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MISSES GOLD BY 1CM

NEW DELHI, MONDAY AUGUST 23, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

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10 VIVACITY

India flies 392 more to freedom

With the latest evacuation, the number of people flown in from Kabul since last Monday reached 590

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up efforts to bring its citizens back home, India on Sunday airlifted 392 people, besides some Afghan politicians, from Kabul to New Delhi. They were evacuated in three different flights of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Air India. Some more flights are planned in the days to come to safely bring back stranded Indian citizens from Afghanistan.

A team of Indian officials is now based in Kabul to assist those Indians who want to return home. However, the operations will depend on those willing to return being able to reach the airport. The Taliban has set up checkpoints at various places in the Afghan capital and roads leading to it from other provinces, sources said here on Sunday.

Giving details of the operation to fly back the lucky ones to New Delhi and Hindon near the national Capital on

Taliban say 'hundreds of fighters' heading for Panjshir Valley

Dubai: The Taliban said on Sunday that "hundreds" of its fighters were heading to the Panjshir Valley, one of the few parts of Afghanistan not yet controlled by the group. Since the Taliban overran Afghanistan, flickers of resistance have begun to emerge with some ex-Government troops gathering in the Panjshir, north of Kabul, long known as an anti-Taliban bastion.

Af returnees get polio shots on arrival in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Afghanistan and Pakistan being the only two countries in the world where polio is still endemic, India on Sunday said as a preventive measure it has decided to give polio vaccinating to those returning from the violence-hit nation.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said this on Sunday even as he shared a photo where returnees could be seen getting jabs at the Delhi international airport. In 2014, India was officially declared polio-free, along with the rest of the South-East Asia Region.

"We have decided to vaccinate Afghanistan returnees with free polio vaccine — OPV



People who were stranded in crisis-hit Afghanistan arrive by a special repatriation flight of the IAF at the Hindon Air Force Station, in Ghaziabad on Sunday

PTI

Sunday, officials said the rescued people included two Afghan Members of Parliament. With the latest evacuation, the number of people flown in by India from Kabul since last Monday reached 590.

A total of 168 people, includ-

ing 107 Indians and 23 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, were flown from Kabul to Hindon airbase near Delhi in a C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft of the IAF on Sunday. Another group of 87 Indians and two Nepalese nationals were brought back in a special Air India flight from Dushanbe, a day after they were evacuated to the Tajikistan capital in an IAF C-130J transport aircraft, officials said.

Separately, 135 Indians, who were earlier evacuated from Kabul to Doha in the last few days by the US and NATO aircraft were flown back from the Qatari capital city to Delhi on a special flight, they said.

The group of 168 people, who were evacuated from Kabul, included Afghan lawmakers Anarkali Honaryar and Narender Singh Khalsa and their families, sources said.

"India is our second home. Even if we are Afghans and live in that country, people often call us Hindustanis. I thank India for extending its helping hand," Khalsa told reporters at the Hindon airbase near Delhi.

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Situation in Af shows why CAA is needed: Puri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the Afghanistan crisis and India's ongoing evacuation exercise following the Taliban takeover of the country, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Sunday cited the evacuations from Afghanistan to back the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The law allows citizenship to persecuted non-Muslims who reached India before 2015.

"Recent developments in our volatile neighbourhood and the way Sikhs & Hindus are going through a harrowing time are precisely why it was necessary to enact the Citizenship Amendment Act," the Minister tweeted, quoting a media report on the evacuation of 168 people — which included 23 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus — from Kabul by the Indian Air Force. The Taliban



takeover of Afghanistan has triggered an exodus, especially of foreigners, religious and sectarian minorities.

Over the past week, hundreds of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus have been lining up at the Kabul international airport, looking for a way out of Afghanistan.

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7 Afghans killed in chaos at Kabul airport

Kabul: A panicked crush of people trying to enter Kabul's international airport killed seven Afghan civilians in the crowds, the British military said on Sunday, showing the danger still posed to those trying to flee the Taliban's takeover of the country. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, too, on Sunday described as "incredibly volatile" the situation at the airport and said several citizens had died. The deaths came as a new, perceived threat from the Islamic State group affiliate in Afghanistan has seen US military planes do rapid, diving combat landings at the airport surrounded by Taliban fighters.

Other aircraft have shot off flares on takeoff, an effort to confuse possible heat-seeking missiles targeting the planes.

The changes come as the US Embassy issued a new secu-



A Taliban fighter stands guard at a checkpoint in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighbourhood in the city of Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday

AP

urity warning telling citizens not to travel to the Kabul airport without individual instruction from a US Government representative. Officials declined to provide more specifics about the IS threat but described it as significant. They said there have

been no confirmed attacks as yet by the militants, who have battled the Taliban in the past.

On Sunday, the British military acknowledged the seven deaths of civilians in the crowds in Kabul.

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FinMin summons Infosys on income tax portal glitches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the new I-T portal continued to have glitches and remained unavailable for two consecutive days, the Finance Ministry "summoned" Infosys MD and CEO Salil Parekh on Monday to explain to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman the reasons for the continued snags even after over two months of the site's launch.

However, just ahead of the meeting with Sitharaman, Infosys late on Sunday night said that emergency maintenance on the website had been concluded and the portal was live again. Infosys India Business, which is the Twitter handle of Infosys India Business unit, in a tweet said: "The emergency maintenance of the @IncomeTaxIndia portal has concluded and the portal is live. We regret any inconvenience caused to taxpayers."

The new income tax e-filing portal Incometax.Gov.In, developed by Infosys, had a bumpy start from the day of its launch on June 7, as it continued to face tech glitches with users complaining that certain functionalities were either

Site goes live late at night after emergency maintenance



unavailable or too slow.

Consequently, the I-T Department had to allow manual filing of remittance forms and also extend due dates for electronic filing of forms related to intimidation by pension funds and sovereign wealth funds.

"Ministry of Finance has summoned Salil Parekh, MD & CEO @Infosys on 23/08/2021 to explain to FM as to why even after 2.5 months since launch of new e-filing portal, glitches in the portal have not been resolved.

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CAPSULE

FM TO LAUNCH NATIONAL MONETISATION PIPELINE

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday will launch the National Monetisation Pipeline, which will list out the Government's infrastructure assets to be sold over the next four years, an official statement said. **P9**

QUAD'S WAR GAMES TO BEGIN ON THURSDAY

New Delhi: The Quad countries — India, the US, Australia and Japan — will carry out the next edition of the high-voltage Malabar naval exercise from August 26 to 29 off the coast of Guam amid mounting global concerns over China's growing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region. **P4**

L GANESAN APPOINTED GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR

New Delhi: Senior BJP leader from Tamil Nadu La Ganesan was on Sunday appointed as the new Governor of Manipur. The post of the Governor had fallen vacant after the retirement of Najma Heptulla earlier this month.

Both Hurriyat factions may be banned soon

PNS ■ JAMMU/NEW DELHI

After exposing the murky deals of a section of Hurriyat leaders who were found selling Pakistan-based MBBS seats to fund terrorism in the Kashmir Valley, the Union Government is set to impose a permanent ban on both factions of the Hurriyat Conference under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The Hurriyat Conference was formed in 1993 with 26 groups, including some pro-Pakistan and banned outfits such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, the JKLF and the Dukhtar-e-Millat (DeM) among others. The grouping also included the People's Conference and the Awami Action Committee

headed by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq.

The original separatist conglomerate broke into two factions in 2005. The moderate group was led by the Mirwaiz and the hard-line faction was headed by Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Both factions are estimated to have linkages with Pakistan's ISI-Army combine as also the political parties there, sources in the security agencies said.

The Centre had earlier banned the Jamaat-e-Islami and the JKLF under the UAPA.

Dropping clear hints of an imminent crackdown against both the factions of the Hurriyat, official sources said, "It is a matter of time."

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2,800 trees to pay with life for Ayodhya airport's birth

But 7,87,00,000 trees to be planted under compensatory afforestation norms

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least 2,800 trees will be chopped for the development of the proposed ₹242.14-crore Ayodhya airport in Uttar Pradesh. However, the Government is making sure that nature does not pay for the developmental projects in Ayodhya. The plantation of more than 7,87,00,000 trees has been stipulated under com-

pensatory afforestation as per the project report.

The Yogi Government's pet project, Ayodhya Airport, is planned to be developed in Faziabad city. It will serve the districts of Bahraich, Gonda, Sultanpur, Amethi and Basti in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The proposed airport, to be known as Maryada

Purushottam Sriram Airport, Ayodhya, will be spread over 347.62 acres (140.67 ha) of land, including 177.62 acres needed for existing runway. About 170 acres (68.79 ha) of additional land has already been hand over by the district administration for the proposed development activities.

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Cong calls Baghel, Deo to Delhi to resolve Ch'garh rift

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

With resentment between Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and his Cabinet colleague TS Singh Deo growing and both washing dirty linen in public, the Congress leadership has summoned both to Delhi on Tuesday.

The resolution of the internal tussle between the duo in the State Congress, which rules Chhattisgarh with two-third majority, has now become another headache for the central leadership after tackling rifts in Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya



Pradesh, Karnataka, and a couple of North Eastern States.

With both sides threatening to resign, party sources said Baghel and Deo have been called to meet senior leaders separately. This was the same method the Congress high command applied in Punjab unit and was also making similar attempts in Rajasthan to

solve the crisis.

Baghel and Deo are likely to meet AICC general secretary organisation KC Venugopal, State in-charge PL Punia, Pawan Bansal among few others first and, then if need be, former party chief Rahul Gandhi and then Congress president Sonia Gandhi, as per the AICC sources.

After the Assam Assembly elections where he was made the in-charge, Baghel has come into the good books of the party high command that may now reward him by making him responsible for managing the election affairs in Uttar Pradesh next year.

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We thank God, India for saving us: Af lawmaker

New Delhi: "All achievements of the last 20 years in Afghanistan have been lost. Nothing is left. It's zero now," said Afghan lawmaker Narender Singh Khalsa soon after his arrival along with 167 others at the Hindon airbase on Sunday as part of India's evacuation mission from Taliban besieged Kabul.

The Sikh lawmaker thanked the Indian Government for rescuing him, his family and several other members of his community. Recalling the harrowing experience of the past seven days after the Taliban took control of Kabul, Khalsa said the situation is "very bad" and appealed to the Indian Government to rescue the remaining stranded Hindus and

Sikhs from the war-torn country.

"The Taliban used to ask us to remain in Afghanistan saying your security is our responsibility. As there are so many groups of Taliban, we do not know whom to speak to and whom to believe. That's why we decided to leave as the situation is serious," he added.

Khalsa said almost all Indians and Afghan Sikhs were taking shelter at gurudwaras in Kabul and elsewhere and that some 200 other Indians and Indian-origin people are waiting to be rescued.

"We are worried about our people who are still staying there," he said. Asked about the brief detention of Indians and the

Afghan Sikhs and Hindus on Saturday by the Taliban when they were on their way to the Kabul airport.

"They separated us from the Indians...In each of the gates at the airport, 5000-6000 people were standing. Initially, we could not go inside," he said.

"A person from Taliban harassed us. Then we left the place and came to a gurudwara. Our Indian friends were also harassed. It was difficult to understand who was a good person and who was bad. Then around 8 at night, we entered the airport by a VIP entry point," he added.

Khalsa said the temples and gurudwaras in Afghanistan are unharmed and safe so far. **PTI**



Indian Naval Vessel Shakti reaches Colombo, Sri Lanka with 100 tons of oxygen from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. More oxygen consignments are scheduled from India

Amarinder takes exception to 'atrocious' comments by two of Sidhu's advisors

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh asked State Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu on Sunday to "rein in" his advisers after two of them made "atrocious" comments recently on sensitive issues like Kashmir and Pakistan.

In a statement issued here, Singh warned against such "atrocious and ill-conceived comments that were potentially dangerous to the peace and stability of the State and the country".

The Chief Minister, who has been at loggerheads with

Sidhu in the past, trained his guns on the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC) chief's advisors.

He urged them to stick to giving advice to Sidhu and not speak on matters "of which they clearly had little or no knowledge and had no understanding of the implications of their comments".

Singh was reacting to the reported remarks of Pyare Lal Garg, questioning his criticism of Pakistan, as well as an earlier statement made by Malwinder Singh Mali on Kashmir. Both of them were recently appointed by Sidhu as his advisors.

Cong calls Baghel, Deo to Delhi to resolve Ch'garh rift

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Last month, Baghel met party chief Sonia, Rahul, and Priyanka Gandhi.

Baghel's rival, Health Minister Deo, has been giving trouble to the Congress which is ruling the State with a very comfortable majority. He claims that the party promised half tenure (two and half year) to him after anointing Baghel as the CM soon after the Assembly results were declared in December 2018.

As per the claims made by Deo and his side, Baghel should vacate now that 2.5 years have elapsed, a promise which the party has time and again denied making.

Situation in Af shows why CAA is needed: Puri

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Fearful of religious persecution, these minorities are pleading to the Governments of India, the US, and the European Union to be evacuated from the war-torn country at the earliest. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi also posted pictures of the evacuation efforts on Twitter. Bagchi posted details of the evacuation efforts by Air India and IndiGo flights. He also posted a short video clip where the evacuees can be seen chanting "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", adding more evacuation flights will follow.

The crisis in Afghanistan has brought the controversial CAA again into discourse as it aims to grant Indian citizenship to persecuted Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who arrived in India before the end of December 2014. The rules under the Act are yet to be notified. The CAA was passed in December 2019 and one of its provisions

promises the grant of permanent citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan fleeing religious persecution. The Opposition parties and several groups have protested against the implementation of CAA. The detractors of CAA believe that the law, coupled with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise is intended to target the minorities in India.

The Ministry of Home Affairs had earlier stated that it is committed to repatriating all Indians and Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. It has recently reviewed the visa provisions and created a new e-visa category for Afghan nationals -- mainly Hindus and Sikhs -- to apply online.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi early this week chaired a high-level meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security on the Afghan situation and directed officials to ensure the safe evacuation of all Indian citizens and also to provide refuge to Sikhs and Hindus wanting to come to India.

Both Hurriyat factions may be banned soon

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The Government is expected to declare Hurriyat Conference to be unlawful."

Official sources in the J&K Home Department claimed an ongoing probe into funding of terror groups has clearly established the alleged involvement of secessionist and separatist leaders, including the members and cadres of the Hurriyat Conference who have been acting in connivance with active militants of proscribed terrorist organisations Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), DeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

On the basis of material evidence collected so far, the Centre is most likely to crack its whip by issuing a notification in the Official Gazette, declaring such association to be unlawful. The Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Police have so far arrested four separatist leaders while it is looking for others in connection with the case. The FIR in the case was registered in July 2020.

Referring to the modus operandi, official sources said, the Hurriyat cadres raised funds in the country and from abroad through various illegal channels, including hawala, for funding separatist and terrorist activities in J&K. The funds collected were used for causing disruption in the Kashmir Valley by way of pelt-

ing stones on security forces, systematically burning schools, damaging public property and waging war against India as part of a criminal conspiracy, they claimed.

A large number of second-rung separatist leaders are currently lodged in different jails in connection with the terror-funding cases.

They include separatist leaders Altaf Ahmed Shah, the son-in-law of Geelani; businessman Zahoore Ahmed Watali; Geelani's close aide Ayaz Akbar, who is also the spokesperson of the hard-line separatist organisation Tehreek-e-Hurriyat; Peer Saifullah; Shahid-ul-Islam, spokesperson of the moderate Hurriyat Conference; Mehrajuddin Kalwal; Nayeem Khan; and Farooq Ahmed Dar alias 'Bitta Karate'.

Yasin Malik, chief of the JKLE, DeM head Asiya Andrabi and pro-Pakistan separatist Masarat Alam were also named in a supplementary charge sheet in a case of terror financing.

Another case which is likely to be cited for banning the two Hurriyat Conference factions is the one against PDP youth leader Waheed-ur-Rahman Parra, who is alleged to have paid Rs 5 crore to the son-in-law of Geelani for keeping Kashmir in turmoil after

the death of Hizbul Mujahideen terror commander Burhan Wani in 2016, the officials said.

The NIA has alleged that after the death of Wani, who was killed in an encounter with the Army in July 2016, Parra got in touch with Altaf Ahmad Shah, alias Altaf Fantoosh, and asked him to ensure that the Valley was kept on the boil with widespread unrest and stone-pelting.

Also, the Counter Intelligence (Kashmir), a branch of the CID department of J&K Police, registered a case in July last year following information that several unscrupulous persons, including some Hurriyat leaders, were hand in glove with some educational consultancies and are selling Pakistan-based MBBS seats and securing admission in other professional courses in various colleges and universities there.

In this case, four persons, including Mohammad Akbar Bhat alias Zaffar Bhat, self-styled chairman of Salvation Movement which is part of moderate Hurriyat Conference, were arrested.

The constituents of Hurriyat Conference were allegedly "selling" MBBS seats in Pakistan to Kashmiri students and using a part of the funds for fuelling terrorism.

7 Afghans killed...

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There have been stampedes and crushing injuries in the crowds, especially as Taliban fighters fire into the air to drive away those desperate to get on any flight out of the country.

"Conditions on the ground remain extremely challenging but we are doing everything we can to manage the situation as safely and securely as possible," the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

On Saturday, British and Western troops in full combat gear tried to control the crowds pressing in. They carried away some who were sweating and pale. With temperatures reaching 34 degree Celsius the soldiers sprayed water from a hose on those gathered or gave them bottled water to pour over their heads.

"Listen sir, you need to calm down," one soldier told a man laying in the dirt, as another gave him an orange liquid. "Calm down." It wasn't immediately clear whether those killed had been physically crushed, suffocated or suffered a fatal heart attack in the crowds.

Soldiers covered several corpses in white clothes to hide them from view. Other troops stood atop concrete barriers or shipping containers, trying to calm the crowd. Gunshots occasionally rang out.

Amir Khan Motaqi, chief of the Taliban's guidance council, criticised America over the situation at the airport in an audio clip posted online Sunday.

He described the US' actions as "tyranny" — even as it is Taliban fighters who have beaten and shot at those trying to access the airport over the last week.

"All Afghanistan is secure, but the airport which is managed by the Americans has anarchy," he said. "The US should not defame itself, should not embarrass itself to the world and should not give this mentality to our people that (the Taliban) are a kind of enemy."

Speaking to an Iranian state television channel late on Saturday night in a video call, Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem also blamed the deaths at the airport on the Americans in what quickly became a combative interview. "The Americans announced that we would take you to America with us and people gathered at Kabul airport," Naeem said. "If it was announced right now in any country in the world, would people not go?" The host on Iranian state TV, which long has criticised America since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, quickly said: "It won't happen in Iran."

Naeem responded: "Be sure this will happen anywhere." The Biden administration is considering calling on US commercial airlines to provide planes and crews to assist in transporting Afghan refugees once they are evacuated from their country by military aircraft. Under the voluntary Civil Reserve Air Fleet program, civilian airlines add to military aircraft capability during a crisis related to national defence. That programme was born in the wake of the Berlin airlift. **AP**

FinMin summons...

From Page 1

In fact, since 21/08/2021 the portal itself is not available," the Income Tax department tweeted.

As users complained of various glitches after a fortnight of launch, Sitharaman on June 22, called a meeting with key officials of Infosys to review the issues on the portal. The Minister had then asked Infosys to address all issues without further loss of time, improve their services, and redress grievances on priority as it was impacting taxpayers adversely.

Infosys CEO Salil Parekh, and COO Pravin Rao, along with other company officials, took note of the issues highlighted by the stakeholders.

They also acknowledged the technical issues in the functioning of the portal and shared the status of the resolution with respect to the issues highlighted by the stakeholders, an official statement issued after the meeting had said.

In 2019, Infosys was awarded a contract to develop the next-generation income tax filing system to reduce processing time for returns from 63 days to one day and expedite refunds. Till June 2021, the Government has paid Rs 164.5 crore to Infosys for developing the portal.

Infosys India Business, which is the twitter handle of Infosys India Business unit, in a tweet on Sunday said, "The @IncomeTaxIndia portal continues to be under emergency maintenance. We will post an update once the portal is available again for taxpayers. We regret the inconvenience."

It had on Saturday tweeted that the Income Tax portal is "currently inaccessible due to planned maintenance."

Quoting the I-T department tweet, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Senior Advisor, Kanchan Gupta, tweeted, "This is the second major GoI project @Infosys has messed up. The first

was #GST portal. Now it is #IncomeTax portal. Infosys bags GoI projects using L1 route which limits its options. Clearly lacks either capacity or intent to deliver. Two 'failures' in a row cannot be coincidence."

"L1" route refers to the lowest bidder in the tender for a contract.

Infosys had also developed the GST Network (GSTN) portal, used for GST payment and return filing. The software major had faced flak for slow functioning of the GSTN portal.

Sitharaman last week had said that technical glitches in the new e-filing portal will be largely fixed in the next few days and that she has been constantly reminding Infosys about the issue.

"I have been reminding Infosys constantly, and (Infosys head) Nandan Nilekani has been messaging me with assurances that next couple of days they will sort out majority of problems," she had said, adding that to a large extent, the system is far better than what it was in June but still some issues remain.

The revenue secretary is monitoring this on a weekly basis, she had said, adding the glitches will be fixed largely in the next couple of weeks.

Earlier this month, in a reply to a Parliament question on whether technical glitches continue to mar the functioning of the new IT portal, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary had said most of the issues reported by tax payers pertain to non-availability or technical issues of certain functionalities or forms. "Certain key functionalities like user profile, dashboard, filing of ITR 1, 2 & 4, e-proceedings including Video conferencing requests, Digital Signing Certificate, viewing of old Income Tax returns, e-verification, e-PAN service, Aadhaar-PAN Linking, Adding Authorised Representative, etc. Are available to the users," he had said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

India flies 392 more to freedom

From Page 1

"I am feeling like crying. Everything is finished. It is a very difficult and painful decision to leave the country. We have not seen such a situation. Everything has been snatched away. It's all over," a visibly despondent Khalsa said when asked about the situation in Afghanistan.

Thanking India for undertaking these missions, Afghanistan Ambassador at India Farid Mamundzay said, "I appreciate the kind words of sympathy and support messages from all Indian friends and the diplomatic missions in New Delhi over the suffering of Afghans in the past few weeks, particularly the last seven-eight days."

"The avoidable suffering of Afghanistan is man-made and at a scale beyond all civilised contemplation. Afghanistan is going through a difficult time, and only good leadership, compassionate attitude and international support to the Afghan people would somewhat bring an end to these miseries," he tweeted.

India carried out the evacuation missions in coordination with the US and several other friendly countries. A group of Indian officials is coordinating the evacuation mission at the Kabul airport and another batch of Indians is expected to be brought back from the Afghan capital on

Monday. Sources said Afghan nationals with Indian visas are facing increasing scrutiny from the Taliban.

The small group of Indian officials in Kabul is coordinating the country's evacuation missions amid continuing chaos and a challenging ground situation, sources said.

The multi-agency group is coordinating with the American officials handling security at the airport as well as other relevant authorities, they said. The US armed forces are controlling the Kabul international airport.

"Evacuation continues! IAF special repatriation flight with 168 passengers on board, including 107 Indian nationals is on its way to Delhi from Kabul," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted hours before the plane landed at Hindon.

It is learnt that the Indians evacuated to Doha from Kabul were employees of a number of foreign companies that were operating in Afghanistan.

"Bringing Indians home from Afghanistan! AI 1956 carrying 87 Indians departs from Tajikistan for New Delhi. Two Nepalese nationals also evacuated. "Assisted and supported by our Embassy @IndEmbDushanbe. More evacuation flights to follow," Bagchi tweeted at around 1:20

AM.

Two days after the Taliban seized control of Kabul, India evacuated 200 people including the Indian envoy and other staffers of its embassy in Kabul in two C-17 heavy-lift transport aircraft of the IAF.

The first evacuation flight brought back over 40 people, mostly staffers at the Indian Embassy, on Monday last. The second C-17 aircraft evacuated around 150 people including Indian diplomats, officials, security personnel and some stranded Indians from Kabul on Tuesday.

Following the evacuation, the External Affairs Ministry said the focus now would be to ensure the safe return of all Indian nationals from the Afghan capital.

The Ministry said the immediate priority for the Government is to obtain accurate information about all Indian nationals currently staying in Afghanistan.

It also requested the Indians as well as their employers to urgently share the relevant details with the special Afghanistan cell that was set up on August 16.

Sources said the cell received more than 2,000 phone calls and answered over 6,000 WhatsApp queries during the first five days of its operation. The cell answered more than 1200 e-mails during the period.

2,800...

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The pact for the development of the airport has been signed between the Uttar Pradesh Government and Airport Authority of India (AAI), which is project proponent.

Besides 2,800 trees, the AAI has identified at least 298 other obstacles, including seven cell towers, four each electric poles and sign boards, which will be removed during its construction, said the DPR prepared by the AAI.

While seeking its approval from the Central green panel, the project proponent has enlisted a range of benefits it will bring in such as better infrastructure facilities for air passengers, promotion of tourism, trade, commerce, etc., and increase in regional economy as it will boost tourism and commercial activities in the region, besides more employment opportunities for the locals.

The State Government is providing extra land free of cost for the further expansion and for the construction of a terminal.

About two aircraft will be operated per day in the proposed Ayodhya Airport. With the development of the airport, there is expected to be a huge growth of air traffic from the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, said the AAI. According to the Government, total 76,72,337 trees were cut down between 2016-17 and 2018-19.



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Makeshift hosps to remain in standby mode

To face severity of possible third Covid wave

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

When Covid-19 turned into a global pandemic, many nations across the world came up with a strategy to set up makeshift hospitals to cater to the needs of growing infected patients as the virus challenged the healthcare facilities even of all the developed nations. Apart from the medical oxygen-crisis, limited healthcare facilities during the second Covid wave was also one of the most apparent reasons for the devastating pandemic in India. As the virus continued to pose challenges to the healthcare facilities across the nation, many makeshift hospitals were constructed on an urgent basis to accommodate the patients suffering from the infection. The Indian Railways stopped all trains and converted many coaches into isolation centres for the patients.

However, the daily Covid case trajectory has shown the declining trend now, all makeshift hospitals in the national Capital Delhi are operational and will remain in a



standby mode to face the severity of a possible third Covid wave.

The health scientists are continuously warning about the possible third wave in India anytime. Recently, the Delhi Government announced building seven makeshift hospitals with 7,000 ICU beds in the next six months to prepare for a potential third covid wave. These seven makeshift hospitals will be constructed by the

public works department (PWD) in Sarita Vihar, Shalimar Bagh, Sultanpuri, Kirari, Raghunagar, GTB Hospital, and Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya.

The makeshift Covid-19 facility attached to the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital at Ramlala Maidan started operations with 250 ICU beds during the second wave. Dr Ritu Saxena, Media Cell Chief, says that the

makeshift Covid-19 facility at Ram Leela ground is fully operational and "we are planning the extension of the facility there as per the direction from the government to prepare in advance for possible third wave. She said, "Till we get any direction from the government, the facility will remain operational." Though, she accepts that only a few Covid patients are visiting the facility now.

Dr Purvi Verma, Clinical Doctor at the CWG Covid care center, said, "We are ready to face the challenges of the third wave with two oxygen plants ready and a total of 450 beds attached with the oxygen supply."

She said we have two halls here where 450 beds are available along with 50 beds with ICU facilities. "We have received directions for 460 beds to be in complete operation". A Medical Mobile Unit (MMU) facility also runs from the CWG center that detects the Covid patients and provides quality treatment. The facility is presently running in New Delhi district.

"SPCCC Radha Soami Satsang Beas in Chhatrapur will continue to function till further orders. We will continue to manage the centre till the time we are asked to do so", ITBP spokesperson Vivek Kumar Pandey said. He said, "However, we are receiving near to zero Covid patients and have reduced the staff for the facility. We will continue to be operational till we get any direction from the government.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain recently said that all necessary measures are being taken and health infrastructure is being ramped up to unprecedented levels with more than 37,000 Covid-19 dedicated beds being built for the fight against the likely third wave of Covid-19. He said that if third wave comes, it will be milder than the second wave in Delhi at least because the majority of the cases that emerged during April-May this year were caused by the Delta variant, implying the majority of the population may already have antibodies.

Metro services hit for 3 hrs on section of Pink Line

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several passengers faced discomfort as services were affected for about three hours on a section of the Pink Line due to a technical snag on Saturday night.

Services between Majlis Park and Rajouri Garden stations were affected due to a technical issue with the OHE (overhead equipment) line, sources said.

The Pink Line was fully connected, end-to-end, after a small segment near Trilokpuri was bridged.

The 59-km-long Majlis Park-Shiv Vihar corridor or the Pink Line, spans 38 stations. The snag occurred about 7 pm and was fixed around 10 pm, sources said.

Earlier, the DMRC tweeted at 7.17 pm: "Pink Line Update Delay in service between Majlis Park and Rajouri Garden. Normal services on all other lines".

Around 10.11 pm, it tweeted: "Pink Line Update. "Normal service has resumed". "There was a delay on the Pink Line between Majlis Park and Rajouri Garden due to an



OHE-related issue. It was resolved and services were normalised around 10 pm. It was not a major issue," a source said.

Many commuters had taken to Twitter to share the hardship faced by them due to the long delay in services.

Delhi Metro to replace existing lights with LEDs



LED lighting system installed at the concourse area of Shivaji Station Airport Line as Delhi Metro is upgrading to LED system to save energy and provide a much better lighting experience

PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro has undertaken a massive drive to replace the conventional existing lights with 'Light-emitting diode' (LED) lights at 155 locations covering Metro stations, depots, parking etc.

The decision to replace conventional lights (incandescent bulbs, fluorescent lamps, CFL lamps etc) is taken with an aim to save energy and provide a much better lighting experience.

A senior DMRC official said that the DMRC has already covered 75 per cent of the drive in recent months by installing around one lakh LED lights at these locations by replacing the conventional lights.

The official further said that remaining 25 per cent of the drive will be completed by the end of October 2021 wherein around 35000 LED lights will be installed in the remaining portion of these locations.

"The LED based light system will help DMRC save around half of the energy expenditure vis a vis the existing lighting system. As a result, the whole cost of installing these lights will be recovered by DMRC in around two years

time," he said.

The lifespan of LEDs is long as compared to conventional existing lights with much reduced maintenance cost. The average LED lasts 50,000 operating hours or more. It is more than 40 times of the lifespan of an incandescent bulb. In addition, LED lights have an energy efficiency component which makes them consume a very low amount of power.

Talking about challenges in undertaking this drive, he said that it was a challenging task for the DMRC maintenance teams as there is regular movement of people. "The work had to be executed at night time due to safety reasons which in turn increased the installation time. Even during night, the work could be carried out for around two hours only in a day since the time window available from the close of last passenger service and commencement of first passenger service is very limited and other important operational preparedness and routine maintenance activities are undertaken in this period only," he said.

DMRC had to arrange special scaffoldings and cranes to cover the spaces at twice or thrice the normal height of a building which is again very tricky and a time consuming exercise, he added.

Global syndicate of fake Indian currency notes busted, 2 held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police has busted a Dubai based international syndicate of fake Indian currency notes with the arrest of its two members from Delhi's Sarai Kale Khan area.

Fine quality Fake Indian Currency Note (FICN) of ₹4 lakhs were recovered from the accused, identified as Mohammad Jakir and Kamre Alam, who also circulated fake Indian notes in Delhi NCR on the directions of a Dubai based man.

The recovered amount were in the denomination of 100 and 200 rupee notes, police said.

According to Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, in the past few months, information was being received through sources about a FICN syndicate operated by a Dubai based person named Sariq alias Sata.

"Sariq is involved in the circulation of FICN in Delhi-NCR in a large quantity. But through surveillance and tracking skills, our team found out that the FICN racket is being operated by Jakir and Alam in Delhi NCR on the direction of

Dubai based Sariq," said the DCP.

"On August 20, police team got a tip off that a delivery of FICN would take place near Sarai Kale Khan here. A trap was laid and during the late evening hours, Zakir who supplied FICN in Delhi and NCR was apprehended with a total FICN of Rs. Four lakhs," said the DCP.

"Later, his associate -- Kamre Alam, was also apprehended from Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh. During interrogation, it was further revealed the syndicate is being run by Dubai based Sariq who has links with Pakistan," said the DCP.

"Sariq is the kingpin of the sata gang that steals luxury cars in Delhi-NCR and other states. He is involved in more than 50 cases of auto theft, robbery, dacoity, Gunda Act, NSA etc. After shifting Dubai, besides operating a motor vehicle theft gang, he also started dealing in FICN," said the DCP.

"On his direction, fake Indian currencies are circulated in Delhi NCR and other states by accused Kamre Alam and Zakir. They exchanged these fake notes with original Indian currency notes at the rate of Rs 60 for Rs 100 FICN," said the DCP.

Air quality commission asks city, States to adopt ISRO's protocol for farm fire estimation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the harvesting season, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has asked Delhi and neighbouring States to ensure the adoption and application of a standard protocol developed by ISRO for estimation of crop residue burning fire events using satellite data.

The commission, mandated to devise and execute plans to prevent and control air pollution in the national capital region and adjoining areas, has also asked Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan to develop a time-bound comprehensive action plan, in consultation with stakeholder agencies responsible for monitoring and reporting of agriculture residue burning events, based on the protocol.

The commission had stressed the need to develop and implement a standardised methodology across NCR and adjoining areas for the monitoring of fire events at meetings with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at a meeting held in December last year.

The protocol has been prepared in consultation with stakeholder agencies like State Remote Sensing Centers and Indian Agricultural Research Institute, it said.

"Now, therefore, in view of the compelling need to moni-



tor and control air pollution from stubble burning, the commission...hereby directs government of NCT of Delhi to ensure adoption and application of the standard protocol for estimation of crop residue burning fire events using satellite data," the directions read.

The commission said the protocol should be adopted uniformly across the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi, and not restricted to Punjab and Haryana alone.

The panel on air quality has also asked these states to submit a compliance report on the adoption of the protocol by August 30.

The northern states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh attract attention during the paddy harvesting season between October 15 and November 15.

Farmers set their fields on fire to quickly clear off the crop residue left behind after harvesting and before cultivating wheat and potato. It is one of the main reasons for the alarm-

ing spike in pollution in Delhi-NCR.

Despite a ban on stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana, farmers continue to defy it as there is a short window between the harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat.

The high cost of manual or mechanical management of straw is a major reason why farmers choose to burn it.

State governments are providing 50 to 80 per cent subsidy to farmers and cooperative societies to buy modern farm equipment for in-situ management of paddy straw, installing paddy straw-based power plants and running a massive awareness campaign against stubble burning.

But these measures are yet to make any significant impact on the ground.

According to a recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), a Delhi-based not-for-profit policy research institution, a relatively longer stubble-burning period and unfavourable meteorological conditions were primarily responsible for Delhi's worsening air quality in winters last year.

The analysis showed the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's PM2.5 levels exceeded 30 per cent for seven days (between October 10 and November 25) in 2020 as against three days in 2019.

With low Covid case count, Delhiites step out to celebrate Raksha Bandhan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With a dip in Covid-19 cases and easing of restrictions, several people here chose to travel to meet their relatives and celebrate raksha bandhan on Sunday, unlike last year when festivities were subdued because of a rampaging pandemic.

No death due to Covid-19 was recorded in Delhi on Saturday, the second consecutive day the daily fatality count stood nil, while 19 new cases, the lowest since April 15 last year, were also reported here, according to health department data.

However, information technology (IT) professional Swati Singh celebrated the festival of brother-sister bond at home for the second consecutive year as her family is yet to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

She said that on every raksha bandhan, before the infection's outbreak, her family went out for lunch at a restaurant to celebrate the day.

"Even though we miss eating out, this has turned out to be a good way to bond. We all are cooking a little of something, and enjoying a variety of dishes at home," Singh told PTI.



Jamshedpur, decided to travel with his family to the city in Jharkhand.

"This year, I am away from home (Delhi) and celebrating rakhi with my cousins. The other purpose of this visit, is to take my maternal grandfather to Delhi as he still has some complications post-recovery from Covid," he said.

Gautam said that travelling to Jamshedpur, brought some change.

Preeti Mishra, a researcher at IIT-Delhi, caught up with her cousins to celebrate the festival after a year's gap.

"This year, we are back to our regular celebration. We

cousins met up to celebrate which we missed last year due to the pandemic. This year, we all gathered at one of my cousins' house," she said.

According to the Delhi Traffic Police, traffic jams were reported from Tilak Nagar, Najafgarh, Punjabi Bagh, Pitampura and Peera Garhi, among other places in the city.

"I'm going to Delhi to my grandmother's house to tie rakhi to my cousin... Stuck in traffic for an hour. Just how much I wish I was at home..." a Twitter user posted.

Police in response saying, "traffic is heavy due to festival". 2019.

Rain, rakhi crowd hits city traffic



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Heavy rain in Delhi on early Saturday gave a much-needed respite from heat to people of the national Capital, but the resultant waterlogging at several locations, and the Raksha Bandhan festival, hit vehicular movement on Sunday.

Some parts of Delhi also witnessed light rain on Sunday as well.

Delhi recorded its highest one-day rain for August (139 mm) in at least 13 years on Saturday, resulting in heavy water logging in many parts of the city and traffic snarls.

The IMD had issued a yellow alert for the national Capital on Sunday and had predicted bad weather for the day.

Meanwhile, there were traffic snarls at several stretches because of Raksha Bandhan. The Delhi-Noida link road, Vikas Marg, Anand Vihar, Firmi Road in Najafgarh and many more areas witnessed heavy traffic as people came out in large numbers to visit their relatives on the festival.

Meanwhile, traffic on stretches like Minto Bridge, Rajghat, Connaught Place, and ITO was also affected due to rain.

DMRC hands over lost mobile phone to passenger

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Limited (DMRC) on Sunday handed over a mobile phone to a passenger who had lost his phone at New Delhi Metro station on Saturday night.

Damanjeet Singh, whose

mobile phone fell down and got stuck under the railway track at New Delhi Metro station said that he is a merchant exporter and he was returning home from Delhi to Amritsar following Raksha Bandhan when due to sudden congestion at New Delhi Metro station, his mobile phone fell.

"I immediately contacted the Metro officials who tried many times to find my mobile phone but failed. Later at around 12 AM. I got a call from Station Controller Rajesh Yadav who informed me that they have found my phone and I can collect it from their office," said Singh.

Maximum temperature settles at 34.3 degrees Celsius

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The maximum temperature in the national Capital settled at 34.3 degrees Celsius on Sunday, the meteorological department said.

The Met has forecast generally cloudy sky with light rain and thundershowers at isolated places on Monday. The maximum and minimum temperatures on Monday are expected to be around 35 and 26 degrees Celsius respectively.

Rains lashed some parts of the city on Sunday morning, and the minimum temperature settled at 24.5 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's normal, said the official.

The relative humidity recorded at 5.30 pm was 72 per cent. In the last 24 hours, the city received 9.2 mm rainfall, they said

Two arrested for supplying weapons

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two men for allegedly involved in illegal supply of weapons from outer Delhi's Mangolpuri area.

The accused have been identified as Vipin (22) and Imran (28), both residents of Mangolpuri. Police said that both have been active in the trade of illegal supply of firearms for the last eight months. Police said the duo were unemployed for a while now and during this period, they came in contact with the Uttar Pradesh based person who lured them into this trade of illegal supply on the pretext of making easy money.

According to Parvinder Singh, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Outer district, acting on a tip off, police team on



August 20 identified two men engaged in business of supplying illegal firearms and later arrested them from Mangolpuri area.

"Seven illegal weapons and 27 live rounds were recovered from them and during questioning, it surfaced that the duo act as a conduit between UP based suppliers and gangs operating in outlying areas of Delhi," said the DCP.

The accused duo disclosed that they received the recovered illegal weapons from a supplier based in Uttar Pradesh, police said, adding efforts are being made to nab him.

LeT planning IED attack on convoys in Jammu



RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

A mixed tanzem, led by Pakistan-based terror group Lashkar-e-Tayabba, is planning to carry out multiple attacks on the vehicles/convoys of security forces in Jammu by using magnetic IEDs/sticky bombs. Similar attacks were earlier planned by the terror groups for the Valley, according to intelligence inputs. The likely targets are vehicles moving from Rajouri to Jammu side including Jammu town. Other possible targets are vehicles of security forces moving from Poonch-Surankot via old Mughal Road to Shopian including in Shopian district, reads the input shared with stakeholders involved in counter-insurgency operations

as also law and order duties. Another input suggests that three-four LeT terrorists have managed to infiltrate through Kanachak (Jammu region) on August 13. “They would try to carry out some big attacks but due to tight security they are facing difficulties,” agencies warned through the inputs. Reportedly, weapons have already been cached in Domana, Jammu and the terrorists are trying to extract the same. A local terrorist Shahid Khurshid of the LeT and its affiliate The Resistance Front (TRF) along with foreign terrorists were noticed in Golpora area. “They might plan to snatch weapons and cause grenade attacks on security

forces deployed in Pampore, Panthachowk, Lasjan Bridge and Nowgam Area. Recently, inputs had also suggested that the terror groups are in the lookout to target temples in Jammu region to flare up communal passions. The terrorists have already been able to carry out drone hits on the Jammu air base in the recent past. The case is being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) without much headway. The shift in the terror tactic to target Jammu has been made by the jihadi groups as the security grid in the Valley is particularly difficult for the tanzems to penetrate amid a strong security footprint, officials said.

He lived for people’s welfare: Modi’s tribute to Kalyan Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

Rich tributes continued to pour in for the late former Chief Minister and Governor Kalyan Singh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached Lucknow on Sunday to pay his tributes. Later talking to the media, he said: “This is a moment of grief for all of us. His parents had named him Kalyan Singh. He lived his life in such a way that he fulfilled the name given by his parents. He lived his entire life for the public welfare. He made ‘jan kalyan’ as the mantra of his life, and dedicated his life for the BJP, Bharatiya Jan Sangh family, for an ideology and for the bright future of the country,” Modi said even as he hailed him as a “committed decision maker” who had become “a name of faith (vishvaas) across the country.” “For the most part of his life, he made efforts for public welfare. Whatever responsibility he had got, be it as an MLA, any post in the Government, or as a governor, he had been a centre of inspiration for everyone. He became a symbol of faith for the common public,” Modi added. “We have lost a capable leader. We should make maximum efforts by taking his values and resolutions to compensate for him; we should leave no stone unturned in fulfilling his dreams,” the PM said.



Lauding the role of Kalyan Singh in the ‘Ram Janambhoomi movement’, senior BJP leaders LK Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi said on Sunday that the late UP Chief Minister’s commitment, drive and sincerity towards resolving the Ayodhya issue was a great source of strength for his party and others and that he was the nation’s leader. Advani said Singh was a stalwart of Indian politics and a grassroots leader. “I cherish my many special memories with him during the Ram Janambhoomi Movement. His commitment, drive and sincerity towards resolving the Ayodhya issue was a great source of strength not only for my party, the BJP, but for scores of Indians who were eagerly

waiting to see the realisation of their dream of a grand temple of Lord Ram at Ram Janambhoomi,” he said. Singh, also an ex-State Governor, was ill for some time, and passed away at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow late on Saturday. A ‘Lodh leader’, he was the first OBC Chief Minister of the State and drew considerable support from Advani in gaining political eminence. He had fallen-out with Atal Bihari Vajpayee and formed his own political outfit but rejoined the party in 2004 at the latter’s behest. For his part, Joshi said, “Kalyan Singh wasn’t the leader of a caste. He felt pain for farmers, oppressed and backward

Advani said Singh was a stalwart of Indian politics and a grassroots leader

but he wasn’t their leader alone. He was the nation’s leader. It’s a personal loss. We faced batons & bullets together. It’ll be tough to make up for the loss.” “My acquaintance with Kalyan Singh ji is from 1962. I know him since he was a teacher at a college in Aligarh. He used to sing very good songs, Kalyan Singh ji had a very melodious voice. He was a caretaker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.” Joshi applauded Singh’s tenure as the UP CM saying, “The most important tenure of Kalyan Singh ji was the time when the Ram Mandir movement was going on. I was the President of the party at that time and he was the UP CM and when he announced that ‘no matter what happens, I will not shoot at Kar Sevaks’, it raised his stature and people got the idea that he is a man of principles,” Joshi said. “At that time, he had also made it clear that he will not allow bloodshed in the movement of this temple under any circumstances. Back then, this announcement was a big deal,” he said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who also paid tributes to the departed leader in Lucknow, said he lost an elder brother. “We used to tell him (Kalyan) that we are ‘bhoot-poorv’ (former) chief minister, you are ‘abhootpoorv’ (unprecedented) Chief Minister, on which he used to laugh. I have seen him as an elder brother,” he maintained.

USFDA removes Ivermectin from Covid treatment list



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ivermectin, a controversial anti-parasitic drug commonly used for livestock but looked upon as a potential Covid-19 treatment, should not be taken to treat or prevent Covid-19, the US Food and Drug Administration has said. In India, sold in black-market during the second Covid -19 wave, Ivermectin is now already off the covid treatment list. The USFDA warning came a day after the Mississippi State Department of Health issued a similar statement in response to reports that an increasing number of people in Mississippi were using the drug to prevent a Covid infection. Some studies last year spurred use of the drug against Covid-19, especially in Latin America, and Fox News has promoted some of those studies’ findings on air. But the National Institutes of Health said in February that most of the studies related to Ivermectin and the coronavirus “had incomplete information and significant methodological limitations,” including small sample sizes and study outcome measures that were often unclear. Ivermectin, which is also formulated for use by people to treat parasitic worms, had been controversially promoted as a potential Covid treatment earlier in the pandemic, but recent studies found that the drug’s efficacy against the coronavirus is thin, and the F.D.A. has not approved the drug for Covid treatment. In India, there has been mixed response for the usage of the drug. Some state governments like Uttar Pradesh and Goa had during the raging infection wave advocated its use for Covid-19 treatment and as a prophylaxis (preventive medication). In June, the Union Health Ministry’s directorate general of health services (DGHS) had issued revised guidelines to stop the use of Ivermectin besides Doxycycline in Covid-19 treatment for asymptomatic and mild cases. It said these drugs have not been found to be effective in treatment of the Covid-19.

Commercial dispute trials getting faster: Law Min

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of days it takes in trial and judgment of commercial disputes has come down significantly in Delhi and Mumbai, according to the latest data of the Law Ministry. According to the World Bank’s ‘doing business’ report for India, it used to take 1,095 days in trial and judgment of commercial disputes in 2020. But following a push for reforms, the number of days has come down to 424 in Delhi and 306 in Mumbai, according to the data put the in public domain by the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry. The Code of Civil Procedure of 1908 provides time standards for case management. According to it, the filing of written statement should be done within 30 days of the notice served on defendant and the judgment should be delivered within 30 days from



hearing conclusion date. Time standards are respected in more than 50 per cent of cases in dedicated commercial courts, the department said. Fixing of time standards for key court events and streamlining of trial process have led to speeding up case disposal, it claimed. Order XVII Rule (1) of the CPC provides for a maximum of three adjournments during the hearing of a suit.

Order XVII, Rule 2(b) of the CPC states that no adjournment will be granted at the request of a party, except where the circumstances are beyond control. The Department of Justice had sent letters to the high courts of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Karnataka to adhere to the three-adjournment rule. The four high courts have issued advisory to all the dedicated commercial courts

under their jurisdictions to strictly adhere to the timelines and three-adjournment rule. The rule of maximum three adjournments is being actively enforced in more than 50 per cent of cases of dedicated commercial courts of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru. This has reduced the time taken for trial, arguments and final judgment, the department noted. Besides, e-committee of the Supreme Court has ensured compliance with the three-adjournment rule by creating facility which is provided in “daily proceedings screen” to alert judge about the listing of case. Green colour indicates that the case is listed on the same stage for less than three times. Orange colour indicates that the case is listed on the same stage between three and six times. Red colour shows the case is listed on the same stage for more than six times.

Paddy sowing takes a beating with deficient rainfall



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With monsoon deficiency still 8 percent in the country, area sown to summer crops like paddy was lagging behind by 1.55 per cent at 1,043.87 lakh hectare so far in the ongoing kharif season of the crop year 2021-22 (July-June) as against 1060.37 lakh hectare last year. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said that current rainfall activity over plains of northwest India was likely to reduce from Monday. The Ministry of Agriculture on Sunday released a kharif sowing data said that area sown to paddy (the main kharif crop) remained marginally lower at 374.03 lakh hectare till August 20 of this kharif season as against 378.07 lakh hectare in the year-ago period. Similarly, area sown to oilseeds remained slightly lower at 187.88 lakh hectare as against 189.98 lakh hectare, while that of coarse cereals

acreage was down at 169.06 lakh hectare as against 171.82 lakh hectare in the said period. However, area sown to pulses was marginally higher at 134.23 lakh hectare so far this kharif season, from 132.03 lakh hectare in the year-ago period. In cash crops, area sown to cotton was down at 117.04 lakh hectare so far this kharif season, against 127.69 lakh hectare in the year-ago period. But, acreage under sugarcane was slightly higher at 54.63 lakh hectare as against 53.85 lakh hectare, while jute and mesta area was flat at 7.02 lakh hectare as against 7 lakh hectare in the said period. Sowing of kharif crops in some places continues till September and harvesting begins from October onwards. Sowing operation is still underway and planting of summer (kharif) crops can be continued till the end of August, it said. Sowing of kharif crops begins with the onset of south-west monsoon from June.

Monsoon rainfall was lower eight per cent between June 1 and August 20, the ministry said. However, water storage available in 130 reservoirs in the country was 96 per cent of live storage in the corresponding period of last year, and 99 per cent storage of average in the last 10 years, as per the Central Water Commission, it added. According to the ministry, “sowing is still going on” in states growing kharif crops with “occurrence of monsoon rains in many states”. A majority of States have informed the Central Government that the sowing of kharif crops, particularly paddy, urad, moong and sesamum castor, can be continued up to the end of August, it said. Castor can be grown up to September 15 in Gujarat which has been receiving good rains for the last two days. Similarly, sowing of kulthi and nizer and early mustard seed can be done up to September in Jharkhand, it added.

Kalyan Singh’s death has caused irreparable loss to public: RSS

IANs ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing its condolences on the demise of former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Sunday said that his death has caused an irreparable loss in public life. In a joint statement, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and Joint General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh expresses its deep condolences on the

demise of former Governor and former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, popular public leader Kalyan Singh ji. He was a grounded politician and an efficient administrator. His death has caused an irreparable loss in public life.” “He was devoted to Hindutva, Bhagwan Shri Ram and Bharatiya values. He had become a people’s leader after fulfilling his national consciousness in the Shri Ram Janambhoomi movement,” they said.



Referring to Singh’s association with the RSS, they said, “He was proud to be a Sangh

Swayamsevak. He played an important role in strengthening the BJP organization in Uttar Pradesh as a worker and leader. He worked for the empowerment of the weaker sections of the society and always kept public welfare paramount.” “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh pays heartfelt tributes to Kalyan Singh ji. We pray to the almighty to give strength to his family to bear this loss and to place his departed soul at his feet,” they added. Singh (89) passed away due to sepsis and multi-organ failure in Lucknow on Saturday night. A two-term Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Singh had also served as the Governor of Rajasthan from 2014-2019.

Navy warships reach Guam for Malabar exercises

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to increase its presence in the Pacific region and strengthen Quad alliance, Indian Navy ships have reached Guam for the Malabar series of exercises to commence shortly. The Malabar series comprises the Quad countries including India, US, Japan and Australia. Giving details of the forthcoming exercise, navy official said here on Sunday warships INS Shivalik and Kadmat arrived at Guam, an Island Territory of the USA on Saturday as part of their ongoing deployment to nations in South East Asia and the Pacific Ocean. The two ships are scheduled to participate in the annu-

al Exercise Malabar between navies of Australia, India, Japan and the USA. Malabar series of maritime exercises commenced in 1992 as a bilateral India-US exercise and has grown in stature over the years to include four prominent navies in the Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. As part of the Exercise, Vice Admiral AB Singh, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command will have operational discussions with Rear Admiral Leonard C. “Butch” Dollaga, Commander CTF-74 focussing on developing an action plan and coordinated operations in the maritime domain. Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet,



Rear Admiral Tarun Sobti would be embarked onboard INS Shivalik during the conduct of Sea Phase commencing 26 Aug 21. The latest exercise will be for four days commencing August 26. The drill will provide an opportunity for common minded navies to enhance interoperability, gain from best practices and develop a common understanding of procedures for Maritime Security Operations. It will witness high-tempo exercises conducted between Destroyers, Frigates, Corvettes, Submarines, Helicopters and Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft of the participating navies. Complex surface, sub-sur-

face and air operations including Live Weapon Firing Drills, Anti-Surface, Anti-Air and Anti-Submarine Warfare Drills, Joint Manoeuvres and Tactical exercises will be conducted during the exercise. The conduct of these exercises despite Covid restrictions is a testimony of synergy between the participating navies and commitment to safer seas. The participating Indian Ships are the latest indigenously designed and built, multi-role Guided Missile Stealth Frigate and Anti-Submarine Corvette respectively and form part of the Indian Navy’s Eastern Fleet based at Visakhapatnam, Eastern Naval Command.

Ganesan appointed new Manipur Guv



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader from Tamil Nadu La. Ganesan was on Sunday appointed as the new Governor of Manipur. The post of the Governor had fallen vacant after the retirement of Najma Heptulla earlier this month. A communique from the Rashtrapati Bhavan said Ganesan will be the new “Governor of Manipur with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office”. Heptulla had demitted office on August 10 and on the same day, the charge was given to Sikkim Governor Ganga Prasad. Puducherry Chief Minister N Rangasamy greeted Ganesan on his appointment. In his message to Ganesan, the CM said his appointment as the Governor of Manipur was a “proud development”. Rangasamy also stated in his message that the rich political experience and administrative proficiency of Ganesan would be of immense help for Manipur to make progress. “I extend my greetings and best wishes on my behalf and on behalf of the people of Puducherry,” he said.

‘BJP never in support of partitioning WB’

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal BJP is vertically divided over State party president Dilip Ghosh’s open stand in favour of partitioning Bengal.

Contradicting what Ghosh said on Saturday in support of Union Minister John Burla’s demand for a separate State comprising the districts of North Bengal, former State party president Rahul Sinha on Sunday said “there is no question of the BJP supporting any divisive cause ... we want to make all those who have been making such comments aware of what Rabindranath Tagore did on Raksha Bandhan Day ... he called upon the people of undivided Bengal to tie rakhi on each other’s hands as a mark of unity ... how can we being the descendants of Tagore uphold such mischievous demands...”

“I can say with full responsibility on behalf of my party

that irrespective of some individual sentiments the BJP has never been in support of partitioning Bengal ... the BJP wants a united and prosperous State.”

Ghosh had earlier made a strong point in support of Burla an MP from Alipurduar saying “if he has said something ... it is not unjustified because as a representative of the people he has a duty towards airing the views of the people of that region.”

Burla had on more than one occasion demanded division of Bengal by carving out a separate State comprising the districts of North Bengal.

“There has been no development in this part of the State for decades ... the local people have their aspirations which have to be fulfilled as the previous Governments have failed to perform the people of this region want a separate State ... they can settle for even a Union Territory ... at least we

will be under the Centre so that a full-fledged development of this area can take place,” Burla had said even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi made him a central minister

apparently dropping a silent hint of the BJP’s ideas.

Though Ghosh had distanced himself from Burla’s views earlier saying it was the saffron MP’s personal views, on Saturday he made u-turn saying “he has full right to make such demands.” In fact while backing Burla in North Bengal Ghosh also took into the sweep of his argument the Jangalmahal areas of South Bengal saying the leaders of both these regions deserved to demand separate States because the “Mamata Banerjee Government has done nothing for them ... there has been no development ... no big hospital, no job opportunity ... the people have to go to other States like Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujarat from these regions

for jobs and medical help ... so I think such demands have arisen from deprivation of these regions.”

When asked whether his statement could adversely affect the party’s performance among the Bengali-speaking people Ghosh said “even Mamata Banerjee backed the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha against the Left Government in order to earn supporters in Darjeeling and Terrain region ... even the TMC struck an alliance with the GJM even after they were asking for a division of Bengal.”

Incidentally BJP has a stronghold in North Bengal and Jangalmahal sending most of its MPs and MLAs from these regions.

According to sources in the party Ghosh was making such comments to hold together the disintegration of his party in these regions. In fact Ghosh’s comments came almost in tandem with 11 local level BJP leaders joining the Trinamool

Congress in North Bengal.

“If he does not raise such issues then the party will simply collapse with a section going to the TMC and the other going to the Left which had a strong following in this area before 2019,” said IK Lahiri a political analyst.

Attacking Ghosh for his “irresponsible statements” TMC MP Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said, “BJP is encouraging fissiparous elements to divide Bengal after suffering a humiliating defeat in the recent assembly election.... But the people will reject them in 2024.”

Another senior leader and minister Firhad Hakim said “if the BJP continues to do so they will be obliterated from Bengal. A third leader said that “Burla is trying to play with the tribal votes of North Bengal but in trying to win 4 lakh votes his party will lose the vote of 20 lakh Bengali-speaking people,”

Mizoram tried to construct bridge in our territory, stopped: Assam

Guwahati: The Assam Government alleged on Sunday that Mizoram officials entered its territory in Hailakandi and started constructing a bridge, in a fresh escalation between the two Northeastern States.

The incident took place on Friday when a few workers from Mizoram were trying to construct a bridge at Kachurthal in the Ramnathpur police station area, Hailakandi’s Superintendent of Police Gaurav Upadhyay told PTI.

“The Officer In-Charge (OC) of Ramnathpur police station and his patrolling team immediately reached the spot and stopped the construction work, calling it a trespass by Mizoram as they had no authority to build a bridge on the Assam side,” he said.

Upadhyay alleged that around 40-50 security personnel from Mizoram reached the bridge site on Saturday and few

of them crossed to the Assam side “in complete violation of the joint statement issued by both States on August 5 to maintain peace in the border area”.

The local police team from Assam urged the Mizoram security personnel to leave the Assam land, but they refused to do so, he alleged.

“In order to assert the position of Assam and to ask Mizoram forces to retreat from the Assam side of the bridge, a party of around 200 Assam Police personnel and commandos under my leadership and other senior officials reached Kachurthal on Sunday morning,” Upadhyay said.

He, however, stated that being a responsible force, the Assam Police did not confront and gave the respective civil administrations a chance to amicably resolve the matter by stopping the construction on the unauthorised bridge and

remove the force of Mizoram.

“The allegation of any theft by a disciplined force like Assam Police is absolutely concocted, baseless, malafide and devoid of any facts and is an attempt by Mizoram administration to divert the attention from main issue, that is illegal construction by Mizoram authorities on Assam soil,” Upadhyay asserted.

The Mizoram Government said that it has filed a case against personnel of the Assam Police for allegedly “stealing” construction materials from the bridge site, which it claimed to be in its territory.

Mizoram’s Kolasib deputy commissioner H Lalthlangliana told *PTI* that personnel of the Assam Police entered the state’s territory at Zophai near Bairabi town and allegedly stole some construction materials, including iron rods, from the bridge construction site on Friday. *PTI*



Hindus perform ritual for ‘aneu Sanskar’ (sacred thread) at the Holy lake of Pushkar, on the occasion of Sawan Purnima, in Pushkar, Rajasthan, on Sunday

Lotus will bloom in State soon: BJP’s top TN leader

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

C P Radhakrishnan, two-time BJP MP from Coimbatore and former State Chief of the party, is a person who is known for economical use of words. As part of the Jan Ashirwad Yatra in Kongunadu region (south west Tamil Nadu), Radhakrishnan declared in all the meetings he addressed that the day is not far off when Lotus blooms in the State.

In addition to his prophecy about the blooming of Lotus, Radhakrishnan gave enough hits of the BJP emerging as an alternative force to the DMK and the AIADMK in the State. Looking towards K P Ramalingam, former DMK

MP and Duraisamy, former DMK MLA, Radhakrishnan said that the BJP would make situation conducive for welcoming many senior Dravidian party leaders to the saffron party. “We will welcome M K Alagiri if he decides to join us. There is nothing that separates Annan (big brother as Alagiri is addressed by friends) from us,” said Radhakrishnan on Sunday which has caused a furore in Tamil Nadu politics.

Alagiri, the Madurai based elder son of late M Karunanidhi, the former chief minister of Tamil Nadu who was also the party chief for 49 years till he breathed his last in 2017, was expelled from the DMK in 2014 and has been in political wilderness since then. During the 2019 Lok Sabha

election and 2021 assembly election Alagiri lied low at the request of his mother Dayalu Ammal and sister Selvi with whom he enjoys good rapport despite his anger towards younger brother M K Stalin, the chief minister.

“Thampi (Tamil for younger brother), don’t ask me anything as of now. I am not in active politics. Let everything be over and then I’ll speak to you in detail,” Alagiri had told The Pioneer when asked about his stance prior to the assembly election,

“I did not tell Annan would join the BJP. What I told was that if he opts to join the BJP, there is nothing in his way to block his decision,” said Radhakrishnan who enjoys a special relation with Alagiri.

‘I am big fan of PM, hope to meet him’

Udhampur (J&K): Fahim Nazir Shah is walking to Delhi from Srinagar, hoping that his around 815-km journey will get the attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and he will get an opportunity to meet him.

“I am a very big fan of Prime Minister Modi,” the 28-year-old, who works as a part-time electrician in Jammu and Kashmir’s Srinagar, said as he reached Udhampur on Sunday after walking over 200 km. Taking short breaks on his journey, which started two days ago, Shah, a resident of the Shalimar area in Srinagar, believes that at the end of this arduous journey his dream of meeting the Prime Minister will be fulfilled.

“I am on my way to Delhi by foot to meet him (Modi) and

I hope to attract the attention of the Prime Minister. To meet the Prime Minister is my cherished dream,” he said, adding that his previous attempts to meet the PM did not fructify. Shah said that he has been following the prime minister on social media over the past four years, and his speech and actions have “touched my heart”.

“At one time, when he was delivering an address at a rally, he stopped suddenly on hearing the ‘azaan’ (Muslim call for prayer) leaving the public astonished ... that gesture of our prime minister touched my heart and I became his ardent fan,” he said. Shah said that over the past two and a half years, he has made several attempts to meet Prime Minister Modi in Delhi. *PTI*

Pandemic has opened our eyes: Arunachal CM

Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pena Khandu on Sunday admitted that the pandemic has been an “eye-opener” for the State Government prompting it to revamp the health sector in the last 18 months which it could not do in decades.

The Government has “learnt the lesson the hard way” due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and is developing the sector through the creation of infrastructure.

“It was this pandemic that enabled us to ‘right’ the ‘wrong’ and revamp the health sector in the last one and half years that we couldn’t do in decades,” the Chief Minister said.

Khandu said this while laying the foundation stone of a 200-bedded speciality unit of the Ramakrishna Hospital here.

“Being the chief minister even I was not aware of the status of our health facilities, especially at the ground level. Due to the pandemic, we

repeated reviews, consultations, and meetings at all levels, which subsequently revealed the poor condition of our health infrastructure. I

“We are completely overhauling infrastructure and facilities of all the district hospitals. We have recruited and will continue recruiting sufficient doctors, including specialists, nurses of all categories, paramedics, and other sanitary and assisting staff as required,” he said.

Khandu also informed that the government has decided to select and develop one hospital each in every assembly constituency with all facilities.

Applauding the role of Ramakrishna Mission Hospital here in the fight against Covid-19, the Chief Minister said doctors, nurses, paramedics, and all staff of the facility had done everything possible for taking care of the sick and needy during the pandemic.

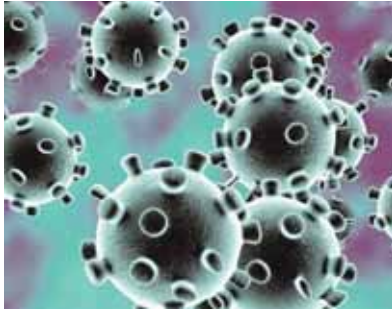
1,189 fresh Covid cases, 22 deaths in K’taka

Bengaluru: Karnataka registered 1,189 fresh Covid-19 cases and 22 deaths taking the total infections and fatalities due to the disease to 29.38 lakh and 37,145 respectively, the health department said on Sunday.

There were 20,556 active cases in the state while the recovery of 1,456 patients took the total recoveries to 28,80,889. Dakshina Kannada district, which borders Kerala, remained the number one Covid-19 hotspot with 286 infections and four fatalities which was the highest among all the districts on Sunday. Bengaluru urban district was the second major Covid-19 hotspot with 267 cases and two deaths. The Karnataka capital has so far reported 12,35,036 infections and 15,959 deaths.

There were 7,762 active cases. Other districts too reported Covid-19 cases including 132 Udupi, 79 in Mysuru, 75 in Hassan, 55 in Kodagu and 50 in Chikkamagaluru. According to the media bulletin, there were deaths in 14 districts including Bengaluru, Dakshina Kannada, Tumakuru, Udupi, Mandya and Dharwad. Kalaburagi district recorded zero infections and zero fatalities. There were zero fatalities in 17 districts in Karnataka. The department said in its bulletin that 1,25,158 Covid-19 tests were conducted on Sunday including 92,842 RT-PCR tests and other methods. With this, Karnataka has so far performed 4.19 crore Covid-19 tests in the State, the department said. There were 1,50,127 inoculations done on Sunday taking the total vaccination to 3.69 crore. The positivity rate today was 0.94 per cent while the case fatality rate was 1.85 per cent, it said. *PTI*

Kerala sees 10,402 new Covid cases



Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala reported 10,402 Covid-19 positive cases and 66 related deaths on Sunday, taking the total number of those affected in the State by the viral infection to 38,14,305.

State Health Minister Veena George said 63,406 samples were tested in the last 24 hours and the test positivity rate was 16.41 per cent. Till now, 3.02 crore samples have been tested in the state. Among the districts, Malappuram reported the highest number of cases today at 1,577, followed by Kozhikode with 1,376 and Palakkad 1,133. The Minister said out of those found infected today, 104 reached the state from outside, 9,674 contracted the disease from their contacts. *PTI*

Deve Gowda rues unruly events inside Rajya Sabha

Bengaluru: Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda on Sunday rued the unruly scenes in the Rajya Sabha and wastage of the recently concluded Parliament session without any debates on issues affecting people, saying he had not seen anything like it in his 30 years as a parliamentarian.

After the conclusion of the monsoon session on August 11, he met the opposition leaders and asked them what they had achieved as none of the issues affecting the people was discussed, Gowda said.

“I was not allowed to speak during the monsoon session due to the ruckus by members of the ruling and opposition parties. No business took place and the session was wasted,” the JD(S) leader told reporters at the party office here.

On the unruly behaviour of parliamentarians in the Rajya Sabha, he said, “I am disgusted with the behaviour of the ruling party, as well as the members of the opposition... People danced on the table in

the well the house. In my 30 years as a parliamentarian, I have never witnessed any incident like this.”

Such behaviour was not good for society because it showed the degeneration of democratic values and was an insult to the great people who fought for the freedom of the country, he said.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu had suspended four TMC MPs on August 4 for the rest of the day for creating a ruckus over the Pegasus spying issue.

Gowda said his party would launch a State-wide campaign after the conclusion of the legislature session on September 24, to resolve the water disputes in the state, including that pertaining to the Krishna and Mahadayi rivers and the Mekedatu balancing reservoir project across the river Cauvery.

He said Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai had spoken to NCP chief Sharad Pawar and other BJP leaders in a bid to find a solution to the Krishna and

Mahadayi water sharing dispute between the State and Maharashtra.

Regarding the Mekedatu issue, he said some leaders from Tamil Nadu he had spoken to had advocated a reservoir on the Cauvery river at Hogenakkal on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border, and not Mekedatu in Ramanagara district. “A reservoir at Hogenakkal would mean encompassing a large catchment area whereas in Mekedatu, the catchment area is small,” Gowda said.

The former PM said only a regional outfit like JD(S) could find a solution to these two river water disputes and not any national party.

He said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi needed to ‘walk the extra mile’ to hone his political skills and wondered what he had achieved by taking out a bicycle rally recently to protest the hikes in fuel prices.

To a question on his recent meeting with Bommai, Gowda said he assured him support on various issues. *PTI*

Rescue centre becomes home for orphaned rhinos of Assam

Guwahati:A four-month-old Ganga had lost her mother to surging waters of the Brahmaputra nearly two decades back, but she has now found her home on the banks of another river and is a healthy mother of four young ones.

Orphaned by the floods in Assam’s famed Kaziranga National Park, Ganga had found a refuge on the periphery of the Park where she was raised before setting out to live on her own in her natural habitat.

Ganga was the second rhino to be rescued by the Center for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) in Kaziranga in 2003, along with another rhino calf, Rathin Barman of Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) told PTI. Hand-raised by the staff of the CWRC, the pair was translocated to Manas National Park (MNP), about 300 km away from their birthplace, four years later where they have thrived over the years. Named Ganga-Jamuna for their bonding by the frontline staff of MNP, they were the second lot of rhinos sent to the Park with the first

being Mainou (Lakshmi in local Bodo language) preceding them by a year to Manas, also from the CWRC.

While Ganga gave birth to her fourth calf in the last week of July this year, Jamuna has three calves of her own and Mainou had also become mother to three calves over the years before dying of natural causes a couple of years back, Barman said.

The Center was established by Government of Assam, Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), with the support of Government of India, in 2002.

It is located at the periphery of the Kaziranga National Park and attends to wildlife displacements originating mainly from the Park and adjoining Dibru-Saikhowa National Park.

The Center has been engaging in rescue of wildlife that stray out of their natural habitats and rhinos of KNP have been among such animals that have found a new lease of life in its premise. *PTI*

Guj: Woman doctor kills mother, sister with injection

Surat:A 30-year-old doctor allegedly killed her mother and sister by injecting them with drugs before overdosing on sleeping pills in a bid to end her life here in Gujarat but survived, police said on Sunday.

Dr Darshana Prajapati injected her mother Manjulaben (59) and her sister Falguni (28) with drugs at their house in the Katagram area on Saturday night that caused their death on Sunday morning. She also tried to end her life by consuming a large number of sleeping pills. She is currently undergoing treatment at the civil hospital, a police officer said.

“Both Manjulaben and Falguni died apparently due to drug overdose while Dr Darshana is undergoing treatment at the civil hospital where the police recorded her statement,” Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), D-Division, DJ Chavda told reporters.

Dr Darshana told the police that she was fed up with her life, he said. “Since her mother and sister were dependent on her, she wanted to take their life before killing herself. She said she injected them with a sleep-inducing drug. The exact drug injected will be known after postmortem,” Chavda said. *PTI*



BSF jawans celebrate Raksha Bandhan at Indo Bangladesh border in Meghalaya

Unholy practice

The scourge of using religion in polls is very much alive, as is happening in Uttarakhand

Will the next Assembly elections in Uttarakhand be steered by Lords Ganesha and Ram? Only if the Supreme Court and the Election Commission of India do not immediately and heavily come down on such a provocatively religious campaign proposal. It is the brainchild of Congress general secretary Harish Rawat, a former Chief Minister of the State. He is the party's campaign committee head. Rawat has two justifications for making "Jai Shri Ganesh" the party's war cry for the forthcoming Assembly elections. One, he will not allow the BJP to "hijack the word Hindu for political gains" as it has "reduced Hindus to a mere vote bank". Two, Ganesha is always worshipped first, "which is why we have selected this slogan". The issue is, he is violating a 2017 Supreme Court ruling that "an appeal in the name of religion, race, caste, community or language is impermissible under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and would constitute a corrupt practice sufficient to annul the election". The previous round of Assembly elections witnessed a violation of the order by all political parties during the West Bengal elections. Mamata Banerjee of the TMC was accosted by BJP workers shouting "Jai Shri Ram" slogans wherever she went to address meetings. She herself used words with "religious overtones", as the Election Commission quoted in its April 2021 order banning her from campaigning for 24 hours.

Last year, in the campaigning for the Delhi Assembly elections, the Commission imposed a 72-hour ban on then Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur and a 96-hour ban on BJP MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma for statements that could "aggravate existing differences and create mutual hatred between different religious communities". Significantly, the Supreme Court order on not using religion in elections had come in January 2017 even as Uttar Pradesh was facing Assembly elections. It faces elections again, along with Uttarakhand. In a way, Rawat may have done a yeoman service — BJP campaign managers would elatedly feel — by being the first to bite the religious bullet. The biggest worry is that given the high stakes in the coming round of elections, communal and religious rhetoric would be at its shrillest. It is best handled at once by both the apex court and the poll panel taking suo moto cognisance of Rawat's statement and reiterating their previous order. As it is, several petitions are expected to be filed in UP courts as soon as the first political leader publicly refers to the under-construction Ram temple in Ayodhya in a pre-election speech. Should not the Supreme Court take this opportunity to cover two more loopholes? One is banning the mention of religious affairs and promises in political manifestoes. The other is using symbols that have obvious religious connotations but do not strictly fall under the sections proscribed by the law. The politicians got away with it in West Bengal.



Koli fishermen celebrate the festival of Narali Purnima at the Thane Creek

Way to go!

Fewer fresh cases and rising recovery rate show the right path to tackle COVID-19

There is some good news after a long time. According to the data released by the Health Ministry, the daily count of fresh Coronavirus cases has come down to 36,571 in the last 24 hours. The recovery rate has also risen to 97.53 per cent. Most of the cases are from Kerala, reporting around 21,000 cases every day, taking the daily tally to 36,000+. Over 36,000 recoveries took place on August 19. As per the Ministry, the total active COVID-19 cases have now declined to 3,63,605, the lowest in 150 days. Indeed, it is some relief but not a reason to lower the guard. Let us not forget that the stipulated date of the third wave is approaching soon and that could change the scenario. Nevertheless, there is all likelihood that the third wave would not be as catastrophic as the second one and there are reasons for this. As per the WHO figures, around 3.23 crore people were infected by Coronavirus so far. Most of them recovered and developed antibodies. Now, as the theory goes, these people become a barrier to the spread of the virus; that is herd immunity for you which is now at play.

Apart from this, 57 crore people — almost half our population — have been vaccinated so far, which again provides a barrier to the spread of the disease. Moreover, the facilities at hospitals and oxygen arrangements have improved significantly. We have suffered enough due to COVID-19 and now is the time to redeem our lives. After all, for how long can life be put on pause, or for that matter how long can the country remain paralysed with the lockdown? Education, sports, businesses, entertainment and the travel and hospitality industries have suffered immensely. The economic and psychological loss due to the pandemic is huge. We have to learn to live with it by finding ways to deal with it. Prolonging the lockdown cannot be a lasting solution. We must think afresh and reclaim our lives. A Corona passport for travel would be a good idea. Opening schools in two or three shifts could ensure children's safety. We are so proud of our athletes at the Olympics but if the sports facilities are not opened, many careers would end even before they begin. Likewise, the entertainment industry needs to be opened to ease the tensions of the industry and us all!

Who're the Taliban? What is their credo?

The Taliban fundamentalist organisations have spawned from the Deoband madrasa, and the ideology preached there has worldwide influence

The Taliban in our neighbouring Afghanistan are in the news after the sudden takeover of Afghanistan by the militia's hordes. But who actually are the Taliban? To learn more about them, we must turn our attention to Deoband, barely 300 km from our Capital, Delhi.

The Deoband madrasa was set up in 1867 as a reaction against the end of what remained of the Mughal Empire following the defeat of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58. The seminary's objective was to preserve Islamic learning and way of life. It began with one teacher, Mullah Mahmud Deobandi, and was originally known as the Arab madrasa. There were those who swore vengeance on the British; out of these movements emerged the Taliban as well as al-Qaeda (though much later), with global aspirations.

In the period military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq was fervently Islamising Pakistan, the Taliban first emerged in Afghanistan as a cohesive unit. Rahimullah Yusufzai, a Peshawar-based scholarly journalist, in an interview with Charles Allen, a renowned historian of the British Raj (and grandson of the founder of *The Pioneer* daily), reported being the first journalist to note the appearance of the Taliban on the Afghan scene in 1994. They were unsmiling youngsters with untrimmed beards, black turbans, black waistcoats, carrying either Kalashnikov automatic rifles or grenade launchers.

In 1879, the Deoband madrasa assumed the additional name of Dar-ul-Uloom, or the abode of Islamic learning. English was prohibited; all students had to learn the *Quran* and the *Hadith* in Arabic. This was in accordance with the teachings of Shah Waliullah of Delhi. The madrasa retained militant jihad as a central pillar of the faith. Officially, Deoband has rejected *ijtihad* (the use of independent reasoning) in matters of the *Sharia*. Around the end of the 19th century, the teachings at the madrasa were traditional and termed *Salafi*, or following the forefathers based on the ideas of renowned jurists Hanabali and Ibn Tamiyya. The ideology



preached at the institution has worldwide influence. A true Muslim's first duty is to defend his religion wherever it is under attack. Sunni Islam of South Asia has been impacted the most by these teachings.

The Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Hind (JUH), the Party of Clerics of Hindustan, formed in 1920 later resulted in two splinter groups: Tablighi Jamaat (Preaching Party) led by Naqshbandi Sufi Maulana Muhammad Ilyas followed the teachings of Shah Waliullah. The second was led by Mawdudi, who promoted a new political agenda. For him, Islam had to present itself as a viable political and social alternative to both Western capitalism and socialism. He advocated a new political platform based on Islamic revival and separation through political action and *jihad*. Islam had to confront non-Islam head on. Out of the Islamic revolution would emerge the Islamic State purged of all accretions, that is, a 'democratic' caliphate whose citizens would embrace *Sharia* willingly. In 1939, Mawdudi moved to Lahore. Two years later, he founded Jamiat-e-Islami (JI) in direct opposition to JUH. As the demand for a separate Muslim State grew in India, a number of Deobandis formed another

THE VARIOUS FUNDAMENTALIST ORGANISATIONS THAT EXIST NOW IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN ARE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER CONNECTED TO THE DEOBAND MADRAS. THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THE INSPIRATION RECEIVED FROM DEOBAND (INDIA)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE NORTHEASTERN TURBULENCE

Sir — The Northeast region seldom catches attention unless something tragic happens there. Although the region has been divided into various States, the boundary disputes refuse to recede which can be gauged from the turbulent and violent nature of events which occurred over the last few months. Northeast India has the distinction of remaining aloof from the rest of the country. However, frequent insurgency, political instability, separatist tendencies and distinct identities have distorted the culture and history of the region for decades.

However, with the arrival of digitalisation and a shift from PV Narasimha Rao's 'Look East Policy' in the 1990s to 'Act East Policy' by the Modi Government in 2014 to expand its footprint for electoral and geopolitical gains, a renewed vigour in development projects can be seen. But at a time when the world is struggling with issues like the Taliban imbroglio, Coronavirus pandemic, terrorism and fast-changing centres of powers, India cannot afford to be complacent in its internal matters and interstate disputes. The Governments' approach must not exacerbate these fault lines by polarisation but respect their regional identities. The Centre must also closely monitor the situation from slipping out of control. Consensus and confidence-building measures must be adopted to solve the border issues at the earliest.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

CAN TALIBAN SUSTAIN FOR LONG?

Sir — India must be on the alert and watch carefully how the Taliban run the Government in Afghanistan. Even though the Taliban leaders have assured the world that they would moderate their harsh religious principles, the Taliban have so far failed to walk the talk. They have been perpetrating atrocities against the civilians ever since they took over Afghanistan. It is a fact that if the new Taliban regime in

RAKSHA BANDHAN AS PUBLIC HOLIDAY



In response to an RTI petition from the Delhi Government offices, interesting data emerged that more than 80 per cent employees avail Raksha Bandhan as one of the two restricted holidays allowed to them. Similar data can emerge if a study is conducted on employees of the Central Government and public sector undertakings (including banks). Most private establishments observe Raksha Bandhan as a holiday, and the thin attendance in Government offices makes it a holiday for all practical purposes.

Afghanistan functions against the interests of the people of the country, it will be difficult for it to sustain in the long run.

The agitation by Afghans led to protests in parts of the country where they were seen waving the national flag of the previous Afghan Government. It remains to be seen whether the Afghans continue to stage protests against the Taliban after there were rounds fired at them. Against this backdrop, India needs to wait and watch. A pragmatic approach needs to be adopted by India rather than an ideological one. The interests of India must reflect in its thinking and actions. Given that there are some elements in India who celebrate Talibanisation of Afghanistan, the re-emergence of the Taliban is a matter of grave concern for India.

Venu GS | Kollam

INSUFFICIENT JUDICIAL STRENGTH

Sir — It is good augury that the Collegium has cleared nine names for elevation to the Supreme Court. The

outfit, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, or party of scholars of Islam, in 1945 under the leadership of Maulana Shabbar Ahmad Othmani and Maulana Mufti Mahmud. Its aim was to shape the upcoming nation of Pakistan into a truly Muslim State with an Islamic Constitution in conformity with the *Quran* and *Sharia*, a vision it shared with Tablighi Jamaat.

Ahead of Partition in 1941, there were around 200 madrasas in Pakistan, rising to 893 by 1972. Of these, 354 were Deobandi, 144 Al-Hadith and 267 Bareilvis. By 1980, nearly 70 per cent of the madrasas were controlled by Deobandis. By 2002, their number was 10,000; of this, 7,000 belonged to Deobandis. Going by this trend, all madrasas would now be under the control of Deobandis. Such is the extent of influence of the institution based in Deoband.

Most of the Taliban are the products of these madrasas, which have become nurseries for producing more Taliban. The various fundamentalist organisations that exist now in India and Pakistan are one way or the other connected to the Deoband madrasa. The Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan have acknowledged the inspiration received

from Deoband (India).

Charles Allen, in his book '*God's Terrorists — The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*', points out that Wahhabism is the guiding ideology behind modern Islamist terrorism. The Taliban are representatives of this ideology in action. Allen mentions that Ahmad Rashid has meticulously captured the rise of Taliban in his book, '*Taliban: The Story of the Warlords*'. In Rashid's words: "The Taliban represent nobody but themselves and recognised no Islam but their own."

The *Shia Revival* says that the Deobandi area of influence stretches from Bangladesh to southern Afghanistan. The Deobandis became associated with the Afghan war in the 1980s. Many other of South Asia's Sunni extremists hail from the Deobandi tradition. The Pakistan-trained Taliban committed atrocities on the Afghan Hazaras. The Taliban declared Afghan Shias to be infidels and massacred at least 2,000 of them in Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamian in 1997-98. Others have been told to convert to Sunnism or face death.

(The author is a seasoned writer, an editor and analyst with publications in Hindi and English. The views expressed are personal.)

SOUND BITE

I will be out of politics for the time being. I have sent my resignation letter to the party president (interim) Sonia Gandhi.

Tripura Congress president — Pijush Biswas

Our political and diplomatic efforts to find a solution for Afghanistan, working with the Taliban, of course, if necessary, will go on.

UK Prime Minister — Boris Johnson

It is a big win not for me but for the team of *The Family Man* because be it a film or a web series, it is teamwork that matters.

Actor — Manoj Bajpayee

Knowing that he (Hardik Pandya) is going to play a very crucial role for us, it is important to manage his bowling workload very well.

Former Indian pace bowler — Paras Mhambrey

Unless you can fund the electoral coffers of the BJP, the Government wouldn't bother about you.

Congress spokesperson — Pawan Khera

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

RESERVOIR FISHERIES:
THE WAY FORWARD

As shown by Uttar Pradesh, the public-private partnership in fisheries is vital



M KRISHNAN

The vision document of the fisheries department of Uttar Pradesh (2013) and now supported exceedingly well by the programmes envisaged under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) can easily deliver on the targets with some imaginative strategies.

UP produced 6.99 lakh metric tonnes of fish in 2019-20 of the 104.37 lakh metric tonnes of inland fish harvested in India. Majorly, inland fish production in UP consisted of 5.61 lakh metric tonnes of Indian major carps and 1.26 lakh metric tonnes of minor carps. The current average fish yield from UP reservoirs is only 15 kg per hectare a year, thus producing only about 1000 tons annually from 1.49 lakh hectares.

Despite the straightforward strategies identified to raise the productivity of reservoirs, it is unlikely to achieve the target of 280 kg of fish/ha unless appropriate scientific and co-management practices are set in place.



The importance of public-private partnership in fisheries is no less important for its success than how it has proved to be a success in sports. The contribution of Inspire Institute of Sports of Kotak Mahindra Bank and JSW sports has played no mean role in India's success at the Tokyo Olympics.

Similarly, the collaboration of Tata group in cage culture fisheries in reservoirs in Andhra Pradesh is a script that can be replicated in Uttar Pradesh. It is the livelihood element that scores highest in any project. The involvement of the Tatas began in 2016 when communities were mobilized through local self-help groups. Modified strategies and support systems can be developed with any identified corporate group in UP under their CSR programme.

It is archaic thinking to expect co-management to happen, explode and sustain on its own in fisheries, especially when dealing with live material. Constant handholding and supervision at every level of supplementary stocking, hatchery management, organizing of networking between the department and the fishers self-help groups for involving them as active partners in planning, implementation and decision making process, creation of adequate rearing space for ex-situ/in-situ production of quality fingerlings for stocking; leasing of reservoirs on long-term; and continuous programme for HRD of reservoir fisheries managers and fishers; the banks that are involved in enabling the financial flow through, marketing arrangements; sale of the fish and remittance of the income needs to be done through CSR involvement.

Another opportunity to explode reservoir fish production is to avail the PMMSY window of creation of FPOs (Fishers Producers Organisations) in the various locations in the state. The biggest hitch that we have faced in the establishment of FPOs in Maharashtra among ornamental fish breeders is the difficulty in recruiting a technically qualified manager owing to the unwillingness of qualified fisheries personnel to take up the challenge of managing the FPO. This again needs to be bridged with the CSR participation. This can also be attempted to be corrected with the involvement of fisheries students in such FPOs as a compulsory component of their RAWF program.

Only with these measures can it be expected that annual fish yield will increase to 400 kg, 300 kg, 100 kg and 50 kg for small-A, small-B, medium and large reservoirs, respectively, thereby increasing the total fish production from reservoirs from the current level of about 1000 tons to over 6200 tons. Such efforts will also help meet the PMMSY targets set for the state.

(The writer is Adviser, State Level Project Advisory Committee for Marine Resources, Andhra Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

How expansionism joined terrorism?

The story of how the US, India and Afghanistan were left out completely and the fulcrum shifted towards China and its allies — Russia, Pakistan and Iran

The Taliban takeover is the first step in the establishment of an alternative world order devoid of any international law. As the US exits its 'forever-war' phase, many are still bewildered about the how Taliban managed to become an important "stakeholder" in the region. Today Pakistan is going to be the first country to recognize the terror reign. It will be soon followed by China and other powers hostile to the West. Expansionism has thus joined terrorism. There is a possibility that when the West was focused on the talks, the Taliban was using the talks platform to gain political recognition. It was simultaneously rearmed by others. Move a few steps back and the contours of the entangled geo-politics emerge.

Taliban's quest for diplomatic and political recognition can be traced back to the year 2007 when it established a political commission to reach out to the world, especially the US. The fundamental objective that the Taliban had in mind was to project itself as a "political movement" instead of a terrorist organisation. Later, the opening of their first overseas office in Dohain 2013 gave them defacto recognition as it was visited by diplomats from different countries. The talks were unsuccessful and the office was shut down. However, it gained the Taliban a "diplomatic" voice for itself and the much-required political space. The international community had started differentiating between Taliban, Al-Qaida, and ISIS, something which India had always disapproved of and had time and again appealed for "zero tolerance" against terrorism.

In early 2014-15, major powers and Taliban converged to finish off ISIS. The Iranian Government allowed the Taliban to open its office in Mashhad. This convergence also led to the US-Iran nuclear deal of 2015. The US through Iran engaged with the Taliban indirectly to fight ISIS. Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani played an important role in helping the US to fight ISIS. In a way or the other, the US "outsourced" the fight, a development that was covered in the Washington Post.

The Russian interests too coincided against ISIS. This motivated powers such as Russia and China to engage the Taliban and treat it as an important stakeholder. Dealing with the regional and extra-regional powers by using back channels was a moment of a tactical and strategic victory for the Taliban. This was also the time when the re-arming of the Taliban was initiated by Iran and Russia. For instance, Tehran's military aid to the Taliban included light arms, rifle-propelled grenades, and even military training. Pakistan's military support to Taliban is already well established. The joint resistance against ISIS thus paved the way for the Taliban. Two objectives of the Taliban were fulfilled. First, a sneak into



CHINA HAD INITIATED ITS OBOR IN 2013 AND STRETCHED ITS ECONOMIC PRESENCE TO SOUTH, CENTRAL AND WEST ASIA, APART FROM AFRICA. IT ALSO MADE TACTICAL INROADS WITH ITS SMALL ARMS SUPPLIES AND SUPPORTING THE UNDEMOCRATIC AND TYRANNICAL GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THESE REGIONS. CHINA THUS ADOPTED A POLICY OF A 'SHADOW BOXER' WHEREIN IT LOOSELY COOPERATED WITH COUNTRIES INIMICAL TO THE US IN THEIR SUB-REGIONS

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The views expressed are personal.)



the stakeholders' club, and second, how it regained a stronghold in Afghanistan which then gave wings to its old aspirations of forming an Islamic Emirate.

China had initiated its OBOR in 2013 and stretched its economic presence to South, Central, and West Asia apart from Africa. It also made tactical inroads in the region through its small arms supplies and supporting the undemocratic and tyrannical governments across all these regions. China thus adopted a policy of a "shadow boxer" wherein it loosely cooperated with countries who are inimical to the US in their sub-regions. It also strengthened its strategic, military, and economic relations with Russia as well as Pakistan. The lucrativeness of Iran to both Russia and China is thus well-founded. The sharp polarisations became evident in 2016 at the sixth Heart of Asia (HoA) conference held at Amritsar. India and Afghanistan, despite attempts to highlight Pakistan's role in the terror network, were brutally side-lined when Islamabad received diplomatic appreciation from Russia.

Simultaneously, the Sino-Pak nexus supported the armed insurgencies in Afghanistan through the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks while also offering their good offices to broker a deal between Kabul and the Taliban. Such a deal at that particular point of time meant initiating some sort of legitimacy for the Taliban. The Afghan peace process was a fertile ground to sow the seeds of China-Russia-Pakistan and Iran's cooperation. The first meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group

(QCG) on the Afghan Peace and reconciliation process was held in Islamabad in January 2016. Through this platform, Pakistan was successful in bringing both US and China to the same table. This ensured that whatever decision would be taken would be in Pakistan's favour; and projection of its strategic utility to the US, Russia, and other European powers would be a bonus.

As Beijing continued to influence Moscow, new tripartite talks between China, Pakistan, and Russia were held for the first time in December 2016 wherein Moscow decided to work on "working group on Afghanistan". India and Afghanistan were again let down in this geo-politics. It set the stage for an emerging Pakistan-China-Russia alliance. Overtime, as the fundamentalists from Syria and Iraq moved towards Afghanistan, Moscow and Beijing further enhanced their cooperation with the Taliban. This also downplayed the US-led Mission in Afghanistan. For these reasons, the Haqqani network and its proxies played an important role.

Upon India and Afghanistan voicing their concerns, the talks were converted to six-party talks in 2017 but both had little influence. The pressure of Russia, Pakistan, and China made the Afghan government talk on unconditional terms with the Taliban in 2018 and it was compelled to recognize it as a political party. India despite its divergences with Afghanistan on the issue continued its humanitarian support and its developmental projects.

By this time, a Sino-Russo

entente had taken shape, and U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018. Iran had encouraged the relations between Russia and the Taliban. Further, the ex-Taliban dissidents who joined ISIS posed a common threat to both Moscow and Tehran. This resulted in the US, India, and Afghanistan being left out completely and the shift of the fulcrum towards China and its allies -- Russia, Pakistan, and Iran. Taliban by this time was recognized as an important stakeholder and had started negotiating over issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and the rights of women projecting their "sovereign" claims over Afghanistan. They went to the extent of declaring non-recognition of the Afghan delegation. Further, Iran embraced the OBOR and the geostrategic landscape of South and Central Asia completely changed. Expansionism had thus joined terrorism.

Having realized the encirclement, the US struck a "peace deal" with the Taliban, of course, with certain obligations on the latter's part such as peaceful return, the safety of women and the children, etc., and obligated itself for a September-2021 departure. The environment became too hostile for the US and thus resulted in an early exit. In all these circumstances, there are no complete victories or defeats. China readies itself to be in a creditor's trap in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. For India too, the challenges are immense and India displayed its character by doing all that it could do on humanitarian grounds -- from building parliament to Libraries, dams and providing scholarships to the Afghan students.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

ONE OF NINE GIRLS DIES BEFORE THE AGE OF FIVE IN INDIA. THERE ARE ATROCITIES AND CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN. BUT THEY (CENTRE) ARE WORRIED ABOUT WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN. — AIMIM LEADER ASADUDDIN OWAIISI



IT IS BETTER TO SEND OWAIISI TO AFGHANISTAN TO PROTECT THEIR WOMEN AND THEIR COMMUNITY. — UNION MINISTER SHOBHA KARANDLAJE

Human capital is the key to business excellence

The quality of human capital in India can play a vital role in transforming its economy and overtaking China in the growth rate

Every crisis comes with an opportunity. India today is at the cusp of a major transformation that has the potential to make her a global leader. India's greatest asset is human capital that has the potential to make a difference to the emerging world order. More than 300 million people are part of the skilled domestic workforce in the country.

India today has a diversified pool of quality, ready to meet the needs of an expanding economy. In the past decade, a million Indian students have pursued education at universities abroad. This pool will be a great strength for India if we are able to engage with them and show them the emerging opportunities. In comparison to China, Indian professionals have a better talent perception



ANIRBAN R BANERJEE

(The writer is an expert on Leadership Development currently a Country Manager for India with a Global IT firm. The views expressed are personal.)

rating and India's global perception, as per Pew Research, adds strength in terms of engagement. We need to focus on developing leadership skills from the schooling stage.

Our education system revolves around the colonial and socialist era that focuses on creating educated labour rather than entrepreneurs and domain experts. A major drawback of this ecosystem is its inability to help students learn from failures. The education system has limited flexibility for students to pick their subject combinations from the available options. We need a model of pedagogy that facilitates engagement, quality of teaching and creates diversity of streams and effectiveness of ability for application of learning. The present model fails to



build self-confidence and independent thinking. Emphasis on bookish knowledge and assessment of what children do not know should be replaced by building an understanding of various subjects, ability to integrate and apply learnings in form of projects.

We lack in our world view and the ability to link macro-economics and micro business strategy. The key area of deficiency is social skills and the ability to build collaborative networks to

expand opportunities.

Economic growth thrives on trust, collaboration and capability. Our education system is key to building a social quotient and interpersonal skills to drive collaboration, innovation and change. Our growth depends on our ability to collaborate. Lack of emphasis on building social skills, participation in sports and extracurricular activities hampers the ability of youngsters to interact, get different insights and become more confident about themselves through such interactions and presentations. Such skills form the core for leadership and enterprise building to be successful in other professions as well.

Universities need to be developed as centres of excel-

lence with direct support from the HRD ministry and international partnerships. We need to create the right funding and support system to develop enterprise and research. The system should be friendly for growth and not marred by red tape. India needs to initiate a national integrated education policy that encourages cross country cultural and social exposure for graduates and post-graduates from different parts of the country to get exposed to work being done by their peers in other states and develop a strong understanding of cultures of different parts of the country. Activities related to sports and National Cadet Corps should be included in the curriculum.

It is time for an India Sovereign Wealth Fund with

focus on start-up incubation and modernizing the education system with emphasis on teaching quality, research facility and technology support. Indians can reach their potential only by showcasing the ease of business in tier-2 cities and the talent pool available there. Each Indian state will have to create the right environment for expansion of business and the mobility of working professionals and students.

India has everything that is required to take advantage of the changing world order in the post-pandemic era with a changing global economic and geo-political order. A very positive and significant development has been India receiving nearly \$82 billion in foreign investment in 2021. Efforts by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and former President Donald Trump to get QUAD into action for safeguarding economic, security interests and Trump's personal effort to rename 'Asia-Pacific' as 'Indo-Pacific' and thereby bringing India the world's most crucial geo-economic region holds enormous potential that will unfold in the years to come.

Time has come for India to position itself as a world economic power beyond just the label of a "market" or "source of cheap talent". It is time to embark on One Nation - One HRD Initiative focusing on quality.

To paraphrase Swami Vivekananda, we will be remembered for what we are and we have the power to make ourselves whatever we wish ourselves to be.

US enlists commercial airlines to help in evacuation

Austin seeks ‘creative ways’ to get Americans out of Kabul

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US military is considering “creative ways” to get Americans and others into the Kabul airport for evacuation from Afghanistan amid a range of security threats, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said, and the Pentagon on Sunday ordered six US commercial airlines to help move evacuees from temporary sites outside of Afghanistan.

Austin told ABC’s “This Week” that as President Joe Biden’s August 31 deadline for ending the evacuation operation approaches, he will recommend whether to give it more time.

Tens of thousands of Americans and others have yet to flown out of the country.

The interview aired Sunday but was taped Saturday as other US officials cited increased concerns about security threats at the Kabul airport from militants affiliated with the Islamic State group.

The US Embassy issued a security warning Saturday telling citizens not to travel to the airport without individual instruction from a US government representative. Officials declined to provide more specifics about the IS threat but described it as significant.

“We’re gonna try our very best to get everybody, every American citizen who wants to get out, out,” Austin said in the interview.

“And we’ve got — we continue to look at different ways to — in creative ways — to reach out and contact American citizens and help them get into the airfield.”

He later said this included non-Americans who qualify for evacuation, including Afghans who have applied for Special Immigrant Visas.

Austin noted that the US military on Thursday had used helicopters to move 169 Americans into the airport from the grounds of a nearby

hotel in the capital.

That is the only announced example of US forces going beyond the airport to get evacuees, who often are blocked by chaos, violence and crowds at airfield gates.

A central problem in the evacuation operation is processing evacuees once they reach other countries in the region and in Europe. Those temporary waystations, including in Qatar, Bahrain and Germany, are sometimes reaching capacity.

In an attempt to alleviate that, and to free up military aircraft for missions from Kabul, the Pentagon on Sunday activated the Civil Reserve Air Fleet. The Defense Department said 18 aircraft from six commercial airlines will be directed to ferry evacuees from interim waystations. The airlines will not fly into Afghanistan.

According to the Pentagon, the activation involves three



A US soldier shoots in the air with his pistol while standing guard behind barbed wire as Afghans sit on a roadside near the military part of the airport in Kabul

AFP

aircraft each from American Airlines, Atlas Air, Delta Air Lines and Omni Air; two from Hawaiian Airlines; and four from United Airlines.

‘Imbecilic’: Ex-UK leader Blair slams US’ Afghan withdrawal

AP ■ LONDON

Tony Blair, the British prime minister who deployed troops to Afghanistan 20 years ago after the 9/11 attacks, says the US decision to withdraw from the country has “every Jihadist group round the world cheering.”

In a lengthy essay posted on his website late Saturday, the former Labour Party leader said the sudden and chaotic pullout that allowed the Taliban to reclaim power risked undermining everything that had been achieved in Afghanistan over the past two decades, including advances in living standards and the education of girls.

“The abandonment of Afghanistan and its people is tragic, dangerous, unnecessary, not in their interests and not in ours,” said Blair who served as prime minister during 1997-2007, a period that also saw him back the U.S.-led war in Iraq in 2003.

“The world is now uncertain of where the West stands because it is so obvious that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in this way was



driven not by grand strategy but by politics,” he added.

Blair also accused U.S. President Joe Biden of being “in obedience to an imbecilic political slogan about ending ‘the forever wars’, as if our engagement in 2021 was remotely comparable to our commitment 20 or even 10 years ago.”

The former prime minister, whose reputation in the U.K. took a dive from the failure to find the alleged weapons of mass destruction that were cited as justification for U.S. coalition’s invasion of Iraq, said Britain has a “moral obligation” to stay in Afghanistan until everyone who needs to be evacuated is taken out.

“We must evacuate and give sanctuary to those to whom we have responsibility — those Afghans who helped us and stood by us and have a right to demand we stand by them,” he said.

Like other nations, Britain is trying to evacuate Afghan allies as well as its own citizens from Afghanistan, but with a U.S.-imposed Aug. 31 deadline hovering into view, it’s a race against time.

In addition to the 4,000 or so U.K. citizens, the country is thought to have around 5,000 Afghan allies, such as translators and drivers, earmarked for a seat on a plane. The Ministry of Defense said Sunday that nearly 4,000 people had been evacuated so far.

Blair conceded that mistakes were made over the past two decades but added that military interventions can be noble in intent, especially when challenging an extreme Islamist threat.

“Today we are in a mood which seems to regard the bringing of democracy as a utopian delusion and intervention virtually of any sort as a fool’s errand,” he said.

ISIS threat forces changes to evacuations

AP ■ KABUL

Potential Islamic State threats against Americans in Afghanistan are forcing the US military to develop new ways to get evacuees to the airport in Kabul, a senior US official has said, adding a new complication to the already chaotic efforts to get people out of the country after its swift fall to the Taliban.

The official on Saturday said small groups of Americans and possibly other civilians will be given specific instructions on what to do, including movement to transit points where they can be gathered up by the military. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

The changes come as the US Embassy issued a new security warning Saturday telling citizens not to travel to the Kabul airport without individual instruction from a US government representative. Officials declined to provide more specifics about the IS threat but described it as significant.

Russian envoy to Kabul: Taliban offering a deal

Moscow: The Russian ambassador in Kabul says the Taliban have asked his embassy to convey their offer of a deal to a remaining pro-government holdout in northern Afghanistan.

Ambassador Dmitry Zhirmov said on Saturday that a senior member of the Taliban’s political leadership has asked Russia to tell fighters in the Panjshir Valley that the Taliban hope to reach a political agreement to settle the situation there. The diplomat says the Taliban claim they don’t want bloodshed in the region.

The Panjshir Valley north of Kabul, a stronghold of the Northern Alliance militias that were allied with the US during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, is the only area that hasn’t fallen to the Taliban. **AP**

Britain to convene G7 meeting on Afghanistan

AP ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said he will convene a meeting of leaders from the Group of Seven nations on Tuesday for “urgent talks on the situation in Afghanistan.”

In a statement posted on Twitter, Johnson said it is “vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis and support the Afghan people to secure the gains of the last 20 years.”

Biden to virtually meet with G7 leaders

Washington: US President Joe Biden is scheduled to virtually meet other leaders of the G-7 countries on August 24 to discuss close coordination on Afghanistan policy, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Sunday. The leaders will discuss continuing our close coordination on Afghanistan policy and evacuating our citizens, the brave Afghans who stood with us over the last two decades.

As China, Pak weigh recognising Taliban, experts warn of long-term losses, US ire

PTI ■ BEIJING

As China, Pakistan mull a joint strategy to push for a global recognition of the Taliban regime in war-torn Afghanistan to further their interests, experts have warned the “all-weather allies” of long-term losses, especially a blow-back effect from the US which may turn its ire on Beijing and Islamabad to avenge its Afghan

imbroglio.

Since the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul on August 15, China and Pakistan have stepped up contacts amidst a sense of their delight over a “humiliating defeat” of the US after a 20-year war in Afghanistan despite lingering concerns over the return of the Taliban with all its baggage of the al-Qaeda and the Islamic State terror groups.

Contrary to its oft-stated

diplomatic position that it has no favourites in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government is clearly comfortable with the return of the Taliban, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted some Pakistani analysts as saying.

Within hours of Kabul’s fall, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said the Afghan people had “broken the shackles of slavery” to the West.

Palestinians arrest 24 demonstrators in West Bank

AP ■ RAMALLAH

Palestinian police on Sunday said they arrested 24 people protesting the government’s response to the death of a prominent political activist while in the custody of Palestinian security forces.

The demonstrators had planned to call for accountability in the death of Nizar Banat, an outspoken critic of the Palestinian Authority who died in custody on June 24 shortly after he was arrested. But police prevented Saturday’s protest and arrested two dozen activists.

Police spokesman Louay Arzeigat issued a statement saying the demonstrators had not received a permit and “refused to sign the conditions for the gathering.” It did not elaborate.

Israel hits weapon sites in Gaza after protests at border

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel’s military bombed Palestinian militant weapons sites in the Gaza Strip early Sunday in response to a violent demonstration on the perimeter fence that left an Israeli police officer critically injured, the army said.

Saturday’s violence erupted after hundreds of Palestinians took part in a demonstration organised by Gaza’s Hamas rulers to draw attention to the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the territory.

The demonstration grew violent after dozens of people approached the fortified border fence and threw rocks and explosives toward Israeli soldiers from behind a black smoke screen billowing from



burning tires. At least 24 Palestinians, including a 13-year-old, were injured by Israeli gunfire, according to the Gaza health ministry. An Israeli Border Police officer was shot and critically injured.

The army said in a statement that in response to the violent demonstrations, fight-

er planes hit “four weapons and storage manufacturing sites” belonging to Gaza’s Hamas rulers, and that the military deployed additional troops to the region near the border with the Palestinian enclave. There were no immediate reports of injuries in the airstrikes.

Qatar to hold first-ever advisory Shura Council vote

AP ■ DUBAI

Qatar on Sunday announced October 2 as its date for the country’s first election to vote for members of its top advisory panel, known as the Shura Council.

The date was announced by royal decree, according to a report in the state-run Qatar News Agency.

The Shura Council election aims to give the country’s citizens more say on how their hereditary emirate is governed. Qatar’s ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, has described the election as “an important step” for the country.

The election allows Qatari citizens to choose 30 members of the country’s 45-seat Shura Council, which are now all hand-picked by the ruling elite. The council has no substantive legislative power but advises the emir on new laws and policies.

Pak to allow fully-vaccinated Sikh pilgrims to visit Kartarpur

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has decided to allow fully-vaccinated Sikh pilgrims to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur from next month with strict Covid-19 protocols, ahead of the 482nd death anniversary of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev on September 22, media reports said on Sunday.

On this occasion, three-day rituals will be held at the shrine from September 20. Guru Nanak died in Kartarpur on September 22, 1539.

Pilgrimage to the Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara was suspended in March 2020 because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The decision to open the Kartarpur shrine was taken by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Saturday due to the approaching death anniversary of Sikhism founder Baba Guru Nanak Dev on September 22.

Dawn newspaper reported that the NCOC meeting unanimously decided to allow Sikh pilgrims to visit Kartarpur next month under strict Covid-19

protocols. Due to the Delta variant, India was in category C in Pakistan from May 22 till August 12, and a special approval was required for people coming from the country, including Sikh pilgrims.

However, fully-vaccinated persons with certificates will be allowed to enter Pakistan provided they show Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test reports which should not be more than 72 hours old. Apart from this, a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) will also be conducted at airports and in case of a positive result, the individual will not be allowed to enter Pakistan.

Besides, as per Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs), a maximum of 300 people will be permitted to assemble at a time at the darbar. According to an official of the Ministry of National Health Services (NHS), Pakistan had introduced three categories to deal with the coronavirus spread.

“Countries in category A are exempted from the manda-

tory Covid-19 test, travellers from areas falling in category B are required to present a negative PCR test that must be taken within 72 hours of the travel date, while visitors from nations in category C are restricted and can travel only under specific NCOC guidelines,” the official said.

The movement of pilgrims to Pakistan through the Kartarpur corridor has been suspended since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the neighbouring country banned all travel from India citing the surge in cases here in April this year, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai told Parliament in New Delhi on August 3.

India signed the Kartarpur corridor agreement with Pakistan on October 24, 2019. Under the pact, Indian pilgrims of all faiths are allowed to undertake round-the-year visa-free travel through the Kartarpur corridor to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, one of the most revered shrines of Sikhs, in Pakistan.

Swedish PM Stefan Lofven to step down in November

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

Stefan Lofven, Sweden’s Social Democratic Prime Minister since 2014, said Sunday that he will step down as head of Government and the party in November.

The unexpected announcement — made during his annual summer speech — came ahead of next year’s general election and after Lofven in June became the first Swedish leader ever to lose a motion in parliament.

Josephine Baker is 1st Black woman given Paris burial honour

AP ■ PARIS

The remains of American-born singer and dancer Josephine Baker will be reinterred at the Pantheon monument in Paris, making the entertainer who is a World War II hero in France the first Black woman to get the country’s highest honour.

Le Parisien newspaper reported Sunday that French President Emmanuel Macron decided to organize a ceremony on November 30 at the Paris monument, which houses the

remains of scientist Marie Curie, French philosopher Voltaire, writer Victor Hugo and other French luminaries.

The presidential palace confirmed the newspaper’s information.

After her death in 1975, Baker was buried in Monaco, dressed in a French military uniform with the medals she received for her role as part of the French Resistance during the war. Baker will be the fifth woman to be honoured with a Pantheon burial, and will also be the first artist.

Haiti earthquake death toll passes 2,200

Port-au-Prince: Haiti’s Civil Protection Agency said Sunday that the toll from this month’s magnitude 7.2 earthquake has grown to 2,207, with 344 people still missing.

The previous figure had been 2,189 on Wednesday. The agency said via Twitter that 12,268 people were injured and nearly 53,000 houses were destroyed by the August 14 quake. The new toll comes at a time when relief operations are expanding — the US-based aid agency Samaritan’s Purse opened a field hospital Saturday — but authorities are struggling with security at distribution points. **AP**

FM to launch NMP today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will launch the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) today, which will list out the Government's infrastructure assets to be sold over the next four-years, an official statement said.

"The NMP comprises a four-year pipeline of the Central Government's brown-field infrastructure assets. Besides providing visibility to investors, NMP will also serve as a medium-term roadmap for the asset monetisation initiative of the Government," the Niti Aayog said in a statement on Sunday.

Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey had earlier this month said that the government is finalising ₹ 6 lakh crore worth infrastructure assets, including national highways and power grid pipelines, which would be monetised.

"A national monetisation plan of about ₹ 6 trillion is in the offing which will have a range of assets from pipelines to power grid pipelines to

national highways, ToT (toll-operate-transfer) and so on," Pandey had said.

The Union Budget 2021-22, laid a lot of emphasis on asset monetisation as a means to raise innovative and alternative financing for infrastructure. In her Budget speech, Sitharaman had said that monetising operating public infrastructure assets was a very important financing option for new infrastructure construction.

"A National Monetisation Pipeline of potential brownfield infrastructure assets will be launched. An asset monetisation dashboard will also be created for tracking the progress and to provide visibility to investors," she had said.

The government views asset monetisation as a strategy for the augmentation and maintenance of infrastructure, and not just a funding mechanism.

The NMP book will be released in the presence of Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar, Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, and Secretaries of relevant ministries whose assets constitute the monetisation pipeline.

IBA moves RBI seeking licence to set up ₹6,000-cr bad bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Banks' Association (IBA) has moved an application to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking licence to set up a ₹6,000-crore National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL) or bad bank, according to sources.

NARCL was incorporated last month in Mumbai following the registration with Registrar of Companies (RoC).

According to sources, the company after mobilising an initial capital of ₹ 100 crore and fulfilling other legal formalities has approached the RBI seeking licence to undertake asset reconstruction business.

The RBI in 2017, raised the capital requirement to ₹ 100 crore from the earlier level of ₹ 2 crore, keeping in mind the higher amount of cash required to buy bad loans.

RBI has its process and procedure for granting licence for such business, sources said, adding, it could take next few weeks to obtain licence from the regulator.

RBI's approval could come either in September or October, sources added.

Legal consultant AZB & Partners has been engaged to seek various regulatory



approvals and fulfilling other legal formalities.

IBA, entrusted with the task of setting up a bad bank, has put a preliminary board for NARCL in place. The company has hired P M Nair, a stressed assets expert from State Bank of India (SBI), as the managing director.

The other directors on the board are IBA Chief Executive Sunil Mehta, SBI Deputy Managing Director S S Nair and Canara Bank's Chief General Manager Ajit Krishnan Nair.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Budget 2021-22, announced that the high level of provisioning by public sector banks of their stressed assets calls for measures to clean up bank books.

"An Asset Reconstruction Company Limited and Asset Management Company would be set up to consolidate and take over the existing stressed debt," she had said in the Budget Speech. It will manage and dispose the assets to alter-

native investment funds and other potential investors for eventual value realisation, she had said.

Last year, IBA made a proposal for the creation of a bad bank for swift resolution of non-performing assets. The government accepted the proposal and decided to go for an asset reconstruction company and asset management company model in this regard.

Meanwhile, state-owned Canara Bank has expressed its intent to be the lead sponsor of NARCL with a 12 per cent stake.

The proposed NARCL would be 51 per cent owned by PSBs and the remaining by private-sector lenders.

NARCL will take over identified bad loans of lenders. The lead bank with an offer in the hand of NARCL will go for a 'Swiss Challenge', wherein other asset reconstruction players will be invited to better the offer made by a chosen bidder for finding a higher valuation of a non-performing asset on sale.

The company will pick up those assets that are 100 per cent provided for by the lenders. Banks have identified around 22 bad loans worth Rs 89,000 crore to be transferred to NARCL in the initial phase.

Xiaomi to offer full spectrum of financial services via partners

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Xiaomi is bringing in offerings like gold loans, credit line cards and insurance products as it looks to provide the full spectrum of financial services across payment, lending and insurance in India, its India head Manu Jain said.

Speaking with PTI, Jain said these financial services will be offered in partnership with organisations like Axis Bank, IDFC Bank, Aditya Birla Finance Ltd, Stashfin, Money View, Early Salary and Credit Vidya.

He stated that Mi Credit, a curated marketplace for personal loans of up to Rs 1 lakh, in 2019 witnessed a lot of euphoria, and more than one lakh loans have already been disbursed.

However, as the pandemic hit, its lending partners took a backseat.

"Many quarters went into re-thinking about the future of Mi Credit or Mi Financial Services should look like. We are now back to growing this particular platform. Q1 2021 versus Q4 2020, we grew 95 per cent, and Q1 2021 versus Q1 2020, we saw 35 per cent growth," he added.

Jain highlighted that the company is working on building a full spectrum platform



with respect to overall financial services as well as credit perspective.

He said Xiaomi is adding insurance vertical to its platform as well as expanding lending category with the addition of offerings like gold loans and credit line cards.

The top executive said Mi Credit will now offer a higher pre-approved loan of Rs 25 lakh (against Rs 1 lakh previously) and tenure of up to 60 months.

Besides, the company has started offering SME Loans and credit line cards as well.

"Mi Credit, in partnership with Stashfin, has launched Credit Line cards.

"It is a unique product that comes with a proposition of Buy Now Pay Later combined with personal loan in order to enable the customer to utilise the offering across channels without any limitations," Xiaomi India Financial Services

Head Ashish Khandelwal said.

Another service that will be launched in the next few weeks is gold loan, he added.

Jain said 40 per cent of the company's credit product users are self-employed and the remaining 60 per cent are salaried employees.

"In 2021, we are planning to further diversify and provide 20 per cent of the loans to MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises).

We have launched business loan to meet the emerging needs of entrepreneurs and MSMEs," he added.

Xiaomi's Mi Pay service, which was launched in 2018, had touched 20 million registered users in a year's time. This number has now crossed 50 million users. Talking about the insurance segment, Khandelwal said Xiaomi has partnered with ICICI Lombard to curate a health insurance product.

Three insurance sector firms to raise ₹10k cr through IPOs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Adding more fire to the already-frenzied IPO market, three insurance sector companies are entering the primary market with initial public offerings in coming months to mop up over ₹10,000 crore.

These companies are — PB Fintech, which runs the insurance brokerage Policybazaar; standalone health insurer Star Health & Allied Insurance Company; and third-party administrator Medi Assist Healthcare Service. They have already filed their draft prospectus with markets regulator Sebi.

Already over 40 companies have hit the IPO market so far this year, raising close to ₹ 70,000 crore.

August alone saw four listings, and the fifth one (Nuvoco Vistas Corp, which raised Rs 5,000 crore) is slated for Monday and as many as 24 more have filed their IPO papers so far this month, seeking to mop up over ₹4,000 crore.

Investment bankers are expecting more than 100 issues this year, making it the best-ever for the IPOs.

PB Fintech, the parent company of online insurance distributor Policybazaar, is

looking to raise Rs 6,017 crore, which will make it the second-biggest issue so far this year after the Rs 9,375-crore Zomato issue last month. PB Fintech is backed by Tiger Global and Tencent Holdings.

Star Health, the largest standalone private health insurer, is planning to raise Rs 3,000 crore; while Medi Assist, which is the largest third-party administrator, is lining up a Rs 840-1,000 crore issue, according to their draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed with the market watchdog.

While PB Fintech has filed the DRHP on August 4 (a day when four companies launched their IPOs), and Star Health did so on July 28 and Medi Assist on May 11.

Star Health, backed by billionaire Rakesh Jhunjhunwala and Westbridge Capital, is the largest standalone private health insurer with a market share of 15.8 per cent in the health insurance market in the financial year 2021.

Its public offering will consist of a fresh issue of shares aggregating Rs 2,000 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 60.1 million shares by shareholders.

Safecrop Investments India is looking to offload 30.68 million shares, followed by Apis Growth, which is looking to sell

7.68 million shares. Other investors such as the University of Notre Dame, Mio Star, Roc Capital, Sai Satish, Venkatasamy Jagannathan, Konark Trust, Bejris Minoo Desai, and MMPL Trust are also selling shares through the OFS.

PB Fintech addresses the large and highly underpenetrated online insurance and lending markets in the country through its Policybazaar and online lending platform Paisabazaar, the largest digital insurance marketplace with a 93.4 per cent market share based on the number of policies sold. In the financial year 2020, 65.3 per cent of all digital insurance sales by volume was transacted through the Policybazaar platform.

Its Rs 6,017.5-crore public issue comprises a fresh issue of Rs 3,750 crore and an offer-for-sale of Rs 2,267.5 crore by existing selling shareholders. The OFS consists of sale by investor SVF Python II (Cayman) for Rs 1,875 crore, and Rs 392.5 crore worth of shares by other shareholders.

Medi Assist is the country's largest third-party insurance administrator in terms of revenue and premium serviced. It operates a pan-India network comprising over 11,000 hospitals across 722 cities and towns.

FPIs pumped in ₹7,245 crore in Aug so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) have pumped in a net ₹7,245 crore into the Indian capital markets in August so far amid positive sentiments due to an improving macroeconomic environment.

The gradual increase in the amount of net inflows indicates that investors are slowly dropping their cautious stance and gaining higher conviction on the Indian markets, said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director - manager research, Morningstar India.

As per depositories data, ₹5,001 crore was invested in equities and ₹2,244 crore in the debt segment by overseas investors between August 2-20. This took the total net investment to ₹7,245 crore.

Regarding other emerging markets, Shrikant Chouhan, executive vice president, equity technical research at Kotak Securities, noted that flows in South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand continue to be negative to the tune of USD

5,269 million, USD 855 million and USD 341 million, respectively.

On the other hand, Indonesia reported FPI inflows of USD 156 million.

As per Srivastava, the Indian equity markets offer an attractive investment proposition from the long-term perspective. With improving macroeconomic environment and positive outlook, FPIs are focusing their attention on Indian equities.

However, he added that short-term risks continue to persist.

Additionally, lower chances of further rate cuts on the back of global inflation continue to add to their worries.

"With the latest Fed minutes indicating the possibility of tapering by year-end, markets have turned a bit volatile. With the Dollar index at around 93.57, FPIs are likely to be on a wait & watch mode, going forward," said V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services..

Customs commissioners must not issue reports interpreting law: CBIC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC has asked customs commissionerates not to issue any circular or reports which are in the nature of interpretation or clarification on matters covered under the Customs Act, a move aimed at avoiding any possible contradiction and ensuring ease of doing business.

In an instruction to all Principal Chief Commissioners of Customs, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said in order to establish a standard practice on all matters of classification of goods, with respect to levy of duty and for the implementation of any other provision of the Customs Act, 1962 or of any other provision of the Customs Act, 1962, directorates/commissionerates/audit will not issue any circular which are in the nature of clarification or interpretation.

Currently, circulars/reports/alerts are issued by the directorates/commissionerates/audit to all the Customs zones in order to promote information sharing on the modus operandi, findings or observations detected during the investigation, audit or risk analysis.

This has helped in uniform

application of the findings resulting in the safeguarding of revenue and better enforcement of compliances.

However, it has been observed that on multiple occasions, communications are issued which are either contrary to an existing circular issued by the Board or delve on matters covered by Section 151A of the Customs Act without the approval of, or a reference to the Board, the CBIC said.

"... In order to establish a standard practice on all matters of classification of goods, with respect to levy of duty thereon and for the implementation of any other provision of the Customs Act, 1962 or of any other law for the time being in force.. It is hereby directed that Directorates/Commissionerates/Audit shall not issue any Circulars/ Reports/Alerts etc. Which are in the nature of interpretation / clarification/prescription for the sake of uniformity, on matters covered under section 151A of the Customs Act, 1962..." the CBIC said.

Clarifications on all such matters would be issued by the CBIC under Section 151A of the Customs Act, 1962, it added.

NABARD's loans rise 25.2% to reach ₹6 L Cr in FY21

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The total loans and advances extended by NABARD during 2020-21 registered a growth of 25.2 per cent year-on-year to reach ₹6 lakh crore, with half of it going into production and investment, the bank said in its annual report.

The report said NABARD earned ₹34,671.2 crore income during 2020-21, or a 6.1 per cent increase over the preceding year. Its profit before tax in 2020-21 was ₹ 6,081.4 crore, against ₹ 5,234.3 crore in the year-ago period. The profit after tax was ₹ 4,320 crore compared with ₹3,859.2 crore in 2019-20.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) also said its balance sheet size reached ₹6.57 lakh crore as on March 31, 2021, most of which is on account of non-idle (earning) assets that, in turn, helped create private and public investments at the ground level.

"We achieved a record year-on-year growth of 24 per cent in our total assets and similar impressive growth in loan portfolio," NABARD Chairman G R Chintala said in the annual report.

He noted that because of the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat package and hardworking farmers, the agricultural sector recorded a growth of 3.6 per cent last year and is likely to repeat the performance in the current financial year also.

\$17.2 bn infused in Indian startup ecosystem by venture capital firms during Jan-July: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Venture capital firms infused a total of \$17.2 billion investment into the Indian startup ecosystem during January-July 2021, according to data released by the Indian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (IVCA) and Venture Intelligence (VI).

This is much higher than the \$11.1 billion and \$13 billion investments made by VCs in 2020 and 2019, respectively.

VC funding included seed to series F investments in companies less than 10 years old, and late stage tech investments.

Some of the big VC deals included those in Udaan, Lenskart, Zomato, Swiggy, PharmEasy, Meesho, Pine Labs, Zeta, Cred, RazorPay, HealthifyMe, Byju's, Unacademy, Eruditus, Vedantu, Dunzo, Bira 91, Boat, Mamaearth, MyGlamm, Uniphore Software Systems, YellowAi, Entropik and others.

"The strong deal flow is expected to continue in the latter half of the year with movement forecast in the AI/ML, Edtech and food tech space," IVCA said.

The report said the average

VC deal cheque size expanded in 2021 across stages when compared to 2019-20.

The amount put in seed funding was approximately \$1.8 million compared to \$1.2 million in 2019, the report said.

The amount invested in series A and B funding witnessed a marginal increase with \$6.8 million investment, across 110 deals till now.

Additionally, the growth stage deals almost doubled this year — \$7.5 million in 2021 whereas it was close to \$4.9 million in 2020, the report said.

The average amount infused in the late-stage tech ecosystem till July in 2021 was \$217.57 million across 38 deals, it added.

"There are tailwinds supporting exits as the ecosystem has started actioning IPOs and offshore listing for Indian startups is under discussion, with the Government of India also in sync with this principally," IVCA President Rajat Tandon said.

The Indian consumption story is really playing out, users have been switching to digital buying more through the COVID times, he added.

Petrol, diesel prices cut by 20 paise

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol and diesel prices were cut by 20 paise per litre each on Sunday - the first reduction in petrol rate in over a month, and the fourth in case of diesel in less than a week.

Petrol price in Delhi was cut to ₹101.64 a litre and diesel to ₹89.07 per litre, according to a price notification of state-run oil companies.

The reduction came as international oil prices tumbled to their lowest level since May, after the US Federal Reserve signalled it was set to start tapering asset purchases within months, hurting commodities and lifting the dollar.

The price cut in diesel is the fourth since August 18, when the reduction cycle began. All four reductions have been of 20 paise per litre each.

On the previous three occasions when diesel rates were cut, petrol prices remained unchanged.Sunday's cut in petrol price came after 36 days of status quo in rates. Diesel rate change was effected after 33 days of no change.

The freeze in rate revision coincided with Parliament session, where the opposition parties tried to corner the government on various issues including the hike in fuel prices.

Petrol and diesel prices were last hiked on July 17. Prior to that, the petrol price was increased by Rs 11.44 a litre between May 4 and July 17. Diesel rates had gone up by ₹9.14 during this period. The price hike during this period pushed petrol prices above Rs 100-a-litre mark in more than half of the country, while diesel crossed that level in at least three states.

International oil rates have fallen to \$66 a barrel from \$75 per barrel touched last month. India is dependent on imports to meet nearly 85 per cent of its oil needs and so benchmarks local fuel rates to international oil prices.

India's exposure to US securities jumps over \$20 bn; touches \$220.2 bn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's holding of US Government securities surged by more than \$20 billion in just three months ended June to \$ 220.2 billion amid rising foreign exchange reserves.

Compared to June last year, when most of the economic activities were ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic, the exposure of India to the US Treasury securities jumped by nearly \$40 billion.

Latest data from the US Treasury Department showed that India, with holding worth \$ 220.2 billion at the end of June this year, is the 11th largest holder of these securities while Japan has the most exposure at little over \$ 1.277 trillion.

India has been steadily hiking its exposure to the treasury securities since March when it was at \$ 200 billion. In April, the holding rose to \$ 208.7 billion and then to \$ 215.8 billion at the end of May. In February, the country's exposure stood at \$ 204.4 billion, a steep decline from \$ 211.6 billion in January. The holding was at USD 182.7 billion at the end of June 2020.

Unmesh Kulkarni, Managing Director Senior Advisor at wealth management major Julius Baer India, said the rise in India's exposure to US treasuries needs to be seen in the context of the continuous build-up of the country's forex reserves. "US Treasury yields,

after bottoming out around the middle of last year and rising steadily thereafter, have been on a decline since May'21, while RBI has been gradually raising its exposure since April'21," he told PTI.

Forex reserves of India stood at USD 619.365 billion in the week ended August 13 after touching a record high of USD 621.464 billion in the previous reporting week.

Kulkarni noted that domestic liquidity in the Indian money markets has been ruling high, and RBI has been trying to normalise the liquidity situation through variable rate reverse repo auctions. "The increasing forex reserves further add to the domestic rupee liquidity, and therefore it makes sense for RBI to drain a part of the surplus liquidity by purchasing forex assets.

"Among forex sovereign assets,

the US

dollar is generally the more preferred currency of the RBI; contrary to market expectations, the US dollar

has been stable in the current calendar year so far, and has in fact appreciated 4.1 per cent (Dollar Index) and 1.8 per cent against the INR," he said, adding that apart from RBI, it is learnt that Indian commercial banks have also started deploying some of their surplus funds in overseas sovereign papers.

In terms of US Treasury securities' holding, Japan is at the top followed by China with an exposure of USD 1.061 trillion at the end of June.

At the third spot was the United Kingdom with holding worth USD 452.9 billion, followed by Ireland (USD 322.9 billion), Luxembourg (USD 301.8 billion), Switzerland (USD 270.1 billion), Brazil (USD 249 billion), Cayman Islands (USD 244.8 billion), Taiwan (USD 239.4 billion) and Belgium (USD 228.5 billion), as per the data.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

Jal Shakti Department

State Mission Directorate, Jal Jeevan Mission J&K

Regional Office Address : Jal Bhawan, Near RTO Office, Narwal, Jammu email: info.jimjk@jk.gov.in.

CORRIGENDUM-01 Dated: 18/08/2021

Subject: EOI No. 01 of 2021-22, dated 05.08.2021 issued for Empanelment of ISA's under JJM in J&K.

This is for information of all the firms/agencies that following amendments/Corrigendum are being made in the above cited EOI.

S.No. 1, Page No. of EOI :- 2, Instead of :- A/c No. 0110010100000985, Read as :- A/c No. 0110010200000985

S.No. 2, Page No. of EOI :- 9, Instead of :- value of receipt against each of such projects should not be less than 05 lakhs, Read as :- value of receipt against each of such projects should not be less than 03 (three) lakhs.

The firms/agencies are advised to take into account the above amendments/Corrigendum before submission of documents against this EOI. If any firm/agency has already submitted their documents, then they should resubmit their documents taking into account following amendments/Corrigendum.

Sd/- Technical Adviser

State Mission Directorate, JJM (J&K)

No. DIPK-7008/21 Dated: 21-08-2021



BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

RAJESH NIRMAL examines the reasons behind vaccine-hesitancy in rural India while listing tactics to rectify the same

New diseases are often accompanied by misconceptions, superstitions and rhetoric. During the 1974 smallpox epidemic of India — one of the worst epidemics of the 20th century — most of the rural areas believed it to be the wrath of a regional goddess called 'Sheetla Mata'. Even today, if someone is infected with smallpox, people claim that the goddess is upset with the infected person and that they should worship her to get rid of the disease. Today, when the entire world is faced with the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rumours and misconceptions associated with this novel virus have made the fight even more difficult. The situation is worse in rural areas.

Rural regions in India are often disconnected in terms of information and awareness due to inaccessibility to the relevant information in a timely fashion. Women, owing to their restricted mobility, are further pushed away and rely on the information provided by men in the family. The ones who are literate and aware are often neglected by their families and forced to follow the mis-



conceptions they believe to be true.

Women at the crossroads

Whenever Pooja Kumari, a 23-year-old graduate from Rampur Babuwan village in Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur district, tries to explain COVID-19 through a scientific lens, her in-laws discard her information upholding a traditionalist view-

point, resulting in a never-ending disagreement. While her husband and brother-in-law work in another city, she lives in the village with her in-laws and two small daughters. Expressing her difficulty in making an informed decision, Pooja says, "My in-laws are orthodox and do not believe in the concept of immunisation. Going against their beliefs, I

ensured that my elder daughter received all the important vaccines. My decision has angered them, and they keep complaining. I am, however, aware of what is best for my child's future. I will also get her vaccinated against the novel Coronavirus, once it's available for infants."

Lack of proper awareness about vaccines has also contributed to disagreements among household members. "In my village, there is a continuous conflict regarding vaccination within several households. While half of the household members are willing to get vaccinated, the rest are dominated by their apprehensions," informs Namita Dwivedi, an Anganwadi worker from Nandauli village in Sultanpur district. In a situation where the family's opinions are divided, it becomes difficult for a woman to make a decision based on her knowledge. She will be ridiculed for a long time and will be held responsible for everything that goes wrong in the future.

The bigger challenge

Another concern that stops villagers from agreeing with the

informed opinions to participate in the fight against the pandemic by getting vaccinated is the fear of possible side effects. They are quite apprehensive about these. A common question arises as to why they get fever after getting vaccinated; why does a medicine meant to provide relief cause fever? With no one to address their concerns, some have developed a fear of death. This absence of information regarding the Covid-19 vaccine has resulted in various misunderstandings and misconceptions. Namita further adds, "I feel people are extremely scared. Last year, the sudden spread of the virus and deaths in urban areas shook them. In the second wave, the virus reached the remotest corner of the villages, killing hundreds. Now, there are several rumours regarding vaccination. People are not going to fully trust it until they are properly informed. The myths and superstitions among rural women, who are least educated, regarding vaccination are deep-rooted." She emphasises the urgency of ending superstitions, which is the biggest challenge and is influencing people's decision-making. This has increased the challenges of the frontline workers who often struggle to educate the village community about Covid-19 and vaccines.

Learn from the past

While underlining the importance of effective information dissemination, Pappu Kumar, project manager for the National Rural Livelihood Mission in the district's Baldirai block says, "The way the second wave impacted the villages, it is important to focus on the education and awareness of villagers. We need to learn from the past epidemics. During the polio eradication drive that started in 1994, as the vaccinations were being administered, rumours started doing rounds that the polio vaccine is laced with infertility hormones. A massive media campaign, public messaging and door-to-door awareness drives helped address the concerns of villagers." He stressed that this time the administration needs to invest double the efforts.

There is a need to run special awareness campaigns for the Covid-19 vaccines and pull villagers from the state of confusion. Until then, the tussle between science and superstition will continue and we will not be able to defeat Covid-19.

(The article has been written under the Sanjoy Ghose Media Award 2020) —Charkha Features



A DREAM CALLED SWA-RAJ

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI contemplates whether we have attained independence or not

Last week, India and Indians celebrated the platinum jubilee (75 years) of the country's Independence in various ways and with various feelings. Leaders, thinkers and writers gave their variegated assessment and analysis of the achievements and failures of the country during the last seven and a half decades. While some had words of admiration for attaining self-sufficiency concerning food and for becoming a considerable economic and technological power, others spoke of its miserable failure in its efforts to bring down the rate of population growth, achieving the goal of mass-literacy and to bring some economic benefits to the poor.

On this day of great national importance, some senior-most statesmen and freedom fighters gave the eye-witness account of what happened on that historic night when stalwarts such as Dr Rajendra Prasad and Dr Radha Krishnan spoke at midnight and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru gave his famous 'Tryst with Destiny' speech when the whole world slept and India awoke to freedom, "to redeem its pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially". They also spoke of the pledge taken by all the members of the Constituent Assembly, present at that moment, "which comes but rarely in history", saying loudly with one voice that they dedicated themselves in all humility to the service of India and her people to the end so that the country could "attain her rightful place in the world and could make her willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind". Others were heavy with sorrow and spoke of incalculable sacrifices made by innumerable persons for achieving independence, which was accompanied by the great tragedy and horrors of partition and the barbarity and bloodshed of and by thousands of people on both sides of the border. One thing that was admitted by all the leaders and common men was that the country has not yet been able to "wipe every tear from every eye" as Bapu Gandhi had deeply aspired nor has it been able to have the 'swaraj' he had envisioned. All spoke with one voice that the country had failed to provide effective social and economic justice to the backward and poor classes, that almost half of the population does not feel any worthwhile benefit of Independence. We tend to forget that independence is not only living freely but also allowing oth-



ers to live freely.

The majority of us do not realise the fact that all our problems have arisen from an identity crisis, i.e. the deep ignorance of our real identity which is that of a soul and not the body. Hence the discrimination based on the accident of birth as well as issues of communalism, casteism, violence and disgraceful attitude towards the tribal and the backward classes will all go away if we realised that each one of us is a soul. There would have been no massacre in 1947 or even partitioning of the sub-continent if people had the awareness that they are souls. Also, there would be no injustice of any kind or corruption of any brand or gender bias if people become soul-conscious. We must thus remember that our spirituality and spiritual response will arise from our soul-consciousness and from that would come real swa-raj i.e. rule of the self or soul.

The day is not far when we will see a world centred around the purity of character and values, where every being is divine and would co-exist in harmony with nature. There will be no form of violence, be it physical, mental or emotional. Every person will be an embodiment of truth and divine virtues. Pure love and respect will form the basis of relationships. They will be completely ignorant of evil, vices and suffering. Materially, they will be living in opulence and abundance. Science will be used for creating perfect technology and comforts that are a necessity. People will enjoy perfect health, natural beauty and a long lifespan free from sickness and untimely death. Everybody will be happy and content. There will be lightness, innocence, purity and joy in every action. Don't ever think that this is all but a myth. No! It's indeed a reality that's as close as tomorrow.

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (SAR6) has confirmed the climate crisis this generation and the ones in the future are going to face and is unequivocal about human influence in global warming. Globally, food loss and waste contribute to 8 per cent of emissions.

To understand the social, environment, and economic impact of food loss and waste in India and the current state of play, the World Resources Institute India (WRI India) undertook a systematic analysis of 106 published and grey literature, along with consultations with sectoral experts. This study, supported by the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU) India platform, highlights significant gaps in research, policy and practice which need to be addressed systematically to manage food loss and waste in India.

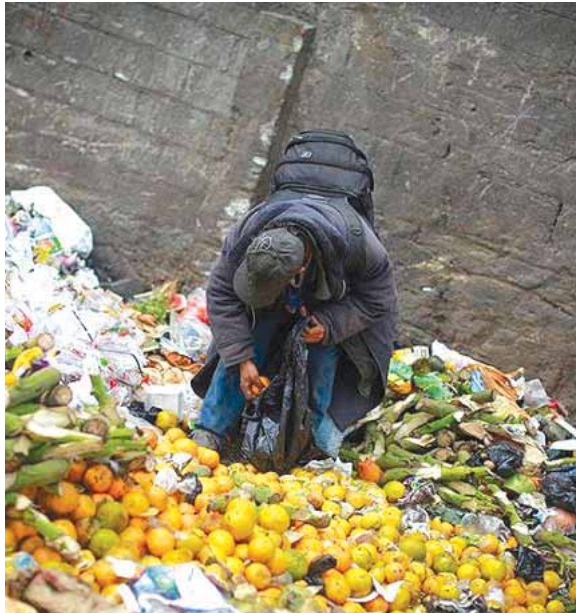
The new study from WRI India, *Food Loss and Waste in India: The Knowns and the Unknowns*, provides an important foundation to start developing a road map for addressing the nation's food loss and waste, like understanding the magnitude, identifying the hotspots and critical loss points, and so on.

The study found that:

- ♦ There is much more research emphasis on the quantity of post-harvest losses

Not too late, yet

Reducing food loss and waste is an opportunity to cut emissions, improve food and nutrition security and income in India, as per a systematic analysis by World Resources Institute (WRI). By TEAM VIVA



es than on food waste in India. Even in post-harvest losses, the quality aspects of food loss remain neglected.

- ♦ While there is national and sub-national research on post-harvest losses, the existing data across various stud-

ies are not comparable due to different measurement metrics used by them.

- ♦ The empirical research on the extent of food waste at the household, retail and service level is almost non-existent. The interventions



around food waste are mainly focused on food bank interventions or managing waste through composting.

- ♦ The social, economic, and environmental aspects of food loss and waste in India are largely unexplored. Gender-disaggregated research on food loss and waste is neither available nor considered in improving technology or in solutions for its management.

- ♦ The policy interventions are largely focused on

augmenting post-harvest storage infrastructure including the cold-chain infrastructure.

Talking about the findings, Monika Agarwal, senior manager at WRI India, said, "Significant amount of food in India never gets consumed because it gets wasted during its movement from farm to plate. The loss is much more than just the amount of food, it is about the health of our people, ecosystem - plants, animals, soil, water, biodiversity which are all inter-linked. We need concerted multi-actor efforts to reduce food getting lost in how we produce, store, transport, process, distribute, and consume food."

Dr O P Agarwal, CEO of WRI India pitched in, "WRI India's motivation for working on this issue is that large reductions in food loss and waste is a crucial element in achieving healthy diets by 2050. Cutting down food waste is an opportunity to reduce pressure on land, water and air. It will also enhance the availability of food, and improve the incomes of farmers and consumers. Though there are gaps in research, there is significant information on post-harvest losses that need to be built upon systematically."

Considering the observations, the study recommended developing a roadmap for managing food

loss and waste in India, based on data-driven strategies and solutions and taking into account the challenges faced by diverse stakeholders.

Call to action

In accordance with the findings, WRI India and FOLU India coupled the launch of the working paper with a round table to discuss the 'Champions 12.3 strategy of Target-Measure-Act' which includes adopting the Sustainable Development Goal target 12.3 which underlines halving food waste and reducing losses while measure food loss and waste to take action on the hotspots identified. The findings have resulted in the emergence of the 'Friends of Champions 12.3' in India, a group of entities from diverse sectors across the globe that are committed to reducing food loss and waste.

Dr Jayahari K M, the country co-ordinator for FOLU, expressed, "Considering the complexities in Indian agriculture and management of commodity supply chains in private and public sectors, FOLU looks forward to creating a strong action coalition under the Friends of Champion 12.3 partnership, with wider participation and focus. We hope governments — both subnational and national — would join this action coalition."

If you do not change direction you may end up where you are heading.
—Lao Tzu

GLOBAL WARMING IS CATCHING UP

Immediate and urgent globally coordinated efforts to mitigate climate change and increase resilience to extreme heat to limit additional warming can help save lives, say researchers. Extreme heat is an increasingly common occurrence worldwide, with heat-related deaths and illnesses also expected to rise. Reducing the health impacts of extreme heat is an urgent priority and should include immediate changes to infrastructure, urban environment, and individual behaviour to prevent heat-related deaths, said researchers in a new two-paper series on heat and health, published in *The Lancet*. "Two strategic approaches are needed to combat extreme heat. One is climate change mitigation to reduce carbon emissions and alter the further warming of the planet. The other is identifying timely and effective prevention and response measures, particularly for low-resource settings," said Kristie Ebi, Professor at the University of Washington, US.



MILLETS CAN REDUCE CHOLESTROL

The consumption of millets can reduce total cholesterol, triacylglycerols (commonly known as triglycerides), and BMI, according to a new study analysing the data of 19 studies with nearly 900 people. The study was undertaken by five organisations and led by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). The results, published in *Frontiers In Nutrition*, brings critically needed scientific backing to the efforts to popularise and return millets to diets, especially as staples, to combat the growing prevalence of obesity and being overweight in children, adolescents, and adults. The study showed that consuming millets reduced total cholesterol by eight per cent, lowering it from high to normal levels in the people studied. There was nearly a 10 per cent decrease in low and very low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (commonly viewed as 'bad cholesterol') and triacylglycerol levels in blood.



VACCINE SHARING IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE

Vaccine nationalism may strongly impact global trajectories of Covid-19 case numbers and increase the potential emergence of novel variants, warn researchers. A team of researchers from the US and Canada projected forward the incidence of Covid-19 cases under a range of vaccine dosing regimes, vaccination rates, and assumptions related to immune responses. They did so in two model regions: One with high access to vaccines (HAR) and a low-access region (LAR). The models also allowed for the regions to be coupled either through case importation, or the evolution of a novel variant in one of the regions. The study is published in the journal *Science*. Overall, the study found that increased vaccine-sharing resulted in reduced case numbers in LARs. As the pandemic progresses, viral evolution may play an increasingly large role in sustaining transmission, the researchers said.



PINEAPPLES TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Pineapple-based agroforestry, traditionally practiced by ethnic 'Hmar' community in southern Assam can be a sustainable alternative to jhum cultivation for the North East India providing twin solutions for climate change and biodiversity loss, a new study has said. Jhum cultivation, also called swidden agriculture, the dominant agricultural practice in the region, has become unsustainable primarily due to the reduced fallow cycle resulting in depletion in soil fertility, severe soil erosion, and low agronomic productivity, said an official from the Climate Change Programme Division of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. "Hence, Northeast India and many south Asian countries are shifting to agroforestry and high-value cropping systems from traditional jhum practices over the past decades, which are considered sustainable and profitable alternatives," the official added.



'BLUE' HYDROGEN WORSE THAN GAS, COAL

Blue hydrogen — an energy source that involves a process for making hydrogen by using methane in natural gas — is being lauded as a clean, green energy to help reduce global warming. But researchers believe it may harm the climate more than burning fossil fuels. The carbon footprint to create blue hydrogen is more than 20 per cent greater than using either natural gas or coal directly for heat, or about 60 per cent greater than using diesel oil for heat, according to new research published in the journal *Energy Science and Engineering*. Blue hydrogen starts with converting methane to hydrogen and carbon dioxide (CO2) by using heat, steam and pressure, or gray hydrogen, but goes further to capture some of the CO2. Once the byproduct CO2 and the other impurities are sequestered, it becomes blue hydrogen, according to the US Department of Energy.



Eng too reliant on Root: Gooch

Rublev vs Zverev in final

IAN S ■ LONDON

Former England batsman Graham Gooch believes that England are way too dependent on captain Joe Root to score runs. Though he is confident of Root continuing his run-making spree, Gooch wonders if Root is feeling the pressure just like he felt in his playing days.

“We’re too reliant on the one person. I have had that experience and that’s not a complaint but at certain stages of my career there was a greater responsibility on having to deliver. As a player, you can be in the best form of your life but you can’t deliver all the time and that expectation is not helpful. You need everyone to contribute,” said Gooch in an interview to *Daily Mail* on Sunday.

He added, “Whatever he says, Joe will be feeling the pressure because at the moment he’s 50, 60, 70 per cent of our batting, isn’t he? Can he keep this form going for the rest of the series? Of course he can.”

“He’s a world-class player and he’s performing unbelievably. He can keep it going. But of course, with any performer in any sport there is going to be a fallow period. It’s not possible to keep it going game after game after game,” concluded Gooch.

The 68-year-old, who served as the batting coach of the England team between 2009 and 2014, had some sympathy for the top order which is set for a rejig ahead of the Leeds Test on Wednesday. With Dom Sibley dropped from the squad, Haseeb Hameed is in line to partner with Rory Burns at the top with Dawid Malan at number three on his return to the Test fold after three years.

“Every one of those crick-



eters works hard, trains hard, prepares themselves. It’s not lack of effort but things like attitude, technical ability, knowledge and concentration all come into play, especially for an opening batsman because one mistake and it’s the end of your day,” said Gooch.

He is supportive of Hameed, who made zero and nine in his comeback Test at Lords. “They’ve got to play him for the rest of the series because you don’t bring someone in and leave them out after one game.”

Malan’s selection might have raised some eyebrows. But Gooch finds it to be a good one. “He’s got a technique

where he plays the ball late, plays straight. He’s a composed player, he knows his own game, he knows how to score runs, he’s had a bit of success at Test level before. Just because someone has had a go doesn’t mean one mistake and it can’t come back.”

Gooch finished by saying that Sir Alastair Cook, who retired from international cricket in 2018, would still get into the current Test team. “He’d still play if he was available, of course he would.”

The third Test between England and India begins at Headingley from Wednesday.

Indian team undergoes first training session at Headingley



PTI ■ LEEDS

The Indian team on Sunday began training for the upcoming third Test against England in earnest with almost all its top players sweating it out at the nets at Headingley.

The visitors started practic-

ing soon after reaching Leeds to play the third Test of the five-match series, having taken a 1-0 lead with a big 151-run win over the hosts at the Lord’s.

From skipper Virat Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane and senior opener Rohit Sharma to pacers Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and the spin duo of Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, all the players were seen training at the nets.

Also part of the session was wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant.

The last time India played a Test at Headingley was way back in 2002, meaning it will be the first outing for all the current team players.

The third Test starts on Wednesday.

“Hello and welcome to the Headingley Stadium, Leeds. Our venue for the 3rd Test against England. #ENGvIND,” the BCCI tweeted after the team’s arrival.

Bumrah channelised anger in right way: Zaheer

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan lavished praise on seamer Jasprit Bumrah for his all-round show in India’s win over England in the Lord’s Test. Zaheer also believes the heated exchange with James Anderson acted as a motivation for Bumrah in the match.

“If by getting angry, he can carry himself and perform like this, I believe he should at times needle the opposition. See, in the first innings, he had gone wicketless and being the class bowler that he is, I am sure it



must have bothered him,” Zaheer was quoted as saying by *Cricbuzz*.

“After that, the whole Anderson episode that unfolded, the bouncers he bowled to him and then while batting, the manner in which the England pacer went after him all those things motivated him, and he channelised that anger in the right way. England must be thinking ‘we should have let Bumrah bowl bouncers’ and not mess with him. The intensity with which he bowled, was worth praising.”

The Bumrah-Anderson fight in the Lord’s Test happened on day

three when India pacers looked to bowl out the England batting lineup in their first innings. Bumrah bowled a 10-ball over to Anderson, in which he overstepped the line four times.

Apart from bowling no balls, Bumrah also bowled a few short-pitched deliveries to the Lancashire cricketer who managed to save his wicket. However, Mohammad Shami clean bowled Anderson in the last ball of day three and when the players were walking back to the dressing room, everyone witnessed Anderson having a war of words with Bumrah, as the latter kept smiling back.

T20 WC of vital importance to Proteas & SA: Bavuma

Long jumper Shaili misses Gold by 1cm

IAN S ■ DUBAI

South African skipper Temba Bavuma has said that the upcoming 2021 men’s T20 World Cup serves as a tournament of vital importance for his team and country. South Africa have never made it past the semifinal stage of either the men’s T20 or 50-over World Cups.

“The 2021 ICC T20 World Cup is of vital importance to the Proteas and South Africa as a nation. Not only is the T20 format a key part of Cricket South Africa’s strategy to introduce new fans to the game of cricket, this tournament will also be the first of three opportunities for us to claim our first-ever ICC World Cup trophy,” said Bavuma to *icc-cricket.com*



South Africa have been drawn in a tough group 1 in the Super 12 stage alongside reigning champions West Indies, 2010 winners England, Australia and two more teams from the first round.

“The group that we are in is an exciting one and we’re looking forward to facing off with

everyone in it as we go about our mission to reach the final and the ultimate championship,” affirmed Bavuma.

South Africa started this year with a 2-1 away series loss to Pakistan in February. It was followed by a 3-1 series loss to the same opposition at home in April. But they bounced back to

beat West Indies 3-2 in June and July followed by Ireland 3-0 later in the month.

South Africa will get the chance to decide their combinations ahead of the World Cup when they take on Sri Lanka in a three-match T20I series in September.

“We have a really exciting team that we are building with a lot of raw talent, coupled with the experienced hands that will guide and lead the youngsters. We have spent the greater part of the year preparing for this contest and I look forward to leading our country in my first world showpiece as captain,” concluded Bavuma.

South Africa start their T20 World Cup campaign against Australia on October 23 in Abu Dhabi.

Nairobi: Highly-talented long jumper Shaili Singh on Sunday missed out on scripting history by a mere 1 cm as the Indian settled for Silver medal in the U-20 World Athletics Championships here.

The 17-year-old Indian’s personal best effort of 6.59m was not enough for the Gold medal as she was pipped at the post by Sweden’s reigning European junior champion Maja Askag, who managed 6.60m for the top spot on the final day of the championships.

A protege of legendary long jumper Anju Bobby George, Shaili was leading at the end of the third round but the 18-year-old Swede overtook her in the fourth round by a mere 1 cm, which proved to be decisive in the end.

“I could have jumped farther than the 6.59m and won the Gold. My mother had told me about winning Gold and national anthem being sung in the stadium (but I could not do it),” an emotional Shaili said after the race.



“I am just 17, I want a Gold in next U20 World Championships (in Cali, Colombia). There is also Asian Games and Commonwealth Games next year and I want to do well in those events.”

India ended their campaign with a best ever medal haul of 2 Silver and 1 Bronze, though the country had won one gold each in the earlier two editions — by Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra (2016) and quartermiler Hima Das (2018).

Shaili began brightly with a 6.34m and repeated the same distance next before her best effort in the third round. Her next two attempts were fouls and she could not get past the 6.60m in her final jump and the youngster seemed to be distraught at missing a Gold and a chance to create history.

In men’s triple jump, Donald Makimairaj missed the Bronze by 3cm as he produced his personal best of 15.82m but had to be content with a fourth-place finish. **PTI**



Depay rescues point for Barca

AFP ■ BILBAO

Barcelona were given a torrid time by Athletic Bilbao but escaped from their trip to San Mames with a point as Memphis Depay’s superb late strike secured a 1-1 draw for the Catalans on Saturday.

Depay found the net with a fine left-foot half-volley 15 minutes from time in the Basque Country for his first goal in La Liga since moving to Barcelona from Lyon.

Ronald Koeman’s side had impressed in their first match of the post-Lionel Messi era as they beat Real Sociedad 4-2 last weekend, but they were fortunate to depart with a point from this game and it was impossible to avoid questions about the Argentine at full-time.

“I don’t like to always talk about the same thing but he is the best in the world and the opposition might be more afraid if Messi is there,” Koeman admitted.

“For us too, if there is a pass to Leo, normally he doesn’t lose the ball, and today we gave the ball away too often in the first half. You notice it, but that’s how it is, it can’t be changed now.”

It was a difficult night for Barcelona’s defence in particular, with Gerard Pique coming off after half an hour and Eric Garcia being sent off in stoppage time for bringing down Inaki Williams.

Former Manchester City defender Garcia received news of his grandfather’s death before the match and struggled throughout the 90 minutes, allowing Inigo Martinez to get away from him to head in the opener early in the second half.

Athletic will feel they should have won despite missing several key players, among them goalkeeper Unai Simon, who has not featured at the start of this season after helping Spain reach the Euro 2020 semi-finals and then the final of the Tokyo Olympics.

AFP ■ LONDON

Romelu Lukaku marked his second Chelsea debut with his first Premier League goal for the Blues as the European champions outclassed Arsenal 2-0 on Sunday to compound the Gunners’ miserable start to the season.

The Belgian has returned to Stamford Bridge for a club record £97 million (\$132 million) as the missing piece of a proven goalscorer to turn the Champions League winners into English champions.

Thomas Tuchel’s men have made a formidable start towards that aim with six points, five goals scored and none conceded from their opening two games of the Premier League season.

Arsenal, by contrast, have

Lukaku scores in Chelsea’s win



yet to register a point or score a goal as the gulf between Mikel Arteta’s men and the title contenders was exposed.

Circumstances have also gone against Arteta as he lost £50 million signing Ben White before the game to the fifth positive case for coronavirus among his squad in the past 10 days.

A difficult start could get even worse with a trip to defending champions Manchester City next weekend.

A bright start in front of the first full house at the Emirates for 17 months quickly dissipated once Chelsea found their rhythm

and began to play to Lukaku’s strengths.

The former Inter Milan striker received the ball with his back to goal on 15 minutes, shrugged off Pablo Mari as the ball was worked to Reece James on the right and then stayed onside to tap home his 114th Premier League goal for four different clubs.

Lukaku should have been given another on a plate moments later when James instead picked out Mason Mount, whose shot was deflected behind.

But Arsenal did not learn their lesson and afforded James huge spaces being the

right.

Mount picked out his England teammate 10 minutes before half-time and James thrashed a brilliant finish high past Bernd Leno.

James, though, was lucky just before the break when his push on Bukayo Saka as he burst into the box went unpunished by both referee Paul Tierney and VAR.

Rob Holding should have halved Arsenal’s deficit after the break when the centre-back headed wide from close range.

At the other end Leno also did his case to hold off Ramsdale as number one no harm with an incredible

Bayern earn 1st win in thriller vs Cologne

Munich: Serge Gnabry struck twice as Bayern Munich picked up their first Bundesliga win this season with a 3-2 victory over Cologne on Sunday with all five goals scored in second-half.

Goals by Robert Lewandowski and Gnabry put Bayern 2-0 up just after the break, but Cologne roared back with two goals in as many minutes by Anthony Modeste and Mark Uth.

Gnabry gave Julian Nagelsmann his first Bundesliga win as head coach by smashing the winner into the roof 19 minutes before the whistle.

Bayern seized control at the Allianz Arena when second-half replacement Jamal Musiala, 18, ghosted through the Cologne defence and squared for Lewandowski on 50 minutes.

The Poland star, who scored



a record 41 goals in the Bundesliga last season, has already scored twice in as many league games in 2020/21.

Gnabry doubled the lead when he stabbed in a Thomas Müller cross on 59 minutes.

Cologne deserve credit for fighting back at 2-0 down and scored just a minute later.

When Bayern defender

Niklas Süle misjudged a cross, Modeste powered home his header. The French veteran then swung in a cross on Cologne’s next attack which Uth stabbed home to level.

Gnabry restored Bayern’s lead when he picked his spot from the edge of the area as his shot flew past Cologne ‘keeper Timo Horn. **AFP**

Thompson-Herah runs second fastest women’s 100m of all time

Eugene: Olympic champion Elaine Thompson-Herah scored an emphatic 100m victory over the returning Sha’Carri Richardson at the Prefontaine Classic in Oregon on Saturday. Jamaican star Thompson-Herah powered over the line at Hayward Field in 10.54sec — the second fastest time in history — as Richardson finished a distant last in 11.14sec.

Thompson-Herah’s compatriot Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce finished second in 10.73sec while Shericka Jackson took third in 10.76sec — a carbon copy of the Tokyo Olympic 100m podium. **T h o m p s o n**

Herah’s winning time saw her slice 0.07sec off her Olympic record of 10.61sec set on July 31.

Only the late Florence Griffith Joyner has ever run faster, with Thompson-Herah now tantalisingly close to the American’s 33-year-old world record of 10.49sec.

“To come back with a PB after the championships, that is amazing,” Elaine said. “It means a lot to me...because my job is to inspire a generation. I have more races, so I don’t get too excited, too carried away. I have to continue doing the job.”



Aditi slips in tough weather conditions

Carnoustie: Aditi Ashok had an off-day at the Carnoustie Links as she carded a roller-coaster three-over 75 in tough and challenging weather conditions to slip to T-58 with one round to go in the AIG Women’s Open.

Aditi, who began the week nicely with 71, had a rough start with three bogeys in a row from second to fourth but made up with three birdies in a row from sixth to eighth and turned in even par.

On the back nine of the Links course, she bogeyed 11th and closed with a double bogey on the tough 18th.

Sweden’s Anna Nordqvist produced the best round of the week with a sensational 65 and was the co-leader heading into the final day. **PTI**