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UNENDING
LADAKH STORY

WORLD 8
AZAR LEADS HIGHEST-LEVEL US
DELEGATION TO TAIWAN IN DECADES

SPORT 12
PIRLO IS NEW
JUVENTUS COACH

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FIND LIGHT:
HRITHIK ROSHAN
10 VIVACITY

Desi push bans 101 defence imports

Giant step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat, says Rajnath; embargo on guns and missiles import from Dec

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

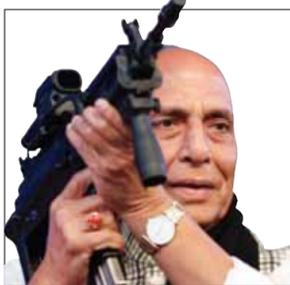
The Government on Sunday announced an import embargo on 101 items to give a major boost to the Indian defence industry.

This move towards self-reliance will see the domestic players manufacturing weapons ranging from artillery guns to missiles and assault rifles to name a few.

They will also be expected to bag orders worth over ₹4 lakh crores over the next seven to eight years as the Army, IAF and Navy will be procuring world class weapon systems developed and manufactured within the country.

The negative list or the embargo will commence from December this year in a graded manner and continue till 2024 as the Services are now amidst negotiating deals with foreign vendors. As defence deals take relatively longer time compared to other contracts, the Government has gone in for timeline for stopping imports.

Making the important



announcement about the import embargo, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here it is a big step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) in defence.

In a series of tweets, he said the Defence Ministry has prepared a list of 101 items for which there would be an embargo on the import beyond the timeline indicated against them. The Minister also said the Defence Ministry has also bifurcated the capital procurement budget for 2020-21 between domestic and foreign capital procurement routes.

A separate budget head

- This will see the domestic players manufacturing weapons ranging from artillery guns to missiles and assault rifles to name a few
- They will also be expected to bag orders worth over ₹4 lakh crores over the next seven to eight years as the Army, IAF and Navy will be procuring world class weapon systems developed and manufactured within the country
- A separate budget head has been created with an outlay of nearly ₹52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year, Rajnath said
- More equipment for import embargo would be identified progressively by the Department of Military Affairs in consultation with all stakeholders

has been created with an outlay of nearly ₹52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year, he said. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a call for a self-reliant India based on the five pillars, i.e., economy, infrastructure, system, demography & demand and announced a special economic package for Self-Reliant India named 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Taking cue from that evocation, the Ministry of Defence prepared the list, said Rajnath, adding it will offer a great opportunity to the Indian defence industry to manufac-

ture the items by using their own design and development capabilities or adopting the technologies designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Elaborating upon the policy, the Minister also said almost 260 schemes of such items were contracted by the Tri-Services at an approximate cost of ₹3.5 lakh crore between April 2015 and August 2020.

"It is estimated that contracts worth almost ₹4 lakh crore will be placed upon the domestic industry within the next 6 to 7 years," he said.

Of these, items worth almost ₹1,30,000 crore each are anticipated for the Army and the Air Force while items worth almost ₹1,40,000 crore are anticipated by the Navy over the same period.

Singh said more equipment for import embargo would be identified progressively by the Department of Military Affairs in consultation with all stakeholders.

The list also includes, wheeled Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) with indicative import embargo date of December 2021, of which the Army is expected to contract almost 200 at an approximate cost of over ₹5,000 crore, he said.

The Defence Ministry officials said the embargo on imports is planned to be progressively implemented between 2020 and 2024.

The aim is to apprise the Indian defence industry about the anticipated requirements of the Armed Forces so that they are better prepared to realise the goal of indigenisation.

PC: PROMISED BANG ENDED WITH WHIMPER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a dig, Congress leader and former Home Minister P Chidambaram said the Defence Minister promised a 'bang' on a Sunday morning and ended with a 'whimper'.

The only importer of defence equipment is the Defence Ministry. Any import embargo is really an embargo on oneself. What the Defence Minister said in his historic Sunday announcement deserved only an Office Order from the Minister to his Secretaries!

Import embargo is high sounding jargon. What it means is we will try to make the same equipment (that we import today) in 2 to 4 years and stop imports thereafter!, the Congress leader said in a series of tweets.

2L Covid cases in just 3 days; daily death crosses 1K



A health worker takes a nasal swab samples to test for Covid-19 in Hyderabad on Sunday

If trend continues, by August end, cases will soar to 35 lakh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As India breached 2 million Covid-19 cases on Friday and just in three days from then it has added two lakh more cases, taking the overall count well past 22 lakh cases on Sunday death in a day increased to 1,000.

The country has started recording more than 60,000 cases every day, and death toll are above 900 on daily basis.

The way India is adding new cases and death, by the end of this month, the country could have around 3.5 million cases and nearly 75,000 deaths.

Apart from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka and West Bengal have started reporting huge number of cases on daily basis.

With several States still not carrying out adequate number of tests, the caseload could go up substantially when the testing

is ramped up.

On Sunday, the country saw its highest single day death count of around 1,000 with Maharashtra alone reporting 390 deaths during the last 24 hours. Maharashtra reported 12,248 new cases, 390 deaths, while 13,348 patients discharged today. The total positive cases in the State rose to 5,15,332 including 3,51,710 recovered patients and 17,757 deaths. Active cases stood at 1,45,558.

Mumbai reported 1,066 new positive cases and 48 deaths, while situation in Dharavi remained under control. Tamil Nadu accounted for 119 deaths as there was no let up in the number of positive cases fatalities being reported from various places in the state, which recorded 5,994 new cases.

This is for the eleventh day in a row Tamil Nadu is testing less than 6,000 persons per day. On August 1, the State had 5,879 patients while the numbers came down to 5,875 on August 2 and 5,609 on August 3.

Though the number further came down to 5,063 on August 4, since the last five days it has been showing hike in the number of positive cases.

Centre transfers ₹17,100 cr to bank accounts of 8.5 cr farmers electronically

Modi launches agri infrastructure fund with capital of ₹1 lakh-crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to direct financial support and to empower the farmers of the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday electronically transferred ₹17,100 crore to the bank accounts of over 8.5 crore farmers as part of the PM-KISAN scheme.

The Prime Minister also launched the agriculture infrastructure fund with a capital of ₹1 lakh crore for agri-entrepreneurs, startups, agri-tech players and farmer groups for post-harvest management and nurturing farm assets through a video conference on the

occasion of "Balam Jayanthi", a day when farmers worship plough.

The first sanction of over ₹1,000 crore was made to over 2,280 farmers under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund.

Speaking on the occasion, Modi said no middlemen or commission was needed as the amount went straight to farmers.

He also expressed satisfaction because the objective of the scheme was fulfilled.

"₹17,000 crore of PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi have been deposited into bank accounts of 8.5 crore farmers with single click. No middlemen or commission, it went straight to farmers."

I am satisfied because the objective of the scheme is being fulfilled," PM Modi said during the launch of a financing facility for farmers.

Colleagues falling prey to ultras, 12 BJP men desert party in Valley

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Grassroot workers of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are turning out to be "sitting ducks" in Kashmir valley in the absence of adequate security cover for even those who figure on the "hit list" of terrorists and fearing for their lives, about one dozen BJP workers have so far resigned from the membership of the party recently.

Four party workers from Budgam resigned following fresh attack on a BJP worker in the area on Sunday.

It is learnt the BJP workers have forwarded their letters of resignation to SSP Budgam and District President Budgam BJP. Budgam BJP president Aga Mohsin told reporters the letters of resignations of four BJP workers are in circulation on WhatsApp.

"I will talk to them regarding their resignations," he

added. According to a police spokesman, a BJP worker hailed from Budgam was shot at and critically injured by terrorists. He was out for a morning walk when terrorists targeted him.

This is the third incident in the valley in the last one week.

On August 6, BJP sarpanch Sajad Ahmad Khanday was killed in Vessu village of Qazikund block in South Kashmir's Kulgam district. On August 4, BJP Panch Arif Ahmad was also critically wounded after terrorists fired at him in Akhran Qazigund.

According to a police spokesman, at about 6.30 am terrorists fired upon a BJP worker identified as Abdul Hameed Najar, son of Mohammad Jamal.

"The BJP worker was shifted to SMHS hospital Srinagar for treatment where his condition is stable," police spokesman added.

Delhi's edu board from next year, not to be imposed on Govt schools, says Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's own school education board is expected to be operational by next year, however, unlike other States it will not be imposed on Government schools, according to Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.

Giving details of plans for setting up the state education board, Sisodia said the board will be in sync with the reforms proposed in the new National Education Policy (NEP) and the focus will be on continuous

evaluation and not year-end exams.

"We have recently set up two committees for working on the proposed board as well as curriculum reforms.

An ideal situation would be that we make it operational by next year. Initially, around 40 schools will be affiliated to the board, which could be either Government or private," Sisodia told PTI in an interview. "We will have no imposition. It will be optional for both government and private schools," he said.

CISF official asked if I am Indian as I don't know Hindi: Kani

PTI ■ CHENNAI

DMK MP Kanimozhi on Sunday said a Central Industrial Security Force officer asked her if she was an Indian, when she asked the woman official to speak in Tamil or English.

"Today at the airport a CISF officer asked me if I am an Indian," when I asked her to speak to me in Tamil or English as I did not know Hindi. I would like to know from when being Indian is equal to knowing Hindi. #hindiimposition," Kanimozhi who is also the DMK's women's wing secretary said on her twitter handle.

A number of social media users replied supporting her, with one of them saying, "I am an Indian and Hindi has nothing to do with it! #hindiimposition Pass it on!"

According to party sources, the incident occurred in Chennai when the MP was at the airport to board a Delhi flight in the afternoon.

PS to Guv, 4 more test Covid +ve in Punjab Raj Bhawan

Chandigarh: With rapid surge in the Covid-19 positive cases in the city, Punjab Raj Bhawan on Sunday reported five positive cases, including JM Balamurugan, Principal Secretary to Punjab Governor and UT Administrator, who tested positive for the highly contagious virus. JM Balamurugan, 1994 batch IAS, had been attending war room meetings regarding Covid-19 with Chandigarh Administrator VP Singh Badnore and top officials of UT Administration and WHO representative at Punjab Raj Bhawan.

Following his positive report, the Administrator VP Singh Badnore and his Advisor Manoj Parida also underwent Covid-19 test and have been tested negative. The report of Home Secretary, Finance Secretary among other top officials who had been attending the war room meetings physically were awaited.

A spokesperson of Punjab Raj Bhawan said that a two-day Covid testing exercise with rapid antigen test was carried out at Raj Bhawan in which a total 336 persons including security personnel, officers and staff members were tested for the virus. "JM Balamurugan, Principal Secretary to Governor tested COVID positive and has been home quarantined. Besides Balamurugan, four others were found to be asymptomatic positive. All pre-

cautions including sanitisation of the entire Raj Bhawan and safeguarding the official premises have been taken as per the health advisories, protocol and doctors' advice, the spokesperson said.

Sources said that two meetings including war room meeting and Independence Day preparations were scheduled to be held on Monday at Raj Bhawan. The meetings are likely to be conducted through video conferencing now.

A highest single-day spike of 89 positive cases was reported in Chandigarh on Sunday with total cases crossing 1500-mark.

PNS ■ Detailed Covid-19 reports on Pg 3

STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	5,15,332	17,757	3,51,710
Tamil Nadu	2,96,901	4,927	2,38,638
Andhra Pradesh	2,27,860	2,036	1,38,712
Karnataka	1,78,087	3,198	93,908
Delhi	1,45,427	4,111	1,30,587
Uttar Pradesh	1,22,609	2,069	72,650
West Bengal	95,554	2,059	67,120
Bihar	79,720	429	51,315
Telangana	79,495	627	55,999
Gujarat	71,064	2,652	54,238
Assam	57,715	145	40,592
Rajasthan	52,497	789	38,235
Odisha	45,927	321	31,785
Haryana	41,635	483	34,781
Madhya Pradesh	39,025	996	29,020
Kerala	34,331	109	21,832



Health Min: Record 7L tests conducted in a day; recovery rate goes up to 68.78%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Scaling up testing capacity in the country, over seven lakh samples have been examined for Covid-19 in a day taking the cumulative tests conducted so far to 2,41,06,535, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday with recovery rate rises to 68.78 per cent.

CAPSULE

6 DIE IN JHARKHAND INSIDE SEPTIC TANK

Deoghar: Six persons died on Sunday after inhaling poisonous gas in a septic tank in Jharkhand's Deoghar district, a senior police officer said.

THAROOR: CONG MUST FIND FULL-TERM PREZ

New Delhi: The Congress must expedite the process of finding a full-term president to arrest the growing public perception that the party is "adrift and rudderless", senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said on Sunday.

LANKAN DON POISONED TO DEATH BY WOMAN

Coimbatore: The question whether Amani Thanji, who had been living with the Sri Lankan don Angoda Lokka, poisoned him to death to avenge the killing of her husband in the island nation, is doing the rounds among the police and public.

12 NAXALS SURRENDER IN CHHATTISGARH

Raipur: Twelve Naxals, five of them Collectively carrying a reward of ₹6 lakh on their heads, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Sunday, police said.

11 members of Pakistan Hindu migrant family found dead at farm in Jodhpur

PNS ■ JODHPUR

Eleven members of a family of Pakistan Hindu migrants were found dead at a farm in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district on Sunday morning, police said.

A member of the family, however, was found alive outside the hut they lived at Lodta village of the Dechu area, over 100 km away from Jodhpur city, an officer said.

"But he claimed to have no idea about the incident, which believed to have happened in the night," said Superintendent of Police (Rural) Rahul Barhat. "We are yet to ascertain the

Preliminary probe indicates they committed suicide

cause and means of death. They appeared to have committed suicide by consuming some chemical in the night," Barhat said.

He said there was a smell of some chemical in the hut, suggesting they consumed something.

The family belonging to the Bhil community had come to India from Pakistan's Sindh province in 2015 on a long-term visa.

They had been living at the Lodta village farm, which they had hired for farming, for the past six months.

"There was neither any injury mark on any of the bodies nor any evidences of any foul play," the SP said.

"But we have roped in a forensic team and a dog squad before arriving at any conclusion," he said.

Preliminary investigation indicated that there was some dispute in the family over some issue.

"Once we interrogate the survivor, we would be in a position to find out what had led to this incident," he said.

ED summons Rhea, her father

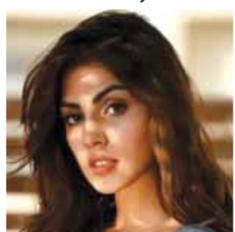
Sushant's girlfriend is being grilled for second time for money laundering

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned actress Rhea Chakraborty, accused of abetting film star Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide, to appear before it again on Monday in an ongoing money laundering probe.

Rhea was grilled for eight hours on Friday, while her brother Shouvik was questioned for 18 hours on Saturday. The questioning continued till Sunday morning. Shouvik is also an accused in the abetment to suicide case now taken over by the CBI from the Bihar Police.

Shouvik's statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and his questioning centred on his personal businesses, income, investments and financial dealings with his sister and the late film star. Besides Rhea, the ED has



also summoned her father and co-accused Indrajit Chakraborty to appear before it on Monday.

On Friday, the ED had briefly questioned Shouvik and Indrajit besides the actress

Chartered Accountant (CA) Ritesh Shah and business manager Shruuti Modi, who also worked for Rajput.

As part of the money laundering probe, the ED is looking into the financial deals involving the accused actress, her father and brother who are directors in two companies that are under the agency's gaze.

The ED is seeking to establish Rhea's income, investments, business and professional deals as the probe so far has shown mismatch between her income, expenditure and investments, they said.

Haryana CM launches anti-bullying campaign

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH
Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday launched the anti-bullying campaign of Faridabad Police by unveiling Instagram, Facebook and Twitter page of Faridabad to flag the problem of bullying in home, neighbourhood, schools, colleges and workplace and implement targeted programs to counter the menace.

society, an official spokesman said. He said that the campaign will particularly target teenagers, the segment worst-affected by the problem. Bullying destroys a victim's confidence, impairs their personality development, stunts their social intelligence and drives them to depression and a host of other diseases.

Under the campaign, people will be encouraged to follow Instagram, Facebook and Twitter page with username @FBDpolice. It will carry interactive posts to make people aware about the prevalence of bullying. Besides, it will also have a platform for victims of bullying where they can report bullies. Police will follow it up with counselling bullies with the help of NGOs working with youth-at-risk, the spokesman said.

Against the violent and incorrigible, police will take legal action under appropriate sections of law. The initiative is a part of the 'Teen Age Police' programme of Faridabad police. The idea is to eliminate the scope of violence and intimidation at interpersonal and group relations at an early stage, he said.

The society has juvenile delinquents in substantive numbers. As per a conservative estimate, for every adult criminal, there are at least two juvenile delinquents who ultimately graduate into hardened criminals, the spokesman said. The anti-bullying campaign is first in the series that will later cover other issues particularly baneful for teenagers like drugs, gambling and alcohol addiction, online frauds and human trafficking. Through the initiative, teenagers will be encouraged to develop social skills, empathy and a spirit of voluntary compliance to law so that they grow into productive adults, he added.

PSPCL assesses power theft of ₹48.47 lakh by 428 consumers

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited has launched a massive campaign against the menace of power theft across the State as per the directions of chairman-cum-managing director A Venu Prasad and Director (Distribution) DIPS Grewal.



"The border zone of PSPCL has succeeded in detecting various cases of power theft and unauthorized use of electricity," said PSPCL Chief Engineer, Border Zone (Amritsar), Pardeep Kumar Saini. Saini said that a massive electricity checking drive was conducted in city, suburban circles of Amritsar, Taran Tarn, and Gurdaspur circles. "PSPCL checked total 7,246 connections out of which 428 cases of theft or unauthorized use of

electricity has been detected. An amount of 48.47 lakhs has been charged to the defaulters consumers out of which Rs 10.82 lakhs have already been recovered," he said. He made it clear that stern action will be taken against the consumer indulging in these sort of illegal activities. PSPCL spokesperson has appealed to all its consumers to help it in controlling the menace of electricity theft by providing information about it on Whatsapp no 96461-75770. PSPCL assured its consumers that their identity will not be disclosed.

Himachal CM lays foundation stone of projects worth ₹80cr in Kangra

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday dedicated and laid foundation stones of developmental projects worth over Rs. 80 crore in Sullah Vidhan Sabha area of Kangra district.



Addressing a gathering on the occasion at Palampur, the Chief Minister said that initially while visiting Kangra district, he was planning to perform foundation stones and inaugurations of developmental projects through video conference from Dharamshala. But it was on the request and assurance from the leaders of Kangra that they would ensure social distancing, so he decided to hold public meetings by ensuring social distancing, he added.

Thakur said that to start economic activities in the State, the Government decided to start public transport and also opened all business activities, adding that people still need to ensure that they adopt all safety measures to check the spread of this virus. He said that the opposition leaders were also trying to politicise even this pandemic crisis, adding that when he was holding meetings from his office at Shimla, these leaders alleged that the Chief Minister was avoiding meeting the people of the State. But now when he is out on tour to Kangra, the same leaders are alleging the Chief Minister for defying social distancing norms, he added. The Chief Minister said the Centre and State Government has dedicated several schemes for the people of the Country and State which include Ayushman Bharat, HMCARE, Ujjwala Yojna, and Grihini Suvidha Yojna, housing schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, Mukhyamantri Awas Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna, Social Security Pension, Sahara Yojna, Jan Dhan Yojna etc. He assured the people of the area that all the developmental demands of the people of the area would be considered sympathetically.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
LOST AND FOUND
I, Gaurav Parkhi S/o Parmod # 4045, sector 25-D, Chandigarh, Lost my 10th Qualifying DMC, session 2018, roll no.2334216 issued by CBSE.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Aman Bura S/o Ramesh Kumar, R/o Vill. Kirmach (Kurukshetra) declare that my original qualifying examination certificate of main Secondary Examination of year 2018 and Roll No.2171801 issued by CBSE has been actually lost.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Kuldeep raj Mahajan S/O late sh Dina Nath Mahajan R/o House No. 202, GH 93, Sector 20, Panchkula declare that my sons Vanshet Mahajan and his wife Sunita Mahajan & Ankit Mahajan and his wife Naiya Mahajan are out of my control and leaving separately from me since 17 April 2017. So I disown them from my moveable/immovable properties. If anybody deals with them will do their own risk/responsibility.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Kamlesh Kumari Bhagal W/o Late Sukhi Ram Bhagal R/o H.No. 2281/12 Gali No. 3, Shanti Nagar Tehsil Thanesar District Kurukshetra, has disowned my son Ashish Kumar Saini, his wife Rajinder Kaur and his son Sarthak from all our movable immovable properties as they are out of our control.

PUBLIC NOTICE
We, Jaswinder Singh Spal S/O Ramesh Kumar, Amandeep Kaur W/O Jaswinder Singh Spal Residents Of VPO Bhari, Distt. Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, India And Now Residing At 7/1, Sala Street, Whakarewarewa Rotorua 3010, New Zealand Have Changed The Name Of Our Daughter Hargun To Hargun Kaur Spal. All Concerned Note.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Azad Singh S/o Gaje Singh R/o Mundlana, Tehsil Gohana, Distt. Sonapat declare that I am serving in the Army as HAV. No.15123891F. In the Army record my daughter's name (ANSHU) and date of birth (17/1/2000) was wrongly written. My daughter's correct name is Somvati. And the correct date of birth is 02/02/2000. For all future purposes.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Pooja W/o Vishal Dhiman, H.No. 62, Jarnail Enclave, Zirakpur, (SAS Nagar), have changed my name to Pooja Dhiman.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Karan Singh S/O Bhulla Ram R/O Ward No.10 Balachaur Tehsil Balachaur Distt. S.B.S. Nagar Punjab Have Changed My Name To Karan Singh Kaushal.

PUBLIC NOTICE
An important General Body Meeting of Shri Gurdwara Singh Sabha Huda, Sector-17 Jagadhri Distt. Yamuna nagar was called by S. Harjial Singh Walia (President) and S. Harpreet Singh Johar (General Secretary) at Gurdwara Sahib on Aug 9,2020 at 11 am today got postponed due non-presence of members during Covid19 Situation and as a result quorum was not completed. The main agenda of meeting was regarding Election Procedure. The meeting will remain postponed until further notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Krishan Lal S/O Hari Ram R/O Village Bakapur Guru P.O. Basiala Tehsil Garhshankar Distt. Hoshiarpur Have Changed My Name To Krishan Singh.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Sarishtha Devi Alias Satwinder Kaur W/O Sathnam Singh R/O Village Littan P.O. Garhdiwala Tehsil Dasuya Distt. Hoshiarpur Have Changed My Name To Satwinder Kaur.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Sarup Lal S/O Daulat Ram R/O Village Ucha Pind P.O. Jagatpur Jattan Tehsil Phagwara Distt. Kapurthala Have Changed My Name To Ram Saroop.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Major Singh S/O Kartar Singh, R/O Raikot, Distt. Ludhiana, Have Changed My Name To Manjit Singh.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Sarabjeet Kaur W/O Kulwinder Singh R/O H.No 516 Peergori Mohalla Samana Distt. Patiala Have Changed My Name To Sarabjeet Kaur.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Kewal Dass S/O Mehar Dass R/O Vpo. Powadra Tehsil - Phillaur (Jalandhar) changed my name to Budh Singh.

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Punjab school education department all set for 'Achievement Survey'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To make the school education system more effective, Punjab Education Department has finalized the preparations for conducting Punjab Achievement Survey (PAS) — the first initiative of its kind by any state in the country — with the state Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla emphasizing on conducting the survey in a scientific manner. To finalize the arrangements for the survey, the School Education secretary Krishan Kumar reviewed the arrangements by holding a series of meetings with the officers concerned through the video conferencing and briefing them on all the criteria besides the issued guidelines for conducting this survey.

"The survey will not only prepare the students and teachers for the 'National Achievement Survey', but it will also play an important role in strengthening the students' learning as well as reasoning ability," said the spokesperson. Spokesperson said that the survey would be conducted in all government schools across the State and would be attended by students from primary to Class XII. "The survey will be based on National Achievement Survey criteria, and will evaluate students' learning outcomes," added the spokesperson. The survey will be based on elective subjects including English, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies, and have Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs).

Capt Amarinder doesn't tolerate criticism, says AAP

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A day after Punjab Government withdrew the state security of Congress' Rajya Sabha MP Partap Singh Bajwa, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) state unit president Bhagwant Mann on Sunday termed Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh as 'a dictatorial king' saying that like Hitler, Capt Amarinder also does not tolerate his own criticism. "That is why, whoever criticizes the corrupt, hopeless, and mafia-style working of the Congress led Punjab Government, the monarchy government goes against it to the extreme extent, even if they are senior leaders of their own party," quipped Mann. Mann said that though there was infighting between Congress Rajya Sabha members and former Punjab Congress state president Partap

Mann demanded the Chief Minister to clarify his stand to the people about voluminous security provided to Majithia and Badal family by Punjab Government

Singh Bajwa-Shamsher Singh Dullu and the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder over the power centre which can be considered as an internal matter of the Congress, but Bajwa and Dullu are saying the same things which AAP has been stating about the incompetent, corrupt, and monarchical working style of the Chief Minister from the very beginning with complete responsibility. "Even Raja Sahib has come to know that like Badals, he too has lost his credibility among the people of Punjab... If the Chief Minister does not work, he should learn to bear his criticism," he added. Questioning the Chief Minister over withdrawing police security given to Bajwa under the pretext of security provided by the Centre, Mann said that why this criterion could not be applied to other politicians like Badal family and Bikram Singh Majithia who have been granted security cover by Central Security Agencies as well as Punjab Police in large numbers. Mann demanded the Chief Minister to clarify his stand to the people about voluminous security provided to Majithia and Badal family by Punjab Government.

IN BRIEF

5 QUINTAL POPPY HUSK, 64 KG MARIJUANA RECOVERED
Chandigarh: Foiling the major drug smuggling bids, Haryana Police, in separate incidents, have seized 500 kg poppy husk and 64 kg 750 gram marijuana (ganja) from Jind and Palwal districts. Police have also arrested four persons in this connection. A spokesperson informed that a team of CIA in Jind got a tip-off that huge consignment of narcotics was placed on a canal track between Ujhana and Neppewala village. On receiving this information, the police team immediately rushed to the spot and recovered 500 kg poppy husk. A person was also arrested in this connection identified as Mohit. In Palwal, an anti-vehicle theft recovered 54 kg 450 gram marijuana from a car during search. Two persons identified as Majlis and Waseem, both residents of district Nuh were arrested. Cases under the provisions of the NDPS Act were registered against them in different Police Stations. Further investigation is underway, he added.

HRY, SIDBI JOIN HANDS TO DEVELOP MSME ECOSYSTEM
Chandigarh: Haryana Government through its Directorate of MSME and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the objective of development of the MSME ecosystem in Haryana. A spokesman said, SIDBI has spearheaded a few initiatives towards strengthening the enterprise eco system. Setting up a project management unit in 11 states is a key step in this direction. The first such MoU has been signed between Haryana Government and SIDBI. Under the arrangement, SIDBI shall set up a dedicated Project Management Unit (PMU) which will work in coordination with Haryana Government and facilitate schemes for benefit of MSMEs in the state. The focus areas shall include designing schemes for equity support, interest subvention, resolution of stressed MSMEs and learning events for MSME entrepreneurs.

Punjab to conduct social pre-audit of stubble management scheme for Kharif-20

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government will carry out a first-of-its-kind social pre-audit of Crop Residue Management (CRM) scheme for supplying farm equipment or machinery on subsidy to farmers. The orders for the same were issued by the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday while rejecting allegations of favouritism being shown to certain manufacturers. "The social pre-audit by the Agriculture Department will nail the lies being propagated by certain vested political interests," said the Chief Minister, adding that there not a single farmer had questioned the quality of the machines or equipment being supplied

under the scheme, aimed at ensuring scientific disposal of paddy straw during Kharif Season-2020. The Chief Minister said that the pre audit will seek to make the scheme more efficacious, broad-based and farmer-friendly with the ultimate goal of making the state free of pollution triggered by stubble burning. Suggestions and objections, if any, will be invited from all stakeholders for this purpose. Notably, the Central Government has been running the scheme for past two

years for distributing farm machinery among farmers and cooperative societies for effective in-situ management of the paddy straw. Under the scheme, farmers from Punjab have been given subsidy of nearly Rs 460 crore on 50,815 farm machines. The Centre has already listed around 180 manufacturers from Punjab to ensure supply of farm equipment or machinery in this regard. During the current year, the Government intends to give subsidy approximately to the tune of Rs 300 crore on

23,500 on such machines. Capt Amarinder has directed the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Development, Anirudh Tiwari to provide these machines to farmers or societies only after the completion of the said audit. The ACS said that the social pre audit would be completed well before the distribution of farm machinery or equipment to the farmers and cooperative societies. Around 7,000 individual farmers will be given the machines at 50 per cent subsidy, while 5,000 coop-

The pre audit will seek to make the scheme more efficacious, broad-based and farmer-friendly with the ultimate goal of making the state free of pollution triggered by stubble burning

erative societies, panchayats and farmers' groups would be given the machines at 80 per cent subsidized rate. Meanwhile, the state Agriculture Secretary KS Pannu has urged all farmers, farmer organizations, political parties, machine manufacturers and NGOs to put forward their suggestions and objections in order to make the scheme better aligned to the interests of farmers.

VOICE WITHIN :The Path of Selfless Service



VIJAY SINGAL

works to the Supreme, with utmost devotion. He accepts whatever comes his way, with an attitude of gratitude. Krishna has advocated action without attachment. At the same time, he has cautioned against superficial control over activities and a false sense of detachment. It has been stated that he who regulates his organs of action outwardly, even while thinking of pleasures of objects of the senses, only cheats himself. He is a hypocrite. But the one who brings, through the mind, all his senses under control and engages the organs of action, without any attachment, on the path of selfless service, is a great man. The true spirit of detachment is when one not only restrains his outward activities, but also manages the desires which impel those actions. Gita has further recognised the fact that sometimes it becomes very difficult to determine as to what is the appropriate action in a partic-

ular situation. But the one who has gained knowledge of the self, through the practice of karma yoga, does not suffer from any such confusion. He gets a clearer and a broader vision as his soul becomes a transparent channel of the Divine wisdom. He corresponds to a mirror reflecting the will of the Supreme. Through his illumined intelligence, he comes to know as to which action is in harmony with the cosmic purpose and, therefore, the right action. He can, then, easily decide as to, in the given circumstances, what work must be done and what work must be avoided. Spiritual realisation prompts ethical action. Distraction is natural to human mind. Thoughts of anyone are scattered and endless. But those who traverse the path of karma yoga have firm determination and a clear goal. Having a resolute intellect, they focus on the goal with single-minded attention. Instead of worrying about favourable or unfavourable results, they

concentrate only on doing a good job. They put in their best efforts and then leave the results to the will of the Divine. By preserving inner composure and paying proper attention to the work in hand, they certainly get better rewards. Though engaged in all kinds of activities, the one who takes refuge in Ishvara, the Supreme Lord; he reaches by His grace, the eternal and imperishable abode of the Divine. When one surrenders himself completely to the Supreme Lord, the individual consciousness expands itself to the vastness of the undifferentiated and timeless consciousness. In such a state of being, no one can think of doing any evil deed. Considering himself to be only an instrument in the hands of Ishvara, whatever one does, he does it for the great cosmic purpose of the Divine. Attainment of perfection in karma yoga does not imply abandonment of work. The one who has realised the self through the practice of karma

yoga, the freed soul, remains active even after becoming aware of his true nature. Instead of being prompted by any selfish desire, the actions of a perfected being are governed by his immortal self. As his sense of separateness gets eradicated, he works without the egoistic will. He surrenders himself to the will of the Supreme. Outwardly his conduct is the same as that of any other person. But inwardly he is fixed in purity, free from the dualities like pleasure and pain. As he has nothing to gain or loose by action or non-action, he works only for furtherance of the purpose of God. His actions are accompanied by inner joy and peace. Krishna has specifically urged the learned, men of knowledge, to work in the spirit of karma yoga, for the betterment of the world. Their responsibility is more because common people always follow the great men in their footsteps. Instead of mere preaching, they have been called upon to

set high standards of behaviour. They must lead by example. As the ignorant people work only from attachment to their work, similarly the learned should act without attachment, just for the benefit for the common masses. It has also been assured that one can certainly attain spiritual perfection by selflessly serving the society. To conclude, karma yoga is that path of spiritual evolution which exhorts man to work without any attachment to the actions and their results. An aspirant for karma yoga dedicates all his actions to Ishvara and accepts all the results gladly, with a sense of gratitude. For him, unselfish performance of his duties is worship of the Supreme Lord. Karma yoga purifies the mind and enables one to realise his true nature. As a result, even amidst intense activity, one can experience inner peace and spontaneous joy. In other words, karma yoga is that manner of doing things which frees one from all stresses and strains.

COVID-19: Punjab reports 987 fresh cases, 24 deaths

CHANDIGARH WITNESSES HIGHEST SINGLE DAY SPIKE

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Sunday reported a total of 987 fresh cases of the novel coronavirus besides 24 deaths, taking the State's COVID-19 tally to 23,903 and death toll to 586.

Despite imposition of night curfew, Ludhiana continues to register spike with nine deaths and 319 fresh cases in the past 24 hours — breaching 5000-mark. With this, the district's tally stood at 5,203 (22 percent of the total positive cases in the state) with 173 deaths (30 percent of the total deaths in the state).

Besides Ludhiana, Amritsar reported four deaths, while three casualties were reported in Bathinda, two each from Kapurthala and Jalandhar, and one each from Barnala, Gurdaspur, SAS Nagar (Mohali) and Sangrur.

Patiala district also registered a spike with 204 fresh cases, followed by 79 in Jalandhar, 76 in Amritsar, 59 in

Moga, 41 in Bathinda, 37 in Fatehgarh Sahib, 29 in Gurdaspur, 22 in SBS Nagar (Nawanshahr), 20 in Sangrur, 18 in Ropar, 16 in Ferozepur, 14 in Barnala, 12 each in Kapurthala and SAS Nagar (Mohali), eight in Hoshiarpur, seven in Pathankot, six each in Mansa and Tarn Taran, and five in Muktsar.

As many as 27 police personnel — nine from Ludhiana, eight from Bathinda, five from Gurdaspur, four from Moga, one each from Sangrur, Nawanshahr, and Tarn Taran — were among the fresh positive cases reported on Sunday.

Besides six prisoners — three from Bathinda, two from Moga, and one from Ludhiana; nine healthcare workers, one frontline worker from Tarn Taran, other than 16 with travel history to other states and countries were among the fresh cases reported in the past 24 hours.

As many as 459 patients — 133 from Amritsar followed by

Ludhiana (90), Gurdaspur (52), Sangrur (50), Tarn Tarn (35), Fatehgarh Sahib (25), Kapurthala (23), Fazilka (20), SAS Nagar (10), Hoshiarpur (7), Barnala (6), Mansa (4), Muktsar (3) and Moga (1) — were discharged on Sunday after recovering from the deadly contagion.

With this, the total number of recoveries has gone up to 15,319 — accounting for 64 percent of the total cases, with the state still having 7,998 active cases (34 percent of the total positive cases) of which 131 patients are on oxygen support, and 22 are critical and on ventilator support.

In Ludhiana, a 19-year-old coronavirus positive girl, who was a patient of congenital heart blockage, died while undergoing treatment at Ludhiana's Dayanand Medical College and Hospital. Earlier, the girl had tried to run away from Ludhiana Civil Hospital's isolation ward on Friday, as she wanted a smartphone but the family had refused.

HARYANA REPORTS NINE DEATHS, 792 CASES

Haryana on Sunday reported yet another spike with 792 fresh COVID-19 positive cases

and nine fatalities. With this, the state's tally of positive cases reached 34781 and the total toll stood at 483.

Five deaths were reported from Yamunanagar, two in Kurukshetra and one each in Faridabad and Sonapat in the last 24 hours.

The worst-affected district in the state-Faridabad district has reported a maximum of 150 positive cases on Sunday crossing 10000-mark. The total cases in the district were 10129 while 141 deaths have been reported till date.

Other two worst affected districts namely Gurugram and Sonapat have so far reported 9728 and 3209 cases respectively. Gurugram has reported 125 COVID-19 deaths while Sonapat recorded 43 fatalities.

“Out of 792 fresh cases, 150 were reported from Faridabad, 93 from Karnal, 80 from Gurugram, 55 from Panipat, 53 from Sonapat, 52 from Ambala, 20 from Hisar, 39 from Kurukshetra, 48 from Sirsa, 43 from Yamunanagar, 32 in Panchkula, 37 from Palwal, 27 from Mahendragarh among other cases. Out of critical patients admitted in the hospitals, 122 patients were on oxygen support while 25 were on ventilator,” the Haryana Health Department's evening bulletin stated.

According to the bulletin, the fatality rate is recorded at 1.16 percent in Haryana. The case-doubling rate in Haryana on Sunday stood at 28 days, COVID positive rate was 5.64 per cent and recovery rate was

recorded at 83.54 percent.

34781 patients including 750 in the last 24 hours have recovered and have been discharged from hospitals in the state. There were a total of 6371 active cases in Haryana till the evening.

As many as 7.44 lakh samples have been tested till date in Haryana. The report of 5781 samples is awaited, the bulletin added. Notably, Haryana Government has established plasma banks at Faridabad, Gurugram, Panchkula and Rohtak. A total 595 number of plasma units have been collected from COVID 19 recovered patients till date and 291 COVID-19 patients have been given plasma therapy treatment till now, as per the bulletin.

Apart from this, intensive sampling of COVID through rapid antigen testing kits are being done in Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat and Jhajjar, the bulletin further added.

CHANDIGARH RECORDS HIGHEST SINGLE DAY SPIKE OF 89 CASES

The union territory of Chandigarh on Sunday witnessed the highest single-day spike with 89 fresh COVID-19 cases and one more resident succumbed to the virus. The total cases crossed 1500-mark and stood at 1515 till the evening while the toll had reached 25. There were 585 active cases in the city till the evening.

Earlier, it was on August 5 when the city had witnessed its

previous highest single-day spike with 64 fresh COVID-19 cases. “A 32 years old female, resident of Sector 32, expired at her house on August 7. She was a known case of heart disease and was suffering from Jaundice and Ascites also. She was sampled post death for COVID 19 and has been reported as positive,” stated Chandigarh Health Department's evening bulletin.

The bulletin stated, “Out of 89 fresh infections, 60 were detected through RT-PCR while 29 were found through antigen testing. The fresh cases were reported Sectors 16, 28, 30, 31, 32, 35, 38, 39, 40, 43, 45, 47, 49, 52, 56, 63, Sarangpur, PGIMER, Khuda Alisher, Burali, Ramdarbar, Manimajra, Daria, Behlana, Dhanas and

Punjab Health Minister ridicules Delhi Model of Covid-19 management

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Ridiculing the so-called Delhi model as “nothing more than a desperate bid by the Arvind Kejriwal Government to divert attention from its own failures”, Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu on Sunday said that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was making a laughing stock of itself with its absurd claims on COVID-19 management in the national capital.

The Minister termed Punjab's Leader of Opposition Harpal Singh Cheema's statement expressing “dissatisfaction” over the Capt Amarinder Singh government's measures to tackle the

pandemic as “ludicrous” saying that AAP MLA was clearly oblivious to the fact that Punjab continues to fare much better than many other states in the fight against COVID, which in fact had totally exposed the inadequate Delhi healthcare infrastructure.

Sidhu pointed out that the effectiveness of Punjab's battle against COVID was not on account of any help from the Central Government, unlike Delhi where the Centre had to step in and virtually take over the pandemic management to pull the city out of the total and unprecedented mess into which the AAP government had pushed it.

Punjab to enhance Covid-19 testing capacity up to 4000 tests/day by Sept

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Medical Education and Research Department has set up four new Covid viral testing labs to enhance the total daily testing capacity of 4,000 tests during September 2020 with 1,000 tests per day per lab in the State. Besides, the total viral testing capacity in three Medical Colleges at Patiala, Amritsar and Faridkot would also be ramped up to 5,000 tests per day per college by August 31.

The initiative would go a long way to fight the pandemic as early diagnosis is a key to contain and curb the spread of the disease,” said the spokesperson.

The state Principal Secretary (Medical Education and Research) DK Tiwari

informed that Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Science University, Ludhiana, has already started its operations on August 5 with the capacity of 100 tests per day, which would be further increased to 1000 tests per day by in September.

Likewise, the Forensic Sciences Lab in SAS Nagar (Mohali) will start its operations on August 10 this year with a starting capacity of 100 tests per day ramping up to 250 by August 30 and going up to 1000 tests per day by in September, he said.

Similarly, Punjab Biotechnology Incubator would start its operations on August 10 with an initial capacity of 100 tests per day and going up to 250 by August 25 and 1000 tests in September. The Regional

Disease Diagnostic Lab in Jalandhar would start with a capacity of 25 tests per day ramping up to 250 by August 20 and increasing up to 1000 tests per day in September.

So far, over 6.15 lakh tests have already been done in State till date. A sum of Rs 14.47crores has been spent for the procurement of total equipment for Virology labs.

Informing about the process of setting up these RTPCR labs, Tiwari said that these labs has been established in record time of three months from concept and design to reality. He said that process of approval and tendering etc have been completed in 25 days, and machines installation in 15 days. He said that ICMR approvals have been taken in 10 days.

Haryana CM felicitates UPSC topper Pradeep Singh Malik



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday congratulated Pradeep Singh Malik from Sonapat, who has topped the UPSC Civil Services Examination, 2019 and said that his achievement would also inspire other youth of the State and country.

Khattar interacted with Pradeep Singh Malik as the latter called on him at New Delhi to take his blessings.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister felicitated Pradeep with a shawl. He also honoured Sukhbir Singh Malik, father of Pradeep Singh Malik by presenting him a shawl and said that credit for the success of Pradeep goes to him.

Khattar said that by achieving this great feat, Pradeep has brought laurels not only to his family and Sonapat but also to Haryana. Pradeep, who belongs to Tewri village in Sonapat district, has secured All India first rank in the 2019 UPSC Civil Services exam, the results of which were announced recently.

The Chief Minister said

that Pradeep has secured first rank in the Civil Services exam through sheer hard work and dedication. The youth of the country have a lot of talent and are getting success with their ability whenever they get an opportunity.

Thanking the Chief Minister, Pradeep said that besides the society, teachers, family and friends, the state has also supported him a lot in his success. He said that during the interview, he was asked questions regarding Haryana from an administrative point of view. In response, he referred to various public welfare policies of the State Government and several reforms undertaken in the field of ease of doing business.

Apart from this, he also mentioned other achievements like inclusion of Haryana in the top five states in view of Good Governance Index, Gold Award for timely implementation of citizen-centric services under the e-governance and schemes implemented for women empowerment and strengthening the agriculture sector.

Rural Development Dept to develop 1500 parks, playgrounds in Punjab's villages

750 parks would be developed in the villages during the financial year 2020-21

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government, in an effort to provide maximum facilities in state's villages, is developing parks and constructing playgrounds in the villages.

“This year, 1500 parks and playgrounds would be constructed by the Rural Development Department,” said the state Rural Development and Panchayat Minister Tripti Rajinder Singh Bajwa on Sunday.

The Minister said that despite the recent corona pandemic, 750 parks would be developed in the villages during the financial year 2020-21, out of which work of 578 parks is going on at full stretch.

Apart from this, the Department has set a target to construct 750 playgrounds in the villages during this financial year out of which 165 playgrounds are under construction, he added.

Bajwa said that with the help of village panchayats, not only the overall look of the villages has been facelifted, but the villages have also become greener by developing parks and playgrounds. “This is a great effort to motivate the youth and children of the villages towards sports,” he said.

Punjab excise dept seizes 27,600 litres illicit chemical containing spirit from Dera Bassi

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/MOHALI

Cracking down further on illicit liquor trading and smuggling in the State, Punjab Excise Department on Sunday seized 27,600 litres of chemicals containing spirit — the biggest haul of such nature by the department so far.

A special team from Mohali, supported by DSP Bikram Brar, seized heavy quantity of 27,600 litres of chemical containing spirit from three places, said a spokesperson of the Excise and Taxation Department.

The chemical was stored in 138 drums of 200 litres capacity each. The seizure was made from Devnagar village in Derabassi Tehsil in Mohali district.

During the raid conducted at the premises of the M/s Allychem Chemicals godown, in Focal point Dera Bassi, 82 drums of 200 litres each has been recovered. On raids con-

ducted at M/s Om Solvi Trading, which was running its operations from D-11 Focal point, Dera Bassi, 49 drums of 200 litres each have been recovered. Similarly, on a raid on M/s Pure Solutions F-28, Focal Point Dera Bassi, seven drums of 200 litres each have been recovered.

Spokesperson said that four persons have been arrested in the case including owners of the firms.

The link for these firms have been traced from the earlier raid carried out by the Department on July 23 almost a week before the unfortunate tragedy when 5,300 litres of chemicals and spirit was recovered from the premises of M/s Binny Chemicals.

It is reported that these firms used to supply the material to Binny Chemicals who would further sell it in the market.

During the interrogation, the accused revealed that they were reducing the waste of pharmaceutical companies. However, they couldn't clarify the products they were manufacturing as also their customers.

Investigations are in progress to examine the record and to trace further links of the accused in the case. Taking no chances, the Excise Department has also called for the services of Chemical experts of the Forensic Science Laboratory.

It may be recalled that the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has already given clear cut instructions to the Excise Department not to show any leniency with the unscrupulous elements involved in the illicit liquor trade.

Modern libraries to be set up in Haryana rural areas, says Deputy CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Sunday said the state government will set up modern libraries for students in rural areas if panchayats provide some land for the purpose. He said these libraries will be fully equipped and help youths in villages to prepare for competitive exams.

Chautala, who also holds the panchayat portfolio, said that he has set a target of opening modern libraries in every village.

He called upon all village panchayats to give a room or two or some space in their villages for setting up libraries. “The state government will build a modern library at its own expense.

The students in the rural areas can immensely benefit from these libraries,” he said.

Chautala said he had also pushed the idea when he was a Member of Parliament between 2014 and 2019.

The deputy chief minister said the state government will initiate many other steps in the coming months for the betterment of education facilities in rural areas.

“In the education sector, we need to make full use of technology and the government is doing continuous work in this direction.

The state government is taking steps in constructing Sanskriti model schools in each block on the pattern of central government model schools and to make primary schools bag free,” he said.

Increase in single-use plastic in Chandigarh amid pandemic

NISHU MAHAJAN ■ CHANDIGARH

The Covid-19 which had hit Chandigarh in the month of March helped heal the environment to an extent but ironically just like the global trend, the city has also witnessed a surge in single-use plastic waste.

Days back, social media was abuzz with pictures of clean skies of Chandigarh but now worrying pictures of glut of discarded single-use masks, gloves, shoe covers, bottles of hand sanitiser, other personal protection gear, cups, cutlery, plates, water bottles among other items has led to fresh health and environmental concerns.

The environmentalists feel that with wearing a face mask becoming a new normal to protect ourselves from the contagious Covid-19, the dependence on single-use plastic as a safety measure has also significantly increased, leading to a reversal trend in Chandigarh Administration's push to phase out single-use plastic items in the city.

In Chandigarh, three separate notifications have been issued by the UT Administration since

September last to impose a ban on a variety of single-use plastic products in the city.

The UT's notification dated September 27, 2019 had imposed a ban on single use plastic cutlery, thermocol or styrofoam cutlery, single use plastic containers, plastic (sold in the name of silver/aluminium) bag/pouch for packing food items, drinking water sealed glasses and plastic mineral water pouch, single-time use razors, single-time use pens among other items.

In January this year, the Administration had issued a fresh order extending the ambit of ban on single-use plastic products, banning industrial packing (of any kind) less than 50 microns, single use plastic containers (used for curd, kheer, ice creams etc) less than 250 microns used for packaging of dairy items, plastic sachets used in cosmetic, ketchup and toiletries having quantity of 30 ml and less, and plastic sticks for ear buds, balloons, flags and candles.

Later in July, the Administration had included plastic refill pouches having quantities less than 500 ml, straws attached with tetra packs, and multilayered plastic used for foods or snacks pack-

ing under extended producer responsibility (EPR) instead of putting a ban on them.

Nevertheless, the items which are banned have now made a comeback in the city as the focus is shifted entirely on using single-use plastic as a safety measure against COVID-19.

A city-based environmentalist Paveela Bali while talking to The Pioneer said, “The importance of single-use PPE for healthcare workers is not disputed. But from shopkeepers to salons, everybody is now using single-use plastic items which are banned in the city. When we go to salons, they hand over plastic covers to the customers for shoes and plastic bags for keeping their belongings. Several shopkeepers are giving customers single-use plastic gloves before they enter the shops. Eateries and other shops are also using plastic carry bags for home-delivery.”

“Not only this, as more people are wearing personal protective equipment in their daily lives, they are discarding gloves and masks all over streets, parks and parking lots. This is not only a health hazard but environmental hazard as well,” said Paveela, who had



played a major role in the stay over the contentious Tribune Flyover project in Chandigarh.

Maintaining that the Administration has miserably failed to keep a check on violations of ban on single-use plastic items, she said, “We cannot ignore such environmental hazards under the garb of COVID-19. It's been more than four months now and the plastic pollution problem is snowballing as there is no focus on safe disposal of biomedical waste, no inspections are being conducted by sanitary inspectors to check the violations of ban and public's environmental consciousness is also lost.”

According to the Administration's notifications, no person including a shopkeeper, vendor, wholesaler or retailer, traders, hawker or

rehiwala etc can manufacture, store, import, sell, transport, supply or use the banned plastic items. And, any person causing breach of the ban is liable for the penalties as per the provision of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and orders of National Green Tribunal.

Under Section 15 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, whoever fails to comply with the orders, is liable for punishment of imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both. The violator may also face the closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process, stoppage or regulation of the supply of electricity or water or any other service.

Apart from this, the NGT

has directed that any person who is found to be using, storing, purchasing, dealing with or distributing plastic bags, plastic plates or plastic glasses and such allied items will be liable to pay environmental compensation at the rate of Rs 5000 per event.

Acknowledging that the use of banned single-use plastic items is rampant in the city, Debendra Dalai, Director, UT Environment Department and vice-chairman, Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee said, “Due to focus on dealing with COVID-19 pandemic, special drives to check violations of ban could not be conducted in the past almost three-four months.” “Since October 2019, around 60000 challans have been issued across the city for violation of the ban. Undoubtedly, there has been a steep increase in usage of day-to-day items such as plastic bags and other single-use plastic items due to COVID-19. Mitigating plastic pollution remains a challenge not in Chandigarh but globally also,” he said.

Given the current scenario when people are using disposable masks, gloves, cups, plates etc on a daily basis, Dalai said that the Department will

review if any changes are required in the previously issued orders putting a ban on several single-use plastic items in the city.

On how the Administration plans to deal with the unchecked violations, he said, “We have called a meeting with the officials of Municipal Corporation next week to chalk out a strategy on how to ensure strict enforcement of the ban, effective management of biomedical waste generated besides spreading awareness about safe disposal of used masks and gloves. The Government of India had also earlier issued guidelines on the safe disposal of bio-medical waste.”

The issues like promoting cloth masks and reducing the use of single-use personal protection gears, which are neither recyclable nor biodegradable, would also be deliberated upon, Dalai added.

Currently, only face masks are made from different material and are reusable but plastic is used in making face shields, head covers, shoe covers, sanitizer bottles and other personal protective gears. And, there is no substitute to plastic in making most of the protective gears as it has proved to be

the most sanitary, reliable and cost-effective answer to the global healthcare crisis.

Another city-based environmentalist Rahul Mahajan said that with the beginning of unlock phase 3.0, the focus should be on reducing the use of single-use plastic products. Reusable cloth masks and gloves should be increasingly encouraged.

We understand the short-term needs for healthcare and other frontline workers but the long-term environmental impact should also be considered. The plastic problem will be never-ending. Plastic products can take hundreds of years to break down, he said.

There is a ban on industrial packing (of any kind) less than 50 microns, single use plastic containers less than 250 microns used for packaging in the city, Rahul said adding that such items are however available in the markets now.

I feel that the Administration needs to re-work its strategy considering the pandemic and come up with effective solutions to at least curtail the use of plastic carry bags, disposable cups, plates, masks, cutlery among other banned items in Chandigarh, he added.

Andaman will be hub of 'blue economy': Modi



Modi urges people to maintain 'do gaj ki doori'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day before the launch of the 2,300-km optical fibre cable connectivity project in Andaman & Nicobar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the Union Territory would be developed as a hub of 'blue economy' and 'high-impact' projects would be developed in 12 islands.

The Prime Minister was interacting with BJP workers of Andaman and Nicobar Islands through a video conference in the presence of party president J P Nadda.

The meeting comes a day before inauguration of the submarine optical fibre cable connecting Chennai and Port Blair which would provide fast internet to the archipelago.

The submarine cable, which will also connect Port Blair to Swaraj Dweep (Havelock), Little Andaman, Car Nicobar, Kamorta, Great

Nicobar, Long Island, and Rangat of the Island group, is expected to transform life in the remote Island including defence, business and tourism sectors.

An estimated 2,300 km of submarine optical fibre cable has been laid at an expenditure of about ₹1,224 crore and the project has been completed well within deadline.

"The internet connectivity in Andaman and Nicobar will go through a sea change after the inauguration of the facility on Monday. This will facilitate online education, tourism and business in the island," said the Prime Minister who also pointed to the strategic location of its ports which he said are established in "competitive distance" with many places and countries.

He said "high-impact projects would be developed in 12 islands" and Andaman and Nicobar would emerge as a "blue-economy" front in the country.

Addressing the workers, Modi again stressed on "do gaj ki doori" and the importance of wearing facemask to keep away coronavirus. "We need to insist on these two things and also spread awareness...", the Prime Minister said.

Modi said in the time of pandemic it is important that "dialogue should continue" with all and "we should be useful for all".

During the interaction, party workers described to the Prime Minister how they provided food and medical aid to people stuck in the island during the lockdown. Modi praised their efforts in serving the distressed people in the island during the coronavirus pandemic saying "you have passed with flying colours".

He asked party workers to continue their work with the spirit of 'Seva hi sanghathan' motto.

The total number of coronavirus patients in Andaman and Nicobar Islands reached 1,222 on Saturday. The Union Territory has 778 active cases, while 425 have been cured of the disease so far. In all, 19 patients have died in the islands.

Gehlot urges MLAs to save democracy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Ahead of the Rajasthan Assembly session, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has appealed to all MLAs to listen to the voice of people to save democracy and stand with the truth in the interest of people of the State.

In a letter to all MLAs, Gehlot sought their cooperation in fulfilling the promises of development and prosperity of the State. "It is my appeal that you should listen to the voice of people in order to avoid wrong tradition, to maintain people's trust in us and to save democracy," Gehlot said in the letter.

The Assembly session in the State, which has been witnessing political turmoil after the rebellion by former Deputy CM Sachin Pilot and legislators loyal to him, will start on August 14. Gehlot is likely to seek a trust vote during the session.

Pilot was sacked as deputy Chief Minister and the president of the State unit of the Congress after he and some MLAs loyal to him rebelled against Gehlot. Many believe that Gehlot still has an edge in the numbers game and is confident of a majority.

"You may be a legislator from any political party, you

should ensure and take a decision after understanding voter's feeling that how a people's elected government continues to work strongly for state's welfare," he said, emphasising that efforts to destabilise Government are not successful.

The Chief Minister expressed faith that legislators will act in the larger interest of people of the state and will cooperate in fulfilling the promises of development and prosperity.

In the three-page letter the Chief Minister also wrote about the novel coronavirus pandemic besides mentioning "attempts to topple his Government". The senior Congress leader also said that former Prime Ministers - Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee - faced defeats during elections, "but they didn't let the institution of democracy weaken".

"I appeal to all of you that to save the democracy, to ensure that voters continue to trust us and a wrong precedent is not set by us, you all should listen to the voice of people. While respecting the sentiment of your family members, your voters, please channelise your efforts in ensuring the government - elected by the people - continues to deliver with all its strength," the 69-year-old leader wrote.

"I am confident that you all

with stand with the truth and will contribute in delivering promises made to the public," he said.

"Amid the pandemic, we should all be concerned about fighting coronavirus... saving lives, economy, jobs. The state Government is working day and night for this. At such a time, some of our colleagues and opposition leaders are trying to conspire against us... this is unfortunate," Gehlot's letter read.

Between 1993 and 1996, "similar attempts were made to make such deals in order to topple the Bhairon Singh Shekhawat government," he mentioned.

"At that as the Union Minister and state's party chief, I had raised objection with (former Rajasthan governor) Baliram Bhagat and ex-Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao, stressing that it's against the democratic values to topple an elected government. Voters here will never want that such a precedent is set," the Chief Minister added.

Victory and defeat are a part of election cycles but the "people's mandate is the most important," he stressed.

"Our fight is to save democracy, it will continue. We will win. Truth shall win... people shall win. All the MLAs -

whether those from the ruling party or opposition - will win who don't want the government to be destabilised," Gehlot tweeted on Sunday.

Gehlot has claimed that he has the support of 102 MLAs, one above the majority mark. The BJP has 72 MLAs. Both the parties have been guarding their floor amid the crisis.

BJP MLA Nirmal Kumawat had alleged that the Congress government in Rajasthan was "harassing" opposition MLAs, and said they were on a pilgrimage to Somnath to seek mental peace.

Congress MLAs are currently holed up in a Jaisalmer hotel as the party has accused the BJP of horse-trading following the revolt by Pilot and 18 MLAs loyal to him.

Pilot and his 19 MLAs in his camp are at resorts in BJP-ruled Haryana.

Earlier this week, the BSP appeal seeking a temporary freeze on the merger of its six former legislators with Rajasthan's Congress government, was dismissed by the High Court. The six MLAs have sought transfer of the case to the Supreme court.

If there is a freeze on the merger, Gehlot's numbers will drop and he will have a tougher fight on his hands in case of a trust vote.

NGT directs DDA to file response to plea alleging pollution in lake

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to file response to a plea alleging that a lake in east Delhi is being polluted by operation of boat services.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson, Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel, also noted the submission that concretisation around trees is taking place in violation of its orders.

"Let DDA file its response within one month failing which coercive measures under Section 25 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 read with section 51 of CPC may be the only option left with the Tribunal. The response be filed by e-mail," the bench said.

According to the applicant, he made a representation to the authorities but the same has not been acted upon.

The Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation told the bench that no pollution is being caused in operating boats on the lake.

With regard to the issue of concretisation of the trees, action is to be taken by DDA, the tribunal noted.

Rahul flays centre over 'looming unemployment'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Sunday hit out at the Centre over looming unemployment in the country. He accused the Narendra Modi Government of failing to meet its promise of jobs for two crore people every year, and then enacting policies that "destroyed India's economic structure" and left crores without jobs.

His attack on the government came as the Congress youth wing launched a "Rozgar do" campaign with the objective to raise the voice of the youth against alleged unemployment prevailing in the country.

"When Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, he promised the youth of the country that he will give jobs to two crore youth every year. He sold a dream, but the reality is that 14 crore people have become unemployed due to the policies of Narendra Modi," Rahul alleged.

Rahul alleged that the Modi Government's decision of demonetisation and its "faulty" implementation of GST and the lockdown have "destroyed" the economic structure of the country.

"Why did this happen? Because of wrong policies. Demonetisation, faulty implementation of GST and then lockdown - these three steps have destroyed the economic structure of the country and the truth now is that India cannot give employment to its youth," the former Congress chief said in a video message he tweeted.

Therefore, the Indian Youth Congress has hit the streets, he said, expressing happiness that the IYC will raise these issues in all towns and streets.

"Please join the 'Rozgar Do' programme and along with Youth Congress, get jobs for the youth of this nation," the Gandhi scion said.

He also congratulated the Youth Congress on the occasion of its foundation day and urged them to keep fighting for the youth of the country. Expressing solidarity with the campaign, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said "youth power" is India's strength.

"As opposed to the BJP Government's job-destroying policies, there is a need to create more and more employment opportunities for the youth of India," she said on Twitter.

"Rozgar Do is the demand of young India. Employment is the need of young India," she said.

Under the "Rozgar Do" campaign, the voices of the unemployed youth will be amplified all over the country, the IYC said.

"Anti-youth policies of the central government will be highlighted among the youth of the country through social media and other mediums," it said in a statement.

Several Congress leaders posted videos on social media voicing concerns over alleged rising unemployment in the country.

Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the demand of every youth of this country is "Rozgar Do" (give employment).

"We all demand, it is our right that the youth of the country should get employment on the basis of qualifications and get ahead in the progress of the country," he said. Several Congress leaders like Digvijaya Singh, Depender Hooda, Gaurav Gogoi, Rajeev Satav, Gaurav Vallabh and Ragini Nayak called for employment opportunities for the youth on social media as part of the campaign.

KVIC set to open first of its kind Training-cum-Production Centre of Silk in Arunachal Pradesh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The far-flung tribal village of Chullyu in Arunachal Pradesh will soon be bustling with spinning and weaving activities with Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) set to open the first of its kind Training cum Production Center of Silk in the State.

Conceived just six months ago, the Centre will be launched in the first week of September. The KVIC has refurbished and converted a dilapidated school building into the training cum production center. The school building has been provided to KVIC by the education department of Arunachal Pradesh Government zero rent.

Machinery like handlooms, Charkha, Silk reeling machines and warping drums have already arrived and installation of machines are in full swing. The first batch of 25 local artisans of Chullyu village has been selected to begin the training with.

The project was conceived in February this year during the visit of KVIC Chairman Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena to this tribal village Chullyu.

The project was conceived in February this year during the visit of KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena to this tribal village Chullyu

Identifying a great potential of silk production and other activities of village industries in the village, Saxena sanctioned setting up of training cum production center for the Eri Silk, which is traditionally worn by local tribals.

The work, however, progressed at a slow pace due to Covid-19 lockdown.

Recently KVIC also distributed 250 honey bee boxes in Chullyu village which has rich flora for production of high-altitude honey.

Located on the main highway just 30 km before the most popular tourist spot Ziro, Chullyu is a scenic village known for its eco-friendly ways of living. It is easily approachable by tourists which is an advantage for the local artisans.

Kharif cultivation all set for new record this year

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Despite the loss of 4.5 lakh hectare crops due to floods in 11 States and 20-60 per cent deficiency in rainfall in eight States, kharif cultivation is all set for a new record with sown area under many crops including major oilseeds and cotton exceeding the normal area.

According to kharif sowing data released by the Agriculture Ministry, a total of 966 lakh hectares were planted till date, nearly 10 per cent more than 878 lakh hectare sown in the corresponding week last year. Though there is nearly two months left in the season, paddy plantation such as rice, soyabean, cotton, maize and groundnut already surpassed the normal sown area.

The data shows that there is a spectacular 17.36 per cent increase in rice planting too. As compared to 274.19 lakh hectare planted in same week last year, the area under rice so far is nearly 322 lakh hectare, an increase of 47.60 lakh hectare.

Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra have reported more paddy plantation so far while Assam, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh reported



The data shows that there is a spectacular 17.36 per cent increase in rice planting too

less area under rice sowing. Similarly, there is a 4.22 per cent increase in area under pulses with moong exceeding its normal area and urad and arhar inching closer to the respective normal areas.

Total under pulses so far is close to 119.59 lakh hectare as against 114.77 lakh hectare planted in the same period last year, an increase of 4.82 lakh hectare.

India has received 531.6 mm rainfall as against the normal of 533 mm so far while over 1.33 crore population have been affected due to floods across India. According to the India Meteorological Department, the rain deficiency in Nagaland recorded 25 per cent, Manipur 46 per cent, Mizoram 26 per cent, Tripura 10 per cent, Delhi 33 per cent, Himachal Pradesh 34 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 52 per cent and Rajasthan 22 per cent, so far while Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala,

Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh are among those States reeling under the flood. As per the central water commission report, most of the river in the country are overflowing or above the danger mark.

As against the designated area of 110 lakh hectare, soyabean is sown over 118 lakh hectare so far.

Similarly, cotton has covered 123.64 lakh hectare as against the normal area of 121 lakh hectare. The area sown in the same week last year was 118.73 lakh hectare. At 47.29 lakh hectare, groundnut planting is nearly 44 per cent more than 32.86 lakh hectare in the corresponding week in the previous kharif season.

The normal area under groundnut is 41.41 lakh hectare. Against the assigned area of 74.73 lakh hectare, maize is planted over 75.88 lakh hectare already.

1.5L tele-consultations held via eSanjeevini, eSanjeevaniOPD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tele-consultation medical facilities -eSanjeevini and eSanjeevaniOPD- launched by the Centre is finding good response from the patients stuck at home due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

About 1.5 lakh tele-consultations have been completed on the tele-medicine service platforms of the Union Health Ministry.

"It is planned to implement tele-consultation in all the 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres (as spokes) in a 'Hub and Spoke' model, by December 2022," said a senior official from the Union Health Ministry.

So far, eSanjeevini and eSanjeevaniOPD have been

implemented by 23 States while others are in the process of rolling it out.

Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan in a review meeting said, "We have started implementing the vision of Digital India through broadband and mobile phones at the Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres.

"This has substantially augmented our health infrastructure during the COVID pandemic".

Echoing similar sentiments, Minister of State for Health Ashwini K. Choubey said that it would be a "gamechanger for people in the rural areas who do not have easy access to medical specialists located in cities".

Presently, telemedicine is

being provided through more than 3,000 HWCs in 10 States.

Owing to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Ministry launched the second tele-consultation service enabling patient-to-doctor telemedicine through 'eSanjeevaniOPD' free of cost in around 20 States.

Presently, on an average, around 5,000 consultations per day are provided through both the modes (eSanjeevani and eSanjeevaniOPD). The telemedicine platform is hosting over 40 online OPDs, more than half of these are speciality OPDs which include gynaecology, psychiatry, dermatology, ENT, ophthalmology, anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for the AIDS/HIV patients, non-com-

municable diseases (NCDs) etc.

The top ten States which have registered highest consultations through eSanjeevani and eSanjeevaniOPD platforms are Tamil Nadu (32,035 consultations), Andhra Pradesh (28,960), Himachal Pradesh (24,527), Uttar Pradesh (20,030), Kerala (15,988), followed by Gujarat (7,127), Punjab (4,450), Rajasthan (3,548), Maharashtra (3,284) and Uttarakhand (2,596).

The majority share in the doctor-to-doctor eSanjeevani consultations at AB-HWCs has been of Andhra Pradesh (25,478) and Himachal Pradesh (23,857) while Tamil Nadu leads in the patient-to-doctor eSanjeevaniOPD services with 32,035 consultations.

India at worst phase in its Covid fight : Dr VK Paul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Niti Ayog member Dr VK Paul on Sunday said India has 1,466 cases per million whereas the world average, into the seventh month of the pandemic, is around 2,500 per million even as he warned people not to be complacent if cases begin to decline.

"The trailer is over I think, but we are still before the interval," he said at a webinar organised by the India International Centre on the topic towards a holistic long-term medicare system.

He pointed out that currently, India is experiencing the worst phase in its fight against Covid-19 with a total of 64,399 new coronavirus cases getting

Mortality rates in India continue to be low

reported in the last 24 hours, taking the overall caseload to 21,53,011, while the death toll mounting to 43,379 with 861 fresh fatalities.

But there may be a silver lining said Dr Paul.

Citing the day-wise daily new cases data, he said, "If we look at the five-day moving average, we could see some kind of stabilisation; I do not know whether it is true or random, that only time will tell. Maybe, there is something out there, which is indicating that we may have moved away from

the exponential rise and we may be stabilising. But that only time will tell."

Dr Paul said that the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic was in the most populous cities, in the western half of the nation, where the pandemic originated.

It seems now that the pandemic in this part of the country is now reaching some kind of peak. "As we have seen in the context of Delhi," he added.

Dr Paul said, "We still have large swathes of our geography and large swathes of our population, which are naive to this virus. The virus loves people, the virus loves dense places, the virus loves irresponsible citizens who do not look after their respiratory secretions and do not maintain physical dis-

tance."

He insisted that mortality rates in India continue to be low and in terms of response, home-based isolation protocols have succeeded. "Deaths will be imprinted in pages of history, how many deaths happened in this pandemic in a given nation? Need to keep a sharp eye number of deaths? In case of fatality rate, India is currently at 2.06 per cent. Some states have below 1 per cent case fatality rate. The highest we have seen for a state is 6 per cent or little above 6 per cent" said Dr Paul.

He insisted that in India the mortality burden so far has been on the lower side. "We would like to keep our case fatality rate below 1 per cent and it is possible," he added.

CPCB proposes fine up to ₹1L for incessant honking, loud construction activity at odd hours

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Incessant honking, loud construction activity, loud-speakers at odd hours among other noise pollution actions will attract fines ranging from ₹1,000 to ₹1 lakh, country's top pollution watchdog Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has proposed.

The new fines have been proposed in response to a set of cases going on in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) regarding noise pollution wherein the applicants complained that despite sever-



asked the CPCB to look at revising fines for bursting crackers and for repeated violations. The tribunal had also asked laying down stringent



compensation for tampering with the sound limiters. In a report filed with the NGT in June this year, the CPCB came out with a string

of penalties for violation of noise pollution norms.

For instance, violation of norms regarding the use of loudspeakers/public address system can result in seizure of the equipment and a fine of ₹10,000.

Similarly, violation of noise pollution norms regarding the use of diesel generator sets can result in sealing of DG sets and a fine of ₹10,000 to ₹100,000 depending upon its size.

The violation in cases of sound-emitting construction equipment can result in a

fine of ₹50,000 and its seizure or sealing.

The violation of noise norms while bursting fire-crackers beyond the time limit (prescribed by the Supreme Court) could attract a fine of ₹1,000 (in the residential, commercial or mixed zone) and ₹3,000 (in a silence zone).

But in case of violation of norms during public rallies, marriage procession or any religious event, a heavier fine of ₹10,000 could be levied on the organiser in residential/commercial or mixed

zone and ₹20,000 in a silence zone.

In case of the first violation of noise rule within a fixed premise in a function organised by the resident welfare organisation, a marriage function, public or institution event, banquet hall, open ground functions, a fine of ₹20,000 may be levied while a second violation could result in a fine of ₹40,000.

However, more than two violations could result in a fine of ₹100,000 and sealing of the premises, as per the CPCB proposal.

Death toll in Idukki landslide at 42 now

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI The death toll in Friday's landslide at Munnar in Kerala reached 42 as search and rescue team retrieved 17 dead bodies by Sunday evening.

Death and destruction were reported from various low lying lands in the districts of Alappuzha, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Idukki in southern Kerala.

The Kerala Government had declared ₹10 lakh each to the families of those who lost their lives in the air crash.

Kerala reports 1,211 new cases

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala, battered and bruised by nature's fury for the last three days saw Covid-19 continuing its dance of destruction across the State as 1,211 new patients were diagnosed with the pandemic on Sunday.

Infected people roaming around pose big threat to health of others: Officials

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

The negligence of the district administration and the health department has proved to be a threat to health of many people now. Covid positive patients are roaming around in the public and no wonder how many people they have come in contact with.

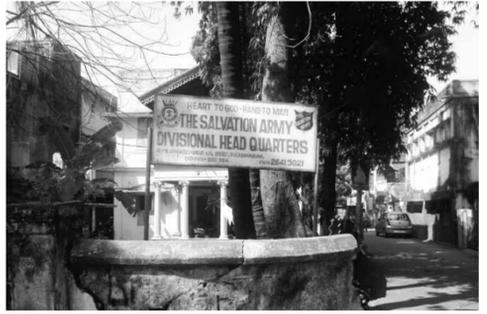
Infections are also spreading by seeking contact with infected patients and delaying their reports. Systems like Containment Zone and Red Zone are no longer visible anywhere.

Dr. BP Singh, CMO stated that after the list of infected patients is out, attempt to admit the Covid +ve patient at the earliest are made.

Temple trust land given free on rent to Church in TN

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The uninitiated may see this as the standing proof of the Social Justice for which the Dravidian political parties stage agitations across Tamil Nadu.



of the Salvation Army operates from the premises along with a Church, absolutely free of cost as the HRCE has given it on Rent Free basis to the Church.

the Temple properties, the land or building can never be rented out or leased or sold to a non-Hindu organization.

has some shocking information with him. "We took a sample survey of the temples. In the survey, we uniformly found that 5 per cent of the temples exists no more.

Army intelligence, national intelligence agency question fake colonel

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

A fake lieutenant colonel resident of Nurpur, Ludhiana, who cheated people in the name of being admitted to the Army, was questioned by the Army Intelligence and intelligence agency in the district prison.

Pradeep alias Piru, a resident of Nurpur Ludhiana, used to cheat people in the name of being recruited into the army by being a fake lieutenant colonel in the name of his brother Shrawan Singh son of Gurmel Singh.

fake identity card, fake educational records were recovered from him. After the fake lieutenant was caught, the Army Intelligence is also trying to find out to whom its wires are connected.

Terrorist killed, two hurt as Army foils infiltration bid in Poonch

Jammu: Alert jawans of the Indian Army eliminated one terrorist while two others received injuries when an infiltration bid was foiled along the line of control in Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch on Friday.

Defence PRO further stated, during searches it was found that the dead body of the terrorist had been dragged away from the incident site.

Number of Covid-19 cases across Tamil Nadu remains critical and there is no let up in the fatalities being reported from various places in the State.

119 more succumb to virus, 5,994 new infections in TN

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

As part of aggressive testing carried out across the State, 68,179 persons were tested on Sunday. The number of persons discharged from hospitals till date crossed the 2.38 lakh on Sunday.

Chennai tested positive for 989 out of the 5,994 new patients across the State. Chengalpatt (397), Kancheepuram (393) and Thiruvallur (396) remained problematic districts in the cluster of four districts which include Chennai.

WB OK's charter flights from abroad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Government which has temporarily banned flights from corona hit regions have however decided to let international charter flights ferrying Indian nationals land in the State.

Indian Missions abroad. The flights coming to Kolkata will be required to carry clearance certificates from the Indian Missions or the MEA.

Besides it has also been said that the respective airlines ferrying in stranded passengers from abroad will have to apply for a no-objection certificate from the State Government providing the sponsor, the number of passengers along with their details apart from an undertaking that the passengers so flying in are corona negative.

Shami's ex-wife gets life threat for praising Ram Puja at Ayodhya

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Hasin Jahan the estranged wife of India's fast bowler Md Shami has lodged a formal complaint with the Kolkata Police after getting life threats from some people for praising the ground-breaking ceremony at Ram Temple site in Ayodhya.

AI crash: Capt Sathe's mortal remains arrive in Mumbai, funeral tomorrow

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The body of Capt. Deepak V. Sathe - who was killed in the ill-fated Dubai-Kozhikode Air India Express flight crash - was brought from Kochi to Mumbai in cargo flight on Sunday.

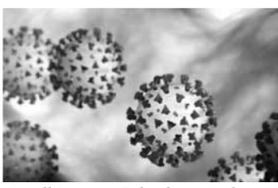
Late Capt Sathe's aged parents are in Nagpur, it is not certain yet that they will be arriving in Mumbai for son's last rites.

K'taka Health Minister tests corona positive

Bengaluru: Karnataka Health Minister B. Sriramulu on Sunday said that he has tested positive for coronavirus. He is the fourth Minister in the state to be diagnosed for the disease, apart from Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa.

Gujarat's virus tally breaches 70K-mark, toll climbs to 2,654

Gandhinagar: Gujarat's Covid-19 tally breached the 70,000 mark on Sunday as 1,078 fresh cases were reported, while 25 more deaths took the toll to 2,654, health officials said.



Gandhinagar, 45 deaths in Rajkot, 30 deaths in Patan, 26 deaths in Bhavnagar, 24 in Aravalli, 23 in Mahesana, 17 in Panchmahals, 16 in Banaskantha, 15 in Kheda, 14 in Anand and 11 in Bharuch.

New cases coming up in Agra's rural belt

Agra: A number of new coronavirus cases now getting reported from the rural hinterland of Agra has got the authorities worried, even as 34 new cases took the district's total tally to 2,065.

Tragedy in Kozhikode

The crash of an Air India Express Boeing 737 at Kozhikode is an unfortunate disaster but could it have been avoided?



Indian air crash investigators examining the wreckage of Air India Express flight 1344, a Vande Bharat Mission flight from Dubai to Kozhikode, are likely to have witnessed similar scenes just a few short years ago. Another Air India Express Boeing 737-800 overran a runway at Mangalore airport, just a few hundred kilometres north of the current site. Thankfully, while that crash saw few survivors, it appears that, at the time of writing, a large majority of the passengers on board this plane survived the slide down the end of the runway. This is probably because the pilot turned off the engine to avert fire. Investigators will have several tools at their disposal from weather reports, radar displays and even the plane's own Cockpit Voice Recorder and Flight Data Recorder. However, the similarities between the two accidents bring to mind the risks of operating at such "tabletop" airports. Both Kozhikode and Mangalore airports are carved into the Western Ghats, leaving pilots little room for error. The information available at this time has revealed that the pilot had already made one missed approach to the airport. Landing in the monsoon in India, when runways are wet, is always a risk and runway "excursions" are common due to the lower braking action available on the slippery tarmac, as any motorist on the roads would be quite aware of. While Kozhikode airport's runway was clearly long enough at 9,000 feet for a Boeing 737 to land safely in most conditions, the distance needed for a landing in extremely wet conditions with a tailwind might have been an ask too far for the aircraft. And unlike Cochin airport, a hundred or so kilometres to the south, this one, by its very layout on the top of a plateau, had little runoff area and no soft concrete surface at the end of a runway for planes to sink into. Now that the crash has happened, every oversight and lapse is being called into account. As it turns out, civil aviation experts had warned of the airport's risk factors about nine years ago. In a letter sent on June 17, 2011, to the then director-general of civil aviation, Capt Mohan Ranganathan wrote, "An aircraft landing on runway 10 in tailwind will experience poor braking action due to heavy rubber deposits ... All such flights ... are endangering the lives of all on board." While no accident happened until now, the report got buried. Even now the Government has claimed that hundreds of flights have landed there in the recent past, overlooking the need to reassess the lay of the land.

There are six tabletop runways in India where landing flights is somewhat difficult as there is no additional space on the runway. Since there are many issues pertaining to safety of aircraft, crew and passengers, many international flights and Airbus A330 and Boeing 777 do not land at these airports. The Kozhikode airport's runway end safety area was expanded in 2018 to accommodate wide-body aircraft. Though it meets United Nations international civil aviation requirements, the agency recommends a buffer that is 150 metres longer than what exists at Kozhikode airport. Some reports also suggest a laxity about routine tests. Apparently no friction test was done at the airport, as is mandatory on runways and taxiways, especially those affected by rains. Flying in India has been incredibly safe over the past decade even as air traffic has exploded with hundreds of new aircraft and millions of first-time passengers. But air travel, while being inherently safe, does have an ability to shock us when something goes wrong. One expects this accident to be thoroughly investigated and faults if any to be rectified, even if that means closing down of certain airports in India or restricting large jet aircraft from flying there. Ranganathan has flagged Patna and Jammu airports as accident-prone and sitting ducks that need immediate upgrades. Aviation is a vitally important transportation option in a country as large as India where millions make their living outside Indian shores. The safety and security of this industry is not only of paramount importance but also a strategic necessity for this nation.

Breaking stereotypes

UPSC toppers come from fairly modest backgrounds and have shown how the ordinary can manage extraordinary feats



The recently published results of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) civil services examination, 2019, have thrown up some powerful stories of triumph, surpassing gender, caste, economic and religious barriers. Stories of grit and inspiration abound as most candidates who have made the cut have done so under challenging circumstances and modest means. While some never gave up despite repeated failures, there are others who had to overcome physical as well as family limitations to prove that courage is the only

mark of success. The topper, Pradeep Singh, though already an IRS officer, is the son of a farmer from Sonapat. Surprisingly, Jatin Kishore and Pratibha Verma, too, not satisfied with their earlier results, reappeared for the exams and have now become the second and third rankers and the top scorers among women. Overall there are three women candidates in the top 10 list. But setting a new record are 12 candidates from Jammu and Kashmir, including Nadia Beig, the youngest officer from Kupwara, at a time when young people in the blacked out State are suffering on account of lost opportunities. In yet another example of perseverance, a son of a petrol pump worker from Madhya Pradesh has bagged the 26th position. Neither financial struggles nor a missed opportunity last year, when he failed to make it to the list by just one slot, could deter this young officer. Aishwarya Sheoran, who bagged the 93rd position, has become a classic example of beauty with brains. A former Miss India finalist, she has broken the stereotype that models aren't smart enough by clearing the exams in her first attempt. A former child actor, too, is an inspiration for he is a COVID warrior and is ready to become an officer. And Purana Sunthari, a 25-year-old visually impaired woman from Madurai, has proved just how no vision can be out of sight.

Caste and gender barriers continue to be broken. Of the total qualified candidates, 304 belong to the general category and 78 from the reserved (SC, ST and OBC) quotas. The gap is still wide but there is some progress. Women have pushed their way creditably into the top 10 list but overall, the number of women joining the services is still less than 25 per cent, according to Government data. This year, it is 23.7 per cent women, an improvement on the 2018 figures. The biggest takeaway is that the young and hard-working achievers have broken many myths surrounding one of the toughest examinations in the country — that it is meant for the intelligent, those who have excellent academic records, that it is easier for those from engineering and medical fields to clear the exams, that one needs to devote more than 16 hours of the day to do so and that one needs to spend money and time on coaching classes. Yet everybody on the toppers' list this year is a regular youngster. Each has been high on motivation, effort and focus. The mindset has won in the end.

opinion 06

Unending Ladakh story

The Modi Govt is in a fix today, not because of the negligence of previous regimes but because of its own deliberate neglect of the military. We have failed to learn lessons



DEEPAK SINHA

An interesting anecdote doing the rounds among military veterans' groups on social media pertains to an incident just after the 1971 war. A young officer performing duties of the Regimental Adjutant, the principal staff officer to the Commanding Officer, was approached by an extremely engaging and popular ex-serviceman — who was employed by a well-known corporate — for an authority letter to continue drawing canteen stores from his unit. This was a common occurrence in those times when smart cards were yet to make an appearance. However, on a hunch, the officer decided to obtain verification of his antecedent prior to signing the certificate from the office that maintained departmental records.

Surprisingly, it turned out that the individual was a deserter from the Army and had absconded from his unit during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 while his unit was deployed in the combat zone. On receipt of this information, as was expected, the ex-soldier was apprehended and questioned. He accepted his guilt and explained that after his unit was overrun by the Chinese, he successfully evaded them and escaped to Bhutan where he got himself a job. One thing led to another and he settled into civilian life and never rejoined the Army. As is customary, he was brought before a court-martial; was found guilty and sent off to serve time in jail. However, the commanding officer being a kindly soul and displaying immense empathy for the convict, convinced his company to retain him on the rolls, while also arranging to look after his family till he had served his sentence. Thus, on his return, the former soldier not only got his job back but was also able to finally shed his sense of guilt and apprehension that had haunted him all those years.

This is a simple straightforward tale of being held to account for one's misdeeds, which fortuitously ended well for the soldier and his family, despite all the trials and tribulations that he must have faced. A contrarian view would suggest that in all likelihood, he had probably been traumatised by his world collapsing around him when his unit disintegrated in battle, leaving him to fend for himself. Given his experience and mental state — where there was no sufficient ground for mitigation — should he not have been absolved of all wrongdoing? Of course, while this question may draw differing conclusions, depending on one's point of view and interpretation of the law, what cannot be disputed is that he was guilty of fraudulently attempting to obtain benefits authorised only to military veterans. He deserved to be held to account. Ironically, the account does not make clear whether the latter aspect was glossed over or even considered.

But here is the thing that the young soldier was undoubtedly an insignificant cog in that vast military machine and yet, he was held to account for the error he had committed.



One wishes that those responsible for derailing the military and forcing it and this country to live through years of ignominy of defeat had also been meted out justice in a similar manner. The sad truth is that they got away without being held accountable as neither resignations — like that of Krishna Menon or General Thapar, the Army Chief — nor deprivation of further promotion, as some others faced, can be called punishment enough. At the minimum, those responsible should have certainly faced disciplinary proceedings, maybe even have had their pensions stopped, as was the case with General AAK Niazi after he surrendered in Dhaka. After all, surrendering 37,000 square km of the territory that we claimed as ours to the Chinese was no small matter. Yet, how did we respond to this humongous disaster? Shamefully, to say the least, the Government did transfer the individual entrusted with the defence of India, the then Defence Secretary O Pulla Reddy, but subsequently nominated him as the founding Vice Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University. Talking of second chances.

Our unwillingness and inability to fix the blame for acts of commission and omission at the highest levels have ensured that no lessons are ever learnt. We have also gone on to perfect the art of deflection as the Kargil dis-

aster clearly showed. There was no reason why Atal Bihari Vajpayee's attempts at engaging Pakistan should have led to complacency on the part of either the intelligence or the security establishment. It was all very well to have blamed it on "systemic intelligence failure" but why nobody thought it necessary to ask the question: While the intelligence agencies may have failed to discern Pakistan's intentions, how was it that the latter occupied our territory without detection by the Army? Instead of taking it to task, we made much of our top military brass, treating them as heroes for reclaiming — at great cost one might add — what we should not have lost in the first place. Of course, the Government of the day could not have acted in any other manner as that would have been seen as a blemish on its performance as well.

Naturally, we are again witness to this sordid cycle as the Chinese once again make fools out of us. The same clichéd excuses are being trotted out that unfortunately, the "Wuhan-Mamallapuram spirit" made our security establishment complacent and we were, thus, caught wrong-footed as intelligence agencies were unable to detect Chinese movers or gauge their intentions. The security establishment hopes to save itself the blushes by pushing the blame on its favourite whipping boy, "sys-

temic failure." In this case, the current border management practice that ensures a rather opaque division of responsibilities between the Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

One can be certain that they will manage to avoid being held to account this time as well. Not least because of the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi has attempted to change the narrative by denying any ingress or loss of territory and instead promoting through his minions "differing perceptions of the LAC between both sides" to fudge the issue. He hopes — and not without good reason given the blind support he enjoys — this will allow him and his Government to carry on as if it is business as usual. Unfortunately for him, the unexpected appearance in the public domain of the Ministry of Defence report on the ingress by the PLA — though now withdrawn — does suggest that there are those within the Government who have serious reservations about his actions and have no compunction in showing him up for dissembling.

Normally, in a bureaucratic and hierarchical system such as ours, it is often the case that those left holding the baby, so to say, are not necessarily the ones responsible for its procreation in the first place. We would certainly not have found ourselves in the present situation if the previous Government, and this one, had

shown even a modicum of interest in national defence and kept their eye on the ball. Modi finds himself in an extremely difficult situation, not because the Manmohan Singh Government was negligent, which it certainly was, but because of his own deliberate neglect of the military since 2014. He made all the right noises but had no time for the military, except for where it helped his own political fortunes.

Similarly, General Rawat would not have found himself caught in this controversy today if he had not been appointed the Chief of Defence Staff after pandering to Modi's wishes. He cannot escape responsibility for having sabotaged the Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) midway through its raising while he was Chief of Army Staff. One may recall that it was after the ingress by the Chinese in the Depsang Sector in 2013 that the dysfunctional Manmohan Singh Government understood the seriousness of the issue and sanctioned the raising of the MSC. Its raising was given full attention by the Army Chief and was of immense concern to the Chinese because they clearly understood the shift in the intent of the Indian armed forces from a purely defensive posture to a more pro-active one. It changed the concept of Sino-Indian conventional deterrence.

Thus, one can imagine their utter joy when the Modi-Doval-Rawat combine put the spanner in the works and put the MSC into forced hibernation. This was allegedly done because of budgetary constraints, something that apparently had no impact on the unbridled expansion of the Central Armed Police Forces. It is obvious that purely defensive actions on our part will never restore the status quo ante, which we are insisting upon, in the foreseeable future. If we do nothing, the loss of territory will be a body blow to our reputation in the region and internationally.

In the long run, as happened with Nehru, it will be the ruination of Modi. His reputation will suffer, his ability to stay in power will be constrained and he will be reduced to a caricature. Ironically, while Nehru continues to shoulder much of the blame for problems that afflict us today, Modi and his minions will not have that advantage. They will have to bear the consequences for their actions. There is something to be said for poetic justice and that old adage, "As you sow, so shall you reap."

(The author, a military veteran, is a consultant with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation)

SOUNDBITE

There have been no significant reforms in education for the last many years. As a result, our society started promoting herd mentality instead of imagination and curiosity.

Prime Minister
—Narendra Modi



If a new actor is launched today, even in a small film, they (public) should support them, write good comments on their posts and stop crying nepotism, nepotism.

Actor
—Gurmeet Choudhary



If Democrats continue to hold this critical relief hostage, I will act under my authority as President to get the American people the relief they need.

US President
—Donald Trump



With MS Dhoni in the IPL, I don't see much difference. In fact, the conditions that we have are just perfect for Dhoni, where it's going to be about the mind and not just power hitting.

Former India batsman
—Sanjay Manjrekar



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

China cannot be trusted

Sir — Despite several rounds of talks between India and China, no solution appears to be in sight with regard to the border crisis along the Line of Actual Control. Clashes at Galwan were proof enough that China cannot be relied upon. It attacked Indian soldiers without any provocation. To top it all, China's expansionist tendencies and greed for grabbing weaker landlocked territory through unfair means are a never-ending phenomenon. India's relationship with Russia, though on an even keel, cannot be ignorant of the former's support to China. It is doubtful if Russia will extend us any help in case of a conflict. It is, thus, imperative that India forges a military pact with the US to keep a check on China's assertiveness, aggressiveness and other nefarious activities.

Rashmi
Via email

Debt restructuring

Sir — In view of the COVID-19 pandemic having battered the economy, it was expected that the

Raging rainforest a climate threat

The rainforest region of Brazil, Amazon, recorded 6,800 incidents of fire in July, up from 5,318 last year, the same month. Amazon has been a talking point for most experts because it comprises more than half of the world's wetlands. Continued dry spells are a threat to the forests. Raging fires in the region may not entirely be attributed to natural causes such as lightning, heatwave or the eruption of volcanoes. Cattle ranching is the largest driver of deforestation. In the months between July and September, farmers are known to clear their lands for cattle farming and soil fertilisation. Illegal mining in Amazon rainforest, too, has become an "epidemic." Artisanal mining for gold and other minerals in Amazon forests and rivers has been a problem for decades and is usually illegal.

Critics of President Jair Bolsonaro have placed the blame at his doorstep and his "anti-environment," "pro-agriculture" and "pro-industry" policies. The pro-development image of Bolsonaro has angered conservationists, who feel he is not doing enough to save the forests from man-made disasters. Species of plants and animals in the rainforests slow down global climate warming. Rainforests contribute to a healthy maintenance of the ecosystem. In contrast, wildfires emit a high con-



tent of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone precursors let alone nitrogen oxides and organic materials — all of which are detrimental to the climate. In 2019, the forest fire was termed as a "global crisis" by world leaders. President Bolsonaro's attempt to crack a whip on "offenders" was too late to bear fruit. This season in Brazil is expected to be drier than the corresponding period in 2019. The fires may only get worse in the months ahead.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) would come up with another rate cut but it left it unchanged at four per cent. Instead, the Central bank has allowed financial institutions a special one-time dispensation to restructure loans which

are stressed due to the pandemic. Indeed, a rate cut at this juncture would have meant little. Unless demand is generated, units will continue to gasp for survival despite the repayment breather.

The Monetary Policy Committee has also called for the appointment of an expert committee to frame a window under the prudential norms for speedy resolution of stressed loans. Besides, the gold loan-to-value

ratio has been increased to 90 per cent. This will pave the way for a robust rise in the quality and quantity of loans. While extending forbearance, it is imperative for the banks to be diligent and cautious to prevent good money from turning into NPAs.

Shivansh
Via email

Deal with compassion

Sir — The Kashmir problem needs to be tackled with sensitivity. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered enough. All possible aid should be provided to them. Kashmir should be transformed into a world-class tourist destination. Establishing good colleges and other technical institutes will help the Kashmiri youth compete equally with the rest of the nation as they are talented and given to innovation. By setting up good medical colleges and hospitals, public health needs can be taken care of, too.

Ashok Malik
Via web

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

October surprise awaits the US?

Maybe Trump will arrange the premature certification of a COVID-19 vaccine, so he can roll it out just before the Nov 3 election



GWYNNE DYER

An "October Surprise" in the US is now almost inevitable, because that will be US President Donald Trump's last chance to get re-elected legitimately. Trump might try to cling to office even if he loses the vote, but it would be a lot easier and neater if he actually won a majority in the Electoral College on November 3. In US political jargon, an "October Surprise" is a news event deliberately created or timed to influence the outcome of an election, particularly one for the US presidency and usually involves foreigners or a threat to the nation. It is planned such that all other issues are forgotten, Americans rally around the flag and the incumbent wins on a surge of patriotism. Or that's the theory, at least.

The same thing happens elsewhere, too, of course and not necessarily in October. That's when it needs to happen in the US to win a presidential election. For instance, a "July Surprise" happened recently in Belarus because of the August 9 presidential election. Alexander Lukashenko, the strongman who rules Belarus, "discovered" Russian mercenaries in his country. It matters little that they were unarmed and on their way to Istanbul, but President Lukashenko told his people that there was a plot. "So far there is no open warfare, no shooting, the trigger has not yet been pulled, but an attempt to organise a massacre in the centre of Minsk is already obvious. Only I can save our country. Vote for me," was Lukashenko's impassioned plea to his citizens.

Trump will need something like that because otherwise the Coronavirus is going to kill him politically. This was not true as recently as early June, because up until then the US was not performing especially badly in dealing with the pandemic. It looked a lot worse because of Trump's bizarre behaviour — the endless, shameless lies, the narcissism, the suggestions that people should inject bleach and so on — but in terms of COVID-19 deaths per million people, the US fatality rate was still lower than other major Western countries, except for Germany and Canada.

The US was late to go into the lockdown, but so were they all, at least compared to most Asian countries. Until recently, if you were a Trump supporter, you could still believe he was doing a good job. It was Trump's rush to end the lockdown, not all the earlier nonsense, that did the real damage. He believed that he would lose the election if the economy didn't revive, but by opening up too fast he managed to revive the pandemic at the same time.

The numbers tell the tale. This week the US will record its 1,65,000th death from COVID-19. That's almost a quarter of all the Coronavirus fatalities in the world. Much worse, US deaths are still going up while casualties elsewhere in the developed world have fallen steeply. That's almost entirely due to Trump.

Take Canada, for example. It is very similar to the US in its economy and demography but different in social and political terms. Canada has universal healthcare and a much less drastic divide between the rich and the rest, for example, which probably explains why the US' cumulative death rate per million is 484, while Canada's is only 237. The history is, therefore, an American death rate twice as high as Canada's: Not great but structurally inevitable. By now, however, Canada has managed to get its casualties down to ten a day, whereas the US is back up to around a 1,000 fatalities a day.

Even allowing for Canada's much smaller population, that is ten times worse. This is what coming out of a lockdown too early did to the US, and it is all down to President Trump. The pandemic is raging once again in the US and there may be a quarter-million deaths there by election day in November. US "deaths per million" are going up three per day, which means that the US will overtake Chile (now at 509 casualties) in less than one week, Italy (582) in a month, Spain (609) in five weeks. It might even catch up with the UK (682) by election day.

Most of those newly-dead Americans will be over 60, so probably they would have been Trump supporters. Their relatives and friends are bound to notice eventually. As it is, Joe Biden's lead over Trump in the polls has already widened to 10 per cent. How could Trump turn that around in the remaining 82 days? His only hope is to manufacture an "October Surprise" involving China, a restaged "Tonkin Gulf Incident" i.e. the one real and one phantom firefight that embroiled the US in the Vietnam War.

Or perhaps he could manufacture a terrorist "threat" — so homogenous that it would give him a pretext to declare martial law nationwide. Or maybe Trump will arrange the premature certification of a COVID-19 vaccine so he can roll it out just before the November 3 vote. If it kills a lot of people later on, who cares? He won. Trump knows that if he loses the November election, he will spend the rest of his life in court, possibly even in jail. He will do whatever it takes to win. It isn't over yet.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work'.)

JAMMU AND KASHMIR WAS A BROKEN STATE. NOT A SINGLE SOUL CRIED OVER THE DETENTION OF POLITICAL AND SEPARATIST LEADERS IN AUGUST LAST YEAR.

—J&K CHIEF SECRETARY
 BVR SUBRAHMANYAM

POINT COUNTERPOINT



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

After the release of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) half-yearly Financial Stability Report (FSR) on July 24, shares of banks and finance companies were battered at the stock market. Though the private banks (PVBs) like ICICI, HDFC, Axis Bank, Bandhan Bank got seared, the public sector banks (PSBs), too, bore the brunt of the bloodbath on the bourses. The mayhem exposed the structural weaknesses of the Indian banking system and the severity of the Non-Performing Asset (NPA) crisis looming over them.

As the RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das emphasised (and his sentiment was echoed by the Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission) the soaring NPAs and the consequent capital erosion of the banks would need immediate recapitalisation of both PVBs and PSBs.

To alleviate the pandemic-created stress on borrowers, the RBI has already placed a moratorium on the payment of loan instalments and deferment of interest payments till August 31. However, the banks are fearing — as articulated by the HDFC Chairman — that even solvent borrowers may take advantage of this relaxation and not repay their loans. This would further worsen the financials of the banks.

The FSR has also acknowledged that there is a major risk that the moratoriums may have serious implications on the financial health of the banks. Overall, about 50 per cent of all loans — 65 per cent of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) borrowings and 56 per cent of retail loans — were under moratorium as on April 30, against only 39 per cent of corporate loans. The PSBs have a larger share — 58 per cent, 82 per cent and 80 per cent respectively for corporate, MSME and individual loans, as against 20 per cent, 43 per cent and 34 per cent respectively for the PVBs.

As far as Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) are concerned, 56 per cent, 61 per cent and 46 per cent of the loans are under moratorium respectively for these categories. The scenario is really disquieting. The RBI has assumed a contraction of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 4.4 per cent, gross fiscal deficit of 10.9 per cent and Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) of 4.1 per cent as the baseline scenario assuming steady recovery from the second-half of the current fiscal. The GDP contraction and fiscal deficit numbers may be a tad too optimistic, given the severe economic disruptions with no end in sight.

The FSR has stated that the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) stood at 14.8 per cent while their Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio stood at 8.5 per cent in March. But it projected that the GNPA ratio may worsen further to 12.5 per cent by March 2021 under the optimistic baseline scenario and may escalate to 14.7 per cent under a severely-stressed scenario.

The implications of these numbers are indeed very serious. As of March, the total NPAs of SCBs stood at ₹8.62 lakh crore; at the baseline scenario which seems a bit hopeful, this would rise to around ₹13 lakh crore and at the worst case scenario to ₹15 lakh crore, at which level, all undercapitalised and overleveraged banks would cease to be going concerns.

In fact, the pandemic has wiped out all the work done so far by the SCBs by using a large part of their capital to correct their balance sheets

“THE RECAPITALISATION BOND ROUTE BY WHICH THE GOVERNMENT ISSUES BONDS TO THE BANKS, WHICH PROMPTLY INVEST THEM IN GOVERNMENT SECURITIES, IS NOTHING MORE THAN AN ACCOUNTING TRICK. APART FROM INCREASING THE GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST LIABILITIES, IT RARELY ADDRESSES THE DEEPER STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE BANKS. WITH LOW CREDIT OFFTAKE AND HIGHER NPAs, BANKS WILL BE FORCED TO FURTHER LOWER THE DEPOSIT INTEREST RATES — ALREADY AT THE ROCK-BOTTOM — AND DRIVE DEPOSITORS TOWARDS THE EQUITY MARKET OR GOLD. THIS IS HARDLY A RECIPE FOR REVIVAL”



SUBRAHMANYAM AND HIS TEAM ARE LEAST EXPECTED TO KNOW HOW THE PEOPLE FEEL. TO QUOTE GANDHI, THEY ARE RULING J&K FROM THE 500TH FLOOR.

—PDP LEADER AND FORMER J&K MINISTER
 NAEEM AKHTAR

Nip the NPA crisis, now

The Govt and the RBI must urgently reassess the moratorium policy and limit it only to the hardest-hit, address the delays in IBC resolution and not drive away depositors



— which was so assiduously pursued by the RBI during the last few years. This has seen a steady decline in their GNPA ratio from 11.5 per cent in March 2018 to 8.5 per cent in March this year. Though this reduced their CRAR, however, it still remained above the Basel III-compliant RBI norms. Now, the loans are likely to rise to a 20-year high as a result of the crisis triggered by the pandemic.

As the RBI Governor said in the foreword to the FSR, "The financial system in India remains sound. Nonetheless, in the current environment, the need for financial intermediaries to proactively augment capital and improve their resilience has acquired top priority. In the evolving milieu, while risk management has to be prudent, extreme risk-aversion would have adverse outcomes for all."

Under the current crisis, risk aversion, both by banks and borrowers, is only to be expected as evidenced by the banks parking their excess liquidity with the RBI instead of lending. Credit demand has not picked up despite the easing of the lockdown and financial vulnerabilities are likely to be amplified, leading to a further deterioration in the asset quality of the banks due to the piling up of mountains of bad loans.

As a 90-day window is given for paying the loan instalments to keep the loans from being classified as NPAs, the exact position would be known only in December after the expiry of the moratorium on August 31. But there is an urgent need to recapitalise the banks — both PSBs and PVBs — for building stronger buffers for them to be able to absorb the losses.

The recapitalisation bond route by which the Government issues bonds to the banks, which promptly invest them

in Government securities, is nothing more than an accounting trick. Apart from increasing the Government's interest liabilities, it rarely addresses the deeper structural problems of the banks.

While the GNPA ratio of PSBs may increase to 15.2 per cent under the baseline scenario (16.3 per cent under the worst-case scenario), the ratios of the PVBs and even the foreign banks are likely to increase to 7.3 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively. Erosion of the capital will shrink the system-level CRAR of the banking sector as a whole from 14.6 per cent in March to 13.3 per cent by next March under the baseline scenario and to 11.8 per cent under severe stress conditions.

Five banks will fail to meet the minimum prescribed CRAR level of nine per cent by March 2021 — five more will be close (under 10 per cent) without merger or recapitalisation which might increase their systemic resilience. However, mergers of PSBs, now practically stalled because of the lockdown, have their own problems. The NPAs of the State Bank of India (SBI) worsened after its merger with associates two years ago, with write-offs and persistent slippages eating into profit and capital both, besides impeding the growth of credit.

Other mergers — Bank of Baroda (BoB) with Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank and Punjab National Bank's (PNBs) 1993 merger with the New Bank of India also faced many problems. It is unlikely that the current mergers of healthy banks with weak banks will improve the health of the banking system as a whole; in any case, they will not cause any significant reduction of the NPA ratios of the amalgamated banks. Then there is the added danger

of spillover effects from the NPAs of NBFCs, which are still unable to recover from the IL&FS shock of 2018. Bank lending to NBFCs had increased dramatically from ₹3 lakh crore in December 2016 post-demonetisation to ₹8 lakh crore in May this year. Any increase in their NPAs will automatically trigger a contagion, leading to further deterioration of the banking system. The gravity of the situation cannot be overemphasised.

The structural problems with the recovery of bad loans have remained unresolved even after operationalisation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Of the total claims of ₹3.52 lakh crore from 190 companies (till December 2019), ₹1.52 lakh crore (43 per cent) has been recovered, which of course was a significant improvement over the earlier recovery rate of 10 per cent. But only two cases — Bhushan Steel and Essar Steel — accounted for 49.5 per cent of the overall recoveries.

Given the huge number of case-loads — 1,961 as of December 2019 — and the time taken for disposal by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), the system is already getting clogged like never before. With low credit offtake and higher NPAs, banks will be forced to further lower the deposit interest rates — already at the rock-bottom — and drive depositors towards the equity market or gold. This is hardly a recipe for revival. The Government and the RBI must urgently reassess the across-the-board moratorium policy and limit it only to the hardest-hit, address the delays in IBC resolution and not further alienate and drive away the depositors.

(The writer is a former Director General at the office of the CAG of India and an academic.)

Did an Islamic State ever exist?

The modern State is a fairly recent European construct and has been borrowed to project a retrospective interpretation about what an Islamic State meant



NADEEM PARACHA

The roots of the concept of the State lie in the political ideas formulated in ancient Greece and the Roman Republic. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle write of the "polis" (the city State) as an ideal form of association, in which the religious, cultural, political and economic needs of the citizens can be satisfied. The ancient Roman idea of *res publica* is more similar to the modern concept of the State. The *res publica* was a legal system, the jurisdiction of which extended to all Roman citizens, securing their rights and determining their responsibilities.

State fully emerged in Europe. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, the idea was expanded and developed in the works of philosophers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham and Karl Marx. By the 19th century, the concept of the State as we know it today, had been practically established in various regions of Europe.

According to the noted political anthropologist Professor Irfan Ahmad, till the 17th century, "the State governed by not governing." Seldom did it interfere in most affairs of its subjects. Its main interest was to extract levies and taxes. Its administrative scope was limited. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, claimed that the scope of the State began to expand from the 16th century. The idea of the State in non-Western regions was no different. According to Irfan Ahmad, the nature of the State in Muslim-majority regions and in regions being ruled by Muslims was also static. It was only interested in gathering taxes and aiding the monarch and his vassals to

retain their wealth and power.

The State as we know it today, is thus a comparatively recent construct and a product of political and economic modernity. So what do concepts such as "Islamic State" or "Riyasat-i-Madina (State of Madina)" really mean? Such terms are often used by ideologues and politicians in Muslim-majority regions. The thinking behind them is that Islam is inherently political and its sacred texts lay out a blueprint for a State run by laws prescribed by Allah. Those who hold this view insist that such a State came into being with the arrival of Islam that actively regulated every political, economic and social aspect of the community.

Irfan Ahmad writes that till the 16th/17th century, the working of the State, even in powerful Muslim empires, was as limited as it was in non-Muslim realms. He adds that the idea of an Islamic State is actually not more than a 100 years old. According to the works of Egyptian scholars Ali Abdel Raziq and Saïd al-Ashmawi, theologically, Islam treats faith and the

concept of State separately and, in fact, puts more emphasis on faith and how it can operate as a moral guide. Ahmad writes, "to impose the modern concept of the State on 7th century Arab society is misleading." Because of infrastructural weaknesses, the State could not have expanded its scope beyond a handful of duties, even if it wanted to.

The Syrian academic and historical Aziz Al-Azmeh, in a widely-debated 1990 essay *Utopia and Islamic Political Thought*, demonstrates that there is no political theory (about a State) in classical Islamic political thought. Fact is, those who insist that there is, are simply projecting the modern concept of the State on ancient and medieval Islamic polities, reimagining these polities as Islamic states which influenced almost every aspect of the lives of their citizens. According to Ahmad, such projections are the result of ideas that first emerged in the early 20th century.

One of the pioneers in this respect was the prolific South Asian ideologue

and Islamic scholar Abul Ala Maududi. Ahmad writes that, as a young man, Maududi was associated with *The Muslim*, a daily that took an anti-British, pro-Congress Party position and promoted Muslim-Hindu unity and a secular set-up in India. However, after 1937, Maududi changed his stance, especially when Jinnah's Muslim League began to press for a separate Muslim-majority State. Ahmad writes that all major political players in British India had become smitten by the concepts of the State and nationalism introduced in the region by the British colonialists. The Muslim League began to speak about a Muslim State, the Congress about a post-colonial secular Indian State and the Leftists about a socialist State.

Rejecting all these concepts as ungodly, Maududi came up with the theory of Government of Allah or Islamic State. He then set out to formulate a new political theology, by interpreting Islamic scriptures in the context of the State. In a 1941 essay, he writes, "In reality, the classical Arabic

word *deen* approximately has the same meaning which the word State has in the contemporary age." Noting that the modern State regulates almost every facet of people's lives, he contemplated the creation of an Islamic State that would regulate every aspect of its citizens' lives according to laws laid down by the Islamic scriptures.

Maududi understood the Muslim League as a secular Muslim nationalist organisation. So, to neutralise Maududi's criticism, Pakistan began to borrow his ideas. Yet, Maududi's own party could not gain much traction among voters. This was probably due to the aforementioned ploy by the State and, more so, because from the mid-1970s, even non-religious parties began to adopt ideas from Maududi and fused them with their secular outlook. His ideas in this context reached completion as an elaborate theory in his 1979 magnum opus, *Four Fundamental Concepts of the Quran*.

The theory suggested that an Islamic State existed during the early days of the faith because the sacred

scriptures were treated as an all-encompassing political constitution and that such a State fell away because of corruption and needs to be re-enacted. Interestingly, this is the narrative popularised by the Imran Khan Government. Though Maududi's thesis was inspired by largely European ideas of the State, this does not bother those who take the revisionist historical claims of his theories as fact.

Ever since the 1980s, whenever there are claims and promises made by a variety of ideologues and leaders in the Muslim world, about working towards an Islamic State, it is assumed that it is rooted in the workings of a 7th century Islamic realm. According to Ahmad, objective history does not support this. As Egyptian scholar Nasr Abu Zayd says, "Religious scriptures are at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter. For a communist, they would reveal communism, for a fundamentalist they would be fundamentalist text, for a feminist it would be a feminist text, and so on..."

(Courtesy: Dawn)

Trump signs virus relief order for Americans

Washington: President Donald Trump on Saturday signed executive orders extending economic help to Americans hit by the coronavirus crisis after his Republican party and opposition Democrats failed to agree on a new stimulus package.

"We've had it and we're going to save American jobs and provide relief to the American workers," he said at a press conference in his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

With double digit unemployment, massive disruption to businesses from social distancing rules, and stubbornly high rates of coronavirus infection, many Americans have been relying on relief measures approved earlier by Congress, but which mostly expired in July.

Trump said his decision to circumvent Congress with executive orders would mean relief money getting "rapidly distributed."

One order aims to get \$400 a week added to unemployment benefits, while two others offer some protection from evictions and relief for student loans.



A fourth measure — opposed by many Republicans as well as Democrats — orders a freeze in payroll taxes.

Trump, speaking in the ballroom of his Bedminster, New Jersey golf club with an audience of club members cheering him and laughing at his colorful insults against opponents, said he was also working on new tax cut ideas.

However, his executive orders are likely to face court challenges, since they short-circuit Congress, which has constitutional power over most spending decisions.

Democrats, Republicans and White House negotiators had worked all last week with-

out coming close to a deal on a congressional relief bill.

Democrats pushed for a massive new \$3 trillion stimulus package aimed at propping up the economy, repairing the tattered postal system in time for the presidential election, and giving the unemployed an extra \$600 a week.

Democrats later announced they could drop the price tag but refused the Republicans' offer of a \$1 trillion package.

Trump, who is down in the polls against Democrat Joe Biden, faces broad criticism over his handling of the health and economic responses to the coronavirus pandemic. **AFP**

Rajapaksa takes oath as Lanka PM, cements family's grip on power

Colombo: Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in on Sunday as Sri Lanka's new prime minister at a centuries-old Buddhist temple after his party won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections that allowed the influential family to consolidate power for the next five years.

The 74-year-old former president and Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) leader was administered the oath of office by his younger brother and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at a gathering of Buddhist monks, representatives of the diplomatic community and other senior officials.

"I am humbled by the opportunity given to me to serve my people again," he tweeted soon after starting his fourth innings as prime minister.

Mahinda Rajapaksa said the trust bestowed on him by the people will inspire him to continue to serve the country. The prime minister vowed that he would ensure that Sri Lanka would embark on a progressive journey during his tenure.

Supporters of the SLPP lit firecrackers to celebrate his

swearing-in as the 13th Prime Minister at the Rajamah Viharaya in Kelaniya, a north Colombo suburb, at the auspicious hour of 9:28 am local time.

The Rajamah Viharaya, also known as the Kelaniya temple, dates back to 2,500 years. According to the website of the temple, it has often been associated with the rise and fall of Sri Lanka.

The SLPP, led by Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa, registered a landslide victory in the August 5 general election, securing two-thirds majority in Parliament needed to amend the Constitution to further consolidate the powerful Rajapaksa family's grip on power.

India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay on Saturday became the first envoy to congratulate the new prime minister when he called on Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Baglay recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had complimented the people and Government of Sri Lanka on the successful conduct of elections and had acknowledged the impressive electoral performance of the SLPP. **PTI**

Azar leads highest-level US delegation to Taiwan in decades

Taipei: US Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar arrived in Taiwan on Sunday in the highest-level visit by an American Cabinet official since the break in formal diplomatic relations between Washington and Taipei in 1979.

Beijing has already protested Azar's visit as a betrayal of US commitments not to have official contact with the island. China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be brought under its control by military force if necessary.

Azar is due to meet with the island's independence-leaning President Tsai Ing-wen along with health officials during a three-day visit aimed at highlighting cooperation in the fight against the coronavirus.

Taiwan's government-run health care system has been credited with keeping the number of coronavirus cases to under 500 with just seven deaths, despite its close proximity to China where the virus originated.

China sees Taiwan as a key irritant in its troubled relationship with Washington, with whom it is also at odds over trade, technology, the South China Sea and China's

response to the virus pandemic.

The US maintains no unofficial ties with Taiwan in deference to Beijing, but is the island's most important ally and provider of defence equipment.

Azar is the first health secretary to visit Taiwan and the first Cabinet member to visit in six years. In 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator Gina McCarthy visited Taiwan, sparking protests from Beijing.

Azar's office said he will hold discussions on COVID-19, global health and Taiwan's role as a supplier of medical equipment and technology. Azar's visit was facilitated by the 2018 passage of the Taiwan Travel Act, which encouraged Washington to send higher-level officials to Taiwan after decades during which such contacts were rare and freighted with safeguards to avoid roiling ties with Beijing.

China has cut contacts with Tsai over her refusal to recognise China's claim to the island and has brought increasing diplomatic, economic and

military pressure against her, including by poaching away several of its remaining diplomatic allies and excluding it from international gatherings including the World Health Assembly.

That, in turn, has increased already considerable bipartisan sympathy for Taipei in Washington and prompted new measures to strengthen governmental and military ties.

Also Sunday, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu met with the first representative of Somaliland to the island ahead of the territory's opening of a representative office in Taipei.

Wu earlier tweeted that Mohamed Omar Haji Mohamoud had "braved Chinese pressure" — a reference to reports that China had sought to block relations between Taiwan and the region on the Horn of Africa that broke from the rest of Somalia but is not recognized by the United Nations as an independent country.

"The fact 'sovereignty & friendship aren't for sale' deserves international recognition," Wu tweeted. **AP**

Afghan council frees Taliban prisoners to set up peace talks

Kabul: A traditional Afghan council concluded Sunday with hundreds of delegates agreeing to free 400 Taliban members, paving the way for an early start to negotiations between Afghanistan's warring sides.

The declaration read out in both of Afghanistan's official languages of Pashto and Farsi calls for an immediate start to negotiations and cease fire.

The move looks to bring the United States a little closer to returning its troops and ending its longest military engagement.

No date has been set but negotiations between Kabul's political leadership and the Taliban are expected to begin as early as next week and will most likely be held in the middle eastern state of Qatar, where the Taliban maintains a political office.

The Afghan negotiations were laid out in a peace deal signed by the United States and the Taliban in February. At the time of its signing it was touted as Afghanistan's best chance

at ending decades of war.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani praised delegates for their decision, urged the Taliban to stop fighting.

Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen said the decision "was a good step, a positive step." He said negotiations could start within one week of their prisoners being freed.

As for a cease fire, Shaheen said the Taliban was committed to the deal it struck with the United States and according to that deal "the cease fire will be one of the items to be discussed during the intra-Afghan negotiations."

The council's decision to free the prisoners does not come as a surprise as delegates were urged by the US at the start of the council, or jirga, on Friday to take "this difficult action" so negotiations could begin to bring an end to the war.

"To remove obstacle, to start peace talks and to stop the bloodshed, the Jirga confirms

the release of 400 Taliban prisoners," said Atefa Tayeb, a council secretary who read out the final declaration at the conclusion.

The deal negotiated between the United States and Taliban calls for the government to free 5,000 prisoners and for the Taliban to free 1,000 government and military personnel in its custody as a goodwill gesture ahead of the start of negotiations.

Kabul balked at the release but eventually freed all but the last 400. President Ghani said he was not authorized to free these because of the seriousness of their crimes, and asked for the council to decide instead. He did not detail what the 400 were accused.

Delegates were therefore given the stark choice of either freeing the prisoners or seeing a war that has killed tens of thousands continue. The delegates said they wanted international guarantees that the Taliban would not return to the battlefield.

Washington's Peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad spent more than a year and a half negotiating the deal with the Taliban to provide for the withdrawal of American soldiers after more than 19 years in Afghanistan.

The withdrawal began earlier this year but roughly 8,600 US soldiers remain in Afghanistan and their return

will depend on the Taliban honoring its commitment to fight against other terrorist groups and ensure Afghanistan is not again used to attack the United States or its allies.

The withdrawal of US and NATO troops is not dependent on the success of negotiations between Kabul's political leadership and the Taliban. **AP**

Officials resign in Lebanon in wake of deadly blast

Beirut: Lebanon's information minister resigned on Sunday as the country grapples with the aftermath of the devastating blast that ripped through the capital and raised public anger to new levels.

The resignation comes after a night of demonstrations against the ruling elite, blamed for the chronic mismanagement and corruption that is believed to be behind the explosion in a Beirut Port warehouse.

Hundreds of tons of highly explosive material were stored in the waterfront hangar, and the blast sent a shock wave that killed at least 160 people, wounded nearly 6,000 and defaced the coastline of Beirut — destroying hundreds of buildings.

Manal Abdel-Samad said in her resignation letter that change remained "elusive" and

she regrets failing to fulfill the aspirations of the Lebanese people.

Her resignation comes as about half a dozen lawmakers offered their resignation in protest over government performance. Local media also reported that another minister, and a close advisor to Prime Minister Hassan Diab, was also expected to resign.

Diab met with his Cabinet reportedly to discuss the resignations Sunday, but there were no comments after the meeting.

"Given the magnitude of the catastrophe caused by the Beirut earthquake that shook the nation and hurt our hearts and minds, and in respect for the martyrs, and the pains of the wounded, missing and displaced, and in response to the public will for change, I resign from the government," Abdel-Samad wrote. **AP**

Riot declared as fire burns in Portland police union offices

Portland (US): A fire inside a police union building led authorities in Portland, Oregon, to declare a riot and force protesters away from the offices as violent demonstrations continue in the city that had hoped for calm after federal agents withdrew more than a week ago.

A group of demonstrators broke into the Portland Police Association building, set the fire and were adding to it when officers made the riot declaration late Saturday, police tweeted. Video shot by a journalist shows smoke and flames arising from inside the building.

Several hundred people had gathered outside the offices, which are located about 5 miles (8 kilometers) north of the federal courthouse that had been the target of nightly violence earlier this summer. **AP**

Belarus strongman president faces strong election challenge

AP ■ MINSK

Belarusians are voting on whether to grant their authoritarian president a sixth term in office, following a campaign marked by unusually strong demonstrations by opposition supporters frustrated with the country's stumbling economy, political repression and weak response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Incumbent Alexander Lukashenko, in office for 26 years, has made it clear he won't hesitate to quash any attempt by his opponents to protest the results of Sunday's election.

"If you provoke, you will get the same answer," he said after

casting his ballot.

"Do you want to try to overthrow the government, break something, wound, offend, and expect me or someone to kneel in front of you and kiss them and the sand onto which you wandered? This will not happen." But some voters were defiant.

"There is no more fear. Belarusians will not be silent and will protest loudly," 24-year-old Tatiana Protasevich said at a Minsk polling place Sunday.

The head of staff for main opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was detained late Saturday for allegedly participating in authorized protests and is likely to be in jail until at least Monday.



Thousands protest against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in front of his official residence in Jerusalem **AP**

YOUR TIME'S UP: PROTESTERS TARGET NETANYAHU OVER JOBS, COVID

Jerusalem: Thousands of Israelis rallied outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem on Saturday as anger mounted over corrup-

tion allegations and his handling of the coronavirus crisis. "Your time is up," read the giant letters projected on to a building at the protest site, as demonstrators

waved Israeli flags and called on Netanyahu to resign over what they say is his failure to protect jobs and businesses affected by the pandemic. **AFP**

North Macedonia cops find 94 migrants hidden in truck

Skopje (North Macedonia): Police in North Macedonia say they have found 94 migrants packed into a truck in a country's southeast.

A police patrol stopped the truck with Macedonian national license plates late Saturday near the town of Radovich, 110 kilometers (68 miles) southeast of the capital, Skopje. The truck driver fled from the scene, police said Sunday.

Police found 94 migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan packed into the truck cargo area.

The migrants were detained and will be transferred to a migrant shelter in the southern border town of Gevgelija, pending deportation to Greece, where they came from.

The Greek border with North Macedonia was closed earlier this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But trafficking networks remain active, ferrying migrants who make their way from Turkey into Greece and then attempt to head north toward more prosperous countries in the European Union. **AP**

US tops 5 million confirmed virus cases, to Europe's alarm

Rome: With confirmed coronavirus cases in the US hitting 5 million Sunday, by far the highest of any country, the failure of the most powerful nation in the world to contain the scourge has been met with astonishment and alarm in Europe.

Perhaps nowhere outside the US is America's bungled virus response viewed with more consternation than in Italy, which was ground zero of Europe's epidemic. Italians were unprepared when the outbreak exploded in February, and the country still has one of the world's highest official death tolls at 35,000.

But after a strict nationwide, 10-week lockdown, vigilant tracing of new clusters and general acceptance of mask mandates and social distancing, Italy has become a model of virus containment.

"Don't they care about their health?" a mask-clad Patrizia Antonini asked about people in the United States as she walked with friends along the banks of Lake Bracciano, north of Rome. **AP**

New Zealand marks 100 days of virus elimination

Wellington: New Zealand on Sunday marked 100 days since it stamped out the spread of the coronavirus, a rare bright spot in a world that continues to be ravaged by the disease.

Life has returned to normal for many people in the South Pacific nation of 5 million, as they attend rugby games at packed stadiums and sit down in bars and restaurants without the fear of getting infected. But some worry the country may be getting complacent and not preparing well enough for any future outbreaks.

New Zealand got rid of the virus by imposing a strict lockdown in late March when only about 100 people had tested positive for the disease. That stopped its spread. **AP**

Nagasaki urges nuke ban on 75th anniv of US A-bombing

Tokyo: The Japanese city of Nagasaki on Sunday marked its 75th anniversary of the US atomic bombing, with the mayor and dwindling survivors urging world leaders including their own to do more for a nuclear weapons ban.

At 11:02 am, the moment the B-29 bomber Bockscar dropped a 4.5-ton (10,000-pound) plutonium bomb dubbed "Fat Man," Nagasaki survivors and other participants stood in a minute of silence to honor more than 70,000 dead.

The August 9, 1945, bombing came three days after the United States dropped its first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the world's first ever nuclear attack that killed 140,000. On August 15, Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

At the event at Nagasaki Peace Park, scaled down because



of the coronavirus pandemic, Mayor Tomihisa Taue read a peace declaration in which he raised concern that nuclear states had in recent years retreated from disarmament efforts.

Instead, they are upgrading and miniaturizing nuclear weapons for easier use, he said. Taue singled out the US and Russia for increasing risks by

scrapping the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

"As a result, the threat of nuclear weapons being used is increasingly becoming real," Taue said. Noting that the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty entered into force 50 years ago, Taue urged the US and Russia to show a (asterisk)workable way(asterisk) towards their

nuclear disarmament at the NPT review process next year.

He said that "the true horror of nuclear weapons has not yet been adequately conveyed to the world at large" despite struggle and efforts by hibakusha, or atomic bombing survivors, to make Nagasaki the last place of the tragedy.

He also urged Japan's government and lawmakers to quickly sign the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

After taking part in the ceremony, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe criticized the treaty for not being realistic. None of the nuclear states has joined, and it is not widely supported even by non-nuclear states, he said.

"The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted without taking into consideration the reality of

the harsh national security environment," Abe said at a news conference.

"I must say the treaty is different from Japan's position and approach" even though they share the same goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, he said.

Abe has repeatedly refused to sign the treaty. He reiterated that Japan's approach is not to take sides but to serve as a bridge between nuclear and non-nuclear states to encourage dialogue to achieve a total nuclear ban. Survivors and pacifist groups say Japan is virtually siding with the US and other nuclear states.

Abe cited "severe national security environment and a wide gap between the two sides on nuclear disarmament." He also noted Japan faces threats of development and modernization of nuclear weapons from

"neighboring countries in the region." Taue, who spoke before Abe, disagreed, saying: "Among the nuclear-weapon states and countries under the nuclear umbrella, there have been voices stating that it is too early for such a treaty. That is not so. Nuclear arms reductions are far too late in coming."

While Tokyo renounces its own possession, production or hosting of nuclear weapons, as a US ally Japan hosts 50,000 American troops and is protected by the US nuclear umbrella. The post-WWII security arrangement complicates the push to get Japan to sign the treaty as it beefs up its own military to deal with threats from North Korea and China, among others. An aging group of survivors have expressed a growing sense of urgency to tell their stories, in hopes of reaching

younger generations to continue their effort toward establishing a nuclear-free world.

"There is not much time left for us survivors," said Shigemitsu Fukabori, 89. He was a 14-year-old student mobilized to work at a shipyard when Nagasaki was bombed.

"I'm determined to keep telling my story so that Nagasaki will be the last place on Earth to have suffered an atomic attack."

Fukabori, who almost instantly lost four siblings, said he never forgets the pile of charred bodies, bombed-out street cars and the badly injured desperately asking for help and water as he rushed back to his house in the back of the Urakami Cathedral, which was also nearly destroyed.

"We don't want anyone else to have to go through this," he said. **AP**

Asia-Pacific may see \$31.4-54.3 bn remittance losses due to Covid-19: ADB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asia Pacific, which accounts for a third of the global migrant workforce, is likely to face remittance losses of USD 31.4-54.3 billion due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said in a report.

The Governments need to come up with policy measures to reduce the economic and social fallout arising out of it, the ADB said.

Job losses stemming from Covid-19 are hurting households around the world, but for Asia and the Pacific's 91 million migrant workers — a third of the global migrant workforce — the impacts will be particularly severe, the ADB said in August 2020 brief on COVID-19 Impact on International

Migration, Remittances, and Recipient Households in Developing Asia. "ADB economists estimate that the region faces remittance losses ranging from USD 31.4 billion to USD 54.3 billion. To reduce the economic and social impacts, policy responses are proposed in areas such as social protection, immigration, labour, and health," it said. In 2019, six of the 10 largest remittance recipients globally were from this region—India, China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, the Manila-headquartered multilateral funding agency said. The countries likely to face more severe effects from the pandemic-induced decline in remittance inflows are the ones where remittance shares to gross domestic product (GDP)

and per capita remittances are high.

These include Tonga, Samoa, and other Pacific countries, with remittances relative to the size of their economies and populations very high.

Central Asian countries such as Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan, sending a large number of seasonal and long-term migrants mainly to the Russian Federation and Europe, will also be hard-hit, along with some of the major migrant origin countries such as Nepal and the Philippines, it added.

Remittances to Asia and the Pacific, amounting to USD 315 billion in 2019, are an important and stable source of income for families back home and help strengthen external financing—alongside foreign

direct investment and tourism recipients—in many developing economies, said the report penned by four ADB economists. They boost general consumption as well as investment and help sustain Government debts by contributing to the foreign currency revenue base, said the economists.

Jobs and worker welfare are severely affected by the pandemic globally but some sectors are hurt more than others such as retail and wholesale trade, hospitality and recreation, manufacturing, and accommodation and food service sectors.

These are the sectors largely in non-essential services with frequent face-to-face interactions and the migrant and informal workers are among those facing the most

severe impacts, as they often do not have regular contracts nor strong bargaining power, said the report. "Migrant workers are more vulnerable from layoffs once prolonged lockdowns and production breaks drive companies out of business."

Also, uncertainty looms about the timing of full recovery, even as lockdowns are lifted, with concerns about persistent weak demand in some economic sectors.

"The wide-scale economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reach between USD 5.8 trillion and USD 8.8 trillion globally, equivalent to 6.4 per cent to 9.7 per cent of global GDP, reflecting the spread of the pandemic to Europe, the United States, and other major economies," said the report. The ADB said that

employment in host economies of Asian migrants is contracting significantly.

"The remittance flows to developing Asia is to plunge amid the pandemic as during the first months 2020, remittances began to contract in major migrant source countries...While some migrant workers may feel altruistic and send more money to their families in extremely difficult situations, prevailing weak economic forecasts are pointing toward declining remittances." However, relative increase in remittance inflows is observed in June in selected countries which can be attributed to lifting of lockdowns in destinations that allowed migrants to remit over the counter and introduction of policy measures that incentivise transfer

by reducing restrictions and transaction fees, the ADB said.

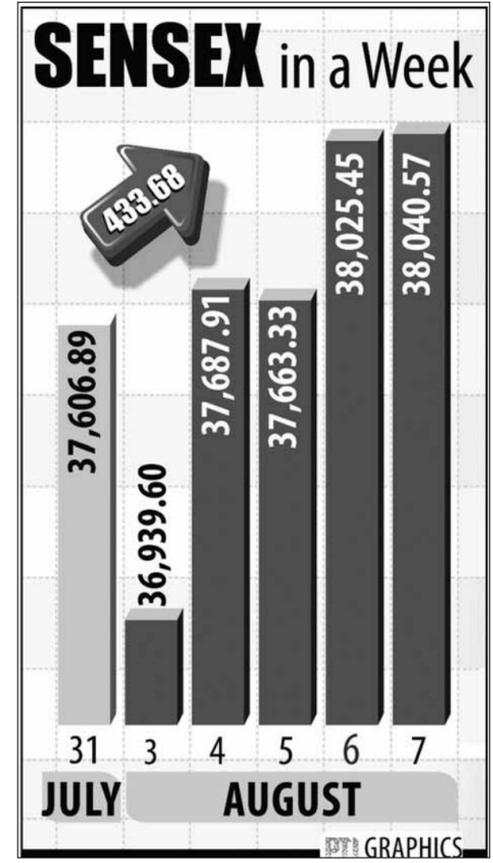
Citing a study of 10 migrant sending countries in Asia, the ADB said remittance dependent households are at risk of falling into poverty, as it is estimated that a 1 per cent increase in the share to GDP to remittances inflow from overseas is associated with a reduction in poverty gap by 22.6 per cent and poverty severity by 16 per cent.

A study based on micro-data from selected economies in South Asia and Southeast Asia suggests that a 10 per cent increase in remittance inflows leads to a 3-4 per cent rise in real GDP per capita, it said.

Recommending policy actions to the host and source countries, ADB economists said governments of host coun-

tries of migrants need to ensure that migrant workers have access to social protection, including employment-related support and social assistance, as well as health services. They should support employers to help retain and hire laid-off workers, including migrant workers.

Such effort contributes to the smooth recovery of the economy by ensuring workforce availability and the reduction of contagion risks, said the report. Among others, the host and source countries should continue to recognise remittance service providers as one of the essential businesses to allow migrants and families to transact without disruption as remittance money is a lifeline for many poor and vulnerable families left behind.



'TRAI to give decision on priority plans within 2 weeks of telcos reply'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

TRAI expects to finalise its decision on priority plans of Vodafone Idea and Airtel within two weeks of getting detailed responses on its queries from the two telcos, according to a regulatory source.

The source said that while TRAI had "serious concerns" on multiple issues pertaining to the priority plans, it had granted additional time up to August 10 to the two telcos to respond to its fresh round of questioning, as the players themselves had sought more time to reply.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is probing whether assuring minimum, faster or average data speeds is technological feasible or not.

And indeed, if it is, why should telecom operators offering priority/platinum plans not be able to quantify the same, and clear the air around treatment that will be meted out non-premium customers as well, the source privy to the ongoing enquiry said.

Telcos must clearly quantify the benefits being offered

TRAI is probing whether assuring minimum, faster or average data speeds is technological feasible or not

to consumers (of the priority plans) in return for what they are being charged. Subscription to a mobile plan is akin to a 'sale' where consumer is the purchaser of the service and hence the telcos "must quantify" exactly what services such users are going to get.

Merely using the term 'better service' is not suffice, the source said.

Asked about the timelines for TRAI to come to a conclusion on the ongoing issue, the source said that the two telcos themselves had asked for some more time earlier this month to answer TRAI's second round of queries, many of which were technical in nature and needed concrete data.

TRAI will finalise its decision on priority plan issue within two weeks of getting

response from the telcos, the extended time for which is Monday (August 10), the source said.

Service quality must be specified for two sets of users now -- priority and general users, and that information too has not been given by the companies, so far, the source added.

Moreover, when the plans were filed, the operators should have drawn the regulator's attention to the fact that these represented differentiated offerings.

TRAI had recently granted additional time to Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea to submit detailed responses on fresh set of questions on premium plans, where queries range from what happens when a non-priority customer is surrounded by priority users during congestion, to limit of throughput configured for the two sets of network subscribers.

TRAI shot-off nearly two dozen additional questions to Airtel and Vodafone Idea over the contentious premium plans on July 31, and had asked them to explain their stand backed by data and presentation.

Indian Railways committed to integrate with GeM portal: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Railways is committed to integrate with the Government e-marketplace (GeM) portal to move all its procurement to the platform, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

The railways' direct procurement of goods for its operations or its public sector undertakings or production units stood at about ₹70,000 crore-₹75,000 crore, the Commerce and Industry and Railways Minister said.

"I am happy to share that GeM and Indian Railways are burning the midnight oil, working day and night to ensure this entire ₹70,000 crore procurement on the GeM platform," Goyal said at the GeM-CII National Public Procurement Conclave 2020.

"Our own belief is that it will save railways not less than 10-15 per cent and that could be a saving of as high as ₹10,000 crore," he added. Railways buys more than 98 per cent of its goods and services in India and moving this purchase to the GeM platform in the next "probably 8-12

months" will help in making procurement process more transparent, seamless, efficient and faster, Goyal said.

"The railways has committed itself fully to integrate with GeM and move all procurement there (GeM)...Imagine we will save 1000s and 1000s of man hours of procurement time."

"The amount of elaborate tendering, advertisements, bids opening, reverse auction, all of that become so seamless that our digital system of the railways will flag the requirement on the GeM portal, and it will be available for the whole world to see and more and more people will be enticed to register on GeM as suppliers," Goyal said.

He added that if any supplier or vendor provides bad quality goods, it will be black listed not only on GeM, but throughout the government system.

"We will ensure that the entire government system does not entertain that company anymore," he said, adding that at a later stage, GeM will move from goods and services to contracts.

The minister said the government's public procurement would be in the range of USD 100-150 billion (about ₹7.5 lakh crore-₹11.25 lakh crore), and probably more if one combines all the PSUs, state government and local bodies.

He said GeM should play a role in publicising all those products which are not made in India, but are required in India in a big way so that "we can encourage" entrepreneurs to plan to make those products in India, as is being done by railways. He said railways has identified the products which are imported and is working through RDSO (Research Design and Standards Organisation) to develop new vendors for those products.

"We have taken certain game changing reform measures in railway vendor registration also. Number of products have been moved out of vendor registration."

"So mostly safety items are being kept for vendor registration...If you are registered in any one organisation, you are deemed to be Sregistered throughout the railways," he said.

CAIT launches 'China Quit India' campaign to boycott Chinese goods

New Delhi: On the anniversary of Quit India Movement, the Confederation of all India Traders (CAIT) on Sunday launched a campaign 'China Quit India' to boycott Chinese goods, while its members held protests across 600 places across the country.

The trader's body said there is an urgent need to check "China's growing footsteps in India and import of Chinese goods". Adding a new dimension to its nationwide campaign "Bhartiya Saamaan-Hamara Abhimaan", CAIT said it has launched 'China Quit India' movement to boycott

Chinese goods and "held a protest dharna at about 600 places in different states of the country." Expressing concerns over Chinese investment in various Indian companies, start-ups and digital apps, CAIT said there is a need to take necessary action in this regard. It said that Chinese investments in Government projects and various sensitive construction works should be put under government scanner.

On the 78th anniversary of Quit India Movement, it said people across the country had come together under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to

protest against the British Raj.

While releasing the agenda of the 'China Quit India campaign', CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal "urged the central government to carry out an all-round siege of China and its activities in India." "Several Chinese companies have made large investments in Indian startups in sizeable numbers, all such startups should be asked to exclude Chinese investors and the government should announce a lucrative policy to encourage Indian people to invest in these startups," he said.

PTI

CBDT issues guidance note on MAP

STIPULATES CASES WHERE ITAT HAS PASSED ORDER

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian authorities will not deviate from the resolution order passed by statutory appellate body ITAT in cross-border tax disputes which are undergoing simultaneous resolution through mutual agreement procedure (MAP), the income tax department has said.

MAP is an alternative dispute resolution process under the tax treaties, under which

competent authorities of two countries enter into discussions to resolve tax related disputes. As many as 600 tax disputes have been resolved under MAP between April 1, 2014 to December 31, 2018.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes has come out with a guidance note on MAP which also specifies cases or situations in which India will provide access to MAP. Tax disputes relating to transfer pricing adjustments, determination of existence of a permanent establishment, attribution of profits to permanent establishments, characterisation or re-characterisation of an expense or receipt as a taxable expense or taxable income would be covered

under MAP if they result in taxation not in accordance with the relevant DTAA.

The guidance note also said that India shall provide access to MAP even in a situation where the Indian tax authorities apply domestic anti-abuse provisions. The CBDT also said that in case of orders of Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, the Competent Authorities of India shall not deviate from the orders of the ITAT for the relevant year where the dispute is decided on merits," the CBDT guidance note said.

Such MAP cases shall be closed as having been resolved by a domestic remedy.

"However, if the order of the ITAT does not resolve the disputes but only sets them aside to be adjudicated afresh, then access to MAP would be provided again after the fresh

adjudication by tax authorities, if requested for by the relevant taxpayers," it added.

In May, the Govt amended Income Tax rules to state that Indian authorities would "endeavour" to resolve disputes under MAP within a timeframe of 24 months, a move aimed at speedy settlement of cases of MNCs which have opted the alternative dispute resolution process. Nangia & Co LLP Partner Shailesh Kumar said Indian tax authorities have apparently shown their intention to provide a speedy resolution to taxpayers opting for MAP by appointment of two dedicated offices for taking up MAP applications and negotiations.

Aramco's Apr-Jun profit down 73%, but sees oil market recovery

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Energy giant Saudi Aramco has reported a 73 per cent fall in its profit, or the net income, for the April-June quarter to \$6.6 billion amid the pandemic.

During the same period of 2019, the company had reported a net income of \$24.7 billion. For the first half of 2020, it has reported a net income of \$23.2 billion, compared to \$46.9 billion reported during the corresponding period a year ago, the company said in a statement.

"Aramco navigated challenging market conditions to record net income of \$6.6 billion for the second quarter and \$23.2 billion for the first half of 2020, respectively, compared to \$24.7 billion and \$46.9 billion in the corresponding periods of 2019.

This demonstrates Aramco's agility, strength and resilience across market cycles," it said.

Noting that strong headwinds from reduced demand

and lower oil prices reflected in the company's second quarter results, Aramco President & CEO Amin H.

Nasser said that the company foresees a partial recovery in the energy market as economies open up.

"We are seeing a partial recovery in the energy market as countries around the world take steps to ease restrictions and reboot their economies. Meanwhile, we continue to place people's safety first and have adapted to the new normal, implementing wide-ranging precautions to limit the spread of Covid-19 wherever we operate," the CEO said.

He noted that despite the challenges, the company delivered "solid earnings" because of low production costs, unique scale, agile workforce, and unrivalled financial and operational strength.

This helped the company to deliver on its plan to maintain a second quarter dividend of \$18.75 billion to be paid in the third quarter, Nasser added.

E-auction dates for commercial mining of coal likely to be extended again: Sources

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The dates for submission of bids for online auction of coal blocks for commercial mining could be further extended due to disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, sources said on Sunday.

The Centre had earlier extended the dates for submission of technical bids. According to the revised schedule, the last date for submitting a technical bid is 2 pm of September 29, and e-auction would be carried out for qualified bidders between October 19 and November 9.

However, the sources said further extension is likely to be sought by investors, keeping in mind the COVID-19 restrictions on travel and movement. "We are not sure whether this extension will be enough for bidders to complete evaluation and feasibility studies, which have to be conducted with rigorous on-ground data and inputs

If needed, fresh extension would be sought," a senior official of a large corporate bidder told PTI.

BSNL to enhance data speed in Andaman Nicobar by 10 times from Monday

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-run BSNL will start offering up to 10 times faster broadband speed at 100 mbps and up to 20 times more data download limit for its customers in Andaman and Nicobar Islands from Monday, the company said on Sunday.

The announcement from BSNL comes a day before the launch of 2,312 kilometre long Chennai-Andaman and Nicobar Islands (CANI) submarine optical fibre cable project by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Despite many challenges the project is completed in a scheduled timeline and without any cost overrun. Being a first of its kind project in India, BSNL ensured that the laying of submarine optical fibre cable is completed as per global specification to ensure quality," BSNL chairman and managing director P K Purwar said.

BSNL will enhance data speeds across all the plans between 2-10 times after the launch of the project without charging any extra amount

from the customers, according to details shared by the company.

"For BSNL wire line segment, copper broadband customers are now provided with higher speeds which is up to 10Mbps and up to 15 times more data download ranging from 30 GB to 750 GB in a month on its existing plans," the statement said.

The data speed restriction after the download limit, will also be enhanced from 512 kbps to up to 2 Mbps in various plans, it added.

"BSNL FTTH (Optical Fibre) customers are also provided with higher speed up to 100 Mbps and up to 15 times data volume download ranging from 60 GB to 1500 GB in a month on its existing plans. The data speed restriction after the download limit, is also enhanced from 512 kbps to up to 4 Mbps in various plans," the statement said. BSNL customers who have subscribed to the high end plan of ₹7,999 will be upgraded from 10 mbps speed to 100 mbps download speed.

Planned layoffs at British companies surge

AP ■ LONDON

The number of British companies planning to cut staff numbers in June was five times higher than in the same month a year earlier, in an ominous sign of Covid-19's economic impact.

Figures obtained by the BBC show that 1,778 companies informed the Government of plans to cut a total of 139,000 jobs.

A year earlier the figure was 345 companies announcing a total of 24,000 job losses. Businesses are required to inform the Insolvency Service if they plan to cut 20 or more jobs.

During the pandemic the government has been paying the salaries of almost 10 million furloughed workers. Economists are predicting a surge in unemployment when that program ends in October.

The U.K. Economy shrank by more than 20 per cent in the first half of 2020, and despite some signs of recovery the Bank of England says the economy will end 2020 9.5 per cent smaller than it started the year.

81% micro enterprises confident of recovery post Covid-19, says survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Despite several businesses remaining closed during the lockdown, 81 per cent of micro enterprises polled are confident of a recovery post Covid-19 whereas 57 per cent reported not having any cash reserves to survive, according to a survey.

Initial results of a six-month survey that is underway by GAME (Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship) in association with LEAD at Krea University covering 1,500 micro enterprises also reveal that 40 per cent tried to borrow money to cover expenses.

However, only 14 per cent of the overall borrowing was from formal borrowing sources.

As per the revised criteria, any firm with investment up to Rs 1 crore and turnover under Rs 5 crore is classified as a "micro" enterprise.

Madan Padaki, co-founder of GAME, said COVID-19 has left a devastat-

ing impact on the Indian economy, especially micro-enterprises that comprise around 99 per cent of all firms in India.

"Through this longitudinal survey, we intend to truly understand the on-ground situation and challenges faced by micro-enterprises in managing cash flows, dealing with broken supply chains and delayed payments. By keeping our ears to the ground, we want to provide specific recommendations to all ecosystem actors to accelerate the recovery of these enterprises," Padaki said.

The survey also revealed that across all respondents, female business owners faced more household challenges than men.

In fact, 70 per cent female business owners suggested inter-house conflicts as the biggest challenge while 53 per cent men responded to the same. Women also faced more unaffordable expenses than men, with 46 per cent suggesting the same, the survey said. PTI

Trend
Blazer

We will find light: Hrithik

Actor **HRITHIK ROSHAN** feels helpless witnessing the series of tragic incidents that has plagued us over the past months.

"It is difficult, yet important to latch onto every ray of hope... A feeling of helplessness engulfs me as I witness a series of tragic events in our world. Beirut explosion. Air India crash. Mauritius environment emergency. Floods and distress. Earthquake. The collapse of the last Arctic ice shelf. All this while we battle a pandemic. My prayers for the peace of the departed souls. Condolences for the grieving families. May we uplift each other in these unfortunate times and stand strong. This too shall pass. We will find light," he wrote on Instagram.



With the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is compelled to acknowledge the fact that things cannot function the way they used to anymore. As a part of the business community, society and the larger ecosystem, the need to learn to adapt to the new normal has become a necessity. Studies reveal how workplace conducts can be modified and regulated as per the changing requirements as the lockdown is gradually being lifted up.

A survey by Pulse studied the key competencies to survive the current pandemic. Its second survey focussed on the priorities and policies HR functions should adopt to help organisations and employees navigate through the current crisis. The third survey now focusses on the relevance of POSH Act and Policy (The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013) in the new normal considering the emerging current realities that have surfaced.

It lists these top priorities for organisations to look at while evaluating the relevance of POSH Act and Policy while redesigning and reshaping their work culture and employee behaviour.

MODIFYING THE POLICY FOR REMOTE WORKING

As the workforce continues to adapt to the changing needs of their work environment and undergo dramatic shift in workplace dynamics, organisations should constantly re-look and refresh their frameworks, practices, processes and policies for workplace safety.

Thus, an important aspect to workplace safety is that the POSH policy should be modified to meet the needs of remote or virtual working. During work from home (WFH), the need for POSH training has become a pressing requirement as per the data in the survey.

REDRESSAL OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING WFH

Emerging dimensions of workplace conduct and safety are equally important. This period of lockdown has led to a staggering increase in domestic violence cases in India and globally. With social distancing in place, several people are unable to contact or seek help from their regular support system. Taking this into account, Twitter India has also launched search prompts to help domestic violence victims. Thus, with the merging of workplace and personal space, there is a need to keep safety of employees under check.

The policy says that the workplace covers both organised and unorganised sectors and includes any offsite, get-togethers, or any place that comes under the ambit of work-related relationship. Therefore, the need to safeguard the physical and mental safety of an employee within the new normal with a shift in the work space, work safety must continue to be a top priority for companies.

FOCUS ON LGBTQ-RELATED HARASSMENT

While some companies have made the POSH policy gender-neutral, a need for the POSH Act to be made into a gender-neutral act by law has also emerged. This indicates the need for LGBTQ-related harassment to be taken into consideration while reviewing the



Up close with new rules

Organisations need to evaluate their POSH Act and Policy too while redesigning and reshaping their work culture and employee behaviour in times of remote working. By TEAM VIVA

policy in offices to ensure safety is not a privilege limited to a few within the workforce.

CYBER BULLYING OR VIRTUAL HARASSMENT

The need for HR leaders to review complex scenarios under the POSH Act has become a pressing need. We are connected virtually for long hours when it comes to work life as lines between professional and personal space have blurred.

Emerging challenges have also surfaced with virtual connectivity becoming a part of our everyday work that needs to be addressed. As per Gartner, by 2030, demand for remote working will increase by 30 per cent with "Gen Z" entering the workplace. Cyber bullying or harassment on virtual platforms is a pressing concern that should be addressed in the POSH policy.

SENSITISATION AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR "NOT CAMERA-READY" BEHAVIOUR

As a major portion of our workforce continues to work from home, they operate in this workplace while interacting with colleagues and work teams. Therefore, a certain level of sensitisation of managers and other employees on "not camera-ready" behaviour, code of conduct and dress code for video conferences, virtual or video conference guidelines are required to be clearly stated and put in place. It will help maintain a certain level of professional conduct among employees.



POSH TRAINING DURING WFH

It is important for companies to conduct training and awareness sessions for employees across the verticals within the organisation. It should include the leadership, managers, employees, newly-recruited staff and interns who are now getting on-board virtually. The need to be sensitised to expected standards of

professional behaviour, redressal mechanism and clear implications of false and malicious complaints need to be taken into consideration with assurance of swift action.

Popular method for facilitating training sessions or activities across industries on the POSH Policy and Act were Face-to-Face. However, even

though social distancing is the norm, the need to sensitise employees across multiple locations should not be undermined. Utilisation of virtual platforms has become an excellent mode of communication and learning with online training and webinars to support and address training needs of employees in an organisation.

'I wanted to introduce Jammwalions to push-ups. I thought the best way to do it was to demonstrate

Kalari Dand to them. It targets the core, back, chest, shoulders, back, legs and triceps. It's the humblest of all workouts. It does not require any heavy equipment or trips to the gym.'

—Vidyut Jammwal

Bored of tying your hair in a top knot, hiding those dull, lifeless strands? It doesn't help that the monsoons make the hair frizzy, weak and create all sorts of havoc to our tresses.



Actor **KALKI KOEHLIN** tries something she has never done before — colouring her hair at home in a rich hue of mahogany.

"I have heard L'Oreal Paris Casting Creme Gloss Hair Colour is one of the easiest and the best. Not just because it gives you a great colour but also because it makes your hair really glossy," she says.

'Co-writing a screenplay'

Singer **MADONNA** has revealed that she has been writing a screenplay lately.

The pop diva has been collaborating with *Juno* writer Diablo Cody. In a black-and-white video Madonna has shared, she can be seen sitting at a discussion with Cody.

"When you're stuck in a house with multiple injuries what do you do? Write a Screenplay with Diablo," Madonna captioned the post.

Their table in front is covered in drafts and different scripts. Madonna can be heard saying, "All these details are important."

It wasn't all work, though. At one point, the superstar singer was in the mood for some fun and games, with two peanuts up her nose.



Discovering the truth

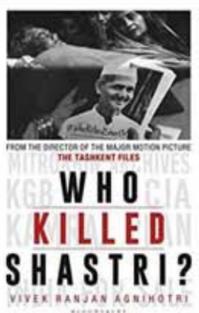
Filmmaker and author **VIVEK AGNIHOTRI's** new book, *Who Killed Shastri?: The Tashkent Files*, uses the democratic Right to Information to question the mysterious death of a Prime Minister

After his first book, *Urban Naxals: The Making of Buddha in a Traffic Jam*, director and screenwriter Vivek Agnihotri is now set to come up with his second non-fiction book, *Who Killed Shastri?: The Tashkent Files*.

Known for writing screenplays of films like *The Tashkent Files*, *Buddha In A Traffic Jam*, and *Dhan Dhan Dhan Goal*, Agnihotri has bound together the elements of the mystery around the legendary Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in the book.

According to the author, this is "the first-ever book to investigate the mysterious death of independent India's second prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, from all possible angles."

Commenting on his book, Agnihotri said, "Four years ago, I figured out that the first fundamental right of a citizen in a democracy has to be the right to truth but how is it possible if we don't even know the truth of our second prime minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri mysteri-



ous death in Tashkent. That's how this journey begins after filling many RTIs and struggling with all the possible sources. We decided to chase the history and discover the truth behind Shastri ji's death and in his journey. I rediscovered the synergetic politics of India after the humiliating defeat by China in 1962 till the emergency. How India was sold and I concluded that whoever killed Shastri are the same people who sold India, too. This book is my spiritual journey into politics and very strongly conveys that it's because of the absence of spirituality and moral values in politics; how India has suffered generations after generations. This book is also a warning to the new generation as it aims to explain to them why they must fight in moral politics and always stand up and fight for right the truth."

Vivek's directorial film, *The Tashkent Files* (2019), also came with a hashtag question — Who killed Shastri? More than half a century after that fateful morning in Tashkent and the question still remains unanswered — Did Shastri really die a natural death or was it an assassination birthed from political disagreements? For the director, it was a tweet that inspired him to work on the mystery related to his death.

The filmmaker and author has also made the book available online for pre-orders. He has released the cover of the book on social media, for pre-orders and to get feedback. The book will hit the stands on August 28.

On the work front, Vivek will start working on his new project, titled, *The Kashmir Files*.

WEBBED



BIO HACKERS

A medical student enters a top German university on a secret mission to uncover a conspiracy linking a family tragedy to a visionary biology professor. Starring Luna Wedler, Jessica Schwarz and Thomas Prenn, season 1 releases on Netflix on August 20.

CLASS OF '83

Demoted to an academy job, a cop trains five foolhardy students as assassins in his risky revenge plot against police corruption and the underworld. Starring Bobby Deol, Bhupendra Jadawat and Hitesh Bhojraj, the film releases on Netflix on August 21.



THE SLEEPER

What do you do if your parents are kidnapped by a crew of international thieves? You begin a wild overnight adventure complete with spy gear. The film releases on Netflix on August 21.



BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

We must remember that the current condition of the world is a warning bell to improve ourselves and prepare well for unexpected emergencies, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

The current events, especially growing border tensions between the two Asian countries reflect the present state of world. Likewise, the growing pandemic situation and the Indian government's handling of this and other national issues such as those relating to Kashmir or Assam, indicates the state of the Indian nation. The current events prove how egoism, confrontation and violence have become the rule of the day. The situations in the Western Asia is, indeed, becoming more and more complicated with the passing of each day. It is acquiring new angles and dimensions, and is nearing its ignition point. There are now emerging new alignments and enmities. Many nations are now getting involved into it, either because of the resolutions of the UN Security Council or because of some other reasons. Even if this situation is now defused, it will be only for a temporary phase and will keep smoldering visibly or covertly.

Similarly, there are deep inter-party dissensions, social rifts, ethnic bickerings and economic divides, which have added a new dimension to the present Indian scenario. These are, in fact, un-resolvable because these are in-built. Hence, social scientists call them structural defects in the society which cannot be corrected unless the structure of the society is changed. However, those who are well-versed with spiritual knowledge, would have no difficulty in diagnosing the present maladies that afflict the world in general and the Indian nation in particular. They would understand that the present situation is due to gross selfishness, ego and lack of self-control, all of which are rooted in body-consciousness.

If we look at these happenings from a spiritual point of view, then it becomes very clear as to why are they caused and what are their results. Time and again, it has been said by many religious and spiritual leaders that the world-situation would soon take a wide turn for the worse so much so that we will have to change our ways of living. A time would soon come when people would flock in large numbers for receiving the spiritual knowledge. Silence and yoga would become the highest power to cure mankind from all kinds of mental diseases. Looking at the series of events across the world, this situation seems to be arriving very soon. Hence, we must all prepare ourselves in advance for such a crisis. And for that, we need to first of all pay greater attention towards self-improvement. Our stage of purity and peace must get strengthened and become unshakable. We must pay full attention to the inculcation of all divine qualities such as humility, patience, tolerance, contentment, honesty, sincerity and more. We must not lag behind even in a single divine attribute for our goal is to become paragon of virtue or a divine being, who has all divine qualities. For achieving this cherished goal, the time left is very less. Hence, if we don't wake up and speed up now, we will not be able to reach our goal. We must remember that the current condition of the world is a warning bell for us to improve ourselves and prepare well for unexpected emergencies.



—Charkha Features

Leave no one behind

Virtual classes may have become the new normal for education but what about the students deprived of gadgets, asks KALPANA DHAKU MALAYE

It was the third week of March. The teachers had almost completed the syllabus and the schools were busy preparing for the final exams. Computation of the average of the unit test scores of each student was being done. At that juncture, the novel Coronavirus had advanced and bared its fangs in India.

As a precautionary measure, the government announced the closure of all the educational institutions. The students were briefed on the safety measures and a break till March 31 was declared. However, the risk of contracting the virus called for further closures and restrictions. The students and parents were in a dilemma. Further, on April 1, cancellation of the final exams were announced. Every educational institute was asked to promote the students to the next grade based on their school assessments, projects, periodic tests and term exams. The well-heeled schools started classes via apps like Zoom.

As the reopening of schools remain under a cloud of uncertainty, the state of

the current academic year looks too grim. There seems to be no thoughtful programme or policy in sight for engaging the students meaningfully. Virtual schooling has been implemented all across the country even though a large number of students are deprived of internet connectivity and gadgets like smartphones and laptops. The virtual mode became a one-way communication where the doubts of the students remain unanswered. Amid all this, are we really interested in knowing what students have to say about 'learning from home'? Well, it appears doubtful as not much has been said about it.

This spontaneous virtualisation of education came with various challenges for both the administration and the students. In schools that were not equipped with technology to conduct online classes, teachers had to fend for ways to launch home-based learning. Some of them created lecture videos and forwarded them to parents and children. It was like delivering a lecture without keeping any scope for questions. It signalled that

neither the participation of students was taken care of nor their accessibility to online education was thought about.

Another major issue of accessibility emerged in the families where there was only one cell phone and two to three children. It became important for the child to attend classes online as the absentees were reprimanded by the school. On the other hand, parents/older siblings were jittery because when they wanted the handset for work, the child was busy attending the online classes. A kid of a daily wage earner developed an inferiority complex because she couldn't access the file her teacher had sent. It was difficult for her to keep up with the virtual classroom exercises and activities. She faced a lot of disruption in her studies. Initially, the parents tried to pacify her but when she refused to relent, they had to borrow money to buy a smartphone. This story is not restricted to just one family, it's all pervasive. There are millions of stories of such children committing suicide for not being able to access digital education.

The pandemic has posed many barriers in front of our education system — Have teachers been trained to handle technology with ease? How many students are equipped to handle e-learning? What criteria was used to declare a school as a digital institute? According to the latest information, one of the bizarre criteria was if the teachers of the school owned a mobile phone, it was considered to be a digital school.

From a global perspective, "Half of the total number of learners — around 826 million students — kept out of the classroom by the COVID-19 pandemic. They do not have access to a household computer. Almost 43 per cent (706 million) have no internet at home at a time when digitally-based distance learning is used to ensure educational continuity in the vast majority of countries." These figures were compiled on the basis of data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the International Telecommunication Union.

While speaking about online education, one is compelled to compare it with

the offline mode. When children go to school, they gain education not merely through books but vibrant activities and interactions with teachers and friends. The best we were giving children was making education a multi-sensorial experience for them rather than just a digital one. In classrooms, when the teacher narrates an incident, the students unknowingly compare it with their own experiences and become eager to share their stories. All these happenings go into developing the intellect and character of the child. Online education is taking away experiential learning, an integral part of the school setting. It seems that e-learning can never be an alternative for in-person education.

Although virtual classes have become the new normal for education, but what about the students belonging to the underprivileged section of the society?

(The article was written originally in Marathi. It has been translated in English by Alka Gadgil.)

August is the month for two Agarden W's: weeding and watering. Regular attention to both keeps a vegetable or flower garden pretty and productive well into autumn. For now, let's look at watering. It's not necessarily less rain that makes soils drier in August; it's August's combination of heat and lush plant growth that quickly dries the soil.

Don't expect to recharge your soil with water by standing in place with hose in hand, directing a shower of water onto your tomato plants. You may find this satisfying and relaxing on a hot summer evening, but no one has the patience to stand fixed in place long enough to do plants any good. If you don't believe me, scratch an inch or so into the soil with your finger the next time you finish watering in this manner. Unless you held the hose immobile for about an hour, only the surface is wet.

INFREQUENT, DEEP WATERING FOR DEEP ROOTING

Shallow watering develops shallow root systems that can't reach water deeper in the ground. Promote deep rooting by giving your soil weekly, but thorough, soakings that wet the soil at least

SOAK OR DRIP?

Early morning or late afternoon, when the air is cooler, usually calmer and leaves dry off reasonably fast, are the best times to water with a sprinkler, suggest experts



six inches deep. One inch of water on top of the soil will do this, as measured in straight-sided cans set out with your sprinkler. Or, equivalently, apply about a half a gallon of water over every square foot of ground.

You'll probably do this weekly watering with a sprinkler. Most sprinklers take about an hour to put down that inch of water.

Some gardeners shy away from watering when the sun shines for fear that beads of water on the leaves will act as magnifying glasses and burn the leaves. Not true! (How many plants die after a sun shower?) Midday is not the best time to water because evaporation and wind will carry much of the water off target. Nighttime also is not a good time to water because the leaves stay wet too long, promoting diseases. Early morning or late after-

noon, when the air is cooler and usually calmer and leaves dry off reasonably fast, are the best times to water with a sprinkler.

FREQUENT, SHALLOW WATERING IS AN OPTION

The shallow watering and the resulting shallow rooting that I cautioned against are bad only if you can't keep up with the shallow watering. You can keep up with it — and reap other benefits — with an alternative method of watering called drip or trickle, irrigation.

The essence of drip irrigation is simply a plastic pipe laid in the garden row, with emitters at intervals out of which water slowly drips. Dripping takes longer but is more efficient than sprinkling (it was developed for farming the desert by Israeli agricultural scientists), because water can be applied slowly to approximately offset what plants are using. Dripped water is less subject to evaporation and lessens the chance of diseases by not wetting plant leaves. The shallow layers of soil are also where beneficial bacteria, fungi and other soil microorganisms are most active.

Drip irrigation, by pinpointing water near your garden plants, also results in less weeding. A

sprinkler spreads water not only to your garden plants, but also to paths and areas between rows, where it promotes weed growth. Drip irrigation is really more than just plastic pipes with holes in them. The emitters are engineering marvels that drip consistent amounts of water along their lengths and are somewhat self-cleaning. Despite that self-cleaning feature, every drip system should also begin with a sediment filter.

One of the best features of drip irrigation is that makes frequent, shallow watering possible simply by attaching a timer to your hose spigot. I set my timer each spring and hardly think about watering at all until I bring it and the sediment filter back indoors in autumn. Drip lines can be left in place outdoors all year.

Reserve hand watering for the first few days that vegetable and flower transplants are in the ground, and for your weekly deep watering for newly planted trees and shrubs.

It might seem that almost every time you finish your hand watering, rain falls. Cause and effect? No. It's your imagination. —AP

Do one thing every day that scares you.
—Eleanor Roosevelt

VIT D TWICE A DAY MAY KEEP VERTIGO AWAY

Researchers have revealed that taking vitamin D and calcium twice a day may reduce your chances of getting vertigo again — a sudden internal or external spinning sensation, often triggered by moving your head too quickly.

"Our study suggests that for people with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, taking a supplement of vitamin D and calcium is a simple, low-risk way to prevent vertigo from recurring," said study researcher Ji-Soo Kim from Seoul National University in South Korea. "It is especially effective if you have low vitamin D levels to begin with," Kim wrote in a paper published in the journal *Neurology*.

About 86 people of people with this form of vertigo find that it interrupts their daily life or causes them to miss days at work.



A DRUG BENEFICIAL FOR KNEE OSTEOARTHRITIS

Researchers have found that bisphosphonates — a class of drugs that prevent the loss of bone density and used to treat osteoporosis and similar diseases — appear to be safe and beneficial for osteoarthritis patients.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis and a leading cause of disability worldwide with more than 300 million sufferers with the condition, yet there are no effective treatments to stop the disease or its progression. According to the study, published in the journal *Osteoarthritis and Cartilage*, one of the lesions in OA that causes pain and progression of the structural pathology of the disease is bone marrow lesions.

Researchers believe bisphosphonates may alter bone marrow lesions, and thereby could improve pain in OA and halt its progression. Alternatively, they could also alter the mechanical properties of bone, thereby potentially contributing to detrimental effects.



DIZZINESS WHILE STANDING LINKED TO DEMENTIA

Researchers have found that people who feel dizzy or lightheaded when they stand up may have an increased risk of developing dementia.

The condition, called orthostatic hypotension, occurs when people experience a sudden drop in blood pressure when they stand up, according to the study published in the journal *Neurology*. The study found the link with dementia only in people who have a drop in their systolic blood pressure, not in people with only a drop in their diastolic blood pressure or their blood pressure overall.

"People's blood pressure when they move from sitting to standing should be monitored. It's possible that controlling these blood pressure drops could be a promising way to help preserve people's thinking and memory skills as they age," said study author Laure Rouch from the University of California in the US.

According to the study, the people with systolic orthostatic hypotension were nearly 40 per cent more likely to develop dementia than those who did not have the condition.



NEW TEST PREDICTS DIABETES IN BABIES

Researchers have come up with a new method to predict which babies will develop type 1 diabetes.

According to the study, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, the new approach moves a step closer to routine testing for newborns which could avoid life threatening complications.

"We know that while genetics have a strong correlation as a risk factor for family members to develop T1D, most newly diagnosed individuals do not have a known family history," said study researcher Sanjoy Dutta from the JDRF, a US-based NGO.

The new approach doubled the efficiency of programmes to screen newborns to prevent the potentially deadly condition of ketoacidosis, a consequence of type 1 diabetes in which insulin deficiency causes the blood to become too acidic.



FLU CLINICS MAY REDUCE PANDEMIC IMPACT

Opening clinics dedicated to treating influenza can limit the number of infected people and help to flatten the curve or reduce the peak prevalence rate, say researchers.

While the work focused on influenza, the findings, published in the journal *PLOS One* are relevant for policymakers seeking ways to reduce impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"Dedicated clinics would have less of an impact than interventions such as vaccination, but at the statewide level, we're talking about cutting the overall number of infections by six figures," said study author Julie Swann from the North Carolina State University in the US.

"And while our work here focussed on the H1N1 strain of influenza, the findings are useful as we grapple with how best to respond to COVID-19," Swann added.





London dreams

Lewandowski scripts another dominating Bayern win over London club, this time against Chelsea to set up Barca clash

Bayern's Robert Lewandowski celebrates with teammate Leon Goretzka after scoring his team's first goal from penalty spot AP

AFP ■ BARCELONA

Lionel Messi scored a brilliant solo goal as Barcelona saw off Napoli on Saturday but they are likely to need something even more special from their captain to beat Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals.

Messi's weaving run and finish came between an early Clement Lenglet header and a Luis Suarez penalty, also won by Messi, as Barca stormed into a 3-0 lead in the first half at Camp Nou.

But Lorenzo Insigne gave Napoli hope just before the interval and an unconvincing second period from Barcelona

left them hanging on for a 3-1 win on the night, 4-2 on aggregate.

"A second goal would have given them a feeling of euphoria that can hurt you," said Barca coach Quique Setien.

"It's normal to get a little nervous."

In winning the penalty, Messi took a heavy kick from Napoli's Kalidou Koulibaly and needed treatment.

"It was a heavy knock," said Setien. "It will have to be treated but I don't think there is a problem."

After finishing five points

behind Real Madrid in La Liga, Barca resumed in the Champions League with doubts hanging over the form of the team and the future of their coach.

And victory against Napoli eases the pressure but the performance will not inspire confidence, even with Messi seemingly rejuvenated after three weeks rest.

Napoli, whose own league season only finished last weekend, should have had the advantage of rhythm but a disastrous opening half an hour left them with too much to do.



Barcelona's Lionel Messi, right, embraces Napoli's goalkeeper David Ospina after the end of Champions League round of 16, second leg soccer match AP

Koulibaly, linked with a move to several elite European clubs this summer, endured a particularly disappointing night.

Yet Barcelona will have to improve significantly to match Bayern, who advanced after putting seven past Chelsea over two legs and are arguably favourites to win the tournament.

"It's going to be very complicated," admitted Setien ahead of the quarter-final on Friday.

Messi now has four goals in his last three games and in a one-off match in Lisbon, the Argentinian is capable of anything.

But Bayern have their own trump card in Robert Lewandowski and a more complete team that makes them heavy favourites to reach the semis.

7-1 IN TWO LEGS

At Allianz Arena, treble-chasing Bayern Munich seal a 4-1 home win over Chelsea in the last 16, return-leg tie after Robert Lewandowski netted twice to.

"The anticipation is enormous. Barcelona has a good team with very good players, but if you look at the last few weeks, we can fly to Portugal with a lot of confidence," said Bayern defender David Alaba.

Lewandowski, the

Champions League's top-scorer, bagged his 12th and 13th goals in Europe this season and played a part in all four Bayern goals in Munich on Saturday.

Leading 3-0 from the first leg at Stamford Bridge in February, before the coronavirus pandemic halted the competition, Bayern progressed 7-1 on aggregate.

"We can be pleased, it was our first game for a month and it's not easy to keep the rhythm," added Alaba.

"We have prepared for this for the last two weeks and you could see the result."

Lewandowski netted a penalty with just 10 minutes gone at the Allianz Arena.

Winger Ivan Perisic then doubled Bayern's lead before England striker Tammy Abraham tapped home a loose ball to give Chelsea brief hope.

However, replacement midfielder Corentin Tolisso put the result beyond doubt when he fired home a Lewandowski pass with 14 minutes to go.

"I am really happy with how we played over the 90 minutes, the first 30 minutes we shut Chelsea out," said Bayern head coach Hansi Flick.

This was a world-class display from Lewandowski who added a late header to his pair of assists.

He is now four goals short of

NUMBER GAME

66 With a brace against Chelsea, Robert Lewandowski is now the outright fourth-highest scoring player in Champions League history, with 66 goals

7 Chelsea's 7-1 defeat on aggregate to Bayern Munich was the second-heaviest inflicted on an English team in CL history, behind only Arsenal's 10-2 aggregate defeat in the last 16 in 2016/17, also against Bayern Munich

7 Robert Lewandowski was involved in all seven of Bayern's goals against Chelsea this season (3 goals, 4 assists). He was the first player to register 3+ goals & assists against an opponent in a season since Luis Figu in 2004/05 vs Roma

35 Lionel Messi has scored against 35 different clubs in the CL; two more than the next best Cristiano Ronaldo

53 Robert Lewandowski has scored 53 goals in 44 appearances in all competitions this season, finding the net in 36 of those 44 matches (82%)

1 Lorenzo Insigne is the first Italian player ever able to score at least one goal at Bernabeu vs Real Madrid and one goal at Camp Nou vs Barcelona in the UCL history

Cristiano Ronaldo's record of 17 Champions League goals in 2013/14.

"It's not a goal of mine," said Lewandowski when asked about Ronaldo's record. "We have a few more games in the knock-out round and I am just as happy creating goals as scoring them."

The Poland star was also coy when asked about a rivalry with Barcelona star Lionel Messi. "We have to perform well and show our quality as a team against a good Barcelona side, it's a big game for everybody."

Pirlo is new Juve boss

AFP ■ TURIN

Former Italy and Juventus star Andrea Pirlo was appointed the Italian champions' new coach, just hours after Maurizio Sarri's sacking with the club promising a "new chapter in world football".

Sarri, 61, leaves Juventus after just one season, a day after the Italian giants crashed out of the Champions League in the last 16 to French club Lyon.

The 41-year-old Pirlo, with no previous top-level coaching experience, recently took over the Juventus U-23 side and arrives on a two-year contract.

"The choice is based on the belief that Pirlo has what it takes to lead from his debut on the bench, an expert and talented squad to pursue new successes," Juventus said.

"Today, begins a new chapter of his career in the world of football: from Maestro to Mister"

Pirlo's swift appointment, a day after their Champions League exit, is again a bold choice for club president Andrea Agnelli.

Other former players have turned to coaching such as Zinedine Zidane, Frank Lampard and Gennaro Gattuso, but Pirlo does so without experience.

The former midfielder does, however, know Juventus and its players well after an impressive four-year spell from 2011 to 2015.

"Pirlo has had a legendary career as a player. In his four years at the centre of the Juventus midfield, he won as many league titles, a Coppa Italia and two Italian Super Cups," Juventus said.

He also won two Champions Leagues and two league titles with AC Milan.

At Juventus, Pirlo will now find himself coaching some of his former teammates such as Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, a year older at 42.



Verstappen wins Silverstone race

AFP ■ SILVERSTONE

Max Verstappen delivered Red Bull's first victory at Silverstone since 2012 on Sunday when he made the most of a superior strategy in sizzling conditions to beat both Mercedes and claim victory in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix.

It was the Dutchman's first victory of the season and the ninth of his career and the first time a race had been won by a driver who did not start on pole position in seven races since last year's Mexican Grand Prix.

Verstappen owed his victory to a team decision to start the race on hard compound tyres while his main rivals all launched from the grid on mediums, the two Mercedes men struggling to manage tyre-wear throughout the race.

During the race, Red Bull asked him to ease off, but he replied saying "I don't want to drive like a grand-ma" before the team relented.

Verstappen won by 11.326 seconds ahead of championship leader and six-time champion Lewis Hamilton who passed Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas in the closing stages.

Bottas, who started from pole, said: "Very frustrating for me, to start from pole and finish third."

"It's not ideal and I think that as a team we were sleeping at some points in the race. My strategy was far from ideal."

Hamilton's podium finish meant he equalled Michael Schumacher's career record of 155 podium finishes. It was also his record-extending 38th points scoring finish in a row.

Charles Leclerc came home fourth after a sterling drive for Ferrari ahead of Alex Albon in the second Red Bull, Lance Stroll and his Racing Point teammate Nico Hulkenberg. Esteban Ocon finished eighth for Renault ahead of Lando Norris of McLaren and Daniil Kvyat of Alpha Tauri.



BCCI may start domestic season from Nov 19

NEW DELHI: The BCCI is mulling November 19 as tentative date for start of domestic season with Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament but Indian players in various IPL teams won't be able to play first few rounds due to quarantine protocols in place.

The delay in the beginning of the domestic season due to pandemic means that only Mushtaq Ali trophy and Ranji Trophy (Dec 13 - March 10) comprising of 245 games (across formats with 38 teams) will be played.

There will be no Vijay Hazare Trophy, Duleep Trophy or Challenger Series this year and as of now there is no provision for Irani Cup also.

"This is a tentative list that has been prepared and it has gone for approval of president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah," a senior BCCI official told PTI.

While this is a draft schedule, it is being asked how the Indian players, who will return from IPL, will play since they will have to be in a 14-day quarantine as per Government rules.

"That's an issue primarily for the uncapped players, who would be with the squad and would like to play some cricket. Now even a player's team is



knocked out before play-offs, he won't be back before November 3 and till Nov 17 will be in quarantine.

"For those whose teams are in play-offs and may reach finals, they will have to miss the first few rounds in that case. But again this is a draft proposal and there could be some tweaks in it," the official said.

However with BCCI expecting to conduct the next IPL in India, starting end of March or early April, it is imperative that they keep a three-week window between Ranji final and beginning of IPL which will help the domestic stars recover after hectic tournament.

PTI

Root hails Poms mental strength after 'brilliant chase'

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

England looked all but beaten when they stumbled to 117-5 in their pursuit of a 277-run target set by Pakistan at Old Trafford but captain Joe Root felt confident about his team's battling qualities.

"We knew it would take something special but after last summer it is very hard to stop believing. It's a real strong trait of ours," he said.

Almost a year on from Ben Stokes' heroic batting display to stun Australia in the 2019 Ashes at Headingley, Jos Buttler and Chris Woakes combined to deliver a counter-attacking display in a 139-run sixth-wicket stand.

Buttler (75) was trapped leg-before with 21 runs still required and the second new ball due, but Woakes (84) struck it out, edging the winning boundary down to third man to seal a famous victory.

"It was a brilliant chase. I couldn't be more proud of the lads," Root said.

"Jos, it shows the mental



Chris Woakes returns to pavilion after he guides England to win in 1st Test AP

strength, to play that situation and manage different passages of it, calculating risks, manipulating the spinner, brilliant innings, and Chris was magnificent too.

Stokes out of series for 'family reasons'

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

England's star all-rounder Ben Stokes will miss the remainder of the three-match Test series against Pakistan due to family reasons, the country's cricket board announced on Sunday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), however, did not specify the exact reasons for his pull-out.

"Stokes will leave the UK later this week and travel to New Zealand. He will

miss England's two Test matches against Pakistan at the Ageas Bowl starting on Thursday 13 August and Friday 21 August," the ECB said in a statement.

He will be flying to Christchurch — where his parents Ged and Deb live.

Stokes' father — a former rugby league international — was hospitalised days ahead of England's Boxing Day Test against South Africa in December last year, and has since been recuperating at home in New Zealand.

"The more important thing is we back it up again, and keep learning, but the clarity with which they played shows the maturity of the group too."

With England losing four quick wickets after lunch, Woakes and Buttler had no

choice but to reel in the target in one-day mode.

"It was good idea to take them on and put them under pressure," Woakes said. "He is one of the best white-ball players in the world — one of best run-chasers — and he showed why today."

Shan, Woakes rise in rankings

DUBAI: Pakistan batsman Shaan Masood's century in the first Test has propelled him to a career-best 19th place in the ICC rankings for Test batsmen while Chris Woakes's match-winning 84-run knock in England's chase helped him jump 18 places.

Left-hander Masood's first-innings knock of 156 pushed him up by 14 places and

he is now second-highest ranked Test batsman for Pakistan behind Babar Azam (6th). Masood's previous best was 32nd position in February this year.

Woakes is now ranked 78th in the batsmen's list. Woakes, who scored 19 and 84 in the match, has also jumped to seventh position in the list of all-rounders.

Buttler's innings of

38 and 75 have lifted him from 44th to 30th while Ollie Pope has attained a career-best 36th after scoring 62 and seven.

In the bowlers' list, Pakistan leg-spinners Yasir Shah moved up two places to 22nd place after finishing with eight wickets in the match. Shadab Khan has re-entered the rankings at a career-best 69th position.

PTI

Saina begins training but will join SAI camp after couple of weeks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

London Olympics Bronze-medallist Saina Nehwal has resumed training at a separate facility in Hyderabad after the coronavirus-induced break and is likely to join the national camp at the SAI Pulella Gopichand Academy in a couple of weeks.

Saina is one of the eight Olympic hopefuls who have been allowed by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to resume training at the SAI Pulella Gopichand Academy from August 7 following the Telangana Government's approval.

However, the former world No 1 has, for the time being, decided to train with shuttle husband Parupalli Kashyap and 2014 Commonwealth Games Bronze medallist RMV Gurusaidutt at a different centre near the Gopichand academy.

"We have been training at a centre near the Gopichand academy for a week now. It is a small facility. We started with the basics as it was a long time that we were hitting the court," Kashyap, a former Commonwealth Games champion, said.

"Saina has just joined. She will probably start training at the Gopichand academy in a couple of weeks. She wants to get fitter and reach a decent level. She has sought the permission of Gopi sir and discussed it with new Indonesian coach Agus Dwi Santoso," he added.

Kashyap, who is currently ranked 24th in the world, believes the Gopichand academy is equipped with enough courts to accommodate a few more players, who can start training by following social distancing and other regulations laid down by SAI.

Akram criticises Ali's captaincy

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Fast bowling great Wasim Akram has come down heavily on Pakistan captain Azhar Ali for his decisions during the first Test against England, saying he "missed a trick quite a few times" in the visitors' three-wicket defeat here.

Akram was particularly critical of Ali's decision to under-bowl pacer Naseem Shah, who was used for just 13 overs out of 82 in the second innings while defending a target of 277.

"It will hurt. It will hurt the Pakistan team and the cricket lovers in Pakistan," Akram was quoted as saying by Sky Sports.

"Winning and losing is part of cricket, but I think our captain missed a trick quite a few times in this game, as far as his leadership is concerned," the former Pakistan captain said.

Akram felt with England reduced to 117 for five, the need of the hour was to put pressure on Buttler, who was fighting for his Test spot, and Woakes, who averaged just 5.22 with the bat in his previous six Tests.

"When Woakes came in, there were no bouncers, no short deliveries, they let him settle down and runs were coming easy," Akram said dissecting the errors of Pakistan skipper Ali.

"Once the partnership got going, nothing happened — the turn didn't happen, swing didn't happen — and Buttler and Woakes just took the game away."

'LET OFF THE HOOK' Pakistan head coach Misbah-ul-



Haq is not happy with his side's below-par batting effort in the first Test but more disappointing to him was how the visitors let England off the hook during their run chase.

"...We are disappointed that we let England off the hook after they were five wickets down at one stage. The way Buttler and Woakes counter-attacked our bowlers it was very skilful," Misbah said.

"Over all, we could have done better with the bat in the second innings. It would have been a different scenario if it was a 300 above target. It is very important to put up decent score in the second innings against England's quality bowling attack in their own conditions."

Serena fit & ready to play

LEXINGTON: Serena Williams on Saturday said that she is pressing ahead with plans to play in the US Open despite a wave of player withdrawals from the upcoming Grand Slam event over coronavirus fears.

The 23-time Slam winner returns to tennis next week at the inaugural Top Seed Open WTA event in Lexington, Kentucky, relaunching her season after a six-month hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Williams, who was one of the first players to commit to the US Open despite the pandemic, said her plans remain unchanged, adding that she was tentatively planning to go to



Europe for the rescheduled French Open.

"I see myself doing it all if it happens," Williams said when asked about her schedule during a virtual press conference.

"But I am not planning for the future, as tournaments got

cancelled I was just like, 'Let me just work on today and see what happens.'"

Williams revealed that she had been practicing on her own court, built with the same hard-court surface used at the US Open. She has also stayed fit with construction of a home gym.

Serena, who is also scheduled to play the Western and Southern Open tune-up event in New York before the US Open, admitted that only tournament play would allow her to properly gauge her fitness.

"Everyone has an opportunity to be more fit now, because we spent so much time at home

to work on ourselves," Williams said. "Fitness wise, there is going to be a tonne of fitness, but match fitness is different to fit-fitness."

Williams, who turns 39 in September, meanwhile said she was unable to say whether she would be at the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

"That is just looking too far ahead, I don't know if Tokyo plans to be in Tokyo, we will have to wait and see," she said.

"I don't know what to expect. One thing I have learned is don't plan, I am living for the day and for the moment, in a good way but I am not making plans too far out." AFP