

TIME AND US

DAILY

SRINAGAR, KASHMIR

THURSDAY

● AUGUST, 31, 2017
 ● 08 ZHUL HIJAH 1438 AH
 ● ISSUE: 204
 ● VOLUME: 03
 ● PAGES: 08

WEATHER TEMPERATURE

STATION	MAX TEMPERATURE	MIN TEMPERATURE
	ACT	ACT
SRINAGAR	28.0	17.9
JAMMU	28.2	24.7
LEH	28.0	16.3
KARGIL	26.0	12.0

SUNSET THURSDAY: 07:00 PM
 SUNRISE FRIDAY: 06:05 AM

LOCAL FORECAST OF SRINAGAR

Light Rain, Thunderstorms. Maximum & Minimum temperatures will be around 26°C & 18°C respectively.

RNI NO: JKENG/2015/62397 ● PRICE RS.3/- (AIR SURCHARGE FOR DELHI, JAMMU & LADAKH 50/- PAISA)

STATE | 3

CABINET APPROVES PROMULGATION OF THE GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (COMPENSATION)

NATIONAL | 5

CENTRE MOVES SC SEEKING TRANSFER OF PLEAS AGAINST RERA TO DELHI HC

BUSINESS | 7

BIRD GROUP SAYS KEEN TO BUY AIR INDIA'S SUBSIDIARY

SPORTS | 8

PSL SPOT-FIXING CASE: PCB TRIBUNAL PLACES 5-YEAR BAN ON SHARJEEL KHAN

Hustle and bustle in markets ahead of Eid-ul-Azha

Shoppers complain of increase in prices

Srinagar, Aug 30: As Eid-ul-Azha is round the corner Markets on Wednesday witnessed a heavy rush of shoppers with people laying their hands on everything that came in their way. Shoppers complained of increase in prices of essential commodities. However the Minister of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Department, (CAPD) claimed that checking squads conducted market inspections to curb inflating rates of commodities. On Wednesday different markets across the valley were flooded with shoppers. The busy markets of Residency Road, MA Road, and other small and big markets in Srinagar witnessed a huge rush of customers. In most of



the markets, people were seen busy buying bakery, confectionary, dress

material, kids wear and grocery. But the soaring prices of commodities left many customers high and dry. Many shoppers, who spoke to KNS, complained that price of vegetables, fruits, and other items have been 'arbitrarily increased' manifold by traders in view of Eid. The CAPD Department is doing nothing to curb this problem. The claims of having constituted market checking squads seem to have fallen flat because the traders have increased prices of commodities arbitrarily," said Shabir Ahmad, a customer at Lal Chowk. The rush of people triggered frequent traffic jams at various places especially across the Dalgate-Batmaloo

Officers, Jawans directed to remain cautious after Pulwama attack: IGP

'Local militants have gone into hiding after successful interventions by security forces'

Srinagar, Aug 30: Saying that no high alert has been sounded in Kashmir, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kashmir Range, Munir Khan Wednesday said that the forces were directed to remain cautious after Pulwama attack. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a cleanliness drive at the police control room complex here, IGP said, "No high alert has been sounded in Kashmir but following the Pulwama encounter we have directed our jawans and officers to remain vigilant." He said that as being the head of the Police department Kashmir, it stands his responsibility to tell the officers and jawans to remain cautious. "It is part of our drill," Khan said. Khan also said that the local militants



have gone into hiding after successful interventions by security forces and are now giving space to the foreign militants. "After the successful actions by the forces which led to the killing of top Hizb and Lashkar commander, the local militants have now gone into the hiding to survive and are giving space to the foreign militants," he said.

ATM stolen from Anantnag recovered

Anantnag, Aug 30: Unknown burglars have stolen an ATM of HDFC Bank in South Kashmir's Anantnag district. The incident occurred at Barakpora village of Anantnag district during the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday. A police official said that ATM has been recovered

Manmohan Singh led group to visit JK in Sep

Will meet political parties, groups, individuals: G A Mir

Srinagar, Aug 30: Commenting on the visit of PPG (Policy & Planning Group) of AICC led by Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to J&K, the J&K Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) President G.A. Mir stated that it has now been decided the group will meet delegation/groups/Individuals desirous of meeting the Group during their visit to J&K.



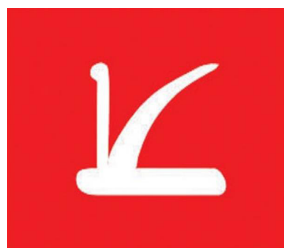
Stating that the group will also interact with the Congress Leaders and workers in an

extended Executive Committee including Ex MLA and Senior Leaders, G.A. Mir said that Dr. Manmohan Singh accompanied by P. Chidambaram, former Finance Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, LOP in Rajya Sabha and Ambika Soni General Secretary AICC is scheduled to visit Jammu on 10th and 11th of Sept 2017 and Srinagar on the 16th

PDP's inaction in defending Art 35-A shocking: NC

NC holds orientation program, takes out protest march in Kulgam

Kulgam, Aug 30: National Conference on Wednesday organized a day-long orientation program to spread awareness about Article 35-A in Kulgam and reiterated the party's commitment to fight for the safeguarding of the State's special status and unique political and cultural identity. The orientation program that was attended by party leaders and functionaries threw light on the importance of Article 35-A and



possible disastrous repercussions of its repeal. Following the conclusion of the orientation program, National Conference leaders and activists led by NC Kulgam District

President and MLA Homshalibug Abdul Majeed Larmi, Provincial Spokesperson Imran Nabi Dar, District President Youth National Conference Ishtiyaq Ganaie and other members of the District Committee, held a peaceful protest march from Town Hall Kulgam to the office of the DC, Kulgam. Speaking on the occasion, the NC leaders said PDP's inaction and lack of

Schools closed near LoC

Rajouri, Aug 30: India and Pakistan traded heavy fire along the Line of Control in Nowshera Sector of Rajouri district in Jammu and Kashmir prompting authorities to close down all the schools located along the border. An Indian Defense official said that "Pakistani troops initiated small arms, automatic and mortar fire from 10.35 am along the LoC in Nowshera sector". "The Indian army

Abdul Haq chairs DDB Kulgam meeting

Reviews progress of developmental projects



Kulgam, Aug 30: Minister for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Law and Justice Abdul Haq today chaired the District

World Enforced Disappearances Day: Families remember their missing sons

APDP stages sit-in-protest

Srinagar, August 30: On the eve of International Day of Disappeared, Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) staged a peaceful sit-in at Pratap Park Srinagar on Wednesday. Scores of family members of disappeared persons participated in the peaceful protest that was also attended by Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front Chairman Muhammad Yasin Malik who expressed solidarity with the families of the victims and said that people of Kashmir always support the APDP which is fighting for a just cause. He said that more than ten thousand people were subjected to enforced



See Missing...Pg 02

Forces allegedly thrash teachers, teargas student protesters in Handwara

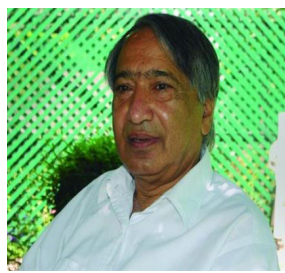
Handwara, Aug 30: Government Degree College Handwara teachers Wednesday alleged that they were thrashed by Forces personnel who according to them barged into the college and targeted students as well as them. According to teachers, Government Forces resorted to indiscriminate tear-smoke shelling after the College students staged a protest against the killing of their college student in a fake encounter. Pertinently, Shahid Bashir Mir was killed by Army in alleged fake encounter in Hefdara forest of Handwara town in North Kashmir's Kupwara district. Scores of students amid pro-freedom slogans staged

See Forces...Pg 02

Weaker sections of society left to fend for themselves by govt: Tarigami

'Casual labourers, NREGA workers moving from pillar to post, but nobody listens to their woes'

Srinagar, Aug 30: Stating that corruption has rendered the system defunct in Jammu and Kashmir despite tall claims of PDP-BJP government to eradicate it, CPI (M) leader and MLA Kulgam Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami today said marginalized and poorer sections of the society have been left to fend for themselves by this government. In a statement issued to KNS, he said, "the weaker and poorer sections of the society have been totally neglected by the government which has severely hit their means of livelihood. The welfare schemes for old aged, destitutes and other weaker sections are virtually defunct. Same is the situation with casual labourers working in different departments. There has been



lot of noise on their regularisation. Even the issue was discussed in the Assembly,

but till date nothing has been done on ground. Wages of casual labourers in several departments are pending for several months. The NREGA workers are without wages, widows, old aged and destitutes are moving from pillar to post to get their pension, but nobody is listening to their woes." "The insensitive approach

Karra overwhelmed with announcement of Policy planning group's JK visit

Reaching out to people of Kashmir would give them sense of belonging

Srinagar, Aug 30: Overwhelmed with the Congress decision of sending the Party's Policy Planning group to the Jammu and Kashmir next month, Senior Congress leader and former minister Tariq Hameed Karra has said that it was a matter of satisfaction that his efforts have finally began yielding results for which he is indebted to Party Chief Sonia Gandhi, Vice President, Rahul Gandhi,



former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. In a statement to KNS,

Karra said that the finalization of dates for the team's arrival was a welcome step and hoped the move would help in assessing the ground situation in a better way. The team would visit Jammu on September 10th and Kashmir six days later on September 16th. Karra who has been instrumental in the constitution of the Policy Planning group said that during his frequent

See Karra...Pg 02

PM HOLDS PRAGATI VIDEO-CONFERENCE WITH CHIEF SECRETARIES

Reviews GST implementation, GeM portal, Smart City Mission

SRINAGAR, AUGUST 30: Prime Minister, Narendra Modi today complimented the States for the good work done in the smooth implementation of Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime and said that the apprehensions with regard to GST have been proven to be unfounded, and a smooth transition has happened. He asked all Chief Secretaries to further boost efforts to increase registration under GST, and to achieve a quantum jump in this regard within a month.



The Prime Minister said this while reviewing the progress of flagship central projects in his twenty-first interaction through Pro-active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) initiative with Union Secretaries of various Ministries and Chief Secretaries of the States.

J&K Chief Secretary, B B Vyas also participated in the video conference. Prime Minister also called upon the State Chief Secretaries to make effective use of Government e-Marketing (GeM) portal for procurement of material and supplies. He said GeM portal has improved transparency, and has reduced wasteful expenditure. He asked Chief Secretaries to give priority to GeM in government procurements and in this regard submit a report to the Union Cabinet Secretariat.

Prime Minister also reviewed the progress of various central projects related to Railways and Road Transport & Highways, handling and resolution of grievances related to patents and trademarks and the status of the Smart City Mission. He appreciated the participation of cities in the challenge route. He said the challenge before everyone is now to ensure implementation and expeditious completion of the work in the 90 identified cities, with high quality. He asked Chief Secretaries to hold regular review meetings, so that bottlenecks, if any, in the implementation of Smart City Mission are addressed on priority.

Prime Minister also reviewed the progress of the Forest Rights Act and emphasized the importance of using space technology to determine the rights of tribal communities, and settle claims expeditiously.

40 VEHICLES SEIZED IN PULWAMA FOR ILLEGAL MATERIAL EXTRACTION

PULWAMA, AUGUST 30: Deputy Commissioner Pulwama, Ghulam Mohammad Dar today launched a drive to enforce the ban on illegal material extraction from streams in the district.

During the drive 40 tippers loaded with illegally extracted sand, gravel and boulders were confiscated. These tippers were carrying material extracted from Nallah Rambai Ara, Romshi and other streams of the district.

On the occasion, the DC said that legal action would be taken against violators involved in the illegal material extraction. He said that the extraction of sand, gravel and boulders would be allowed only at the locations which are identified by the Department of Geology and Mining.

Due to illegal extraction of sand, gravel and boulders from the streams and nallahs not only Government is losing revenue but the constructed protection bunds on the said streams and nallahs also get damaged, he added.

Continue from Front Page

EID

stretch where most of the people happily emptied their pockets to buy their favorite items. Imparting a colorful touch to the shopping frenzy, children accompanied by their parents were seen engrossed in choosing their favorite toys, colorful dresses and footwear.

Meanwhile, the shoppers rush is giving a tough time to the men in blue in maintaining the traffic and ensuring smooth flow vehicles along the Exchange and Residency roads here. Pertinently vendors have occupied footpaths along the Amira Kadal and Residency road leaving virtually no space for the pedestrians and too many vehicles passing through too little times means the bridge remains choked throughout the day.

When contacted the Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Department (CAPD) Minister, told KNS that government have deputed many checking squad to Srinagar markets and other markets in the valley. "I urge the people that if they find any trader or shopkeeper selling commodities at higher prices, they should contact us. We will take action against them," he said and added that it is very sad that we hardly receive any complaints when authorities conduct market checks. That time nobody complains about soaring prices.

IGP

adding that as per the reports, the local militants have gone to higher reaches.

He said that earlier the local militants were roaming freely but it has stopped now.

Meanwhile, asked about the reports that militants have stopped using mobile phones to avoid getting traced, IGP said that militancy in Kashmir is ongoing since 90's when there no mobile phone were existing and during that time, the militants were also being neutralised.

"The work doesn't stop with such things. If one thing closes, another opens up and we work on it," he said.

ATM

from Bogam village of Qazigund on Wednesday morning.

An official from the bank told Kashmir News Trust that the ATM carried Rs 7.18 lakh.

It was not immediately known whether the burglars managed to loot cash from the machine.

SINGH

and 17th of September and shortly thereafter, Ladakh for which the date, will soon be finalised.

"Adding that Senior Leader Dr. Karan Singh, who has already made his individual programmes to Jammu and Kashmir over the next few months will nevertheless, try to be with the group where ever possible".

He further said that the group is meeting the representatives of other political parties, including trade bodies and other individuals during their scheduled tour programme in the State, G. A. Mir said.

NC

seriousness in defending Article 35-A in the Supreme Court spoke volumes about the party's real intentions and exposed their hidden, nefarious understanding with the BJP to launch an assault on the State's Special Status. The NC leaders also questioned the PDP's moral ground to speak about its alleged 'Agenda of the Alliance' anymore after its own Senior Leader, MP and Vice President of the Party, Muzaffar Hussain Baigh publicly questioned the validity and credibility of the document.

The NC Leaders also highlighted the fact that the BJP-led Central Government had chosen to not file a counter affidavit to the petition challenging Article 35-A and had openly advocated a "larger debate" on the issue in clear contradiction to earlier claims that PDP had succeeded in getting BJP to agree to maintain a "status-quo" on the State's Special Status and those constitutional provisions that give J&K a right to define its State Subjects and the rights they are entitled to in exclusivity.

The National Conference Leaders lauded the decision of the Party Leadership to fight this battle from the forefront and evolve a consensus on the grassroots level in tandem with other likeminded organizations in the State. Speaking at the orientation program and the protest march, the NC leaders said it was laudable that National Conference Working President Mr. Omar Abdullah has made it unambiguously clear that the party was in touch with top-notch legal experts from the country and would consider to represent the State's interests in the Supreme Court as a private party if the need arises.

The National Conference Leaders asked party workers and activists to go door-to-door to make people aware about the malicious propaganda unleashed by the BJP and its allied non-governmental-organizations (NGOs) in falsely portray-

ing Article 35-A as detrimental to the State's interests. "Article 35-A forms the cornerstone of the State's political identity and is vital and non-negotiable for its prosperity and peace. Any harm to Article 35-A would be an unprecedented provocation that could lead to instability in the State and also break the constitutional bridge that connects J&K to the rest of the country", the NC leaders said.

The NC Leaders said the party leadership is reaching out to people in all the three regions of the State to dispel myths and false propaganda about Article 35-A and would leave no stone unturned to defend the rights and honour of the people.

SCHOOLS

was retaliating strongly and effectively," he added. Reports said that fire and mortar shells were exchanged by the armies of both the countries in Kalsian, Bhawani and Baba Khori.

"The fresh spate of shelling and firing begun a day after Pakistan troops at a flag meeting with their Indian counterpart at Chakkan Da Bagh in Poonch last week had agreed to maintain peace and tranquility on the border," said an official.

Reports said that some shells fired from across the border landed in civilian areas.

"As a precautionary measures, some educational institutions located near LoC in Kalal, Kalsian and Bhawani have been closed for today," said an official.

HAQ

Development Board meeting to review the progress of various developmental projects in the district.

The meeting was attended by Member of Parliament, Nazir Ahmad Laway, MLAs Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami, Abdul Majid Bhat (Larmi), Mohammad Amin Bhat, Abdul Majid Padder, DDC Kulgam Talat Parvez, Heads of concerned departments and sectoral officers besides other concerned officers.

While addressing the Board Meeting, Minister directed the officers to prioritize those schemes and projects which are near completion but linger on due to meager funding so that they can be physically and financially completed.

The chairman exhorted the officers to take the development on mission mode basis so that its fruition is cherished by the general public. The Minister directed the officers that the board decisions should be implemented in letter and spirit as it acts as institution of empowerment for people, which should be strengthened.

The Minister called for judicious use of funds and consolidation of works as per the requirement and asked the executing agencies of various projects to construct buildings as per requirement, not as per the wishes of contractors.

Stating that the Government has strengthened monitoring system to bring more transparency in implementation of various flagship programs, he said that persons found wasting public exchequer will be held responsible and dealt under law. He also stressed on timely completion of projects.

Earlier, DDC Kulgam briefed the Board about progress made in the implementation of various developmental projects till date in the current financial year 2017-18.

He informed the meeting that Rs 33.45 crore have been spend in the district so far out of the available budget of Rs 56.59 crore in the district. The district has an approved budget of Rs 134.59 crore.

He further informed till date roads of 25 kilometres length have been completed during the current fiscal at the cost of Rs 16.94 crore while work is in progress for completion of 78.46 Kms at the cost of Rs 47.25 crore.

Under R&B sector, Four bridges have also been completed at the cost of Rs 7.42 crore viz Brazloo, Khee, Damhall-Laisoo, Malwan-Khaloor bridges. Work is also in progress on 10 bridges being constructed at the cost of Rs 81.13 crore. The Meeting was informed that work on six bridges will be completed by the end of this year. The bridges were fully washed away during the floods of September 2014 floods.

The ACD Kulgam was also directed to start the work on construction of Akhal-Khulshan road under MGNREGS which shall be completed at a cost of Rs 10 lacs.

It was given out that construction of four buildings including a Drug De-addiction Centre, IPD Block-A, ARTO Office and Sub Centre Adpora at the cost of Rs 24.22 crore. It was stated that there are 16 more projects under execution including construction of various buildings out of which four buildings will be completed during current fiscal that include including Polytechnic College Kulgam, NTPHC Srandoo, Twin Lecture Block Degree College Kulgam. In addition two blocks of residential quarters for sectoral officers at Lirrow will also be completed by the end of this year.

Meeting was further informed that 11 Ultra High Density Apple Plants Orchards have been established in the district while a Model Nursery has also been established.

The department of agriculture has also successfully introduced Mushkibudji and Kamad on 33 plots while High Quality Paddy Seed Villages have also been established over 126 hectares of land. The department of Fisheries provided

huts to seven fishermen at the cost of Rs 5.12 lakhs.

It was stated in the meeting that nine Mini Sheep farms have been established in the district this year while 25 bicycles along with ice boxes are targeted to be provided to fishermen for marketing purpose

Under Education sector, the minister was informed that 19 smart class rooms have been established during last fiscal while 16 are at various stages of completion and 22 new smart classrooms have been approved for the current fiscal. It was stated that 57 seasonal Centers have been established in meadows of zone Devsar and DH Pora for the children of Migratory population. It was given out that 23225 students have also been proposed under District Scholarship Programmes.

The Board was further informed that under MGNREGA, 10000 man days have been generated and 3731 works have been completed so far while there are 1507 ongoing works under the schemes. It was stated that 264 families covered under IAY/PMAY and 668 units have been verified under PMAY.

Under Swach Bharat Mission, the Department has taken up construction of 2856 IHHLs out of which 1072 IHHLs have been finalized. It was said that two blocks viz Pombay and Frisal will be declared Open-Defecation Free by the end of this year.

During the current year 14 Water Supply Schemes will be completed that will cover about one lakh souls of 61 habitations. While a project of Solid Waste Management in the district will also be completed this year which is under execution at the cost of Rs 16 crores.

Under Power Sector, seven towns of the district have been covered under IPDS scheme with estimated cost of Rs 16.99 crore while work has been tendered out for electrification of 150 habitations at the cost of Rs 21.78 crore under DDUGY.

It was stated that 374 Transformers were damaged this year out of which 351 transformers have also been repaired so far. The Chief Engineer PDD apprised the meeting that work on the workshop shall be completed within 3 months so that dependence of Central Workshop and SSI units could be curtailed down.

During the meeting legislators of the district raised numerous issues of public interest in their respective districts while the chairman of the board sought on-spot answers from the officers regarding various issues and passed directions for the redressal of the grievances.

Meanwhile, owing to the slow progress of work execution of different projects and in light of certain complaints regarding technical irregularities in construction of PHCs, the chairman directed the DDC to hold any enquiry into the matter.

MISSING

disappearance in Kashmir Valley. "They were either picked up by CRPF or BSF and their families are still looking for them. The ugly part of the story is that a wife who is still searching for her husband is called half-widow. It is a tragedy that has taken heavy toll on the affected families," Malik said added that peace can only prevail when Kashmir issue will be resolved as per the aspirations of the people.

The family members whose loved ones disappeared allegedly at the hands of security agencies during the turmoil in Kashmir reiterated that they will continue their struggle till government locate their missing members.

One of the protesters, who hails from North Kashmir's Katianwali area of Baramulla district Bashir Ahmad Chichi told CNS that his brother Altaf Ahmed was on his way back from his routine work from fields when he was picked up by some unidentified gunmen. "Since November 16, 2002 his family has been roaming from pillar to post in search of Altaf but all in vain."

An elderly woman from Kawoosa village of Budgam said that her son Muhammad Ramzan Sheikh was a 25-year-old young lad in 1992 when he was allegedly taken away by forces. "He was engrossed in his work; we were busy in our paddy fields," she said while wiping her tears.

"I will die in peace after having a glimpse of my beloved son," she said.

APDP Chairperson Parveena Ahanger said the victims have left no stone unturned to know the whereabouts of disappeared but to no avail.

"Our search from pillar to post is turning futile." Parveena said adding, "We don't get any clue of our dear ones doesn't mean we would give up. No way till our last breath."

Parveena said the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), High court, Supreme Court and all other institutions of justice have failed to do justice with them.

She said they are living with the hope to see their loved ones back one day. "Hope sustains life, we are hopeful that our disappeared kin will be with us someday soon," she added. She further said, "We want government to come clear on the disappearance issue." "Where are our loved ones? Are they alive or dead, we want to know," Parveena questioned.

She said that several movements across the globe have been raising their voice for the victims of the enforced disappearances in the world. Like us many families have organized

themselves in Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.

"I would like to remind ourselves that the enforced disappearance in Kashmir cuts across regions and religions. Besides Kashmiri Muslims, the Sikh minority has not remained untouched from the state terror. In the year 1994 five foreign tourists who were picked up from the forests of Phalgham also became victims of enforced disappearances. Despite evidence State has failed to give details of their whereabouts to their families," she said.

FORCES

a protest and demanded action against the army personnel responsible for his killing. However, Government Forces swung into action and fired tear-gas shells to disperse the protesting students.

"There was chaos and confusion. During the melee several students were wounded," said a teacher adding that government forces manhandled many teachers of the college.

TARIGAMI

of the state government towards the long pending legitimate grievances of casual labourers, Anganwadi workers and helpers, contractual employees is unfortunate. These people work with dedication but they have been pushed to the wall and the state government seems to be insensitive towards their well-being."

Stating that the governance deficit has cost the state dearly, he said, "Inflation is so high that for a common man purchasing essential commodities from the market has become difficult. There is no accountability on price control as government is nowhere. Corruption has spread its tentacles everywhere despite tall claims of the government that it will leave no stone unturned to eradicate it. System has become defunct and government is insensitive to the woes of common people. There is a dire need to chalk out a comprehensive policy to regularize the casual labourers. Government should fulfil the promises it has made with casual labourers and contractual employees from time to time without any further delay. How will these people and their families celebrate Eid if government fails in its duty to release their pending wages?"

Tarigami lashed out at the government for its erratic utility services and scarcity of rations at the CAPD outlets, especially in remote and far off areas. "The rations at the CAPD outlets in these areas are either out of stock or of the substandard quality."

The CPI (M) leader urged the government to release the pending wages of casual labourers and contractual employees before Eid festival. He also urged the government to review the cases of prisoners for release on Eid.

KARRA

interactions with the Senior Party leaders in New Delhi including President Sonia Gandhi, and vice President Rahul Gandhi, he has been insisting on such endeavors so that not only the ground situation is understood in a better way but also the people of Jammu and Kashmir are given a sense of belonging.

He said that sending the team to Kashmir was also significant because BJP government has shut the doors for negotiation and has left no room for any kind of outreach therefore Congress endeavor is worth appreciation.

He further said that it is an attempt of 'handholding' from the Congress party and imbuing sense of self confidence in the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Karra added that considering the situation in Kashmir and the absence of any reconciliation on ground, he had suggested, the visits should be scheduled by or before 27th of August prior to the Supreme Court hearing on Article 35-A petition. But the visit has been scheduled in September because the hearing has been deferred in the Supreme Court. He added that Kashmiris have been marginalized with divisive politics of PDP- BJP combine and reaching out to them in the time of distress was indeed a much needed step.

The former Parliamentarian further said that he has been persistently raising the miseries of the people of the state in the party forum at New Delhi and sending the team under the leadership of none less than the two time former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh was not only the acknowledgment of his efforts but also depicts the seriousness and the commitment of the Congress high command in engaging with the people in Kashmir. He added that he has held many rounds of meetings with Dr. Singh and other senior leaders during his recent visits in New Delhi in order to acquaint them about the prevailing situation.

While lauding the efforts of the members of Policy Planning group, Karra said that all these leaders have been working extensively for bringing change in Kashmir situation and the instant was part of that process.

He hoped, the process would continue and the people of state are heard at a time when Government has shut the doors for any kind of outreach.

Cabinet approves equivalence of posts in Central Public Sector

Undertakings (PSUs), Banks, Insurance Institutions with Posts in Government so that the children of those serving in lower categories in PSUs and other institutions can get the benefit of OBC reservations

New Delhi: 30 August: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval to the norms for establishing equivalence of posts in Government and posts in PSUs, PSBs etc. for claiming benefit of OBC reservations. This addresses an issue pending for nearly 24 years. This will ensure that the children of those serving in lower categories in PSUs and other institutions can get the benefit of OBC reservations, on par with children of people serving in lower categories in Government. This will also prevent children of those in senior positions in such institutions, who, owing to absence of equivalence of posts, may have been treated as non Creamy Layer by virtue of wrong interpretation of income standards from cornering government posts reserved for OBCs and denying the genuine non creamy layer candidates a

level playing field.

The Union Cabinet also approved the increase in the present income criterion of Rs. 6 lakh per annum for applying the Creamy Layer restriction throughout the country, for excluding Socially Advanced Persons/Sections (Creamy Layer) from the purview of reservation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The new income criterion will be Rs. 8 lakh per annum. The increase in the income limit to exclude the Creamy Layer is in keeping with the increase in the Consumer Price Index and will enable more persons to take advantage of reservation benefits extended to OBCs in government services and admission to central educational institutions.

These measures are a part of the Government's efforts to ensure greater social justice and inclusion for members of the Other Backward Classes. The

Government has already introduced in Parliament, a bill to provide Constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes. It has also decided to set up a Commission, under section 340 of the Constitution, to sub categorize the OBCs, so that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs. All these decisions, taken together, are expected to ensure greater representation of OBCs in educational institutions and jobs, while also ensuring that the more under-privileged within the category are not denied their chance of social mobility.

Background:

In its judgment dated 16.11.1992 in WP(C) 930/1990 (Indra Sawhney case) the Supreme Court had directed the Government to specify the basis, for

exclusion of socially and economically advanced persons from Other Backward Classes by applying the relevant and requisite socio-economic criteria.

An Expert Committee was constituted in February 1993 which submitted its report on 10.03.1993 specifying the criteria for identification of socially advanced persons among OBCs i.e. the Creamy Layer. The report was accepted by the then Ministry of Welfare and forwarded to DoPT which issued an OM dated 08.09.1993 on exclusion from the Creamy Layer.

The OM of 08.09.1993 specifies six categories for identifying Creamy Layer (a) Constitutional/Statutory post (b) Group 'A' and Group 'B' Officers of Central and State Governments, employees of PSUs and Statutory bodies, universities, (c) Colonel and above in armed forces and equivalent in paramilitary

forces (d) professionals like Doctors, Lawyers, Management Consultants, Engineers etc. (e) Property owners with agricultural holdings or vacant land and/or buildings and (f) income/wealth tax assessee. The OM further stipulates that the said parameters would apply mutatis mutandis to officers holding equivalent or comparable posts in PSUs, Banks, Insurance Organizations, Universities, etc. and Government was required to determine equivalence of positions in these organizations with those in Government.

Pending the equivalence to the established in these institutions Income criteria would apply for the officers in these Institutions.

However, this exercise of determining the equivalence of posts in Government and posts in PSUs, PSBs etc. had not been initiated. The determination

of equivalence of posts has been thus pending for almost 24 years.

The matter of formulating equivalence has since been examined in detail. In PSUs, all Executive level posts i.e. Board level executives and managerial level posts would be treated as equivalent to group 'A' posts in Government and will be considered Creamy Layer. Junior Management Grade Scale-1 and above of Public Sector Banks, Financial Institutions and Public Sector Insurance Corporations will be treated as equivalent to Group 'A' in the Government of India and considered as Creamy Layer. For Clerks and Peons in PSBs, FIs and PSICs, the Income Test as revised from time to time will be applicable. These are the broad guidelines and each individual Bank, PSU, Insurance Company would place the matter before their respective board to identify individual posts.

CPWD goes digital ; all Rs.20,000 cr payments per year now online

New Delhi, 30 August: The Government's construction major, Central Public Works Department (CPWD) has undergone a major digital transformation enabling payments worth Rs.20,000 cr per year electronically. This has been done by networking all the 400 field offices of CPWD across the country through a special integrated portal ensuring digital payments from this month. With this, CPWD has become the first organization of a civil ministry to become digital at the field level.

CPWD executes over 25,000 project works across the country involving annual payments of over

Rs.20,000 cr every year by its 400 field offices including in remote, hilly and North-Eastern parts. The new digital payment mode covers over six lakh transactions. The Office of Chief Controller of Accounts (CCA) of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has evolved this special Public Financial Management (PFMS) Portal for CPWD.

During a demonstration of this online payment system to Shri Duga Shanker Mishra, Secretary (HUA), Shri Shyam Dubey, CCA explained that it enables real time monitoring of expenditure in respect of each of the 25,000 projects across the country. Since fund release is linked to progress

of works, digital payments also ensures efficient utilization of funds, he said.

In yet another initiative, electronic Measurement Book (e-MB) has also been developed for CPWD that enables reporting of progress of works online as per the schedule of agreement with contractors based on which payments will be made. e-MB has been made mandatory from the first of next month doing away with manual reporting by all the 400 field offices.

Shri Durga Shanker Mishra directed CPWD and CCA to further ensure geotagging of physical progress of works for effective monitoring.

PFMS is an end-to-end solution for electronic processing payments, tracking fund flow, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting etc.

PFMS has been adopted by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs since October, 2015 by which the allocation of Rs.34,000 cr has been transferred electronically. With CPWD now going digital, the volume of e-payments of the Ministry and CPWD would be about Rs.60,000 cr during 2017-18.

Since CPWD has a separate scheme of delegation of functions and financial powers, it required a special PFMS e-module for online transactions.

Ministry of Defence approves first phase of reforms in The Armed Forces

New Delhi, 30 August: In a first ever exercise after Independence, the Ministry of Defence in consultation with the Indian Army has decided to reform the Indian Army in a planned manner. These decisions were approved by the Defence Minister Shri Arun Jaitley after an extensive consultation with all stakeholders. The first phase of the reforms involves redeployment and restructuring of approximately 57,000 posts of officers/JCOs/ORs and civilians. Major reforms concerning the following have been approved:

Optimisation of Signals Establishments to include Radio Monitoring Companies, Corps Air Support Signal Regiments, Air Formation

Signal Regiments, Composite Signal Regiments and merger of Corps Operating and Engineering Signal Regiments.

Restructuring of repair echelons in the Army to include Base Workshops, Advance Base Workshops and Static/Station Workshops in the field Army.

Redeployment of Ordnance echelons to include Vehicle Depots, Ordnance Depots and Central Ordnance Depots apart from streamlining inventory control mechanisms.

Better utilization of Supply and Transport echelons and Animal Transport units.

Closure of Military Farms and Army postal establishments in peace locations.

Enhancement in standards for recruitment of clerical staff and drivers in the Army.

Improving the efficiency of the National Cadet Corps.

Implementation has begun with the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security to close 39 military farms in a time bound manner.

The Ministry of Defence had constituted a Committee of Experts under the Chairmanship of Lt Gen (Retd) (Dr) DB Shekatkar with a mandate to recommend measures for enhancing of Combat Capability & Rebalancing Defence Expenditure of the Armed Forces with an aim to increase "teeth to tail ratio".

The Committee of experts had submitted its report to

the Ministry in December, 2016, which was considered by the Ministry of Defence and 99 recommendations were sent to the Armed Forces for making an implementation plan. The Defence Minister Shri Arun Jaitley has approved 65 of these recommendations pertaining to the Indian Army for implementation. These reforms will be completed in all respects by 31 December 2019. Restructuring by the Indian Army is aimed at enhancing Combat Capability in a manner that the officers/JCOs/ORs will be used for improving operational preparedness and civilians will be redeployed in different wings of the Armed Forces for improving efficiency.

Agriculture Ministry is trying to ensure women participation in the mainstream agriculture: Shri Radha Mohan Singh

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister, Shri Radha Mohan Singh said that through its mandate, goals and objectives, the Ministry is trying to ensure that women become part of the mainstream agriculture, reap the benefit of every penny spent on agriculture and contribute to agricultural productivity and production and in doubling the income of their families. Shri Singh said it today at the "Securing Rights of Women Farmers: Developing a Roadmap for Action" event, organized at the Constitution Club, New Delhi, by the National Women Commission in association with UN Women and Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM).



cultural all the more tougher. Having said that, women play multi-dimensional roles in agriculture - from sowing, harvesting, applying fertilisers, irrigation, plant protection to weeding, storing etc - they do it all while shouldering household chores like cooking, storing water, collecting fuel wood, maintaining the house, etc. Shri Singh said that apart from this, women are active in other agriculture related activities like cattle management, fodder collection and allied activities related to dairy and agriculture such as beekeeping, mushroom farming, pig farming, goat rearing, poultry etc. The Ministry's initiatives to bring women into mainstream agriculture.

The following measures have been taken to bring women in the mainstream agricultural sector:

I. Earmarking at least 30% of the budget allocation for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes/programmes and development activities.

II. Initiating women centric activities to ensure benefits of various beneficiary-oriented programs/schemes reach them.

III. Focusing on women self-help group (SHG) to connect them to micro-credit through capacity building activities and to provide information and ensuring their representation in different decision-making bodies.

IV. Last year, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare decided to celebrate 15th October of every year as Women Farmer's Day.

Agriculture Deptt organizes 'New India Manthan: Sankalp-Se-Siddhi Programme'

UDHAMPUR, AUGUST 30: Agriculture Department today organized a programme on "New India Manthan: Sankalp Se Siddhi" at Conference Hall, DC Complex.

MLA Udhampur, Pawan Gupta, MLA Chenani, Dina Nath Bhagat, ADCC, Arvind Sharma, Chief Agricultural Officer, Naresh Kumar Dubey besides various district officers were present on the occasion.

The main objective of holding the programme was to create a New India that would be stronger and more prosperous besides commemorating 75 years of the Quit India Movement.

Speaking on the occasion, the legislators stressed on the importance of the comprehensive strategy adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare in bringing the visionary idea into reality by the year 2022.

They also briefed the stakeholders about various important Government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Food Security Mission and Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana, Gokul mission, etc. which have been launched to improve the economical status of the farmers.

It was informed that the Government is focusing on seven point strategies for making

Sankalp se Siddhi a reality which include focus on irrigation along with adequate resource building, increasing the production through improved seeds, planting materials, organic farming and Soil Health Card, strengthening warehousing and cold chain facilities to curb post-harvest losses, value addition through food processing, overcoming deficiencies in agriculture marketing through e-NAM, Work on institutional loan to reduce risk and growth of agriculture sector and development of allied activities of agriculture like dairy development, poultry, bee-keeping, agro-forestry and integrated farming system.

Chief Agriculture Officer Udhampur, N.K. Dubey, said that crop insurance and diversification of farm enterprises are critical components for securing and enhancing farm income in rural areas. Stressing on the need for equipping farmers with good quality seeds, organic fertilizers and irrigation facilities to increase their income, the CAO said that a target oriented strategy needs to be planned at Panchayat level. He further advised the farmers to avail full benefit of these programmes and asked them to adopt new agricultural practices.

At the end, all the participants including the farmers took a pledge (Sankalp) to build a new and stronger India by 2022 (Siddhi).

Cabinet approves promulgation of the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Ordinance, 2017

New Delhi August 30: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval to the proposal of the Finance Ministry to promulgate an ordinance to suitably amend the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Act, 2017. The approval would allow to increase the maximum rate at which the Compensation Cess can be levied from 15% to 25% on:

a) motor vehicles for transport of not more than thirteen persons, including the driver [falling under sub-headings 870210, 870220, 870230 or 870290]; and

b) motor vehicles falling under headings 8703.

The GST Council, in its meeting held in August 2017, taking into consideration the fact that post introduction of GST, the total incidence on motor vehicles [GST+ Com-

pensation Cess] has come down vis-a-vis pre-GST total tax, incidence, and had recommended increase in the maximum rate at which Compensation Cess can be levied on motor vehicles falling under headings 8702 and 8703 from 15% to 25%.

The issue regarding the increase in effective rate of Compensation Cess on motor vehicles will be examined by the GST Council in due course.

Cabinet apprised of jointly issue of postage stamps between India and Canada

New Delhi, 30 August: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi was informed today that India and Canada have mutually agreed to jointly issue a set of two Commemorative Postage Stamps on India-Canada: Joint Issue on the theme "Diwali". The joint stamps will be released on 21st September, 2017. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has already been signed between Department of Posts and Canada Post for this joint issue.

India and Canada have a longstanding close relationship, based on shared values of democracy, pluralism, equality for all and rule of law. Strong people-to-people contacts and the presence of a large Indian Diaspora in Canada provide a strong foundation for the relationship.

In this joint issue, the theme "Diwali" has been selected as it is a cultural theme for both the countries and also considering the large presence of Indian Diaspora in Canada.

Cabinet approves MoU on "India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund"

New Delhi August 30: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Israel on "India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)". The MoU was concluded in July, 2017

India and Israel will make a contribution of four million US Dollars each for the Fund, both equivalent amount, annually for five years. The Innovation Fund will be governed by a joint Board which will consist of four members from each country.

The MoU envisages promotion of bilateral Industrial R&D and Innovation cooperation in the fields of science and technology by extending support to joint projects for innovative or technology-driven new or improved products, services or processes. Such projects will lead to affordable technological innovations in focus areas of mutual interest such as water, agriculture, energy and digital technologies. Institutional support in building up consortia including private industry, enterprises and R&D institutions from India and Israel will be enabled through these collaborative projects.

The activities supported by the Joint Fund would increase the techno-economic collaboration between the two countries by investing in jointly developed technology projects and collaborations based on technological innovation. It would leverage the complementary strengths of Israel.

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A HALF-DONE REFORM

The government has informed Parliament about its decision to completely do away with the subsidy offered to cooking gas used for household purposes. In an order issued in May this year, public sector oil companies were authorised to incrementally hike the "effective price" of LPG cylinders until the entire subsidy is wiped off by March next year, the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan, told Parliament. Interestingly, political pressure from Opposition parties following the announcement forced the Minister a day later to argue that the government is merely "rationalising", rather than cutting, the subsidy. But the initial announcement left very little to interpretation. Previously, in July last year, the oil companies were given the green signal to increase the effective price of subsidised cylinders by ₹2 a month. So the latest order to increase the effective price by ₹4 a month, but with the clearly stated aim of eventually doing away with subsidies completely, signifies a more aggressive pursuit of the policy of cutting the fuel subsidy. It should be noted that the fall in global crude oil prices, which has reduced the price difference between subsidised and non-subsidised cooking gas in the local market, has already eased the burden on the government. In the latest Union budget, the government allocated about ₹25,000 crore towards oil subsidy, which is a fourth of the total oil subsidy bill (of almost ₹1 lakh crore) incurred in fiscal year 2013.

The cut in subsidy would further strengthen fiscal discipline. The implementation of the direct transfer of cash benefits in the last few years has already helped in the better targeting of subsidies to the poor, thus substantially reducing wasteful spending. The fall in oil prices over the same period may have led the government to believe that this may be the right time to withdraw the cooking gas subsidy without causing too much pain to consumers. It is estimated that about 18 crore people, many of them below the poverty line, depend on subsidised gas cylinders. It would therefore be difficult to argue that a complete abolition of subsidy will not adversely affect them. In fact, it will not be surprising if the government steps in to foot the bill if oil prices rise in the future, as it probably should to ease the pain. Much depends on how the government makes use of the current spell of relatively low oil prices. The foremost aim should be to sustainably lower the price of cooking gas once and for all, getting the government out of the business of managing subsidies. In the long run, this is the only way to ease the burden on consumers and also free the budget from the pressure of international oil prices. Deregulating the market for cooking gas, thus opening it up to more widespread market competition, would also help.

AGE AND MARRIAGE

In the past few months, Kerala has been witness to a persistent controversy over moves, allegedly with the silent support of the Muslim League, a prominent partner in the Congress-led coalition government, to challenge the provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, especially in the grey area where they come into conflict with Muslim personal law. While the Act of 2006 lays down the minimum age for marriage of all Indian citizens as 21 for men and 18 for women, Muslim personal law, it is argued, allows the "age of puberty" to be considered as the age of marriage.

The demand is to let Muslims follow their personal law in this matter, to lower the age of marriage, especially of Muslim women—a claim that goes against the grain of the long resistance in India to end the scourge of child marriage.

The controversial claim is being raised in a State with a large and progressive Muslim population that has grown used to enjoying the benefits of educating the girl child and delaying the age of marriage—and at a time when doubts have been raised again about the commitment of the Central government itself to end the problem of child marriage.

Despite being a country with one of the largest number of child brides, India recently refused to co-sponsor—and abstained from voting in—the first-ever global resolution for elimination and prevention of forced child marriages at the United Nations General Assembly.

The chronology of the recent events in Kerala is instructive:

On June 14, the State Local Administration Department headed by a Muslim League Minister issued a circular to all civic bodies in Kerala allowing, in the case of Muslims, the registration of marriages in which the groom was not yet 21 and the bride was not yet 18 (but above 16) at the time of the marriage if it took place with the consent of parents and was supported by a certificate from the religious authority concerned.

The circular claimed, strangely, that such marriages had legal validity as the "Muslim Marriage Act of 1957" (a non-existent law) does not insist on the minimum age of 21 and 18 for men and women respectively, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, does not say that the marriage between a man below 21 and a woman below 18 "is void". (However, it did not mention that the 2006 law does say: "Every child marriage, whether solemnised before or after the commencement of this Act, shall be voidable at the option of the contracting party (bride or groom) who was a child at the time of the marriage.")

It was further explained that the circular was issued because the officials in several local bodies were refusing to follow a similar direction sent earlier in response to a clarification sought on the matter by the Director of the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), an autonomous training and research institution for local bodies under the government. Moreover, it was said, there were several complaints from among Muslim community members that requests for registration of marriages already solemnised were being denied because the bride had not turned 18 as specified in the Act of 2006.



However, following the hue and cry that the circular raised and allegations that it was meant to reduce the marriage age of girls to 16 by circumventing secular laws of the country, the department issued a second circular which said that the marriages of Muslim men below 21 and Muslim women below 18 (but above 16) that took place until June 27, 2013—the day the circular was issued—alone could be registered.

It was explained that the government decided to have a relook at the original circular as it felt that its true intent had been "misunderstood", some "factual errors" had crept into it and that, anyhow, it was not meant to dilute the provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. Instead, it was argued, such a direction became necessary because many Muslim couples who had been married and had been living together (and their children) were facing genuine difficulties (for example, in getting passports and other documents for migration to foreign countries for work) as they could not get their status registered legally.

Moreover, it was also clarified that the decision was based on (i) the 2006 order of the Supreme Court in the Seema vs Ashwini Kumar case (which said that "though the registration itself cannot be proof of valid marriage per se, and would not be the determinative factor regarding validity of a marriage, yet it had great evidentiary value in the matters of custody of children, right of children born from the wedlock of two persons registered and the age of parties to the marriage") and, (ii) some recent orders of the Kerala High Court that said marriages between couples who were below the legal minimum age could also be registered based on the particular circumstances of each case.

Even as questions were being raised about the propriety of a government department trying to introduce such a change through a circular without the approval of the State Assembly, there was a sudden uproar against, in what eventually turned out to be a rather typical case, especially in Muslim-dominated districts of Kerala, the dangers involved in giving any kind of loophole or sanction for child marriages under whatever pretext.

It turned out that a 17-year-old girl, brought up in an orphanage in Malappuram district, had been married off to a citizen of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on June 13. However, after spending several days in various locations in the country with the

girl, the man deserted her and fled to the UAE, and the girl and her wardens found themselves in a predicament all too familiar in north Kerala (and widely known as "Arabikkalyanam" or "Mysore Kalyanam", depending on whether the "groom", in most cases, men much older than the child bride, was from "Arabia" or parts of Karnataka).

As per the 2006 law prohibiting child marriage, whoever performs, conducts, directs or abets any child marriage shall be punishable under the Act. A police action against the victim's parents and orphanage authorities, inspection of records at the orphanage, therefore, added to the confusion.

Subsequently, on September 22, nine Muslim organisations led by the Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama met at Kozhikode and decided to move the Supreme Court seeking "constitutional protection for the Muslim community in matters involving their personal law, including the age of marriage", and a solution to the problems faced by girls (and their families) who had to be married before the age of 18 "under the force of certain circumstances".

The meeting also reportedly came to the "unanimous conclusion" that "since Muslim personal law has not prescribed an age for marriage, the laws implemented in India that are in conflict with it are an infringement on the fundamental right to religion of Muslims".

Besides the representatives of the Ulama, those of the Muslim League (including a prominent MLA and a spokesperson of the party), and orthodox organisations such as the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, factions of the Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen, the South Kerala Jamiat Ulema and the Kerala Jamiat Ulema took part in the convention.

A few organisations that participated in the convention later reportedly distanced themselves from the move. Muslim League leaders, E.T. Mohammed Basheer (national general secretary) and P.K. Kunhalikutty (Industries Minister), however, claimed that the members of the League "did not participate in the meeting as party representatives" and that the decisions taken at the meeting, including the one on the age of marriage of Muslim girls, were those "concerning religion taken by religious organisations". "As a political party the Muslim League is not responding to the decision of the religious organisations," Kunhalikutty said.

The Muslim League sought to take

cover under such a non-committal position on an important issue affecting the community, even as its prominent members were leading the demand for reducing the age of marriage of girls and right when women's groups and progressive organisations in Kerala were debating the need for increasing the age of marriage of girls further from the legally approved 18 years.

Even though the Local Administration Department was forced to withdraw the controversial first circular following the intervention of Muslim women's organisations, several progressive groups, including those from within the community and a large section of the media, the Muslim League's silent but total support to the subsequent move by religious organisations to approach the Supreme Court is a revealing indication of the dominant thinking within the second biggest party in the State's coalition government.

Naturally, it has led to the allegation that such a sudden demand on a rather familiar, controversial issue (already conveniently described as "the second Shariat struggle") is a part of a carefully crafted move for pre-election communal consolidation launched by the Muslim League. The League would benefit a lot from a consolidation of Muslim votes in Kerala in what is surely going to be a very difficult and crucial election for the ruling coalition United Democratic Front led by the Congress.

The controversy needs to be seen in a larger context. Even eight decades after the first law against it was introduced in India, child marriage is still widely prevalent in many States. According to a 2009 study based on data from the National Family Health Survey III, for example, 44.5 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married off before they attained the legal minimum age of 18, 22.6 per cent before they turned 16, and 2.6 per cent before they were 13.

Comprehensive and reliable figures on the actual number of child marriages taking place in Kerala are not available. But newspaper reports, police cases, some local studies, and applications submitted for registration of some such marriages indicate that the practice is still common in the State, though not to the extent it was in the past.

They indicate that though a majority of child marriages in Kerala, perhaps, take place within the Muslim community, it is not confined to any one community; a number of such marriages, which take place with the consent of parents, are kept a secret until the girl attains the age of 18; at least in some cases, forced marriages of girls with much older men continue to take place with parental approval; and, as in the rest of the country, child marriage is a practice that still has both social and religious sanction and is often justified.

Prominent among the arguments put forth in Kerala in the wake of the controversy are: child marriage guarantees the girl's economic, social and personal safety when parents are unable to provide it; it reduces the heavy burden of dowry otherwise, which forces parents to marry off their daughters early; it protects girls against sexual violence; and it lessens the fear of "love marriages" and "sexual promiscuity" and consequent social and religious dishonour.

UP FOR GRABS

IN September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the "Make in India" campaign and set in motion several changes in government policy at the Centre and in States aiming to increase the ease of doing business. As part of this effort, the Department of Industrial Policy and Planning (DIPP) began formulating pointwise action plans with specific deadlines given to States and Union government departments to implement administrative measures to improve the business environment.

The first such plan was a 98-point action plan prepared for States by the DIPP at a workshop organised in December 2014. Among the recommendations concerning land given in this action plan document is the following: "Develop land bank for ready availability of land for industry." The DIPP asked all States to get this land bank ready by June 2015. In the last week of December, Raghubar Das took over as Chief Minister of Jharkhand, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the All Jharkhand Students' Union forming a coalition government.

For most of 2015, despite the deadline, the State was unable to set up an

online land bank. An assessment of the State's record in implementing business reforms prepared by the DIPP in September 2015 stated that availability of land for investors was an area that Jharkhand needed to improve upon.

The same month, another action plan, this time a 340-point "Business Reform Action Plan", was prepared by the DIPP. It asked the States to implement four things to ensure land availability for private investors: a) make information on land banks for industrial use available online, b) earmark industrial land parcels with specific criteria (such as type of industries, pollution levels, and so on) for industries that can be set up on such land, c) design and implement a geographic information system (GIS) providing details about the land earmarked for industrial use, and d) ensure that the GIS provides details about available infrastructure such as roads and sources of water.

The pressure from the Centre worked. On January 5, 2016, the Chief Minister announced the setting up of an online and real-time land bank for investors. "Make available land for companies who have been awarded coal blocks from the land bank and also earmark land for

food-processing parks soon" was the initial direction of the Chief Minister to his officials. One of those officials, Revenue Secretary K.K. Son, shared the following details about the land bank: "In the State, there are 21,01,471.99 acres of land available. This includes Gairmajra Khas, Gairmajra Aam, Gairmajra Jungal-Jhari and lands utilised by government departments. For the convenience of investors, land availability has been divided into multiple categories: 1 to 50 acres; 50 to 100 acres; and there are multiple links for 100 and above acres."

To an outsider unfamiliar with the complexities of land issues in Jharkhand, the sheer variety of types of land available in the State in terms of size and official description might appear impressive and full of possibilities for business. Indeed, the State government's publicity machinery and the Centre's eagerness to do away with processes of land acquisition or introduce new ones give that kind of an impression. But a close scrutiny reveals that the government's decision to offer Gairmajra, or GM lands, as they are alternatively called in official records, in the land bank for investors to consider setting up projects may have

put many vulnerable individuals and community land owners at risk of forced displacement. Gairmajra lands are peculiar to this part of the country, especially Jharkhand. According to a State government-sponsored study of land governance in the State prepared in October 2014 by the Ranchi-based National Institute of Study and Research in Law, the state of Gairmajra lands in Jharkhand is poor. It observes:

"[Gairmajra Aam lands are] under the control of State government on which every common people [sic] has rights. However, in reality much of the pieces of this land have been encroached upon by influential persons. So the entries in land records may not reflect the actual status of possession." The observation on Gairmajra Khas lands was: "Earlier Gairmajra Khas Land was recorded in the name of local zamindar [landlord] and zamindar had the power to settle individuals on these lands through registered deeds and in many cases through sadda hukumnama [unregistered deeds]. After abolition of zamindari, these lands are vested in State government and this type of land can be settled with raiyats, that is, individual settlers, through lease or regular settlement or

patta to persons belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward classes. In the government record lakhs of acres of Gairmajra Khas land are available but in reality Gairmajra Khas have been distributed by the previous landlords (zamindars)."

When a senior official from Jharkhand's Revenue and Land Reforms Department was asked about the vulnerability of owners of Gairmajra lands on account of this decision about the land bank, he said: "Only land belonging to the government was put up for the consideration of investors and no private land owners are affected." A cursory glance at the land bank shows that land offered to investors is of the four types mentioned by the Revenue Secretary during the launch of the online portal. Two of these are Gairmajra-type lands. In Godda district, activists claim many small landowners from the oppressed castes, who have been paying taxes for decades and using Gairmajra lands, have received notices of eviction.

Independent observers warn that the manner in which the land bank has been created in Jharkhand is creating fresh problems of forcible displacement. Dr Prabhat Singh, an associate professor

in the Anthropology Department of Ranchi University, told Frontline: "The government is showing raiyati land as Gairmajra land. This is unjust towards the raiyats who have been paying taxes to the government on the lands they have been using for decades. They are not encroachers. Setting up a new project only means displacing the existing landowner from the Gairmajra land despite his livelihood being dependent, in a large number of cases, upon it."

Prabhat Singh also found problematic the identification of Gairmajra Aam land as government land up for grabs in the land bank for private investors: "All common lands belong to the community, not the government. Including such land in the land bank for industry means giving away lakes, grazing lands for animals, temples and similar public places to private companies."

Meanwhile, the campaign to realise the investment potential of private capital goes on relentlessly. After the State's maiden "Global Investment Summit", Raghubar Das announced that his government was "committed to implementing 172 out of 201 MoUs signed with investors on the ground in the next one year".

Deadline for linking Aadhaar to welfare schemes extended to Dec. 31, Centre tells SC

NEW DELHI: The Union government on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that the deadline for the mandatory linking of Aadhaar to social welfare schemes for availing their benefits has been extended from September 30 to December 31, 2017.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal submitted before a Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra about the extension in deadline during an urgent mentioning in the court by petitioners who have challenged the validity of the Aadhaar scheme and the Aadhaar Act of 2016.

The petitioners, represented by senior advocate Shyam Divan, wanted an early hearing on the ground that the last date for link-

ing the Aadhaar cards of beneficiaries to these welfare schemes fell on September 30.

Privacy is a fundamental right | Verdict on Right to Privacy | How privacy stacks up | Major arguments in the right to privacy case | The importance of constantly seeking freedom

A series of notifications issued by various central ministries under Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act of 2016 required beneficiaries to enroll for Aadhaar to continue getting the benefits.

On hearing Mr. Venugopal's submission, the Bench posted the Aadhaar petitions for hearing to November first week.

Mr. Divan then drew the court's attention to the concluding para-

graph in Justice Rohinton Nari-man's privacy judgment. This paragraph directed the Aadhaar petitions to be posted for hearing before the "original" three-judge Bench. The task before the sentinel: privacy challenges to Aadhaar

This Bench, led by Justice J. Chelameswar, had referred the petitions for hearing before a five-judge Bench, keeping in mind the pertinent legal question — whether privacy is a fundamental right or not — that had to be answered first. The five-judge Bench had referred the legal question to a nine-judge Bench to numerically overcome the MP Sharma and Kharak Singh judgments, which had declared that privacy was not a fundamental right.



Last week, the nine-judge Bench, led by then CJI J.S. Khehar unanimously upheld privacy to be a fundamental right intrinsic to life and personal liberty.

The verdict in favour of the common man's right to privacy against the State has a crucial bearing on the Aadhaar petitions, which had argued that Aadhaar's

use of biometric details such as fingerprints and iris scans violated bodily and informational privacy. The petitioners, including Magsaysay award-winner Shanta Sinha, have challenged the validity of more than 17 government schemes requiring an Aadhaar ID for availing benefits such as mid-day meals, disability pension, rehabilitation for Bhopal gas tragedy victims, among other programmes. The petitions argued that mandatory requirement of Aadhaar for these schemes "constrict rights and freedoms which a citizen has long been enjoying unless and until they part with their personal biometric information to the government".

The petitions termed the Aad-

haar Act of 2016 as unconstitutional. The Act was contrary to the concept of limited and accountable government, it contended.

"Collection of biometric data, including fingerprints, and [their] storage at a central repository [...] puts the State in an extremely dominant position in relation to the individual citizen," the petitions said. "Going by the stand of the UIDAI itself, the number of cases where de-duplication resulted in the rejection of an application for an Aadhaar number is to the tune of nine crore out of around 100 crore enrolments. The number 9 crore is just a little less than the population of Bihar and twice the population of Odisha as per the 2011 census."

Centre moves SC seeking transfer of pleas against RERA to Delhi HC

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear the Centre's petition seeking transfer of various pleas, which are challenging validity of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) and are pending in different high courts, to the Delhi High Court.

The government mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra and said that 21 petitions challenging the validity of the Act are pending in various high courts across the country.

The Centre told the bench, also comprising Justices Amitava Roy and A.M. Khanwilkar, that these petitions pending before different high courts should be transferred to the Delhi High Court for adjudication of these matters. The bench agreed to hear the Centre's plea and fixed it for hearing on September 4. The central Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) came into effect on May 1, 2017, a year after it was passed by Parliament as per the Act, developers, projects and agents had till July 31 to mandatorily register their projects with the Real Estate Regulatory Authority. Any unregistered project would be deemed to be unauthorised by the regulator.

Under RERA each state and UT will have its own Regulatory Authority (RA) which will frame regulations and rules as per the Act.

RERA covers both new project launches and on-going projects where the completion/occupation certificate has not been received.

RERA makes it obligatory on the part of the builders not to book, sell or offer for sale, or invite persons to purchase any plot, apartment of building, as the case may be, in any real estate project without registering the real estate project with the authority.

Why migrant labourers loved to work in the Dera

SIRSA: Walking towards the police check point near Gate number 10 of the Dera Sacha Sauda on Tuesday were not just followers of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh but migrant labourers who had been working inside the Dera premises for years.

They had lockets with pictures of all the three Dera chiefs — Shah Mastana, Satnam Singh and Gurmeet Ram Rahim — tucked inside their bags, for fear of being mistaken for 'premis', as Mr Singh's acolytes are known. The labourers got their luggage checked by government officials and iterated their names and addresses for record.

Mahesh Harijan, 30, worked as a mason inside the Dera. He had joined a year ago with two of his friends while his family stayed back in his village in Bihar. "Someone who used to follow the Satguru told me that I could work here. Life inside the Dera was stable, unlike what it is for a labourer outside," he said.

He is among the 2,000-odd

labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana who associated themselves with the Dera for a better life, Mr Harijan said.

Explaining why they chose the Dera despite a smaller wage of Rs300 a day as opposed to Rs500-700 outside, Sunil Kumar, 28, who hails from UP and joined the Dera three years ago told The Hindu, "We get Rs9,000 on the 6th or 7th of the month without fail. For a labourer, nothing is more important than receiving his wages on time." He added that his previous employer in Lucknow never paid him on time or gave him his full dues.

Life inside the Dera was bliss, claimed Krishan Kumar and Ramvir Paswan, both from Bihar's Samastipur village. "We stayed there for free. The meals were free. Our lunch and dinner were delivered to our workplaces by premis," said Mr Krishan. Those with families were given one-bedroom accommodation on a rent of Rs1,500 for a month. "That



was all they had to pay; no water, electricity or other bills," he said.

In return for all the perks reportedly given by the Dera, the workers were only expected to perform 'sewa' (service) for one day in addition to their daily work. "It means we had to work for a day for free," said Mr Paswan.

Mr Kumar said that if a labourer fell ill or got injured, he was properly attended to by the administration inside. "We were fully taken care of. Even if we missed a day's work, our salaries

were not cut and we were paid in full. If a person is unable to bathe by himself due to an injury, the premis would help him," he claimed, adding that an ethos of equality was one of the major reasons for their belief in 'satguru'. As they walked towards the Dera's exit, they requested the officers near the gate to inform all the other labourers inside that they need not be afraid to come out. "There was an announcement at 7 am asking people not come out on the roads, and that they

would be shot if they did," said Mr Paswan. Haryana government's Deputy Director (Information and Public Relations Department) Satish Mehra denied that there was any such announcement. 13 FIRs registered, 47 arrested. Meanwhile, a total of 13 FIRs have been registered and 47 people arrested so far in connection with the violence that broke out in Sirsa after the Dera chief was convicted on rape charges on August 25.

"Several people were booked for arson, rioting, illegal assembly, attempt to murder, and obstructing officers discharging their duty. Of them, 47 have been arrested," said Superintendent of Police Ashwin Shenvi.

The police said that the accused were arrested from various places in Sirsa after they were identified. "Most of them were apprehended from the spot. Some were identified later with the help of witnesses," said Mr Shenvi. Why migrant labourers loved to work in the Dera

Himachal CM Virbhadr Singh under fire after IG Zaidi's arrest in Kotkhai rape case

SHIMLA: The arrest of Inspector General of Police Zahur Zaidi and seven other policemen for the custodial death of a man accused of being involved in the rape and murder of a schoolgirl in Kotkhai has stirred a political storm in the poll-bound state with opposition parties hitting government gunning for Chief Minister Virbhadr Singh.

A day after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested the cops for the custodial death of Suraj, political parties in the hill state charged chief minister Virbhadr Singh, himself an accused in a disproportionate assets case, and his government with shielding anti-social elements.

Both the right-wing and left-wing parties attacked Virbhadr for indulging in corruption and shielding anti-social elements. State BJP chief Satpal Singh Satti urged the Centre

to sack the Virbhadr government. "We have been suspicious about the shoddy probe. The CBI has shown how the government bent backwards to shield the real culprit," said Satti. He reminded that the chief minister holds the home portfolio and should take responsibility for the botched-up investigation. The BJP has been running a statewide 'Mafia hatoo, pradesh bachao' (Oust mafia, save Himachal) campaign against the ruling party for the last three months now. The party has staged more than 100 rallies at the district as well as block headquarters accusing the CM of patronising criminals.

The saffron party, which has 29 seats in the 68-member house, is making a concerted bid to regain power in the hill state. The six-time CM Virbhadr Singh, meanwhile, is embroiled in a disproportionate assets case besides facing factionalism

within his own party. Sources say he is now putting pressure on the Congress high command to give him a free hand in the assembly polls. He is also demanding the removal of Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee chief Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, considered close to AICC vice-president Rahul Gandhi ahead of assembly polls. Singh, insiders say, has told the high command that it was difficult to lead the party under 'present circumstances'.

Meanwhile, Communist Party of India (Marxist) has accused the ruling party of sheltering criminals involved in this crime. Former MLA and CPM leader Rakesh Singha alleged that anti-social elements have penetrated the political hierarchy in the state. He also blamed the government for the shoddy probe into the Gudiya rape case. "The arrest of such a senior police officer demonstrates

that those responsible for protecting the Constitution committed a crime," he said. "Organs of the state -- civil as well as police administration -- are being politicised and protection is being given to anti-social elements," he said. "The CM has time and again commended the role of cops posted in the Kotkhai police station," he said. "Such a statement is only given under two circumstances, either he is immature or guilty," Singha alleged, adding, "It seems the CM is trying to cover up his guilt, that is why he posted the pictures of some youth on his FB account." Meanwhile, the Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU) staged a protest outside the police headquarters in Shimla today. Left unions have been asking the government to sack the Director General of Police (DGP). The botched-up police probe led to CBI investigations into the Kotkhai rape case.

Priyanka Gandhi discharged from Ganga Ram Hospital

NEW DELHI: A week after she was admitted to a city hospital with dengue fever, Congress President Sonia Gandhi's daughter, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, was discharged on Wednesday. Vadra was diagnosed with dengue — a mosquito-borne viral infection — and was being treated at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi. "Mrs Priyanka Vadra was discharged from SGRH on August 30 at 4pm, after recovery from dengue," confirmed Dr DS Rana, chairman, board of management at the hospital. "She has been advised rest at home and to avoid physical exertion."

Vadra was admitted to the hospital on August 23 and her treatment was being monitored by chest medicine consultant Dr Arup Basu, who is the Congress president's family physician, and also by specialists from the hospital's medicine department.

"Priyanka Vadra developed fever and then tested positive for dengue. She was brought to the hospital on the evening of August 23," said Dr Rana. Dengue is a viral infection spread by the bite of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito. The symptoms appear in five to six days after



being bitten by the mosquito and include high fever (less than 103 degrees Fahrenheit), severe headache, pain behind the eyes, joint and muscle pain, nausea and vomiting, rashes, abdominal cramps and in some cases, bleeding from the gums, nose or ears.

Patients are prescribed paracetamol for fever and pain and are asked to drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. Most recover in a week to 10 days.

Authorities have confirmed 945 cases of dengue, of which 435 patients are from Delhi and 510 are from the neighbouring states who are being treated in the national capital.

2 killed, 25 injured in bus accident in Dalhousie



DHARAMSHALA: At least two persons were killed and 25 others injured when a Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC) bus they were travelling in overturned and

Bhawarna, Kangra. The injured have been rushed to nearby hospitals in Kakira and Dalhousie.

Police have registered a case of rash and negligent driving and investigation are on.

Seven to eight eastern states holding back India's development: NITI Aayog CEO

NEW DELHI: Seven to eight states in eastern India are responsible for "holding back" the nation and there is a need to name and shame them, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said on Wednesday.

Kant said analysis showed that there are close to 200 districts where there was a failure in terms of education, health and nutrition.

"When we break them down, the southern and western parts of India do reasonably well, but it's the eastern part which is totally in the red," the NITI Aayog CEO said at the Impact Conclave here.

"So failure of India is accounted for by these states. Until you radi-

cally reform them and the 200 odd districts, it will be very difficult for India to grow," he added. Without naming the states, Kant said there had been a huge failure of governance in these places. Unless they were transformed, India would "fail Sustainable Development Goals as we miserably failed Millennium Development Goals." "We need to create a baseline survey and monitor these states and districts on a regular basis and put it all in the public domain. We need to name and shame these states and districts. We must bring it out that these are the states which are holding India back," he said.

Kant was speaking at a two-day conclave that focuses on "Transformation after two years of Sustainable Development Goals". He said that with 33 per cent of stunted children in the world coming from India, there seemed to be something "seriously wrong with governance". "It is not about financial resources. There are schemes for women and child development, Health Department, anganwadis and Asha workers. All these schemes have been running for around 45 years and the leakage levels are so enormous that something seems to be wrong with the governance," he added. Kant said Indians like to work in silos unlike the Jap-

anese "who work as a team". "It's not possible to achieve nutrition goals unless Women and Child Welfare Department, Education, Health and Sanitation Departments work together." But at district levels, they are not speaking to each other. So you need a very high level of convergence at the field level," he said.

Kant added that even at district level, naming and shaming was the key to force improvement at the ground level. "We must monitor and rank everything and put them out in the public domain. We should rank district hospitals and put them out. People must know why a district hospital is performing badly."

Fat shaming by doctors may harm physical, mental health of patients



Discrimination at the doctor's office based on the size and negative stereotypes of overweight people can take a toll on a patient's physical health and mental well-being, a study has found. "Disrespectful treatment and medical fat shaming, in an attempt to motivate people to change their behaviour, is stressful and can cause patients to delay health care seeking or avoid interacting with providers," said Joan Chrisler, a professor of psychology at Connecticut College in the US. Sizeism can also have an effect on how doctors medically treat patients, as overweight people are often excluded from medical research based on assumptions about their health status, meaning the standard dosage for drugs may not be appropriate for larger body sizes, Chrisler said. Studies have shown frequent under-dosing of overweight patients who were prescribed antibiotics and chemotherapy, she added. "Recommending different treatments for patients with the same condition based on their weight is unethical and a form of malpractice," Chrisler said. "Research has shown that doctors repeatedly advise weight loss for fat patients while recommending CAT scans, blood work or physical therapy for other, average weight patients," she said. In some cases, providers might not take fat patients' complaints seriously or might assume that their weight is the cause of any symptoms they experience, Chrisler added. "Thus, they could jump to conclusions or fail to run appropriate tests, which results in misdiagnosis," she said. In one study of over 300 autopsy reports, obese patients were 1.65 times more likely than others to have significant undiagnosed medical conditions (eg endocarditis, ischemic bowel disease or lung carcinoma), indicating misdiagnosis or inadequate access to health care.

Studies show that negative attitudes among medical providers can also cause psychological stress in patients, Chrisler said.

"Implicit attitudes might be experienced by patients as microaggressions - for example, a provider's apparent reluctance to touch a fat patient, or a headshake, wince or 'tsk' while noting the patient's weight in the chart," she said. "Microaggressions are stressful over time and can contribute to the felt experience of stigmatisation," she added.

Chrisler argued that there is no research that has shown exactly how much weight is too much. Other predictors of illness, such as genetics, diet, stress and poverty, also play a role, yet being fat often leads to the assumption that a person is unhealthy, she said. Fat shaming on social media has become prevalent and weight is the most common reason children are bullied in school with 85% of surveyed adolescents reportedly seeing overweight classmates teased in gym class, researchers said. "Stigmatisation of obese individuals poses serious risks to their psychological health," they said. "Research demonstrates that weight stigma leads to psychological stress, which can lead to poor physical and psychological health outcomes for obese people," they added.

Media 'unrealistically' portrays the glamour of pregnancy, puts women at risk

To a large extent, media 'unrealistically' portrays the glamour of pregnancy, according to a recent study. 46% of women, who participated in the study, reported that exposure to unrealistic images and messages fostered a host of negative emotions, such as self-consciousness about their bodies and feelings of depression, frustration and hopelessness when they're unable to lose weight as rapidly after childbirth as celebrities purportedly do. Images celebrating celebrities' lightning-fast weight loss after giving birth and the media's overall focus on women's bodies during and after pregnancy can be detrimental to other women and their infants, according to lead author Toni Liechty at the University of Illinois. During the perinatal period, the time frame shortly before and after giving birth, women are particularly concerned about their appearance and vulnerable to poor body image, Liechty said. Liechty and her co-authors interviewed 50 women about the media's representations of pregnant and postpartum women and the impact these images and messages have on women's feelings about their bodies. Most of the participants, who were 20 or more weeks pregnant or up to nine months postpartum, viewed



media portrayals of pregnant and postpartum women as idealistic and far removed from most women's actual experiences - especially photos of celebrities flaunting their figures in bikinis within weeks of childbirth, their well-toned bodies lacking the sagging skin and stretch marks that pregnancy often leaves in its wake.

"Participants felt that media portrayals of women 'losing all their baby weight' in a short time frame set unrealistic expectations and did not account for the realities of giving birth, such as hormones, physical healing and the stress of caring for a baby," Liechty said.

Social media were perceived "as

having a unique influence because (these messages were) viewed as coming from 'real people,' including friends and family," Liechty said. Some women found social media refreshing because they provided opportunities for sharing information and honest, supportive communication with other "real" women, in addition to

providing a broader array of content than other media. However, online media also jeopardized some women's feelings about their bodies. Some women felt judged by other users' remarks, even when they didn't interact with those people directly, and the selfies that peers exchanged online fostered feelings of competition and even guilt when participants failed to live up to the ideals or standards set by others. Regardless of the medium, women in the study appreciated images and stories that portrayed pregnancy and postpartum authentically and in relatable ways. Regardless of the medium, participants cautioned that it was important to be a selective consumer, Liechty said.

"These participants felt that they had benefited from being intentional consumers of media - seeking out positive messages and avoiding negative ones." Women who were critical consumers of media, had emotionally supportive spouses or were aware that various body types respond differently during pregnancy and postpartum were more likely to maintain healthy body images, regardless of the media messages they were exposed to, the researchers found. The study appears in journal Health Communication.

No child's play: 20-month-old infants can understand difference between two languages



Are two languages at a time too much for the infant mind? According to a recent study, babies as young as 20 months can understand a lot more than you'd think. In a new study, a team of researchers, including those from Princeton University, reported that bilingual infants as young as 20 months of age efficiently and accurately process two languages.

The study found that infants can differentiate between words in different languages. "By 20 months, bilingual babies already know something about the differences between words in their two languages," said co-author Casey Lew-Williams. "They do not think that 'dog' and 'chien' [French] are just two versions of the same thing. They implicitly know that these words belong to different languages," Lew-Williams added.

To determine infants' ability to monitor and control language, the researchers showed 24 French-English bilingual infants and 24 adults in Montreal pairs of photographs of familiar objects. Participants heard simple sentences in either a single language ("Look!

Find the dog!") or a mix of two languages ("Look! Find the chien!"). In another experiment, they heard a language switch that crossed sentences ("That one looks fun! Le chien!"). These types of language switches, called code switches, are regularly heard by children in bilingual communities. The researchers then used eye-tracking measures, such as how long an infant's or an adult's eyes remained fixed to a photograph after hearing a sentence, and pupil dilation. Pupil diameter is an involuntary response to how hard the brain is "working" and is used as an indirect measure of cognitive effort. The researchers tested bilingual adults as a control group and used the same photographs and eye-tracking procedure as tested on bilingual infants to examine whether these language control mechanisms were the same across a bilingual speaker's life. Lew-Williams suggested that this study not only confirms that bilingual infants monitor and control their languages while listening to the simplest of sentences, but also provides a likely explanation of why bilinguals show cognitive advantages across the lifespan. Children and adults who have dual-language proficiency have been observed to perform better in "tasks that require switching or the inhibiting of a previously learned response," Lew-Williams said. "Researchers used to think this 'bilingual advantage' was from bilinguals' practice dealing with their two languages while speaking. We believe that everyday listening experience in infancy, this back-and-forth processing of two languages, is likely to give rise to the cognitive advantages that have been documented in both bilingual children and adults," Lew-Williams said. The study is published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Dear women, beware. You are more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders than men

Continuous efforts are being made to better understand the causes of mental disorders in diseases such as Alzheimer's, and develop newer, more targeted treatments. Recently, American researchers at the Amen Clinics, in Newport Beach, California, analysed the functioning of 128 regions of men's and women's brains.

Among the subjects studied, 26,683 suffered from a variety of psychiatric conditions (bipolar disorders, mood disorders, psychoses, schizophrenia, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders), and 119 were healthy volunteers. The researchers used a high-precision scintigraphic system, SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography) imaging, which produces images and 3D models of organs and their metabolism, to identify hypoactive and hyperactive zones in subjects' brains.

The results of the study indicate that healthy women's brains are more active in many more areas than healthy men's brains. Among



women suffering from mental disorders, cerebral activity was particularly dense on the level of the prefrontal cortex, the region of the brain that is linked to concentration,

the control of emotions and the limbic system, which is closely associated with anxiety and mood. Among men, the region responsible for vision in the occipital lobe, and

the region responsible for coordination in the temporal lobe, which is also linked to a wide range of cognitive functions (hearing, language, memory and object recognition), were more active than they were among women. These findings may partially explain why women often demonstrate greater aptitude for empathy, intuition, collaboration, self-control, and appropriate concern, and also why they are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, insomnia and eating disorders. Taking into account these gender-based brain differences could pave the way for innovative research, notably in the field of Alzheimer's disease (AD), concludes the study. It should be noted that women are more likely to suffer from AD, depression - which is a known risk factor for Alzheimer's - and anxiety disorders. Men are more likely to suffer from attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders as well as behavioural problem. These findings have been published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

Dear moms-to-be, take note. Extreme heat may lead to a premature delivery

In a tropical country like India, pregnant women need to take a lot of precautions. A new study warns that pregnant women exposed to extreme heat may be at increased risk of delivering preterm. Exposure to temperature extremes can adversely impact birth outcomes, including changes in length of gestation, birth weight, stillbirth, and neonatal stress during unusually hot temperatures, according to the study published in the Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. "Expecting mothers are an important group whose unique vulnerability to heat stress should be factored into public health policy," said Sabrina McCormick, Associate Professor at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University. The researchers conducted extensive systematic review of research articles that identify how heat-related exposures result in adverse health effects for pregnant women. The findings showed that heat events occurring earlier in the warm season cause an increase in adverse outcomes relative to comparable events occurring later. "Exposure to extreme heat can harm



both pregnant mothers and their babies, especially in situations where the expectant mother has limited access to prenatal care," McCormick said. "Our study indicates that there is a need for further research on the ways that climate change, and heat in particular, affect maternal health and neonatal outcomes," McCormick said.

"The research also shows that uniform standards for assessing the effects of heat on maternal foetal health need to be established," McCormick added.

Cabinet clears hike in GST cess to 25 per cent on mid, large size cars



MUMBAI: Mid and large sized cars, luxury vehicles, hybrids as well as SUVs are likely to cost more as the Cabinet cleared the issuing of Ordinance to raise the GST cess on them to a maximum of 25 per cent, from 15 per cent at present. Car prices had dropped by up to Rs 3 lakh following the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from July 1 and the ordinance is being seen as an attempt to rectify the anomaly where rates of certain common use items had gone up but luxury cars were costing less under the new regime.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the ordinance, or an executive order, will amend the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 to raise the maximum rate of cess. However, he added, the actual cess on different classes of vehicles and as to when it will be implemented is to be decided by the GST Council.

Headed by Jaitley and comprising representatives of all states, the Council is to meet in Hyderabad on September 9. The Ordinance, which is issued to enact a law or amend an existing legislation during times when Parliament is not in session, will now be sent to the President for promulgation.

The amendment would have to be approved by the Parliament within six months. The next session of Parliament is likely in November/December. Jaitley said the objective of a taxation policy cannot be to make luxury items cheaper, and essentials costlier. "If at all relief is to be given, it has to be given to a common man's item rather than a luxury item. So a person who can afford Rs 1 crore for a vehicle can also afford Rs 1.20 crore," he said.

Under GST, which replaced over a dozen central and state levies in the biggest tax reform since independence, cars attract the top tax rate of 28 per cent. On top of this, a cess of 1 to 15 per cent is levied for the creation of a corpus to compensate states for any loss of revenue from implementation of GST.

After the introduction of GST, the total tax incidence on motor vehicles (GST plus compensation cess) has come down when compared with the total tax incidence in the pre-GST regime. The highest pre-GST tax incidence on motor vehicles worked out to about 52-54.72 per cent, to which 2.5 per cent was added on account of Central Sales Tax, octroi etc.

Against this, post-GST the total tax incidence came to 43 per cent. Presently, large motor vehicles, SUVs, mid-segment cars, large cars, hybrid cars and hybrid motor vehicles attract a cess of 15 per cent on top of 28 per cent GST. Small petrol cars of less than 4 meters and 1,200 cc attract a cess of 1 per cent, while small diesel cars of less than 4 meters and 1,500 cc engine attract a cess of 3 per cent. An official said automobiles that currently attract 15 per cent cess would see the rate going up to 25 per cent. The GST Council had in its August 5 meet recommended that the central government move legislative amendments required for increasing the maximum ceiling of cess leviable on motor vehicles to 25 per cent from present 15 per cent. Jaitley said pursuant to GST implementation price of vehicles had "substantially come down", whereas the smaller vehicles remained untouched.

Raising the cess requires an amendment to the Schedule of section 8 of the GST (Compensation to a State) Act, 2017. There are 12 different categories of automobiles and two categories are impacted by this decision to hike cess. "These hikes are not across the board," Jaitley said. Revenue Secretary Hasmukh Adhia said the categorisation of cars has not changed. Cars on which there was a excise duty of 27 or 30 per cent, those were luxury cars. There is no intention of increasing rate on any other car other than those which were put in luxury category and had very high excise duty and VAT," Adhia said. On whether the government will look at lowering rates on items of mass consumption going forward, Jaitley said the GST Council is "sensitive", but the expenditure requirement of states and optimum level of taxation has to be kept in mind. "I think one has to study a pattern over several months before you have any kneejerk reaction," he said. Justifying decision of GST Council on hiking cess post GST roll out, Jaitley said the object was GST could never be intended to make cigarettes cheaper.

"It would be a mindless policy if we did that," he said, adding only after implementation it could be made out where the "shoe-pinches". The GST Council had hiked cess on cigarettes on July 18 to take away an estimated Rs 5,000 crore annual "windfall" manufacturers could have reaped from lower GST rates. Sridhar V, Partner, Grant Thornton India LLP said: "While the ordinance sets right the anomalies which crept in while the rates were finalised for the passenger car segment in early June, the additional 10 per cent cess will have a dampening impact on the otherwise increased demand expectation for luxury cars and SUV, which in recent times have been picking up. "The government is expected to come up with more clarity if it intends to have a couple of more levels of cess within the overall cess of 25 per cent."

Infosys founders taking part in buyback does not send wrong signal, says Bala

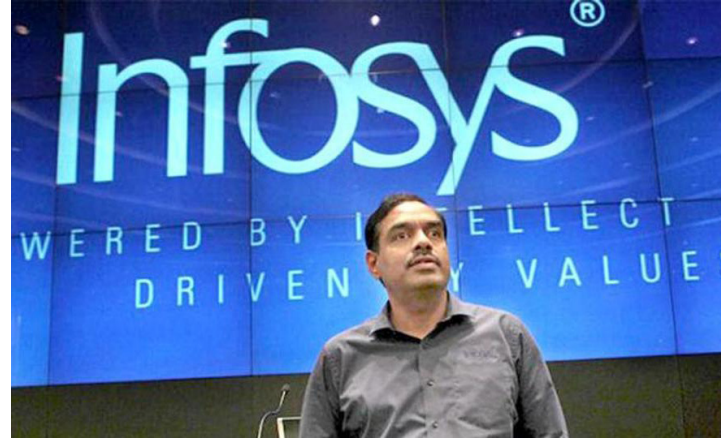
Bengaluru: Infosys founders participating in the Rs 13,000 crore buyback offer does not give any wrong signal to shareholders, the IT giant's former chief financial officer V Balakrishnan has said. Infosys on Monday said some of the members of the promoter and promoters group of the company have communicated their intention to participate in the proposed buyback. "One can have some concern only if founders sell their holding in normal circumstances. Buyback is another form of dividend which is tax efficient in Indian context and hence the founders participating in that does not give any wrong signal to shareholders," Balakrishnan told PTI. He was replying to a question whether founders participating in the buyback offer would send a wrong signal that promoters are taking a bleak view on the company's future.

"Buyback is a pro-rata right given to all shareholders and if exercised by all of them will ensure the economic interests levels of all shareholders remaining at same levels," he added.

Infosys plans to buy back 11.3 crore shares at Rs 1,150 apiece. The founders and their families between them hold some 12.75% (29.28 crore shares) of Infosys.

Balakrishnan also said it looked unusual that the Infosys board announced a buyback offer just prior to CEO's resignation.

"Under that circumstances, for outsiders like me that the board announced buyback just prior to CEO's (Sikka) resignation is very unusual," he said. The promoters' keenness to participate in the buyback comes within days of upheaval at the Infosys board, which first saw CEO Vishal Sikka quitting citing slander



by founders. Over the next few days, Murthy and Co installed fellow founder Nandan Nilekani as the chairman. Balakrishnan noted that even when the founders were running the company, they never looked at controlling shareholding to exercise control on the company.

They depended on their performance and track record to sway hold on the company and strongly believed as long as performance is good and shareholders value is enhanced, the shareholders will support them, Balakrishnan said. Also, founders have made it very clear that their

only interest lies in protecting core values of the company and do not have any interest in running the company, he pointed out.

"They never talked about the CEO, the company performance or its strategies and they never meddled in the affairs of the company. Exercising a shareholders right to information cannot by any stretch be termed as meddling in affairs," he argued. Asked whether Panaya deal report will ever be made public, Balakrishnan said, "I think the disengagement clause is standard one whenever a senior management personnel leaves the company. Unless we see the actual clause I will not be able to comment. Having said that such clause does not restrict the company's ability to publish the investigation report or seek accountability and take action if they find any wrong doing."

In 2nd list of 26 defaulters to banks, RBI names Videocon, Jaiprakash Associates

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sent commercial banks a second list of at least 26 defaulters with which it wants creditors to start the process of debt resolution before initiating bankruptcy proceedings, three bankers aware of the development said.

In a letter, the central bank said these accounts should first be resolved through any of RBI's schemes before 13 December, failing which cases should be filed against these companies under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) before 31 December. NCLT is the arbitration authority for cases filed under the IBC. These are accounts where 60% of the outstanding amount was classified as non-performing on the books of banks as of 30 June, RBI added in its letter, the bankers cited above said on condition of anonymity. The defaulters' list comprises companies primarily in the power, telecommunication, steel and infrastructure sectors, according to the bankers, who spoke on condition of

anonymity. Mint hasn't seen a copy of the letter. Videocon Industries Ltd and Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) are the two large companies among the list of 26 defaulters, accounting for over Rs 1 trillion of debt, two of the bankers said. Multiple phone calls to Venugopal Dhoot, chairman and managing director of Videocon, remained unanswered.

"We have no comment to offer as JAL's resolution plan was approved on 22 June by JLF (joint lenders' forum)," said Manoj Gaur, chairman, Jaypee Group. Mint isn't naming the remaining 24 defaulters because it couldn't confirm the names from at least two bankers and couldn't reach out to them. On 19 August, Mint reported that RBI had identified 40 large defaulters as the next lot of firms where banks will push for early debt resolution. Along with the 12 cases where bankruptcy proceedings have already started, these would account for 60-65% of the bad loans clogging the banking system, the report added. Gross bad loans of banks rose 24% year-on-year to Rs 7.9

trillion at the end of June. In June, RBI identified 12 accounts accounting for 25% of gross bad loans in the system for immediate bankruptcy proceedings. Except for Era Infra Engineering Ltd, the other 11 cases have been admitted by NCLT. At that time, the central bank had said that lenders should finalize a resolution plan within six months for their top 500 stressed accounts. If they failed to find a resolution through other means, then they should move the NCLT for bankruptcy, RBI said. "If this list is true, it creates an incentive for both lenders and borrowers to restructure accounts outside of the bankruptcy code and avoid the disruptions that a bankruptcy filing can sometimes cause," said Ashwin Bishnoi, partner, Khaitan and Co. "Of course, as lenders and borrowers compare their options, they would like to know the difference between the bankruptcy code and other RBI restructuring regimes in terms of asset provisioning for banks. RBI clarity on this comparison would be helpful," Bishnoi added.

Countdown Begins For Navigation Satellite Launch

CHENNAI: The 29-hour countdown for the launch of India's eighth navigation satellite IRNSS-1H began at 2 pm today at Sriharikota rocket port, 80 kilometres from Chennai, officials said. The 1,425-kilogram satellite -- part of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) -- will be carried by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rocket, XL variant. It will blast off on Thursday at 7 pm, an official of the Indian Space Research Organisation or ISRO said.

This will be the eighth IRNSS satellite and will be a replacement for IRNSS-1A as its atomic clocks have failed. The atomic clocks are important to provide accurate positional data. The IRNSS or NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) is similar to the US-owned Global Positioning System or GPS. The Rs. 1,420-crore Indian satellite navigation system

NavIC consists of nine satellites -- seven in orbit and two as substitutes. One of the substitutes is the IRNSS-1H. Each satellite has three clocks, and a total of 27 clocks for the navigation satellite system (including the standby satellites) were supplied by the same vendor. Like its other IRNSS predecessors, IRNSS-1H also carries two types of payloads -- navigation payload and ranging payload.

The navigation payload of IRNSS-1H will transmit navigation service signals to the users. This payload will be operating in L5-band and S-band. The ranging payload of IRNSS-1H consists of a C-band transponder, which facilitates accurate determination of the range of the satellite. The four stage PSLV-XL stands 44.4 metres tall and weighs 321 tonnes at the lift-off stage. At least 19 minutes 25 seconds after lift-off, the rocket will sling IRNSS-1H at an altitude of 507 km. According to ISRO, NavIC is useful for fishermen to reach potential fishing area. Fishermen can also get alert messages on bad weather, high waves or when they approach international maritime boundary line.

Narayana Murthy backs Infosys chairman Nilekani to fix governance lapses

BENGALURU: Infosys Ltd co-founder NR Narayana Murthy on Tuesday backed chairman Nandan Nilekani to fix corporate governance lapses and also hailed last week's overhaul of the board that resulted in the exit of four members, including previous chairman R Seshasayee.

Murthy also took a direct shot at former and current board members Jeffrey Lehman and Roopa Kudva, alleging that the former said the board couldn't disclose to founders the reason behind Infosys agreeing to pay Rs 17.38 crore in severance to former chief financial officer Rajiv Bansal; the latter asked the founders to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) if they wanted to know the reason.

"You would all agree that the rejuvenation of the board has begun with the resignation of Mr R Seshasayee and some other board members. However, it is still a work in progress," Murthy told investors hosted by Investec India in Mumbai. Last week, Infosys named co-founder Nilekani non-executive chairman. Nilekani's appointment, which was conditional on the overhaul of the previous board, resulted in the exits of Seshasayee, Lehman, John Echemendy and Vishal Sikka, who had stepped down as CEO on August 18. However, Murthy also sounded a conciliatory note towards the current board that is being led by Nilekani and said that Infosys had already "started taking corrective steps". He said he hoped Nilekani would do the right thing with the report on an investigation into Infosys's 2015 purchase of Israeli firm Panaya Ltd -- an indication that Murthy hopes the full probe report will be made public by Nilekani at some point. Last week, Nilekani had declined to directly answer whether the company would make the probe report public and instead pointed to Infosys' statement, which said that he would get a full briefing on all investigations and "the appropriate course of action will be decided". "I would like to reiterate my confidence in the current senior management of the company, which has several excellent people with whom I have worked. I know the company is in good hands. I wish Nandan the best of everything in his effort to bring back a clean (good days) to Infosys," Murthy said. "Having worked with Nandan for long, I know that he is a stickler for good corporate governance. As explained earlier, it is this kind of corrective and decisive action that I was looking for in the detailed report. These actions are now being taken. Therefore, we can all move forward from here. Now, we can all sleep better knowing that, under his (Nilekani's) leadership, the corporate governance standard practised by Infosys will be on par with the global best standards."

Bird Group says keen to buy Air India's subsidiary

NEW DELHI: Aviation services provider Bird Group on Wednesday said it is interested in buying state-owned carrier Air India's ground-handling subsidiary AIATSL, making it the second company to formally show interest in bidding for a part of the ailing airline. Bird Group, which handles ground services at seven airports in India and operates hotels in the United Kingdom, has expressed interest to the civil aviation min-

istry to bid for Air India Air Transport Services Ltd, it said in a statement. The Union cabinet in June approved plans to privatise Air India after successive governments spent billions of dollars to keep the debt-laden carrier afloat.

A ministerial panel, headed by finance minister Arun Jaitley, has been appointed to look after the sale process of the flagship carrier, which has six subsidiaries -- three of which are struggling to turn a

profit -- with assets worth about \$4.6 billion. Bird Group, which also operates car dealerships, has "requested for separate disinvestment of the Air India subsidiaries" in order to unlock value, a spokesperson said in the statement.

The carrier could be sold in parts to make it attractive to potential buyers, government officials told Reuters last month. Last month, InterGlobe Aviation's IndiGo, the country's largest airline

which flies four of every 10 passengers, said it was keen to buy Air India's international arm and low-cost division Air India Express. Founded in the 1930s and known to generations of Indians for its Maharajah mascot, Air India is saddled with a debt burden of \$8.5 billion and a bloated cost structure. The government has injected \$3.6 billion since 2012 to bail out the airline.

Air India has several sub-

subsidiaries including Air India Air Transport Services Limited (AIATSL), Air India Charters Limited, IAL Airport Services Limited, Airline Allied Services Limited and Air India Engineering Services Limited.

Once the nation's largest carrier, its share of the booming domestic market has slumped to 13 percent as private carriers such as IndiGo and Jet Airways have expanded.



PSL spot-fixing case: PCB tribunal places 5-year ban on Sharjeel Khan

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB)-appointed Anti-Corruption Unit on Wednesday awarded Sharjeel Khan a five-year ban in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) spot-fixing case, DawnNews reported.

According to DawnNews, Khan will not be able to play any form of cricket for at least 30 months, after which he may be allowed to play domestic cricket until the completion of the ban — subject to the terms and conditions set by PCB.

Talking to the media after the decision was announced, Khan's lawyer Sheghan Ijaz said that once a detailed verdict is released by the tribunal, they will file an appeal.

"We have reservations over the decision; it is not what we expected," he said, adding that the verdict will



probably be released Eidul Azha, following which they will have 14 days to file an appeal.

PCB Chairman Najam Sethi hailed the decision as vindication of the

board's "policy of zero tolerance against corrupt practices in the game."

He commended PCB's anti-corruption and vigilance department "for identifying the culprits and nipping

the spot-fixing scandal in the bud through their prompt action."

Sharjeel along with four other cricketers were charged under different clauses of being involved in the spot-fixing scam which surfaced on the opening day of the second edition of PSL in Dubai earlier this year.

After the final of the PSL on March 5 in Lahore, it was decided to form a tribunal with former PCB chairman retired Lt Gen Tauqir Zia and ex-Pakistan captain Wasim Bari as its members. The panel began hearing against Khalid Latif, Mohammad Irfan, Nasir Jamshed, Shahzaib Hasan and Sharjeel Khan.

Irfan was cleared with a ban of one-year and a hefty fine while the cases of Latif, Jamshed and Hasan are still under progress.

Sri Lankan selectors quit amid debacles



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's cricket selectors resigned en masse on Tuesday, days after fans hurled abuse and projectiles at the beleaguered national side as they suffered another humiliating thrashing on home soil.

The five selectors, led by former skipper Sanath Jayasuriya, handed a joint letter of resignation to Sports Minister Dayasiri Jayasekera, a ministry official said.

The announcement comes midway through India's five-match One-day International tour in Sri Lanka, a series the hosts conceded on Sunday with a third straight loss.

The five-member panel will stay on only for the next two ODIs and the sole Twenty20 against India.

"A combined letter bearing the names of the above committee has conveyed this decision to sports minister Dayasiri Jayasekera. According to the letter, their tenure will end on Sept 7," the ministry was quoted as saying.

Fans, tired of thumping losses, leadership changes and mismanagement, booed the home side and lobbed bottles as they approached inevitable defeat at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in the hills.

Play was held up for about half an hour, after which India recorded a six-wicket win.

"The selection panel felt they should step down, allowing the board to appoint a fresh set of selectors in view of the criticism and the crowd reaction on Sunday," a source close to Jayasuriya said.

The ODI series loss came hard on the

heels of India's three-Test series whitewash over Sri Lanka on home soil.

Selectors have borne a fair share of recent criticism, with Sri Lanka's World Cup-winning skipper Arjuna Ranatunga accusing the panel of lacking 'backbone'.

The latest losses only compounded the misery for the national side, which suffered a humiliating ODI home series defeat against bottom-ranked Zimbabwe and bowed out early from the ICC Champions Trophy in England.

They have also been beset by injury, with Test skipper Dinesh Chandimal ruled out of the remaining ODIs with a thumb injury and Chamara Kapugedera also likely to miss the matches.

Angelo Mathews stepped down as Sri Lanka captain from all formats last month after they succumbed to their first ever ODI series defeat against Zimbabwe.

Chandimal was then put in charge of the Test side that lost 3-0 in the Test series by India and now faces a similar humiliation in ODIs against the neighbours.

The selectors have been accused of lacking vision and making frequent changes to the squad but Jayasuriya has blamed it on a spate of injuries that have plagued the side over the last 12 months.

Sri Lanka's next international assignment will be the tour of the UAE and Pakistan, which is expected to begin in late September. A new set of selectors is likely to be named over the course of the next three weeks.

Uttar Pradesh sports authorities admit mistake after felicitating tainted weightlifter

LUCKNOW: By considering a dope tainted weightlifter for the Rani Laxmi Bai award (given to outstanding female athlete), the Uttar Pradesh government has made a mockery of an award function held in Lucknow on Tuesday. On the occasion of National Sports Day, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath felicitated 14 outstanding sportspersons. The award also carried a cash prize of ₹3,11,000. International weightlifter Sushila Panwar, who had failed a dope test conducted by the National Anti Doping Agency (NADA) in March, was one of them. She was attending the national preparatory camp in Patiala when she was provisionally suspended on April 28, pending a hearing. Sushila, win-



ner of gold medal in the plus 75kg at the South Asian Games held last year at Guwahati, could face a four-year suspension if found guilty. Interestingly, a similar honour was refused to 400m runner Priyanka Panwar, who had won gold at the 2016 SAF Games, since she was also facing dope charges. Though the award committee recommended Priyanka's name last week, it was dropped

in the last minute. "I was surprised by the omission of Priyanka's name from the list as the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) too had cleared her name after the UP sports directorate authorities sought a clarification on the issue," committee member Anandeshwar Pandey told HT on Wednesday. "It's wrong that Priyanka is denied award and at the same time Sushila's name is

cleared," said Pandey, who also happens to be the secretary general of the UP Olympic Association. As per rules for the Arjuna Award or the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna awards, dope cheats can't apply. India's 2014 Asian Games women's discus throw champion Seema Antil has not been considered either for Arjuna or Khel Ratna since she had failed a dope test in 2000 during the world junior championship.

RP Singh, director of sports in Lucknow said he wasn't aware of Sushila's positive test, adding she wouldn't have been considered had he known. "The officials screening the applications should have apprised the department," he said, adding that he will look into the issue.

R Ashwin picks up 3 wickets on English county debut for Worcestershire



NEW DELHI: Ravichandran Ashwin picked up three wickets in his English county debut for Worcestershire which helped them restrict Gloucestershire for 258 in their first innings, short by 105 runs of his side's first innings total.

South African Gareth Roderick was Ashwin's first scalp as he lofted back a simple catch to the Indian off-spinner in the 31st over. Gloucestershire, reeling at 93/5 then, however, found some momentum as Jack Taylor scored a fighting century and skipper Phil Mustard provided resistance. However, once the latter was dismissed, it was again a free-fall for the Gloucestershire. Ashwin then trapped Kieran Noema-Barnett for his second before having Craig Miles caught in the 75th over. The three wickets not only provided a fabulous start for Ashwin, it also gave him the much-needed momentum after he was rested for India's five-match ODI series against Sri Lanka. He ended with figures 3/94 off 29 overs, including a maiden.

Ashwin, who now sits at No.3 in ICC Test rankings for bowlers, had admitted that it was his dream to play county cricket. "It's not just about next year. It's always been a dream to play county cricket," Ashwin had said in an interview to ESPNcricinfo.

"I grew up watching it on TV in India and it has always meant a lot. Spinners have come before and told me it is a must do experience. I was being rested from a series (against Sri Lanka), so I thought I might as well come here to get experience." "I signed up for the cold," he further added. Commenting on his stay with the club, Ashwin said, "I could be called to play in the Australia series. But I have indicated to Bumpy (Steve Rhodes, the Worcestershire director of cricket) that I will be available for all four games. As of now, there are no communication channels open but they will be shortly so. I'll probably get a clearer idea after the Sri Lanka series." India are set to play a five-match ODI series against Australia after they finish with their Sri Lanka tour. India have taken an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series and look good to end the series in a whitewash. The two will lock horns for a T20I as well.

Ottis Gibson leaves England to become Cricket South Africa's head coach

LONDON: Ottis Gibson has agreed to step down from his role as England bowling coach and become South Africa's new head coach, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Wednesday. Gibson, who took up his current role in 2015, will leave after England's third and final Test against West Indies next week. He succeeds Russell Domingo, whose contract with Cricket South Africa expired after South Africa's 3-1 Test series defeat in England earlier this month.

"I would like to place on record my thanks to Ottis Gibson for his services to English cricket," England's director of cricket Andrew Strauss

said in a press release. "Ottis has been an integral part of the England team in his two stints as bowling coach. His experience, tactical awareness and understanding of bowling in all conditions has benefited our approach and has helped our bowling unit develop greatly across all formats of the game. He is an ambitious man and when this opportunity presented itself, it was difficult for him to turn down. On behalf of the ECB, I would like to wish him every success in the next chapter of his career."

Gibson, 48, is in his second spell working with England's pacemen after four years as head coach of his



native West Indies from 2010-14. England head coach Trevor Bayliss said: "Ottis has played a vital

role in our progress over the past few years." His knowledge of the international game and the way he

has supported all our bowlers in their development has been immeasurable. "He will no doubt relish the challenge of becoming a head coach once again and coupled with his strong affinity with South African cricket, he will look to take them forward." Gibson's first South Africa assignment will be a two-Test home series against Bangladesh beginning on September 28, which is followed by a four-match one-day series and a two-match Twenty20 series. The ECB said it intends to appoint a new fast bowling coaching ahead of England's busy end-of-year schedule, which includes an Ashes tour of Australia.

Roger Federer plays down back worries after US Open battle against Frances Tiafoe

LONDON: Roger Federer played down concerns over his back injury after a hard-fought five-set win over Frances Tiafoe in the US Open first round.

The Swiss great was pushed by American teenager Tiafoe on Tuesday, battling to a 4-6 6-2 6-1 1-6 6-4 victory on Arthur Ashe. Federer made a slow start, dropping a set in the opening round at Flushing Meadows for the first time since 2003.

And, for just the fourth time in his illustrious career, the 19-time grand slam champion was pushed to five sets in the first round of a major. But Federer, who blamed his early struggles on not being able to prepare as he would have liked, dismissed suggestions he was having issues with the back injury that troubled him heading to New York. "I'm very happy that I'm feeling as good as I'm feeling



right now," he said. "Honestly, if I would have felt like that going into this tournament that

my back was going to get worse every match, I probably wouldn't have played.

"My hope and my belief is that it's only going to get better from here because every day that goes by puts me further away from what happened in Montreal. So that's how I see it. "I'm very happy how I'm feeling right now, how I felt coming off the court. I think there's a lot of positives for me to look at, that I can come through a five-setter with the preparation that I had.

"I was definitely also lucky to play tonight because the rain. Others got all pushed over to tomorrow [Wednesday]. So that would have been tougher for me maybe to back it up back-to-back days." "Look, if I enter the tournament, it's because I believe I can play and go deep. I still believe that.

"I think this will actually give me a lot of confidence. In the first set really I was just seeing and feeling it, see how far I could push, but I was never in pain. It was OK. "That's why when I was down a set, I just said, 'OK, the match starts here. One set all, OK, it's a best-of-three set match.' Being in the fifth set, I said, 'It's great I'm still in the match. Things are actually great.' I always try to keep a very positive mindset out there."

Federer will face either Blaz Kavcic or Mikhail Youzhny in the second round, with the Swiss star and Rafael Nadal the only men able to complete their opening matches on a rain-affected day.