

GOOD MORNING ANDHRA

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Viveka case: Avinash again skips CBI interrogation

Hyderabad, May 19 (GNS) Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash Reddy once again skipped CBI interrogation in former Andhra Pradesh Minister Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy's murder case.

The MP, who was in Hyderabad, left for his hometown of Pulivendula in Kadapa on Friday.

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader has informed the CBI that he will be unable to appear before it as his mother has taken ill and so he had to rush to Pulivendula. Avinash Reddy had left his residence here and was believed that he was heading for the CBI office in Koti.

Media vehicles were also following him, but the MP's vehicle turned towards the highway.

This is the second time this week that Avinash Reddy has skipped CBI questioning.

The MP, who is the cousin of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, did not appear before the central agency on Tuesday.

Stating that he has pre-scheduled engagements in his parliamentary constituency, he had conveyed to the CBI that he was unable to appear due to the short notice.

However, the same day



The CBI issued him a fresh notice, directing him to appear at its regional office in Hyderabad at 11 a.m. on Friday.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain the MP's plea for an urgent hearing on his petition seeking a direction to the Telangana High Court to grant him anticipatory bail.

Last month, Avinash Reddy, who has already been questioned four times by the CBI, had approached the Telangana High Court for anticipatory bail.

The High Court on April 28 adjourned the hearing to June 5 and refused to pass an order restraining CBI from taking any harsh measure against him in the case.

The Supreme Court last

month extended the deadline for completing the investigation into the case till June 30.

The apex court had earlier fixed April 30 as the deadline for the CBI.

Vivekananda Reddy, brother of former chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and uncle of Jagan Mohan Reddy, was murdered at his residence in Pulivendula on March 15, 2019, weeks before the elections.

The 68-year-old former state minister was alone at his house when unidentified persons barged in and killed him.

The CBI took over the investigation in 2020 on the direction of Andhra Pradesh High Court while hearing a petition of Vivekananda Reddy's daughter Suneetha

Reddy, who raised suspicion about some relatives.

In November last year, the Supreme Court transferred the case to Hyderabad based on the petition.

Last month, the CBI arrested Avinash Reddy's father Y.S. Bhaskar Reddy.

The agency told the court during hearings on multiple occasions that Bhaskar Reddy, Avinash Reddy and their follower Devireddy Shiva Shankar Reddy hatched a conspiracy to murder Vivekananda Reddy as he had opposed the Kadapa Lok Sabha ticket to Avinash Reddy.

Avinash Reddy has denied the allegations against him and his father and claimed that the CBI ignored several key facts in the case.

NHRC notice to Jharkhand govt, DGP over assault on tribal girl

Ranchi, May 19 (GNS) The National Human Rights Commission on Thursday sent notices to the Jharkhand government and the Director General of police over reports that a tribal girl was allegedly assaulted and paraded in a village with shoes around her neck after shaving her head when she refused to marry a man of the choice of her kin.

The horrific incident took place on the diktat of Jogidih village panchayat in Palamu district of Jharkhand.

The NHRC in a statement said that it has taken suo motu cognisance of media reports that the tribal girl was "physically assaulted, and paraded with shoes around her neck after shaving her head when she re-

used to marry a man of the choice of her kin", they said.

The Commission has observed that the content of the media report, if true, amount to a violation of the human rights of the victim at the behest of a village panchayat.

"The perpetrators of such an immoral and unlawful act cannot be allowed to go scot-free in a civilised society governed by the rule of law," it said.

Accordingly, it has issued notices to the chief secretary and the director general of police of the state, seeking a detailed report within four weeks, including the status of the FIR registered by the police, medical treatment of the victim girl

and compensation if any, granted to her, the statement said.

The authorities are expected to explain in the report the status of the instalment of the compensation given to the victim, who is eligible for the same according to the provisions of the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the rights panel said.

They are also expected to intimate the status of any counselling provided to the victim girl, who suffered the trauma of physical pain, humiliation, and social stigma. The Commission would also like to know about the action taken against the delinquent officers, responsible for the tragedy, it added.

According to the media reports on May 16, the victim had run away on the day of her marriage on April 20, and when she returned after 20 days to the village, a meeting of the panchayat was organised to punish her, the statement said.

"After torturing and parading her in the village, she was left in the jungle in the night from where the police recovered her the next day and admitted her to the hospital. Reportedly, her parents had died eight years ago and she is living with her brother and two sisters," it added, quoting the reports.

She was tortured, left in the jungle, from where the police recovered her the next day and admitted her to the hospital.

Kiren Rijiju takes charge of Earth Sciences Ministry

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Kiren Rijiju on Friday assumed charge as Earth Sciences Minister and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving him an opportunity to handle various portfolios.

Rijiju, who was removed as Law Minister on Thursday, refused to answer questions about his previous ministry contending that they were no longer relevant and that he looked forward to serve in the Earth Sciences



Ministry.

"Don't ask questions related to the previous ministry as they are no longer rel-

evant," Rijiju said to questions whether he was removed as Law Minister for his frequent run-ins with the

judiciary.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrityunjay Mohapatra and Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor Vishwajit Sahay were present when Rijiju assumed charge as the Minister of Earth Sciences. Senior officers of the ministry, including Secretary M Ravichandran, were away in Diu for the G-20 Research and Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG) Conference.

Jagan's Wrong Strategy Causing Problems

Guntur, May 19 (GNS)

The election season is underway, and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is about to address the public and party members. However, he seems to be focusing more on verbally attacking Pawan Kalyan, who is a relatively insignificant figure in reality.

Pawan himself has admitted that he cannot fight alone and needs the support of CBN. He has implied that he is not a candidate for the position of Chief Minister. In such a scenario, continuously ridiculing him serves no purpose.

Moreover, there are many Kapus who feel a sense of belonging to Pawan Kalyan and wish to see him as the Chief Minister. However, if he joins CBN with the aspiration of making CBN a CM, many Kapus may turn against him, potentially leading them to vote for Jagan's party. But by persistently mocking Pawan, Jagan may risk losing the loyalty of such Kapus.

Why should Jagan provoke Pawan by saying, "If you have the courage, come and fight the elections alone"? This serves no purpose. Currently, Pawan is occupied with his film shoots and other commitments.

Jagan's main political opponent is CBN, and as long as he directs his verbal attacks towards him, it makes more sense. It is unclear who is advising Jagan Mohan Reddy with such



strategies. The present trend of the CM's verbal assault on Pawan is somewhat backfiring, albeit unintentionally. It is time for Jagan to be cautious and attentive. Adding to this, some captions and slogans like "Jaganannaku Chebudam", "Maa nammakam nuvve Jagan" and "Jagananne Maa Bhavishyattu" carry no value now and moreover they tend to frustrate the voters at this point

of time. Already there is a system to post grievances to the Government. Now Jaganannaku Chebudam which goes on in similar lines is repetitive. What is more disgusting is the sticking of stickers with slogans "Maa Nammakam Nuvve Jagan" and "Jagananne Maa Bhavishyattu" on the walls of houses of the voters. These bring a sense of repugnance than anything else.

Will Bring G.O. No.1 In Another Form!

Guntur, May 19 (GNS) It is known that the AP High Court recently struck down the highly controversial G.O. No. 1 that was passed by the Jagan government, which restricts opposition parties from holding public meetings in crowded places.

They cited public safety as the reason behind this seemingly unacceptable order. The court opined that the order restricts the basic rights of the opposition parties in the state and this isn't the right practice. However, the Jagan government doesn't seem to have learned a lesson from the feedback from the court. Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has announced that the YCP government will bring back G.O. No. 1 in another form at a later point. He said the court just reprimanded them over the G.O but this isn't the end of it. He added that the order will be bought back with other modulations. Going by

Sajjala's comment, it is evident that the AP government's intention was never about public safety, but just to restrict the opposition parties.

Now that Lokesh and Chandrababu are already drawing huge crowds to

SC gains full strength as Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra, KV Viswanathan sworn in as judges

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Supreme Court on Friday got two new judges as CJI Chandrachud administered oath to Andhra Pradesh HC Chief Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra and Senior Advocate KV Vishwanathan as Supreme Court judges.

Senior Advocate KV Vishwanathan would be in line to be at SCs helm of affairs till May 25, 2031.

Their appointment was notified by the Centre on Thursday. Newly appointed Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal while notifying their appointment in his tweet said, "In exercise of the powers conferred by the Constitution of India, Hon'ble President of India, after consultation with Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, is pleased to appoint the following as Judges of the Supreme Court



of India: Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra, Chief Justice of AP HC and Kalpathy Venkataraman Viswanathan, Sr. Advocate are appointed as Judges of the Supreme Court of India." Their names were recommended by the collegium on May 16 pursuant to the retirement of SC judges Dinesh Maheshwari and MR Shah. "The Supreme Court of India has a sanctioned strength of thirty-four Judges and is presently functioning with thirty-two Judges. Thus, there are two clear vacancies. With four more vacancies which are going to arise by the second week of July the working strength of Judges would come to twenty-eight. The Collegium has, however, unanimously resolved to recommend, for the present, names to fill up the two ex-

isting vacancies," collegium resolution signed by CJI DY Chandrachud, Justices SK Kaul, KM Joseph, Ajay Rastogi and Sanjiv Khanna stated. While recommending Justice PK Mishra's name, the collegium had taken note of the fact that there is no representation to Chhattisgarh HC in present composition of SC. "Besides according representation to the State of Chhattisgarh, the appointment of Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra will provide a value addition in terms of his acquired knowledge and experience. Justice Mishra is a judge with integrity," collegium resolution stated. Senior Advocate KV Vishwanathan's name was recommended considering that there is only one member from the bar (Justice PS Narasimha) who was directly

appointed to SC and his appointment would enhance the representation of bar in SCs composition. Interestingly, appointment of Senior Advocate KV Vishwanathan had made headlines in October last year when there was a split in the collegium headed by ex CJI Justice UU Lalit. Although Justice Lalit had in an unprecedented move written to the fellow members of the collegium seeking their consent through circulation for appointment of four judges to SC which also included Senior Advocate KV Vishwanathan's name but the move had remained "unfinished". Notably, CJI DY Chandrachud along with Justice S Abdul Nazeer (now retired) had at that time objected to the method adopted for the recommendation.

and now is to irk the opposition parties through this controversial GO, opine political experts.

For a government to stand, its good work needs to resonate, but trying to curb the opposition will only backfire badly.

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Religious Freedom

It was an unusually busy and buzzy day in the otherwise sleepy village of Undhela in Gujarat's Kheda district. Ten young Muslim men were brought to the chowk by police and each one was held against a pillar and caned by policemen in plain clothes. As the video shows, the villagers shouted "Bharat Mata ki Jai", while the caning continued. Some others were seen cheering and clapping. These 10 men were among 43 who allegedly threw stones, indulged in violence and disrupted a garba event at the same chowk the previous night. At a store in Citrus Springs in Florida, USA, Roy and Robert Lashley met a black man, who too was shopping there. Seeing an Afro-American man, Roy repeatedly used racial slurs. Later the two followed the victim into the parking lot. There, Robert ran to the victim and hit him several times, while Roy retrieved an axe handle from his truck, ran to the scene, and struck the victim multiple times with it. The victim sustained deep injuries to his face and legs. There are numerous such cases in the US of targeted killings in the name of religion and colour. In one case, in January this very year, a Black man was seen screaming for his mother as US cops beat him to death, reminding one of the killing of George Floyd in 2020 that led to the nationwide 'Black Lives Matter' movement. Statistically speaking, this year, the trend of fatal police shootings in the United States seems to be only increasing, with a total 344 civilians having been shot, 42 of whom were Black (as of 1 May 2023). In 2022, there were 1,096 fatal police shootings, of them more than one-fifth (225) were connected with Black. In 2021, there were 1,048 fatal shootings — and 233 of them came from the Black background. When one analyses the two given cases, they appear similar in nature — of police brutality, of targeting a particular community (religious or racial). In fact, in the first case, the victim has been at least accused of throwing stones, indulging in violence and disrupting a garba event. But in the second case, there was no such provocation; it was sheer racial hatred that led to the targeting of that Black man. But the State Department's Religious Freedom Report 2022, released by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in Washington on Monday, has picked out Case 1, among other isolated incidents in India, to project the image of a majoritarian state indulging in targeted attacks against "members of religious minorities". As for the violence in America, they remain law and order issues.

Apart from the selected targeting of Muslims, the report also highlights how religious conversion in India is under state scrutiny. "Thirteen of 28 states have laws restricting religious conversions for all faiths. Some of these states also impose penalties specifically against forced religious conversions for the purpose of marriage although historically, some state high courts have dismissed cases brought under these laws," it said. What this report doesn't say is that the laws in these states are reactive in nature; they have been made after several cases of "undue influence, coercion, and allurement" came to light. As Section 3 of Uttar Pradesh's Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 says, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert" another individual, directly or otherwise, by "misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means". It is only in the case of "violations of Section 3" that one is punished "by prison terms between one and five years and a fine of at least Rs 15,000". One wonders how a law that stops "undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means" can be cited to paint India and its democracy in dark hues. The Religious Freedom Report 2022, however, is not one of its kind in targeting India and its leadership. In fact, in the last year, especially after the Ukraine war and with India heading for a parliamentary election early next year, the anti-India, anti-Modi tirade has only increased. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), for instance, had come up with its report in March this year and it too had targeted India for promulgating the anti-conversion laws. It accused the "12 Indian states" of promulgating the anti-conversion laws that "grossly violated" the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

But it was the report of the US Holocaust Museum that took the cake. This report came out in December last year and its Early Warning Project for 2022-23 has ranked India eighth in the top 15 highest-risk countries in the world. "Our statistical model estimates that there is a 7.4 percent, or approximately 1 in 14, chance of a new mass killing beginning in India in 2022 or 2023. India ranks 8th highest-risk among 162 countries," the report said. For the last six years, India has ranked in the top 15 highest-risk countries in the world. Interestingly, as per the latest report, India is just better off than Afghanistan, but worse than Sudan, Somalia, Syria and Iraq in the same ascending order. Even autocratic China, ranked 23rd in the list, is better off than democratic India! The Western doublespeak is obvious when one realises that Black Americans make up 13 percent of the US population "but are killed by police at more than twice the rate of white Americans", as the Washington Post had reported. Still, the Americans never shy off from lecturing the world's largest democracy with a content-size population and globe-like diversity. Europeans have experienced a surge in government restrictions on religious activity over the last decade, as per a recent PEW survey, but they remain the paragon of libertarian values.

Business Growth Cannot Be at the Cost of Human Lives and Environmental Loss

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Growth and prosperity cannot be at the cost of human lives and environmental loss. This is not the definition of inclusive growth. Businesses that are not environmentally sustainable are at best set up and run for the short term and cannot grow to be larger corporations of the future. Every state in India must champion the concept of 'Sustainable Entrepreneurship' and that alone can bring accountability and social responsibility to every entrepreneur towards the environment and prevent the collision of business, environmental interests and human lives.

April 30 was a sad Sunday morning, that was painfully etched in the memories of the Giaspura locality of Ludhiana forever when 11 people lost their lives when a sewerage manhole gas leak caused people to drop dead. Out of these 11, five be-

longed to a single family. Surprisingly, leakage of odorous gases and effluents is an accepted fact for the residents of this locality who live amid rickety, polluting industrial units in residential areas.

The present gas leak disaster needs grassroots investigation and seems to have been the culmination of years of degrading environmental conditions in the state. In a survey conducted by IQAir, a Swiss-based air quality technology company, Ludhiana was featured in the top 50

most polluted cities of the world in 2021, reported an average yearly particulate matter (PM) 2.5 value of 71.8 micrograms per metric cube ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). Saw a big jump of

more than 100 ranks as compared to the previous year earning it the 41st spot among the cities of the world. The credit for these deplorable conditions goes

man lives.

Once the Manchester of India, Ludhiana accounts for 75 percent of India's bicycle production and 95 percent of India's woolen knitwear ex-

erate under hazardous conditions. The illegal and harmful discharge and disposal of industrial waste and effluents has reached a crescendo in Punjab.

never heard of waste treatment plants. As a result, the liquid and solid waste management rules framed by the National Green Tribunal in 2016 are alien to the industry operators.

Many more towns and cities have an inter-mix of residences and industries, for example, Jalandhar may be at the threshold of disasters that may unfold anytime. This requires more funds, infrastructure, and manpower to make the residential areas as well as business establishments environment-friendly. However, the government must not see this as an expense but more as an investment because new industries especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will spell the growth of the economy and employment generation. If these industrial units are not set up and run as per safe environment norms, we all will have to pay major social and environmental costs in the future.

Today, the number one economic threat to humanity is our inability to value lives and nature. This is not only about monetisation. Sure, valuing human capital and ecosystem services is critical. So, valuing human lives also means that we have to accept leaving the realm of economics.

Tiny units operating in Ludhiana residential areas are not able to shift to proper focal points because the higher cost (Rs 4-5 crore/acre) of land is out of their reach and also affects their competitiveness. In nearby periphery areas of industrial towns of the state, new focal points should be set up for the tiny units at affordable prices.

To avoid man-made disasters, the northern India industrial hub, Ludhiana, needs to build up environment-friendly industrial as well as residential area infrastructure and for this, a special environment welfare fund should be generated through excise policy to save precious human lives losses in the future.

How India's Waterways Can Carry its Freight and Reduce Carbon Emissions

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Can India's massive maze of waterways move its freight, bring in more money and reduce carbon emissions? PM Narendra Modi has been championing the revival of India's waterways recently. The big plan is to take cargo off trucks and put them on ships. India is home to a rich maze of 15,500 km of navigable rivers, backwaters and creeks alongside a vast 7500-km-long coastline. According to the Global Logistics Emissions Council's framework, the greenhouse gas footprint for a unit distance of cargo transported by waterways is almost half compared to railways and about one-tenth compared to road freight. Despite its potential, India's waterways currently occupy a mere 6 percent share in cargo and a negligible share in passenger movement.

The government envisions a three-fold increase in inland waterway transport and a 1.2-fold increase in the coastal shipping sector by 2030. Additionally, the Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is working on a Rs 5,000 crore package to facilitate the construction of vessels for inland waterways ships to promote the "Make in India" initiative. This could also present an opportunity to decarbonise the sector by leapfrogging to alternate fuel technologies for vessels. For example, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) could serve as a transition fuel for cargo-carrying vessels operating in inland waterways and coastal regions. Ammonia and hydrogen could also serve as cleaner fuels though their usage is still at a nascent stage. Further, a recent Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) study highlights that a transition to solar-assisted electric ferries in the passenger segment and LNG retrofitted vessels for the cargo segment could create a potential market size of Rs 77,000 crore and abate 1.1 million tonnes of CO2 emissions by 2030.

Despite the copious benefits of a clean fuel transition, the waterways vessels market lacks policy direction, a robust local ship-building ecosystem, and the availability of new technology alter-

natives or retrofitting options.

We propose three key enablers that could drive the adoption of clean fuel vessel technologies in India.

First, the government must create a long-term roadmap for a waterways transition to nudge the market towards clean technologies. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)

encourages the construction of vessels that use alternate fuels. The Inland Vessels Bill 2021 acknowledges future technologies like LNG and electric propulsion. However, both the policy and bill offer limited mechanisms to facilitate clean energy adoption in waterway vessels. The government must set a long-term roadmap to enable the fuel technology transition and incentivise it through strategies and programmes like PLIs. Long-term government commitments would offer investors comfort to enter the market and entice private manufacturers.

Second, the waterways sector needs private sector investments to develop and transition to clean technologies. The Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, expects India to attract an investment of Rs 35,000 crore by 2047 to create a network of river waterways across the country. Limited competitiveness against global manufacturers, poorly developed ancillary services, high cost of finance and tax burdens currently plague the private sector and stymie investments. The government is already working towards mechanisms like Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to augment private entities working in vessel construction. These mechanisms can be supported with economic instruments similar to the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme in the automotive sector to attract private investments. Investments through public-private partnerships will further bolster the growth in the sector by

improving the ecosystem through construction, operations and maintenance of new jetties and multi-modal hubs, with refuelling stations across waterways. This would be instrumental to facilitate the growing passenger and cargo movement in the waterways sector and

further create potential and market for alternate fuels in this sector. Third, India's fledgling ship-building and repair industry can facilitate the R&D for alternative fuel technologies along to be ahead of the curve. The government has set ambitious targets for India to rank among the top 10 shipbuilding and repair in-

dustries. India already tops the ship-breaking and recycling sector and thus can recycle resources to promote a circular economy. Currently, the public sector occupies the lion's share in the order books, however, the private sector could bring in R&D in alternative fuel technology, retrofitments and cutting-edge designs to rapidly develop the ecosystem for clean technologies. Moreover, pilots for clean fuel technologies involving global experts and local entrepreneurs are imperative to create awareness and visibility among consumers.

Globally, multiple alternate fuel options have been explored to decarbonise vessels. India can be a trendsetter for clean fuel adoption in the new generation of vessels. If we plan to put cargo on water vessels, India will need a robust plan for clean tech, ship-building and economic instruments. This will promote both a blue economy and Make in India.

Datamatics Global Services zooms 71% in one month on robust Q4 results

Mumbai, May 19 (GNS) Shares of Datamatics Global Services hit a new high of Rs 509.35, surging 8 per cent on the BSE in Friday's intra-day trade amid heavy volumes. In past one month, the stock of IT enabled services has zoomed 71 per cent after the company reported robust earnings for March quarter (Q4FY23).

Datamatics had a remarkable Q4, with revenue up 32.9 per cent year-on-year (YoY) at Rs 416.30 crore and earnings before interest tax (EBIT) increasing by 78 per cent YoY at Rs 75.30 crore. The company's profit after tax jumped 30.9 per cent YoY to Rs 59.70 crore.

This was the first quarter in which the company surpassed the Rs 400 crore revenue mark. This revenue growth was broad-based, driven by all three segments of Digital Operations, Digital Experiences, and Digital Technologies.

Despite the global economic situation, the company managed to maintain a healthy margin 20.2 per cent, up 378 bps YoY. EBIT margins saw considerable improvement from 2.2 per cent



ports, the city's residential areas having thousands of tiny industrial units. They are forced to run from residential localities which are legally not permissible to op-

erations. The illegal and harmful discharge and disposal of industrial waste and effluents has reached a crescendo in Punjab. A recent audit by the state government confirmed that at least 765 MLD of wastewater is generated daily within the MC limits of Ludhiana, most of which flows into the sewer lines and open nullahs that further fall into the Buddha Nullah, the most polluted water body, an outcome of the disposal of industrial effluents in the local sewer network became a nightmare in minutes and snuffed out lives.

There are about six common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) with a capacity of 135 MLD (millions of litres per day or megalitres per day) operated significantly by the Punjab Dyeing Association to treat industrial waste. However, waste generated by the tiny industries in residential areas in the unscientific manner in which it was dumped and flow into the civic body's sewer lines and open nullahs remains a mystery. It is witnessed that in the rainy season, industrial acid is often seen mixing with rainwater, and contact with the same is very hazardous.

For a long time, the industrial units that have hazardous substances with their suspected pollution compliance standards have been escaping national attention. The Giaspura gas leak shows that the willful environmental destruction is a serious threat to innocent lives.

Small units run in residential areas and single-room tenements are accorded tacit nod to operate. As a result, these bootstrapped units running on shoestring budgets have

to 9.1 per cent in Q4FY23 primarily due to renegotiated prices and tighter cost controls. In Q4FY23, Datamatics signed a total contract of about \$20 million and added about 21 new customers.

The management said it expects to see a sustained growth momentum for FY23-FY24, given a decent pipeline of opportunities. They are optimistic about the overall demand and confident of maintaining an overall revenue growth of 14 per cent to 15 per cent in FY24.

In terms of geographical footprint, US remains largest geography with 54 per cent of the company's total busi-

ness, followed by India at 27 per cent, rest of the world including UK and Europe at 19 per cent. The company's top 5, 10 and 20 clients contributing to 24 per cent, 37 per cent and 52 per cent respectively.

The management further said that there's no impact on the demand outlook that remains equally robust, but one is seeing some softness in the US BFSI sector, and one is seeing some headwinds, particularly out of US and Europe.

However, as far as Datamatics is concerned, the management is still seeing a very healthy pipeline. But

they are being a bit cautious, because of the economic challenges that they're having, inflation and recession and things like that, it added.

Datamatics a digital operations, technology and experiences company that provides intelligent solutions for data-driven businesses to increase productivity and enhance the customer experience. With a complete digital approach, Datamatics portfolio spans across Digital Technology Solutions, Business Process Management and Engineering Services powered by Artificial Intelligence.

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they are being a bit cautious, because of the economic challenges that they're having, inflation and recession and things like that, it added.



'No middlemen please': Engineer from Satara starts online market for farmers, by farmers



GNS News Agency, May

He started a YouTube channel five years ago to promote the stories of farmers. Today, he is at the helm of a dedicated e-commerce platform to help farmers directly sell their products — "without middlemen". This unique platform, called Indian Farmer Entrepreneurs (IFE) Store, was co-founded by a 28-year-old engineering graduate from Satara, Aniket Gharge, who has been documenting stories of farmers and their entrepreneurship for his YouTube channel since December 2017. Pune farmers online platform The products retailing on the platform range from chicken pickle, rose water and rose syrup to desi ghee, millets and millet products. Gharge describes his latest venture as "a labour of love". "It has to do with my background, too. I come from a family of farmers in Vadgaon in Khatav taluka of Satara. We grow cane and

seasonal crops. From an early age, farmers and their stories have fascinated me. And my YouTube channel brought me closer to the world of farmers and the work they do," he said. "During my travels, I realised that many farmers face a problem of reaching the right markets. Often, their value-added products had to be sold in local markets where they failed to get the right price," he said. What was missing, according to him, was the right platform for farmers to reach the end consumer directly. "Thus, the IFE Store was born. Along with my friend Jay Sidhpura, I started the e-store on March 1, 2022. It took another seven months to ensure that the platform was fully up and running," he said. Farm entrepreneurs, Gharge says, often get a raw deal from most e-commerce platforms. "More often than not, the so-called suppliers are middlemen who buy produce from farmers and sell them elsewhere. But our main idea is that farmers should get to sell their products directly. At present, we have on-boarded 15 farmers whose products we are selling," he said. The products retailing on the platform range from chicken pickle, rose water and rose syrup to desi ghee, millets and millet products. "Our delivery partners include local courier companies and Indian Post. We have also got a warehouse in Satara but in some cases, the farmers dispatch products directly from their end," he said. Gharge, however, admits that his passion was not initially welcomed by his family. "They wanted me to get a corporate job. Now, along with the store, I also run a software development company. This has taken the steam out of their criticism," he said with a smile.

Case filed against me by Nashik police under Maharashtra CM's pressure: Sanjay Raut

GNS News Agency, May

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday alleged that the Nashik police have registered a case against him under pressure from Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and state Home Minister Devendra Fadnis. Raut in a Twitter post also claimed that democracy and freedom have been severely affected in Maharashtra and said such "autocracy" has to be fought back. The Nashik police have registered the case against Rajya Sabha member and Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Raut for his alleged appeal to state officials and police personnel to not follow orders of the "illegal" state government, police earlier said.

Raut had made the remarks on May 12, a day after the Supreme Court pronounced its verdict on the Shiv Sena-centric political imbroglio in Maharashtra. The Nashik police suo motu took cognisance of the remarks and the case was registered under section 505(1) (B) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act, and other relevant sections, an official said on Sunday. Section 505 (1) (b) deals with the "intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility".

Raut in a tweet on Monday claimed, "The police registered the case against me under pressure from the chief minister and state home minister." The Rajya Sabha member wondered what was his crime. "I had expressed my opinion that the state administration should not follow the orders of this government because they might face legal implications in future. Is this even a crime? The state government directly filed a case against me," he tweeted. The Supreme Court held on Thursday it cannot reinstate the Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition government headed by Uddhav Thackeray since he chose to resign without facing the floor test in the wake of a rebellion in his party.



The unanimous verdict by a five-judge Constitution bench came as a relief for CM Shinde even as it censured former Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari over his decision calling upon Thackeray to prove his majority in the Assembly based on a request by the Shinde faction of the Sena. Shinde, who led the rebellion in the Shiv Sena against Thackeray sparking a nine-day political crisis in June last year, later tied up with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form a new government. Refusing to disqualify the 16 rebel Shiv Sena MLAs including Chief Minister Shinde, the bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said the court cannot ordinarily adjudicate disqualification petitions under the anti-defection law and directed Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar to take a decision on the pending matter within a "reasonable period." Citing the SC order, Raut in his Twitter post claimed, "After the Supreme Court's verdict, the procedure that led to formation of the state government has now become illegal. The appointment of chief whip and Shinde as leader of the party in the Legislative Assembly has now become unconstitutional." "The situation is such that the 16 MLAs can be disqualified any time. However, I am not afraid of any action against me," he said. Democracy and freedom have been severely affected in Maharashtra, Raut claimed and said such "autocracy" has to be fought back.

IL&FS money laundering case: ED issues fresh summons to NCP MLA Jayant Patil



GNS News Agency, May

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued fresh summons to Maharashtra NCP president and MLA Jayant Patil for questioning in a money laundering case linked to alleged financial irregularities in the now bankrupt financial services firm IL&FS, official sources said Monday. The 61-year-old MLA from Islampur seat of Maharashtra

was issued the first summons for appearance on May 12 but he had sought deferment for about 10 days citing some personal and official engagements. The politician has now been asked to appear on May 22, the sources said.

Patil, a former minister of home and finance, is also the state president of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and is a seven-term legislator. He had told reporters last week that he never had any association or financial dealing with IL&FS. Alleged payment of some "commission amount" by some accused companies to entities linked to Patil are under the scanner of the agency and it is understood he will be questioned about these transactions and his statement recorded under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The agency has recently initiated fresh action in this 2019 case after it searched the Mumbai offices of—Deloitte Haskins and Sells and BSR and Associates, an Indian affiliate of global accounting firm KPMG—, the two former auditors of IL&FS.

'You can't sell the same product': Sibal takes dig at BJP over Karnataka poll result

GNS News Agency, May

Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Monday took a swipe at the BJP over its defeat in the Karnataka elections, saying the lesson from the poll outcome was that one cannot sell the same product, repeat the same lies or play the communal card all the time. In the May 10 elections, the Congress won 135 of the 224 seats, while the BJP and the former prime minister H D Deve Gowda-led Janata Dal (Secular) secured 66 and 19 seats, respectively. In a tweet, Sibal said, "Lesson from Karnataka outcome: You can't sell the same product, repeat the same lies, spew venom, vilify the past, align with a corrupt government and call others corrupt, play the communal card, all the time!" Earlier on Sunday, Sibal had urged the Congress to "win people's hearts" for the next five years in the state by being open, honest and non-discriminatory. Sibal, who was a Union minister during UPA 1 and 2, had quit the Congress in May last year and was elected to the Rajya Sabha as an independent member with the Samajwadi Party's support. He recently floated a non-electoral platform "Insaaf" aimed at fighting



In the May 10 elections, the Congress won 135 of the 224 seats, while the BJP and the former prime minister H D Deve Gowda-led Janata Dal (Secular) secured 66 and 19 seats, respectively.

English a bigger hurdle than Math for MCD school students



GNS News Agency, May

In Municipal Corporation of Delhi schools, post-Covid pandemic performance of students in English remains at lower levels as compared to Hindi and Math in the past year as per data accessed by In each class, students are divided into five levels based on learning abilities. Level 1 (Beginner) is for familiarising students with letters and numbers. Level 2 aims at identifying and writing characters and digits from 0 to 9. Level 3 is for identifying, reading, writing words and numbers from 10 to 99; and Level 4 is for reading paragraphs and subtraction. Level 5 targets reading, writing and understanding a story and division and it is the desirable level at which each school wants their student to be. mcd schools

As per the data of the weekly assessments under the FLN program started by the MCD last year, the performance of students in MCD in English between April 2022 to February 2023 at Level 1, stood at 26.72%, indicating the percentage of students at this level, which was higher than Math (16.15%) and Hindi (20.55%). Speaking to The Indian Express, MCD Education Director Vikas Tripathi said, "The performance in English is lower as compared to Hindi and Math as students are not usually surrounded by people who regularly speak the language. This problem always existed but was more prevalent due to learning loss during the pandemic-induced lockdown when students missed school for a long time."

Tripathi said that the MCD has been focussing on

tackling this problem by introducing new worksheets, which focus on writing and understanding, under the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Assessment which was introduced to track the progress of children. The Indian Express reported this on May 11. At Level 5, the performance in English stood at 21.98% by February this year, whereas performance in Math was at 34.90% and Hindi at 36.66%. The overall percentage at the desirable performance level (level 5) is the lowest in English. Hindi has a slightly better percentage at the beginner level as compared to Math, but the progress from beginner to the desirable level is similar in both. "Even though it's been a while since English as a subject has been introduced in MCD, we have always faced a challenge with the subject even before Covid. Students learn Hindi sooner than English because they keep on hearing those words around them. With English, the most effective way they learn words is by watching television. I think another major reason for this is that students are not able to revise the subject properly when they go home and this increased post-Covid as memory retention span has reduced," said a principal of an MCD school in South Delhi on the condition of anonymity.

Teachers and principals that The Indian Express spoke to also expressed that recovery of children after Covid was a bigger challenge in English as compared to Math at junior levels of schooling. "Since 2021 there was an order to teach English in every MCD school... Before Covid, English was being taught as a subject only in two schools in each ward. As schools saw many enrollments, the students who came from public schools had weak Hindi and the ones in our schools had weak English speaking skills. The major reason for low progress in English is owing to the fact that students who join here are first-generation learners of the language... when students go to class 6, the problem they might face is that he/she is used to only one teacher teaching different subjects but in the senior level, engagement with different teachers becomes a challenge which affects his/her performance in various subjects," said Vibha Singh, MCD school Gandhinagar's principal.

Manipur violence: Houses burnt... People attacked in camps, say residents of Churachandpur share ordeal

GNS News Agency, May

When 35-year-old Waikhom (name changed) along with her infant daughter arrived at her parental house in Manipur's Churachandpur district for a vacation on April 18 little did she know that life will never be the same for her family just a few days later. On April 28, an open gym facility to be inaugurated by Chief Minister N Biren Singh was set on fire by a mob in the wake of sectarian tensions between the state's Meitei community and the Kuki tribe. The mobile internet services were suspended in parts of the state and the family,

The 35-year-old, who recently landed at the Kolkata airport where her husband is posted in the Army, said, "Things looked very normal the next day. A rally (tribal solidarity march) was held on May 3 when slogans were raised against us, the Meiteis. The protesters were armed and local residents did not venture out of their homes that day. We still thought that it was not a big issue and normally will return to the area soon. Also, we trusted the police force and the fact that our house was located close to the local police station."

The solidarity march was taken out in the hill districts of the state in opposition to the demand for inclusion of the Meiteis in the scheduled tribe (ST) category. Besides Churachandpur, arson and vandalism was reported in Moirang, Motbung and Moreh on May 3. On May 3 night, Waikhom witnessed the most harrowing experience of her life — seeing the house where she spent most of her childhood years being set on fire in front of the family and the sheer helplessness of not being able to do anything. "It was around 8pm that a mob reached the area and set nearly all the houses in the locality on fire one by one. They broke open the locked doors, vandalised and ransacked the shops. We took shelter in our neighbourhood," said Waikhom while crying inconsolably. The personnel of police and the Assam Rifles played a mute spectators to the violence and arson, she claimed. Traumatized, her two-year-old daughter has not slept or eaten properly and is having nightmares, she said.

"This trauma is going to haunt us forever. And the worst part was that we were even beaten up in a community hall where we took refuge after being rescued for the first time," said Waikhom accompanied by her parents and two younger brothers who will be living with her in south Kolkata. A private bank deputy manager living in a relief camp in Manipur's Moirang town, nearly 45 km from Imphal, told The Indian Express over phone, "I didn't sleep even for a second on May 3. I saw my house burning in front of me. All of us felt so helpless." He added, "Two lakh people were part of the peace procession which turned violent. The area had been facing one or the other



issue since August last year. Why should not we doubt the intention of the Manipur Police? No security was provided by the police. We called up the senior-most police officer of the area at 8pm and we were told that help was coming. The police reached our area at 1.30 am. We were left with nothing by then."

"We were given shelter by our tribal neighbours. I am not against any community but the houses of Meitei community were burnt down in Churachandpur. Where no media has reached yet? Dirty politics was played. We will file a petition before the Human Rights Commission as why security was not provided?" he asked. Laishram Emo, another resident of Churachandpur, said over phone, "I saw smoke billowing from houses that were burnt in a row. I knew they were coming to our side. I along with my wife and eight-month-old-son took shelter at neighbour's house from the tribal community. My house was burnt. We will settle down in some other place but won't go back." Meisnam Ricky, a student from Churachandpur, said, "Within five minutes of their arrival, the mob attacked us. I along with others was beaten up at the community hall. They snatched our money, belongings and even burnt our clothes. This happened in front of Assam Rifles jawans who did not intervene."

The deputy bank manager said, "A total of 182 people, including 66 women and 48 children, from Churachandpur travelled for 2-3 kilometres. Then we were escorted by the Army and Assam Rifles troops to a community hall. But a mob carrying guns and other weapons followed us. They kept hitting at the gate of the hall. I felt that this was the end of my life." Emo, however, wants to go to Churachandpur. "It is my hometown. My family has been living there for long. We will go back once peace is restored in the area." Meanwhile, the West Bengal government has launched a helpline number for people in need of evacuation from Manipur. A help desk has also been created at the Kolkata airport for those arriving from Manipur.

Among those who lost: Lawyer named 4 times for judgeship by SC Collegium

GNS News Agency, May

ITS seat tally halved, its vote share down by almost 27%, the shrinking of the Janata Dal (Secular) in this Assembly election is stark. For one of its candidates, it's a double blow. Contesting on a JD(S) ticket from Bhatkal, advocate Nagendra Naik lost, notching up barely 1,500 votes, less than 1 per cent of the votes polled.

This came weeks after the Supreme Court had proposed his nomination, for the fourth time, as a judge of the Karnataka High Court — even as the Centre is said to have declined its assent. "I always wanted to do public service and once I realised that my judgeship was at a dead-end," Naik told The Indian Express, "I chose to take a plunge into politics... I decided one month ago to contest the elections." With over 1 lakh votes, Congress candidate Mankal Vaidya won the coastal town against incumbent BJP legislator Sunil Naik who got just over 67,000 votes. On January 10 this year, the Supreme Court Collegium headed by chief Justice of India, D Y Chandrachud had reiterated, for the third time, its decision to appoint Naik as a judge of the Karnataka High Court. Naik was first recommended by the SC Collegium headed by then CJI S A Bobde on October 3, 2019. This decision was reiterated on March 2, 2021 and Septem-

ber 1, 2021 by the Collegium headed by CJI NV Ramana. Sources told The Indian Express that the file is currently pending with the government. "I am aware that the fact that I studied in Anjuman College in Bhatkal may have been held against me. At that time, Anjuman was the only college in Bhatkal and I may have not even been an advocate if not for that college," Naik said. Naik added that in 2018, he had written an article chronicling communal riots in the coastal region in Karnataka for a local newspaper. Studying at Dayananda Sagar Law College in Bengaluru, Naik has served as an advocate since 1993. His practice has included cases involving criminal and labour law. He gained prominence as a defence lawyer in anti-corruption cases, appearing in CBI courts for several bureaucrats and politicians. When asked if he had withdrawn his consent for being a judge before contesting elections, Naik said that he had decided not to do on "on principle." "I have waited for (the judgeship to be cleared) for four to five years and this wait has impacted my practice. Every time news reports surfaced that my name has been reiterated, files stopped coming to my office. I knew the fate of my recommendation and, therefore, took the decision to contest," he said. Naik admitted he is aware that this decision means that all doors to the bench are now, effectively, closed.

Kharge summoned by Punjab court in Rs100 crore defamation case for remarks against Bajrang Dal

GNS News Agency, May

A court in Punjab on May 15 summoned Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge in a ₹100 crore defamation case filed by Hitesh Bhardwaj, the founder of Hindu Suraksha Parishad, against Mr. Kharge for allegedly making defamatory remarks against Bajrang Dal during the recently concluded Karnataka Assembly elections, news agency ANI reported. The Congress manifesto proposing to ban the Bajrang Dal heated up the latter half of the campaign as the BJP and Prime Minister Modi aggressively latched on to the issue to portray the grand old party as being against Lord Hanuman and the sentiments of Hindus.

Barbs like 'venomous snake', 'Vishakanya' and 'Nalayak beta' vitiated the poll campaign as some leaders used intemperate and abusive language. While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, who hails from Karnataka, likened Mr. Modi to a 'venomous snake' and his son and Congress candidate Priyank Kharge called the Prime Minister a "nalayak beta", BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal described former Congress president and MP Sonia Gandhi as a 'Vishakanya' (venomous woman).

The Congress has made a stunning comeback in



Karnataka ousting the BJP from its lone southern citadel with a comfortable majority in a morale booster win that will be key for reviving its electoral fortunes ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The Congress' decisive victory in the Assembly elections after an aggressive pro-poor campaign spearheaded by mass leader and former chief minister Siddaramaiah and KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar also saw Karnataka continuing with a 38-year-old anti-incumbency trend. The State has never voted an incumbent party to power since 1985.

Minister of State L. Murugan to lead delegation to Cannes Film Festival



GNS News Agency, May

Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L. Murugan will lead a delegation to Cannes International Film Festival this year, the Ministry said on May 14. Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur will address the inaugural session through a video message to showcase India as a global hub for content creation at the 76th edition of the festival.

Mr. Murugan will be accompanied by filmmaker Guneet Monga of The Elephant Whisperers fame;

Manushi Chhillar, actor, model and the winner of the Miss World 2017; Esha Gupta, also an actor, and Kangabam Tomba, an acclaimed Manipuri actor whose restored film Ishanau is being screened in the Cannes Classic Section. "The India Pavilion is being conceptualised and designed by the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, with the theme 'Showcasing India's Creative Economy' to the global community. The pavilion design has been inspired by the Saraswati Yantra, the abstract representation of goddess Saraswati, keeper of knowledge, music, art, speech, wisdom and learning," said the Ministry in a statement.

Four Indian films have made it to the official selection in the festival. Kanu Behl's Agra will be his second film to have its world premiere at Cannes, at the Directors' Fortnight. His 2014 debut film, Titli, was unveiled at the "Un Certain Regard" section. Anurag Kashyap's Kennedy is being screened in Midnight Screenings and Nehemich in the La Ciné section of the Festival de Cannes. These apart, several Indian films are slotted for screening in Marche du Films. A series of interactive sessions will be organised throughout the festival at India Pavilion.

Public accepted issues raised during 'Jan Sangharsh Yatra': Sachin Pilot

GNS News Agency, May

Former Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot on Sunday said the public has accepted the issues on which he started his "Jan Sangharsh Yatra" -- corruption and government recruitment exam paper leaks. The yatra, on its fourth day on Sunday, covered a distance of around 25 km from Mehla town in Jaipur district to Mahapura, where the dissident Congress leader is scheduled to stay the night. Addressing his supporters from the top of a bus in Mahapura on the Ajmer highway, Pilot said the yatra will reach its destination in Jaipur Monday.

"The public has accepted the issues on which the yatra was started -- paper leaks and corruption -- for the future of the youth and clean politics," he said. "This is not about a person...the public is standing by the issues with which we started," he said. Pilot also saluted the enthusiasm of his supporters and invited people to his public rally to be organised on the fifth and last day of his yatra near Kamla Nehru Nagar on Ajmer highway in Jaipur. Pilot started his yatra from Ajmer on the issues of corruption and government recruitment exam paper leaks.

"The yatra is getting overwhelming response from people. Be it the youth or the elderly, all are attending the padayatra," an aide of Pilot said. Pilot began the foot march from Ajmer on Thursday, challenging Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and the party's top brass as assembly elections in Rajasthan approach. The yatra mounts further pressure on the party leadership as it hopes to retain the state in



the elections at the end of the year. The march comes days after Gehlot accused the MLAs involved in the 2020 revolt of taking money from the BJP. Pilot and 18 other Congress MLAs had then sought a leadership change in Rajasthan. He was sacked as the party's state unit president and the deputy Chief Minister.

The two Congress strongmen in Rajasthan have been at loggerheads over the post of Chief Minister ever since the party formed the government in the state in 2018.

Government 'misleading' SC on herbicide-tolerant nature of GM mustard: Coalition of GM-free India



The government is instead seeking to "criminalise" farmers who use herbicide on GM mustard, it said

GNS News Agency, May

The government is allegedly misleading the Supreme Court on the herbicide-tolerant (HT) nature of GM mustard and is trying to "criminalise" farmers for using herbicide on the crop, a group of NGOs opposing genetically modified crops has said. In a letter to Union Environ-

ment Minister Bhupender Yadav, the Coalition of GM-free India also alleged the government is ignoring the clear recommendation by the court-appointed technical expert committee (TEC) for a ban on HT crops in India. "The Union of India is misleading the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India with an assurance that GM mustard is not an HT crop. By repeatedly giving this assurance that GM mustard is not a herbicide-tolerant crop, the Government of India is trying to circumvent the clear recommendation by the court-appointed TEC for a ban on HT crops in India," the letter read.

The government is instead seeking to "criminalise" farmers who use herbicide on GM mustard, it said. The approval letter issued by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) for the environmental release of GM mustard in October 2022 contained a condition that prohibits farmers from using any formulation of herbicide for cultivation in their fields under any situation, it said. However, it said, the criminalisation or penalising of farmers is legally not possible as they are exempted from regulation under the Insecticides Act of 1968.

The debate on the effects of GM crops on agriculture and the environment is a contentious issue in many countries, including India. While proponents of GM crops argue that they can help address issues such as food security and agricultural productivity, critics often point to concerns over their safety and potential environmental impacts. In the case of GM HT mustard, the specific concern is the use of glufosinate, a herbicide that is commonly used with HT crops to control weeds. While HT crops can benefit farmers, their use can also negatively impact the environment and contribute to the development of herbicide-resistant weeds.

MEA faces tough choice as Taliban picks a new Ambassador for Delhi

GNS News Agency, May

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan's decision to recall Afghan Ambassador Farid Mamundzay and appoint the current Trade Counsellor Qadir Shah as the Charge D' Affaires (Acting Ambassador) in his place has posed a tough decision for the government's policy on the situation in Afghanistan and its engagement with the Taliban. The tussle between the two became public on Sunday, after Afghan media outlets published a letter from Afghans based in India accusing the existing Ambassador and other officials of corruption. In a response Mr. Mamundzay, who has been the Ambassador in India since 2020 and is presently in Delhi, issued a letter calling the allegations "one-sided, biased and untruthful", and blaming the "collapse of the democratic system" in Afghanistan for the "extreme problems" that Afghans outside their countries face.

However, trouble has been brewing within the Embassy over the past month, after the Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)'s Human Resources Director issued a letter (Order No. 3578 dated April 25, 2023), recalling Ambassador Farid Mamundzay and asking him to report to the MFA in Kabul. Another order on the same date by Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said that Trade Counsellor Qadir Shah would "supervise affairs at the Afghanistan Embassy in Delhi, India" and report to the government in Kabul. The move appeared to mirror what the Taliban did in China in April 2022, when the serving Ambassador resigned after the Taliban appointed another senior diplomat serving in the Embassy in Beijing.

When contacted, Mr. Shah said he was not affiliated to any "political party, group or movement". He said he believed that in its communication the MoFA in Kabul had wished to appoint an officer to resolve issues of "complaints against Embassy officials of corruption and non-performance of their official duties". He reiterated that he was a diplomat assigned by the pre-Taliban "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. The MEA has thus far declined to comment on the Taliban decision, with officials maintaining that they had not so far received formal no-



tice of the change, and indicating that this is an "internal" matter for the Embassy. However, bigger apprehensions are over how New Delhi would react if a Taliban-approved dispensation at the Afghan Embassy in Delhi were to act against Afghans in India who are under threat from the Taliban regime in Kabul, or were to raise the Taliban flag at the Embassy, as they have Afghan Embassies in Moscow and in Beijing. Embassies in Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Iran also now have Taliban-approved diplomats at the helm, while many of Afghanistan's erstwhile 60-odd embassies are facing a closure as Ambassadors have refused to pledge loyalty to Taliban and are running out of funds.

While India, like all other countries does not recognize the Taliban government, the government decided in a major U-turn last year to set up a "technical mission" in Kabul. MEA officials have also travelled to Kabul and met with Taliban ministers, and Taliban officials have been trained in online courses in MEA projects, but in India, the MEA continues to deal with Ambassador Mamundzay for consular and trade issues. However, accepting the Taliban's desire to change the Afghan Ambassador would be seen as one step further towards formalizing its ties with the insurgent group that India has accused in the past of carrying out terror attacks, including the 2008 bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul in which an Indian diplomat and two ITBP security force personnel were killed.

Cyclone Mocha floods homes, cuts communications in western Myanmar, at least 700 injured

GNS News Agency, May

Rescuers early on May 15 evacuated about 1,000 people trapped by seawater 3.6 meters (12 feet) deep along western Myanmar's coast after a powerful cyclone injured hundreds and cut off communications in one of Asia's least developed countries. The extent of the damage and the death toll were not yet known. Strong winds injured more than 700 of about 20,000 people who were sheltering in sturdier buildings on the highlands of Sittwe township such as monasteries, pagodas and schools, according to a leader of the Rakhine Youths Philanthropic Association in Sittwe. He asked not to be named due to fear of reprisals from the authorities in the military-run country.

Seawater raced into more than 10 low-lying wards near the shore as Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine State on May 14 afternoon, he said. Residents moved to roofs and higher floors, while the wind and storm surge prevented immediate rescue. "After 4 p.m. yesterday, the storm weakened a bit, but the water did not fall back. Most of them sat on the roof and at the high places of their houses the whole night. The wind blew all night," the rescue group leader said. Water was still about 1.5 meters (5 feet) high in flooded areas Monday morning, but rescues were being made as the wind calmed and the sun rose in the sky. He asked civil society organizations and authorities to send aid and help evacuate residents. At least three deaths had been reported earlier in Myanmar, and several injuries were reported in neighboring Bangladesh, which was spared the predicted direct hit. Mocha made landfall near Sittwe township with winds blowing up to 209 kilometers (130 miles) per hour, Myanmar's Meteorological Department said. By Monday morning, it was downgraded from its severe status and was steadily weakening over land, according to the India Meteorological Department.

High winds crumpled cell phone towers during the day, cutting off communications. In videos collected by local media before communications were lost, deep water raced through streets and wind blew off roofs. Myanmar's military information office said the storm had damaged houses, electrical transformers, cell phone towers, boats and lampposts in Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, and Gwa townships. It said roofs were torn off buildings on the Coco Islands, about 425 kilometers (264 miles) south-



west of the country's largest city, Yangon. Volunteers previously said shelters in Sittwe did not have enough food after more people arrived there seeking help.

Mocha largely spared the Bangladeshi city of Cox's Bazar, which initially had been in the storm's predicted path. Authorities had evacuated hundreds of thousands of people before the cyclone veered east. About a dozen people were injured on Saint Martin's Island, while some 300 homes were either destroyed or damaged, leading Bengali-language daily Prothom Alo reported. U.N. agencies and aid workers in Bangladesh had prepositioned tons of dry food and dozens of ambulances in the refugee camps that house more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims who fled persecution in Myanmar.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar with a storm surge that devastated populated areas around the Irrawaddy River delta. At least 138,000 people died and tens of thousands of homes and other buildings were washed away. Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune city, said cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are becoming more intense more quickly, in part because of climate change. Climate scientists say cyclones can now retain their energy for many days. Cyclone Amphan in eastern India in 2020 continued to travel over land as a strong cyclone and caused extensive devastation. "As long as oceans are warm and winds are favorable, cyclones will retain their intensity for a longer period," Mr. Koll said. Tropical cyclones, which are called hurricanes or typhoons in other regions, are among the world's most devastating natural disasters when they hit densely populated coastal areas.

Supreme Court to hear Bombay lawyers body plea for action against VP, Rijiju over remarks on judiciary

GNS News Agency, May

A view of the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of the Bombay Lawyers Association (BLA) against Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar over their remarks on the judiciary and the collegium system for the appointment of judges. A view of the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of the Bombay Lawyers Association (BLA) against Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar over their remarks on the judiciary and the collegium system for the appointment of judges. | Photo Credit: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of the Bombay Lawyers Association (BLA) against Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar over their remarks on the judiciary and the collegium system for appointment of judges. The lawyers' body has moved the Supreme Court to challenge the Bombay High Court's February 9 order dismissing its plea on the ground that it was not a fit case to invoke the writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution.

As per the Supreme Court website, the appeal of the BLA is listed for hearing before a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Ahsanuddin Amanullah. The Bombay Lawyers Association (BLA) had claimed that Rijiju and Dhankhar showed lack of faith in the Constitution with their remarks and conduct. It had

sought orders to restrain Dhankhar from discharging duty as the vice president, and Rijiju as the cabinet minister for the central government. In an appeal, the lawyers body said the "frontal attack not just on the judiciary but the Constitution" by the two executive officials has lowered the prestige of the Supreme Court in public. Rijiju had said the collegium system of appointing judges was "opaque and not transparent". Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar had questioned the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati judgement that gave the basic structure doctrine.

Dhankhar had said the verdict set a bad precedent and, if any authority questions Parliament's power to amend the Constitution, it would be difficult to say "we are a democratic nation".

"It is submitted that the Petitioner herein filed the PIL before the High Court of Judicature at Bombay praying therein to declare the Respondent no 1 and 2 as disqualified candidates to hold any constitutional posts of Vice President and Minister of the Union Cabinet, respectively, based on their behaviour, conduct and utterances made in public," the petition has said. The two constitutional functionaries, it said, showed lack of faith in the Constitution by their conduct and utterances made in public and by attacking its institutions, including the Supreme Court, and showing scant regard for the law laid down by the Supreme Court. "The conduct of Respondent Nos 1 and 2 appeared to have shaken public faith in the Supreme Court and the Constitution," it said.

Pakistan's military plans to keep me in jail for 10 years under sedition charges: Imran Khan



GNS News Agency, May

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan claimed on May 15 that the country's powerful military establishment has planned to keep him in jail for the next 10 years under sedition charges and vowed to fight against the "assortments of crooks" till the last drop of his blood. Mr. Khan is likely to appear before the Lahore High Court in connection with the cases registered against him for torching the house of the Corps Commander in Lahore and other incidents of violence that erupted after his arrest in a corruption case last week.

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) had granted 70-year-old Mr. Khan bail, barring the authorities from arresting him in all the cases registered beyond May 9 and asked him to approach the Lahore High Court for further relief on May 15. In a series of tweets in the early hours of Monday, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief said: "So now the complete London plan is out. Using the pretext of violence while I was inside the jail, they assumed the role of judge, jury and executioner. The plan now is to humiliate me by putting Bushra begum [Mr. Khan's wife] in jail, and using some sedition law to keep me inside for the next ten years." The tweets came after Mr. Khan held a meeting of PTI leaders at his Lahore residence.

Mr. Khan, who has been on bail in more than 100 cases, further said: "To ensure that there is no public reaction, they have done two things — first deliberate terror is unleashed not just on PTI workers but on common citizens as well. Second, the media is totally controlled and muzzled." The Army remains Pakistan's most powerful institution, having ruled it directly for close to half its 75-year history through three coups.

Russia says two military commanders killed in east Ukraine

GNS News Agency, May

Russia said on May 14 that two of its military commanders had been killed in combat near the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine. In a rare announcement of its losses on the battlefield, the Russian defence ministry said the commander of the 4th motorised rifle brigade, Vyacheslav Makarov, and the deputy commander of the Army Corps for military-political work, Yevgeny Brovko, had been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The announcement came as battles raged for control of Bakhmut in the eastern region of Donetsk. Colonel Makarov was killed as his brigade repelled attacks by Ukrainian troops south of the settlement of Krasne, the defence ministry said in a statement. "Two attacks of the enemy have been repelled," the statement said. "As a third attack was being repelled, the brigade commander was seriously wounded and died during the evacuation from the battlefield."

Brovko was killed as Russian troops repelled attacks elsewhere, the ministry said, saying he "died heroically, having received multiple shrapnel wounds". Referring to the mercenary group Wagner, Moscow said that "assault detachments" have continued to fight for control of western parts of Bakhmut with the support of airborne forces. "Over the past day the enemy has made massive attempts to break through the defence of our troops to the north and south of Artemovsk," the ministry said, referring to Bakhmut by its Russian name. "All attacks of the Ukrainian armed forces have been repelled," it said. Russia has kept a tight lid on its losses in Ukraine.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said last year that 5,937 Russian troops had been killed in the pro-Western country even though military analysts say Moscow has sought to hide the scale of its losses in Ukraine. Ukraine

"This is a deliberate attempt to instil so much fear in people that when they come to arrest me tomorrow, people won't come out. And tomorrow they will again suspend internet services and ban social media [which is only partially open]. Meanwhile, as we speak, houses are being broken in and shamelessly police are manhandling the women of the houses," he said. He said never has the sanctity of chadar (veil) and chaar dawaari (four walls) been violated the way it is being done by these "criminals". Giving his message to the people of Pakistan, Mr. Khan said: "My message to the people of Pakistan; I will fight for Haqeeqi Azaadi [real freedom] till the last drop of my blood because for me death is preferable than to be enslaved by these assortments of crooks."

"I urge all my people to remember that we have pledged LA Illah ha illallah, that we bow to no one except the One [Allah]. If we bow to the idol of fear there will only be humiliation and dismemberment for our future generations. Countries where there is injustice and the law of the jungle prevails, don't survive for long." Mr. Khan returned to his Lahore home on Saturday after having locked himself in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) premises for hours due to the fear of re-arrest despite being granted bail on Friday.

Mr. Khan further said the JUI-F "drama" that is being done outside the Supreme Court is only for one purpose — to overawe the Chief Justice of Pakistan so that he does not give a verdict according to the Constitution. "Pakistan has already seen such a brazen attack on the Supreme Court when in 1997 PMLN goons physically attacked it and had one of the most respected Chief Justices Sajjad Ali Shah removed," he said. Mr. Khan's arrest by the Pakistan Rangers at the IHC premises last Tuesday triggered unrest in Pakistan that continued till Friday and led to several deaths and dozens of military and state installations being destroyed by the protesters. For the first time in the country's history, the protesters stormed the army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi and also torched the historic Corps Commander's House in Lahore. Police put the death toll in violent clashes to 10 while Mr. Khan's party claims 40 of its workers lost their lives in the firing by security personnel.

Punjab Inspector General Police Dr. Usman Anwar told a press conference on Sunday that over 3,500 people have been arrested in Punjab province for their involvement in the violence that erupted after Mr. Khan's arrest. He said most of them will be tried in anti-terrorism courts. Mr. Khan was ousted from power in April last year after losing a no-confidence vote in his leadership, which he alleged was part of a U.S.-led conspiracy targeting him because of his independent foreign policy decisions on Russia, China and Afghanistan.



troops. Western arms targeted in strikes: Russia

Moscow said that Russian forces had struck Western arm depots and Ukrainian troops in the western city of Ternopil and the eastern town of Petropavlivka. Russia's armed forces "delivered a strike with high-precision long-range air and sea-based weapons at the points of deployment of the Ukrainian armed forces," the defence ministry said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies

"Places of storage of ammunition, weapons and military equipment received from Western countries" were also struck, it said. Ukraine "not attacking Russian territory": Zelenskyy. Ukraine has no plans to attack targets inside Russia, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in Berlin after receiving a huge new military aid package ahead of an expected counter-offensive. "We are not attacking Russian territory," Zelenskyy told reporters in Berlin. "We have neither the time nor the strength to do so and we have no weapons left with which to do so. We are preparing a counterattack to de-occupy the illegitimately conquered territories," he added.

China launches projects to build 'new-era' marriage, childbearing culture



GNS News Agency, May

China will launch pilot projects in more than 20 cities to create a "new-era" marriage and childbearing culture to foster a friendly child-bearing environment, the latest move by authorities to boost the country's falling birth rate. China's Family Planning Association, a national body that implements the government's population and fertility measures, will launch the projects to encourage women to marry and have children, state-backed Global Times reported on May 15.

Promoting marrying, having children at appropriate ages, encouraging parents to share child-rearing responsibilities, and curbing high "bride prices" and other out-

dated customs are the focus of the projects, the Times said. Cities included in the pilot include the manufacturing hub Guangzhou and Handan in China's Hebei province. The association already launched projects in 20 cities including Beijing last year, the Times said.

"The society needs to guide young people more on the concept of marriage and childbirth," demographer He Yafu told the Times. The projects come amid a flurry of measures Chinese provinces are rolling out to spur people to have children, including tax incentives, housing subsidies, and free or subsidised education for having a third child.

China implemented a rigid one-child policy from 1980 until 2015 - the root of many of its demographic challenges that have allowed India to become the world's most populous nation. The limit has since been raised to three children. Concerned about China's first population drop in six decades and its rapid ageing, the government's political advisers proposed in March that single and unmarried women should have access to egg freezing and IVF treatment, among other services to boost the country's fertility rate. Many women have been put off having more children or any at all due to the expense of child care and having to stop their careers, with gender discrimination still a key hurdle.

Zelenskyy calls Germany 'true friend' as Ukraine readies riposte

GNS News Agency, May

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on May 14 called Germany a "true friend" in his country's battle against Russia, as Berlin pledged unwavering support for Kyiv ahead of a widely expected counter-offensive. Berlin unveiled a new military package for Kyiv worth €2.7 billion (\$3 billion), its biggest yet for Ukraine, as Mr. Zelenskyy made his first visit to Germany since Russia's invasion. The Ukrainian President had travelled to Berlin for talks with Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier after meeting Italian leaders and Pope Francis in Rome. Zelenskyy due in Paris late Sunday: diplomatic sources

His next destination later Sunday will be another European heavyweight France, where meetings are expected with President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, sources told AFP. It would be the Ukrainian leader's second visit to France since Russia invaded his country last year. Zelenskyy had previously made a late evening stop-off in Paris in February, where he met French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Zelenskyy's weekend diplomatic tour comes ahead of an EU summit in Reykjavik and a gathering of G7 leaders in Japan. In Berlin, he thanked Chancellor Olaf Scholz for Germany's "powerful support" in the form of the armaments package, saying "everything in this security package will significantly strengthen our defence." "Now is the time for us to determine the end of this war this year. This year, we can make the aggressor's defeat irreversible," he said. Along with Mr. Scholz, Mr. Zelenskyy then travelled to the western city of Aachen, where he was due to pick up the Charlemagne award for efforts to foster European unity at a ceremony also attended by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

Anticipating Mr. Zelenskyy's arrival, several hundred Ukraine supporters holding blue balloons and wearing yellow-and-blue flags around their shoulders held a rally in Aachen. Olga Zelenska, 37, told AFP she came to show her support for her country. "We are proud," she said, when asked about the Charlemagne award for her people.

"As long as necessary" Ukrainian forces have been training troops and stockpiling Western-supplied munitions and hardware that analysts say will be key to reclaiming territory captured by Russia. Once accused of reticence in supplying military gear to Ukraine, Germany has since become the second-biggest contributor of tanks, rockets and anti-missile systems to the country, after the United States. Mr. Scholz on Sunday reiterated Berlin's firm backing, telling Zelenskyy directly: "We will support you for as long as it is necessary." Mr. Zelenskyy said he would urge Mr. Scholz to support Ukraine's bid for fighter jet deliveries, though he did not specify if he was seeking aircraft directly from Germany. Early on in the conflict, Kyiv had accused Germany of being too accommodating to Russian President Vladimir Putin, while



Berlin's reliance on Russian energy had proved tricky. Kyiv had also snubbed a visit by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the weeks following the invasion, which in turn delayed Scholz's first trip to the war-torn country. Both Mr. Steinmeier and Mr. Scholz have since visited Ukraine.

In a clear show of its backing for Kyiv, Berlin on Saturday said it would send Ukraine more firing units and launchers for the Iris-T anti-missile system, 30 additional Leopard 1 tanks, more than 100 armoured combat vehicles and over 200 surveillance drones. Mykhaylo Podolyak, an adviser to Mr. Zelenskyy, hailed the announcement, saying it indicated that Russia was "bound to lose and sit on the bench of historical shame". As Kyiv prepares its offensive to retake ground in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions, as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in the south, Germany's continued military backing will likely prove vital.

High-tech German-made Leopard 2A6 tanks sought by Kyiv have already been put to use at the frontlines, and the medium-range Iris-T missile defence system from Germany is also helping to bolster Ukraine's protection against Russian strikes.

'Inaction' On the front line, Russia said Sunday that two of its military commanders had been killed in combat near the flashpoint town of Bakhmut. In a rare announcement of losses on the battlefield, the Russian defence ministry said in a statement that the commander of the 4th motorised rifle brigade, Vyacheslav Makarov, and Yevgeny Brovko, deputy commander of the Army Corps for military-political work, had been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine. The head of Russia's private Wagner mercenary group Yevgeny Prigozhin again accused the Russian army of inaction around Bakhmut. In a post published by his press service, Prigozhin slammed the "airborne forces" of not backing his men as claimed by the defence ministry. "I didn't see them... I don't know where they are and who they are helping," he charged. Elsewhere, Moscow said Russian forces had struck Western arm depots and Ukrainian troops in the western city of Ternopil and the eastern town of Petropavlivka.

Indian national shot dead by off-duty constable in Uganda: reports

GNS News Agency, May

A 39-year-old Indian money lender was shot dead with a stolen AK-47 assault rifle by an off-duty police constable in Uganda's capital city of Kampala over a 2.1 million shillings (746,000) loan, media reports said. Kampala Metropolitan Police said that 30-year-old Ivan Wabwire was arrested after he opened fire at Uttam Bhandari on May 12. Chilling footage from the crime scene showed how Wabwire fired multiple rounds of bullets at Bhandari from close range, according to Kampala-based newspaper Daily Monitor. Bhandari was the director of TFS financial services and Wabwire was his client, police said. The two had a misunderstanding over the amount the constable owed to the firm. When Wabwire was told about the loan amount (2.1 million shillings) on May 12, he reportedly started arguing with Bhandari, claiming that the figure was inflated, the report said. Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson, Patrick Onyango told the Daily Monitor that after shooting Bhandari, Wabwire abandoned his AK-47 rifle and fled. Police have recovered 13 cartridges from the crime scene. Wabwire has a history of mental instability and was banned five years ago from possessing a firearm after being admitted to a hospital twice over the mental breakdown, police said. Wabwire, who is now being held at Busia police station in eastern Uganda, stole the gun from a fellow policeman and roommate, the report said. Meanwhile, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Geoffrey Tumusiime Katsigazi, met the Indian community in Uganda and assured them of their safety, the news portal, Nile Post reported.

Uganda President Yoweri Museveni has demanded answers from security forces and questioned: "How an



A 39-year-old Indian money lender was shot dead with a stolen AK-47 assault rifle by an off-duty police constable after the two had a misunderstanding over the amount the constable owed

off-duty policeman accessed a gun." "How are guns stored in the police? Did he (Wabwire) walk away from his guard post without permission with a gun to commit a crime? Is there no security at the site where the victim (Bhandari) was? Why did the local security allow an armed person who had no guard business into the building?" Museveni who is also the commander in chief of Uganda's armed forces tweeted. Uganda has witnessed a spurt in gun violence in recent times. Earlier this month, a 26-year-old private security guard was shot dead by his colleague allegedly over a disagreement, the Daily Monitor report added.

Pita Limjaroenrat | Leading Thailand's political earthquake

GNS News Agency, May

Few tipped him seriously as a likely Prime Minister, but Thai opposition leader Pita Limjaroenrat looks set to play a major role after voters rejected almost a decade of army-backed rule. With most of the votes from Sunday's polls counted, Mr. Pita's radical Move Forward Party was leading the popular vote ahead of the more established opposition Pheu Thai party.

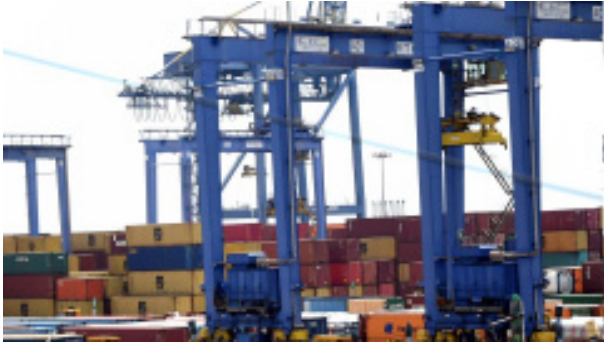
This represents an extraordinary achievement for a party whose forerunner was dissolved and its leader banned from politics. The photogenic 42-year-old Pita has been a dynamic presence on the campaign trail, capitalising on his youth and energy to reach voters disillusioned and yearning for change after eight years of dour military-backed government. "We will together rewrite Thai political history. Vote Move Forward, Thailand changes," he told ecstatic supporters at MFP's last rally in Bangkok on Friday. The election is the first since major youth-led pro-democracy protests erupted across Bangkok in 2020 with demands to curb the power and spending of Thailand's king — breaching a long-held taboo on questioning the monarchy. MFP is the only party promising to reform the lese majeste laws, known as 112 in Thailand after their section in the penal code. A hugely controversial and sensitive subject, it has long been held as an untouchable in Thai politics. Even opposition rivals Pheu Thai said they would leave the issue to parliament.

But Mr. Pita has not shied from it, telling reporters late Sunday that "no matter what, we will push for royal lese majeste law reform". Political heartthrob The father of one is considered a political heart-throb, inspiring pop-star levels of hysteria from his supporters. Educated in New Zealand and the United States, he studied at Harvard on an international scholarship, before going on to become an entrepreneur.

However, following his father's death when he was 25, Mr. Pita returned home to run his family's heavily-indebted business Agrifood, turning its fortunes around. He later became executive director of transport and delivery app Grab Thailand. In 2012 he married Thai TV actress Chutima Teepanat, and they have a seven-year-old daughter. The marriage broke down in 2019. His daughter has featured prominently in the campaign with Mr. Pita bringing her on stage after speeches, much to the crowds' delight. Online, he has utilised a public "personal" account — followed by almost one million users — to share images of him and his daughter wearing matching t-shirts and eating ice cream together.

But despite the success at the ballot box, there is no indication his path to Prime Minister will be straightforward. He must now cobble a coalition together to surpass government-appointed senators who elect Thailand's PM from among eligible candidates.

With 6.9% year-on-year growth, goods exports rise to \$451 billion in 2022-23



India's goods exports for 2022-23 scaled up significantly from earlier estimates to almost \$451 billion, indicating a 6.9% year-on-year growth, with exports for March upgraded sharply to a nine-month high of \$41.9 billion, as per Commerce Ministry data. Initial estimates for the March had pegged exports at \$38.38 billion, marking a sharp 13.9% decline, but revised numbers signal only a 6% contraction. The \$41.9 billion exports made March only the second month of 2022-23 to cross the \$40 billion mark after \$42.3 billion in outbound shipments last June.

The Ministry, which will be releasing the initial estimates for April's merchandise trade on Monday, also revised March's import bill to over \$60 billion, the highest in 2023, raising its initial estimate of imports during the month by \$1.9 billion.

Remained unchanged However, the overall import bill for 2022-23 remained virtually unchanged at \$714.04

billion, a 16.5% rise from 2021-22, compared to \$714.24 billion reported initially. The rise in March's import figure was largely offset by a \$1.7 billion correction in November 2022's import tally that was initially pegged at \$58.2 billion, then revised upwards by half a billion dollars and finally pared to \$56.95 billion.

The latest revisions to official trade numbers cap off a year marked by what economists termed as significantly higher than usual variations between initial estimates and final numbers. Total exports were initially pegged at \$447.46 billion as per data released on April 15, then revised to \$444.2 billion as per a Ministry statement on May 1. That figure has now been raised to \$450.95 billion. Similarly, the import bill as per the May 1 statement was pegged at \$711.85 billion, from the initial estimate of \$714.24 billion.

Overall, export numbers were revised by over \$25 billion from their initial estimates through 2022-23, with four months seeing a \$3 billion-plus upward revision. The pace of these revisions has accelerated since November 2022, with exports etched up by an average \$3.2 billion each month. The revision of \$3.52 billion in March exports was the second highest in the year. Import figure revisions have only been slightly milder, averaging over \$1.5 billion a month through 2022-23. Over \$2 billion revisions from initial estimates were reported in four months, with December 2022 recording the highest upward revision of almost \$3 billion. While experts have flagged petroleum shipments as the main driver for the extraordinarily high revisions of recent export data, the revision in import numbers needs further scrutiny.

With Bommai and PTR out, GST Council needs to rejig GoMs

The change of guard after the Assembly election in Karnataka and the Ministerial council shuffle in Tamil Nadu has triggered the need for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council to reconstitute at least three Ministerial panels tasked with recommending critical reforms of the indirect tax regime. Basavaraj S. Bommai, who resigned as the Chief Minister of Karnataka on Saturday, was the chairperson of the GST Council's group of ministers (GoM) tasked with the rationalisation of GST's complex rates' system with multiple tax slabs.

The panel, formed in September 2021, initially had a two-month deadline. With inflation running high through 2022-23 and remaining a concern, the government has been going slow on the GST rate rationalisation agenda. Sweeping structural changes would likely mean higher tax rates for several items. Mr. Bommai's exit from power will mean the Council would have to appoint a new convenor for the panel, that also had Ministers from six other States, including Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal.

Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, the former Finance Minister and current IT minister of Tamil Nadu, was also involved in two of the Council's GoMs — one tasked with GST's IT system reforms to tackle evasion, and another on the appropriate tax treatment to be adopted for casinos, online gaming and horse-racing. Mr. Thiaga Rajan will most likely be replaced by the new State Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu, going by the practice adopted by the GST Council for GoM membership changes due to external factors. Usually, a Minister from the same State is added into the Council's panels due to any changes in State governments, but there have been



occasions when this principle has not been followed. For instance, the GoM on casinos and online gaming was initially chaired by former Gujarat Deputy CM Nitin Bhai Patel, but Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma was later given charge of the panel, though the State originally had no representative on the panel. Incidentally, erstwhile Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tarkishore Prasad was also part of the GoM convened by Mr. Bommai, but there has been no official communique of any other member being included in the panel after August 2022, when Mr. Prasad exited as a result of Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United)-led State government switching alliance partners. The panel is also tasked with proposing corrections to the inverted duty structures that had crept into the GST regime, and an interim report on these corrections was presented to the Council in June 2022, where most of its recommendations were accepted. An inverted duty structure means that inputs attract higher taxes than the final product.

CRED-owned Happay lays off 35% of its workforce



New Delhi: Corporate expense management platform Happay, owned by credit Card bill payment provider CRED, has slashed nearly 35 per cent of its workforce as part of a restructuring exercise, the media reported. According to leading startup news portal Inc42, at least 160 employees from departments like sales, marketing, tech, product, and operations, have been asked

to go by the platform.

Founded in 2012 by Anshul Rai and Varun Rathi, the startup has more than 450 employees, according to its LinkedIn profile. According to the report, Happay is giving impacted employees three months salary along with an extension of insurance coverage and some other additional benefits.

When reached, CRED did not immediately comment on layoffs at Happay, which it acquired in December 2021 in a cash and stock deal that valued Happay at \$180 million. "With professional expenses forming a significant portion of credit card spends, bringing professional expense management into the CRED ecosystem is a natural extension of our proposition," Kunal Shah, founder, CRED, had said in a statement during the acquisition. While Happay operated as a separate entity, the team worked closely with CRED leadership to leverage its ecosystem, build distribution, expand the product offering and drive scale. CRED last year acquired SaaS lending-as-a-service platform CreditVidya in a mix of cash and stock transaction for an undisclosed sum.



SpiceJet stock was trading at Rs 30.27, up 2.33 per cent on BSE.

SpiceJet subsidiary SpiceXpress to get USD 100 mn from UK group

New Delhi: Budget carrier SpiceJet on Monday said its subsidiary SpiceXpress and Logistics will receive USD 100 million investment from a UK-based group. SpiceJet, which is facing financial headwinds and an insolvency plea by an aircraft lessor, had recently hived off SpiceXpress. Also, last week, the airline said it has no plans to file for insolvency and would invest USD 50 million to revive 25 grounded planes. The United Kingdom-based SRAM & MRAM Group will invest USD 100 million in SpiceXpress. Both sides have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as part of the investment deal, the airline said in a release on Monday. The MoU also comes after a debt restructuring agreement between the carrier and aircraft lessor Carlyle Aviation Partner wherein the latter bought a stake in SpiceXpress at an anticipated future valuation of USD 1.5 billion (Rs 12,422 crore). SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh said the USD 100 million investment should help SpiceXpress to grow further and expand and provide a more streamlined and efficient service to its customers.

SRAM & MRAM Group has interests in agricultural and agro-food products, neural networks, artificial intelli-

Know Your Body: Why wiggling your toes is extremely important for blood circulation



It's a new week, and we are back with yet another interesting aspect of our body and its functioning. Keen to find out? Well, join us as we decode whether a simple activity like wiggling or twitching your toes can help improve blood circulation in the body. In fact, what we found may actually come as a surprise to you — that any movement, including the simple act of wiggling your toes, is extremely healthy not just for overall health but also blood circulation, in particular! Here's how. Dr Subhendu Mohanty, interventional cardiologist, Sharda Hospital, Noida said that wiggling the toes is a form of calf muscle exercise that helps improve blood circulation in the entire body — and this has a link with what we previously told you, that our calf muscles are also known as our "second heart".

Like the heart, which receives venous or deoxygenated (impure) blood from the body and then pumps arte-

rial (pure) blood to the whole body for oxygen supply, the calf muscles also play a major role in returning the venous blood from the legs to the heart, explained Dr Mohanty.

According to a 2016-review, the University of Missouri-Columbia researchers found that fidgeting while sitting can protect the arteries in the legs from getting clogged and potentially help prevent arterial disease as against previous research noting that sitting for an extended period of time at a computer or being on a long flight reduces blood flow to the legs, which may contribute to the development of cardiovascular disease. Neurologist Sudhir Kumar also mentioned that wiggling of toes or moving toes is a must at regular intervals. "Lack of movement during prolonged sitting causes stasis of blood and results in poor circulation. The risk is higher in people with diabetes, and hypertension, and among smokers. The risk is also high in people needing rest after undergoing surgery or suffering a fracture of leg bones," he elucidated.

According to Dr Kumar, most jobs these days require sitting for prolonged hours, which results in lack of movement, further predisposing one to poor blood circulation in the feet and legs. "As such, wiggling your toes for a few minutes, after every 30-40 minutes, would improve the blood circulation in feet and legs, and reduce the risk of vascular insufficiency (less blood flow in arteries) as well as deep vein thrombosis (clotting of blood in leg veins)," Dr Kumar told indianexpress.com.

Upasana Kamineni, Ram Charan decided to freeze eggs 'very early' in their marriage: Know when is a good time to opt for the procedure

Entrepreneur Upasana Kamineni, who is expecting her first child with actor-husband Ram Charan, has opened up on the couple's decision to freeze her eggs "very early" in their marriage. The couple, who got married in 2012, decided to do so then because they wanted to be financially secure before starting a family.

"Ram and I took a call very early in our marriage when it comes to storing our eggs. We definitely believed that for various reasons we need to focus on our careers at that point in time. Today, both of us are at a stable place where we can afford to take care of the child with the income we are generating by ourselves and give our child that lifestyle and stability," 33-year-old Upasana told MidDay.com in an interview. "People might say that we are inheriting so much, but at the end of the day, what we keep for our child, what we earn has to make sense. We didn't let anything in the way of our thoughts, and I think that is something I respect a lot in our relationship," she added.

What is egg freezing and how does it work?

Medically known as mature oocyte cryopreservation, egg freezing is a method that involves safeguarding a woman's ability to get pregnant in the future. "In this method, unfertilised eggs are harvested from the ovaries and frozen to be used later, where they are combined with the sperm and implanted in the uterus manually," said Dr Swati Mishra, consultant, Birla Fertility and IVF.

How does it help?

Egg freezing is a reliable option for women who are not yet ready to get pregnant and wish to conceive in their thirties, Dr Mishra noted. "One of the most significant advantages of this technique is that it is a multi-step process, does not require sperm from the donor, and can be fertilised at the time of conception," Dr Mishra elucidated.

What does the procedure entail?

Once you speak with a fertility consultant, and decide to opt for the procedure, you will be thoroughly monitored. "Before egg freezing, there will be certain tests conducted to detect infections or any factors that can lead to complications. After a step-by-step evaluation, the procedure will only be started if you are found suitable for egg freezing," said Dr Karishma Dafle, fertility consultant, Nova IVF Fertility, Pune. This procedure will be carried out in three parts. "First, ovarian stimulation will be done.



Here, synthetic hormones will be injected into the woman in order to stimulate the ovaries and create multiple eggs instead of having only one. Then, the expert will have to look for the development of follicles (fluid-filled sacs where eggs get mature) with the help of blood tests and vaginal ultrasound. It tends to take some time for follicles to develop inside the ovaries. Then, the eggs which are unfertilised will be retrieved, frozen, and can be used whenever the woman wants to get pregnant in the future," explained Dr Dafle.

When can this option be availed?

Before opting for this method, it is crucial to understand when a woman can use this option. "Couples or individuals can opt for this option in cases of infertility issues, cancer treatment, during IVF or In vitro fertilisation, delayed pregnancy, and physical problems like infections or organ failure which can damage the quality of eggs, and may require such an intervention," said Dr Mishra.

When is an opportune time?

According to Dr Mishra, it has been seen that young women produce more fertile eggs that have higher chances of fertilisation in the future. "The quantity of eggs increases the chances of pregnancy. A higher quantity of eggs also ensures higher opportunities for conception in the future," said Dr Mishra. At the same time, women should make sure to opt for this procedure under the guidance of an expert fertility consultant only. Try to clarify all the doubts that come to your mind, and seek timely treatment, Dr Dafle reaffirmed.

How to move without legs or wings: Helping trees migrate to new regions

While it is true that individual trees are immobile, as a species they can actually move and migrate as well as birds do! However, this takes place over a much different time frame. This is what we will explore in this article, the first in our new summer series. As researchers in forest ecophysiology, we study basic tree physical functions and relate them to broader ecological dynamics. Rapid climate change is challenging the sustainability of forest ecosystems in many ways. To deal with the new problems associated with climate change, we need new tools: "assisted tree migration" is one of these.

And to inspire us, this excerpt from a song by Québec poet Gilles Vigneault: Let's get the definitions out of the way first: assisted migration refers to the "human-assisted movement of species in response to climate change." We usually associate the term 'migration' with the movement of people or the seasonal flights of birds.

We don't typically think about forest migration, however, and it may even seem weird to associate these two terms. After all, trees are typically rooted to the ground and don't move. Or do they? Tree migration occurs through seed dispersal, and the germination and establishment of new seedlings. After some time, these seedlings will start producing new seeds and contribute to this slow geographical expansion. Migration strategies may differ among tree species. For example, maple samaras are wind-carried seeds that can travel faster and further than the acorns of an oak tree, limited by their heavy weight. However, new seedlings require years, often decades to grow and produce seeds that can migrate further than their parents.

This movement, which takes place over a period of centuries — generally too slow for our conception of time — can become limiting in the face of rapid human-induced changes in climate systems. trees migration Climate change is progressing rapidly and forests don't move at the same rate, so it is important to begin planting

tomorrow's forests. (Source: Pixabay) Current climate change is quickly modifying environmental conditions. No natural warming event in the past has occurred at a comparable rate. Such rapid changes are putting great pressure on forest ecosystems, particularly by modifying habitat conditions.

The migration speeds of the vast majority of tree species are slower than the shift of favourable habitats. This means that their migration to new favourable habitats (e.g. cold regions in the north becoming warmer) will not compensate for the loss of habitats in other areas (e.g. warm regions in the south becoming drier). This mismatch between changing habitat conditions and natural tree migration entails a loss of forest vigour. A decline is predicted for many tree species, which may in turn jeopardize local forest ecosystems. We are being called upon to find strategies to help forests adapt to new climatic conditions. This motivates researchers and forest managers to consider new approaches to solving this problem, including assisted migration.

Artificial seed transfer and planting can accelerate the natural migration process and help overcome geographical barriers, such as mountain ranges or large water surfaces. Assisted migration could therefore be used to help maintain functional forest ecosystems in the future. This is not only important for the conservation of species, but also for the maintenance of all the services forests provide, from wood production to carbon sequestration from the atmosphere. In general, short-distance relocation is easier to achieve, while longer-distance migration requires careful planning. Since the latter presents higher ecological risks, it is generally only considered for the conservation of endangered species. But enough theory, let's move on to concrete examples. The sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) is an iconic tree species in Canada. As climate change intensifies, sugar maples in the southern portion of the range are suffering from increased competition from trees that are more tolerant to warmer, drier conditions, such as American beech

Adani Group stocks lose \$10 billion in value as MSCI exclusion weighs

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Stocks part of Adani Group have lost a combined \$10 billion in market value this week, weighed down by MSCI Inc.'s move to exclude two entities from its India gauge and concerns over potential dilution from a fundraising plan.

Adani Total Gas Ltd. and Adani Transmission Ltd. — the two stocks to be dropped from the MSCI India gauge at the end of this month — headed for their worst weeks since late February. The exclusions will probably trigger around \$390 million of selling by passive funds, Brian Freitas, an independent equities analyst who publishes on Smartkarma, predicted earlier.

Flagship Adani Enterprises Ltd., incubator for many of the group's investments, is also set for a weekly loss of almost 4%, the big-



gest since March. The company and the transmission unit last week flagged plans to raise \$2.6 billion via a qualified institutional placement or other modes, triggering concerns of equity dilution. "If the shares are priced too low in a QIP issue, it could be seen as a sign of weakness or desperation," Arpit Shah, a fund

manager at Care Portfolio Managers, wrote via email.

Adani stocks have been trying to regain their footing after fraud allegations by Hindenburg Research in late January spurred a rout that at one point wiped out over \$150 billion from the group's market value. Stocks recovered after GQG Partners in early March bought stakes

in four of the group's entities, offering a vote of confidence. The market-cap loss currently stands at about \$128 billion.

Adani has denied Hindenburg's allegations, while taking steps in the aftermath of the report to assuage investor concerns over debt and corporate governance.

RBI dividends to Centre may double due to gains, aiding fiscal gap

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) The Reserve Bank of India board may decide to nearly double its dividend to the government from official estimates due to revaluation gains and profits from selling dollars, which could help bridge the fiscal deficit.

A Bloomberg survey of nine economists saw the surplus transfer at 900 billion rupees (\$10.9 billion) for the year ended March, compared to the government's own estimate of 480 billion rupees, which includes dividends from state-controlled banks. Last year, the RBI approved a payout of 303.1 billion rupees, the lowest in a decade.

The RBI board is set to meet on Friday as early signs of slowing growth emerge with elevated interest rates and falling global demand. A higher dividend payout will help Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to meet its target of lowering the fiscal deficit to 5.9% of gross domestic product in the current fiscal year from 6.4% a year ago and shore up revenues ahead of the 2024 national vote.

The government is expecting the RBI to transfer a significantly higher dividend, which will help reduce its market borrowing, people familiar with the matter told Bloomberg on Thursday.

"Gains from the near record gross foreign exchange sales in fiscal year 2022-23 would be the major driver of higher surplus," said Madhavi Arora, economist at Emkay Global Financial Services. The dividend



could bring in additional revenue of 0.2% of GDP, which could partly offset losses in bonds and cover for lower tax revenue and slower divestment, she said.

The RBI makes an annual payout to the government from the surplus income earned from investments and valuation changes on its foreign exchange holdings, including the dollar, and the fees it gets from printing currency notes. It is mandated to maintain a contingency risk buffer of within 5.5% to 6.5% of its balance sheet.

Economists polled by Bloomberg expect the dividend to range between 525 billion rupees to 1.65 trillion rupees. The highest estimate surpasses the central bank's record 1.23 trillion dividend transfer for the year 2018-19.

The RBI embarked on massive dollar sales likely for currency intervention in the last fiscal year with data showing \$206.4 billion of the currency sold in 11 months to February. This compares with \$96.7 billion in the whole

of the fiscal year 2021-22.

The RBI probably acquired the greenback at around 62.7 rupees per dollar in the last fiscal year, and sold it around 81-82 rupee level, earning as much as 690 billion rupees from foreign exchange transactions, according to Gaura Sen Gupta, an economist at IDFC First Bank.

Since the central bank denominates its balance sheet in rupees, a stronger dollar results in a revaluation gain that can also be tapped to boost the transfer, she added.

The RBI's balance sheet probably expanded about 2% in the last fiscal year, the slowest since 2016-17's demonetization exercise, and compares with 9% expansion a year before, according to Arora, as abundant liquidity in the system limited the need for bond purchases from the markets.

However, rising interest rates globally likely lowered the value of foreign bonds held by the RBI, leading to nominal losses dragging

down the earnings, said Abhishek Upadhyay, an economist at ICICI Securities Primary Dealership Ltd.

"Given there is no buffer left in the interest rate revaluation account for foreign securities, this loss will need to be charged directly to contingency reserves that is part of RBI realized equity," Upadhyay said.

Other economists cautioned against a higher dividend payout as India's foreign exchange reserves have stayed below \$600 billion for the past 13 months though portfolio inflows and currency appreciation against the dollar are supporting the case.

"The moot point would be to gauge whether RBI draws comfort from distributing higher dividend purely out of revaluation reserves owing to rupee weakness or shows prudence at a time when in reality foreign exchange reserve kitty has declined over the year," said Siddharth Kothari, an economist with Sunidhi Consultancy Services.

Technical View
Bias: Bearish
Target: Rs 1,030; Rs 975
Resistance: Rs 1,210

The stock price of Gland Pharma has witnessed a severe downtrend since August 2021. The stock is down a whopping 75.5 per cent from levels of Rs 4,350 to the present lows. On the daily scale, the stock was seen holding its 20-DMA (Daily Moving Average) since late March. However, with today's sharp fall the stock has once again dropped significantly below the same. The 20-DMA stands at Rs 1,349. The stock is now also trading below the lower-end of the Bollinger Bands on the daily chart, thus indicating a bearish bias to prevail as long as the stock trades below Rs 1,210.

Gland Pharma tanks 20%, hits record low on weak Q4 results

Mumbai, May 19 (GNS) Shares of Gland Pharma hit a record low of Rs 1,070.80, as they tanked 20 per cent on the BSE in Friday's intra-day trade after the company reported a weak set of numbers with profit after tax (PAT) down 72 per cent at Rs 78.70 crore in the March quarter (Q4FY23). The pharmaceutical company had posted PAT of Rs 285.90 crore in a year ago quarter.

The stock fell below its previous low of Rs 1,130.40, touched on March 13, 2023. It has corrected 66 per cent from its 52-week high of Rs 3,176.75, touched on May 23, 2022.

Gland Pharma's revenue declined 29 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 785 crore mainly due to lower offtake of the key products in devel-

oped as well as domestic markets and also due to production line shut down in Pashamylaram Penems facility due to line upgradation.

On operational front earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) de-grew 52 per cent YoY to Rs 169 crore with margins at 21.5 per cent. One of the customers of Gland has filed for voluntary proceedings under Chapter 11 of the US bankruptcy code. Accordingly, Gland has recorded a provision of Rs 56.5 crore for credit impaired financial asset in Q4FY23.

In addition to one of the customers filing for bankruptcy, there has been a shift of business by another customer, impacting Gland's performance adversely for

Q4FY23. Motilal Oswal Financial Services cut its earnings by 36 per cent/22 per cent for FY24E/FY25E factoring in reduction in scope of business from a bankrupt customer, gradual revival in business due to shift of business by another customer to alternate supplier, and reduced share of profit due to higher competition in existing product portfolio.

While the multiple headwinds on revenue and operational cost have hit its FY23 performance, the brokerage firm expects a slow recovery over the next 12-15 months aided by new launches in China/other regulated markets, newer contracts in CDMO segment and inventory rationalization of existing products, it added.

El Ninos cost trillions of dollars with lasting economic scars: Study

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) The natural burst of El Nino warming that changes weather worldwide is far costlier with longer-lasting expenses than experts had thought, averaging trillions of dollars in damage, a new study found.

An El Nino is brewing now and it might be a big and therefore costly one, scientists said. El Nino is a temporary and natural warming of parts of the equatorial Pacific, that causes droughts, floods and heat waves in different parts of the world. It also adds an extra boost to human-caused warming.

The study in Thursday's journal Science totals global damage with an emphasis on lasting economic scars. It runs counter to previous research that found, at least in the United States, that El Ninos overall aren't too costly and can even be beneficial. And some but not all outside economists have issues with the new research out of Dartmouth College, saying its damage estimates are too big.

Study authors said the average El Nino costs the global economy about \$3.4 trillion. The strong 1997-1998 one cost USD 5.7 trillion. The World Bank estimated the 1997-1998 El Nino cost governments USD 45 billion, which is more than 100 times smaller than the Dartmouth estimate.

But the Dartmouth team said they are looking at more than the traditional costs and for longer time periods.

"We have this sense that El Nino is a really big hammer that hits the Earth system every few years. But we didn't have as much of a handle on its sort of macro-economic implications, both what that means just on a year-to-year basis and what that might mean with future global warming," said study lead author Christopher Callahan, a climate impacts researcher at Dartmouth.

"Economies bear the scars of El Nino for a decade or more and potentially for



ever," said study co-author Justin Mankin, a Dartmouth climate scientist.

The economic scars are the diversion of spending away from technology and innovation toward recovery and rebuilding efforts, Callahan said. It's about opportunities lost while digging out of the El Nino hole.

The way Callahan and Mankin did this was to simulate a world without an El Nino event and look at the global difference in costs, compared to the global gross domestic product, Mankin said.

El Nino's biggest impacts generally hit in the northern winter, but in the summer it reduces hurricane activity in the Atlantic, studies show. It makes it wetter across much of the US South and West, Peru, Uruguay and Argentina, some of Southeast Asia, and a bit of east central Africa. It makes it drier in southeast Africa, southern Asia, northern Australia and the Amazon and often leads to increased wildfires in those areas. It's warmer in much of Asia, the American Pacific Northwest and Australia. El Ninos occur on average about every three to five years and vary in strength, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The last strong El Nino was in 2016.

Because "the impacts of El Nino look a lot like the impacts of global warming", studying the El Nino economic damage "is pretty es-

sential" to understanding the bigger damage from human-caused climate change, Mankin said. And it shows a world unprepared for the hurt that's coming, he said.

"Our economies are poorly adjusted and poorly adapted to the climate variability that we have right now," Mankin said.

Neither Mankin nor Callahan are full-time economists. Economists who looked at their study were not impressed, but other climate scientists were.

"It's not the case that all countries suffer from an El Nino. In fact in some cases it's just the opposite," said University of Cambridge macro-economist Kaimar Mohaddes.

His 2017 study in the Journal of International Economics looked at 21 national economies, mostly developed, during past El Ninos and found in the United States and Europe an El Nino "has a growth-enhancing effect" while it harmed Australia, Chile, Indonesia, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa.

Mankin and Callahan said their study looked at the globe as a whole, not individual countries.

In those places hurt, El Nino economic damage evaporated quickly contrary to what the Dartmouth team said, Mohaddes said. He also found the Dartmouth estimates of damage too big, with their estimates coming close to the economic cost of the Great Recession of

2007 and 2008.

Climate economist Gary Yohe at Wesleyan University in Connecticut said "the enormous estimates cannot be explained simply by forward-looking accounting," calling them not credible.

However, Marshall Burke, an economist and environmental policy professor at Stanford University, said the Dartmouth scientists "make a compelling case that this has really slowed growth in severely affected countries like Peru, and resulted in trillions of (dollars) of lost economic output around the world.

"This paper has certainly made me much more worried about the upcoming and likely large El Nino," Burke said in an email.

Michael McPhaden, a NOAA oceanographer who studies El Ninos, said he has long thought damage estimates of El Nino were way too low, and more important the "big loser during El Nino is the global south", which are poorer nations that are hit the hardest.

"The economic impacts of the El Nino that is predicted for later this year will depend on how strong it is," McPhaden said in an email.

Big monster El Ninos like those in 1997-98 "can be hugely damaging with lingering effects that carry over into following years. On the other hand, if it turns out to be a garden variety El Nino, the consequences may be more muted and the recovery time shortened.

Adani Total Gas hits over 2-year low; stock slips 26% in six trading days

Mumbai, May 19 (GNS) Shares of Adani Total Gas were locked in the 5 per cent lower circuit for the fifth straight day, quoting at Rs 633.35 on the BSE on Friday, with no buyers seen on the counter. In the past six trading days, the stock has slipped 26 per cent. It is quoting at its lowest level since March 2021. Further, the stock has tanked 84 per cent from its 52-week high level of Rs 3,998.35, touched on January 23, 2023.

A combined 242,000 shares have changed hands, and there are pending sell orders for around 800,000 shares on the NSE and BSE, exchange data shows. In comparison, the S&P BSE Sensex was down 0.17 per cent at 61,328 at 10:13 AM.

Last week, global index provider MSCI dropped Adani Total Gas and Adani Transmission from its India index—a move that will likely result in selling worth Rs 3,200 crore (\$390 million) in these two counters by exchange traded funds (ETFs). The change will become effective from May 31.

Shares of Adani Transmission, too, were down 5 per cent to Rs 713.80 on the BSE in the intra-day trade on Friday. The stock of the



power transmission firm has slipped 22 per cent in the past six trading days.

In January this year, US-based short seller, Hindenburg Group, had issued a report alleging certain issues against specific Adani's promoted entities one of ATGL promoters, which have been duly denied by Adani group.

To uphold the principles of good governance, Adani Group has undertaken review of transactions referred in the short seller's report (including that of the company) through an independent assessment from law firm. The report confirms company's compliance of applicable laws and regulations, Adani Total Gas said in its Q4 results notes.

Further, in context of the short seller's report, there is a petition filed in the Hon'ble Supreme Court, and SEBI is examining compliances of laws and regulations by conducting enquires to the Group's listed companies. Given the matter is sub-judice the financial statement do not carry any adjustment, it added.

Total Holdings SAS had acquired 411.33 million equity shares of Adani Gas, representing 37.40 per cent of its total paid up share capital, on February 28, 2020 from certain existing members of the promoter group of the Company. Subsequently, Adani Gas became a joint venture company of Adani Group and TOTAL Group which represents 37.40 per

cent each and remaining 25.20 per cent by public shareholders. The company changed name to Adani Total Gas to reflect French energy giant Total's stake in the firm.

Adani Total Gas is India's leading private player in developing City Gas Distribution (CGD) networks to supply Piped Natural Gas (PNG) to Industrial, Commercial, Domestic (residential) customers and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) to the transport sector.

Further, ATGL has formed 2 wholly owned subsidiaries namely Adani TotalEnergies E-Mobility and Adani TotalEnergies Biomass for its E-Mobility and Biomass Business respectively.

Volodymyr Zelensky to visit Japan to attend G7 summit this weekend: Report

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky is expected to appear in person at the G7 summit scheduled to be held in Hiroshima, Japan, this weekend, The New York Times (NYT) reported on Friday citing several officials. He will make the trip to seek a continued supply of aid and arms to the war-torn country.

It is yet unclear when Zelensky will arrive in Japan but the summit will be attended by US President Joe Biden along with top leaders of several wealthy democracies including Japan, Germany, Canada, and Britain.

Bloomberg reported that Zelensky will fly on a US military plane to Japan after an expected stop in Saudi Arabia to attend the Arab League Summit.

Media reports have stated that the main point of discussions at the summit will be the ongoing war in Ukraine and the nations are expected to agree to work together on tracking Russian diamonds, among other things.

Last week, Zelensky visited several European capitals to ask for the delivery of arms. His trip to Berlin coincided with Germany announcing its largest aid package yet, and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged support for a coalition to help provide Ukraine with Western-made fighter jets, though no concrete plans were set, the Bloomberg report added.

No public announcements have yet been made about Zelensky's in-person presence. Earlier, Ukrainian media had reported that he



will attend the summit virtually.

Who is Volodymyr Zelensky?

Zelensky has been the president of Ukraine since May 20, 2019. A former comedian and an actor with limited experience in politics had won a landslide victory in the country's presidential election in April 2019. Zelensky did not hold any positions in elective office before running for the post of president.

The world praised Zelensky's bravery and determination to serve his war-torn country during the Russian invasion in February 2022. The global community hailed his valour of not fleeing the country amidst the political mayhem and gained recognition as a wartime leader.

Born on January 25, 1978, in Kryvyi Rih, a Russian-speaking industrial region of south-eastern Ukraine to Jewish parents, Zelensky graduated with a law degree from the Kyiv National Economic University in 2000.

In 1997, he founded Kvarial 95 studio -- a televi-

sion entertainment production company that produced many TV shows for years. Zelensky has worked in many films including -- Love in the Big City, Office Romance, Our Time, 8 First Dates, I, You, He, She, Svanty and Paddington.

In 2015, he starred in the television series "Servant of the People" where he played the role of an anti-corruption politician who eventually becomes the Ukrainian president.

He defeated Petro Poroshenko in a landslide victory in 2019 to become the sixth president of the country.

The Russia-Ukraine war On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin had been building up troops and military on the country's border since October 2021.

In a public speech, Putin on February 21, 2022, recognised the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent from Ukraine. He said the Russian troops will go into Ukraine's territory as "peacekeepers".

He defeated Petro Poroshenko in a landslide victory in 2019 to become the sixth president of the country.

Three days later, he announced that they will launch a "special military operation" in Ukraine. Just minutes after Putin's speech was aired, explosions were heard in major cities in Ukraine. Leaders across the globe condemned the attack and promised swift action and sanctions against Russia.

Most big companies have abandoned Russia and several oligarchs have been put under sanctions. But Putin has refused to stop the battle which has been going on for over 450 days now.

Why did Russia invade Ukraine?

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has irrevocably chosen the path of democracy, reforms and European integration. Several countries that emerged from the Soviet Union have already joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato). But Ukraine and Georgia have not joined the organisation yet.

However, since 2014, Ukraine has repeatedly expressed its will to join Nato. But Putin is against this decision as he believes it will bring the European defence forces close to the border of Russia.

Reports have claimed that Russia has interfered in Ukraine's elections before too, to ensure that the candidates who are against Ukraine-EU integration win the top post in the country.

Moreover, several reports have also said that Putin looks at Ukraine as a critical part of "Mother Russia" and does not want Europeans to have any control over it.

Business trips to be exempted from LRS changes, says finance ministry

New Delhi, May 19 (GNS) The finance ministry has clarified that changes in the liberalised remittance scheme (LRS) norms do not cover overseas business trips of employees sponsored by their companies.

"When an employee is being deputed by an entity for any of the above, and expenses are borne by the latter, such expenses shall be treated as residual current account transactions outside LRS and may be permitted by the authorised dealer (AD) without any limit, subject to verifying the bona fide of the transaction," the finance ministry said in a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) released on Thursday.

Under the LRS, all resident individuals, including minors, are allowed to remit up to \$250,000 per financial year (April-March) for any permissible current or capital account transaction or a combination of both.

Under the LRS, in the financial year 2021-22, a total of \$19.61 billion was remitted, rising from \$12.68 billion in 2020-21. In 2022-23, it rose to more than \$24 billion, of which overseas travel accounted for more than half.

The finance ministry on Wednesday had notified the FY24 Budget announcement to include international credit card transactions under the LRS by putting tax collected at source (TCS) of 20 per cent from 1 July. This is expected to impose significant



compliance burden on financial institutions. In the FY24 Budget, the finance ministry had increased LRS on remittances for purposes of buying overseas tour packages, bonds, shares, real estates, etc, to 20 per cent from 5 per cent earlier.

For expenses related to travel, education and medical treatment, the finance ministry said a detailed clarification will be issued later.

The finance ministry clarified that the inclusion of international credit card expenses under LRS is to bring parity with international debit card expenses, which are already under LRS. Due to the erstwhile exemption, "expenditures through credit cards were not accounted for under the specified LRS limit, which has led to some individuals exceeding the LRS limits", the finance ministry said.

"Data collected from top money remitters under LRS reveals that international credit cards are being issued with limits in excess of the present LRS limit of \$250,000. The differential treatment between debit cards and credit cards needed to be removed in the interest of uniformity and equity in the treatment of modes of drawal

of foreign exchange and for capturing total expenditures under LRS for prudent foreign exchange management and to prevent by-passing of LRS limits," the FAQs said, adding that the RBI had written to the government on more than one occasion, pointing to the need to remove this differential treatment.

"Bringing credit cards under TCS purview is a welcome step and will ensure parity between debit or credit card payments," said Mohit Kabra, Group CFO, MaKeMyTrip.

Saurav Sood, practice leader international tax and transfer pricing at SW India said the new rules will lead to a compliance burden on credit card companies while individuals making petty expenses will have TCS provisions getting triggered since there is no threshold limit for the applicability of TCS.

How will this impact you?

This will give rise to cash flows issues for individuals. One concern is that the TCS that is deducted could get blocked for a considerable period of time.

There is confusion regarding how the TCS on credit card spends abroad

will be operationalised. "Will the 20 per cent be levied every time you swipe your credit card abroad, or will it get added when your statement is generated?" wondered Archit Gupta, founder and chief executive officer, Clear. Credit card users may need to be careful about hitting the credit limit on their cards when abroad (accounting for additional 20 per cent).

Another issue could arise if errors happen in TCS deduction or if the amount is not deposited and does not get reflected in Form 26AS. "All this will impose a higher burden on individuals to keep track of transactions and ensure compliance," says Gupta.

Tax experts said complete clarity does not exist yet on whether 20 per cent TCS will apply when a credit card is used to buy a foreign magazine or a software subscription from a foreign provider.

"The move will impose restrictions on foreign travel expenses while an individual is abroad and is aimed at security of such expenses and conservation of forex reserves," said Jyoti Prakash Gaida, managing director at Resurgent India.

Sebi plan to prune MF costs: New expense slabs, no additional charges

Mumbai, May 19 (GNS)

The Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has shared the blueprint of the Total Expense Ratio (TER) overhaul of mutual funds and it's set to bring down the expenses paid by investors. In a consultation paper released on Thursday, the regulator proposed a new TER structure where the cap on total expenses will be linked to the total assets of mutual funds in each asset class in place of the present model where the maximum expenses depend on the total assets being managed in a scheme.

Further, the regulator plans to bring expenses like transaction costs, brokerage, and goods and services tax (GST) within the TER.

"It is observed that spending of some schemes towards brokerage and transaction cost is more than even the maximum TER limits prescribed. This has resulted in investors paying more than double the permissible TER limits... It is proposed that brokerage and transaction expenses may be included within the TER limit and the transaction-wise limits," the consultation paper states.

As a result, while the maximum TER limit is proposed to go up slightly for equity schemes, the overall expenses paid by investors will come down as there won't be any charges over and above the TER. The regulator has proposed the highest TER slab for equity schemes at 2.55 per cent compared to the present cap of 2.25 per cent. For debt, the

While the regulator acknowledged the burden on MFs due to the inclusion of additional expenses, especially the transaction cost and brokerage, it said that the move is important to "bring in much needed transparency in the costs charged to unitholders, and greater accountability in re-

ITC slips 4% in 2 days post Q4 results but analysts remain bullish on stock

Mumbai, May 19 (GNS)

Shares of ITC were down 2 per cent to Rs 411.5 on the BSE in Friday's intra-day trade, thus declining 4 per cent in the past two trading days on profit booking, after the company reported better-than-expected 23.35 per cent year-on-year (YoY) jump in consolidated net profit in the March quarter (Q4FY23) to Rs 5,175 crore, from Rs 4,196 crore in the same quarter last financial year (Q4FY22), led by growth in cigarettes, FMCG (non-cigarette) and hotels business segments.

With the past two days' decline, the market price of ITC has slipped 4.4 per cent from its record high level of Rs 433.45, touched on May 8, 2023. Thus far in the calendar year 2023, the stock has outperformed the market by surging 25 per cent, as compared to 0.55 per cent gain in the S&P BSE Sensex.

Meanwhile, ITC board has recommended a special dividend of Rs 2.75 per share, in addition to the final dividend of Rs 6.75 per share for the financial year ended March 31, 2023.

Consolidated revenue from operations in Q4FY23 was up 7.34 per cent at Rs 19,058.29 crore, beating Bloomberg consensus estimate of Rs 16,856 crore. The estimate for net income adjusted was Rs 4,819 crore.

The performance of the company was backed by a focus on premiumisation, cost optimisation, and asset-right strategy in hotels. The cigarette segment recorded revenue of Rs 8,082 crore in Q4FY23, compared with Rs 7,177 crore in the same pe-



maximum TER slab is proposed to be brought down to 1.2 per cent from 2 per cent.

According to the regulator, the total expenses paid by investors of new equity oriented schemes are presently 2.78 per cent on an average, much higher than the prescribed limit of 2.25 per cent due to additional charges. The consultation paper reveals that the new expense structure can bring down the expenses paid by investors by 4.55 per cent. In the financial year 2022, the MF industry charged a total of Rs 30,806 crore for the management of active schemes and going by the proposed model, these expenses amounted to Rs 29,404 crore.

Further, the regulator plans to bring expenses like transaction costs, brokerage, and goods and services tax (GST) within the TER.

ITC slips 4% in 2 days post Q4 results but analysts remain bullish on stock



riod last year, with the legal trade recovering from pandemic shock.

Operating profit grew by 18.9 per cent to Rs 6,209 crore with operating margin expansion of 385 bps to 36.1 per cent. Strong cigarette volume growth, softening of commodity prices & lower contribution of agri commodity trading business led to expansion in gross as well as operating margin during the quarter.

ICICI Securities believes the company would be able to achieve its target operating margins expansion by 100-150 bps every year by leveraging its strong brands through extension in many food adjacencies.

The brokerage firm said it also believe Hotels business would continue to grow at a faster pace in medium term with significant improvement in mobility in

spect of the significant brokerage costs, with oversight from the AMC Board/Trustees".

It has proposed to allow asset management companies (AMCs) to obtain limited purpose membership with stock exchanges for executing trades for their own mutual fund schemes. This set up is likely to bring down the transaction expenses for mutual funds.

The regulator has also proposed to open an avenue for MFs to charge higher fees if they are able to outperform. Sebi said that MFs may be allowed to charge higher management fees if the scheme performance is more than an indicative return (the benchmark returns adjusted for operating costs). In such a model, the base TER will be that of passive schemes and the total fee will go up based on the outperformance will be charged during redemption.

Further, the additional expenses paid to distributors for bringing investors from smaller towns is proposed to

make a comeback, albeit in a different form. The plan is to now reward distributors only for bringing in new investors (based on PAN) rather than the previous structure where investments from all B-30 investors were eligible for additional commission in the first year. The regulator plans to extend this commission structure for women MF investors residing in top cities as well to enable financial inclusion of women in MF space.

"An additional incentive may be introduced for distributors for new investments/inflows from women investors (new PAN) at the industry level. It shall have to be ensured by AMCs that the proposed incentive for women investors is extended only in those cases where B-30 incentive is not given," the regulator stated.

These additional commissions would be paid to distributors from their investor education budget to ensure that there is no additional burden on MF investors.

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IndoStar Home Finance Private Limited

Regd. Office: - Unit No. 305, 3rd Floor, Wing 2/E, Corporate Avenue, Andheri- Ghatkopar Link Road, Chakala, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400093
CIN : U65900MH2016PTC271587 Tel: +91 22 45107701
Email: contact@indostarhfc.com; Website: www.indostarhfc.com

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given in terms of paragraph 93 of the Master Direction- Non-Banking Financial Company - Housing Finance Company (Reserve Bank) Directions, 2021, that the branch office of the Company located at D.No. : 6-5-69, Yati Raja Complex., 2nd floor, 5/2 Arundilpet, Guntur - 522002. GST No. - 37AAEC10095E1ZQ will be closed with effect from close of business hours of 19th August, 2023 as operations are being shifted to a nearby branch office located at 4-16, 368, 1st Floor, Shop No.2, Potti Sai Ramulu, 4th Line, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh - 522007. GST No.-37AAEC10095E1ZQ. In case any assistance is required, you may contact the nearest branch office as mentioned above or send an email to contact@indostarhfc.com.

This notice may be accessed on the Company's website (www.indostarhfc.com).

For IndoStar Home Finance Private Limited
Sd/-
Nidhi Sadani
Company Secretary

Date : 19-05-2023