

TIME AND US

DAILY

SRINAGAR, KASHMIR

SATURDAY

● APRIL, 28, 2018
 ● 12 SHABAN 1439 AH
 ● ISSUE: 100
 ● VOLUME: 04
 ● PAGES: 08

WEATHER TEMPERATURE		
STATION	MAX TEMPERATURE	MIN TEMPERATURE
	ACT	ACT
SRINAGAR	27.5	9.7
JAMMU	37.4	13.1
LEH	21.2	6.2
KARGIL	21.4	2.4

SUNSET SATURDAY: 07:13 PM
SUNRISE SUNDAY: 05:45 AM

LOCAL FORECAST OF SRINAGAR
 Partly cloudy Sky. Maximum & Minimum temperatures will be around 27°C & 09°C respectively.

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

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CONCERTED WATER CONSERVATION THRUST UNDER MGNREGS

FIVE WOMEN AMONG SEVEN MAOISTS KILLED IN ONGOING CHHATTISGARH ENCOUNTER

GST, DEMONETISATION BROUGHT 1.8 MILLION PEOPLE UNDER TAX NET: GOVT OFFICIAL

HOW 'OUT OF CASH' KINGS XI PUNJAB ALMOST LOST CHRIS GAYLE AT IPL 2018 AUCTION

Centre to make sexual assault of boys under age of 12 punishable by death penalty

New Delhi: Less than a week after the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 — which provides for death penalty for those convicted of raping a girl below 12 years — was promulgated, the Union women and child development (WCD) ministry is set to move the Cabinet seeking approval for the same punishment for those guilty of sexually abusing young boys of the same age, two senior government officials familiar with the matter said.

The April 22 ordinance amended Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that deals with rape. It also changed Section 42 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act, a special legislation enacted in 2012 to address sexual offences committed against those below 18 years of age, to say that newly amended IPC section would apply to children below 12 years of age.

But while POCSO is gender-



neutral, the amended Section 376 mentions the word "woman". This meant that those guilty of raping boys below the age of 12 years old would not be subject to the death penalty provision.

"It resulted in an anomaly where the same crime committed against a girl and a boy is treated differently. The ordinance that was brought in to punish those raping girls less

than 12 years contradicts the spirit of POCSO, which is gender-neutral," one of the officials cited above said on condition of anonymity.

To correct this, the WCD ministry has finalised the proposal to amend sections 4, 5 and 6 of the POCSO Act, which will make rape committed against "any child" below 12 punishable with the death

▶ See **Centre...** Pg 02

SUPREME COURT STAYS TRIAL OF KATHUA CASE TILL MAY 7

New Delhi, April 27 (Agencies): The Supreme Court today stayed till May 7 the trial in the Kathua gangrape and murder case, after several petitions sought shifting of the trial to Chandigarh and handing over the investigation to the CBI.

A bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra said it will deal with the prayer of the victim's father for shifting of trial to Chandigarh and plea of the accused seeking handing over the probe to CBI.

The bench posted the matter for further hearing on May 7.

The child from a minority nomadic community had disappeared from near her home in a village near Kathua

▶ See **Supreme...** Pg 02

Maintain, carry forward tradition of social inclusion, brotherhood: Mehbooba tells people

Says strengthening an inclusive set up was an idea behind stitching the alliance in the State



Jammu, April 27: Hailing the people of Jammu for upholding the values of brotherhood and amity despite severe provocations, Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti today appealed the people to carry forward this tradition of social inclusion and not let any vested elements cause any wedge among different communities and people.

Interacting with the members of civil society here this evening, the Chief Minister praised the people of Jammu region for upholding harmony and brotherhood among themselves despite severe provocations and

defeating the evil designs of miscreants who are out to divide people in different names. She said during the toughest phases of past the people stood up for the tolerant values for which the State has been known since ages and for this they ought to be complimented.

Mehbooba Mufti said strengthening of an inclusive set up in the State was the idea behind stitching up the present alliance in the State so that people, regions and communities get further closer to each other and march together on the path of progress. She, however,

▶ See **Mehbooba...** Pg 02

AS NORTH, SOUTH KOREA HELD SUMMIT, OPPN PITCHES FOR TALKS BETWEEN INDO-PAK

'Today's meeting is a message to the leadership of neighboring countries'

Srinagar, Apr 27: As the leadership from North and South Korea held historic summit today, the opposition mainstream political parties of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday said that the two neighboring countries, India and Pakistan should also discuss the issues through dialogue.

National Conference (NC) Provincial president, Nasir Aslam Wani told Kashmir News Service (KNS) that the meeting between North and South Korea is a positive step. "I wish that India and Pakistan will also sit on a table to discuss the issues," he said.

He said that there is always a right time for talking and

▶ See **Talks...** Pg 02

Govt decides to move SRO-202 appointees to new framework: Altaf Bukhari

'To get pay revision benefits right from January 1, 2016'

Jammu, April 27: In a significant move, the government today decided to move the appointees under SRO-202 to a new framework as also to extend the benefits of pay revision under 7th pay commission to all such employees right from January 1, 2016.

"The new framework will be worked by the General Administration Department in consultation with Finance Department. So far as pay part is concerned Finance Department has already issued nec-



essential clarifications today" Minister for Finance, Educa-

tion, Labour and Employment syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari told reporters at a press conference here today.

Rolling out series of decisions taken at a high level meeting held under his chairmanship, the Minister said the move has come in view of constant demand of stakeholders and public at large adding that with the extending of benefit of pay revision there will be a considerable hike in the pay drawn by these

▶ See **Altaf...** Pg 02

NORTHERN ARMY COMMANDER REVIEWS SECURITY IN VALLEY

Commends troops for recent successful operations

Srinagar, Apr 27: The Northern Army Commander Lt Gen D Anbu visited the Kashmir Valley today to review prevailing security situation in the hinterland.

Accompanied by the Chinari Corps Commander Lt Gen AK Bhatt, the Army Commander visited formation headquarters and was briefed by the commanders on ground as regards the operational preparedness.

The Army Commander was appreciative of the measures and Standard Operating Procedures instituted by the units and formations to meet the challenges posed by the inimical elements.

▶ See **Army...** Pg 02

Two Kashmiri hackers responsible for hacking 500 Indian websites arrested by Delhi Cyber Police

New Delhi, Apr 27: Based on specific input two "Pro-Pak Kashmiri Hackers" were arrested in the night of 26/27 April by Cyber Cell, Special Cell, Delhi Police by raiding two locations in Punjab vide FIR No-47 dated 27 April 2018.

The statement reads that Shahid Malla s/o Ghulam Ahmad Malla, a B Tech (IInd Yr), CSE student at Aryan Group of College in Rajpura. He is permanent resident of Watergam Rafiabadi, of Baramulla district of South Kashmir and was staying in a rented accommodation in Sheetal Colony, Rajpura, Panjab.

Another youth Adil Hussain Teli s/o Muhammad Yusuf Teli, a BCA (Final Year) at St Soldiers Mgt & Tech Instt in Jalandhar. He

▶ See **Two...** Pg 02

DELHI CYBER CELL ARRESTS KASHMIRI STUDENT FOR ALLEGED ONLINE HACKING

Jalandhar, Apr 27: Reacting over the 'abduction' of Kashmiri student studying at St. Soldier Management and Technical Institution, Jalandhar Punjab, Jammu Kashmir Police said that Adil Ahmed Teli has been arrested by Cyber Cell Delhi with regard to a case registered against him.

The students of St. Soldier

▶ See **Delhi...** Pg 02

CLERICAL ASSOCIATION TO CONTINUE STRIKE TILL ACCEPTANCE, IMPLEMENTATION OF DEMANDS

Says 'constituting committees a time buying exercise, what about the committees constituted in past'

Srinagar, Apr 27: Rejecting the government order on constitution of a committee for looking into the demands of Clerks, the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Clerical Association has threatened to continue strike till the government issues a formal order for implementation of the demands including Pay Anomaly already placed before the government.

In a statement issued to KNS, President Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Clerical Association Ali Mohammad Mir said committees have been formed in the past also to buy time and it seems that formation of yet another

▶ See **Clerical...** Pg 02

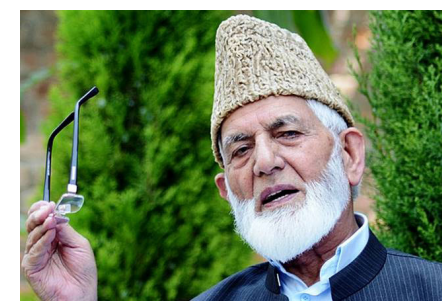
Communalization of rape and murder of Kathua girl is deplorable: Geelani

Expresses concern over 'bias approach of judiciary'

Srinagar, Apr 27: Chairman of Hurriyat Conference (G), Syed Ali Geelani on Friday said that communalization and politicization of rape and murder of 8-year-old girl Asifa was deplorable and disheartening.

According to the statement issued to KNS, Geelani expressed his anguish and concern over the bias approach of judiciary, saying they have always been apathetic and unsympathetic towards suppressed people of occupied state.

He said the gruesome rape and murder of the eight-year-old girl from the Bakewal community, reminds us of the challenges



confronting our society. "It is beastly act," said Geelani and added that one and all need

▶ See **Geelani...** Pg 02

'ARMY DISALLOWS ROAD CONSTRUCTION AT RANGRETH', EMPLOYEES OF THREE DEPARTMENTS FACE INCONVENIENCES

Will check it from concerned department: PRO Def

Srinagar, Apr 27: The army is not allowing construction of road at Rangreth through or outside its camp, leading to three government departments, bringing inconveniences to employees and visitors.

There are three departments at Rangreth - a Regional Centre of SKUAST-K, ICAR, and Central Institute of Temperate Horticulture (CITH), where the employees have to go through army camp.

However, the army is not allowing construction of road leading to three departments. The department have been demanding separate approach road for SKUAST-KICAR,

▶ See **Road...** Pg 02

India and China have 'big opportunity' to work together: PM tells Xi

WUHAN: Prime Minister Narendra Modi today hailed the centuries old Sino-India ties, telling Chinese President Xi Jinping that the two countries have a "big opportunity" to work together for the benefit of their people and the world.

During his delegation-level talks as part of an unprecedented informal summit with President Xi in the central Chinese city, Modi said such informal summits should become a tradition between



the two countries. "I'll be happy, if in 2019, we can have such informal summit in India," Modi told

Xi. Modi said India and China have the responsibility to work for 40 per cent of the world population and the two sides have a big opportunity to work together for the benefit of their people and the world.

The summit in Wuhan - the favourite holiday spot of revolutionary Chinese leader Mao Zedong - is being seen as an effort by India and China to rebuild trust and

▶ See **PM...** Pg 02

SHOPIAN SHUTS TO MOURN THE DEATH OF A CIVILIAN

Tral shuts for 4th straight day

Shopian, Apr 27: A shutdown was observed in South Kashmir's Shopian district against the killing of a student.

A student identified as Shakib Shabir was killed after militants fired at government forces at Lazibal crossing on Thursday, but according to police the fire missed the target and hit him. He was a resident of Hergam Shopian.

All shops and other business establishments remained closed in the Shopian town and other areas while skeletal movement of transport was observed on the roads.

Meanwhile, shutdown was observed in Tral area of

▶ See **Shopian...** Pg 02

GOVT COMMITTED TO DEVELOP RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE: IMRAN ANSARI
Minister inaugurates Blood Donation cum free screening medical camp at Pattan

BARAMULLA, APRIL 27: Minister for Youth Services and Sports, Information Technology and Technical Education, Molvi Imran Raza Ansari today said that Government led by Mehbooba Mufti is committed to develop basic infrastructure of rural areas adding that development of regions on equitable basis have been on the agenda of present coalition dispensation. Minister said this during a public gathering at Kripalpura Payeen area of Pattan constituency.

He said that majority of the demands of people for the area have been fulfilled and the remaining works are in its last phase of completion.

Earlier the minister inaugurated a blood donation-cum-free medical screening camp at Parihasspora Pattan during which the Minister himself donated blood besides event saw overwhelming participation from



various volunteers, civil society members and people from other walks of life.

Camp was organized by the Directorate of Health Services Kashmir in collaboration with IRP- 20 battalion Parihasspora Pattan wherein various volunteers donated their blood for the service of mankind.

Speaking after inaugurating the

camp, the minister highlighted the significance of the camp and said that such camps present a glorious example in the service of mankind. He applauded the volunteers especially police personnel who participated in the camp. He also said that such camps benefit the poor sections of the society who are not able to tolerate the burden of medical expenses.

Deputy Commissioner Baramulla Dr Nasir Ahmad Naqash, Commandant IRP 20th battalion Bakker Samoon, Chief Medical Officer Baramulla Dr Bashir Ahmad Chalkoo, District Youth Services and Sports officer Baramulla Khursheed Ahmad, Block Medical Officer Pattan Dr. Masrat and various other concerned officers were present on the occasion.

BETTER ROAD NETWORK IMPERATIVE FOR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: KAVINDER

Launches multiple development works in Gandhi Nagar Constituency

Jammu, April 27: Speaker Legislative Assembly, Kavinder Gupta today launched multiple development works in the Gandhi Nagar Constituency here today.

The works including macadamization of Satwari - RS Pura road from 2nd km to 5th km at an estimated cost of 2 Crore to be executed by Public Works (R&B) Department.

Meanwhile, Speaker also initiated the construction and tile work of lane at Ward no 50, Gujjar Mohalla, Channi Himmat being executed by Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC). Speaking on the occasion, Kavinder said that

several developmental works are being undertaken in constituency for the benefit of public at large. "Government has formulated a comprehensive development plan keeping in mind all the factors crucial for achieving the desired results on ground", the Speaker affirmed.

Laying emphasis on improvement and expansion of road connectivity, the Speaker said that a feasible road network plays a pivotal role in ensuring that other facilities and amenities reach public. "Roads are essential for growth and social integration which facilitate development

of any area", the Speaker maintained.

Highlighting various development works initiated in the constituency, he said that the government has launched various flagship programmes and laid full focus on development of infrastructure and providing better civic amenities to the people with special focus on improving road connectivity. Kavinder directed the executing agencies not to compromise on the quality of work. He directed all allied agencies to work in close coordination so that the works are completed in stipulated time and further stressed.

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CENTRE

penalty. "We are in the process of sending the proposal to all stakeholder ministries including law for consultation after which we will go to the cabinet," the second official said.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 deal with aggravated penetrative sexual assault on children under 18 years, which is currently punishable with up to 10 years in jail, extendable to life imprisonment, under the POCSO Act.

One of the officials said that the ordinance that was promulgated on April 22 has to be approved by the Parliament within six weeks of reassembling, failing which it will cease to be functional. "By the time the Parliament reconvenes and the ordinance is approved and made into a law, we will try to get the POCSO amendments approved by the Cabinet and make them part of the common law," he added.

Asked why similar punishment for sexual offences committed against minor boys was not part of the April 22 ordinance, the first official said, "Ordinances are temporary laws and are brought in as a response to extraordinary situation that required immediate intervention. In the present case it came in the aftermath of the brutal rape of an eight-year-old girl in Kathua district of Jammu & Kashmir."

But legal experts said the Criminal Law (amendment) ordinance was "constitutionally unsound" and "legally questionable."

"Article 14 & 16 of the Constitution provides for equality before law. One cannot differentiate between genders. The ordinance does not reflect equality of sexes. How can you have different punishment for male and female child when it comes to heinous crimes," said Anil Malhotra, a family law practitioner.

Malhotra was part of the special investigation team constituted by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in 2012 to inquire into allegations of rampant sexual abuse of minors at Apna Ghar, a children's home in Rohtak, Haryana.

"In the course of our investigation, we had come across several cases where minor boys were sexually abused by the accused who ran the children home. The boys were as traumatised as the girls. Having different punishment based on gender is legally untenable in such a scenario," Malhotra said.

SUPREME

in Jammu region on January 10. Her body was found in the same area a week later.

The apex court had yesterday, in a stern warning, said it would transfer the Kathua gangrape and murder case from the local court in Jammu and Kashmir in the "slightest possibility" of lack of fair trial, saying the "real concern" was to hold proper prosecution.

The eight-year-old's father had moved the apex court earlier, apprehending threat to the family, a friend and their lawyer Rajawat.

A separate plea was also filed by two accused seeking that the trial in the case be held in Jammu and the probe handed over to the CBI.

The state police's Crime Branch, which probed the case, filed the main chargesheet against seven persons and a separate charge sheet against a juvenile in a court in Kathua district last week.

The chargesheet revealed chilling details about how the girl was allegedly kidnapped, drugged and raped inside a temple before being killed.

MEHBOOBA

cautioned people against the nefarious designs of some vested elements who do not like this amity and are keen to create an opportunity to disturb peace.

Referring to the recent shameful incident of rape and murder of a young girl at Kathua, Mehbooba Mufti assured the audience that justice would be done in the case and whoever found guilty would be punished. She said the vehemence with which every section of local society including students, women, children, aged stood up demanding justice for the victim was encouraging for the whole State.

Terming peace and communal harmony as pre requisite for development, the Chief Minister said she has conceived many developmental ideas for the region like developing border tourism at Suchetgarh, cable car for the city, development of heritage spots like Mubarak Mandi and Raghunath Mandir.

During the interaction, several speakers put across their suggestions for the development of the region. Among these included frequent interactions among communities and regions, development of tourism to strengthen economy, construction of tunnel on Mughal Road, conducting research activities at Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, welfare of farmers, completion of on-going developmental projects, making the governance apparatus women friendly and start of a Dogri channel on Doordarshan.

The participants in the interaction included members from business community, intellectuals, writers, scholars, lawyers, women activists, social workers, farmers, retired officers, community leaders and representatives from other sections of society.

TALKS

the issues can be solved through a dialogue process only. Peoples Democratic Front (PDF) president and MLA Khansahib, Hakeem Muhammad Yasin while talking to KNS said that the summit between the South and North Korea is an open message to both the countries including India and Pakistan to hold a dialogue in a peaceful manner to resolve the issues.

"I believe it is the right time for both the countries to resolve the issues through a peaceful dialogue process," he said.

Democratic Party Nationalist (DPN), president and former minister, Ghulam Hassan Mir said that the meeting between the leadership of South Korea and North Korea is a message to the leadership of India and Pakistan that they cannot remain on war but have to be friends to each other.

"The meeting of top leaderships of North Korea and South Korea is a message to the leaderships of India and Pakistan that they cannot remain on war always but has to befriend each other," G H Mir tweeted.

ALTAF

employees. Asserting that the Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti was keen to address such issues, the Minister cited that with the extension of pay revision benefits, a Lecturer who was getting Rs 20100 will now get Rs 52000 monthly salary, while Junior Engineer, getting Rs 13500 will be entitled to Rs 35400 and a teacher getting Rs 8300 to Rs 11700 will get Rs 29200 per month.

Revealing benefits extended to other officials, the Minister said that under assured career progression, the J&K Engineering Gazetted Service will be granted Time Bound Scheme at par with doctors with effect from 1st April, 2018.

"Orders in this regard shall be issued after Cabinet approval immediately after the Darbar Move at Srinagar" he said adding the government would also provide employers share in NPS on arrears as well.

Giving further details, the Minister said that as per the commitment made, revenue Infrastructure Development Fund would be put in place with initial corpus of Rs 10.00 Crores. He said the funds will be provided to take care of infrastructure needs of Revenue Department.

The Minister also announced that the exercise for pay/pension revision of university employees has been initiated and necessary orders shall be issued immediately after opening of civil secretariat at Srinagar.

Regarding the issue of pay anomaly of clerical cadre, he said that the meeting decided that the High Level Committee already constituted under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary will convene a meeting immediately after opening of offices at Srinagar to address the issue.

Meanwhile, the Minister appealed to the striking clerical cadre employees to call off their protest to avoid inconvenience to the general public.

ARMY

Commending the performance of troops in the recent successful operations, the Army Commander stressed on the need to maintain extra vigil to defeat evil designs of the hostile forces and assured his full support to further strengthen the security posture. He also lauded the excellent synergy amongst all the security forces.

TWO

is permanent resident of Noonmai Yaripora, Dist- Anantnag and was staying in rented room at House No- 35/A, Bawa Khel Mithu Basti, Jalandhar.

"As per their online activities and initial findings the two were part of anti-national hacking group called Team Hackers Third Eye and claim to have hacked more than 500 Indian websites.

They were also involved in educating Kashmiri youth to bypass state-imposed-social-ban by use of VPN during Apr-May 2017.

Apart from that two were found in touch with several Pak based anti-Indian hackers. Some of them are believed to be backed by Pak Intelligence agencies.

Further they were found to be pro-Kashmiri militancy and pro-Pakistan through their anti-India and seditious post.

The Intelligence agencies said that laptops, mobile phones, SIM Cards, internet dongles and memory devices recovered from them will be examined by Delhi Police in detail to ascertain anti-state activities.

The two are likely to be produced before court and taken on police remand for further questioning.

CYBER

Management and Technical Institution who live in a rented room at Gagan Vihar Mithoo Basti falling under the jurisdiction of JP Nagar Police Station had informed the College authorities that a couple of men brandishing pistols entered their room and abducted Adil Ahmed Teli, a BCA student who hails from Noonmai, Yaripora Kulgam district.

The students said that unknown armed men even seized the laptop and pen drive of Adil.

The student remained untraceable for almost 8 hours while the Principal of the Institute Dr Pushkar Nath according to protesting students showed callous attitude and didn't try to locate the 'abducted' student.

Director St. Soldier Management and Technical Institute, Mr Manohar Arora said that whole college is at the back of the student.

When asked to throw light on the matter, he said that Jalandar police have informed that Adil has been arrested by Delhi Police Cyber Cell in a hacking case. "I don't know which websites he has hacked or what he has done but sincerely speaking he is an intelligent student," Arora said adding that College authorities are in touch with the police.

SSP Kulgam, Dr Harmeet Singh also said that the student has been arrested by Cyber Cell under an FIR registered against him. "We have informed his parents and are in touch with the Cyber Cell," he said.

CLERICAL

committee to look into the demands is yet another time consuming exercise.

Mir wanted to know about the fate of the outcome of the recommendations of two committees, one constituted under the chairmanship of incumbent Chief Secretary B B Vyas in 2007 and another under the chairmanship of former chief secretary Iqbal Khanday in 2012 and said committees are constituted just to buy time and such exercises show the governments non seriousness about the acceptance and implementation of the long pending demands including pay anomaly.

Mir said the core group of the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh association which met after the issuance of an order on the constitution of yet another committee unanimously decided to continue the strike till the government accepts and implements the pending demands including pay anomaly.

It is in place to mention here that Minister for Finance Syed Altaf Bukhari had Thursday this week told KNS that an order over the pending demands of the clerks including pay anomaly will be issued today and government as per the commitment of the Finance Minister issued an order mentioning therein that a committee has been constituted to look into the demands and submit a report to the government.

GEELANI

to resent and react against these gruesome incidents.

Demanding stringent punishment for rapists of Asifa and those who by evoking emotions and giving communal color to rape-and-murder case, Geelani said that these fringe elements are committing a heinous crime against humanity.

Geelani said that some vested interests are trying to derive political mileage out of a brutal and inhuman act.

Appealing people in Jammu, Geelani said that they should identify and resent those sick minded who for their mean interests are trying to communalize this barbaric incident.

Blaming authorities, Geelani said that vested elements and some criminals are hatching conspiracies to handover case to CBI and trying their hard to shelve case and acquit perpetrators and for this purpose even Supreme Court of India is facilitating the move. "We have no faith in Indian judiciary," Geelani said, adding that their bias track record about Kunan Poshpora and Shopian double murder and rape cases, serve as glaring examples for their bias and communal mindset.

Demanding impartial probe by some internal agencies, Geelani said it as "crime against humanity" and as such the criminals should be awarded a stringent punishment.

Meanwhile, a spokesman of Hurriyat Conference (G) on Friday lashed out at state police and authorities for barring Hurriyat chairman from offering congregational prayers.

He said, "Geelani and other resistance leaders are barred from performing religious obligations which is interference in religious matters.

Geelani is a leader of international stature, scholar and a statesman," said a spokesman, and added that there is no constitutional and moral justification to curb his peaceful political activities and stop him from performing religious obligations and lamenting at administration, spokesman said that his residence has been turned into a sub-jail.

Meanwhile, Hurriyat leaders and activists including Molvi Bashir Ahmad Irfani, Mohd Shafi Lone, Syed Mohd Shafi, Imtiyaz Ahmad, Gulshan Abas and senior leaders of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat including Umar Aadil Dar, Syed Imtiyaz Hyder, Nisar Ahmad Bhat, Zahoor Ahmad Beg, Ishfaq Ahmad Khan, Sajad Ahmad Sofi, Ab Ahad Mir, and Sajad Ahmad Pala, staged a protest demonstration at Hyderpora after Friday prayers.

ROAD

and CITH Srinagar from outside the premises of their garrison for the convenience of employees.

"We have to go by walk after the army makes our frisking. Our gate passes are also being checked," an employee of the SKUAST-K said.

An employee of ICAR said that the issue has been raised several times with the army but to no avail.

"A survey was also conducted by the Revenue Department and recommended construction of alternate road," the official said.

He said that army has denied of allowing construction of road citing security reasons. Director CITH Dr Desh Beer Singh told KNS that army is providing employees passes only then allowing going to the departments. "Passes are being renewed to employees. If farmers have to visit they tell us in advance and we manage that," Singh said.

The Director CITH recently wrote a letter to SKUAST-K, a copy of which lies in possession of KNS, which reads, "Kindly refer to this office letter which R K Venna Lieutenant Colonel Administrative Commandant station headquarters old air field Srinagar C/O 56 APO was intimidated regarding objectives raised by army station near the Radar of the Old Air Field for construction of alternate road from Doodhganga road near Kralpora via KD Farm to ICAR-CITH Srinagar and was requested for providing the sources wherefrom NOC is to be required for construction of alternate road."

The letter reads, "In its backdrop the administrative commandant for station headquarter vide letter no 2400/02/G dated March 12, 2018 communicated that due to constant security threat in the Valley and various incidents close to the perimeter wall/fence of this garrison it is not feasible to provide NOC for construction of approach road in between the Radar unit and military units, but at the same time there is a need to have separate approach road for SKUAST-KICAR, and CITH Srinagar from outside the premises of their garrison for the convenience of employees aforesaid organizations."

"The army has requested to conduct the survey for aforesaid purpose after consulting the VC-SKUAST Kashmir, so that further follow up action may be initiated for construction of alternate road from Doodhganga road," it reads.

Col Rajesh Kalra PRO (Def) Srinagar when contacted told KNS that he will check it from the concerned department. "I will check it from concerned department and will get back to you," he maintained.

PM

improve ties that were hit by the 73-day-long Dokalam standoff last year.

Modi recalled that during the 2000 years of history, India and China together provided momentum and strength to the world economy and dominated it for around 1600 years.

"The two countries together constituted for about 50 per cent of the world economy and another 50 per cent was shared by rest of the world for 1600 years," the prime minister said.

Modi also said the people of India felt proud that President Xi has twice received him out of the capital.

"I'm perhaps the first Prime Minister of India, for whom, you have come out of the capital (Beijing) twice to receive me," Modi said, referring to his visit to Xi'an - the hometown of President Xi in 2015.

On his part, President Xi said the two countries have established closer partnership and made positive progress in recent years.

"In the past five years, we have achieved a lot. We have met each other on many occasions," he said.

"Our two countries have established closer partnership and cooperation. We have made positive progress. India and China have a combined population of 2.6 billion which provides enormous potential for development. The influence of our two countries is steadily rising in the region and the world," Xi told Modi.

Xi said he believes in future and the two leaders could meet in format like this from time to time.

"I look forward to in-depth communication with your excellency, and ensure we can build common understanding and help to take the China-India relationship to the next level," he said, ahead of their one-on-one dinner at a state guest house by the famous East Lake.

They will resume their one-on-one interaction tomorrow at 10 a.m (local time) with walks by the lake side, boat ride and wind up their talks over lunch, official sources here said.

This is fourth visit of Modi to China after he came to power in 2014. He is again due to visit China to take part in the SCO summit to be held at Qingdao city on June 9-10.

SHOPIAN

south Kashmir's Pulwama district for the fourth successive day on Friday to mourn the militant killings.

Four militants, including two locals, were killed in a 12-hour gunfight in Lam forests of Tral on Tuesday. The other two were foreigners, including Jaish operational commander, police said.

All shops and other commercial establishments remained closed while public transport also remained off the roads.

Reports said that after Friday congregational prayers, clashes erupted in the town between protesters and government forces.

Witnesses said that a paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) trooper was injured after he was hit by a stone. The trooper was immediately rushed to hospital for treatment.

Railways emerges as the Preferred Carrier of Automobile in the Country

Srinagar, April 27: Indian Railways has emerged as the most preferred mode of transportation given the low cost of transportation, faster service, reliability and safety offered by railway system. Needless to mention that railways are the green mode of transportation. In 2017-18, around 29 million vehicles were produced in country registering a growth of 14.78 percent over the same period last year. Given the current low car penetration, rising prosperity and the increasing affordability of private vehicles, the automobile industry is poised to grow even faster in India. These vehicles need to be transported to the far flung areas of the country. Indian Railways in recent time have undertaken a number of initiatives to capture automobile traffic.

Member Traffic, Shri Mohd Jamshed stated that "Year 2017-18 has witnessed a paradigm shift in the marketing efforts of Indian Railways to attract automobile traffic and

enhance our freight basket. Specially in the later half of 2017-18, under the guidance of Minister of Railways, Shri Piyush Goyal, we decided to liberalise Automobile Freight Train Operator (AFTO) policy to encourage more private investment in special wagons, procurement of our own BCACBM (high-capacity railway wagons) and NMG wagons. In April, 2018, we have taken two game changing decisions to allow handling of automobile from all container terminals and to allow loading automobile and auto spares in privately owned wagons in different directions for optimal utilisation of stock".

Indian Railways is working closely with automobile industry to develop policies which are mutually beneficial to industry as well as Railways. The following noteworthy steps have been taken in 2017-18 to attract automobile traffic by Indian Railways:

Meeting has been conducted with

all stake holders in automobile business including Society for Indian Automobiles Manufactures (SIAM), M/s Maruti Suzuki, M/s Hyundai Motors, M/s Tata Motors and automotive logistics providers on 28.09.2017 in Rail Bhawan.

In view of the issues raised by the stakeholders the AFTO policy has been liberalized viz. registration fees for the AFTO scheme has been reduced from Rs. 5 crore to Rs. 3 crore; and condition of minimum procurement of 3 rakes under the scheme has been relaxed to one rake. The revision was issued on 13.10.2017.

So far 28 routes have been notified for operation of BCACBM rakes.

Now, Auto Hubs are already functional at Walajabad (Southern Railway) and Farukhnagar (Northern Railway). Works are underway for up-gradation of facilities at these auto hubs. Further General Manager's of all Zonal Railways have been asked to identify terminals to be developed as Rail Auto Hubs.

Conversion of 17 additional NMG rakes has been approved out of which 4 rakes have already been inducted.

10 BCACBM rakes have been included in Railway's RSP for 2018-19. The agreement for licensing of commercial plots at Detroj of Ahmedabad division duly agreed by M/s Maruti Suzuki India Ltd finalized and loading started in March 2018.

The positive results of these initiatives are visible in the enhancement of automobile loading in 2017-18. During 2017-18, the loading from automobiles traffic has increased by 16% and earning from automobile traffic has increased by 18% as compared to 2016-17.

In April, 2018 Indian Railways has liberalised AFTO Policy. Earlier, the transportation of automobile and auto spare by AFTOs was permitted only in one direction. With the coming up of auto-hubs across the country, this restriction has now been lifted. AFTOs will be able to utilize their rakes for loading in dif-

ferent directions and will be able to optimize the utilization of their rakes.

The loading of automobile loading was permitted only from auto hubs, Private Freight Terminals' (PFT) and Railway good sheds with automobile handling facility. This condition has severely restricted automobile loading on account of limited availability and capacity of such terminals. It has been decided that the automobile loading/unloading shall be permitted from all Inland Container Depots (ICDs), Container terminals managed by Container Train Operators. This shall result in availability of additional 86 locations in addition to the earlier auto hubs, PFTs and Railway good shed with automobile handling facility.

Automobile Industry is quite ecstatic with these reforms and committed to increase market share of Indian Railways in automobile transportation. Railways would certainly emerge as most preferred carrier of automobiles in the country.

Collaboration between Centre and States to boost Handloom and Handicraft sectors

Srinagar, April 27: A meeting of State Textiles Ministers was held on 26th April, 2018 in New Delhi for taking comprehensive view on the schemes of Government of India for Handloom and Handicraft sectors. Minister of Textiles and Information & Broadcasting Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani presided over the meeting with Minister of State for Textiles Shri Ajay Tamta and Secretary Textiles, Anant Kumar Singh.

Secretary, Textiles, initiated the meeting by highlighting the crucial role of State Governments in identification of weavers and artisans and their active participation in implementation of the Government of India schemes. A detailed presentation on schemes of Government of India for development of Handloom and Handicraft sectors was made by the concerned Development Commissioners.

Speaking on this occasion, the Minister of Textiles and Information & Broadcasting reiterated the belief in cooperative federalism and appealed to State Ministers and representatives to play a pivotal role in decision making for the growth of the textiles sector. Underlining the need for all-round development of weavers and artisans, the Minister requested officials at the Centre and the States to ensure that the benefits of all Government of India schemes, like Ujjwala Yojana, Swachhta Abhiyan, reach the beneficiaries along with Textiles Ministry initiatives. She said that India Handloom Brand launched by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is a bridge between weavers, manufacturers and consumers, ensuring increased earnings for weavers and quality products for consumers. The Minister urged everyone present at the meeting to encourage stakeholders to register their products with India Handloom Brand. She also requested State Ministers to set targets and regularly review activities at Handloom and Handicraft clusters. She emphasized the need for educating weavers and artisans and their families by encouraging them to enroll with NIOS and IGNOU through initiatives taken by the Ministry of Textiles.

State Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand were present at the meeting along with senior officials of the Ministry of Textiles and Development Commissioners for Handloom and Handicrafts.

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Clarification on estimates of Toilet Costs under Swachh Bharat Mission

Srinagar, April 27: It has come to the attention of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Swachh Bharat Mission, that some incorrect estimates of toilet costs constructed under SBM-G are being circulated on social media and reported in print and electronic media.

This is to clarify that under the Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin, each eligible beneficiary gets Rs. 12,000 as an incentive/subsidy to build a low cost but good quality household toilet. This centre and the state contribute to this incentive in the ratio of 60:40. The centre releases its share to the states, and it is the states who implement the program on the ground.

While the average cost of a twin-pit leach pit toilet is about Rs. 12,000, it can vary based on local conditions. In some cases, the beneficiaries may also choose to spend more than just the government incentive in order to build even better quality toilets. Hence it is incorrect to suggest that the incentive is equivalent to the "cost of a toilet".

Recording of Unique Identity Number of Foreign Diplomatic Missions / UN Organizations on invoices while making supplies

Srinagar, April 27: Complaints have been received from the Foreign Diplomatic Missions / UN Organizations regarding unwillingness of vendors / suppliers / E-commerce websites to record the UIN (Unique Identity Number) while making sales to such Embassies / Missions / Consulates or UN organizations.

Unique Identification Number (UIN) is a 15-digit unique number allotted to any specialised agency of the United Nations Organisation or any Multilateral Financial Institution and Organisation notified under the United Nations (Privileges and Immunities) Act, 1947, Consulate or Embassy of foreign countries. First two digits of the UIN denotes State code where such entity is located.

It may be noted that supply to Foreign Diplomatic Missions / UN Organizations is like any other Business to Consumer (B2C) supply and will not have any additional impact on the supplier's tax liability. Recording of UIN while making such supplies by the suppliers will enable Foreign Diplomatic Missions / UN Organizations to claim refund of the taxes paid by them in India. Therefore, it is advised that suppliers should record the UIN of the Embassies / Missions / Consulates or UN organizations on the tax invoice.

It has been noticed many big brands for groceries, clothing, super stores etc. have been denying this facility to Embassies and Consulates. Such organizations / stores are advised to amend their processes / software and enable recording of UIN when insisted upon by a diplomat or an official of a Foreign Diplomatic Missions / UN Organizations.

Attention is invited to Circular No. 43/17/2018-GST dated 13th April 2018 which provides that recording of UIN on the invoice is a necessary condition under rule 46 of the CGST Rules, 2017. If suppliers / vendors are not recording the UINs, action may be initiated against them under the provisions of the CGST Act, 2017.

NEET PG and NEET SS cut off percentile reduced by 15%; about 18000 students to be benefitted

Srinagar, April 27: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has reduced the NEET PG and NEET SS cut off percentile by 15%. The decision is likely to benefit about 18000 students as this will improve the chances of filling up PG seats and minimizing wastage of seats. Referring to the decision, Shri J P Nadda, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare stated that all efforts are being made to fill up the PG seats. "This is a significant step towards strengthening medical sector and indicates the priority given by the government to the health sector. We are making sure that there is adequate manpower for providing quality health services," Shri Nadda added.

Concerted Water Conservation Thrust under MGNREGS

Srinagar, April 27: With near universal geo-tagging of assets and payment of wages and materials through the Electronic Fund Management System (EFMS), a transparent Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has made concerted efforts to create durable assets. The thrust has been on Natural Resource Management (NRM), both on community and individual beneficiary lands of small and marginal farmers. Due to these concerted efforts, 143 lakh hectares have benefitted through Water Conservation efforts under MGNREGS over the last 3 years. This includes construction of over 11 lakh farm ponds in the last 2 years, large scale Water Conservation Schemes and vermi composting pits. National evaluation by Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi and assessment of individual beneficiary schemes for livelihood by Council for Social Development have indicated improvements in productivity, acreage, incomes and water table through MGNREGS works. All State Governments have taken keen interest to use MGNREGS as a livelihood resource even under individual beneficiary schemes for poultry sheds, goat sheds, dairy sheds etc. 90 days of wage labour under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G) housing and Rs. 12,000/- for household toilet wherever SBM Resources are not available has been provided under PMAY-G.

Considering the importance of Water Conservation especially during April to June period of peak demand for work in rural areas, the Government of India has released adequate funds for large scale thrust on completing 43.62 lakh Natural Resource Management works which are under implementation. It has also urged the States to accord maximum priority to Water Conservation works during the first quarter of 2018-19 including River Rejuvenation. Successes in River Rejuvenation have encouraged MGNREGS to undertake similar works in other States as well. The Hon'ble Prime Minister on the National Panchayati Raj Diwas on April 24, 2018 has exhorted Gram Panchayat Pradhans to lead a Community owned movement for Water Conservation using MGNREGS resources to insulate villages from vagaries of monsoon. On the 25th April 2018, Hon'ble Prime Minister has urged all the Chief Secretaries of States in the Pragati Review to assign top most priority to Water Conservation works under MGNREGS in the April to June period. There are no fund constraints in any State and technical training to field functionaries for Natural Resource Management has been given under the Samarthya Capacity Development Programme in partnership with Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, Department of Land Resources and Central Ground Water Board as part of the thrust on 2,264 stressed Blocks under Mission Water Conservation.

Shri J P Nadda reviews preparedness of States to manage vector borne diseases, before the onset of monsoon

Srinagar, April 27: Emphasising the need for early preparedness to be adequately in a position to manage vector borne diseases such as Dengue, Malaria, JE, Kala Azar, Chickungunya, Lymphatic Filariasis in the coming monsoon months, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Shri J P Nadda reviewed the status of vector-borne diseases and the preparation of States through video conference, here today. The Union Health Minister interacted with Principal Health Secretaries and Mission Directors of 20 endemic States - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, UP and West Bengal. The advance review at the level of the Health Secretaries and senior officials of the States was done in view of the predicted upsurge of vector borne diseases at the onset of monsoon.

Shri J P Nadda reviewed the availability of diagnostic kits, drugs, testing labs, manpower and funds. Awareness being the key to prevention of many diseases, Shri Nadda stressed on the importance of conducting focused and intensive IEC campaigns and sustaining them through the monsoon season. He advised that best practices from states like Gujarat and Tamil Nadu may also be

emulated.

Shri Nadda further stated that the focus should be on active case finding for source identification and reduction of vectors. He said adequate attention should be given to building sturdy surveillance systems. Effective surveillance and monitoring was key to success in combatting these diseases, he emphasised. The Minister also underscored need to develop special strategy and effective micro-plans for endemic districts. He requested the Health Secretaries to personally guide the State's efforts and monitor the measures and assured the states of all necessary support to enhance their capacity to manage Vector Borne diseases. The Health Minister also urged States to fill up the vacant posts and wherever necessary redeploy the human resource to endemic areas. Stressing on the importance of inter-sectoral coordination and convergence of efforts in not only the prevention but also management of vector borne diseases such as dengue, malaria etc., Shri Nadda advised them to review and strengthen inter-sectoral coordination. He said that coordination with Rural Development Ministry must also be taken up for construction of pucca houses under PMAY in Kala Azar endemic areas to effect reduction in breeding of sandflies. The Health Minister further reassured the states for all possible help from the Central government.

Our aim is to ensure one ITI in every block of the country by end 2018 and up-grade our skill institutions with market relevant skills - Dharmendra Pradhan

Srinagar, April 27: "Industrial Training Institutes played a vital role in economic development of the country, especially in terms of supplying skilled manpower to industries. We have focused extensively on modernization of our institutes. It is our endeavour to establish at least one ITI in each block of the country by end of 2018", Shri Dharmendra Pradhan has said.

Addressing the State representatives, Pradhan said, "Vocational Training is a concurrent subject and thus it is imperative that Centre and State governments work closely to ensure a paradigm shift in addressing the issues relevant to skill development and identify the gaps in skill development, so as to achieve the objectives in terms of quantity, quality, outreach, and mobility while building this largest human resource exercise that we have undertaken. The States should align themselves to reforms being done to our central initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PM-KVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKK), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)."

Emphasising on the need for strengthening institutional mechanisms for skill development at the State level and bringing in a more robust framework, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Skill Development and

Entrepreneurship, and Petroleum & Natural Gas and Shri Anant Kumar Hegde, Minister of State for Skill Development today launched an array of initiatives at a day long State Skill Development Ministers Conference in New Delhi. The workshop saw a participation from more than 90% of the States, discussing the skills agenda.

The conference witnessed the launch of new courses for ITIs for India's youth, as an endeavour to promote emerging skill areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Robotic Process Automation, Internet of Things, Robotics, Big Data Analytics, 3D Printing, etc. which would be in high demand globally in the coming days. Keeping this in mind an MOU was signed today between Director General of Training (DGT) & National Association of Software Services Companies (NASSCOM) for enabling Skill Development & Continuous Learning for ITI trainees & trainers.

Recognising the concurrent nature of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), the conference marked the launch of new Affiliation Norms 2018 for ITIs which restores the primacy of State Government in the ITIs Affiliation process.

Affiliation Norms 2018 aims at establishing high quality Institutions for Skill Training in all parts of the country especially the un-served blocks. To ensure transpar-

ency in the affiliation process, a Portal has also been designed and was launched at the event. The portal has a three-stage process which simplifies the overall affiliation process.

MSDE also today announced a Self-Grading exercise for ITIs to provide "Star Rating" to each institute, to ensure quality assessment of ITI and a healthy competition between them.

MSDE also today commenced its partnership with Ministry of Home Affairs which has "Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation Scheme for Left Wing Extremists", where surrendered Left-Wing Extremists can take admission in an institute and they are supported with stipend amounting upto Rs. 6000/- per month for a period of upto three years. It has been found that most of such people do not have requisite qualification for getting admission in Industrial Training Institutes. MSDE has realized this situation and accordingly relaxed the entry qualification by tweaking the existing Craftsmen Training Scheme, so that they may secure gainful wage or self-employment after acquiring skill in ITIs. Shri Pradhan today presented the offer of admission to two such beneficiaries at the event.

Urging the States to take the mission to the last mile, Shri Hedge said, "We have introduced an array of schemes and initiatives today, but the real results will only be seen when they reach the masses.

Van Dhan Scheme launched by PM to help increase tribal income through Value Addition

Srinagar, April 27: The Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi launched the Van Dhan Scheme of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED on 14th April, 2018 during the celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti at Bijapur, Chattisgarh. Emphasizing the important role of value addition in increasing tribal incomes, he stated that Van Dhan, Jan Dhan and Gobar-Dhan Schemes had the potential to change the tribal-rural economic system. All these three schemes in tandem need to be promoted for this purpose by the State Governments.

The establishment of "Van Dhan Vikas Kendra" is for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility. This first model Van Dhan Vikas Kendra in Bijapur is being implemented for training of 300 training beneficiaries with a total outlay of Rs. 43.38 lakhs for training, providing equipments & tools for primary level processing and infrastructure & building for housing the Kendra. This Kendra to start with will have processing facility for Tamarind brick making, Mahua flower storage facility and chironjee cleaning and packaging.

Under Van Dhan, 10 Self Help Groups of 30 Tribal gatherers is constituted. They are then trained and provided with working capital to add value to the products, which they collect from the jungle. Working under

the leadership of Collector these groups can then market their products not only within the States but also outside the States. Training and technical support is provided by TRIFED. It is proposed to develop 30,000 such centres in the country.

Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribals in this approach. Three stage value addition would be the corner stone for enhancing incomes of the tribals under the scheme. The grass root level procurement is proposed to be undertaken through Self Help Groups associated with implementing agencies. Convergence and Networking with other Govt. departments/scheme shall be undertaken to utilise the services of existing SHGs like Ajeevika, etc. These SHGs shall be appropriately trained on sustainable harvesting/ collection, primary processing & value addition and be formed into clusters so as to aggregate their stock in tradable quantity and linking them with facility of primary processing in a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra. The stock after primary processing shall be supplied by these SHGs to the State Implementing Agencies or direct up for supply to corporate secondary processor. For creation of secondary level value addition facility at district level and tertiary level value addition facility at State level, Big Corporates.

DAILY Editorial Time and Us SRINAGAR J&K

Unjustified move against students

The motive may well be administratively a short term requirement dictated by some law and order reasons but to ban tuition centres in whole of the State of the Jammu and Kashmir is gratuitous, ill-advised and un called for. To put it in simpler words, Jammu students, due to enforcement of this order, too have to suffer and see their career being affected for no fault of theirs but presumably due to some problems in Kashmir valley which the Education Minister termed as "major distraction".

We see neither any merit nor any rationale behind ordering closure of all private tuition centres in whole of Jammu and Kashmir for three months dictated solely by local considerations of "distraction" of students confined to a few isolated pockets of Kashmir. With this unreasonable and unjustifiable order issued by the State Education Minister, innocent, hard working and serious about studies students of Jammu are going to suffer immensely and in plain words, is tantamount to playing with their academic career. It may be recalled that as per the State Education Minister, the coaching centres were to be "major distractions" for the students. The decision of the Government in improving the educational standards in the educational institutions is not contested, in fact it must be appreciated but agreeably it was going to take a long period when it would actually be felt that the students were getting enough attention in their schools, especially the Government run and they were taken care of as they should have otherwise been taken. To bring Government schools and colleges on the same pedestal as of private ones was an uphill task but undoubtedly never impossible. In any case that was going to take time, policies, planning and dedication.

The Minister's assurances to the students and the parents that, "we will provide coaching to the students or give extra classes as well, please bring back students to schools" is conspicuous of the limitations of the Government to bring that about in shortest period of time but to close tuition centres first looks prosaic and unworthy of seriously getting implemented.

Another aspect of the order is to check as to how many of these tuition centres actually have been closed in the valley but the implementation in other areas was going to achieve nothing excepting playing with the career of students who have to face unparalleled competition in their educational careers and aspire to achieve the best grading in their annual examinations. The Minister is fervently urged to review this decision in the interests of the academic career of the students without any further ado.

DEATH PENALTY FOR RAPIST

► B L Saraf

The committee, after examining the representations made by various civil society groups, individuals and persuing relevant laws in view of the international trends, made certain far reaching recommendations for redefining offences pertaining to the women. It proposed changes in other laws also which the committee found to have a bearing on the terms of mandate. Coming to the main terms of reference, the committee recommended redefining offence of 'rape' within the provision on sexual assault, with a view to emphasise women's right to bodily integrity and honour.

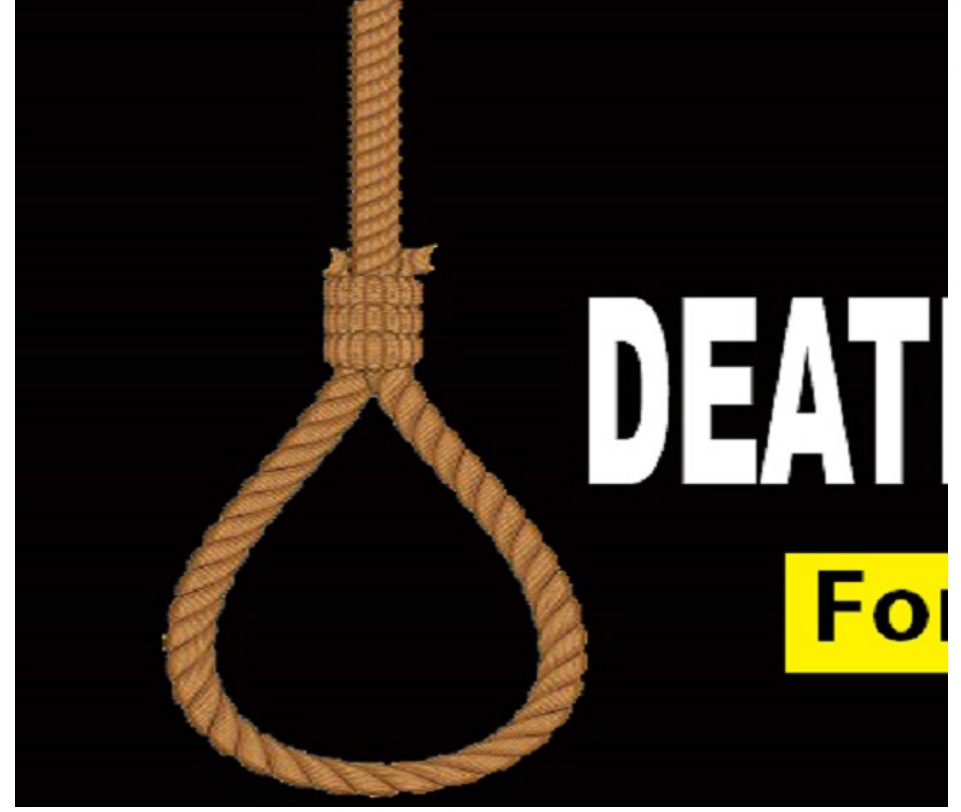
Union Government has promulgated The Criminal Law (Amendment), Ordinance 2018 that provides for death penalty to those convicted of raping a child below 12 years and life term for raping a girl below age of 16 years. Aim of the Ordinance is to ensure effective deterrence against rape and instil a sense of security among women, particularly young girls in the country. A number of measures have been put in place for speedy investigation, completion of trial and disposal of the appeals. The Government has also decided to strengthen investigation and prosecution, including setting up of fast track courts and special forensic labs in each State besides maintaining national data base of sexual offenders. The Ordinance has been promulgated in the wake of nationwide outrage over rape and murder of teenage girl in Kathua and other cases reported from different parts of the country.

President has approved the Ordinance, following which the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, IPC and the Evidence Act stand amended.

We are reminded of the brutal sexual assault on a young girl in Delhi, on 16th December 2012 and her consequent death - (Nirbaya case). Whole nation went up in outrage. Whereupon Govt appointed a committee headed by Justice J S Verma, former Chief Justice of India, with two eminent jurists as its members to "look into possible amendments of the criminal law to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for the criminals committing sexual assault of extreme nature against women." The committee was constituted in response to a nationwide outcry of the people against failure of Government to provide a safe and dignified environment for women of the country, who are exposed to sexual violence.

The committee, after examining the representations made by various civil society groups, individuals and persuing relevant laws in view of the international trends, made certain far reaching recommendations for redefining offences pertaining to the women. It proposed changes in other laws also which the committee found to have a bearing on the terms of mandate. Coming to the main terms of reference, the committee recommended redefining offence of 'rape' within the provision on sexual assault, with a view to emphasise women's right to bodily integrity and honour.

However, the committee did not accede to the demand of recommending death penalty to the rapist. While dealing with this aspect of the matter it has, possibly, taken into the consideration the international standards of human rights. Even today, persons who work for child care and protection hold same view. They say, with some merit, that death penalty in these cases will result in number of these cases going unreported because in most of the cases it is the family member or a close acquaintance who commits the offence. National Crime Record Bureau (Bureau) has produced latest data which reveals that 96 of the rapes are committed by family members. That is why conviction rate in cases of rape is just 24 per cent. It is only 20 percent under



POCSO Act.

The Verma Committee did enthuse new life to the public discourse on the sexual abuses of women. Majority of the recommendations have been incorporated in the relevant laws. But a reality check is needed before embarking on new legislation; has life of a poor girl child or an adult female been made any safer and better after the Verma Committee recommendations were put on the statute book? Going through the reports emanating from every part of the country, it appears that females continue to be as vulnerable as they were before the Justice Verma report.

How ironic? While a girl child continues to suffer sexual assault it is the male juvenile who is main perpetrator of the sexual offence. As per the Bureau, in the year 2011 64 percent of the crimes has been committed by juveniles in the age group of 16 - 18. Therefore to tighten the noose around the juveniles in this age group Parliament, in 2015, introduced "Judicial Waiver System" in the J J Act which allows juveniles to be treated as adults, in certain conditions, in the adult criminal justice system and punishes them as such.

Kathua is in J&K. So onus is on the State Government to ensure fast tracking of the case. To her credit, C M Mehbooba Mufti has been asking for it. But she must be told that, leave alone Fast Track Courts, number of normal courts have become non-functional in the State. Some suffer for want of Presiding Officers others for lack of basic infrastructure and the staff. The institution of Fast Track Courts, across the country, has withered away after Finance Commissions stopped funding them. If we mean real business, then these fast track courts need be created in dozens, fast, after due budgeting. In the meanwhile State Government should provide staff and related infrastructure to the existing courts.

Then there is a need to have a law in the State which is analogous to the POCSO Act. State Government must bring in changes in

the criminal laws as proposed in the Central Ordinance. Otherwise, intention to save a girl child will remain only a pious declaration.

All said, it is better to strengthen existing laws and ensure certainty of the conviction in a time bound schedule. Severity in punishment may be an option but it brings in a concomitant factor which often leads to free walking of the accused. It is the cardinal rule of criminal jurisprudence that more the severity in sentencing more heavy is the burden to bring home a charge to the accused. In such cases even a minor infraction of a mere technicality gives huge benefit to the accused. At the same time, it is of paramount importance that safety of the victims and witness is ensured. Fast tracking of these cases will surely yield desired results.

It will be profitable to recall here how the Verma Committee concluded its report. These conclusions hold good even today. It said that the existing laws if faithfully and sincerely implemented by a credible laws enforcement agencies, are sufficient to maintain law and order and protect safety and dignity of the people, particularly women and punish offenders who commit any crime. It has underlined the necessity for improving law keeping in view the modern times. Therefore, it comes to effective and timely implementation of the laws rather than having more of them that will ensure law and order in the society.

The global experience gathered over a period of time shows that it is the fear of quick meeting out the punishment to the offender than its severity which acts as a deterrent.

We hope that new law will bring in desired results: that two months time limit for investigation, two months for completion of the trial and six months period for disposal of the appeals, provided in the Ordinance, won't end up as Quixotic declarations.

(The author is former Principal District & Sessions Judge)

The dragon beckons again

► P.S. Raghavan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi goes to China on April 27, against the background of turbulence in global geopolitics and some domestic disquiet about "softening" of India's China policy.

The international backdrop is worrying in many respects. The face-off between the U.S. (and its allies) and Russia is arguably worse than during the Cold War. They confront each other, through proxy forces, in three active conflict zones - Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. The recent U.S.-French-British missile strikes in Syria were a stark reminder. It now emerges that prior communication to the Russians had ensured that equipment, personnel and civilians had been evacuated in advance. However, such deconfliction arrangements seem to be episodic, and there is a lurking danger that miscalculation or brinkmanship might spark off a direct conflict at a local level.

Edgy confrontation
Sanctions - particularly the new U.S. legislation, CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanc-

tions Act), under which it can impose sanctions on any company which engages with Russia in the defence or energy sector - impart a sharper edge to the confrontation. This weapon was not wielded in anything like this form in the Cold War; its impact could be far more devastating in today's globalised world. Recent American sanctions on major Russian multinationals, whose stocks are internationally traded, widened the target beyond Russian oligarchs to a larger body of shareholders within and outside Russia.

As the U.S. ratchets up pressure on Russia, it has donned kid gloves in dealing with China, as indicated by U.S. President Donald Trump's tweets. A recent tweet appreciates Chinese President Xi Jinping's "kind words on tariffs and automobile barriers" and "his enlightenment on intellectual property and technology transfers".

Trade issues
While India is being asked to address its trade surplus of about \$25 billion with the U.S., Mr. Trump asked China (in a tweet last month) to reduce its massive trade surplus of about \$375 billion with the U.S. by just \$1 billion! He prob-

ably meant \$100 billion, as has been suggested by his Administration, but it is worth noting that in 2017 alone, the U.S.'s trade imbalance rose by about \$28 billion. America's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade grouping excluding China, effectively benefited China.

India itself, running a trade deficit of over \$50 billion with China, is in difficult negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a free trade grouping that includes China, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Unpredictable U.S.
The unpredictability of U.S. foreign policy is driving even its closest allies to hedge their options. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Mr. Xi are to exchange visits in the near future - a significant breakthrough in relations between two strategic rivals, who were on the verge of a military confrontation about five years ago. Japan (like India) is concerned about China's assertiveness in its neighbourhood and the geopolitical implications of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Yet, having failed to persuade Mr. Trump (with whom he claims excellent personal chemistry) to rethink U.S. withdrawal from the TPP and uncertain about the consistency of U.S. policy in the region, Mr. Abe sees benefit in sustaining a dialogue with China, whose positive response reflects its own desire to keep in touch with a U.S. ally, in the face of conflicting U.S. signals on trade and security policies.

The sharpening of U.S.-Russia acrimony has complicated India's relations with both countries. Besides pressure to address the India-U.S. trade imbalance, India has been warned that its defence and energy links with Russia could attract U.S. sanctions under CAATSA - a development which could have a major impact on our defence preparedness. Russia's intensifying defence cooperation with China and its actions in Afghanistan and with Pakistan are areas on which serious and delicate high-level India-Russia dialogue is being pursued.

Mutual interest in serenity
This is the backdrop to the current "reset" in India-China relations. With a strengthening Russia-China axis and

with the U.S. taking its eye off China to deal with Russia, it is prudent for India to maintain a harmonious dialogue with China, even as we deal with the wrinkles in our relations with the other two great powers. China's motivation in extending the olive branch may be similar: to maintain serenity in relations while it deals with its other challenges.

This is not to say that India should not stand firm on its core interests, political, economic or strategic. We cannot overlook Chinese designs in our neighbourhood - from Doklam to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives - or ignore the larger geopolitical threat posed by the land and sea corridors of the BRI. It is just that circumstances may have opened up some space for furthering mutual interests, without compromising on our other interests.

Countries do not publicly admit adverse asymmetries in relations, but their policymakers have to factor them into their policies and actions. Of course, even countries in adverse asymmetric relationships have levers which can and should be used to further their vital in-

terests. In most cases, this is best done through quiet dialogue instead of public airing of differences, which hardens attitudes.

Importance of messaging
It is a valid point that the public messaging on this change in tone of the India-China relationship could have been better. The course of India-China relations in the past couple of years had created a public narrative of bilateral frictions over CPEC, Doklam, our Nuclear Suppliers Group membership and other issues, on which India had to take strong public positions. The transformation in the international environment, creating opportunities for non-confrontational dialogue, could perhaps have been better explained. Foreign policy can be pursued far more effectively when it is supported by public perceptions.

The reality is that India has to maintain a pragmatic balance in its relations with the three major powers, remaining conscious of the fact that elements of these relations will be continuously impacted by the dynamic flux of today's global geopolitics.

Trust on the agenda as Modi, Xi meet today at Mao's villa in Wuhan

The only item on the agenda of the informal bilateral summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping is trust, according to top Indian government officials.

The two leaders, who will meet without any pre-set agenda, will aim to improve trust between the two countries and make sure "micro issues" do not act as an irritant, the officials added, asking not to be identified.

According to the officials, Modi and Xi will have "many" one-on-one interactions over April 27 and 28, with key aides joining them only for a few of the meetings at the East Lake villa in Wuhan. Politburo member Yang Jiechi, who is also the former Special Representative on India-China boundary talks, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Chinese Ambassador to India Luo Zhaohui will



be present to assist Xi. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, who is also the Special Representative for India-China boundary talks, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale and Indian Ambassador to China Gautam Bambawale, will be present in Wuhan from

the Indian side. This means both sides have advisors with over 100 years of accumulated government experience to assist the principals.

Before PM Modi left for Wuhan, he was locked in a series of meetings with NSA Doval and secretary Gokhale

that extended till early Thursday morning. "Now it is for the two leaders to talk to each other. It will be a leaders-led dialogue, which has the potential to transform the relationship," said a senior government official. While both Indian and Chinese diplomats are tight-lipped about the outcome, there are positive indications from the bilateral meeting between defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her Chinese counterpart Gen Wei Fenghe in Beijing on Tuesday.

HT learns that both sides were positive about future bilateral military to military engagement and were ready to look at the roadmap for defence engagement in future.

"With pressure from the trade war with US looming, China needs to build trust with India. And India is all for increasing trade with China as long as its security concerns are recognised," said a South Block official.

Five women among seven Maoists killed in ongoing Chhattisgarh encounter

Seven Maoists, including five women, were gunned down by security forces in Bijapur's Ipepta forest on Friday afternoon.

"The operation, which is still ongoing, was launched jointly by the Chhattisgarh and Telangana police. While seven bodies have been recovered so far, more are likely to emerge," deputy inspector general (Bastar) Sundaraj P told Hindustan Times.

Police also recovered six rocket launchers, an automatic rifle, a revolver, three grenades, four pairs of camouflage uniforms and 10 kit bags from the spot.

"The operation was launched yesterday on the basis of intelligence inputs. We are also conducting massive combing operations in



the forest, and we are likely to get more positive results in the next few hours," said special director general (anti-Maoist operations) DM Awasthi.

Ten Maoists were killed in a previous encounter with security personnel in the Tadapalagutta-Pujari Kanker forests, bordering Telangana, on March 22. Six women were among the rebels killed in that incident.

MP court summons Zuckerberg over complaint of taking down startup biz page

A court in Bhopal has issued summons to Facebook and its CEO Mark Zuckerberg on a petition filed by a city-based startup which accused the social networking giant of taking down the page, and thereby, hampering and interfering in its business.

Civil judge Parth Shankar Mishra on April 23 asked US-based Zuckerberg to appear in his court on June 20.

The judge directed that the summons be sent by email.

The judge was hearing a civil suit filed by one Swapnil Rai, who runs a web portal thetradebook.org, which he claimed is a business networking platform. In the suit, Rai said Facebook had stopped midway his paid advertisement campaign aimed at promoting his portal.

The campaign was sched-



uled to be run between April 14 and April 21, 2018, but it was "abruptly and wrongfully" stopped on April 16, the petitioner's counsel Ravi Kant Patidar said.

The campaign aimed at promotion of the webpage www.thetradebook.org containing registered trademark "tradefeed", he added. Patidar said Facebook stopped the

paid campaign without citing any reason and in the process "hampered" his client's business which was benefiting from the campaign.

The plaintiff said Facebook took money to promote the web page containing the registered trademark "tradefeed" for one week, but stopped it after three days, which it claims is breach of contract.

The plaintiff said he has the trademark "tradefeed" registered in his name, but Facebook was using "newsfeed" which he claims is similar to "tradefeed" to disseminate trade and business related information.

The suit demanded that Facebook be restrained from infringing the trademark and interfering in the business of "thetradebook.org", Patidar said. Besides, it demanded that "thetradebook.org" page be restored and Facebook take corrective measures to ensure its rightful business is not hampered, he added.

"I hold Mark Zuckerberg in high esteem. He has done a remarkable job by connecting people (through Facebook), but I had no option but to move the court to get my grievances addressed," Rai said.

India hands over helicopter, tanks to Bangladesh as 1971 war memorabilia

India has handed over to Bangladesh a Mi-4 helicopter and two PT-76 tanks as part of the 1971 Liberation War memorabilia.

"The gifts are to be showcased at the Bangladesh army and air force museums," a defence ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

He said the helicopter and tanks were part of gifts given by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj during her Bangladesh visit last year.

The memorabilia included 25 weapons like pistol, rifles, machine guns and mortars alongside a large number of artefact, historical photographs, archival audio and video clipping, maps and battle records related to the 1971 Liberation War.

"While most items of memorabilia have been handed over to the Bangladesh



National Museum; the larger items i.e. PT-76 Tanks and Mi 4 Helicopter are now being handed over to the Bangladesh army and air force," Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla said.

The light amphibious PT-76 tanks were used by the Indian army's armoured regiments in 1971 which played a crucial role in crossing riv-

ers and water bodies during the war.

Analysts said these tanks often outclassed a much larger force and technically superior M34 Chafee tanks, used by the Pakistani army in the war.

The Mi-4 transport helicopter was extensively utilised for heliborne operations by the India-Bangladesh joint forces in the eastern sector

confirming early defeat of Pakistani troops in 1971. Indian air force earlier gifted Bangladesh one Hunter jet fighter, one Dakota transport air craft ahead of this helicopter while India's navy previously gifted memorabilia of its INS Vikrant, models of ships that took part in the war and archival photographs and its army gifts included six 3.7 Howitzer Guns.

Madras HC dismisses petition seeking disqualification of 11 AIADMK MLAs

The Madras high court on Friday dismissed a petition seeking disqualification of 11 AIADMK legislators, including deputy chief minister O Panneerselvam, for voting against the government during a confidence motion moved by chief minister K Palaniswami last year.

Dismissing the petition filed by DMK Whip R Sakrappani, the court said it could not interfere in the Assembly Speaker's domain.

The court said it had the power of judicial review of decisions taken, but could not interfere in a matter where the Speaker had not taken a decision.

It also referred to a case pending in the Supreme Court on a similar issue arising from Andhra Pradesh.

The disqualification petition was filed against 11 AIADMK legislators

for voting against the confidence motion on chief minister K Palaniswami government on February 18, 2017, defying the party whip.

At that time, Panneerselvam had rebelled against the party led by jailed leader VK Sasikala. Later, Panneerselvam merged his group with the one led by Palaniswami who sidelined Sasikala and her relative TTV Dinakaran.

The petition for disqualification was filed by Sakrappani soon after assembly speaker P Dhanapal disqualified 18 legislators owing allegiance to sidelined AIADMK leader Dinakaran.

The legislators belonging to Dinakaran camp had also written to the governor expressing their loss of confidence in chief minister Palaniswami and requested him to



appoint a new chief minister.

The case filed by the disqualified legislators against the Speaker's action is pending before the high court.

As per the party position in Tamil Nadu assembly, the ruling

AIADMK has 116 members followed by DMK-89, Congress-8, IUML-1, Independent-1, the Speaker and 18 vacant seats, totalling 234. Besides, there is one nominated member without voting right.

On Friday, the court also dismissed another petition filed by DMK lawmaker J Anbazhagan against the unveiling of late chief minister J Jayalalithaa's portrait in the assembly.

Welcoming the two judgements, K Pandiarajan, the minister for Tamil Official Language and Tamil Culture, said the court's decision was validation of Tamil Nadu Speaker's decision.

He said the opposition parties might be disappointed but it would give them clarity as to what kind of cases could be filed in the courts.

Tamil Nadu Fisheries minister D Jayakumar said the two orders of the court on Friday was like having milk and fruit together. "It is a twin happy news. Justice has been done."

SC reserves order on Shanti Bhushan's PIL on allocation of cases

The SC on Friday reserved its order on a PIL filed by former law minister Shanti Bhushan challenging the existing roster practice of allocation of cases by the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Attorney General K K Venugopal opposed Bhushan's PIL before a bench comprising Justices A K Sikri and Ashok Bhushan and said the exercise of allocation of cases has to be done by one person and that has to be the CJI.

"This is not an exercise that can be taken by multiplicity of persons," Venugopal, who was earlier asked by the top court to assist in the matter, said.

The AG also told the bench that if a number of judges are involved in deciding on the roster and allocation of cases, there might be a "chaos" over which cases should be heard by whom.

The bench also heard the submissions of senior advocate Dushyant Dave and advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for Shanti Bhushan, on the issue.

Dave told the bench that process of deciding on the roster and allocation of matters to benches in the apex court should be decided by either the Collegium or the full court.

The bench had earlier said it has already held that the CJI is the "master of roster".

The petition filed by Bhushan names the CJI as one of the respondents along with the registrar of the Supreme Court.

In his PIL, Shanti Bhushan has stated that the "master of roster" cannot be an "unguided and unbridled" discretionary power, exercised arbitrarily by the CJI by hand-picking benches of select judges or by assigning cases to particular judges.

The petition said the CJI's authority as the master of roster is "not an absolute, arbitrary, singular power that is vested in the chief justice alone and which may be exercised with his sole discretion".

It said such an authority should be exercised by the CJI in consultation with the senior judges of the Supreme Court in keeping with the various pronouncements of the court.

The petition assumes significance in light of the January 12 press conference where four senior most judges of the top court said the situation in the court was "not in order" and many "less than desirable" things have taken place.

Why didn't Renuka Chowdhury speak on casting couch when she was MP: Shiv Sena

Hitting out at Congress leader Renuka Chowdhury over her remarks that Parliament was not immune to casting couch, the Shiv Sena on Friday sought to know why she did not raise the issue when she was an MP.

The saffron party said although her remarks were "irresponsible" and "insulted the country's women", the Modi government should take serious cognisance of the charges.

Chowdhury, whose term as a Rajya Sabha MP ended last month, recently said Parliament is not immune to the casting couch culture. She

said it was a "bitter truth" not just in the film industry, but in all work spaces.

"Renuka's statements are irresponsible and insulted all the women in the country... She herself was an MP and a Union minister. Only when her Rajya Sabha term came to an end that she remembered casting couch," the Sena said in an editorial in its mouthpiece 'Saamana'.

She said women are exploited at work spaces. According to her, it happens not only in the film industry, but in the Parliament as well, it added.

"If all this was happening



in the Parliament, then why didn't she raise her voice against it in the past? If wom-

en were being exploited before her eyes, why didn't she speak in the Parliament about it?

Why did she choose to speak only when her Rajya Sabha term ended? The Uddhav Thackeray-led party asked.

"But if what she says is right, then her party Congress should give an explanation about it. Parliament is a temple of democracy. She should clarify whether her charges are directed at her own party.

Congress was in power for so many years and the Modi government has been at the helm of affairs for the past four years," it said.

"But the Modi government will have to take a serious cognisance of her allegations... If there is casting couch in Parliament, from when it has been going on?" it asked.

After Saroj Khan (veteran Bollywood choreographer) defended the casting couch culture in the film industry, Renuka spoke on the issue, the Sena said adding, "But had she spoken about it in the Parliament, it would have been taken seriously."

Soda consumption reduces fertility in women, men

Women and men who consume about one sugar-sweetened beverage per day, sugar-sweetened sodas in particular, are nearly 20% less likely to achieve pregnancy in 1 year vs. women and men who consume no sugar-sweetened beverages, according to findings published in *Epidemiology*. Soda consumption has been linked to type 2 diabetes and obesity, but few studies have assessed the relationship between sugary drinks and fertility in men and women, Elizabeth Hatch, PhD, professor of epidemiology at Boston University School of Public Health, and colleagues wrote in the study background.

"Male and female intake of sugar-sweetened sodas and energy drinks were associated with a lower average monthly probability of conception in a large North American preconception cohort study of pregnancy planners," Hatch told *Endocrine Today*. "Results were consistent with control for many other factors, including educational level, income, BMI, caffeine, smoking and alcohol. In contrast, there was no association between intake of fruit juice or diet sodas with fertility." The researchers analyzed data from 3,828 women aged 21 to 45 years and 1,045 men aged at least 21 years

participating in PRESTO, an ongoing, internet-based cohort study of U.S. and Canadian adults trying to conceive for less than six cycles and not using fertility treatments; the study began enrolling in 2013. Women completed a web-based questionnaire and were encouraged to invite male partners to complete a one-time, baseline questionnaire. Both surveys included questions on the average weekly consumption of soda (sugar-sweetened and diet), popular energy drinks (Red Bull, 5-Hour Energy), sugar-sweetened sports drinks (Gatorade) and fruit juices. Participants also completed a food frequency questionnaire 10 days after the baseline questionnaire; women completed follow-up questionnaires every 8 weeks up to 12 months or until conception. Researchers estimated time-to-pregnancy using data from the women's screening, baseline and follow-up questionnaires. Average intake of various sugar-sweetened beverages was categorized as zero, one, two to six and at least seven servings per week. Researchers used proportional probabilities regression analysis to estimate fecundability ratios (FRs), defined as the cycle-specific probability of conception comparing the exposed

with the unexposed. Among the 2,674 couples who completed the study, 85% became pregnant. Women consumed an average of 1.3 sugar-sweetened sodas, 1.2 diet sodas, 0.9 glasses of fruit juice, 0.2 servings of energy drinks and 0.3 servings of sports drinks per week. Men consumed an average of 2.4 sugar-sweetened sodas, 1.6 diet sodas, one glass of fruit juice, 0.5 servings



of energy drinks and 0.5 servings of sports drinks per week. Women and men who consume about one sugar-sweetened beverage per day, sugar-sweetened sodas in particular, are nearly 20% less likely to achieve pregnancy in 1 year vs. women and men who consume no sugar-sweetened beverages. Researchers found that women who reported consuming at least seven servings of sugar-sweetened

beverages per week were 19% less likely to conceive when compared with women who consumed no sugar-sweetened beverages (FR = 0.81; 95% CI, 0.7-0.94); however, researchers observed little association among women who reported consuming fewer than seven servings. The risk for decreased fecundability was further increased when researchers assessed only sugar-

sweetened soda consumption, with FRs of 0.87 (95% CI, 0.77-0.99) and 0.75 (95% CI, 0.59-0.95) for women who consumed two to six servings and at least seven servings, respectively, compared with women who did not consume soda. Adjustment for Healthy Eating Index and total energy intake did not change results. Among men, researchers found that, compared with men who reported no sugary drink consumption, consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages was associated with reduced fecundability, with FRs of 0.85 (95% CI, 0.72-1.01) and 0.78 (95% CI, 0.63-0.96), respectively, for consuming two to six and at least seven servings per week. Researchers also observed a greater reduction in fecundability when analyzing sugar-sweetened sodas alone, with an FR of 0.67 (95% CI, 0.51-0.89) when consuming at least seven servings per week compared with men who consumed no soda, as well as an association between energy drink consumption and reduced fertility. "Couples planning a pregnancy might con-

sider limiting their intake of sugar-sweetened sodas and energy drinks, especially because they have also been linked to other conditions such as type 2 diabetes and obesity," Hatch said. The researchers noted that a possible mechanism for an association between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and fertility includes increased insulin resistance, leading to oxidative stress that affects semen quality or ovulatory function. "Moreover, the type of sweetener found in sodas may matter," the researchers wrote. "Most sodas in North America are sweetened with [high fructose corn syrup] and have higher fructose to glucose ratios than other sugar-sweetened beverages." Given the high levels of sugar-sweetened beverages consumed by reproductive-aged couples in North America, these findings could have important public health implications," the researchers wrote. — by Regina Schaffer

For more information: Elizabeth Hatch, PhD, can be reached at Boston University School of Public Health, 715 Albany St, Boston, MA 02118; email: ehatch@bu.edu. Disclosures: The authors report no relevant financial disclosures.

Arvind Gupta on taking science to children with toys made from junk for over three decades

What ARVIND Gupta would really like, after three decades of evangelising science education to young children, is to have every neighbourhood and housing society give them a lab to tinker. "We make gyms, we make playgrounds, why not tinkering centres? Let the kids come and get their hands dirty together and let's watch what they make. They are brilliant minds, you will see," he says. The 64-year-old has just been awarded the Padma Shri for his long career in education. Central to his life's work is his Toys for Trash initiative — over 1,500 science experiments done with the discarded material of everyday life, from matchsticks to safety pins to old newspapers. They have been captured in over 8,500 videos, translated or dubbed into 18 languages.

It was a time of tumult in India and the world, Gupta remembers. In a Ted Talk in 2010, he speaks of being inspired by the political churning of the time. "The slogan of the early 1970s was 'go to the people, live with them, build from what they know,'" he says. Those six months spent in the village was a turning

point. "In the village, I used things sold in the weekly bazaar. I bought a bicycle valve tube. From someone's house, I took a few used matchsticks. You cut the valve tube into small pieces, scrape off the matchstick head and push it through the valve tube. Push another matchstick through the other end of the tube, joining both head to head inside the tube. Using these simple tools, we can create a triangle, a pentagon, a hexagon or a house — your own homegrown meccano! I called it the Matchstick Meccano and thus began my experiments," says Gupta.

By 1980, he had quit his job and plunged into teaching, choosing to "make toys rather than trucks". He wrote his first book, *Matchstick Models and Other Science Experiments*, in 1985, published jointly by Eklavya and the National Council for Science and Technology Communication. Professor Yash Pal, then secretary of the Union Department of Science of Technology, commissioned an original print run of 2,000 copies. But once the late scientist read the book, 25,000

copies were printed and the book eventually got translated in 12 languages. He went on to write 25 books on various science experiments and is currently translating one of them in Hindi, his mother tongue. In the 1980s, Gupta moved to Delhi from Pune, because his daughter, four years old then, wasn't happy with the "authoritarian" schooling there. He stopped sending her to school and would instead take her to the sprawling Empress Garden, because he felt she could learn much more observing the flowers and the birds. In Delhi, he enrolled her in an experimental school run by Aurobindo Ashram, and took up producing episodes for Tarang, a show for Doordarshan. For 25 years, he made over 125 programmes on making toys from trash that reached the remotest parts of India. Till today, he receives letters from viewers of Tarang. "After the Padma award, emails and letters are pouring in. Some of them are the '80s and '90s kids. They say their children are doing the experiments they had watched on TV from my website now," he says.

Why trash, though? "Because it is accessible, low-cost, readily available to the poorest of the poor child. In a democracy, the benefits of science must reach all sections of society, because it can empower them. In a world which generates so much junk, we also need to clean up our act," he says. In 2003, Gupta returned to Pune after he was offered work at the Muktangan Science Centre at the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), established by the astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar, who was also passionate about the cause. With two other colleagues, he ran a twice-a-week science programme, where school children could come and tinker with science toys. It was the time when the internet was reaching more people.



Gupta was an engineer in his 20s, a graduate of IIT Kanpur, when he was drawn to ideas of alternative education. In 1978, he took a year off his job in Telco, Pune, and spent six months at the Paliya Pipariya village of Bankhed block in Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh, where an Indian academic had set up a pioneering school. This was the famous Hoshangabad Experiment, started by Anil Sadgopal, a PhD from California Institute of Technology, who had quit a high-paying job to teach science to village children.

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SINGLE FATHERS AT RISK OF EARLY DEATH



Single fathers may be at more than double the risk of early death than single mothers and partnered parents, finds a new study.

It is because solo fathers tended to be older, had higher cancer rates, and were more prone to heart disease. The likely culprits also included poor lifestyle choices and stress, said the researchers in a paper published in the journal *The Lancet Public Health*.

"Our research highlights that single fathers have higher mortality, and demonstrates the need for public health policies to help identify and support these men," said lead author Maria Chiu, researcher at the University

of Toronto in Canada. "We did find that single fathers tended to have unhealthy lifestyles, which could include poor diet, lack of exercise, or excessive drinking," Chiu added. For the study, the team tracked 40,500 people across Canada over 11 years.

The subjects — including 4,590 single moms and 871 single dads — were, on average, in their early 40s when the study began. Nearly 700 died by the end of the monitoring period.

The team found that men parenting on their own are more likely to be separated, divorced or widowed than single mothers, a larger proportion of whom raise babies conceived outside of any

relationship. Having experienced a breakup is another risk factor for mental ill health, the researchers said.

"These results show that single fathers might be a particularly vulnerable group," said Rachel Simpson, an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford.

According to a report, provided by the United Nations Populations Division, single parent households have become more common across the developed world and even higher in many low-income nations. "Of the world's 2.3 billion children, 14 per cent — or 320 million — are living in a single parent household," the report showed.

SINGLE FATHERS AT RISK OF PREMATURE DEATH: STUDY

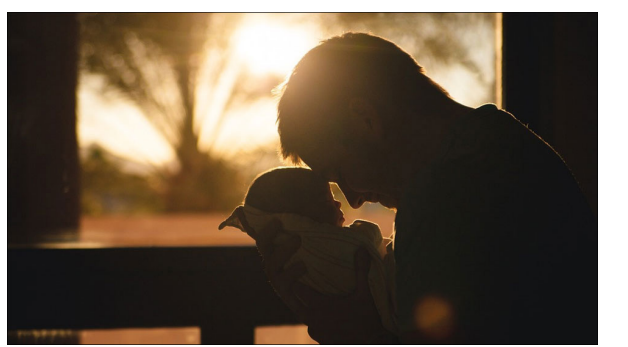
A new study has associated single fathers with premature death, saying that solo fathers tended to be older, had higher cancer rates, and were more prone to heart disease.

Poor lifestyle choices and stress were also found to be the likely culprits, said the researchers in a paper published in the noted medical journal *The Lancet Public Health*.

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COOK UP DELIGHTS FOR REPUBLIC DAY WEEKEND

On the upcoming long weekend coinciding with Republic Day, get creative in the kitchen and whip up a vegetarian lava burger, a mayo dabeli or a haldi chilli fish using quick and easy recipes.

Chef Gaurav Chadha, in-house Chef at Dr Oetker India Pvt. Ltd, Chef Narsimulu Yadav at The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace and Chef Shivan Khanna, Executive Sous Chef, The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, have given few recipes:

* Veg Lava Burger: In a bowl, add potato, carrot, corn, salt and black pepper powder. Mix well. Make round shape ball from above mixture. Flatten it up and put two tablespoons of mayonnaise in the middle. Seal and make round shape patty.

In a bowl, add flour, water and salt. Mix well until a smooth mixture is formed. Coat burger patty in above batter and then roll in breadcrumb from all sides. Place this burger patty in the refrigerator for half an hour. Heat oil in a kadhai (medium flame) and fry burger patty until light brown



in colour. Spread one tablespoon burger mayonnaise on each half of burger bun. On the bottom half of burger bun, place lettuce leaf, onion rings, followed by burger patty and top it up with another half of the bun. Serve. For dabeli stuffing: Heat one tablespoon butter in a non-stick pan

(medium flame) add onion, potato, peanuts, one tablespoon pomegranate, dabeli masala and salt. Stir and cook for 1-2 minutes.

For dabeli: Spread one tablespoon burger mayonnaise on each pav. Place dabeli stuffing inside the pav and add a dollop of mayo. Gently close it. Coat

the sides of the dabeli with sev.

Heat remaining butter in a non-stick and toast the stuffed pavs from all sides until it gets

* Aloo moti tikki: Peel and wash the potatoes. Boil the potatoes in sufficient water, once they are boiled then remove from the hot water and keep aside for cooling. Mash the potatoes. Take a large mixing bowl. Add mash potatoes, green chilli, coriander, crushed peppercorns, cashew nut and rock salt. Mix well. Make small balls out of the stuffing and then make the patties as per the desired shape. Cover all the patties with the soaked sago. Deep fry in ghee. Serve.

* Haldi chilli fish: Mix vinegar, turmeric, chili powder, coriander powder, cumin powder, garlic paste and salt in a broad plate. Mix well. Marinate fish fillets in the above mixture for at least 30-40 minutes. Heat oil in a pan and pan fry fish for 5-6 minutes or till light golden from both the sides. Remove on an absorbent paper. Garnish with salad and lemon wedges.

Modi govt set to meet electrification target, but millions still in darkness

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stormed to victory in 2014 on pledges to improve the lives of Indians, including bringing power to every citizen.

Rural electrification became a cornerstone of Modi's plan, which included connecting more than 18,000 villages by the end of this month. And with only a few left to be electrified, according to government data, that's a target Modi's administration looks set to meet.

But that will still keep almost 32 million homes in the dark: the government deems a village "electrified" if 10% of its households, as well as public places such as schools and health centres, are connected. As of Thursday, less than 8% of the newly electrified villages had all homes electrified, the data showed, leaving swaths of rural India without power, which can hinder economic growth, basic health care and education.

"Such vague definitions only create a false sense of achievement and take us further away from the ground reality of duration and quality of supply in these areas," said Vivek Sharma, a director at CRISIL Infrastructure Advisory, based in Gurugram. "It's not simple connectivity that triggers economic activity. It is continuous and good quality

power supply that does it." Though the village electrification target is nearly met, Modi's government knows more is needed. Last year, it followed up with a \$2.5 billion program to provide power connections to nearly every household by the end of March 2019, just weeks before Modi's term expires.

Government data this week showed India had electrified about 13% of the almost 36.8 million homes identified in October as needing power. To meet its next deadline, it has to accelerate its monthly pace by more than threefold, according to Bloomberg calculations using government data.

"I'm skeptical that the government would be able to electrify all the households by 2019. It's going to take many more years after that," said Johannes Urpelainen, a professor of energy and resources at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. "People are worried about the documentation process and large power bills. Even when you offer them free connections, many people are unwilling to take it."

To be sure, India has made significant strides in electrification since 2000. Electricity reached 82% of the population



in 2016, up from 43% at the turn of century, according to the International Energy Agency. Still, of the one-quarter of the world's population without electricity that year, about 239 million people were in India, it said.

Access must be backed by reliable supply "Government of India is committed for not only village electrification but also household electrification," Rural Electrification Corp. Ltd., a state-run company under the power ministry, said in response to questions. "Access alone

does not serve purpose. It has to be backed by adequate, reliable and quality supply" from the individual states, which the central government is supporting through various policies, it said.

Indeed, the real test will be whether the government can ensure reliable supplies to the people, rather than simply taking power cables into people's homes, according to Brian Min, author of the book "Power and the Vote: Elections and Electricity in the Developing World." "With rising incomes and growth,

voters have greater expectations," said Min, who teaches political science at the University of Michigan. "They want more than just power poles and transformers. They want reliable energy they can use when and where they need it."

The remaining homes without electricity are spread across 24 provinces of the country, with the highest concentration in states that have an outsized impact on general elections. Uttar Pradesh, the giant north Indian state that has the biggest representation in parliament, accounts for 42 percent of the nation's households without electricity access, according to government data.

Varanasi, PM Modi's political constituency, was a key contributor to his 2014 victory and has since been a gauge of the success of his policies. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a majority in state elections last year on the back of promises to improve living standards, including providing better local sanitation and greater access to electricity and clean cooking fuel.

Electricity supply is controlled and maintained by state governments, which have used cheap power to rural homes and farmers as a political tool, often at a financial loss. State distribution com-

panies were saddled with accumulated debts of almost Rs 4.1 trillion (\$61.7 billion) as of March 2015, according to the power ministry's latest annual report. Modi's government has also devised a program to help them work down their debts with help from the states.

The distributors, known as discoms, have traditionally coped with losses by limiting power supplies to heavily-subsidised consumers in rural areas and selling more expensive electricity to industrial consumers.

Lack of political interference would allow discoms to improve billing and revenue collections, revise tariffs to reflect costs and crack down on electricity theft, according to Abhishek Jain, an analyst at New Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

"We have seen extremely strong progress in the past two years in electrification," said Hannah Daly, an analyst at International Energy Agency. "In the broader context, any electrification plan, especially for poor people, needs to be sustainable and needs to be affordable" for both households and governments.

"If it is not affordable for all," she said, "then it won't be sustainable."

NCLAT to hear NuMetal, ArcelorMittal petition in Essar Steel case on May 17

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Friday agreed to hear cross petitions filed by Essar Steel bidders NuMetal Ltd and ArcelorMittal India Ltd on May 17. The two bidders have challenged the eligibility criteria for companies allowed to bid for the stressed steelmaker.

The NCLAT issued notices to a committee of Essar Steel creditors, the resolution professional running an auction of the company and the two bidders on the cross petitions. Russia's VTB Capital-backed NuMetal Ltd has challenged a lower company court order allowing rival ArcelorMittal to clear bank dues of associate companies so that it can become eligible for acquisition of Essar Steel. ArcelorMittal on the other hand has challenged its disqualification from bidding.

The cross petitions were mentioned before a bench of NCLAT which issued notices,



replies and rejoinders of which are to be filed within one week. The matter has been fixed for hearing on May 17.

The NCLAT took up the petitions on a day when a panel of lenders to Essar Steel is slated to meet to decide if fresh bids are to be called for. In the petition, NuMetal said the Ahmedabad-bench of National Company Law Tribunal had disqualified ArcelorMittal India Ltd from bidding to acquire Essar Steel on grounds that it was a promoter company of firms that

had defaulted on payment of bank loans.

The NCLAT had, however, "erred" in permitting ArcelorMittal India Ltd "to cure the ineligibility by making payment of the overdue amounts of Uttam Galva and KSS Petron" within 30 days, it said.

Allowing ArcelorMittal to clear dues after the government frame legislation, barring promoters who had defaulted on bank loans from bidding for companies that were being auctioned to recover unpaid

loans, was not in accordance with the law, it contends.

NuMetal sought setting aside and quashing of the NCLT order that directed the resolution professional (RP) conducting the auction and the committee of creditors of Essar Steel India Ltd to "reconsider the resolution plan submitted by ArcelorMittal India Pvt Ltd and afford ArcelorMittal India Ltd an opportunity to make payment of the over dues amount of Uttam Galva Steels Ltd and KSS Petron Pvt Ltd after the submission of the resolution plan for Essar Steel and cure the ineligibility."

Essar Steel had a debt of Rs 49,000 crore and was referred to NCLT in June last year.

ArcelorMittal in a separate petition challenged its disqualification on the grounds that it had exited Uttam Galva before submitting a bid for Essar Steel on February 12.

GST, demonetisation brought 1.8 million people under tax net: Govt official

India has informed the UN that the Goods and Services Tax reform implemented by it, coupled with the demonetisation of high-value currency notes, has brought 1.8 million more people into the income tax net.

Additional secretary in the ministry of external affairs A Gitesh Sarma, addressing the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow Up, said, India is currently implementing a wave of reforms. Sarma said apart from encouraging digital transactions, introduction of the uniform-tax regime under the GST has led to a 50% increase in the number of indirect taxpayers. "Coupled with demonetisation of high-value currency notes, the GST brought 1.8 million more people into the income tax net," he said at the forum here yesterday.

He added that India stands firm on its stance on the fundamental principles of the



World Trade Organisation, including multilateralism, rule-based consensual decision-making, an independent and credible dispute resolution and appellate process, the centrality of development which underlies the Doha Development Agenda, and special and differential treatment for all developing countries. He said the global economic recovery is progressing gradually, with improved resilience and emergence of new sources of growth.

"However, there are concerns that a durable recovery may remain constrained by factors such as the persistence of low productivity and debt overhang problems in advanced economies, as well as in some emerging market economies, rising populism and protectionism, and the slow pace of structural reforms," he said.

Last year, India established the India-UN Development Partnership Fund that supports Southern-owned and

led, demand-driven, and transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world, with a focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). "I would like to reiterate that the international community must step up its efforts to fulfil the commitments already undertaken - not as a charity but with full realisation that it will be in our collective interest," Sarma said.

Rising crude oil prices spell triple-whammy setback for India

The surge in oil prices couldn't have come at a worse time for India.

Asia's No. 3 economy faces a wider trade deficit, a worsening of stretched government finances, and slower economic growth if oil prices remain stubborn at the current level. That would challenge policy makers trying to strengthen the economy in time for elections next year.

"Higher global crude oil prices are net negative for the Indian economy in almost all aspects," said Kaushik Das, chief economist at Deutsche Bank AG in Mumbai. He estimates that Brent crude at \$75 a barrel could lower his growth estimate for India to about 7.3% from 7.5% for the year through March 2019.

Inflation risk

The Reserve Bank of India estimates oil at \$78 a barrel would shave off 10 basis points from its 7.4% forecast for gross domestic product.

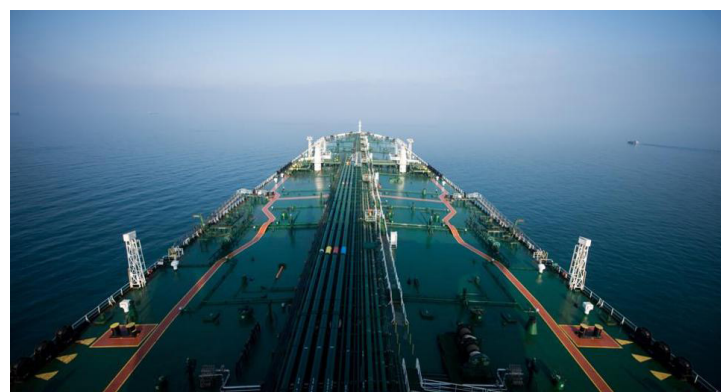
Moreover, it expects costly crude could stoke inflation by 30 basis points, underpinning expectations that monetary policy will turn more hawkish.

"At the current juncture, we believe that headline inflation will peak at 6.2% in the third quarter of this year," said Hugo Erken, senior economist at Rabobank International. "The pretty hawkish RBI minutes released last week give credibility to our previous stance that inflationary pressure will rise faster than expected, which will force it to hike faster than expected."

The RBI aims to keep inflation around 4%. Pressure to tighten could also increase if the rupee - already Asia's worst performer this year - sinks further and pushes up India's oil-import bill.

Rupee hit

The risks of a weaker rupee are real because India imports more than two-thirds of its crude require-



ments and analysts at Nomura Holdings Inc. estimate that for every \$10 per barrel rise, India's current-account would deteriorate by 0.4% of GDP.

That means if Brent averages \$75 per barrel in 2018, India's current-account deficit would widen to 2.5% of GDP from 1.5% in 2017, they wrote. That would be the widest gap since the global 'taper tantrum' of 2013 and above the current 2.2%

Bloomberg consensus.

The rupee has shed about 1% this week against the dollar having hit its lowest in more than 13 months on Wednesday.

Another risk stems from government finances, especially if the government foregoes a levy imposed on oil when prices were low in previous years.

Analysts led by Suvodeep Rakshit at Kotak Institutional Equities

in Mumbai estimate that in a scenario where average crude prices are at \$70 per barrel and domestic duties were cut by 5 rupees a liter, the gross fiscal deficit will likely slip by 25 basis points. They predict the government will end this fiscal year with a shortfall equivalent to 3.5% of GDP, wider than its 3.3% target.

Any slippage risks the wrath of global rating companies, most of whom put India near the so-called "junk" status, as well as anger bond investors. Fitch Ratings on Friday affirmed India's long-term foreign currency issuer default rating at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook, adding that the country's weak public finances were a constraint on ratings. The yield on the 10-year sovereign note has surged to 7.76% from 7.33% at the end of December.

"Rising oil prices risk reversing the improving economic fundamental 'sweet spot' experienced during 2014-16," said Nomura's analysts.

Fitch denies rating upgrade to India, says weak fiscal balances its Achilles' heels

Refusing to upgrade India's credit rating for the 12th year in a row, Fitch on Friday retained its sovereign rating at 'BBB-', the lowest investment grade with a stable outlook, saying that weak fiscal balances continue to constrain the country's ratings.

The government had made a strong pitch to Fitch Ratings for an upgrade after Moody's Investors Service last November gave the country its first sovereign rating upgrade since 2004. Fitch had last upgraded India's sovereign rating from BB+ to BBB- with a stable outlook on August 1, 2006.

"Fitch Ratings has affirmed India's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook," the rating agency said in a statement.

"India's rating balances a strong medium-term growth outlook and favourable external balances with weak fiscal finances and some lagging structural factors, including governance standards and a still-difficult, but improving, business environment," it said.

Fitch added that weak fiscal balances, the Achilles' heel in India's credit profile, continue to constrain its ratings.

"General government debt amounted to 69% of GDP in 2017-18 fiscal while fiscal slippage of 0.3% of GDP in both FY18 and FY19 relative to the government's own budget targets of last year, implies a general government deficit of 7.1% of GDP," it said.

The government aims to gradually reduce its fiscal deficit from 3.5% of GDP in 2017-18, but would not hit the 3% ceiling of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act before March 2021, which is well beyond its current electoral term, Fitch said.

"The Indian economy is less developed on a number of metrics than many of its peers. Governance continues to be weak, as illustrated by a low score for the World Bank governance indicator. India's ranking on the United Nations Human Development Index also indicates relatively low basic human development," it said. After the last rating upgrade on August 1, 2006, Fitch had changed the outlook to negative in 2012 and then again to stable in the following year, though it kept the rating unchanged at the lowest investment grade.

The Fitch review for annual sovereign rating follows India's rating upgrade by Moody's after a gap of 14 years, while S&P retained its rating for the country.

While Moody's had raised India's sovereign rating in November 2017 from the lowest investment grade of 'Baa3' to 'Baa2', S&P refrained from upgrading the rating from 'BBB-' citing high government debt and low income levels. S&P has maintained 'BBB-' rating on India since 2007.

On rating drivers, Fitch said a favourable economic growth outlook continues to

support India's credit profile, even though real GDP growth fell to 6.6% in the fiscal year ended 31 March 2018 (FY18) from 7.1% in 2016-17.

Fitch forecasts that growth will rebound to 7.3% in FY19 and 7.5% in FY20. India's five-year average real GDP growth of 7.1% is the highest in the region and among 'BBB' range peers, it said. Stating that growth has the potential to remain high for a substantial period of time, Fitch said per capita GDP is the lowest among 'BBB' range peers and continued structural reform implementation.

Being Jeff Bezos means never apologising about profits

The Amazon.com Inc. CEO is the world's richest person. He has a meme-worthy physique. And investors love him when he shows them the tiniest bit of profit love.

Amazon on Thursday reported a dinky 3.8% operating profit margin on more than \$51 billion in sales. It was the highest operating profit margin since the middle of 2016, but it's still laughably small compared with a company like Facebook and its 45% margins. Amazon also projected second-quarter operating profit that was higher than most Wall Street forecasts.

Amazon shares had already climbed more than 67% in the last year, and they shot up about 6% in after-hours trading on Thursday. Yup, Being Bezos is pretty grand.

Amazon has a reputation for spending as much money as it can get its hands on, and that reputation is deserved. The company has poured money into building up its e-commerce business in India and other international markets, its cloud-computing business, its Echo line of voice-activated gadgets, programming for its web video service and its packing, sorting and shipping logistics.

That is quite a list of spending priorities, and it shows in Amazon's results. The company's core operating expenses - excluding its cost of sales covering items like payments for products that Amazon sells online - is consistently growing faster than Amazon's rapidly growing revenue. Revenue in Amazon's first quarter rose 43% from a year ago, which didn't include sales from the Whole Foods supermarket chain. Amazon's core operating costs climbed even faster at nearly 50%. This cost line has been inching up gradually, and the increase in the first quarter was the fastest rate since at least 2012.

What has changed, however, is that Amazon is becoming a fundamentally more profitable company. I know that's a weird sentence to read about a company with less than 4% operating profit margins. But what I mean is that Amazon's gross profit margin -- its revenue minus basic costs to purchase products, buy packing supplies and grab digital video programming -- is growing. Gross margin was nearly 40% in the first quarter compared with consistent margins in the 30% range for several years. The growing gross margins are great news for Amazon investors who have long been starved for profits. As Amazon expands its sales from cloud computing, digital advertising, Prime subscriptions and the middleman fees.

How 'out of cash' Kings XI Punjab almost lost Chris Gayle at IPL 2018 auction

Chris Gayle has proved to be quite a bargain buy for Kings XI Punjab in the ongoing Indian Premier League but co-owner Ness Wadia revealed that the team almost lost the destructive opener at the auction, thinking it had run out of cash.

Gayle had unexpectedly gone unsold twice before KXIP bought him for his base price of Rs 2 crore. Wadia explained how the franchise got lucky with the Jamaican.

"We had only Rs 2.1 crore left and if we had bid for Chris earlier (at the auction) and another team came up with a counter bid, we did not have the money to buy him. Luckily, no other team bid for him and we were more than happy to get third time lucky," Wadia told PTI.

KXIP, who had retained just one player in Axar Patel before the auction, spent big bucks in their bid to build a team for the future. Gayle was their final buy and the Rs 2 crore they spent on him meant they were left with just Rs 10 lakh, using almost their entire purse of Rs 67.5 crore.

Two months later, Gayle has proved all his critics wrong with two half centuries and a sensational 104 in four innings. He has even exceeded the expectations of team mentor Vi-



render Sehwal, who had said that the Rs 2 crore spent on Gayle and Yuvraj Singh will be recovered even if they both won them a couple of games.

The 38-year-old has been exceptional so far but a big knock from the 36-year-old Yuvraj is still awaited. In fact, the stylish southpaw was dropped from the playing eleven against Sunrisers Hyderabad last night.

"Yuvi is not among the runs at the moment but we hope that he will bounce back. He is of good value to the franchise and that is why we got him back," said Wadia referring to Yuvraj, who was KXIP captain in the first two seasons.

Yuvraj may not be in the best of

form but the big bucks spent at the auction seem to have paid-off with the team doing well in the first half of the season under new captain Ravichandran Ashwin. Besides Gayle, performances from K L Rahul, Ankit Rajput and young Afghanistan spinner Mujeeb Zadran have stood out.

Wadia too is pleased with the performance so far after disappointment in the previous three seasons.

"We wanted to build a team for the long term. We wanted to spend more money. We wanted an Indian captain and to be honest we wanted Ashwin at any cost. He is a genius and knows what it takes to win (having

won IPL at CSK).

"We were very clear that if we spent the money we would get what we were looking for. That was the difference with the old strategy. Bringing an Indian captain also brings in a lot of flexibility," said Wadia adding that going for Afghan spin sensation Zadran as very much Ashwin's idea.

Talking about the evolution of IPL over the last decade, Wadia is relieved that being part of the tournament was finally making financial sense.

"Finally, it is making sense (financially) after 10 years. It has been a long wait. The most important thing is when we got into the IPL the focus was on to promote sport. IPL has led to the emergence of cricket leagues around the country. I am so glad about that.

"It has given the players a career option. It has led to leagues in other sports too."

Where does IPL go from here on?

"There has to be more international matches (for the teams), more exposure. If you include the pre-season camp, we get about an eight week period in one year. A second tournament or a smaller tournament outside India would be very beneficial for everyone," he added.

Saina Nehwal enters semis, Kidambi Srikanth exits Badminton Asia Championships



It was a day of contrasting fortunes for Indian shuttlers. While Saina Nehwal earned a comprehensive straight games victory to enter the women's singles semi-finals, Kidambi Srikanth lost his men's singles quarter-final to exit the Badminton Asia Championships taking place in Wuhan on Friday.

Saina took just 43 minutes to beat South Korean Lee Jang Mi 21-15, 21-13 and advance to the last four where she will take on the winner of the match between Chinese Taipei top seed Tai Tzu Ying and Chinese eighth seed He Bingjiao. This was World No.12 Saina's first ever contest against the South Korean. Earlier, Malaysian legend Lee Chong Wei

came out with his best to defeat India's rising star Srikanth in straight games.

The former champion took just 31 minutes to finish the challenge 21-12, 21-15 at the Wuhan Sports Center. This was the three-time Olympic silver medallist's fifth victory in as many meetings against the World No.5 Indian. However, Srikanth had defeated Lee Chong Wei in the mixed team event at the recently held Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast. But in the individual events the Malaysian came out on top to eventually become the champion for the third time. PV Sindhu and HS Prannoy will play their matches later in the day.

Rafael Nadal eases into Barcelona Open tennis quarter-finals

Top seed Rafa Nadal, who has won the tournament 10 times, also reached the last eight after dispatching compatriot Guillermo Garcia-Lopez 6-1 6-3 and claiming a record-extending 40th consecutive set on clay.

World number five Grigor Dimitrov survived an almighty scare against outsider Malek Jaziri on Thursday to edge into the Barcelona Open quarter-finals beating the Tunisian 7-5 3-6 7-6(8) following a nail-biting tiebreak.

Fellow Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta beat Frenchman Adrian Mannarino 6-2 4-6 7-6 (8-6) in another thrilling three-setter that had fans on the Rafael Nadal court watching the world number one turning their heads towards the action unfolding on the adjacent Court One.

Carreno Busta is ranked 11th in the world to Mannarino's 27th but after blitzing the first set he succumbed in the second and survived a match point to take a delicately-poised tiebreak.

Jaziri, ranked 88th in the world, hit back against Dimitrov after surrendering the first set to comfortably take the second and he looked poised to cause the latest high-profile exit in Barcelona when he went 4-2 up against the second seed in the third.

Former world number one Novak Djokovic had been sent packing from the tournament the day before by Martin Klizan while Kei Nishikori was forced to retire during his match against Garcia-Lopez due to a wrist injury.

Jaziri took a few moments out on the sidelines after experiencing discomfort with his shoulder and consulted his coach and doctor before continuing.

Bulgarian Dimitrov came back to level at 5-5 but was under pressure in the 12th game, before holding on to force the tiebreak.

Dimitrov spurned two match points in the tiebreak and missed another chance to close out the match two points later when his shot landed just wide.

It was Jaziri's turn to serve for the match at 8-7 but he sent a shot crashing wide under little pressure.

Dimitrov finally ended Jaziri's resistance on his fourth match point when the Tunisian found the net to end a match lasting two hours 49 minutes.

Klizan beat Spaniard Feliciano Lopez 6-1 6-4 to reach the quarter-finals and last year's runner-up Dominic Thiem also made the last eight, beating Jozef Kovalik of Slovakia 7-6 6-2. Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas meanwhile knocked out Spaniard Albert Ramos Vinolas 6-4 7-5.

Indian sprinter Dutee Chand blasts 'wrong' testosterone ruling

Indian sprinter Dutee Chand said track and field's new rules on women's testosterone levels were "wrong" and offered legal help to Olympic champion Caster Semenya to help her fight back.

Chand, who won a court battle for her right to compete with a hormonal imbalance, said she was relieved to have avoided falling under the regulations, which only cover distances between 400m and one mile.

But she criticised this week's International Association of Athletics Federations ruling, which has been interpreted as targeting Semenya, a middle-distance specialist. "I am happy and relieved

after four years of uncertainty but I feel for athletes like Semenya. I strongly believe the current rules are also wrong," Chand told AFP by telephone from Hyderabad.

"I have offered Semenya my legal team if she needs. I have emailed her offering my support and help."

South Africa's Semenya has long attracted debate because of her powerful physique related to hyperandrogenism, the medical condition which causes women to produce high levels of male sex hormones.

The issue of hyperandrogenism is controversial because it pits principles of fair competition against the rights of women born with



the condition.

The new rules say that women with high levels of naturally occurring testosterone can only compete if they take medication to reduce them.

The ruling covers events

from 400m to the mile because the IAAF's medical and science department says it has data showing an advantage for hyperandrogenous athletes over such distances.

But South Africa's ruling African National Congress

(ANC) has blasted the new regulations as unjust and racist and urged the Pretoria government to challenge them in the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Semenya, 27, is the reigning world and Olympic champion over 800m and won the 800-1,500m double at this month's Commonwealth Games.

Chand, who competes in the 100m and 200m, took her case to the CAS after she was barred from the 2014 Commonwealth Games by the Athletics Federation of India over her hyperandrogenism.

Now cleared for competition, the 22-year-old is keen to make up for lost time at the upcoming Asian Games in

Indonesia and the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

"I lost crucial years of my career when I could not focus on my training and initially (in 2014) lost six months which is a significant time in a sports person's life," said Chand.

"I missed three big competitions like the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the junior World Athletics Championships when I was just 18 and raring to make a mark.

"A medal in the Olympics is what I dream of. Also I missed participating in Commonwealth Games, so will target the 2022 edition in Birmingham."

Ankit Rajput creates history, takes 5/14 for Kings XI Punjab

On the eve of the match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here, Kings XI Punjab pacer Ankit Rajput had said that he does not feel out of place while sharing the dressing room filled with seniors like Chris Gayle and Ravichandran Ashwin.

On Thursday, the 24-year-old pacer proved he truly belonged to the dressing room. With a match haul of 5/14 against Sunrisers Hyderabad, he jolted the hosts and silenced the crowd.

It was only after two crucial stands that Manish Pandey was part of, with Shakib Al Hasan and Yusuf Pathan, that Sunrisers Hyderabad reached 132/6 in 20 overs.

Rajput's first wicket came in the opening over when he got Sunrisers captain Kane Williamson, who is also their top run-getter. The Uttar Pradesh lad generated bounce that took the Kiwi player by surprise. He attempted a pull but it landed in the hands of Ravichandran Ashwin at mid-off.

If Williamson's wicket was not enough



to sap the energy out of Sunrisers Hyderabad, Rajput got their other opener Shikhar Dhawan in the third over. Again it was the bounce that deceived the batsman. Dhawan edged the away-moving ball to Karun Nair at the slips.

Rajput came back in the fifth over to scalp Wriddhiman Saha in the fifth ball. The wicketkeeper-batsman's attempted a terrible slog and was caught by Andrew Tye at mid-off.

Rajput would have got his fourth

wicket in the same over too, had Tye not dropped Manish Pandey at mid-off.

After Rajput's initial spell, SRH went into a cocoon. There was a period of six over where no boundary was scored.

Pandey and Shakib took no chances during their 54-ball 52 run stand. It was only after Shakib departed that Rajput upped the ante. He went after Ravichandran Ashwin in the 16th over and hit the match's first six.

Then he went to score his half-century in the 19th over while being involved in a 49-run stand with Pathan. However, he also fell to Rajput in the 20th over as the pacer bowled him with a perfect yorker.

Rajput completed his five wicket haul on the last ball as he got Mohammed Nabi's wicket.

ICC aims for tougher ball-tampering sanctions in coming months

The International Cricket Council, cricket's world body said on Thursday it wants tough new sanctions against ball tampering in place within months as it struggles with the fallout from the cheating scandal involving top Australian players.

International Cricket Council chief executive Dave Richardson said football-style red and yellow cards would be among the measures considered as it seeks to bring back a "culture of respect" to the game.

The leaders of top playing nations demanded harsher punishment and more powers

for umpires to act against cheating and misconduct at ICC meetings in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata this week.

"There was clear direction received that we want to move toward stricter and heavier sanctions for ball tampering and all other offences that are indicative of a lack of respect," he told a press conference.

Ex-Indian Test star Anil Kumble is to lead a player legends committee to recommend the sanctions.

The ICC chiefs said the new punishments would be decided in June and July.

Richardson said the pun-



ishments would also cover "other offences that are indicative of a lack of respect for your opponent, for the game, the umpires".

"We want penalties in place that are a proper deterrent.

Fines are not proving to be the answer," he said.

The ICC was criticised after it banned Australia skipper Steve Smith for only one Test over his role in the ball-tampering scandal in South

Africa last month in which batsman Cameron Bancroft was caught trying to alter the ball.

After a wave of public anger, Cricket Australia later banned Smith and his deputy David Warner for 12 months. Bancroft was given a nine-month suspension.

"Quite honestly we were worried about poor player behaviour before that," said Richardson.

"There have just been too many incidents of sledging, ugly abusive language and dissent."

He said letting umpires send off and book players "will

be part of the discussion.

"When it comes to time wasting and things like that we want the umpires to take more on-field actions."

Richardson said he was not convinced that red and yellow cards "will be as easy to implement as in other sports".

Umpires have since last year already been able to send off players for violence and other extreme behaviour but this has not yet been used.

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), guardians of the game rules, have been among the influential groups calling for red cards.