has formed a joint-venture with Luxembourgish satellite-based content connectivity solutions provider SES, and plans to deliver Quantile broadband services across India.

'FPI ownership in equities falls to lowest since Mar 2019'

FPI ownership in Indian equities fell to pre-Covid level to a multi-year low of 19.5% this March in NSE500 companies valued at \$619 billion, as per BofA Securities India report



Amid policy rate hikes, FPIs remain net sellers in equities in May so far

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

IN A month that saw the Reserve Bank of India and the United States Federal Reserve raised interest rates, foreign investors pulled over Rs 6,400 crore from domestic equity markets in the first four trading sessions of May.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) remained net sellers for the seventh straight month till April, as they withdrew more than Rs 1.65 lakh crore from equities.

This was mainly on account of the anticipation of a rate hike by the US Fed and the deteriorating

geopolitical environment following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After six months of selling spree, FPIs turned net investors in the first week of April amid correction in the markets and invested Rs 7,707 crore in equities. However, after a short break, they again turned net sellers during the holiday-shortened April 11-13 week, and the sell-off continued in the succeeding weeks too.

In May till date, FPI flows continue to remain negative as they sold nearly Rs 6,417 crore during May 2-6, data released by depositors showed. The trading in market was closed on May 3 on account of Eid. **WITHPTI**

BRIEFLY

'SCI sale bids'

New Delhi: The Centre is likely to invite financial bids for Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) by September, after the process of demerger of non-core assets is completed, an official said. As part of the strategic sale, the Centre is hiving off Shipping House and the training institute in Pune and some other non-core SCI assets.

LIC IPO day 5

New Delhi: Life Insurance Corporation's (LIC) IPO was subscribed 1.79 times on the penultimate day of the offer on Sunday. As per data on bourses posted at 7 pm, for 16,20,78,067 shares on offer, 29,08,27,860 bids were received. **PTI**

Joshi takes over as CMD of Hindustan Petroleum

New Delhi: Pushp Kumar Joshi on Sunday took over as the new Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), the country's third largest oil refining and fuel marketing company.

"Prior to this Dr Joshi was Director-HR of the Corporation from August 01, 2012," the company said in a statement. Joshi, the senior-most director on the HPCL board, was in January picked by the government headed Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB) to replace Mukesh Kumar Surana. Surana superannuated from services on April 30, 2022, but in absence of a formal order from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by the Prime Minister, Joshi was named interim head.



Pushp Kumar Joshi, the new Chairman & Managing Director of Hindustan Petroleum. via Twitter @HPCL

The ACC confirmation of his appointment has now come and he has formally taken over as the chairman and managing director of HPCL. Joshi is also holding the additional charge of Director—Marketing of HPCL. **PTI**

Chaos at Apple supplier Quanta shows strains of Shanghai Covid lockdown

REUTERS
SHANGHAI, MAY 8

QUANTA SHANGHAI Manufacturing City would seem like an ideal site to implement China's "closed-loop" management system to prevent the spread of Covid-19 that requires staff to live and work on-site in a secure bubble.

Sprawled over land the size of 20 football fields, the campus houses factories, living quarters for 40,000 workers, some living 12 per room, and even a supermarket. But as Covid breached Quanta's defences, the system broke down into chaos Thursday.

Videos posted online showed more than a hundred Quanta workers physically overwhelm-



Workers take Covid rapid antigen tests in Shanghai. Reuters file

ing security guards in hazmat suits and vaulting over factory gates to escape being trapped inside the factory amid rumours that workers on the floor that day tested positive for Covid.

The turmoil at Quanta under-

scores the struggles Shanghai faces to get its factories, many of them key links in global supply chains, back up to speed even as much of the city of 25 million remains locked down under China's "dynamic-zero" Covid policy.

Taiwan-based Quanta puts together about three-quarters of Apple's global MacBook production and also manufactures computer circuit boards for Tesla.

Quanta did not respond to a request for comment on the videos that appeared on Chinese social media platforms before being taken down. Apple declined to comment and Tesla did not respond to a request for comment.

Quanta set up its closed-loop to restart work at the factory on April 18 with about 5 per cent of its workforce, or 2,000 employees, with plans to triple that by April 22. Chinese state media touted the restart as an example of how Shanghai was keeping business open in the country's biggest economic hub, while adhering to stringent Covid measures.

'April: Overall biz confidence of India Inc improves'

New Delhi: The latest round of industry body FICCI's Business Confidence Survey reported an improvement in the confidence level of India Inc, with the Overall Business Confidence Index at 67.6 in the recently conducted April 2022 round against 63.9 earlier.

The survey by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) found an improvement in both current conditions and expectations of Indian companies in its latest round. The Current Condition Index improved to 66.1 from 62.6 in the last survey, while the Expectations Index improved to 68.4 from 64.5.

The survey gauges the respondents' expectations for the period April to September 2022. **ENS**

Women's 4-1 win needlessly exciting in TUC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MAY 8

INDIAN MEN wobbled to a 5-0 start in their opening tie against Germany at the Thomas Cup as the Europeans stretched two matches into deciders, jolting the 5-0 margin a tad. The Uber Cup team made heavy weather against lower-placed opponents, albeit holding nerves to eke out a 4-1 win against Canada.

India's womens singles players though hogged all the excitement as first Aakarshi Kashyap and later Ashmita Chaliha shrugged off indifferent erratic starts to hold their nerves at the clutch in three-setters against Canada and give the Uber Cup team a 4-1 win. Playing against an opponent from a country that is not traditionally known to throw up a bunch of top players, Chaliha indeed woke up mid-match from a set and 4-8 down and went on a 9-point rampage to win the final singles tie 12-21, 21-11, 22-20 showing decent temperament against Rachel Chan. Kashyap had earlier fought back from 17-21 and 7-12 down to pounce on Canadian Wen Yu Zhang's errors and win 17-21, 21-18, 21-17, a 4-point rally from 17-18 down in the decider to close out the match was impressive in an otherwise laborious game where the Indian had more grit than finesse in her kills.

PV Sindhu had given India a good start by beating potential CWG obstacle Michelle Li 21-17, 21-10. Tanisha Crasto and Treasa Jolly, playing India's second doubles, were mighty impressive against Catherine Choi and Josephine Wu winning 21-9, 21-15 in 29 minutes, though the other scratch pair - Shruti Mishra-Simran Singhi went down 19-21, 12-21.

Men shrug off rusty start

begin comfortably against Max Weisskirchen winning 21-16, 21-13 in 36 minutes. But that was followed by two rusty openers - Satwicksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty dropping a set against unheralded Jones Jansen and Marvin Seidel, 21-15, 10-21, 21-13. Kidambi Srikanth gave one tight scare, when Kai Schaffer took the opener 21-18, as the German took off from 16-all. The next two sets were a cakewalk with some delectable strokes, but Srikanth would need to eschew these poor starts in coming days.

MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila pulled out a thriller 25-23, 21-15 against Bjarne Geiss and Jan Voelker after holding three set points and

India play Canada in Thomas Cup on Monday, where Bryan Young vs Lakshya Sen will be the interesting match of young guns.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson

-

MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

YOU WANT TO COME OVER FOR POKER TONIGHT, JEFF?

NO THANKS. I'M NOT VERY GOOD AT POKER

I KNOW. THAT'S WHY THE GUYS WANTED ME TO INVITE YOU

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KU 4829


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.

2	1				7
4		1			8
		3	8		
	2	8			4 6
	9			8	
7 3			4 1		
		5	2		
	2		6		9
9				6	5

5	3	7	1	2	8	9	4	6
9	4	8	3	6	5	7	1	2
1	2	6	7	4	9	8	3	5
8	9	3	5	1	7	6	2	4
4	6	1	9	8	2	5	7	3
2	7	5	4	3	6	1	9	8
3	1	9	8	5	4	2	6	7
6	8	4	2	7	1	3	5	9
7	5	2	6	9	3	4	8	1

BY PETER VIDAL

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

 You must be aware by now of strong undercurrents in your family life, or at least of the possibility that people have big plans for your future. Don't worry if there are delays now, as the end of the week will bring swift solutions.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
 A build-up of planets in lively regions of your chart indicates that

you've every reason to celebrate. This is traditionally a time when you show off all your natural skills and advantages to their best. A word for those of you pursuing professional ambitions: make the most of all social offerings and openings.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
 You're bound to feel a little more secretive, especially as friends will be pestering you over matters which are really none of their business. You'll be on safe ground just as long as you are discreet when necessary. Also, how about occupying the moral high ground?

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
 It would be a gross understatement to say that as far as several of your

major ambitions are concerned, this is a make-or-break period of your life. Press ahead with all the determination for which you are renowned - and set your sights on victory at the end of the week.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Your personal, emotional and romantic trends are looking decidedly

lively. But the last thing you should be doing right now is ignoring the vital necessity of hard work if you want to advance in your career. If you're on the brink of a major breakthrough, one last push may be needed.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
 Not for the first time the planets have taken up a configuration which

there's something
you that resists being the
centre of attention for too long.
As a result you may find
current emotional
opportunities slightly hard to
handle. That's why you might
be tempted to cut yourself off
from a number of contacts.

holds out superb possibilities as far as all your long-range goals are concerned. Try to plan as far ahead as possible. Everything depends on your ability to combine a grasp of detail with a sweeping vision of the future.

Kolkata

PLAYING TONIGHT

Indian Premier League
MI vs KKR, 730pm, *Live on Star Sports Network*
Badminton: **Thomas Cup**
India vs Canada, 12.30pm, *Live on Sports 18*

BRIEFLY

Tough draws for Indian boxers

Istanbul: Indian pugilists were handed tough draws for the Women's World Boxing Championships, to be held in Istanbul from May 8 to 20. Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain (70kg) will kickstart India's campaign on Monday but she got a tough draw as she will be up against the former world champion Chen Nien-Chin who she beat in the quarter-finals of the Tokyo Olympic Games. Two-time Asian Champion Pooja Rani (81kg), Nandini and Nikhat Zareen have also been handed tough draws in their respective categories.

EPL: Man City open up three-point lead

Manchester: Manchester City reclaimed top spot in the Premier League with a 5-0 drubbing of Newcastle United that allowed the reigning champions to open up a three-point lead over Liverpool at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. Raheem Sterling scored twice for the hosts with Aymeric Laporte, Rodri and Phil Foden also on target. City have 86 points to Liverpool's 83 with both sides having three games remaining and City now have a superior goal difference. Liverpool face Aston Villa on Tuesday with City up against Wolverhampton Wanderers a day later.

Indians continue to shine at Deaflympics

New Delhi: Dhanush Srikanth teamed up with Priesha Deshmukh to win the 10m air rifle mixed team competition and extend Indian shooters' gold rush at the 24th Deaflympics in Caxais do Sul, Brazil. Shooting on competition day six, Dhanush and Priesha beat Germany's Sebastian Herrmany and Sabrina Eckert 16-10 in the gold medal match. This was Dhanush's second gold of the Games after having won the individual men's 10m air rifle.

Alba scores late in Barcelona's win

Barcelona: Jordi Alba scored a last-gasp winner to snatch Barcelona a 2-1 win at Real Betis, dealing a blow to the host's hopes of qualifying for the Champions League. Barcelona on Saturday strengthened its hold on second place in the Spanish league behind newly crowned champion Real Madrid, which clinched the title last weekend. Betis remained in fifth place.

Indian GP shifted to Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar: The Indian Grand Prix 3 and 4, which were originally scheduled to be held in Madurai, will now be organised here on May 21 and 24, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) said on Sunday. This is the second time the venue of the two one-day events has been changed. "Earlier these meets were to be held at Madurai. The Grand Prix Meets have been shifted to provide better facilities to the athletes," the AFI said in a release."

PTI, REUTERS & AP

The future is here: Alcaraz beats Zverev in straight sets to win Madrid Open

REUTERS & AP
MAY 8

SPANISH TEENAGER Carlos Alcaraz won his second ATP Masters 1000 title at the Madrid Open after defeating defending champion Alexander Zverev 6-3 6-1 in front of his home crowd on Sunday.

Alcaraz looked dangerous throughout his run at the claycourt tournament, where he stunned world number one Novak Djokovic and 21-times major winner Rafa Nadal before cruising past world number three Zverev in the title clash. The 19-year-old is the youngest player since start of the ATP Tour in 1990 to defeat three top-five players at the same event. Alcaraz, who win his first Masters 1000 title in Miami last month, made the first move as he broke Zverev to love for a 4-2 lead before comfortably closing out the set on his own serve.

The home favourite broke to love again for a 2-1 lead in the second set as Zverev began to grow frustrated, failing to find ways to stop Alcaraz. Cheered on by the home fans, the sublime Alcaraz found the double break at 4-1 and won the next two games to wrap up the match in just about an hour. The Spaniard got the crowd at the Manolo Santana Stadium on their feet with his variety of shots and relentless hitting as he earned a seventh straight top-10 win



Carlos Alcaraz reacts after beating Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final.

and tour-leading fourth title of the year.

Ranked 120 in the world just a year ago, Alcaraz will rise to a career-high no. 6 in the new rankings on Monday.

Djokovic optimistic

Novak Djokovic is optimistic about his game going into the French Open despite going another week without a title.

The top-ranked Djokovic is yet to win a

The 19-year-old is the youngest player since start of the ATP Tour in 1990 to defeat three top-five players at the same event

trophy this season while trying to regain his best form after not being allowed to play in the Australian Open because he was not vaccinated for COVID-19. Djokovic lost to Alcaraz in three sets in the semifinals of the Madrid Open on Saturday, when he was trying to make it to his second consecutive final after losing to Andrey Rublev in Serbia last month.

Despite the loss, Djokovic said he leaves Madrid feeling good about his preparations for the upcoming French Open, where he will defend his title. "I definitely played very good tennis, I mean, the best that I have played this year," Djokovic said. "Probably when the disappointment of losing this match passes, I will have a lot of positives to take away from this week." Djokovic said he felt he could have come away with the victory against the 19-year-old Alcaraz — one the hottest players on tour this season — if he had been "able to capitalize when it mattered" during the match of more than 3 1/2 hours at the "Caja Mágica" center court.

Royal revenge

Dismissed by SRH for 68 in an earlier match, Bangalore turn the tables to win by 67 runs in the reverse fixture

SYNOPSIS: A century stand between Faf du Plessis and Rajat Patidar followed by another strong finish from Dinesh Karthik set up RCB's massive win as Wanindu Hasaranga ran through Sunrisers with 5 for 18

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
MUMBAI, MAY 8

AFTER DISMISSING Royal Challengers Bangalore for 68 at Brabourne Stadium for a nine-wicket win a fortnight ago, Sunrisers Hyderabad have been on a losing streak. And RCB extended Sunrisers' winless phase to four games as they handed them a 67-run hammering at Wankhede Stadium. The win took RCB to 14 points with two games left, and Sunrisers are stuck on 10 with three matches to play.

Another stirring DK finish

In the 19th over of the RCB innings, the DJ exhorted the Wankhede crowd to shout 'Tyagi, Tyagi.' The Sunrisers pacer had just bowled successive dot balls to new batsman Dinesh Karthik. He was keeping the ball outside off and taking the pace off, and Karthik had just tried a reverse-hit and failed to connect. But after a moment or two of silence, as if they were considering what to do, the fans began chanting 'DK, DK' instead. And Karthik, who'd walked out to those shouts moments ago, proceeded to spoil what had been an excellent over; he moved across, stood outside off behind the line where Tyagi had been operating and slog-swept him over deep midwicket.

Fazalhaq Farooqi, the left-arm seamer from Afghanistan, had bowled three steady overs for only 22 runs on his IPL debut. He'd taken treatment for a leg issue at the start of his third over, and been hit on his leg the very next ball by a strike from Faf du Plessis. Through the pain, Farooqi had even managed to smile at his misfortune. He'd have had reason to feel genuine happiness if Rahul Tripathi had caught Karthik on the deep square-leg boundary. Karthik had just come back on strike with four balls left in the last over, and had swung Farooqi straight to Tripathi. The white ball came flat at an awkward time; the setting sun was straight in Tripathi's eyes. It burst through his hands and fell on the rope. Karthik took the remaining three balls of the innings for six, six and four, making it 25 runs off the over and ruining Farooqi's figures too. Farooqi alternated between full and short lengths; Karthik just cleared a jumping long-on, walloped the next over midwicket and ended the RCB innings with a straight hit. He had taken 30 off only eight balls, and had given RCB the big over that hadn't arrived until then during the death phase. It was his eighth unbeaten effort out of 12 innings this IPL, and his season strike-rate is back at 200.

Sunrisers' disaster start
Karthik's surge had propelled RCB to 192 for 3 but Rajasthan Royals had comfortably chased down 190 at Wankhede the previous afternoon against Punjab Kings. An opening stand of 46 in four overs had

IPL TABLE						
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR	
LSG	11	8	3	16	0.703	
GT	11	8	3	16	0.120	
RR	11	7	4	14	0.326	
RCB	12	7	5	14	-0.115	
DC	11	5	6	10	0.150	
SRH	11	5	6	10	-0.031	
PBKS	11	5	6	10	-0.231	
CSK	11	4	7	8	0.028	
KKR	11	4	7	8	-0.304	
MI	10	2	8	4	-0.725	

set RR on their way. But Sunrisers would lose both their openers before the first over was done. Skipper Kane Williamson, going for a pretty tight single, was run out for a diamond duck with a direct hit from short extra cover by Shahbaz Ahmed. Four balls later, Abhishek Sharma swung all over an utterly normal delivery from Glenn Maxwell and was bowled for a duck. So in the space of nine deliveries, RCB had wrested the momentum completely.

Hasaranga runs through 'em

On a surface where it hadn't been easy to swing pitched-up deliveries across the line, Sunrisers had served up extra pacer through Tyagi and Umran Malik to make it more straightforward for RCB. The duo conceded 67 off a combined six overs, and Malik was restricted to just two overs after his opening one was taken for 20 by du Plessis and Rajat Patidar. On the other hand, six overs of spin from J Suchith and Abhishek went for only 43.

RCB saw that and used as many as nine overs of spin. Four of those were from the leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga, and he ran through a line-up way behind on the asking rate with 5 for 18. He broke a 50-run third-wicket stand by having Aiden Markram caught at deep midwicket for Virat Kohli, who'd gone first ball of the match, popping Suchith straight to midwicket for his third golden duck of the season, and second against Sunrisers.

In his second over, Hasaranga took out the dangerous Nicholas Pooran, luring the West Indies captain into a slog-sweep with a tossed-up googly that took the edge to short third man. It was an excellent diving-forward take by Shahbaz.

Two drops in three balls

Malik had put down a similar chance at the same position off Patidar, two balls after Tripathi failed to hang on to a difficult opportunity at midwicket off du Plessis. The second-wicket RCB stand was worth 67 then, it would cost Sunrisers 38 more, and du Plessis would go on to anchor the innings until the very end.

BRIEF SCORES: Royal Challengers Bangalore 192/3 in 20 overs (Faf du Plessis 73 not out, Rajat Patidar 48, Dinesh Karthik 30 not out; J Suchith 2/30) bt Sunrisers Hyderabad 125 all out in 19.2 overs (Rahul Tripathi 58; Wanindu Hasaranga 5/18) by 67 runs



RCB spinner Wanindu Hasaranga ran through the SRH batting line-up by taking five wickets. Sportzpics for IPL

Delhi Capitals lose to Chennai Super Kings by 91 runs, playoff chances take a hit

SYNOPSIS: Conway, Gaikwad play connoisseur's cricket. Moeen does bowling star turn

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
MAY 8

DAVID WARNER glared at Nitin Menon as he walked past him, livid that the umpire's call didn't go his way. Maheesh Theekshana's leg-before appeal was very confident and the DRS showed that Menon was right. Delhi Capitals desperately needed two points from this game to keep their playoffs hopes alive and against Chennai Super Kings' 208/6, Warner was the team's best bet. The batsman's anger captured the frustration of a failed reverse sweep attempt.

In the end, DC folded up for 117 to lose by 91 runs, a serious blow for them with just three group matches remaining. For CSK, they will take this win and hope against hope.

Connoisseur's cricket

Ruturaj Gaikwad and Devon Conway batting in a partnership is connoisseur's cricket. CSK missed a trick by not allowing the partnership to bed in during the early phase of the tournament. Conway was given a game upfront before being dropped. Belatedly, when he was brought back to the fold, he instantly got into the groove and added meat to the CSK top-order in conjunction with Gaikwad.

This has been an underwhelming season for the four-time champions. But a successful franchise like CSK will deal with one bad year. The Conway-Gaikwad opening combination offers hope for the future. They score runs playing orthodox cricket. Conway, an established Test batsman for New Zealand, has every shot in the book. Also, he is excellent against spin. Gaikwad, who has a future India



MS Dhoni's cameo ensured CSK crossed the 200-run mark. Sportzpics for IPL

Test batsman written all over him, revels in the bucketload of time against pace, which speaks volumes for his quality. And when they press the accelerator in the shortest format without compromising on their batting principles, cricket becomes very enjoyable.

CSK by and large have failed to make the Powerplays count this term, which also muddled their middle-overs batting. Today, they raced to 57 for no loss after six overs. The release shot came from Gaikwad in the third over against Anrich Nortje, when the batsman danced down the track and treated the tear-away quick like a spinner. Gaikwad's balance, head position, the straightness of the bat — everything was copybook. The ball sailed over the long-on boundary for a six. Gaikwad had a slow start to the season. But now he has regained his touch and from that perspective, he would rue his dismissals in the 30s and 40s. A Nortje bouncer got the better of him. It was a 152.6kph delivery all right, but a well-set Gaikwad, batting on 41 off 33 balls, was expected to neutral it.

Conway made light work of Kuldeep Yadav. He used his feet to hit a six off a length

ball before sweeping the next one to clear the deep square leg boundary. When a batsman is using his feet and at the same time, sweeping with aplomb, it becomes very difficult for the bowler. Before taking Kuldeep to the cleaners, Conway had accounted for back-to-back sixes against Axar Patel. The two openers complemented each other; Conway taking on spin and Gaikwad attacking the fast bowlers. Their 110-run partnership came in 11 overs. They now have two 100-plus associations in three games. Conway departed for a 49-ball 87. Shivam Dube and MS Dhoni's cameos ensured that CSK would cross the 200-run mark.

Nortje was DC's most successful bowler with 3/42, including the wickets of Moeen Ali and Robin Uthappa in successive deliveries in the final over. Khaleel Ahmed was the most economical, 2/28. Kuldeep conceded 43 runs in his three overs.

Bowling star turn

Rishabh Pant's response to Warner's dismissal was spectacular. He hit Theekshana for three consecutive fours, the first one being a falling lofted straight drive. The DC captain and Mitchell Marsh were going great guns until Moeen intervened.

Marsh was his first victim, a mistimed slog-sweep finding Gaikwad at long-on. Pant was done in by a skidder, the batsman chopping it on to the stumps. Three balls later, Ripal Patel was beaten in the sir and was holed out to deep mid-wicket. Moeen's figures after two overs read: 2-0-9-3. DC slumped to 81/5 and soon they were 85/7 after Rovman Powell's dismissal. The game was done and dusted.

BRIEF SCORES: Chennai Super Kings (Devon Conway 87, Ruturaj Gaikwad 41, Shivam Dube 32, MS Dhoni 21 not out; Anrich Nortje 3/42) bt Delhi Capitals 117 all out in 17.4 overs (Mitchell Marsh 25; Moeen Ali 3/13) by 91 runs

Annu dominates, sets another record at Javelin Nationals with a throw of 63.82m

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MAY 8

SEASONED THROWER Anu Rani lit up the Javelin Nationals in Jamshedpur with a national record-breaking effort of 63.82m on her very first attempt. The Uttar Pradesh athlete has been India's best woman thrower by a distance for almost a decade now. Sunday was the ninth time she broke the national record as she improved on her previous mark of 63.24m set last year at the Federation Cup in Patiala. Annu's next three throws yielded 60.10m, 56.60m and 58.13m before she passed on the last two attempts.

The gulf between Annu and her competitors in Jamshedpur was quite large. The silver medal went to Sanjana Choudhary for 53.87m - almost 10m behind Annu's gold-winning attempt. Annu has been consistently improving on her own national mark since first breaching it in 2014 with 58.83m.

Annu had had a quiet season until now after the disappointment at the Tokyo Olympics where she finished 14th in the qualification round. Despite another record-breaking throw, Annu's hunger to go further won't be satisfied. The 30-year-old thrower



Annu Rani recorded a 58cm improvement on her own mark. File

had worked closely with German biomechanics expert and Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra's coach Klaus Bartonietz in the run-up to the Tokyo Games.

In the men's U-18 (700g javelin) category, Yash Saini of Haryana finished on top with a best attempt of 67.42m. Saini, taking part in his first national-level meet, produced a string of consistent throws of 65.21, 63.24, 64.05, and 65.46m on Sunday. The 17-year-

old was, however, not pleased with his results as he feels he belongs in the 70m club.

"I was hoping to throw with an international javelin. I have thrown 72m in training and would have been happy if I had matched that, but considering the slight wind blowing towards us and my niggles, I am happy that I won gold on debut. I have been training for three years, but it is only now that my coaches Arvind Kumar and Dharmender believed I was ready," the youngster said.

In the men's U-20 category, which had only five participants, Vivek Kumar of Madhya Pradesh took top spot with a best throw of 68.67m. The results don't augur well with the U20 World Championships just three months away. India is yet to see another javelin thrower on the podium in the Junior Worlds since Chopra's gold in 2016. The performance level at the U20 men's event can be gauged by the fact that the gold-winning throw was more than 17m short of Neeraj's age-group national record of 86.48m.

The results in the women's U-16 (500g javelin) event was uninspiring with the gold going to Disha of Delhi for just 34.87m - about 15m less than the age-group national record of 49.31m set by Deepika of Haryana last year. The U-16 women's event had just four entries.