

OPINION 6
CHINA'S 'FRIENDSHIP'
MUST BOTHER PUTIN**WORLD 8**
GLOBAL CORONAVIRUS
CASELOAD TOPS 193.6M**SPORT 12**
MI-CSK TO KICKOFF
IPL 2021 UAE LEG

DEHRADUN, MONDAY JULY 26 2021; PAGES 12 ₹2

www.dailypioneer.com

OTT MAKING
US IMPROVE:
VIDYARTHI
10 VIVACITY

BSY waits for 'orders' as exit looms large

BJP mulls Lingayat strongman's replacement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the longest-serving BJP Chief Minister and 'Lingayat' strongman BS Yediyurappa readies to pave the way for a new incumbent, the BJP central leadership on Sunday considered candidates for the top post who may lead the party in the 2023 Assembly polls in the State which is the BJP's "gateway" to South India.

Yediyurappa, 78, on Sunday gave enough hints that he has been asked to exit after completing the two-year term of his fourth tenure at the helm which falls on July 26 (Monday).

With the countdown for the change of guard nearing, several names are doing the rounds including those of central leaders from Karnataka.

Given that 'Lingayat' seers are demanding that there should not be any change of



Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa visits area affected with rain-water in Belgaum district on Sunday

PTI

leadership, the BJP continued to play subtle and soft with BSY, as he is fondly called by people. On Sunday, BJP president JP Nadda said in Panjim, that Yediyurappa was doing good work and there was no leadership crisis in Karnataka.

Be that as it may, a change of guard seems inevitable with the BJP top leadership shortlisting the names of frontrunners for the Chief Minister's

job. These include Basavaraj Bommai ('Lingayat'). At present he is the Home Minister of Karnataka and a close confidant of Yediyurappa.

Then there is the Mines and Geology Minister in the Karnataka Government Murugesh Nirani ('Lingayat') who is considered close to Union Home Minister Amit Shah; two-time MLA Arvind Bellad ('Lingayat') backed by

the RSS; BJP general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh (Brahmin); Union Minister Pralhad Joshi (Brahmin) and BJP general secretary CT Ravi (Vokkaliga).

The final decision would be taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah and the RSS' general secretary and second-in-command Dattatreya Hosabale, according to sources.

India tightens its border security belt

Police stations on frontiers to form 2nd line of defence

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Amid hyper activities by Chinese PLA all along the Line of Actual Control, the Centre is creating a "border belt" comprising all the police stations adjoining the frontiers that will act as a second line of defence after respective border guarding forces across the land border with various countries.

Typically, the Central paramilitary forces designated for the various border security roles are also known as border guarding forces like the BSF and ITBP among others, and act as the first line of defence.

The border guarding forces are also designated as the Lead Intelligence Agency on their respective operational frontier.

While the ITBP secures the frontier with China, the BSF is deployed along the borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) secures the borders with Nepal and Bhutan. The Assam Rifles is deployed along the border with Myanmar.



"The process of mapping the police stations falling under the border belt is underway. This will help identify the police stations, districts, area, length of the border under their jurisdiction and the population covered by the border belt," a senior security official said.

The Union Home Ministry will coordinate with the police chiefs of the States and Union Territories along the border to initiate action in a time bound manner.

As part of the overhaul of the police stations along the borders, the development of infrastructure is also being included in the Border Area Development Programme funded by the Centre. The Station House Officers of the border police stations are also proposed to be given a fixed two-year tenure to maintain continuity of the development

programmes and gather ground level intelligence.

The SHOs of such police stations are also proposed to be included in the meetings of the Lead Intelligence Agency. Officers from the Crime Investigation Department (CID)/State Intelligence are also proposed to be posted in the border police stations.

For this, the Union Home Ministry, Intelligence Bureau (IB) and police chiefs of the States and Union Territories will coordinate to implement the proposals in a time-bound manner, they said.

In addition, use of optimum technology, technological surveillance solutions like anti-drone technology, foliage penetration radars, sensors, surveillance cameras and intrusion detection systems among others have been deployed for effective border management.

CAPSULE

CBIC ABOLISHES RENEWALS OF LICENCES

New Delhi: The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has abolished the requirement of periodic renewal of licence and registration issued to Customs Brokers and Authorised Carriers. This move is expected to help reduce the compliance burden cast on the trade, which had to otherwise file applications and submit numerous documents to renew their licences/registrations.

28% PLAN TO TRAVEL: 3RD WAVE SET TO RISE

Mumbai: With as many as 28 per cent Indians planning to travel in August-September, which is also the time for some of the major festivals in the country, the risk of the third wave of the pandemic is set to rise, according to a survey. In a statement, online platform Local Circles also said its survey on April 12 had outlined the immediate second wave risk.

MARKETS
SENSEX 52,975.80 (+138.59)
NIFTY 15,856.05 (+32.00)
GOLD 47,472.00 (-162.00)
SILVER 67,135.00 (-239.00)

WEATHER
MAX 34.0°C
MIN 25.0°C
Partly Cloudy Sky
POWERED BY
UNIGATE GENERAL MEDIA (P) LTD
<https://pioneeredge.in>

Holiday turns nightmare as landslide kills nine

Three hurt as boulders fall on vehicle in Himachal

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Nine tourists were killed and three injured in a massive landslide in Sangla valley in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district on Sunday afternoon.

The incident was reported near Batseri village along the Sangla-Chitkul link road. Tourists from various States were travelling in a Tempo Traveller when heavy boulders fell on it killing nine people, including the driver on the spot. While two tourists escaped death they were hurt in the landslide and another person on the road also got injured.

A terrifying video footage of the landslide showed large



A bridge collapsed after a landslide at Batseri of Sangla valley in Kinnaur district on Sunday

PTI

chunks of rocks breaking off a mountain top and rolling down into the valley below. The landslide also led to a bridge collapse at Batseri and several roads were also reportedly blocked.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) offered condolence over the deaths of the tourists in the landslide. "An ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each from the Prime Minister's National

Relief Fund (PMNRF) would be given to the next of kin of those who lost their lives in the accident in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh. ₹50,000 would be given to the injured," the PMO said.

"All arrangements are being made for the treatment of those injured in the accident. I wish them a speedy recovery," read another tweet from the PMO.

Troubleshooting begins in Raj Cong; bid to pacify Pilot

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

After resolving the Punjab political crisis, the Congress high command is now taking steps to address the simmering tension in Rajasthan by suitably rehabilitating Sachin Pilot.

The Central leadership of the Congress on Sunday convened a meeting of party MLAs and Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot to reach for an amicable solution to resolve the 18 months political turmoil in the State.

Congress is taking steps to resolve the internal crisis in several States, including Punjab, Uttarakhand, Assam and Manipur.

In the meeting at Jaipur chaired by AICC General Secretary Organisation KC Venugopal and AICC in-charge Ajay Maken, all the party MLAs were instructed to be present in Jaipur as the Cabinet expansion is likely to take place on Wednesday.



Senior Congress leader Ajay Maken with Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Dolasra and KC Venugopal speak to media persons at Pradesh Congress Committee Headquarters in Jaipur on Sunday

PTI

Pilot too was present in the meeting.

Both the AICC leaders had met Gehlot on Saturday and discussed the expansion and the significant role to be given to Pilot and his side of MLAs. One meeting also took place between them on Saturday and a separate meeting with Pilot was also conducted.

After Punjab PCC change of guard, Cabinet rejig likely

All eyes on Capt who is expected to reshuffle his Ministers' Council

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

After witnessing a change of guard in the Punjab Congress unit with the appointment of Navjot Singh Sidhu on the apex post, all eyes are now glued on the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh who is expected to reshuffle his Cabinet soon.

Amidst the changing political equations not only in Punjab but also within the Congress State unit, Capt Amarinder is expected to replace a couple of his Ministers by inducting new faces in his Council of Ministers.

Available information suggests that the names of Vidhan Sabha Speaker Rana KP Singh and senior MLA Raj Kumar Verka are in the reckoning.



While Rana KP is an OBC leader, Verka hails from the Dalit community.

Sources within the Congress party also informed The Pioneer that the Chief Minister may also drop his Ministers. For the same, names of Revenue Minister Gurpreet Singh Kangar and Technical Education Minister Charanjit Singh Channi are doing the rounds.

It has also been learnt that Channi, if removed from the Cabinet, may be appointed as the Vidhan Sabha Speaker.

Notably, Channi had all along been strongly backing Sidhu's elevation to the Punjab Congress' top post.

Channi was also among few party leaders, including Ministers, who have openly questioned the Chief Minister and the State Government over several issues, including sacrilege.

At the same time, it would be interesting to see if the Chief Minister would take the party high command in confidence before making changes in his Cabinet. On the other hand, the newly-appointed party president, who completely enjoys the high command's backing, may also make an attempt to intervene in the Cabinet reshuffling process.

Notably, the party high command appointed Sidhu as Punjab Congress president along with four working presidents — Kuljit Singh Nagra, Sangat Singh Gilzian, Sukhwinder Singh Danny, and Pawan Goel — on July 18 brushing aside all opposition by Capt Amarinder.

Zero medals but woman power on display

Mary, Manika, Sindhu shine

PTI ■ TOKYO

The shooters came undone once again and the hockey team took a hammering but badminton ace PV Sindhu, boxing great MC Mary Kom and table tennis star Manika Batra went about their jobs with trademark resolve to keep India's Olympic campaign on track despite a medal-less second day at the Games here on Sunday.

A day after Mirabai Chanu sent Indian spirits soaring with her weightlifting silver, it was huge disappointment at the Asaka shooting range where the young Indian marksmen and women failed to make a single final.

It ended with another disappointment when the men's hockey team was literally



India's MC Mary Kom, right, exchanges punches with Miguelina Hernandez Garcia, of the Dominican Republic, during their women's flyweight 51-kg boxing match at the 2020 Summer Olympics on Sunday in Tokyo, Japan

AP

toyed with by world number one Australia, which prevailed 7-1 in one of the most lopsided contests at this stage.

In between these two major disappointments, there were some successes to be celebrated with Sindhu, Mary Kom and Batra showcasing

the woman power of the contingent.

The 26-year-old Sindhu, seeded sixth, beat the 58th ranked Kenia Polikarpova 21-7 21-10 with consummate ease to start her quest for a second Olympic medal in style.

With 7-1 win Aussies give India the stick in hockey

PTI ■ TOKYO

The Indian men's hockey team was pummelled 1-7 by world number one Australia in their second pool A match of the Olympic Games here on Sunday, a morale-shattering loss that exposed every possible chink in the side's armour.

The mighty Kookaburras simply toyed with the Indian defence after the first quarter and scored goals at will to comfortably secure their second consecutive win in the competition.

For India, it was their biggest loss since Australian Graham Reid took charge of the team as coach in April 2019.

Australia looked dominant and were in complete control



India's Manpreet Singh, center right, meets with Australia's Jeremy Thomas Hayward (32) and goalkeeper Andrew Lewis Charter (30) after their men's field hockey match at the 2020 Summer Olympics on Sunday in Tokyo, Japan

AP

from the onset, scoring goals through Daniel Beale (10th minute), Joshua Beltz (26th), Andrew Flynn Ogilvie (23rd),

Jeremy Hayward (21st), Blake Govers (40th, 42nd) and Tim Brand (51st) to secure the easy win.

TOKYO 2020					
OLYMPICS: MEDAL TALLY TILL NOW					
RANK	COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
1	China	6	1	4	11
2	Japan	5	1	0	6
3	USA	4	2	4	10
4	Korea	2	0	3	5
5	ROC	1	4	2	7
6	Italy	1	1	3	5
7	Australia	1	1	1	3
7	France	1	1	1	3
9	Hungary	1	1	0	2
9	Tunisia	1	1	0	2
24	Belgium	0	1	0	1
24	Bulgaria	0	1	0	1
24	Colombia	0	1	0	1
24	Spain	0	1	0	1
24	Georgia	0	1	0	1
24	Romania	0	1	0	1
24	India	0	1	0	1

Students pass with flying colours in ISC & ICSE exams

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Students of various schools in Dehradun, Roorkee and Nainital performed well in the ISC and ICSE exams. In Dehradun, the students of Doon Cambridge School performed well in both classes X and XII. In class X science, Tanvi Silora scored 90 per cent, Divyanshi Kumar scored 88.4 per cent while in XII science, Abhishek Thakuri and Surya Pratap Singh Rathore scored 90 per cent. In XII commerce, Akriti Ghildiyal scored 92.5 per cent while Akshita Rawat scored 91 per cent.

In St Thomas' College, Aoms Negi scored 99 per cent, Praveen Rana scored 98.6 per cent and Lavanya Rana scored 98.4 per cent in ICSE (X) while Pragma Dobhal scored 99.5 per cent, Shaziya Parveen scored 99 per cent- both in science stream and Jay Joshi scored 95.5 per cent in ISC (XII).

In Touch Wood School, class X students Anchita Ghildiyal and Bhumika Bisht scored 94.8 per cent, Kartik Verma and Akshat Kumar scored 93.6 per cent, Khushi Pundir scored 93 per cent, Akshay Taneja and Saurabh

Chauhan scored 92.8 per cent in science. Naina Kapoor scored 95.2 per cent, Sanvi Neha Sinha scored 95 per cent and Deep Sasmal scored 89.4 per cent in the commerce stream. In class XII science, Aviral Sharma scored 96.5 per cent, Vinay Pandey scored 96 per cent and Jessica Jha scored 95.25 per cent while in the commerce stream Sudhanshi Kothari scored 95 per cent, Netra Verma scored 94 per cent and Rishika Singh scored 92.75 per cent. In the Cambrian Hall school, ISC students of science stream, Chahak Jain scored 98.25 per cent, Anshuman

Dangwal and Prateek Singhal scored 97 per cent, Abhay Semwal and Anuditya Mishra scored 96.25 per cent,

Abhayveer Yadav and Deepika Gururani, Abhishek Bhandari and Agrani Rana scored 96 per cent. In humanities stream, Nishtha Uniyal topped with 94.75 per cent followed by Kushwaha G Yogesh with 94 per cent, Krishna Kumar with 92.75 per cent, Pearl Vaid with 92.5 per cent, Prakhari Dhyani and Suhani Joshi with 91.5 per cent. In commerce stream Simran Kaur topped with 97 per cent fol-

lowed by Riyanish Gupta with 96.25 per cent, Aditya Jindal with 93.75 per cent, Riya Gulati with 93.75 per cent and Anushka Sati with 90 per cent.

Among ICSE science stream students Dharmishtha Malhan topped with 97 per cent followed by

Anish Kalra with 96.8 per cent, Adrika Gupta with 96.4 per cent, Deepti Panwar with 95.4 per cent, Garima Pathak, Manvi Sharma and Mehak Pokhriyal with 95.2 per cent. In commerce stream Yuvika Gurung topped with 95.8 per cent followed by Shubhangi Goyal with 95.6 per cent, Subhojit Bagchi with 94.6 per cent, Aisha Goyal and Mohammed Zaki with 94.4 per cent. In the Pine Hall School, 100 per cent results was secured in ICSE and ISC. Raghvender Pareek and Abhinav Aggarwal topped the school with 96.4 per cent in ICSE followed by Akshay Rawat with 95.8 per cent and Laiba Khan with 95.4 per cent. Dhruv Karnwal secured 94.4 per cent followed by Deepika Negi with 93.2 per cent, Tanisha Negi with 93 per cent, Saumya Garia with 92.6 per cent, Sudhanshu Kumar Singh with 92.4 per cent and

Mohammed Faizal with 91.2 per cent. The school director Anurag Anand informed that the students secured upto 100 per cent in Computer Application, 99 per cent each in English and Hindi, 98 per cent in Art, 93 per cent in History, Civics and Geography, Economics and 91 per cent in Mathematics. In ISC, Shivam Yadav topped the school with 95.5 per cent followed by Divyansh Kumar Singh with 94 per cent, Lokesh Singh Badela with 93.75 per cent, Jyotiraditya Singh Guleria with 93.5 per cent and Siddharth Rawat with 91 per cent. In the Carman Residential and Day School, XII science students Diti Tripathi scored 95.2 per cent, Misthi Jindal and Divyanshi Pundir scored 95 per cent while XII commerce student Vasu Sahani scored 92.25 per cent. Similarly, X science student Raghav Sharma scored 96.2 per cent while commerce student Sukhdev Singh scored 93.4 per cent.

In Roorkee's StJohn's Senior Secondary School, principal OC Samuel informed that Grace Samuel, Devyani Sharma and Mark Samuel topped class X with 88 per cent each while XII science students

Shuvanshu scored 93 per cent, Sania Anjum scored 88 per cent, Kushi Saini scored 86 per cent. XII commerce student Chirag Mittal scored 89 per cent.

In Nainital, four CISCE board schools secured 100 per cent results. Among class XII students, All Saints' College student Mudrika Agrawal topped while among Virendra of Sherwood College topped among class X students. Sherwood College principal Amandeep Sandhu informed that 74 class X students and 47 class XII students passed the exams with good marks. Twenty seven students had scored more than 90 per cent. In St Joseph College, principal brother Hector Pinto informed that 77 students had passed in class X and 64 in class XII exams with good marks. All Saints' College principal Kiran Jeremiah said that 73 students of class X and 60 of class XII had passed their exams with good marks.

Thirty six students had scored more than 90 per cent. St Mary Convent principal sister Manjusa informed that 73 students of class X and 87 of class XII had passed their exams with good marks.

Ruskin Bond releases new book on Jim Corbett

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

To mark the 145th birth anniversary of noted conservationist Jim Corbett, popular author Ruskin Bond released a new book 'Burning Bright' by Harnihal Singh Sidhu and published by Natraj Publishers on the weekend. The book is a novel based on the adventures of Jim Corbett that closely follows his career, not only in the jun-



gle but also his years working with the Indian Railways, as well as his experiences in Europe during World War I.

While interacting with Sidhu in his cottage in Mussoorie, after the release, Bond said that he had dipped into the book and learnt so much about good old Jim, which he did not know earlier. He complemented the author on his painstaking research and expressed the hope that fans and admirers

of Corbett across the globe will enjoy the book. Corbett, better known as Carpet Sahib, amongst the simple hill folks of Kumaon and Garhwal, was not only a saviour, killing man-eating tigers and leopards, but also an icon who helped them during famines and epidemics. Later in life, he is credited for being one of the first to promote conservation of wildlife in India by lecturing and writing about his experiences.

NEIFW virtual event concludes successfully

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The fifth North-East India Traditional-Fashion Week (NEIFW) organised by the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD) concluded in Dehradun on Sunday.

The two-day programme displayed the culture, arts and crafts of northeast India through the online platform which was virtually inaugurated by the Union Minister Virendra Kumar on Saturday in the presence of Union Ministers of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Pratima Bhowmik and A Narayanaswamy among others. Addressing the event, Kumar said that such events will generate employment opportunities besides encouraging entrepreneurship avenues for differently-abled people.

Many national programmes are being launched and implemented under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to benefit such people and therefore, all national institutions under the department of empowerment of persons with disabilities must act as a strong link between beneficiaries and the government, stated the union minister.

The main highlights of the event were workshops conducted on skill and entrepreneurship building besides the awareness programmes and the display of the traditional cultural festivals of northeast India.

The two-day programme concluded on Sunday with an online valedictory function in the presence of Nachiketa Raut, the former director of NIEPVD in Dehradun and title winner of Miss Deaf India in 2016, Anjala Lohan.

THE PIONEER
CLASSIFIEDS
PUBLIC NOTICE
PUBLIC NOTICE
The general public is informed that I have changed my name from ISLAMAT KHAN to SALAMAT KHAN and in future I should be known as SALAMAT KHAN S/O Ishak Khan, Address:- Mohalla Ghosiyan, Jwalapur, Haridwar, Uttarakhand

Disclaimer
The Pioneer does not take responsibility for the content for the advertisement (Display/Classified) carried in this newspaper. The paper does not endorse the same. Readers are requested to verify the contents on their own.

For advertisement booking or any query contact-9045057787

नीलामी सूचना

सर्वसाधारण सूचनार्थ जनहित में जारी

टाटा कौपीनल हाउसिंग फाइनेंस कम्पनी द्वारा अपने निजी स्वार्थ के लिए SARFAESI Act- 2002 का दुरुपयोग व खुला उल्लंघन करके गैर कानूनी तरीके से संपत्ति बिक्री के संदर्भ में:-

उक्त कम्पनी ने अपने कर्जदार के पड़ोसी की संपत्ति (खसरा नो 1086,1091, & 1092 स्थित ग्राम सलेमपुर, रुड़की) को गैर कानूनी तरीके से, जिला मजिस्ट्रेट न्यायलय में झूठा व गलत एपीडेक्ट पेश करके, 09 दिसम्बर -2020 को, अपने कर्जदार की बताकर तालाबंदी कराया तथा पिछले ६ माह से गलत व भ्रमित नीलामी इस्तहार देकर उसे बेचने का प्रयत्न किया। जबकि संपत्ति का ब्यौरा मूलेख पर दर्शित है तथा जमीन का mutation, नक्शा पास व construction करके के बाद, सन 2008 से उसे बिराये पर दिया हुआ था।

कम्पनी के अधिकारियों व एजेंटों ने फरवरी में महिला की अनुपस्थिति में पार्टीशन दीवार को क्षति पहुंचाई तथा जब महिला ने नोटिस द्वारा कम्पनी से जवाब मांगा तो उसे मोर्टगेज प्रॉपर्टी करार दे दिया गया लेकिन आज दिनांक तक, मोर्टगेज का सबूत मांगने के बावजूद पेश नहीं किया। इस गैरकानूनी बिक्री से, अपनी संपत्ति को बचाने के लिए महिला ने 10 बार समाचार पत्रों में खरीदारों को सूचित करने के लिए अपनी आपत्ति प्रकाशित करायी। तथा उक्त धोखाधड़ी से कम्पनी को आगाह/सूचित करने के लिए 70 बार नोटिस व पत्र निम्न अधिकारियों को प्रेषित किए।

नोटिस/पत्र		
(1) प्राधिकृत अधिकारी (श्री अजीत भट्ट)	—	14
(2) पावर आफ एटोर्नी उत्तराखण्ड (श्री राजेश साहनी)	—	05
(3) मैनेजिंग डायरेक्टर (श्री अनिल कौल)	—	11
(4) चेयरमैन व CEO (श्री राजीव सबवाल)	—	09

कम्पनी के किसी भी अधिकारी ने अपनी पब्लिक डब्यूटी का निर्वहन करते हुए उक्त 36 नोटिसों/पत्रों तथा 80 ई-मेल का जवाब तक देना मुनासिब नहीं समझा। उक्त महिला, जो राजस्थान में निवास करती है, का पूरा परिचय पिछले 7.5 माह से मानसिक प्रताड़ना व सार्वजनिक अपमान झेलता रहा तथा कम्पनी के सभी अधिकारी अपने निजी स्वार्थों के लिए, प्रॉपर्टी को जल्द से जल्द बेचने का सोचा करने में तत्पर व व्यस्त रहे। उक्त कम्पनी ने पिछले साप्ताह (22 जुलाई) को, महिला के मना करने के बावजूद, उसकी गैरमौजूदगी में उसकी संपत्ति का मापन कराया तथा 13 वर्ष पहले पास कराये गये नक्शे द्वारा बनाई गयी संपत्ति का प्रारूप बदलने के मकसद से, अपनी 08 सदस्य टीम भेजी। लेकिन टीम के किसी भी सदस्य ने महिला का पक्ष जानने / सुनने के लिए, महिला (संपत्ति मालकिन) को फोन तक करना मुनासिब नहीं समझा जबकि फोन नो (7 फरवरी से) मेन गेट पर लिखे हैं। अपना स्वार्थ हासिल करने के लिए, टीम के सदस्यों ने (पैसे के बल पर) पटवारी व कानूनी का सहारा लिया तथा एकतरफा मापन व फेसला सुनाया। उक्त कम्पनी के अधिकारियों व कर्तव्यमर केयर से जब इस धोखाधड़ी में शामिल अधिकारियों के नाम व ई मेल आई डी मांगे गये तो उसे निजी जानकारी बताकर मना कर दिया गया।

अतः मैं दोबारा, जनहित में, सभी संभावित खरीदारों से आग्रह करती हूँ कि उक्त कम्पनी द्वारा दिखाई व बताई गयी संपत्ति का ब्यौरा मूलेख पर देखकर व मौका मुआयना तथा पड़ोसियों से सलाह मशविरा करके ही खरीदी में मांग लें क्योंकि उक्त कंपनी ने सरफेसी एक्ट को जरिया बनाकर धोखाधड़ी का नया तरीका इजाद किया है।

संजीता त्यागी, 9521421383

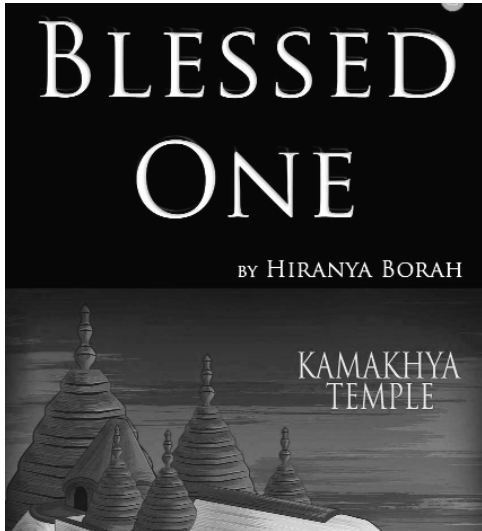
Blessings win over curses in ‘The Blessed One’

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Those who are fond of mythological tales will like what Hiranya Borah is doing with the characters in "The Blessed One". The novel revolves around a curse; similar to stories of a condemnation hunting a family generation after generation, the protagonist being on the firing cord of the curse is saved by the blessing of his mother and mother goddess.

The basic theme of the book is "blessings are more powerful than the curses". For someone who has interest in mythology, this book tells the stories of curses, blessings, deception, devotion and fruition.

The story has crisp and smooth twists and every chapter has something different to offer. In his novel, Borah has complete control over the story and style.



The unexpected ending is a fitting denouement to an epic and memorable excursion.

HP CM dedicates projects worth ₹200 cr in Darang constituency area

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday laid foundation stones of 44 developmental projects worth about Rs 200 crore in Darang assembly constituency of Mandi district.

Thakur, while addressing a public meeting at Bhatog in Darang Vidhan Sabha area announced shifting of PWD division no-1 from Mandi to Darang, Rs 25000 each for Mahila Mandals present on the occasion, Rs 10 lakh each for construction of Panchayat Bhawans in two new panchayats of the area and Rs 3 lakh for construction of link road in the area.

He said that the State Government would take up the matter regarding opening of sub Judge court at Darang.

At Bhatog, the Chief Minister inaugurated and laid foundation stones of developmental projects worth Rs 100.82 crore which include Rs

5.84 crore augmentation and improvement of water supply scheme, Rs 1.07 crore Rajaswa Sadan building at Padhar, Rs 1.59 crore 40 meter span bridge over Deyoli Khad on Baragoon Bah Padwahan road under PMGSY, Rs 65 lakh 40 meter span bridge over Luni Khad on Kunnu Nashadhra Batdhar Manaroo road under NABARD, Rs 4.28 crore Banogi Chehar Chaila road under PMGSY, Rs 6.10 crore metaling and tarring of Nagrota Segaiduhag Chaknwar Pali road under NABARD among other projects.

The Chief Minister also laid foundation stones of Rs 11.70 crore lift irrigation scheme from river Beas to village Tandoo-Mehar-Pakhari-Dadwas and Bhatog in tehsil Sadar, Rs 60.58 crore lift water supply scheme to PC habitation Baragoon, Kufri, Dhamchayan and Tikker etc. in tehsil Padhar under NDB scheme, Rs 2.50 crore Shiv project at Badagoon and Rs 3.38 crore Choura to

Kumharda road under PMGSY.

Thakur said that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Government ensured that the development goes on interrupted.

The achievements of the State in PMGSY have been lauded at the national level. PMGSY has proved boon to the people of Himachal Pradesh as even the remotest village of the state was being connected by roads under this scheme, he said.

The Chief Minister further said that during the Corona pandemic, the State Government laid special stress on increasing the health infrastructure in Himachal. There were only 1200 beds in the health institutions of the state, which in a short period have been increased to about 5000. Similarly, there was only one oxygen plant in the state while ten more functional oxygen plants were set up and 28 more oxygen plants will be established soon, he added.

Punjab to provide grant-in-aid for opening and running senior citizen homes in 16 districts

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has decided to provide grant-in-aid to the eligible NGOs for establishing or running the 'Senior Citizen Homes' in 16 districts of the State.

"Fulfilling its commitment for the well being of all sections of the society, the State

Government has made arrangements to establish and run Senior Citizen Homes in all the districts under "The Punjab Management of Senior Citizen Homes for Elderly Persons Scheme 2019", said the state Social Security, Women and Child Development Minister Aruna Chaudhary on Sunday.

She said that the Department was successfully running Senior Citizens Home in Hoshiarpur district, while Government's Senior Citizen Homes are under construction in Mansa and Barnala districts.

"In the remaining 19 districts, it has also been decided to provide grant-in-aid for establishing or running senior citizen homes in collaboration with local NGOs to provide shelter, food, clothing, health facilities and other essential necessities to the aged people," she added.

The Minister said that a grant-in-aid worth Rs 3.84 crore was released to such NGOs in Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Ferozepur districts for the senior citizen homes during the previous financial year 2020-21. Now in this financial year, applications have been invited from NGOs for grant-in-aid for opening or running old age homes in the remaining 16 districts — Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Faridkot, Fazilka, Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Sri Muktsar Sahib, Moga, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Patiala, Rup Nagar, SAS Nagar,

Sangrur, and Tarn Taran.

Referring to the conditions for providing grants to such NGOs, the Minister said that the institution must have its own building as well as it should be registered under "The Punjab Management of Senior Citizen Homes for Elderly Persons Scheme 2019".

She said that registered NGOs, Voluntary Organizations, Trusts, or Red Cross Societies which are running Senior Citizen Homes or organizations which can establish such old age homes for at least 25 senior citizens or 50, 100, 150 senior citizens in 12 months, subordinate and autonomous institutions of the state government, panchayati raj or local government department, Government approved educational institutions, or charitable hospitals or nursing homes or registered youth institutions will be eligible to apply for the grant.

Agri laws are absurd, not farmers' movement and their sansad: AAP

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday strongly objected to the Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar's remarks calling the farmers' movement and farmers' parliament, absurd.

"The dictatorial spirit has infiltrated the Central Government leaders, who are making such frivolous and absurd statements, who themselves are trying in vain to prove others wrong by making such statements", said AAP's Punjab unit president and Sangrur MP Bhagwant Mann.

Mann said that the reality was that the anti-agriculture black laws, being imposed in the

name of agrarian reform, "are nonsensical, which the farmers have not asked for...When the deadly laws, enacted by the corporate houses, are imposed on the annadatas, it is natural that there would be opposition from farmers and labourers along with all sections of the society dependent on agriculture".

"If the government does not give up its attempt to ignore or suppress the protests against democratic values with dictatorial arrogance, the farmers' parliament or the agitation will not be confined to Delhi, but will spread across the country," said Mann.

Mann added that AAP has been adamant against these

three agricultural laws since its drafting, till date, and would continue to do so till these laws are repealed. "During the monsoon session, I would not miss any opportunity to oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, along with all the ruling parliamentarians and ministers, outside or inside the Parliament House," declared.

Mann said that during the monsoon session, he had moved adjournment motion in the Parliament for four consecutive times, so that the Government could put aside all parliamentary business and discuss agriculture laws only and take the right steps to repeal them through Parliament.

Extremely heavy rain likely in 5 distts till July 30: MeT

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State meteorological centre has forecast a wet spell in the State till July 30. During this five-day period, some parts of the State are expected to receive extremely heavy rainfall.

On Sunday the meteorological centre issued a warning regarding the possibility of extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places in Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Nainital, Pauri and Dehradun districts on Monday. The warning is in addition to the alert issued regarding the likelihood of heavy to very heavy rainfall with intense spells at isolated places in the state on Monday. Apart from this, light to moderate

rain/thundershowers are likely to occur at most places in the state. For the provisional state capital Dehradun, the state meteorological centre has forecast few spells of rain/thundershowers, one or two of which may be heavy in some areas.

The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 27 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today. Further, according to officials, the current meteorological analysis and numerical weather prediction models indicate that the western end of the monsoon trough is likely to shift north of its normal position from July 25 and remain close to the foothills of the western

Himalaya till July 30. With the monsoon trough likely to remain active during this period, widespread rainfall activities are likely under its influence over Uttarakhand till July 30.

Apart from the weather warning issued for today, the meteorological centre has also warned of the possibility of extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places in Dehradun, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Nainital and Pauri districts on Tuesday.

Further, heavy to very heavy rainfall with intense spells is likely to occur at isolated places especially in Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Tehri, Pauri, Nainital and Pithoragarh districts on July 28, 29 and 30.

Dhami exhorts all to make U'khand #1 State by 2027

PNS ■ KHATIMA

On the third day of his tour of Udhampur Singh Nagar district, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami heard the grievances of the public in Khatima and also interacted with representative organisations of various fraternities on Sunday. Thanking the people for the welcome accorded to him, he said that the support of all people is necessary to make Uttarakhand number one among Indian states in education, health, tourism, agriculture, transport, industry and various other sectors. He stressed on the need for collective efforts in order to achieve this aim.

The Chief Minister said that the cooperation of the citizens is vital in enabling him to



discharge his responsibilities more effectively. "Our government wants to make Uttarakhand a good model where the atmosphere for various activities is conducive

with good condition of industry, tourism, education, health and ample employment opportunities.

The government will also work on pendency. For this, the

officials have been directed to ensure the works at the relevant level and not to keep any application pending. The responsibility of the official concerned will be fixed if any negligence

in work is brought to light," said Dhami. The Chief Minister also said that redressal of issues faced by the industry will be undertaken on priority. The announcements made and works for which the foundation stones were unveiled, will be completed on priority basis by the state government. Thanking the people for their affection and trust, Dhami said that he will work hard to achieve all round development of the state.

Later, the chief minister also held a meeting with the district office bearers of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The district minister in-charge Yatishwaranand, MLAs Prem Singh Rana, Rajesh Shukla, Kumaon commissioner Sushil Kumar and others were also present on the occasion.

Covid19: 51 new cases, 24 recoveries in U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State Health Department reported 51 new cases of the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) and 24 recoveries from the disease in Uttarakhand on Sunday. Death of no patient was reported by the department from the disease on the day.

The cumulative count of Covid-19 patients in the state is now at 3,41,724 while a total of 3,27,716 patients have recovered from the disease so far. In the state 7359 people have lost their lives to Covid-19 till date.

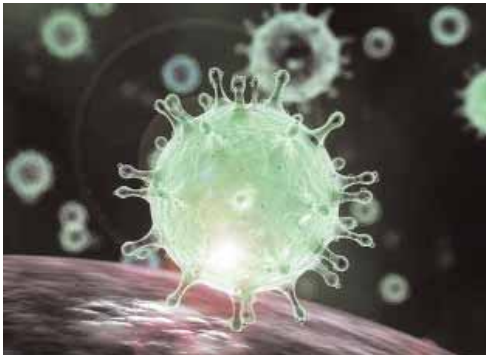
The recovery percentage from the disease is now at 95.90 and the sample positivity rate on Sunday was at 0.21 per cent in the state. The authorities collected 22,021 samples in different parts of the state on Sunday.

The state health department reported nine new patients of Covid 19 each from Dehradun and Nainital, seven from Udhampur Singh Nagar, four from Rudrapur, three from Haridwar, two each from Uttarkashi and Tehri and one each from Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli and Champawat districts on Sunday.

The State now has 637 active patients of the disease. Dehradun district is at top of the table in the list of active cases with 254 patients while Pithoragarh is in the second position with 68 active cases.

The state reported two new cases of Mucormycosis (Black fungus) and death of two patients from the disease on Sunday.

A total of 561 patients of



Black Fungus have been reported till date in the state

and out of them 123 have died.

66,157 jabs a day needed to achieve vax target on time

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In order to achieve its commitment to complete the vaccination of the entire adult 18 plus population before December 31 this year the Uttarakhand Government needs to vaccinate 66,157 people in a day for the remaining period of the year.

The State health department administered only 19,721 beneficiaries on Sunday in 206 vaccine sessions which shows that the department has to increase its current pace of vaccination.

The founder of Social Development for Communities (SDC) foundation Anoop Nautiyal said that there are 49,34,219 citizens in the age

group 18 to 44 in the state. Similarly the population of 45 plus people is 27,95,247 and there are 1,28,003 health care and 1,93,216 frontline workers in the state. He said that the state needs to vaccinate 80,50,684 people which means that a total of 1,61,01,368 doses are needed.

Nautiyal added that 42,03,963 people have received the first dose while 13,12,281 people have received both shots of vaccines. The state has so far administered 55,16,244 doses till July 24. He said that 160 days are remaining in this year and the state and the health department should accelerate the pace of vaccination to achieve the target of complete vaccination.

DM pulls up officials for slow Smart City works



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Expressing dissatisfaction after observing dug up roads, heaps of debris and concrete material lying on the stretch of the road from Survey Chowk to Chuna Bhatta due to the ongoing construction work under the Smart City project, the Dehradun district magistrate R Rajesh Kumar directed the officials to finish the work within 15 days. Due to the ongoing construction work of drainage system under the project on the stretch of the road between Survey Chowk and Chuna Bhatta on Raipur Road, commuters have to face issues like traffic jams and waterlogging.

Besides, debris and concrete material was also not stored properly near the construction site. The DM observed all such issues during his site inspection and ordered

the officials concerned to carry out the construction work systematically across the city rather than making the construction site a mess for the public.

Besides instructing the officials of the Smart City project to finish the work on this site within 15 days, Kumar also directed the Public Works Department (PWD) to level the roads at all such locations where the construction work has been completed.

Following this order, PWD levelled the road near Survey Chowk on Sunday. Meanwhile, the DM also directed PWD and the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) to immediately respond to any complaints regarding waterlogging or any kind of issues. "Any kind of irresponsible and ignorant attitude will not be tolerated by the administration," asserted Kumar.

Martyr Suman remembered on his death anniversary

PNS ■ NEW TEHRI

Shri Dev Suman, a freedom fighter considered a hero of people's movement and who fought against the Tehri monarchy to later die at the age of 28 years, was remembered by various organisations on his Balidaan Diwas on Sunday.

The people of the Tehri district remembered Suman, a freedom fighter and a martyr who played a major role in liberating Tehri from the monarchy.

He was paid floral tributes at the memorial in his native village Jaul. Tehri MLA Dhan Singh Negi dedicated the newly constructed memorial and statue of Suman at Chamba. Vice chancellor of Shri Dev Suman Uttarakhand University, PP Dhyani expressed his views on the life of Suman in an online programme.

Dhyani said that work is on to include the biography of martyr Suman in the curriculum. For this, a committee has been constituted by the uni-

versity and it is taking necessary action. Suman's personality will be included in the university's graduation course soon.

Dhyani said that a gold medal in his name will be awarded from this session to the students who have secured the highest marks at the graduation level in the university. On the other hand, teachers and staff members planted saplings at Swami Ramteerth campus and paid homage to Suman.



Family members of police personnel stage a demonstration on the issue of grade pay at the Gandhi Park in Dehradun on Sunday..... Pioneer photo

GUEST COLUMN Harela and the ground reality



RP NAILWAL

slopes. They are the unsung real heroes, so to say.

The Maiti festival celebrated particularly in the Chamoli district of Garhwal, essentially involves tree plantation initiative by young married couple in the courtyard of the newlywed girls' original homes (Mayka or Maiti). Not many know that this festival exhibits a kind of pomp and grandeur for the rural participants. But underlining essential message is promotion of tree plantation.

However, still the pointy to ponder is: greenery conservation in the state whither to? The regular reports on summer wildfires and resultant destruction of birds and animal habitats, indiscriminate felling of trees and poaching seem to belittle all the efforts by the hill-folk. The question which often makes rounds among the environmentalists is about the frailty of forest and wildlife conservation laws to gain the desired results.

One could understand and estimate how over the decades, millions of trees in our central Himalayan region have been either gutted or felled for the construction of roads, bridges and hydro power projects but the least expectation of the people from the forest department was to go an extra mile to conserve the remaining green cover. Interestingly, the situation before the formation of Uttarakhand state was really not so good when reports



about encroachment of forest land, illegal felling of trees and poaching often made headlines but the state of affairs seems to have gone from bad to worse. Scores of media reports are a pointer to this fact.

Its worth mentioning here how in recent times the ongoing construction of Char Dham rail project has caused large-scale felling in the hilly areas. The mega project involves construction of tunnels and bridges apart from the railway stations in the rugged Garhwal

mountains. As it were, the construction of scores of government buildings, the all weather road and Hemkund Sahib Road has already inflicted a heavy damage to the green landscape in the major part of Garhwal region. In fact, there was report published by FRI scientists some years ago that about ten central Himalayan tree species have already gone into extinction.

The voice raised by some native environmentalists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and

Sundar Lal Bahuguna against the plunder of local ecology had often fallen on deaf ears. Mind you, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, who is based at Gopeshwar, is an internationally recognised environmentalist and a Magsaysay award winner. Newspaper stories on clandestine felling or poaching or Sal borer infestation in Sal forests did not seem to cause concern among the decision-makers. Obviously, either there seems to be total lack of understanding of key issues pertaining to

environment conservation or officials and others are not so much exercised over the grim situation. Therefore, the big noise over non-acceptance of the green bonus demand of the State government by the Central government seems to be lacking logic. The natural question which comes to mind is: when you can't protect your forests and wildlife, how can you ask for green bonus?

Interestingly, it was in 1981 that the then government at the Centre set up Forest Survey Of India (FSI) in Dehradun with a view to promoting studies and research in sustainable management of forests, their resources and survey of country's forest cover etc. Even the job of scientific prediction of wildfires had been entrusted to FSI some years ago. But the ground situation seems to have remained unchanged to a large extent. The Forest Research Institute (FRI) set up as far back as 1906 in Dehradun, by British rulers is the premier institute of the country engaged in forestry research with the aim to push lab-to-land programmes as well. Yet, much more needs to be done at the implementation level. Therefore, the local ecology-oriented festivals such as Harela and Maiti definitely become much more meaningful in the context of keeping the environmental awareness alive.

(The author is a veteran journalist based in Dehradun. Views expressed are personal)

When Dhami came calling

JASKIRAN CHOPRA ■ DEHRADUN

When Uttarakhand got its new Chief Minister recently, a flood of memories surrounded me as my mind went back to the times when a very young Pushkar Singh Dhami used to often visit us at our news bureau which was quite close to the BJP office in Dalanwala. Those were exciting days. Uttarakhand was a year or two old and everyone was full of expectation and enthusiasm. Many young BJP workers used to come to the bureau of our news agency then as it was close to their office. The staff of the bureau would love to chat with them on our huge lawn.

Animated discussions ranging from politics to education, from business to cinema and from sports to law come back to me as I think of those days. Here I would like to recall the visits of Dhami who was then in his twenties and was a dream-eyed youth leader of the party. Soft spoken and polite, he was very popular with our staff and was always warmly welcomed by everyone. His gentle smile and cultured manner endeared him to all of us. He was down to earth and straightforward. His visits led to long discussions over endless cups of tea and hot samosas that were ordered as soon as any guest arrived at the bureau. This youth leader had considerable energy and was always full of new ideas that he would share with us. He also

shared his dreams for the people of Uttarakhand. On one occasion, I remember, the recently deceased senior Congress leader Indira Hridayesh had been the chief guest at a celebration in our office. After some time, when the formal event ended, we had Dhami as our guest and we sat with him late into the beautiful autumn evening in the lawn. Our conversations with him stand in my memory as an example of how politicians and journalists can be amicable and comfortable with each other. The informal atmosphere and the mutual trust were indeed memorable.

When Dhami became the youngest chief minister of this young mountain state, memories of those early years of statehood were refreshed and one was quite sure that Uttarakhand would benefit from his enthusiasm and commitment to the welfare of the people. We, as journalists all those years ago, had heard his views and his ideas when nobody knew what lay in the future. There were no hidden intentions in what anyone said. In a way, those were innocent times, in politics too. The media and the politicians were all geared to work together for the new state and make it into the dream state it was meant to be. Things may have gone wrong in these twenty years, a lot may have happened. But Dhami's appointment as the new CM refreshed not only the memories but also hopes for the state.

‘Bharat Jodo Andolan’ need of hour: Modi



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said there is need of a movement for ‘Bharat Jodo’ on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi’s ‘Bharat Chhodo Andolan’ as India enters the 75th year of its independence.

Addressing people in his monthly radio programme ‘mann ki baat’, the Prime Minister touched on a range of issues including ‘khaadi’ and adapting new techniques and technologies to improve productivity and living conditions besides the ‘Kargil Divas’.

Before signing off, he also said Covid-19 is still around and following protocol is the key to safety.

Modi started off with the Tokyo Olympics and complimented the sportspersons for reaching where they are after overcoming numerous hurdles in life. He appealed all to cheer up Indian olympic sportspersons on social media.

“Our Victory Punch Campaign for the support of Olympics sportspersons has begun. Do share your Victory Punch with your team...Cheer for India”, said Prime Minister.

Affirming that feeling of patriotism unites, Modi

reminded that Monday (July 26) is ‘Kargil Vijay Diwas’ as well.

“The Kargil War is a symbol of bravery and patience on part of India’s Armed Forces which the whole world has watched. This time this pride-filled day will be celebrated amid Amrit Mahotsav. That is why this day becomes all the more special. I want you to read the enthralling saga of Kargil...let us all bow to the bravehearts of Kargil”, he said.

The Prime Minister said to commemorate 75 years of freedom, ‘Amrit Mahotsav’ had commenced on March 12 from Mahatma Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram and felt that there was a need for uniting India by connecting people.

“On this very day, Babu’s Dandi Yatra too was revived...since then, from Jammu-Kashmir to Puduchery; from Gujarat to the Northeast, programmes in connection with Amrit Mahotsav are being held across the country”, he said.

The Prime Minister said “just the way the Quit India Movement (Bharat Chhodo Andolan) steered under Babu’s leadership, every countryman today has to lead a Bharat Jodo Andolan (Unite

The Kargil War is a symbol of bravery and patience, says PM

Khadi sale grew manifold across country since 2014

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Meanwhile, KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena has said that sale of Khadi products across the country has grown manifold since 2014, thanks to the repeated appeals by the Prime Minister to promote Khadi. Since October 2016, the single-day sale at Khadi India’s Flagship Outlet in Connaught Place, New Delhi, has crossed Rs 1 crore mark on 11 different occasions. This record performance of Khadi found a special mention in the latest episode of Prime Minister’s radio program ‘Mann Ki Baat’ aired on Sunday.

Saxena said what made this performance even more significant is the fact that Khadi’s single-day sales exceeded ₹1 crore for 4 times

in October - November 2020, despite the economic distress and the fear surrounding Corona pandemic. Earlier in 2018 also, the single-day sales at Khadi’s CP outlet had crossed Rs 1 crore mark for 4 times.

On 2nd October 2019, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) registered the highest single-day sale of Rs 1.27 crore at the CP outlet which continues to be a record till date.

“It is because of the Hon’ble PM’s appeals that a large number of people particularly youths have been inclined to buy Khadi. The growing buzz around ‘Swadeshi’ has significantly helped lakhs of village industries prosper even during the challenging times of Covid-19 pandemic”, Saxena said.

India Movement).”

He said “It is our duty to ensure that our work helps in closely knitting and binding our India which is filled with diversity.”

He again emphasized on the need for self-reliance and going “vocal for local.” “We can contribute to nation building even while performing our routine chores...such as ‘Vocal for Local’. Supporting local entrepreneurs, artists, craftsmen, weavers should come naturally to us. The National Handloom Day on the 7th of August is an occasion

when we can strive to attempt that”, he said.

The Prime Minister said the National Handloom Day has a remarkable historic background as on this very day in 1905, the Swadeshi Andolan had begun.

Modi pointed out that in the rural and tribal regions of the country, handloom is a major source of income. This is a sector that comprises lakhs of women, weavers and craftsmen and “even small efforts on your part will give rise to a new hope in weavers”, he said.

India, US to discuss Afghanistan, Covid crisis during Blinken visit



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the USA will discuss the fast deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and the ongoing fight against the coronavirus pandemic during the two-day visit of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken beginning Tuesday, July 27. During his talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, terrorism emanating from Pakistan funding of terror groups will also figure. Blinken will meet National Security Advisor(NSA)Ajit Doval and call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi too.

Given the growing strategic and defence ties over the past few years, the two sides are also likely to explore ways to further strengthen relations including exercises and transfer of technology. The two delegations will also do the groundwork for the 2+2 dialogue of defence and foreign ministers to be held in the US later this year.

Highlighting some of the key features of Blinken’s visit, the first ever to India after assuming new charge, sources

said here on Sunday Jaishankar is in regular touch with him for the past few months through telephone conversations. The two leaders met when Jaishankar visited US in May and later on the sidelines of the G-7 and G-20 summits in UK and Italy respectively.

Indicating US President Joe Biden’s keenness to have strong relations with India, the US Secretary of State is the third senior member of the Biden administration to visit India after defense secretary Lloyd Austin in March and special presidential envoy for climate John Kerry in April.

While the two sides are likely hold intensive review of

the situation in Afghanistan and the Taliban controlling major part of the country, India will also convey its concern about the instability in Afghanistan spilling over into the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, Lashkar-e-Taiba(LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed(JeM)terrorists now currently fighting alongside the Taliban may also target Kashmir, sources said.

They said the implications of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, and the need for sustained pressure on Pakistan over terror financing and terror havens will be part of the agenda for talks between India and US.



As regards the ongoing campaign against the corona pandemic, they said the two leaders will focus on supply of vaccine raw materials, and economic recovery efforts.

India will continue to push for ensuring open and consistent supply chains for materials and items needed for vaccine production, as the country ramps up production for both domestic vaccination and global supplies thereafter, sources said.

Also, the need for resilient supply chains for critical medicines and healthcare equipment will figure in the talks. India may also stress the need for gradual resumption of international travel while maintaining health protocols, especially easing the mobility of students, professionals and business travellers, and allowing travel for family reunions and humanitarian issues.

Having forged an alliance as part of the Quad, the two ministers will discuss ways to enhance engagement like the possibility of a meeting of foreign ministers of India, Australia, Japan and the US later this year.

The two sides will also take forward the Quad vaccine partnership, which was launched at the first virtual summit of the group in March, to enable the supply of made-in-India Covid-19 vaccines to countries in the Indo-Pacific from early 2022.

Jaishankar and Blinken are also likely to lay the groundwork for the Quad summit and bilateral meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Joseph Biden due to be held in Washington later this year, sources said.

PC seeks JPC probe into Pegasus snooping



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Finance Minister P Chidambaram on Sunday said the Government should either call for a joint parliamentary committee probe into the Pegasus snooping allegations or request the Supreme Court to appoint a sitting judge to investigate the matter even as he demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi make a statement in Parliament clarifying whether there had been surveillance or not.

The former home minister said he was not sure that one can go to the extent of saying that the entire electoral mandate of 2019 was vitiated by the “unlawful snooping” but added that it may have “helped” the BJP to score that victory which has been “tainted” by the allegations.

Chidambaram also said a probe by a JPC can be more effective than an investigation by the Parliamentary Standing



Committee on Information Technology, asserting that the former would be more empowered by Parliament.

Asked about Parliament IT panel head Shashi Tharoor’s remarks that the subject is already on the mandate of my committee and a JPC is not required, Chidambaram expressed doubts whether the IT panel with a majority of BJP members will allow a full investigation into the matter.

“The parliamentary committee rules are rather strict. For example they cannot take evidence openly but a JPC can be empowered by Parliament to take evidence in public view, to cross examine witnesses, and to summon documents. So I think a JPC

will have far more powers than a parliamentary committee”, he said.

At the same time, he said he is not diminishing the role of the parliamentary committee to the extent it can probe the matter and is welcome to do so.

Posing questions for the government, he asked whether there was surveillance at all and whether snooping was done through Pegasus.

“If Pegasus spyware was used, who acquired it? Was it acquired by the government or by one of its agencies”, he asked.

The Rajya Sabha member also asked the government to come clean on the amount paid to acquire the spyware.

RS member John Brittas seeks SC-monitored probe into spyware snooping

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha member John Brittas has moved the Supreme Court seeking a court-monitored probe into reports of alleged snooping of activists, politicians, journalists and constitutional functionaries using Israeli spyware Pegasus.

A massive political row has erupted after media reports claimed that Pegasus spyware was used to conduct surveillance on about 300 Indians, including ministers, political leaders, government officials and journalists.

Brittas, who has filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, said that recent allegations of snooping has caused concern among a large section of people in India and that snooping would have a chilling effect on free speech and expression.

He has sought a court-monitored investigation into allegations of snooping using Pegasus spyware.

In a statement on Sunday, Brittas, who is a CPI-M member, said that despite the very serious nature, the central government has not cared to investigate into the allegations

involved in the issue but “made only a hopeful hope that the time tested processes in our country are well-established to ensure that unauthorised surveillance does not occur”.

“Therefore, the queries were raised in the Indian Parliament with respect to this leakage. But the government has neither denied nor admitted the snooping by the spyware”, he said.

Amid a row over the Pegasus spyware issue, the government had said that illegal surveillance was not possible with checks and balances in the country’s laws and alleged that attempts were being made to malign the Indian democracy.

On July 19, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told the Lok Sabha that media reports on alleged snooping published a day before the start of the Monsoon Session of Parliament “cannot be a coincidence” and stressed that there is “no substance” behind the sensationalism.

However, the minister did not specify whether the Indian government was using Pegasus spyware. PTI

CISF holds ‘Plantation Festival’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on Sunday observed the day as ‘Plantation Festival’ at all its 352 units across the country and planted about 2.33 lakh saplings.

CISF Director General Sudhir Kumar Saxena, along with other senior officers and personnel, planted saplings of fruit bearing and endemic at the CISF campus at Shastris Park here. Saxena emphasised that we all have to come forward and join the campaign for a green and clean India. He said, “Trees are the true treasures for us all and that by planting trees and nurturing them, we are securing the future of our children and the generations to come.”

“The trees for the plantation drive have been carefully chosen keeping the local topography in mind so that they may contribute to environmental sustenance and to supplement daily requirements. Thus, 50 per cent of the chosen variety of trees are of long life like Neem, Sheesham and Peepal among others, and 50 per cent are fruits bearing trees like mango, jamun, etc.”, the CISF said in a statement.

Heavy rainfall, thunderstorm likely in MP, warns IMD



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday issued orange and yellow alerts forecasting heavy rainfall, thunderstorm and lightning in Madhya Pradesh, even as the monsoon fury continued to wreak havoc in Maharashtra where 113 people have so far died in rain-related incidents.

Several parts of Kerala in south India also witnessed heavy rainfall on Sunday, with the MeT issuing a yellow alert for several districts, including Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Ernakulam.

The ‘orange alert’ which asks authorities to be prepared for possible heavy rains and thunderstorms accompanied with lightning at isolated places, has been issued for 23 districts in Madhya Pradesh, namely Indore, Dhar, Alirajpur, Jabua, Khargone, Barwani, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Ujjain, Dewas, Ratlam, Shajapur, Agar-Malwa, Mandasaur, Neemuch, Hoshangabad, Betul and Harda.

A yellow alert which advises authorities to “be updated” on the situation, warning likely heavy rains and thunderstorms accompanied with lightning at isolated places, was issued for Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh, Balaghat, Anuppur and Narsinghpur districts in the state.

Delhiites experienced a sultry Sunday with the maximum temperature settling at 37.3 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season’s average. The minimum temperature was recorded at 27.6 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of the year.

The IMD has issued a yellow alert for the city on Monday and forecast generally cloudy sky with moderate rain/thun-

Delhiites experienced a sultry Sunday with the maximum temperature settling at 37.3 degrees Celsius

dershowers towards the evening. An orange alert has been issued for Tuesday with the forecast of rain accompanied with gusty winds. Parts of Uttar Pradesh received light rain on Sunday. Agra was the hottest place in the state with the maximum temperature settling at 37 degrees Celsius.

According to the IMD, heavy rain is very likely at isolated places in the state on Monday, while thundershowers are likely at most places in the state on July 27 and July 28.

In rain-battered Maharashtra, the number of deaths due to flooding, landslides and other rain-related incidents reached 113 with one more casualty reported in the last 24 hours, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said 89 bodies have been retrieved and 34 people are missing following landslides triggered by heavy rainfall in the coastal regions of Maharashtra.

According to the official data, NDRF rescuers have retrieved a total of 89 bodies with the highest number of 47 from the worst-hit Talive village under Mahad tehsil of Raigad. As many as 1,35,313 people have been shifted to safer places, including 78,111 in western Maharashtra’s Sangli district, followed by 40,882 in Kolhapur district.

The Krishna river in Sangli and Panchganga in Kolhapur are in flood though the rains were reported to have subsided on Saturday.

States, UTs, pvt hospitals have nearly 3.30 cr jabs available with them: Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when several States are alleging vaccine supply shortage and have even temporarily called off vaccinations on this very ground, the Centre on Sunday claimed the States/UTs and private hospitals combined have nearly 3.30 crore vaccines available with them.

According to the health ministry, over 45.37 crore vaccine doses have been provided to the states and UTs so far through all sources and a further 11,79,010 doses are in the pipeline. Of this, the total consumption, including wastage, is 42,08,32,021 doses (as per data available at 8 am Sunday), the ministry said. More than 3.29 Cr (3,29,38,559) balance and unutilized doses are still available with the States/UTs and private hospitals to be administered, the Ministry said.

As part of the nationwide vaccination drive, the government has been supporting states and UTs by providing them COVID-19 vaccines free of cost. In the new phase of the universalisation of the vaccination drive, the Union government will procure and supply (free of cost) 75 per cent of the vaccines being produced by the manufacturers in the country to the states and UTs. The new phase of universalisation of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from June 21.

India has added 39,742 new cases of coronavirus infection taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,13,71,901, while the death toll rose to 4,20,551 with 535 fresh fatalities in the last 24 hours. The country is seventh among the most affected countries by active cases. The active cases have declined to 4,08,212 and comprise 1.30 per cent of the

total infections and the national COVID-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 97.36 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed. A decline of 765 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

India’s COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

Overall, five states with the biggest 24-hour jump in total cases are Kerala (17518), Maharashtra (6753), Odisha (1917), Tamil Nadu (1830), and Andhra Pradesh (1747).

Govt urges community radio stations to bust vax myths

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Sunday urged community radio stations to bust Covid vaccine myths particularly among people living in remote and far flung areas of the country. The Health Ministry’s request came during a workshop it conducted in collaboration with UNICEF for representatives of community radio stations from 16 states to bust myths related to COVID vaccinations and to educate people on Covid-appropriate behaviour (CAB).

In his opening remarks, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary with the Union Health Ministry, appreciated the contribution of community radio stations in India’s vaccination drive against Covid-19. He also noted that sustained efforts of such radio stations by airing informative programs on Covid vaccination has trans-



lated into increased community participation in the ongoing vaccination drive.

The radio stations were urged to highlight community-led positive initiatives and role models to strengthen vaccine trust among communities that they cater to. The issue of mental health linked to COVID-19 was also focused upon, the ministry said in a statement.

Community radio programmes in regional language aimed at educating communities about importance of Covid-appropriate behaviour, addressing myths and misinformation linked to vaccines and creating awareness on vac-

cination progress is resulting in uptake of vaccination among many tribal districts of India, the Ministry statement read.

The collective responsibility to address mental health issues among communities through informative programming by engaging with subject experts from the state and national level was stressed on, it said.

The radio stations were asked to continuously remind listeners about the need to strictly follow Covid-appropriate behaviour as the second wave is still not over: the virus can strike back as soon the society ignores health advisories and lowers its guard against Covid safety protocol, it said.

Joint Secretary Agarwal answered their various queries and applauded their continued support to widen the net of authentic information in the regions.



सबका साथ
सबका विकास
सबका विश्वास



नरेन्द्र मोदी | प्रधानमंत्री



पुष्कर सिंह धामी
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

राज्य स्तरीय कोरोना योद्धा सम्मान समारोह

देहरादून, 26 जुलाई 2021

मुख्य अतिथि

पुष्कर सिंह धामी
मा. मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

विशिष्ट अतिथि

डॉ. धन सिंह रावत
मा. स्वास्थ्य मंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

अध्यक्षता

गणेश जोशी
मा. कैबिनेट मंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

समय: सायं 4:00 बजे | स्थान: सभागार, मुख्यमंत्री एनेक्सी, कैन्ट रोड, देहरादून



समय पर दूसरी डोज लगवायें, कोरोना से लड़ने हेतु मजबूत सुरक्षा चक्र बनायें

अपनी सुविधानुसार दूसरी
खुराक का दिन जल्द से
जल्द अवश्य चुनें।



- कोविशील्ड की दूसरी खुराक, पहली खुराक के 12 से 16 सप्ताह के अंतर पर लगवायें।
- कोवैक्सिन की दूसरी खुराक, पहली खुराक के 4 से 6 सप्ताह के अंतर पर लगवायें।



अफवाहों पर ध्यान न दें! कोरोना का टीका सुरक्षित एवं प्रभावी है

अस्वस्थ महसूस करने पर ई-संजीवनी पोर्टल esanjeevaniopd.in
पर निःशुल्क उपचार एवं परामर्श प्राप्त करें। समय : प्रातः 9:00 बजे से सायं 6:00 बजे तक

हम सबकी है ये जिम्मेदारी – कोरोना से बची रहे जिन्दगी हमारी



मास्क जरूर
और ठीक से
पहनने



हथों को नियमित धीरे
अथवा सैनिटाइजर का
प्रयोग करें



आपसी सम्पर्क में
2 गज दूरी है जरूरी



लक्षण होने पर
कोविड टेस्ट
अवश्य करावें



अपनी बारी आने
पर कोविड वैक्सीन
अवश्य लगवायें

राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन, चिकित्सा स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग, उत्तराखण्ड
सूचना एवं लोक सम्पर्क विभाग, उत्तराखण्ड द्वारा जनहित में जारी।

No laxity

All signs say the third wave of COVID-19 is on its way; India must keep its guard up

The second wave of COVID-19 is supposed to be abating since June 25, but the sense of relief is not reflected in either the total number of cases or the observations of the anti-pandemic strategists. The national count of fresh cases is over 39,000 and rising. And the empowered strategy group tells the Government not to allow the count to cross 50,000 a day. Should this be taken as a warning to the Government that the third wave may well be on the way? Yes, it is. For the first time, the strategists have given an early alert. For the first time, too, the country's anti-COVID policy is being directed by scientific rather than administrative considerations. The earmarked limit sends two messages. One, that the second wave has abated as much as it can in the country though the surge is largely limited to two States — Kerala and Maharashtra. Two, the breach of the 50,000-case limit will



mark the beginning of the stress on medical infrastructure. The strategists appear to be playing it safe and assuming that the peak of a future wave would see four-five lakh cases a day, nearly 10 times the new case limit. That should give the Union and the State Governments a clear picture of how much additional infrastructure they should organise in the next couple of months.

The example of the UK should show how they are dealing with a situation where the daily cases have crossed 50,000. People are testing positive at an alarming rate. Nearly 650,000 people are esti-

mated to have tested positive in the second week of July. Admissions are rising in hospitals. And yet, the Government has eased all restrictions. Social distancing is no longer mandatory, face masks are no longer required by law, and the ban has been lifted on large gatherings of people. The British Government is facing criticism for the complete unlock, but its confidence perhaps stems from two sources. One, that over 46 million people in the UK or 87.6 per cent of the adults have received their first dose and 35.5 million, or 67.5 per cent, are fully vaccinated. The high number of vaccinations and the presence of antibodies in the infected unvaccinated is said to reduce the severity of infection and the need for hospitalisation, and lower the chances of death. Secondly, thousands of people using the NHS COVID App are receiving self-isolation alerts every day, informing them they have been in close contact with a positive case. The UK is highly vaccinated and has rid itself of safety protocols and the cases are growing. Indian vaccination levels are low and the protocols are violated more and the cases are growing. This goes on to show that an either-or attitude towards vaccination and safety measures is a sure-shot invite to a third wave of the pandemic. The mandatory requirement is a combination of both and that is what the Indian strategists should emphasise on.

PICTALK



A submerged Old Sangli area after the Krishna river's level rose following rainfall

PTI

In a hurry?

The Delhi Govt allowing public transport to ply at 100% capacity raises a number of uncomfortable questions

Another step towards unlocking Delhi would take place today, Monday. Indeed, people will welcome it that buses are plying at full capacity though standing passengers would still not be allowed. Cinema halls are also opening after a long gap. The Delhi Metro would operate at 100 per cent capacity. This would truly bring Delhi closer to normalcy. The Capital has already suffered a great deal due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Though Corona's second wave is ebbing and very few cases are being reported on a daily basis, the threat of the third wave is looming large. In this situation, going for almost complete unlock does not seem reasonable as the experts have warned that the third wave could be here sooner than later. It would have been better had the Delhi Government waited at least three more weeks, until August 15, to open up public transport and recreation centres. The Delhi Government officials say that the restrictions have been eased as the number of cases is falling. But we have seen even in the second wave that the scenario can



change very fast and cases can shoot up within a matter of days.

This is certainly not the time to take the pandemic lightly, especially since we are on the verge of defeating the virus. It would not at all be prudent to let the guard down. Apart from these concessions, 100 people will now be able to attend funerals instead of the earlier 20. A similar number of people can now attend weddings instead of the earlier 50. This would indeed expose people to risk. One can understand that people would welcome these steps but the Government should think beyond that. One can understand people's mounting economic hardships but totally unlocking Delhi might not be the solution. That must be dealt with at a different level. It defies logic why the Government is in a hurry to open cinemas, theatres and multiplexes in the national Capital. The Government's first and foremost responsibility is to save lives and, therefore, it should not put people's lives in danger by going for such-scale unlocking at this moment. Mercifully, the Delhi Government has not yet made plans to open schools and colleges, which may have serious consequences. The Government must work for people and should not play to the gallery, making policy decisions to win accolades and public support.

China's 'friendship' must bother Putin

In 1969, China gained quite a few islands on Siberia's Ussuri river. Now, it has already started claiming the entire Siberia as its territory

Late last month, Russia and China renewed their friendship treaty for a further five years. Comrade Putin appears to be making a dangerous mistake by ignoring the potential threat from China. He was only 17 when the Soviet Union fought a seven-month mini-war across the Ussuri river, which is located in Russia's Siberia (Sleeping Land). How big was Beijing's ambition one does not know, but the Soviets had to convey an implicit nuclear threat to the aggressor. To save face, Mao Zedong, through his Premier Zhou en Lai, threatened a "People's War", which meant that hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers would swarm Soviet tanks as they had done with the Americans in the Korean War in 1951-52. The Chinese leader's belief of convenience was the superiority of man over machine. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) did demonstrate its idea of warfare on one of the islands on the Ussuri by ambushing Soviet soldiers.

In the end, China gained quite a few islands on the river, which were a loss for the Soviet Union. Logically, more conflict lies ahead. China is a much bigger nuclear power than it was in 1969. Its ambitions have grown and, by current indications, it wishes to become a superpower. We have to remember that Siberia is over 13 million sq km with a sparse population, whereas China is bubbling with people but is short of arable land. Incidentally, the Yellow Giant gained several hundred islands in the midst of not only the Ussuri but also the Amur and Argun rivers. This gain by China and loss by the USSR were after decades of harrowing negotiations which ended in 2004.

With climate change and the earth getting warmer, Siberia can well become more hospitable. Today, the whole region is considered hostile due to its very low temperatures in winter. With global warming, Siberia is likely to become attractive for China to occupy. The region is rich in coal, natural gas, diamonds, iron ore, gold and aluminum. A possible scenario of China forcibly occupying Siberia can no longer be



looked upon as hypothetical or imaginary. Patrick Prinston, a Western columnist, informs us that a Chinese portal *Jinji Toutiao* published an article, the author of which calls Siberia "Chinese land". The Chinese media regularly praises Russian ruler Vladimir Putin and how cleverly he puts the West in its place. Simply, from the point of view of Beijing, Russia is not only a good friend but also has an excellent potential prize. "There are no countries around the world that are always friendly or, conversely, always hostile to each other. In the past, Siberia was conquered by the Mongols and, therefore, in fact, is Chinese territory." This is increasingly becoming China's refrain.

Joe Burgess in *The New York Times* column 'Why China Reclaims Siberia' lays out a starker scenario: A land without people for a people without land, Burgess says. The land is as resource-rich and people-poor as China is the opposite. The weight of that logic should scare the Kremlin. Like love, a border is real only if both sides believe in it. And on both sides of the Sino-



CHINA IS A MUCH BIGGER NUCLEAR POWER THAN IT WAS IN 1969. ITS AMBITIONS HAVE GROWN. WE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT SIBERIA IS OVER 13 MILLION SQ KM WITH A SPARSE POPULATION, WHEREAS CHINA IS BUBBLING WITH PEOPLE BUT IS SHORT OF ARABLE LAND

Russian border, that belief is wavering. Siberia — the Asian part of Russia, east of the Ural Mountains — is immense. It takes up three-quarters of Russia's land mass, the equivalent of the entire US and India put together.

The 1.35 billion Chinese people south of the border outnumber Russia's 144 million almost 10 to 1. The discrepancy is even starker for Siberia on its own, home to barely 38 million people, and especially the border area, where only six million Russians face over 90 million Chinese. With intermarriage, trade and investment across that border, Siberians have realised that, for better or for worse, Beijing is a lot closer than Moscow. The land is already providing China "the factory of the world", with much of its raw materials, especially oil, gas and timber. Increasingly, Chinese-owned factories in Siberia churn out finished goods as if the region already were a part of the Middle Kingdom's economy. Beijing could use Russia's own strategy: hand out passports to sympathisers in contested areas, and then move in militarily to "protect its citizens". If Beijing

chooses to take Siberia by force, the only way Moscow could stop it would be by using nuclear weapons.

In a meeting with the press on May 20 this year, Putin, using a bit of colourful language, threatened to "smash the teeth of anyone who tried to bite off even a piece of Siberia". He surely could not have been thinking of the US or the West. Chinese dictator Xi Jinping only last year described Putin as his "best friend".

But despite all the nice sounding rhetoric, the reality of the China-Russia relationship is a shallow one. The US and friendly countries have grown closer by a set of common values or structures like the Quad. There is nothing even remotely comparable in the case of Russia and China; in this partnership, which is purely transactional without any real political integration, Russia is very much the junior partner, with China eyeing its geographically vast, resource-rich but under-populated Eurasian neighbour.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MIRABAI CHANU IS OUR NATION'S PRIDE

Sir — The sight of Mirabai Chanu lifting 87kg in snatch and 115kg in clean and jerk, an astonishing 202kg in total, in the 49-kg category at the Tokyo Olympics and the visuals of her standing on the podium showing the silver medal with a huge smile filled us with pride. Obviously, success in sports is a source of national pride. It was natural and legitimate for us to bask in the reflected glory of our compatriot bagging the silver medal.

Recognising the determined effort, dedication and hard work, everyone speaks of her remarkable performance in glowing terms. The daughter of a humble Government employee and a street *samosa* vendor, Mirabai started her "career" with wood-lifting (she, like most children in her village, used to fetch firewood from nearby hills). We salute the gutsy weightlifter for opening India's medal account on Day 1 of the Games.

On a different note, considering our population and the potential for developing a medal-winning talent pool, we should send a bigger contingent to future Olympics and hope for even more medals than we do.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

MONSOON FURY BATTERS MAHARASHTRA

Sir — Heavy rains in Maharashtra have delivered a huge blow to those residing in the coastal areas. Incessant rains have triggered landslides and floods, leaving over 140 dead and thousands of people displaced. The destruction appears irreversible in cities, districts and villages. Districts like Raigad and Ratnagiri have been among the many worst-hit areas of Maharashtra, the coastal areas have been battered by torrential rains. Since the torrential rains started, 140 individuals died in tragic incidents in Maharashtra like floods, landslides and so forth. Satara in Maharashtra reported at least 21 deaths as a consequence of rain-related incidents and landslides.

The cities of Chiplun and Khed in Ratnagiri district have been devastated

Rid the Ganga of pollution



In spite of the launch of the Ganga Action Plan (GAP), the river continues to be highly polluted. More impetus is required to rid the river from pollution which the Government targets to achieve by 2030. Rejuvenation of the Ganga project is now faced with a new challenge. A new study by Toxics Link has found that the Ganga is polluted with multiple kinds of plastic.

Plastic products and waste materials in the river break down to micro particles. The river transports this into the ocean. This brings into sharp focus the poor state of both solid and liquid waste management. As the river flows through densely populated cities, untreated sewage, industrial waste and religious offerings

wrapped in non-degradable plastic add large pollutants. Micro plastics that get into our body are a serious health hazard. Plastic waste causes marine pollution with profound consequences for marine life and their habitats. It has been reported that over 663 species are badly affected by marine waste and 11 per cent of them are related to micro plastic. Micro plastics drained into the ocean cause serious imbalance in the marine ecosystem.

Micro plastic pollution in the Ganga has huge ramifications. The water from the river is used for various purposes. The river provides drinking water to several cities. Hence, micro plastic pollution has severe impact on the environment and human health. Implementation of plastic waste management must be strengthened. Single-use plastics must be banned. There must be more data and research on micro plastics and their impact on rivers. The threat of plastic on aquatic life must be addressed more realistically. Various stakeholders must join hands and work towards improving plastic waste management and reducing micro plastic pollution.

Venu GS | Kollam

after heavy rainfall and cut off from land routes, according to the State Disaster Management Authority. More than 25 NDRF groups are working on the ground or are on the standby mode, three teams each of the Indian Military and the Indian Coast Guard have been pressed into service, besides seven teams of the Indian Navy and one of the Indian Air Force. Apart from all these arrangements, the local authorities are engaged with the rescue operations nonstop for over 24 hours now. Maharashtra is in deep trouble due to the heavy rains.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT MUST END

Sir — India's high rate of urbanisation has caused a hasty expansion of human settlements into areas that were once exclusively wildlife habitats. With vaguely defined boundaries for fauna, human-

occupied areas in the country have increasingly become the hangouts for wandering wild animals ('The human-animal conflict on the rise', July 24).

The conflict with wildlife has reached unprecedented levels, with predators attacking livestock, thus leading to retaliatory animal killings. The deadly human-animal conflict has largely been the consequence of a fast growing human population's inability to find sustainable ways to coexist with the bustling wildlife. As a result, humans and wildlife compete for the same diminishing resources. It is, therefore, necessary to address the issue in a holistic manner and co-create palliative solutions with full engagement of all the relevant stakeholders.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

I'm very happy to win the first medal for India... I don't belong to just Manipur, I belong to the whole country.



Olympic silver medallist — Saikhom Mirabai Chanu



The Opposition led by the Congress has got no issue to raise that is related to people.

Therefore, they raise such issues (snoopgate).

BJP national president — JP Nadra



Latin American States should do something similar to the European Union, but attached to our history, our reality and our identities.

Mexican President — Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador



It is okay to be boxed. I am fine with it because eventually people will box you with what they see and like.

Stand-up comic and actor — Sunil Grover

I will come to Rajasthan on July 28 and 29. I will talk to each Congress MLA; we feel that the AICC should know the opinion of the MLAs.



Congress in-charge of Rajasthan — Ajay Maken



FIRST COLUMN ADMINISTERING INDIA

The British administered India with the help of Indian Army and an institution called the ICS



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

India as an entity has existed for several millennia. The concept of a unified territory from the 'seas to the horizon' has been documented at least from the time of the Gupta Empire in the 4th century AD). India has seen different models of administration, including those of the Mauryan and Harshaputras, the Cholas, and the British. India came under the British Crown in 1857 and was known as 'British India'. The rule lasted 90 years. There is a notion that this imperial state unified India administratively. It is a myth. British India was initially ruled from Calcutta and then the capital moved to Delhi. Besides the territory under direct British rule, there were hundreds of princely states with various degrees of administrative and revenue autonomy: Travancore-Cochin, Baroda, Jammu and Kashmir being among them. The British withdrew from India with a strange term that the princely states could secede to either of India and Pakistan. It was an attempt to restore the status quo ante to 1857.



The British administered India with the help of the Indian Army and an institution called 'The Indian Civil Service'. After Independence, the service metamorphosed into the Indian Administrative Service.

The story of Indian unity post-independence is a saga that many have testified to. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the chief architect of the merger of the princely states with India. Some territories also merged with Pakistan by a wafer-thin majority. The first few years of Indian independence were also spent on reorganising the Indian Union into linguistic states and the states into districts. The story still continues with new states emerging and the districts of the states being reorganised.

Two administrative reforms commissions have been set up since independence and their recommendations used to carry out administrative restructuring. Appraisal systems of IAS officers have been thoroughly revised and the writer has been involved with some of these efforts. It is not sufficiently recognised that every IAS officer does not automatically graduate to the level of Secretary to the Government of India. There are institutional filters, evaluations, barriers, and in-built learning opportunities.

After 1947, the nascent Indian Administrative Service, through special recruitment, spread across India. However, a few thousand civil servants, definitionally, could not fully administer all aspects of a nation's life. Their expansion no matter how planned was bound to leave gaps.

One of the first felt needs was for an 'Indian Foreign Service' which would handle external affairs. An all-India competitive examination was conceived and the Union Public Service Commission was entrusted with the task of holding it and selecting recruits depending on their need.

Administering India is not just a simple function of civil administration. The railways have to run, health and education need policy attention, information needs handling, etc. So, separate services like the Indian Railway Service and the Indian Information Service were created while IRS and IPS became essential collaterals of the Indian administration.

Over time, administrative groups were created, with IAS, IPS, and Indian Forest Service officials coming under Group A. However, because of their coordinating role, IAS officers remain prima donnas. Their perks and salary structures are also superior.

Gradually, the states developed their own civil service to look after their administrative needs. Provision is there for movement from state service cadre to central service cadre after due evaluation. Domain specialists began to occupy specialised administrative positions, especially in the departments of science and technology, biotechnology, taxation, and customs. The message is simple: the Indian Administrative Service, in its fullness, is amongst the powerful sections that administer India.

(The writer is founder Director, IIM-K and a management thinker and practitioner. The views expressed are personal.)

Pegasus affair is an assault on privacy

Anyone defending this will be slipping down a steep slope of undermining the basic rights of an individual



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI

In a sensational international news break last week, it was revealed that over 300 Indians were being surveilled through an Israeli spyware called Pegasus. This software had the ability to hack into phones and be able to access files, documents, voice calls, and videos of the hacked individual. Those on the list were journalists, opposition voices, activists, and cabinet ministers. Most of the names were anti-establishment and their investigative stories uncovered the various failures of the government.

The Pegasus scandal has once again opened the floodgates of the notion of privacy and to what extent can the state abuse privacy rights. While the history of snooping is not new in India, this is the first occasion of sophisticated technology meant for defence and national security purposes unethically used to get access to all the communication of those who are anti-government. Anyone defending this will be slipping down a steep slope of undermining the basic rights of an individual and also the democratic principles of the nation.

Ever since the controversy has broken, the IT Minister's only defence has been that there is a law in place to protect the privacy of individuals and for the government's need to surveil. The surveillance in India takes place under two laws - the Telegraph Act and the Information Technology Act. While the Telegraph Act deals with audio call records and interception, the IT Act deals with all electronic communication. However, loopholes exist in both Acts and they have not yet been addressed by the Centre and that gap is exactly what it uses for snooping and silencing opposition voices.

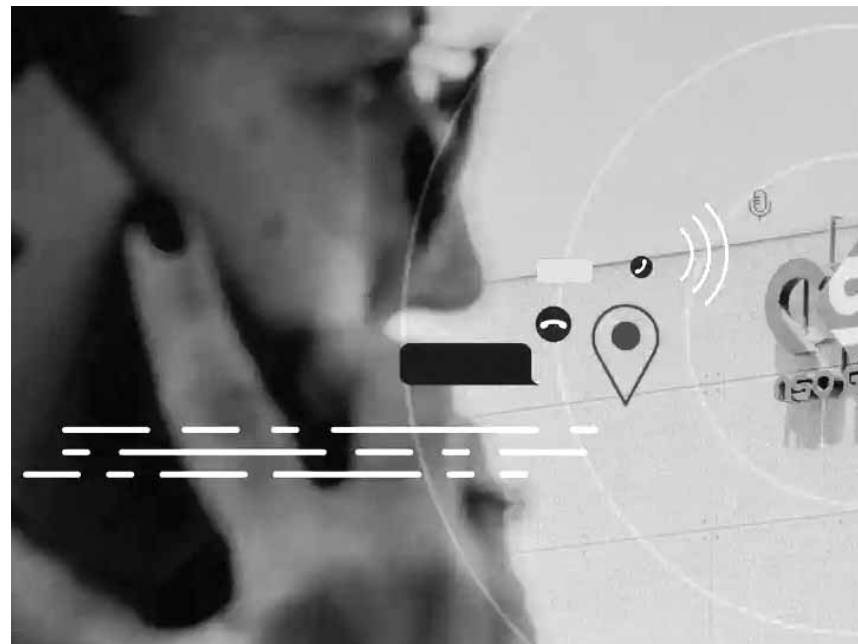
India is a democratic nation. At the heart of democracy are its people. When incidents like this (Pegasus snooping) happen, it infringes on the basic fundamental rights of the citizens. The right to privacy, though not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, is inherent under various provisions of the Constitution. The unanimous Supreme Court of India judgement in 2017 recognised the Right to Privacy as a fundamental right despite the Union government asserting to the contrary. Article 21 of the Constitution of India includes the Right to Privacy which is mentioned in the Puttaswamy judgment as "the right of an individual to exercise control over his personal data and to be able to control his/her own life would encompass his right to control his/her own life and his/her existence on the internet".

In the surveillance issue, the absence of privacy impinges on the ideals of liberty and dignity as envisioned in the Constitution of India and hinders the growth of the individual as a citizen of this country. In these times of digital communication, the "zero detectable"



THE ISSUE HAS BECOME POLITICAL SINCE THE NAMES OF MANY OPPOSITION LEADERS CROPPED UP IN THE SURVEILLANCE INVESTIGATION AND ROCKED EVERY SINGLE DAY OF PARLIAMENT SINCE THE MONSOON SESSION BEGAN. THE GOVERNMENT, INSTEAD OF AGREEING TO LOOK INTO THESE CHARGES, IS BUSY REJECTING THE REPORT ALTOGETHER

(The writer is Deputy Leader of the Shiv Sena in the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)



form of surveillance has engulfed the notion of privacy. The Pegasus allegations threaten the very ideals of democracy our nation is based upon. It threatens the sovereignty of the nation and forms a grave concern for our nation since an accountable institutional framework and mechanism for the protection of citizen's data and privacy is absent. An absence of a credible, sovereign, and accountable framework puts the whole nation at the mercy of such cyber exposure. The Personal Data Protection Bill, which is supposed to be the framework designed to ensure accountability and bring in transparency, is marred by many discrepancies and is still under scrutiny by the Standing Committee.

As India has fast-tracked digital communication and businesses, smartphones have become a necessity rather than a privilege and Covid-19 has fast-forwarded the process of digitisation. The availability of almost everything at the mere touch of your finger makes it an absolute necessity for a sovereign nation to have a blanket institutional framework in place.

The idea of Digital India, with 900 million active internet users by 2025, is afflicted by the threat of cyber warfare weapons being unleashed by any foreign state. Therefore, it becomes pertinent

that the government comes up with stringent data protection and privacy laws and a framework that protects the very people that form the nation. With an increased population that is now using smartphones, we in India have no Data Protection Policy in place. With this very obvious loophole in the system there is no accountability on the issue of who owns the digital data. Imagine you living in the reality show Big Boss where your every movement is monitored and you haven't even signed up for it. Stripping people of their privacy and dignity is what this kind of data invasion does.

The issue has become political since the names of many opposition leaders also cropped up in the surveillance investigation and has rocked every single day of parliament since the monsoon session began. The government, in the interest of transparency, instead of agreeing to look into these charges, is busy rejecting the report altogether and going so far as to say that this is an anti-India conspiracy. This is ridiculous, to say the least; while various countries named in the snooping investigation have launched an inquiry, France has initiated it while Israel has formed a senior inter-ministerial group to look into it but the Indian government continues to tie itself up in knots by defending it.

In governance, the principle of Caesar's wife should be above suspicion rule should apply. However, this government continues to confuse and obfuscate. This controversy is also a reality check of how a missing policy framework can be exploited by those in power to the hilt. Such disregard for constitutional norms will be up for misuse in times to come irrespective of who is in power.

As we find ourselves at the tipping point of losing our freedoms enshrined in the Constitution one by one, it is time to speak up aloud for defending our rights while following our duties. The government cannot shrug itself off all responsibilities, resorting to lies and subterfuge to avoid any accountability. The government should not forget that the seat of power is never permanent and if it bypasses all rules of democratic and constitutional governance, it gives others in power a chance to pay back in the same coin - the only ones who suffer in their power politics are the people of the country who helplessly see their freedoms being trampled upon bit by bit. For those who stay silent and defend even this assault on democracy, I would just repeat the quote of Benjamin Franklin: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

POINT COUNTERPOINT

VACCINATION IS AN ONGOING AND DYNAMIC PROCESS AND, THEREFORE, A FIXED TIMELINE CANNOT BE GIVEN FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE COVID-19 IMMUNISATION DRIVE.

— MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH
BHARATI PRAVIN PAWAR



PEOPLE'S LIVES ON THE LINE, THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ADMITS NO TIMELINE, CLASSIC CASE OF MISSING SPINE. #WHEREAREVACCINES

— FORMER CONGRESS PRESIDENT
RAHUL GANDHI

Small businesses and wealth maximisation

Since surviving is the main goal of small businesses, they are more inclined towards profit maximisation by reducing costs

Any organisation is an ongoing concern and has to make decisions, either big or small, daily. These decisions converge towards its overall goal. So, what should be the overarching goal of a firm from the point of view of financial management? Financial management is a critical branch of economics that makes profit maximization the main goal of any firm.

Profit, as an accounting term, is the excess of income generated by sales over the expenses incurred from the overall operation of a business. Any business is said to be in a loss if the expenses are consistently more than the income. And it is said to be profitable if the income is more than the expenses. Therefore, in the context of economics, the goal



HIMA BINDU KOTA

(The writer is Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal.)

of a firm should be to maximize profits, or to say in simple terms, to realize a large amount of profit.

Profit maximization can be achieved in two ways: enhance revenue and minimize costs. Therefore, to maximize profits, many firms minimize their costs and boost their revenue. The problem, however, with such a goal is that it is short-term in nature and banks on extreme measures to reduce costs, like cutting down and paring advertisement budgets, employee training, development expenses, research and development expenditure, customer care budget, employee salary, or bonuses.

In some cases, firms, in an attempt to maximize profit, may also neglect the safety,



welfare, benefits of the environment, and their different stakeholders. These knee-jerk reactions are short-term in nature and can be efficient for the near future but in the long run, these measures slow down the sales, which in turn diminishes the profits and dwindles the overall value of the firm. Therefore, the objective of profit maximization has a myopic outlook towards the long-term growth of the firm.

Over the years, when financial management became independent from economics

and became a branch on its own, the objective of the firm witnessed a steady shift from profit maximization to shareholders' wealth maximization. This is a comprehensive approach focusing on the long-term growth, profitability, and the value of the firm. This goal focuses on wider objectives and includes the welfare of employees, communities, and society at large. It is a fact that wealth or value is a long-term concept and for the firms, it is reflected in the market price of its shares that in turn depends on the success and expectations of the future success of a firm. Firms with higher performance receive a higher valuation from investors which is reflected in the increase in the share prices as compared to the initial listed value. Therefore,

the value of a firm is a dynamic function of the overall performance of the firm and the rationality of the firm's investment, financing, and dividend decisions.

In a way, shareholders' wealth maximization is also associated with intangible assets like goodwill, branding, good customer relations, a significant and loyal customer base, committed employees, and intellectual property rights. This concept also overarches and includes community and social welfare. Therefore, firms are moving away from the goal of profit maximization that has a short-term approach, ignores any risk or uncertainty, and overlooks the timing of returns. In comparison, a long-term vision acknowl-

edges risks and uncertainty and considers the overall shareholders' wealth and not just profits.

This concept of shareholders' wealth maximization is mainly applicable to large firms where there are a large number of shareholders, including promoters, financial institutions like banks and mutual funds, foreign investors, and retail investors. The managers' actions should enhance the value of the firm to benefit all shareholders. But does this concept apply to small businesses, where the owners are the managers and there are no diverse set of shareholders, except family members or partners?

The situation for small businesses is also different as they are not listed on the

stock markets. In the absence of external shareholders, the objective of profit maximization appears to be the correct approach. For small businesses, the availability of funding or capital is difficult, which is not a constraint for many large firms and they can invest in other stakeholders and efficient business processes. This improves the overall value of the firm and increases the wealth of the shareholders. Since surviving is the main goal of small businesses, they are more inclined towards profit maximization by reducing costs or enhancing revenue. As and when these small businesses start to grow and achieve a sizable expansion, the concept of shareholders' wealth maximization should be the way to go forward.

International Criminal Court investigating war crimes by Taliban

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The International Criminal Court is currently investigating allegations of war crimes and serious human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict, including the Taliban. Taliban forces that have taken control of districts in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province have detained hundreds of residents whom they accuse of association with the Government.

Human Rights Watch said the Taliban have reportedly killed some detainees, including relatives of provincial government officials and members of the police and army.

The watchdog body said that after Taliban forces took control of Kandahar's Spin Boldak border crossing with Pakistan on July 8, 2021, and the Spin Boldak district center

on July 16, they conducted searches to identify residents who have worked for the local government or security forces.

Taliban forces that control areas around Kandahar city have carried out similar searches and have evicted some residents.

Taliban have taken more than 300 people into custody and have detained them in unidentified locations.

"There are grave concerns that Taliban forces in Kandahar may commit further atrocities to retaliate against the government and security forces," said Patricia Gossman, Associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Taliban leaders have denied responsibility for any abuses, but growing evidence of expulsions, arbitrary detentions, and killings in areas under their control are raising fears among the population."

Taliban commanders who knew or should have known about abuses by forces under their control and took no action to prevent or stop them are culpable as a matter of command responsibility.

"The UN, US, and other countries engaged in the peace talks should urgently call on the Taliban leadership to stop these killings and other abuses," Gossman said.

At Spin-Boldak, the Afghan officials found the dead bodies of over 100 civilians -- while the fate of the around 300 civilians abducted was not known.

The Taliban have told members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), including police who have been the principal security force in Kandahar, to register with them to receive letters guaranteeing

their safety, a local activist reported.

Those who registered are required to report to the Taliban once a month. Taliban forces have gone to the homes of some ANDSF members who had registered, taken them into custody, and killed an unknown number of them. In one case, on July 9, the Taliban shot and killed a man named Nangiyali, in front of family members. He was a resident of Sarposha, Kandahar, who had previously worked with the police.

Media reported that on July 19, Taliban forces shot and killed two sons of a provincial council member, Fida Mohammad, who had reportedly had a close relationship with the late Kandahar police chief, General Abdul Raziq whom the Taliban killed in 2018.

Afghanistan imposes night curfew in 31 provinces

IAN S ■ KABUL

The Afghan Government announced that it has imposed a night-time curfew in 31 provinces except Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar, in the wake of unabated Taliban attacks across the war-torn country.

The night-time curfew will be effective between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., TOLO News quoted the Ministry of Interior as saying late Saturday.

The new measure comes

as the Government forces continue to fight the Taliban in 21 provinces of the country.

According to Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA), the decision was made to check the infiltration of Taliban militants to provincial capitals, reports Xinhua news agency.

According to the statistics provided by the Afghan security agencies, the security forces have killed 262 Taliban fighters over the past 24 hours and wounded 176 more.

Afghan forces kill 81 militants in Balkh province

IAN S ■ KABUL

A total of 81 militants were confirmed dead as the Afghan forces, backed by helicopters and fighter planes, launched airstrikes in the northern Balkh province, an army statement released here on Sunday said.

The sorties were launched on Saturday in parts of the restive Kaldar and Chamtal districts, leaving 81 insur-

gents dead and injuring 43 others, reports Xinhua news agency.

A large number of arms and ammunition, as well as over two dozen vehicles and motorbikes of the militants, were also destroyed during the air raids, the statement added.

The Taliban militants have claimed capturing nearly 200 districts since early May across Afghanistan.

UK parliamentary report finds bullying, harassment of women in military

PTI ■ LONDON

Sixty-four per cent of female veterans and 58 per cent of currently serving women reported experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) during their careers in the UK military, according to a new parliamentary report put out on Sunday.

The House of Commons Defence Sub-Committee on Women in the Armed Forces, in its report entitled 'Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life', said that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and military services are "failing to protect female personnel and to help servicewomen achieve their full potential".

While most servicewomen and female veterans that were consulted for the report, nearly 90 per cent of respondents to a survey, would recommend the Armed Forces as a career,

more than 3,000 (around 84 per cent) reported that female service personnel face additional challenges relative to their male counterparts.

"Women are integral to our military's success and our country's security, yet women in the Armed Forces carry additional burdens to that of their male colleagues," said Conservative Party MP Sarah Atherton, Chair of the Sub-Committee.

"Women face barriers to promotion, issues with families and childcare, abuse and inappropriate behaviours, and an overrepresentation in the Service Complaints system. Female veterans face distinctive challenges when transitioning into civilian life and have specific needs, different

to male veterans, that cannot be dealt with by broad-brush, one-size-fits-all veterans' services," she said.

A female veteran herself, Atherton said the sto-

ries the committee heard "paint a difficult picture" for women in the military. Accounts of bullying, harassment, discrimination, "laddish" behaviour, and sometimes serious sexual assault and rape were among the complaints.

"The complaints system, as it stands, is woefully inadequate and leaves most feeling unable to come forward. We also heard accusations of senior officers sweeping complaints under the rug to protect their own reputations and careers. While many commanding officers want to do the right thing, it is clear that, too often, female service personnel are being let down by the chain of command," she added. The Sub-Committee recommends that the MoD create a specialised Defence Authority to handle BHD complaints and that the MoD better resource the Service Complaints Ombudsman and make their decisions binding.

Global coronavirus caseload tops 193.6 mn

IAN S ■ WASHINGTON

The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 193.6 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 4.15 million and vaccinations soared to over 3.81 billion, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Sunday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload, death toll and the total number of vaccine doses administered stood at 193,633,246, 4,151,311 and 3,815,028,866, respectively.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 34,426,844 and 610,833, respectively, according to the CSSE.

In terms of infections, India follows in the second place with 31,332,159 cases.

The other worst countries



with over 3 million cases are Brazil (19,670,534), France (6,041,146), Russia (6,025,698), the UK (5,694,163), Turkey (5,574,997), Argentina (4,839,109), Colombia (4,716,798), Italy (4,312,673), Spain (4,280,429), Germany (3,761,869), Iran (3,664,286) and Indonesia (3,127,826), the CSSE figures showed.

In terms of deaths, Brazil comes second with 549,448 fatalities.

Nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are India (420,016), Mexico (237,954), Peru (195,243), Russia (150,583), the UK (129,416), Italy (127,942), Colombia (118,538), France (111,800) and Argentina (103,584).

French President Macron calls Israeli PM Bennett on allegations of snooping

French President Emmanuel Macron has spoken to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on reports that Morocco's security forces may have used the Pegasus spyware to snoop on his cellphones, according to a media report.

A global media consortium last week reported that 50,000 cellphone numbers were being spied on using the Pegasus malware, which has been developed by Israeli cybersecurity company NSO Group. The mobile phones of French President Macron and 15 members of his government may have been among potential targets, according to a member of the media consortium.

Macron telephoned Bennett on Thursday and asked him to ensure that "the issue was being taken seriously", Israel's Channel 12 reported on Saturday evening.

The Israeli Prime Minister said that the allegations are from a period when he had not assumed office but gave an assurance that the required conclusions on the matter will be reached upon.

Macron had called an urgent national security meeting on Thursday to discuss the Pegasus spyware after reports about its misuse in France emerged. The Moroccan government has denied reports that the country's security forces used the spyware to eavesdrop on the French President. Similarly, the NSO Group has denied that the French President was targeted.

We can "specifically come out and say for sure that the President of France, Macron, was not a target," Chaim Gelfand, Chief Compliance Officer at NSO Group, told Israeli television network i24news on Wednesday.

PoK holds polls to elect Assembly

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Voters in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir went to the polls on Sunday to elect the legislative assembly.

There are over 3.2 million eligible voters who can elect 45 members of the assembly for a five-year term.

India has previously slammed Pakistan for its decision to hold elections in Gilgit-Baltistan and said any action to alter the status of the militarily occupied region has no legal basis.

The assembly has a total of 53 members but only 45 are directly elected, while five seats are reserved for women and three are meant for the technocrats. A tough triangular competition involving Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is expected.

The PTI has nominated candidates for all the 45 constituencies, while PML-N and PPP each issued tickets to can-

didates for 44 seats.

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), the radical Islamist party which was banned in April by the Pakistan government for its violent activities, is contesting on 40 seats.

The TLP was not de-registered by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after the ban, enabling it to take part in the elections.

Thirty-three constituencies are located in PoK, while 12 seats are for refugees settled in different cities of Pakistan.

Apart from the ticket holders of different political parties, a total of 261 independent candidates are also in the race for the 33 constituencies in PoK, while 56 independents are vying for the 12 refugees' seats.

Elaborate security measures have been taken and army troops deployed to maintain peace during the elections.

Traditionally, the ruling party in the country wins the elections in PoK.

Beijing sends supplies to flooded area, rebuilds barriers

AP ■ XINXIANG

Trucks carrying water and food on Sunday streamed into a Chinese city at the centre of flooding that killed at least 58 people, while soldiers laid sandbags to fill gaps in river dikes that left neighbourhoods under water.

Residents cleared away mud, wrecked cars and other debris after record rains that started Tuesday and flooded streets and disrupted train service. The rainfall subsided earlier in the week but some neighbourhoods still were waiting for water up to two metres (six feet) deep to drain.

Trucks dropped off instant noodles and other goods at a stadium in Xinxiang, 40 miles (65 km) north of the metropolis of Zhengzhou in Henan province. Volunteers shifted pallets of drinking water stacked higher than their heads onto other trucks for distribution.

The volunteers occasionally broke into cheers of, "Go,



Xinxiang!"

Direct economic losses throughout Henan were estimated at 13.9 billion yuan (\$2 billion), according to the official Xinhua News Agency. It said a total of more than 3,800 houses collapsed across the province and 920,000 people were evacuated from their homes.

Emergency crews were trying to close gaps in flood dikes that flooded sections of some villages.

Soldiers and paramilitary police dumping stones and sandbags into a 100-metre-long (300-foot-long), eight-metre-deep (25-foot-deep) gap in a gap on the Weihe river in Xinxiang, the official newspaper The Global Times reported.

On Saturday, authorities intentionally had flooded parts of the nearby city of Hebi to lower water levels elsewhere, according to the Shanghai online news outlet The Paper.

California's largest fire torches homes as blazes burn West

AP ■ BLY (US)

Flames racing through rugged terrain in Northern California destroyed multiple homes Saturday as the state's largest wildfire intensified and numerous other blazes battered the US West.

The Dixie fire, which started July 14, had already levelled over a dozen houses and other structures when it tore through the tiny town of Indian Falls after dark. It was burning in a remote area with limited access, hampering firefighters' efforts as it advanced eastward, fire officials said.

The blaze has charred more than 181,000 acres (73,200 hectares) in Plumas and Butte counties and prompted evacuation orders in several small communities and along the west shore of Lake Almanzo, a popular getaway. The fire was 20% contained as of Saturday night.

Meanwhile, the nation's largest wildfire, southern Oregon's Bootleg fire, was near-



ly halfway surrounded Saturday as more than 2,200 crew members worked to corral it in the heat and wind, fire officials said. The growth of the sprawling blaze had slowed, but thousands of homes remained threatened on its eastern side, authorities said.

"This fire is resistant to stopping at dozer lines," Jim Hanson, fire behaviour analyst, said in a news release from the Oregon Department of Forestry. "With the critically dry weather and fuels we are experiencing, firefighters are having to constantly reevaluate their control lines and look for

contingency options."

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency for four northern counties because of wildfires that he said were causing "conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property." The proclamation opened the way for more state support.

Such conditions are often from a combination of unusual random, short-term and natural weather patterns heightened by long-term, human-caused climate change. Global warming has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years.

French protesters reject virus passes, vaccine mandate

AP ■ PARIS

Some 160,000 people, including far-right activists and members of France's yellow vest movement, protested Saturday across the country against a bill requiring everyone to have a special virus pass to enter restaurants and mandating Covid-19 vaccinations for all health care workers.

Similar protests were held in neighbouring Italy.

Police fired water cannons and tear gas on rowdy protesters in Paris, although most gatherings were orderly.

Legislators in France's Senate were debating the virus bill Saturday after the lower house of parliament approved it on Friday, as virus infections are spiking and hospitalizations are rising.

The French government wants to speed up vaccinations

to protect vulnerable people and hospitals, and avoid any new lockdown.

Most French adults are fully vaccinated and multiple polls indicate a majority of French people support the new measures. But not everyone.

Protesters chanting "Liberty! Liberty!" gathered at Bastille plaza and marched through eastern Paris in one of several demonstrations Saturday around France. Thousands also joined a gathering across the Seine River from the Eiffel Tower organised by a former top official in Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration party.

While most protesters were calm, tensions erupted on the margins of the Bastille march. Riot police sprayed tear gas on marchers after someone threw a chair at an officer. Other projectiles were also thrown. Later

some protesters moved to the Arc de Triomphe and police used water cannon to disperse them.

Marchers included far-right politicians and activists as well as others angry at President Emmanuel Macron. They were upset over a

French "health pass" that is now required to enter museums, movie theaters and tourist sites. The bill under debate would expand the pass requirement to all restaurants and bars in France and some other venues.

To get the pass, people need to be fully vaccinated, have a recent negative test or have proof they recently recovered from the virus. French lawmakers are divided over how far to go in imposing health passes or mandatory vaccinations but infections are rising quickly.

5 sites in Saudi Arabia, Europe inscribed on world heritage list

IAN S ■ PARIS

Five cultural sites in Saudi Arabia and Europe have been inscribed on the world heritage list, the Unesco announced in a statement.

According to the statement issued on Saturday, the decision was made during the Unesco World Heritage Committee's 44th session recently held online and chaired from Fuzhou, China, reports Xinhua news agency.

Hima Cultural Area in an arid, mountainous area of southwest Saudi Arabia won the status as it contains a substantial collection of rock art images depicting hunting, fauna, flora and lifestyles in a cultural continuity of 7,000 years, the statement said.

Travellers and armies camping on the site left a

wealth of rock inscriptions and petroglyphs through the ages and until the late 20th century, most of which are preserved in pristine condition.

The trans-national site, "The Great Spa Towns of Europe", comprises 11 towns located in seven European countries - Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy and the UK.

The spa buildings and facilities of this site "are all integrated into an overall urban context that includes a carefully managed recreational and therapeutic environment in a picturesque landscape" and "embody the significant interchange of human values and developments in medicine, science and balneology", said the committee.

The other sites include the Lighthouse of Cordouan on a

shallow rocky plateau in the Atlantic Ocean in France built at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries as "a masterpiece of maritime signaling"; the Darmstadt Artists' Colony in west-central Germany, established in 1897 as a centre for emerging reform movements in architecture, arts and crafts and now "a testimony to early modern architecture, urban planning and landscape design".

In Italy's historic walled city of Padua, a selection of fresco cycles painted in the 14th century by different artists for different types of patron and within buildings of diverse functions, was inscribed because they "illustrate how, over the course of a century, fresco art developed along a new creative impetus and understanding of spatial representation".

Tens of thousands march for LGBTQ rights at Berlin parade

AP ■ BERLIN

Around 65,000 revellers marched for LGBTQ rights at Berlin's annual Christopher Street Day celebration on Saturday, more than three times as many as expected.

It was the biggest demonstration in Berlin since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

The parade started with a call from Klaus Lederer, Berlin's senator for culture, to make the city a "queer-freedom zone" in response to deteriorating safety for gays and lesbians in Hungary and neighbouring Poland.

"LGBT-free zones" have been declared in parts of Poland, while Hungary recently passed a law banning the depiction of homosexuality or gender reassignment to minors that has been denounced as discriminatory by human

rights groups.

Lederer said the situation in the two EU members "sends shivers down my back."

The senator also noted that the pandemic had been particularly hard for some gays and lesbians at home as shelters were closed. He said "there is still much work to be done."

Police spokesman Martin Dams initially told The Associated Press that an estimated 35,000 people were taking part in the parade, but this figure was revised upwards later Saturday. Organizers put the figure at 80,000.

They had been expecting around 20,000 people amid social distancing

rules and a ban on alcohol to combat the risk of new coronavirus infections.

There was no parade last year due to the pandemic so many people took advantage of the warm sunny weather.

CBIC does away with renewals of licences

New Delhi: The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has abolished the requirement of periodic renewal of licence and registration issued to Customs Brokers and Authorised Carriers.

This move is expected to help reduce the compliance burden cast on the trade, which had to otherwise file applications and submit numerous documents to renew their licences/registrations.

The changes have been made effective from July 23, 2021.

The net effect of the amendments carried out to the Customs Brokers Licensing Regulations, 2018 and Sea Cargo Manifest and Transhipment Regulations, 2018, is that the existing licences/registration would have a lifetime validity.

Another change that has been introduced is to allow a licensee/registration holder to voluntarily come forward to surrender his licence/registration. Also, a provision has been made to invalidate licences/registrations that are

inactive for more than a year.

These steps would prevent misuse of dormant licences/registrations by unscrupulous persons who mis-declare import or export or wrongly obtain export refunds/incentives and when caught, put the burden on the original licensee/registration holder, a Finance Ministry statement said.

At the same time, the interest of genuine trade is safeguarded by empowering the Commissioners of Customs to revalidate the licence/registration in case the inactivity is for genuine reasons.

The life-long validity of licences/registrations is expected to provide a major relief to the trade by reducing their compliance burden and promoting ease of doing business in India.

Removing the requirement of seeking periodic renewals also reduces the interface between the Customs and the trade, which is a deliverable of the CBIC's 'Contactless Customs' initiative, a critical component of its flagship Turant Customs programme. **IANS**

28% Indians plan to travel in Aug-Sept; risk of 3rd Covid-19 wave set to rise: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With as many as 28 per cent Indians planning to travel in August-September, which is also the time for some of the major festivals in the country, the risk of the third wave of the pandemic is set to rise, according to a survey.

In a statement, online platform LocalCircles also said its survey on April 12 had outlined the immediate second wave risk suggesting Governments to impose travel restrictions.

To estimate the risk once again in light of a potential third Covid-19 wave and to understand people's travel plans for the coming months, LocalCircles conducted another survey. It also sought to understand the reason for their travel amid the second wave of the pandemic, it said.

The survey received over 18,000 responses from citizens residing in 311 districts, with 68 per cent of respondents men and the rest women.

LocalCircles said 28 per cent citizens are planning to travel during August-September though only five per cent have made their bookings. It added that during the second wave of the outbreak, many citizens faced teething issues to cancel their travel plan for the summer.

In many cases, the travel agent or the airline did not refund anything, and some citizens lost the complete ticket amount, while some were able to retrieve a partial amount, and others were asked to re-book the ticket for a later date, it stated.

As many citizens now look forward to travelling in August and September, the first question in the survey was to know about their current plan.

"In response, it received from 9,146 people, 63 per cent of citizens said they don't have a plan to travel during these two months.

"Five per cent said they have plans and have booked the tickets, along with stays while 23 per cent said they have a plan to travel during these two months but have not booked tickets and they stay yet. Nine per cent said they are undecided," LocalCircles said in the statement.

During this time, many parts of India have holidays for festivals and there is a good bit of travel that takes place. Many also tend to club these holidays with weekends by taking a day or two off, it stated.

The survey also asked citizens about what kind of personal travel do they plan to undertake in the next two months.

"In response, 13 per cent citizens said 'holiday destination', 39 per cent citizens said 'visit family and friends' and 22 per cent said 'other travel'," it said.

The report added that the results of the survey indicate that of those who plan to travel in August-September, 54 per cent will be visiting friends and family.

On an aggregate basis, if the data of those planning to travel in August-September is analysed, it indicates that 54 per cent plan to 'visit family and friends', 26 per cent will be travelling to 'holiday destinations', and 32 per cent will be undertaking other kinds of travel, according to the statement.

In summary, with the decline in daily COVID-19 caseload, 28 per cent citizens plan to travel in August-September. As indicated by the findings of the survey, 23 per cent of citizens plan to travel in the next two months, though they haven't booked their tickets yet and only 5 per cent of citizens surveyed have booked their tickets and accommodation, it stated.

Of those who are planning travel, the majority of 54 per cent citizens are planning to meet their friends and family, while 26 per cent plan to travel to a holiday destination, LocalCircles said.

Kerala vet gets patent for biodiesel from chicken waste

PTI ■ WAYANAD (KERALA)

After waiting for more than seven years, John Abraham, a veterinary doctor-turned-inventor, has finally received the patents for inventing biodiesel from slaughtered chicken waste that offers mileage of over 38 km a litre at around 40 per cent of the current price of diesel and lowers pollution by half.

After seven-and-a-half years, the Indian Patent Office finally granted us the patent on July 7, 2021, for inventing 'biodiesel produced from rendered chicken oil', Abraham, an associate professor at the veterinary college here under the Kerala Veterinary & Animal Sciences University, told **PTI** from Wayanad.

The invention is an outcome of his doctoral research at the Namakkal Veterinary College under the Tamil Nadu Veterinary & Animal Sciences University.

He said the patent was delayed as permission from the National Biodiversity Authority was needed because the key raw material going into the patented invention was a biological material locally sourced.

During 2009-12, Abraham pioneered research on producing biodiesel from the

slaughter waste of broiler chicken and dead poultry birds. He completed the research under the guidance of the late Prof Ramesh Saravanakumar (passed away awaiting the patent in November 2020), who had filed for the patents in 2014 on behalf of the Tamil Nadu Veterinary & Animal Sciences University, Abraham said.

After his research, Abraham joined the Pookode Veterinary College, near Kalpetta in Wayanad, and in 2014 he set a Rs 18-lakh pilot plant at the college campus with funding from the Indian Council for Agricultural Research.

Following this, Bharat Petroleum's Kochi Refinery in April 2015 had issued a quality certificate for the biodiesel he invented and since then a college vehicle was being run on this fuel only, he said.

When asked why chicken waste, he said birds and pigs have single stomach which offer higher fat saturation and this is easy to render oil under room temperature.

Three of his students and Abraham are now working on developing biodiesel from pig waste.

He said 100 kg of chicken waste, procured from slaughter

houses for which he gets paid up to Rs 7 a kg, can produce 1 liter of biodiesel, which offers over 38 kmpl and can be sold at 40 per cent of the diesel price now.

The higher mileage and lower pollution is due to the fact that chicken waste contains 62 per cent fat, offering the key energy content of Cetane at 72, while in normal diesel it is only 64. It also increases engine efficiency by 11 per cent due to the presence of more oxygen, and reduces smoke levels by over 47 per cent, Abraham said.

The high Cetane value of 72 in animal fat bio-diesel leads to shorter ignition delays, providing more time for fuel combustion, leading to more efficiency and less exhaust emission, he explained.

On blending side, he said, for old diesel engines his biodiesel can be blended at a ratio of 80:20, while for new CDREI engines, it the reverse -20:80.

About commercialisation, he said a team from Hindustan Petroleum visited him last Friday, adding after the lockdowns he and the HPCL team would meet the Tamil Nadu veterinary university to negotiate the commercials as the patent is granted to the variety.

India's gold imports surge in Apr-Jun, silver imports fall

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

India registered a manifold raise in import of gold during the first three months of FY22 on a year-on-year basis, to nearly \$7.9 billion.

This rise in gold imports can be attributed to low imports during the same period last year owing to the nationwide lockdown and the revived consumer demand in this financial year.

During the same period last fiscal, gold imports stood at \$687.83 million. As per data from the Commerce Ministry, import of the yellow metal in July also registered a nearly 60 per cent rise to \$969.87 million.

Silver imports, however, have declined this fiscal.

During Q1FY22, silver imports stood at \$39.39 million, 93.15 per cent lower than \$575.11 million worth of imports in April-June FY21. In June, silver worth \$11.83 million was imported, against \$137.22 worth of the metal imported during the same month last fiscal.

India, a major importer of gold, exports gems and jewellery. In April-June, gems and jewellery worth \$9.17 billion was exported, 244.29 per cent higher on a year-on-year basis.

Confidence over job scenario, economic prospects remain subdued in July

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Confidence of urban Indians over the employment scenario in the country and the economic prospects remains subdued although the overall consumer confidence has recorded in uptick in July.

As per the Refinitiv-Ipsos Primary Consumer Sentiment Index (PCSI), the Employment Confidence Sub-Index is down by 0.1 percentage points, and the Economic Expectations Sub Index, has reduced by 1.8 percentage points.

The Primary Consumer Sentiment Index (PCSI), which constitutes of four sub-indices slightly improved by 1.1 percentage points in July 2021, over the previous month.

The overall growth can be attributed to improved sentiments in terms of investment climate and personal finance conditions.

The PCSI Investment Climate Sub-Index is up by a significant 3.7 percentage points, while the Current Personal Financial Conditions Sub-Index has also recovered by a healthy 3.5 percentage points.



"Easing of restrictions and reopening since June has positively impacted livelihoods and we are seeing a robust uptick in sentiment for personal finances (for day to day running of households) and for investments (savings and investing for the future)," said Amit Adarkar, CEO, Ipsos India.

"However, the recovery around jobs and particularly the economy is slow and unless the mass immunisation becomes a reality, we are likely to see the government working with utmost caution, to mitigate another wave of infections. And hence the economy may take longer to get back on grid. Which I believe we'll need to accept because the corona virus threat is still far from over, with many other countries facing the onset of a new wave," Adarkar added

E-commerce rules: CAIT says draft norms to end crony capitalism

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Describing the draft e-commerce rules as a perfect set of guidelines for conducting structured and transparent e-commerce business in India, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has said that the rules if implemented would end the crony capitalism that allegedly exists in the current e-commerce scenario in the country.

The traders' body has also suggested to come up with a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance of these regulations by the online majors. In a letter to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, it has also suggested the penal actions should be taken in case the rules are violated.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that the foreign funded e-tailers and some of the prominent industry chambers are giving lame arguments to oppose draft rules.

He noted that it is a "sinister trap" of vested interests of companies duly supported by industry chambers to dislodge the draft rules. However, more than eight crore small businesses of the country are committed to oppose any wrong narrative if anyone tries to build around the draft rules, Khandelwal said.

CII suggests mandatory life insurance cover for PMAY borrowers

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Government should relaunch the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) with an in-built credit-linked insurance cover for the borrowers, industry chamber Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has suggested.

As per the industry body, the PMAY scheme, which aims to provide housing for all by 2022, falls short of covering the risk of death or disability of the borrower as the loans sanctioned under the scheme do not have an in-built insurance provision.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said: "There is a need for a relaunch of the PMAY scheme with an in-built credit linked insurance or a mandatory life insurance for all borrowers under the PMAY scheme to ensure that the intent of providing 'Housing for All' does not take a hit due to death or disability of the primary borrower. The family should inherit a home, not a loan."

Affordable housing is one of the vital components of economic growth, provided the prevailing impediments of untimely death of the borrow-

er and impact on the residual loan, the status of the home and family in case of such exigency are dealt with, he added.

"Now with the pandemic affecting lives and livelihood of the Indian citizens hard and with increased mortality rate, the importance of protection to families becomes paramount as all sections of society struggle to meet medical costs, unemployment, inflationary pressures. With an in-built insurance cover in the PMAY loans, the inherent lacuna of risk-protection can be plugged with minimum additional disruptions," Banerjee said.

The scheme could have standard premium rates which could be utilised by any insurer to offer the credit cover with their partner banks, according to CII. The in-built level cover equal to the loan amount could be taken by the borrower at the inception.

CII has made presentation on the same to the Finance Ministry, the IRDAI and the National Housing Bank.

As per the current version of the scheme, the banks or lenders are partially protected as the property is mortgaged with them, but the family is left to pay the loan or lose their home.

M-cap of 6 of top 10 firms eroded by ₹76,640 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi: Six of the 10 most valued companies witnessed a combined erosion of ₹76,640.54 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC Bank emerging as the biggest laggard.

During the last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark dipped 164.26 points or 0.30 per cent.

From the top-10 list, Reliance Industries Limited, HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever Limited, HDFC, State Bank of India and Kotak Mahindra Bank witnessed erosion in their market capitalisation.

The market valuation of HDFC Bank tumbled Rs 43,578.18 crore to reach Rs 7,97,422.67 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever Limited eroded by Rs 13,004.97 crore to Rs 5,54,326.75 crore. HDFC's market valuation plunged Rs 9,543.39 crore to Rs 4,48,566.27 crore and that of Kotak Mahindra Bank dipped Rs 5,392.88 crore to Rs 3,41,634.86 crore.

The market capitalisation of Reliance Industries dropped by Rs 4,184.03 crore to Rs 13,34,579.57 crore and that of State Bank by Rs 937.09 crore to Rs 3,82,999.70 crore. **PTI**

Cipla recalls 7,228 bottles of overactive bladder treatment drug in US

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Drug major Cipla is recalling 7,228 bottles of Solifenacin Succinate tablets, a medicine used to treat overactive bladder, in the US market due to manufacturing issues.

As per the latest Enforcement Report issued by the US Food & Drug Administration (USFDA), the Mumbai-based company is recalling 10 mg, 30-count bottles in the US.

The recalled batches were produced at the company's Goa-based plant and later shipped to its New Jersey-based arm Cipla USA Inc.

The US health regulator noted that the company is recalling the 7,228 bottles due to "CGMP (current good manufacturing practices) deviations". Cipla initiated the recall on June 10 this year and the USFDA has classified it as a Class II recall.

As per the USFDA, a class II recall is initiated in a situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

Pandemic-hit Govt finances to get crude shock as crude set to get more expensive

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

In a clear indication that the global oil market may not present an advantage to India as it provided during the pandemic-hit fiscal 2020-21, the country's oil import bill in the first three months of current fiscal has increased close to three times to reach scales not seen in past few years.

As per recent numbers on oil trade, the country's oil import bill has risen to \$24.7 billion in the April-June quarter 2021-22, a whopping growth of over 190 per cent over \$8.5 billion worth of imports made in Q1 of the last fiscal year FY21.

And the high growth in oil bill during the first three months may just be the beginning as crude is set to get more expensive in coming months with a rise in global demand and falling inventory levels of the US.

This despite the oil cartel OPEC agreeing to raising crude production by 400,000 barrels per day stating August to increase production by 2 million barrels a day by the end of the year.

"The way the oil market is giving signals now, crude may remain range bound between \$70-75 a barrel this fiscal. This could add significant jump in the country's oil import bill as

average crude oil purchase price stood at mere \$45 a barrel in FY21 and May be above \$70 a barrel in FY22," an oil sector expert from one of the four largest global consultancy firms said on the condition of anonymity.

If the projections for average crude prices to be over \$70 a barrel in FY22, the country's oil import bill could once again shoot above the \$100 billion mark. It last remained at that level in FY20 at \$101.4 billion.

The government received big advantage of softer oil prices in the pandemic hit FY21 when it had to pay just \$62.7 towards oil import bill with overall import quantity also sliding with demand as lockdowns eroded demand. This also helped the government to raise level of taxes on auto fuels petrol and diesel and earnings from there contributed significantly towards Covid-19 relief and stimulus measures that the Centre announced in FY21.

The problem of higher imports at expensive prices is already becoming real this year. The first quarter over 190 per cent growth in import bill is based on average crude price of \$67.5 a barrel. If the projections for crude at \$70 a barrel stays, the import bill will be even higher in Q2 and the remaining months of the year.

RBI's central board short of 9 non official directors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is facing shortage of nine non-official directors, including seven from the category of people of eminence from various fields.

The central board is the highest decision making body of the apex bank headed by the RBI Governor.

According to the RBI Act, the Government nominates 10 eminent persons from various fields to the central board of the RBI, besides four directors (one from each of the four local boards). The Government is yet to appoint seven non-official directors from the category of people of eminence from various fields while representations from local board from western and southern areas are missing.

Currently, only three eminent personalities -- Tata Sons Chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran, seasoned banker S K Marathe and chartered accountant and RSS ideologue Swaminathan Gurumurthy -- are serving the central board. They are nominated under Section 8(1)(c) of the RBI Act, 1934, according to the RBI's website.

About 90% Indian consumers willing to pay a premium for purchase of EV: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With global electric vehicles (EVs) sales expected to boom in the next 12 months, nearly 90 per cent of consumers in India are willing to pay a premium for buying an EV, according to a survey by consultancy firm EY.

The EY Mobility Consumer Index (MCI), a survey of more than 9,000 respondents from 13 countries, including 1,000 respondents from India, also found that 40 per cent of the respondents were ready to pay a premium of up to 20 per cent. The survey concluded in the second half of July.

"Among the car buyers in India, 3 in 10 respondents would prefer to buy an electric/hydrogen vehicle," the survey said. A majority of the respondents surveyed in India consider a driving range of 100 to 200 miles from a fully charged EV, EY said.

It further said, "Nearly 90 per cent of consumers in India are willing to pay a premium for buying an EV and over 40 per cent of respondents are ready to pay a premium of up to 20 per cent."

Existing and future EV owners, who intend to buy a car, have a relatively higher preference for digital channels

compared to the existing and future ICE owners.

Commenting on the findings, EY India Partner and Automotive Sector Leader Vinay Raghunath said, "The reducing gap in cost of ownership between electric and other technology platforms and the increasing segment of consumers vocal about environmental impact will drive a fundamental change in consumer buying behaviour for electric vehicles."

He further said, "Consumers are willing to pay extra for an added value of being environmentally responsible."

According to the survey, the top reason for buying an EV is environmental concern, with 97 per cent also stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness and concerns about environmental issues. About 67 per cent of those looking to buy an EV feel it is their responsibility to reduce their personal environmental impact, and 69 per cent feel buying an EV is one way to achieve this goal.

When it comes to charging, the survey found that "nearly a third of the existing EV owners expect vehicle charging to take less than an hour compared to 45 per cent of the respondents who are planning to buy an EV".

HDFC Bank's Puri top earner among bankers in FY21

Mumbai: HDFC Bank's Aditya Puri emerged as the highest grossing banker among the top three private sector lenders in his retirement year with total emoluments of ₹13.82 crore.

His successor Sashidhar Jagdishan, who took over as the chief executive and managing director of the largest private sector lender on October 27, 2020 grossed a salary of ₹4.77 crore for the fiscal year, which included payments as a group head till his elevation. Puri's overall payments included ₹3.5 crore as post-retirement benefits.

Its immediate rival ICICI Bank's MD and CEO Sandeep Bakshi "voluntarily relinquished" his fixed compensation of basic and supplementary allowances for FY21, which had seen wide-scale impact of the Covid pandemic, as per the second largest lender's annual report.

Bakshi, however, did receive allowances and perquisites amounting to ₹38.38 lakh, the document said, adding he also got Rs 63.60 lakh as performance bonus from ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company as deferred variable pay for FY17 and FY18.

PTI

Finance Min moves file for extension of 3 MDs, 10 EDs of Govt-owned banks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry has moved a file for extension of tenure of three public sector banks' managing directors, including Punjab National Bank (PNB), according to sources.

Besides, the sources said the Ministry has also recommended the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) for extension of 10 executive directors (EDs) of various public sector banks.

The three-year term of S S Mallikarjuna Rao, MD and CEO of PNB, is coming to an end on September 18 but the finance ministry has recommended for extension for four months till January 31, 2022, when Rao attains his superannuation age of 60 years.

Atul Kumar Goel's term as MD and CEO of UCO Bank has been recommended for a two-year extension beyond November 1 this year. A S Rajeev, MD and CEO of Bank of Maharashtra, has been suggested for an extension of two years beyond December 1.

The finance ministry has simultaneously forwarded the name of S L Jain for the appointment of MD and CEO of Indian Bank. The BBB, the headhunter for state-owned

banks and financial institutions, had recommended the name of Jain in May after the interview.

With regard to EDs, the ministry has recommended names of 10 for extension of their term till their superannuation age or two years, whichever is earlier.

The MD and CEO of a public sector undertaking is given a maximum tenure of five years as a government guidelines.

According to sources, the ministry sought extension of the executives from the Appointments Committee of Cabinet (ACC). The proposal has been sent to the DoF Personnel and Training for the same after consultation with BBB. The final call for extension will be taken by the ACC.

Interestingly, the Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has also invited applications for appointment of new MDs of PNB.

For PNB, the BBB on June 16, had sought public application for the MD and CEO post. The eligibility criteria as announced in public notice is that the applicant should be in the age group of 45 to 57 years in mainstream banking, of which, at least one year has to be at the board level.



Bollywood
'I want to keep exploring myself and genres to get out of my comfort zone.'
—Mrunal Thakur

10



Futuristic building blocks

The Indian real estate and infrastructure sector are no longer exempt from the disruptions of the new-age technologies. Traditional ways of construction are quickly being displaced as developers aim to become more agile to save time and cost by offering more robust and even smart real estate structures that stand the test of time and harsh conditions.

Technological trends like the Internet of Things (IoT) have actively shaped the Indian real estate and infrastructure sector in the last few years. The pandemic further intensified technology's penetration in the sector to ensure business continuity, hence bringing the resisting developers under the umbrella of innovation and technology. This has resulted in real estate making inroads with a multitude of new-age technological developments and innovations that are bringing about some fundamental change that will reshape the industry forever.

Necessity is the mother of innovation

The current pandemic-induced recession has become a golden opportunity for Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure enterprises (EC&O) to accelerate their digital transformation. Compared to other sectors globally, real estate has been lagging in productivity for decades now.

Findings from McKinsey's annual report reflect that yearly productivity growth in engineering and construction has averaged just 1 per cent over the past two decades, compared with a 3.6

ASHOK VANI highlights how we need to make use of the space created by the pandemic to push for technological advancements in the construction process

per cent and 2.8 per cent growth rate for the manufacturing sector and the global economy, respectively.

Another research in the US revealed that a tenth of material purchased for construction is wasted, 30 per cent of all construction is reworked, 90 per cent of projects are delayed, and 40 per cent of job site work is unproductive. This results in 40 per cent of projects going over budget. The scenario is not so different in India and is compelling developers and contractors to embrace technology.

Technology enhances the survival of infrastructure players

The industry desperately needs to

go beyond the convention by employing modern technologies, including data-based 3D models, cloud-based on-site and off-site project coordination and communications, and constructible building information modelling (BIM) for planning and error-free construction. It is estimated that full-scale digitisation in non-residential construction alone could lead to annual savings of between \$700 billion and \$1.2 trillion. These savings will pump fresh blood into the struggling real estate sector resulting in higher wages to help nurture and retain human capital.

Automation, IoT and robotics will also play a crucial role in reviving the



economy while ensuring an uninterrupted construction process. Greater adoption of digitised workflows across all stages of construction, from design and planning to engineering and onsite work, will be vital in overcoming the downturn most real estate firms are currently experiencing.

The era of sustainable infrastructure development

Global commitments to contain greenhouse emissions are compelling construction businesses to switch to more sustainable methods. Given that the global construction industry is estimated to emit 35 to 45 per cent of CO2 released into the atmosphere, it's high time the industry takes on the burden to combat climate change.

Construction development and logistics are the biggest contributors to this number. A conventional construction project typically sees a constant flow of vehicles for material delivery and collecting waste. Construction sites can systematically reduce this through a supply management system by scheduling their traffic. Harnessing subcontractor data to reduce vehicular frequency on multiple sites, avoid peak times, and reduce extra deliveries/double-handling will further enhance project sta-

bility while improving sustainability.

Prefabricated construction is another way to cut wastage up to 90 per cent compared to traditional building methods. Modernised prefabricated elements and smart resource planning are designed to reduce wastage and enhance sustainability, using advanced data analytics to design homes with optimal storage and energy usage. Using materials that maintain a comfortable temperature also reduces excessive heating or cooling to ease climate change.

Leveraging technology for safer construction

The pandemic has created a critical need for safer, faster and more reliable construction workflows. Projects need controlled building sites with more structured supervision, which will create a safer environment and fulfil the necessary social distancing mandates.

Technology can be used to secure safe processes by analysing daily activities and worker movement. This system can be applied to separate individuals or groups of people. Digital technologies like GPS-enabled devices and geo-fencing can help monitor people across the sites and initiate alerts when people get too close or sites get clogged with workers.

Developers who have already jumped on the technology wagon are experiencing much ease and reaping the benefits, avoiding cost leakages and maintaining order in a relatively low economic activity. The labour-intensive construction sector will now have to shift its focus to automation without hampering construction work.

Before the pandemic, digital solutions were primarily used to ensure construction efficiency, meet deadlines, and enhance project profitability. However, the post-pandemic reality will push for digital transformation to resolve the particular challenges posed by COVID-19 and construct a smart future for the real estate industry.

(The author is the head of technology & innovation at Highbar Technocrat Limited, an end-to-end IT solutions provider for the infrastructure industry.)

WEBBED



MR CORMAN

The days and nights of fifth-grade teacher Josh Corman as he struggles with anxiety, loneliness, forfeited dreams of a music career, and the sinking suspicion that he sucks as a person. First episode of the series releases on August 6 on Apple TV+.



SHERSHAHAH

The true story of a PVC awardee brave Indian soldier — Capt Vikram Batra — who shot to fame and became a household name during the Kargil War in 1999. The film releases on August 12 on Amazon Prime Video.



MODERN LOVE S2

Love breaks all the rules. Each episode of this anthology series brings to life different stories of relationships, connections, betrayals and revelations — all inspired by true events. It releases on August 13 on Amazon Prime Video.

Ladies leading the way

Five reasons why we love female characters crafted by screenwriter KANIKA DHILLON. By TEAM VIVA

Indian cinema has been observing a positive change in terms of the representation of women on screen. From merely being a love interest of the hero to crafting impactful female-led films, we have come a long way due to the efforts of many screenwriters and filmmakers. One of the leading voices of this change is Kanika Dhillon.

She has given many memorable, strong, and progressive female characters to the industry. From Rumi in *Manmarziyan*, Bobby in *Judgemental Hai Kya*, Mandakini in *Kedarnath*, Nanki in *Guilty* to Rani in *Haseen Dillruba*, all of her female characters are simply real.

While the ace writer-producer is earning the lion's share of praise for her gripping storyline and powerful dialogues in *Haseen Dillruba*, here's looking at five reasons why we love Kanika's female characters.

♦ They are fearless and unapologetic

Whether it is Rumi or Rani, each of Kanika's characters is bold, opinionated, and unapologetic for their choices. The courage and persona of all these women made the audience instantly root for them.

♦ They are flawed and real

Instead of stereotyping a woman as a figure of sacrifice, Kanika's ladies are flawed, messy, complex, and more than anything, they are real! Be it the struggle of Bobby from *Judgemental Hai Kya* or Nanki's unconventional-

al way of surviving trauma, it was the substance portrayed by these characters that struck a chord with everyone.

♦ They can do anything for love

All of Kanika's women find deep solace in love and are ready to proclaim it like no one else. While Mandakini from *Kedarnath* was least affected by the communal difference between her and Mansoor, both Rumi and Rani's passion in *Manmarziyan* and *Haseen Dillruba*, respectively, received roaring applause.

♦ They voice important issues

Apart from crafting layered female characters, Kanika has a flair for raising important issues through her women on screen. From the #MeToo movement to love in the digital age to shedding light on mental health, her characters have a message to deliver, and we love to hear their voices.

♦ They are decisive

Kanika's ladies are known to take charge of their lives and are courageous enough to live by their decisions. All the women in her films are powerful and lead lives on their terms. Rani from *Haseen Dillruba* was ready to face the consequence of her choices and that is what made her fearless and desirable.



With so much information and misinformation out there, getting fit seems not only hard but also impractical sometimes. While we are often carried away with this information overload, it is important to remember that there is no magic potion or pill which can make us lose fat. Rather, small and achievable changes to our daily lifestyle are the key to reaching our goals.

If you are about to embark on, or in the middle of, your fitness journey, you should be aware of the following myths and facts to amp up your preparations.

□ CONSUMING FATS MAKE YOU FAT

Myth: If you consume fats such as butter, ghee or nuts, you will automatically gain weight. Excluding all kinds of fats will help you lose weight.

Fact: While it is true that fats are calorie-dense (a gram of any fatty ingredient contains nine calories while a gram of carbohydrate or protein has about four calories), consuming them in the right quantity will not lead to weight gain. They are an important macronutrient needed for carrying out functions such as producing hormones, aiding nutrient absorption, and many others. Eliminating them from your diet can lead to deficiencies and hormonal imbalances. Remember that no single food group causes fat gain. As long as your calories consumed are lower than the calories expended, you will lose fat.

□ FESTIVAL FOODS DON'T MAKE YOU FAT

Myth: You can eat shrikhand,

Eyes on the prize

JITENDRA CHOUKEY reveals the reality concerning some prominent weight-loss myths



puri and other festival foods without worrying about gaining weight. Our ancestors were very wise and these regional food combinations are cleverly designed to provide us with nutrients and won't make us fat, especially on festivals and holidays.

Fact: All kinds of foods, festive or not, contain calories. In fact, festive foods are generally high in oil and sugar content. These foods are highly palatable and easy to over-consume. If you eat too many calories and do so over a sustained period, it will certainly result in weight gain. Your body doesn't understand the significance of festivals. It treats all calories equally, irrespective of

when you eat them.

□ THE MYTH OF 'THE PERFECT DIET'

Myth: 'There is one perfect diet or there is a golden formula for weight loss'

Fact: The perfect diet does not exist. As everyone is different, the nutritional requirements also vary. What works for one person might not work for others. Moreover, a plan will work only if you follow it consistently along with a proper exercise routine and a healthy lifestyle. Select a nutrition plan that includes food that you enjoy and aim to keep a caloric balance. Follow this plan consistently and

with time, you will lose weight.

□ SUPPLEMENTS WILL HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT

Myth: 'There is one perfect diet or there is a golden formula for weight loss'

Fact: The perfect diet does not exist. As everyone is different, the nutritional requirements also vary. What works for one person might not work for others. Moreover, a plan will work only if you follow it consistently along with a proper exercise routine and a healthy lifestyle. Select a nutrition plan that includes food that you enjoy and aim to keep a caloric balance. Follow this plan consistently and with time, you will lose weight.

□ YOU CAN'T LOSE WEIGHT BECAUSE YOU LACK WILLPOWER/MOTIVATION

Myth: You just need to stay motivated and things will fall into place. If you've been unable to lose weight, that just means you lack the will to lose weight. Fix your attitude and results will follow!

Fact: Several factors aid and hinder fat loss. While willpower is one such factor, there are several other important aspects such as food habits, immediate environment, genetics, and lifestyle choices that can affect our fat loss. The key is building consistency and being patient.

Now that you are aware of the facts, do not get misled by these myths again and derail your progress. Only a combination of an active lifestyle and a healthy diet can help you get fit.

(The author is the founder and CEO of Fitt'r, a fitness and nutrition community.)

TRENDBLAZER



OTT MAKING US UP OUR GAME: ASHISH

Veteran actor **ASHISH VIDYARTHI** says that OTT platforms have allowed people to access things when they want it, and because of an abundance of options available at a click, one's 'product has to be so much better.'

"It's in your hand when you want it — instant gratification. It is somewhat tricky, everything has its pros and cons. There's so much to choose from, and therefore your product has to be so much better. As far as I am concerned, at this moment, in this form, OTT is the go-to thing," he shares.

fairtalk

GOVINDA



'I remember during my first film, *Ilzaam*, I had to shoot a romantic song with Neelam and I just couldn't do it. The choreographer Saroj (Khan) approached me and inquired whether I had ever romanced a girl. I said 'no', and she immediately asked one of her assistant choreographers to teach me how to do the romantic steps, and it was quite something.'

dailytalk

TANYA MANIKTALA



'I take a digital detox every third day of the week. Part of the detox involves uninstalling Instagram from my phone and being away from gadgets as much as possible. People who know me, are familiar with the fact that I am not a text person. I prefer face-to-face interactions more than any social media text or message.'

'WILL LET SON WATCH KILL BILL WHEN HE IS 7'

Hollywood filmmaker **QUENTIN TARANTINO** has shared that he is open to letting his 17-months old son Leo, watch his movie *Kill Bill* when he turns five or six-years-old.

When asked what age would he be comfortable letting his son watch his work, he replied, "That depends on his interests as well. If I had to imagine, he would probably, as a little boy, be most attracted to *Kill Bill*, anywhere between five, six or seven."



SPILLING THE SECRET

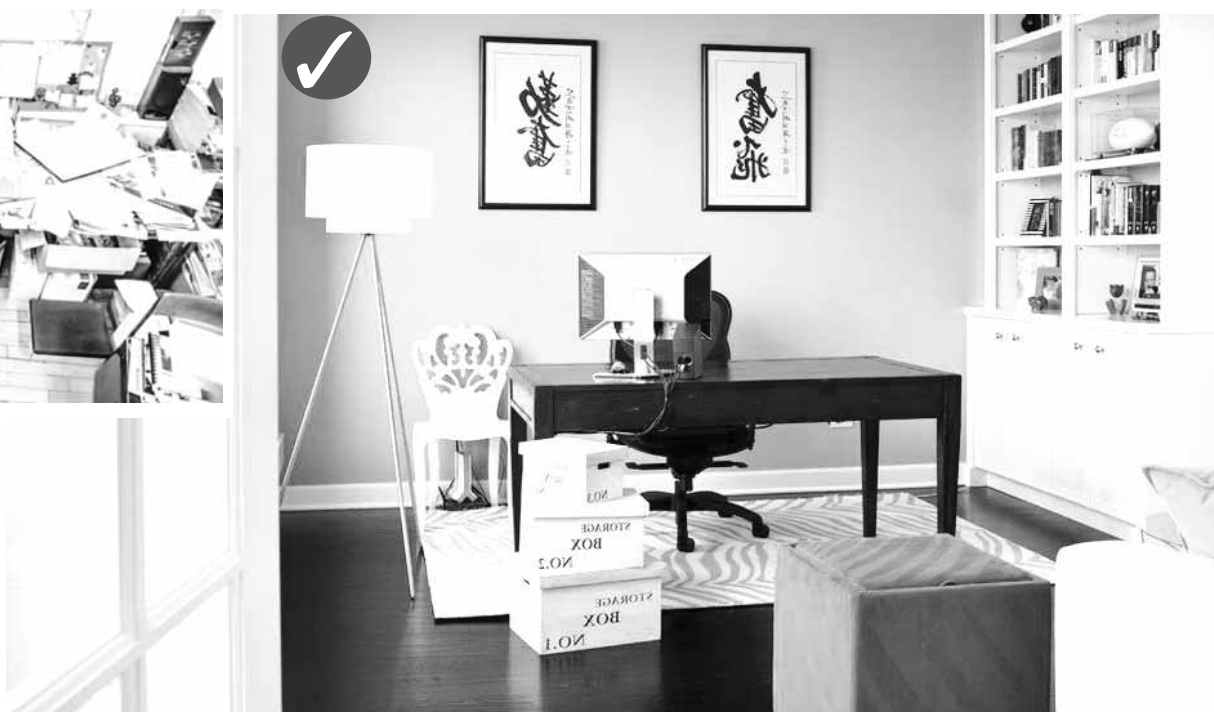
To maintain a balanced environment at your work-from-home set up, ensure productivity and attract positivity, it is important to follow Vastu guidelines, shares MANOJ SRIVASTAV



During the pandemic, working from home has become the new normal. Many software and consulting organisations have switched to work-from-home till the fourth quarter of this year. Even otherwise, due to several modern professions, there are a growing number of home-based professionals and entrepreneurs who now find working from home more productive. Many new mothers also switch to professions that can be conveniently managed from home.

Most work-from-home professionals choose to set up their workspace in a corner of their bedroom, on the dining room table, in the corner of a passage, or maybe even in the guest bedroom. However, to maintain a balanced environment, ensure productivity and attract positivity, it is important to follow some Vastu guidelines. Vastu energies are present subtly in a space that can be harnessed as a catalyst to our growth and progress. Here are a few simple steps which you can follow to ensure the benefits of good Vastu energies while working from home.

Try to arrange your work desk such that there is a solid wall behind you. This helps in bringing stability to your work.



Establish your work desk preferably in the Northeast, East, Southwest, or West corner of your home. To establish the directions stand at the approximate centre of your home with a compass and locate all the above directions. Then decide which is the best as per the other parameters suggested in this article.

As per Vastu Shastra, the best productivity can be achieved when you sit facing North or West. If your job is related to software programming or software application operations it is best to sit facing East. If it involves a lot of financial decisions, such as these days a lot of people trade in stock

markets, then it is better to face the North. Those whose responsibility is to ensure project execution can sit facing South.

You should not install figurines or paintings depicting Gods and Goddesses on the wall or cabinet behind you. If you want, you can place the idols in front of you either on your work desk or on the opposite wall.

Preferably, do not set up your home office in your bedroom. The bedroom is designed to ensure good rest and sleep and having your home office will not do well to your productivity.

The room used as a home office

should have bright vibrant colours. Even light shades of orange, blue and green are suitable for keeping you upbeat and focussed.

One of the most important Vastu advice for a home office is to keep your desk and office room clutter-free. Your files and desk drawers should be properly arranged. Equal emphasis should be given to your computer files and desktop screen. Keep them arranged and neatly labeled. This will go a long way in increasing your productivity and focus.

Do not put paintings depicting loneliness, sadness, darkness, storm, and tempest. Paintings that depict

nature and celebrations are the best.

Do not place figurines or sculptures depicting war or fight in your home office set up. They should not be placed anywhere in your home but especially not in the home office.

The worktable should be rectangular. Irregular and oval-shaped work desks are not recommended as per the tenets of Vastu.

Following these easy suggestions are sure to go a long way in your career growth even when you are working from home.

(The writer is a Vastu Acharya with more than 20 years of corporate leadership experience.)



Make the world a better place

Closer the man is to nature's benevolence, the more bountiful it becomes, says

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Around the globe, the five elements of nature are up in revolt against human beings, unleashing their fury in the form of floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and tsunamis. Despite having several warning systems in place today, no one is really sure about what they are going to wake up to. Hence, disaster management has come up as a major focus area in current years. But while we can gear up for any natural calamity within limits, it is almost impossible to stand up to the unprecedented high magnitude of nature's wrath that we have witnessed lately. Especially in the case of earthquakes, which are occurring so frequently. The question that, hence, emerges in everyone's minds is: What is the reason behind this drastic change in the temperament of nature, which has been revered for ages as the mother by mankind, from the most bountiful to the most ferocious?

Though calamities were not unknown in the past few decades, their occurrence was rare. According to scientists all over the world, global warming, caused by the emission of carbon gases into the atmosphere as a result of greater mechanisation, industrialisation, and depletion of green cover, has brought us to the present predicament. They say that earth has been pushed with such great momentum to the brink that even a full and immediate halt to these activities will not free us from the consequences. The root cause, however, is that man has violated natural laws and plundered resources recklessly to meet his greed, without restoring anything that he took away from nature. His nature, driven by selfishness and corrupted by the quest to exploit and profit from what is free for all, made him greedy and short-sighted, thereby inviting his downfall. Therefore, the corruption of man's nature has led to the degradation of natural resources and the environment. Man has founded the so-called modern world by going against the laws of nature and violated the lessons that nature taught him — to share, sustain and exist in harmony with others.

Through each of its five elements, known for their characteristic qualities, nature is a human being's best guide and teacher. Mother Earth nourishes every species and life on the planet. It is in its heart that seeds germinate and life is sustained. As much as it is known as a bountiful giver and nourisher, it is as much known for its strength and firmness. The element of water is known to keep a low profile all the time, flowing towards a low-lying surface. It is known to take the shape of whatever it is poured into, to meander its way through difficult terrains and yet meet its final destination, the sea. Depending upon the temperature, it can change its form to water vapour or solidify into ice. It is said that a person who learns to master the art of adjustment and flexibility can never be subjected to the wrath of water, for he has befriended it.

The element of fire is known to have a unique capacity of burning away or finishing the unwanted. Unlike water that gets dirty while purifying the human body or belongings, or the air that becomes toxic on being subjected to pollution, fire detoxifies without losing its original nature. It is for this reason that ores are treated with it for purity, clothes are disinfected in the sun and rubbish is burnt away. The power of meditation is like the fire which finishes the past waste and negative traits of a soul and frees it completely of the bondage of karma.

Similarly, the air breathes life into everything on earth. It is a natural transporter and carrier. Temperamentally, it is known to soothe and lift spirits. It, along with the sky, or space as it is called, teaches the importance of the element of freedom. It is in the sky that the birds fly, that kites take soar and humans escape to for experiencing unbounded recreation. The vast expanse of sky holds the uncountable stars and their galaxies, planets, and satellites, which automatically and silently follow a cyclical pattern of revolutions and rotations.

The human body is the closest form of external nature. Our ancestors believed that the body of a person who has imbibed the lessons demonstrated by five elements of nature can never be hurt by the wrath of nature. This is so because the natural environment is an extension of our internal nature and the disturbance in the latter is finally replicated in the fury of nature. Natural disasters and upheavals are becoming common because humans have bypassed the lessons that it has to teach. So what we need to understand is that: Closer the man is to nature's benevolence, the more bountiful it becomes.



The pandemic has revealed the importance of having smooth coordination between the Union, State, and local government bodies (Municipal Corporation and panchayats) in managing crucial tasks pertaining to disease control and shouldering the responsibility of making resources available to its people. At the village level, the local authorities are playing a vital role in fighting the battle against Covid-19 and executing the various support schemes launched by state and union governments. Last year, while observing National Panchayati Raj Day on April 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually interacted with the sarpanches from across the country and emphasised how the progress of panchayats will eventually ensure the development of the nation, more so in times of Covid-19.

The leadership and guidance of sarpanches have certainly become a beacon of hope for villagers amidst these struggling times. Providing treatment and testing facilities, creating awareness, and maintaining the protocols are undertaken under the directions of sarpanches. However, several villages in the country are surviving these times in absence of a leader. Around 15 Gram Panchayats in Maharashtra's Solapur district, which borders Karnataka to the south, are sailing in the same boat.

Although, on January 16, the elections for around 650 Gram Panchayats were held in Solapur district, and the results

A battle without a leader

As we approach the possibility of a third wave of the pandemic, adequate preparation in villages is fundamental to minimising its impact, says SHIRISH KHARE

were announced on January 18. Given that many of the sarpanch seats in these panchayats were reserved and no representative from the reserved community contested the elections, many villages are without sarpanches today. Generally, the district administration is responsible for holding new elections within a month in such a situation, but due to Covid-19, re-election could not take place. Without a leader, the fight against Covid-19 has become even more difficult for the residents of these villages.

Out of these 15 villages, it had become the toughest for seven villages of Sangola Block to contain the spread of Covid-19's second wave, which included, Aglavewadi, Burangewadi, Bopsewadi, Khilarwadi, Nijaampur, Hanmantgaon and Tarangewadi. Apart from these villages, the Gram Panchayats of Jahanpura in Baarshi Block, Khed in North Solapur Block, Bopale and Shengalewadi in Mohol Block, Ganeshwadi in Mangalwedha Block, Rajur and Takali in South Solapur Block, and Yeliv in Malshiras Block are also awaiting a sarpanch. As the cases were on a rise, the district administration was enforcing strict measures with the assistance



of sarpanches. However, the lack of institutional leadership in these 15 villages was causing issues ranging from protocol adherence to treatment provision.

Following the Covid-19 protocol, it is not advisable to conduct re-elections, as of now. However, once the situation improves, the decision to elect sarpanches will be made immediately, as their absence has undoubtedly hampered the district's fight against the virus,"

said Milind Shambarkar, the sarpanch of Solapur.

The Solapur district was one of the most vulnerable areas in the State as well as in the country during both the first and second waves. According to the government records, there were more than 20,000 active cases in the district, whereas on the ground, more than 1.5 lakh people were infected with Covid-19, and more than 3,500 deaths were recorded at the time of writing

this article. People from rural areas made a sizable portion of this population.

Reflecting on the importance of a sarpanch, Milind Kohli, a resident of Sangola Block in Solapur, stated that while the presence of sarpanches would not have eradicated the disease, proper measures would have been in place to prevent its spread. The sarpanches would have made efforts to plan to test and provide better and time-

ly treatment in coordination with the state government.

"There is currently no testing, treatment, or monitoring in place. If it had been the other way around, they would have urged their sarpanch to provide them with medicines and medical equipment such as oximeters and thermometers to monitor their health," shared Milind.

Sandeep Belvalkar, who has a chemist shop in Pandarpur town in Solapur, informed that the number of people affected by cold, cough, and fever was on the rise during the second wave. According to him, the lack of testing was leading to an increase in Covid-19 positive cases in rural areas. He believes it is during times like this that a sarpanch is needed the most. Without a sarpanch, there is no one to coordinate with the district administration to undertake the required tasks. "Several people were sick. Many members of the same family have died, but we do not know if these figures were recorded," Sandeep added.

As we approach the possibility of a third wave, strong preparation in cities and villages is fundamental. Thus, the administration should focus its attention on the urgency of the situation and take the best steps possible. Without sarpanches, the modus operandi to fight the third wave of Covid-19 appears bleak.

—Charkha Features

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

MATURE CATARACT ON THE RISE

The number of cases of dry eyes and digital eye strain has gone up during the pandemic period, said a top official of Dr Agarwal's Eye Hospital.

The cases of digital eye strain and dry eyes seen a significant rise as a result of excessive exposure to light-emitting digital screens as people adapted to work-from-home and study-from-home scenarios, said Dr Amar Agarwal, Chairman.

According to him, the cases of matured cataracts surged from 10 per cent of the total cataract cases in the last quarter of 2019 to over 50 per cent during the same period in 2020.

Citing an internal study conducted in 2020, he said that the delay in seeking medical interventions during the first wave of the pandemic — due to lockdown restrictions or fear of infection risks, had severely deteriorated the eye conditions of many patients.

Hence, without ignoring any eye issue, patients should seek medical intervention at the earliest.



GLOBAL WARMING MAY LIMIT SPREAD OF DENGUE

Global warming could limit the spread of dengue fever but could also affect Wolbachia as a biological control agent, according to new research.

Researchers, at the Pennsylvania State University in the US, found that infection with the bacterium Wolbachia, which has recently been used to control viral infections in mosquitoes, also increases the thermal sensitivity of the insects. Wolbachia have been shown to prevent viruses, including dengue, from replicating inside mosquitoes.

But future climate models point to increasing frequencies of extreme temperature events, making short exposures to high temperatures a threat to the survival of dengue and Wolbachia infected mosquitoes, the researchers said.

"At lower temperatures, we know that dengue virus may fail to replicate fast enough to make it through the mosquito body and be transmitted, thereby reducing transmission risk," said Phallon Ware-Gillmore, graduate student in the Department of Entomology at Penn State.



HYPERTENSION, DIABETES AMONG TOP NCDs

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), as part of its 'Illness to Wellness' campaign, unveiled India's largest primary healthcare survey report on the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCD).

The report titled *Non-Communicable Diseases in India* covered 2,33,672 people and 673 public health offices in 21 states to analyse the rising cases of NCDs in the country and the social profile of suffering households.

Report prepared by Thought Arbitrage Research Institute (TARI), the survey report observed that India's non-communicable disease burden is growing at an alarming rate with the average age for onset falling sharply. It reported that NCDs increase after 18 years and show a quantum leap when an individual crosses the age of 35 years. It found that more than 2/3 of the individuals suffering from NCDs are in the most productive-life age groups i.e., between 26-59 years. This is an alarming trend and points to the grim reality.



SIGNIFICANT PRESENCE OF PLASTIC IN GANGA

The Ganga river is polluted with multiple kinds of plastic, with the highest concentration at Varanasi, and micro-plastics samples being found at Haridwar, Kanpur and Varanasi, a new study by Toxics Link has found.

Micro-plastics are defined as plastics less than five mm in length and recognised as a major source of marine pollution due to their persistence, ubiquity and toxic potential.

Plastic products and waste material released or dumped in the river break down and are eventually reduced to micro particles and the river finally transports significantly large quantities downstream into the ocean which is the ultimate sink of all plastics being used by humans.

"Essentially all along micro-plastics are flowing into the river system. It does reflect or suggest a direct linkage between the poor state of both solid and liquid waste management; hence, it is critically important to initiate steps to remediate it," said Priti Mahesh, Chief Coordinator at Toxics Link.



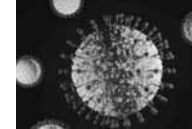
CUT DOWN STEROIDS TO AVOID BONE DEATH

Increased use of steroids for the treatment of Covid-19 has resulted in many problems from black fungus or mucormycosis to bone tissue death in patients who recovered from the deadly infectious disease, say doctors.

Many patients are reporting pain in joints, hip shoulder and knee — a condition medically known as avascular necrosis — months or upto a year after recovering from Covid-19.

While the condition is not new and is treatable, the incidences are on the rise as a side effect in the patients, who had Covid.

"The use of steroids during the treatment of Covid-19 which was a double-edged sword, is the suspect behind this unnatural bone damage. The excessive use of steroids causes marrow edema at bone ends and that cuts off its own blood supply," Orthopaedic & Robotic Joint Replacement Surgeon at Jalandhar's NHS Hospital, Dr Shubhang Aggarwal said.





CAKEWALK FOR SINDHU

INDIA'S SCHEDULE ON JULY 26 (ALL TIMES IST)

TIME	EVENTS	ATHLETES
05:30 AM	Fencing: Women's Sabre Individual Table of 64	C Bhavani Devi
06:00 AM	Archery: Men's Team 1/8 Eliminations	Pravin Jadhav, Atanu Das & Tarundeep Rai
06:30 AM	Shooting: Men's Skeet Event Day 2	Mairaj Ahmad Khan & Angad Vir Bajwa
	Table Tennis: Men's Singles Round 2	Achanta Sharath Kamal
TBD	Tennis: Men's Single Second Round	Sumit Nagal
08:30 AM	Table Tennis: Women's Singles Round 2	Sutirtha Mukherjee
08:35 AM	Sailing: Men's Laser Race 2 & 3	Vishnu Saravanan
09:10 AM	Badminton: Men's Doubles Group Stage	Satwiksairaj & Chirag Shetty
10:15 AM	Archery: Men's Team Quarterfinal	
11:05 AM	Sailing: Women's Laser Radial Race	Nethra Kumanan
11:47 AM	Archery: Men's Team Semifinal	
12:00 PM	Table Tennis: Women's Single Round 3	Manika Batra
12:20 PM	Shooting: Skeet Men's Final	
12:45 PM	Archery: Men's Team Medal Rounds	
03:06 PM	Boxing: Men's 75kg - Round of 32	Ashish Kumar
03:50 PM	Swimming: Men's 200m Butterfly - Heat 2	Sajan Prakash
05:45 PM	Hockey: Women's Pool A	India vs Germany
LIVE ON SONY TEN & SIX NETWORK		



Manika Batra competes during TT women's singles second round match

Manika rises to the occasion

Tokyo: India's table tennis star Manika Batra made a stunning comeback against world number 32 Margaryta Pesotska to reach the women's singles third round but G Sathiyam succumbed to the pressure on his Olympic debut to exit the men's singles competition on Sunday.

While the 26th seed Sathian was expected to beat world number 94 Hong Kong's Siu Hang Lam in his second round match after getting a first round bye, the same cannot be said about Manika, whose gritty approach under pressure proved decisive against her higher-ranked opponent from Ukraine.

Manika, ranked 62, made a remarkable comeback after losing the first two games to prevail 4-11, 4-11, 11-7, 12-10, 8-

Tokyo: Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh on Sunday produced the best-ever Olympic performance by Indian rowers as they cruised into the men's lightweight double sculls semifinals at the Tokyo Games.

The Indian duo clocked 6:51.36 to finish third in the repechage round at the Sea Forest Waterway.

"We followed exactly whatever had been told to us by our coach. The coach told us that we should try to get the best position for India," the duo said.

"It's (rowing) not a very popular sport in India. So our coach told us that getting to the semifinals is also a big motivation for us, and we had to do our best."

While Arjun assumes the role of the bowler, Arvind is the team's stroker. The two had finished fifth in their heats on Saturday.

"Arvind and Arjun are now among the 12 semifinalists. It can be difficult to win a medal but they will be competing in the semifinals. There will be two semifinal races of six boats each and top three from each semifinals will reach the final," Rowing Federation of India president Rajlaxmi Singh Deo said.

The event includes two rowers in a scull boat using two oars each. The long, narrow and broadly semi-circular in cross-section boats helps to reduce the drag.

The maximum weight set

Rowers Arjun, Arvind produce best-ever Indian performance



Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh in action

for each male competitor is 72.5kg and the average weight cannot exceed 70 kg.

The semifinals will be held on July 27.

NAYAK FAILS TO QUALIFY

India's lone gymnast at Tokyo Olympics, Pranati Nayak failed to qualify for the All Round finals of Artistic Gymnastics competition.

The 26-year-old from West Bengal recorded a total score of 42.565 over the four categories — floor exercise, vault, uneven bars and balance beam — at the Ariake Gymnastic centre. She is now ranked at 29th overall at the end of subdivision 2.

There are a total of five sub-

Mary's experience triumphs

Tokyo: Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg) powered into the Olympics' pre-quarterfinals with a superb tactical victory over Dominican Republic's Miguelina Hernandez Garcia but Manish Kaushik's (63kg) Games debut ended in disappointment following a hard-fought opening-round loss on Sunday.

The 38-year-old Mary Kom, who is a 2012 Olympic Bronze-medallist and a multiple-time Asian champion, prevailed 4-1 against a rival who is 15 years her junior and a Pan American Games Bronze-medallist.

But Manish, a Commonwealth Games Silver-medallist and a world championship Bronze-winner, went down 1-4 to Britain's Luke McCormack in an edge-of-the-seat clash.

Mary Kom was the first to step into the ring and in a bout that was also exciting from start to finish, the Manipuri displayed some brilliant tactics to overcome the fight that Garcia put up. She will next be up against third-seeded Colombian Ingrid Valencia, who was a Bronze-medallist at the 2016 Rio Games.

Mary has beaten the Colombian both times the two have faced, including the 2019 world championship quarterfinals.

"I have all the medals in my hand. Olympic medal (Bronze) from 2012, Commonwealth Games Gold, six-time Gold at world championships. It's not easy to count them, but the difficult part is continuously winning and performing, it's not easy," she said.

"...What is left is the Olympic Gold medal. That is what is driving me and pushing me to carry on. I am trying my best, if I am able to get it then I will be so grateful, but if not then I will



still be so happy for all the medals I have won in the past," she added.

On Monday, another Games debutant Ashish Kumar (75kg) will open his campaign against China's Erbieke Touheta.

Medal-winning athletes allowed 30-second smile for photo op

Tokyo: The medal-winning athletes at the Tokyo Olympics will now be able to sport a wide smile for the shutterbugs after the IOC updated its protocol on Sunday, allowing them to remove their masks for 30 seconds during the podium ceremony. The updated protocol, which allows athletes to remove masks briefly, came into effect on Sunday morning.

"It has been decided today, in line with the Tokyo 2020 Playbooks, to adapt the victory ceremony protocol in order



to allow athletes to have a physically distanced image on the podium without their masks on for 30 seconds, and a group photo with masks on the Gold-medal step," said the IOC in a statement.

"...The victory ceremony protocol has been adapted to allow athletes to have an image for the media that captures their faces and their emotions during a unique moment in their sporting career, as well as to celebrate the achievements of all the medallists together."

Shooters disappoint, again

Tokyo: The fancied Indian shooting team drew a blank for the second day running in the Tokyo Olympics, with a major weapon malfunction leading to a heartbreaking exit for the young Manu Bhaker in the women's 10 air pistol event.

Appearing in her maiden Olympics, the 19-year-old Manu finished a creditable 12th, despite losing nearly 20 minutes during the qualifications after the cocking lever in her pistol broke down, forcing her to go to a designated area for getting it fixed. Manu shot 575, while the cut-off was 577.

Yashaswini Singh Deswal, the other first-timer at the Games, recovered from a subdued start to end 13th, with a total score of 574.

In the men's 10 air rifle event, both the experienced Deepak Kumar and the teenaged Divyansh Singh Panwar finished a lowly 26th and 32nd respectively.

Deepak aggregated 624.7 while Divyansh shot 622.8 over the six series, scores which were never going to be enough to make the final.

India's Angad Vir Singh Bajwa missed two targets out of 75 to be placed 11th on



count back at the end of the third round in men's skeet qualifications. He looks to be in search of a top-six finals spot.

Angad had scores of 25, 24, 24 in the first three series and will come back on Monday to shoot the final two series.

Compatriot Mairaj Ahmad Khan shot 71 and was placed 25th out of the 30 shooters in fray.

Taken together, the first two days' performance, or, the lack of it, is certainly going to raise a few eyebrows within the Indian shooting fraternity, including the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), which has done its bit in preparing its athletes.

Sania-Ankita pair knocked out



India women's doubles pair of Sania Mirza and Ankita Raina in action during their opening round match on Sunday

Tokyo: Sania Mirza and debutant Ankita Raina were knocked out of the Tokyo Olympics despite dominating a large part of their women's doubles opener against Ukrainian twin sisters Nadiia and Liudmyla Kichenok.

Sania and Raina were running away with the contest after bageling their opponents but in a dramatic turnaround, the Kichenok sisters came back from the dead to pull off a 0-6, 7-6(0), 10-8 win at court 11 of Ariake Tennis Centre.

Sania was serving for the match at 5-3 in the second set

but perhaps nerves got the better of her and ended up dropping her serve.

From there on, it was not the same match, in which the Ukrainians looked out of sort, struggling with their serves and returns. The Indians became the prey and Ukrainians pounced on them.

Sania and Raina were down 1-8 in the Super Tie break but reeled off seven straight points to make it 8-8 but lost the next two points to make an exit from the Games.

No 1 Ashleigh Barty crashed out in the first round.

Osaka defeated China's Zheng Saisai 6-1, 6-4 in her first match since taking an eight-week break for mental health reasons and is now the clear favourite for Gold after Barty, the reigning Wimbledon champion, dropped serve twice in each set and made 55 unforced errors in a 6-4, 6-3 loss to Spain's 48th-ranked Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Barty exits



Tokyo: Japan's Naomi Osaka won in straight sets on her highly-anticipated return to court on Sunday, while world

Govt exempts Olympic returnees from RT-PCR test

Tokyo: Athletes, officials and media returning to the country from Tokyo Olympics will not be required to produce RT-PCR negative test reports for Covid-19 before their departure from Tokyo, the Government of India said on Sunday.

The decision was intimated in an official letter by Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare after the Indian Olympic President Narinder Batra had earlier in the day requested the Government to exempt returnees from the Tokyo Games to produce RT-PCR negative report before boarding their flights.

The Health Ministry official, however, said that only those individuals who have returned negative in the saliva-based test prior to their departure to India will be allowed to board the flight. Besides, all those returning from Tokyo will be retested upon landing in India.

The weightlifting contingent will depart for India from Tokyo on Monday after Mirabai Chanu won a historic Silver in women's 49kg event.

Surya takes India to 164-5

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Suryakumar Yadav continued his rich vein of form with an another attractive half-century but Sri Lanka bowled well to restrict India to 164 for five in the first T20I here on Sunday.

Surya's second T20I half-century was complemented by useful contributions from skipper Shikhar Dhawan (46 off 38 balls) along with Ishan Kishan (20 not out off 14 balls) at the back-end.

Skipper Dhawan added 62 with Surya in eight overs to provide a solid launch-pad but the latter's dismissal surely cost India 20 extra runs.

But looking at the partnership, it was evident that the junior partner was batting in a more assured manner, having already sealed his place in the T20 World Cup team while the skipper is still fighting what looks like a losing battle to jostle inside that jam-packed top-order in the main squad.

There was a six over deep mid-wicket off Akila Dananjaya but the innings did lack the



punch despite four more boundaries.

It was Surya's five fours and a six that really helped Kishan and Hardik to launch the final assault.

At the start, Prithvi Shaw had a forgettable T20I debut as Dushmantha Chameera's (2/24 in 4 overs) outswinger found the edge of his bat off the very first delivery of the match.

Sanju Samson (27 off 20 balls) hit his customary six while batting like a millionaire

before Wanindu Hasaranga (2/28 in 4 overs) trapped him with a googly.

Surya as usual was in his free-flowing self, hitting those whiplash on-drives, cover drives and ramp shots which is a sight to watch both against pacers and spinners.

However what was exhilarating was how Surya picked all those back-of-the-hand slower deliveries from seamers Isuru Udana and Chamika Karunaratne.

MI-CSK to kickoff IPL 2021 UAE leg

New Delhi: Defending champions Mumbai Indians will meet Chennai Super Kings in Dubai on September 19 when the IPL resumes in the United Arab Emirates, the BCCI announced on Sunday.

The tournament was suspended in May after multiple Covid-19 cases were reported in its bio-bubble.

A total number of 31 matches will be played in the duration of 27 days including seven doubles headers.

After the CSK-MI clash, the action will shift to Abu Dhabi where the Kolkata Knight Riders will square off against Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Sharjah will host its first game on September 24 when RCB take on CSK.

In all, 13 matches will be held in Dubai, 10 in Sharjah and 8 in Abu Dhabi.

The first Qualifier will be played in Dubai on October 10, the Eliminator and Qualifier 2 will be played in Sharjah on October 11 and 13 respectively with Dubai hosting the final on October 15.

PNS