

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

RAIPUR, MONDAY JULY 26 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

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OTT MAKING
US IMPROVE:
VIDYARTHI
10 VIVACITYBSY waits for 'orders'
as exit looms largeBJP 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 short-listing 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 beltPolice 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 Sashstra 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

PEGASUS ISSUE: RS MP
MOVES SC SEEKING PROBE

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.

MAHA MONSOON FURY:
113 DEAD, 100 MISSING

Mumbai: The number of deaths due to flooding, landslides and other rain-related incidents in parts of Maharashtra reached 113 on Sunday with one more casualty reported in the last 24 hours, while 100 people were missing after the monsoon fury.

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.

Holiday turns nightmare
as landslide kills nineThree 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.

Chhattisgarh Assembly
Session from today

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The five-day monsoon session of the Chhattisgarh Assembly will start on July 26 at 11.00 am. The Session will conclude on July 30.

Day one of the session will commence with obituary reference of Gulab Singh, ex-member of the Assembly. Somprakash Giri and Balaram Verma, former members of the undivided

Madhya Pradesh Assembly, Karuna Shukla, a former MP, Badridhar Diwan, a former Deputy Speaker, Dr Shakrajeet Nayak, a former Minister of State in Chhattisgarh, and Ramadhar Kashyap, a former Rajya Sabha member.

On July 27, the first supplementary appropriation bill will be tabled. The discussion on it is scheduled on July 28, an official communication said.

After Punjab PCC change of
guard, Cabinet rejig likelyAll eyes on Capt
who is expected to
reshuffle his
Ministers' Council

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

After witnessing a change of Aguard 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 Dany, 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 toyed



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

with by world umber 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 Ksenia 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

₹100 CRORE CHEATING, FORGERY CASE

Delhi Police arrests Mumbai firm MD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police have arrested the managing director of a firm from Mumbai in a 2018 case related to cheating, forgery and criminal misappropriation of approximately ₹100 crore.

The accused has been identified as Ramchand Karunakaran, who played a prominent role in siphoning of funds and he was one of the directors of IL&FS Rail Ltd and the managing director of IL&FS Transportation Network Ltd.

Police said he was arrested in Mumbai on July 20. He was produced in court and remanded to police custody for further investigation in the case.

According to RK Singh, the Additional Commissioner of Police, EOW, an First Information Report (FIR) was registered in 2018 on the complaint of Ashish Begwani,

Director of Enso Infrastructures (P) Ltd, who alleged that in August 2010, he was approached by the directors of IL&FS Transportation Networks Ltd for an investment.

“Allured by their promises, his company invested ₹170 crore in IL&FS Rail Ltd in order to take 15 per cent stake in IL&FS Rail Ltd, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for Gurgaon Rapid Metro project. Over a period of time, the complainant observed that the company is not performing profitably and funds are being misused,” said the Additional CP.

“It is alleged that bogus contract orders worth ₹ 21.88 crore were issued to a firm named Silverpoint Infratech Ltd but no work was executed by this company. The invoices raised by the Silverpoint Infratech Ltd were forged and fabricated. IL&FS Rail Ltd did this to inflate its expenditure

and show less profit in its books,” said the additional CP.

“It is alleged by the complainant that the directors of the alleged company IL&FS Rail Ltd and other officers of the company intentionally siphoned off the funds of the company to the tune of Rs about 70 crore causing loss to their firm,” said the additional CP.

“During investigation, it was found that the accused had made payments to several companies without executing any work. They could not give any satisfactory reply about the contracts awarded to the questioned companies,” said the additional CP.

“It is also found that no estimate was taken, no name and address of any of the contractors was given or kept in record.

Money was routed through several layers of the different shell companies,” the additional CP added.

Covid-19: Over 1.5 lakh vaccinated in J’khand

PNS ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand on Sunday vaccinated over 1.5 lakh residents against Covid-19 for the second consecutive day after a crisis of vaccines slowed the pace of immunisation in Jharkhand for several days last week, data compiled by the National Health Mission (NHM) highlighted.

As per provisional figures released by the NHM, Jharkhand on Sunday administered the first dose of vaccine to as many as 1,18,004 residents, while the second jab was administered to at least 34,018 beneficiaries. Over 1 lakh beneficiaries who got jabbed on the day were younger than 45 years. As per government data, at least 94,250 residents in the age bracket of 18 years to 44 years got their first jab on the day, while as many as 6,606 beneficiaries in the aforementioned age group got their second jab.

Data released by the NHM on Sunday evening highlighted that the state has received 93,02,030 doses of Covishield and Covaxin doses from the Centre so far. The state, as per this data, has administered vaccines to 87,37,460 residents. Some of these beneficiaries also

received the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, procured separately by private hospitals.

Meanwhile, the active caseload of Covid-19 dropped further down to 254 in Jharkhand on Sunday as the state reported at least 50 Covid recoveries against 28 fresh cases of infection, a separate bulletin released by the NHM stated. As per the bulletin, no fresh casualties were reported on the day, and the Covid toll remained 5124.

None of the 24 districts reported a double-digit-spike in Covid cases on the day with Koderma and Hazaribag reporting the highest spike of four cases each. At least 10 recoveries against one fresh case of coronavirus infection brought the active caseload in Ranchi down to 52, while the active caseload in East Singhbhum dropped to 21 as the district reported five recoveries against one fresh case on the day. The state tested swab samples of 54,968 residents and 0.05 per cent of them were found infected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. So far, over 3.46 lakh people have been infected by the deadly virus in Jharkhand and 98.44 per cent of them have recovered, while 1.47 per cent of patients could not survive.

J’khand Govt extends tenure of local bodies

PNS ■ RANCHI

The tenure of the local bodies of Jharkhand under Panchayati raj system has been extended for another six month by the State Government as the State Government has already published a gazette in this regard. Since the Assembly session was adjourned sine die the Government issued an ordinance for extension of tenure. Through the ordinance an amendment has been made in section 24 (4), 42, 57 and 107 of Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act.

The Governor Droupadi Murmu before demitting the office gave her consent to the ordinance. Now the proposal for the extension will be formally placed before the cabinet for approval.

This is the second six

months extension given to existing local bodies after its term expired on January 15 this year. Due to Covid 19 pandemic; the Hemant Soren decided to defer election of local bodies. The local bodies come under Panchayati Raj department which is integrated with the Rural Development Department. The last time elections were held in 2015.

“By this ordinance the tenure of elected members of the local bodies has been extended by another six months. Local bodies mean Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat. If the situation of Covid 19 remains in control with no obvious threat of spread of the virus then the government may think about conducting an election in December this year,” said an official of the State Govt.

PNS ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand Education Secretary Rajesh Kumar has directed officials to identify 4091 schools from panchayats which can be developed as model schools. The education secretary has asked officials to give priority to those panchayats where there is neither any secondary nor higher secondary schools.

The Secretary, also gave instructions regarding upgrading infrastructure in 325 Adarsh (model) schools. Apart from this, the Secretary stressed on underlining the effect of Adarsh Vidyalayas and said that for this a virtual program should be fixed in the middle or end of August. The virtual programme will be attended by teachers, headmasters. Chief Minister Hemant Soren will also address the programme.

The Education Secretary

directed to ensure the availability of teachers and staff in Adarsh Vidyalayas. The Director of Primary and Secondary School was asked to issue deputation letter for this to the concerned teachers by July 30. Also it has been directed to ensure that all the teachers join at their respective place of deputation by August 7.

Deputation of Headmaster in Adarsh Vidyalaya of Godda and Garhwa was directed to be done without delay.

At the same time, every Adarsh school was asked to make arrangements from security guards, sweepers and gardeners through outsourcing mode.

The Secretary, Education Department, directed all the headmasters to issue the calendar for NCSL training. For training at IIM, Ranchi, it was also asked to issue an orienta-



tion calendar and conduct training on Thursday instead of Friday. At the same time, for the training of teachers, it was directed to ask for necessary documents and proposals from

the British Council of India.

The secretary directed that instead of integrated labs for science subjects, separate labs should be made. At the same time, one person at the district

level was asked to be responsible for developing and monitoring smart classes and labs in Adarsh schools. During the review, the Secretary directed that vocational education

should be upgraded in schools. For this, tie up with other schools should be made, as different schools specialize in different trades. In this situation, a student of one school will be able to go to another school on a weekly basis to study a particular trade and take better education of the subject of his interest.

He also stressed on linking schools with polytechnic colleges and skill development centers to further upgrade vocational education.

State Project Director, JEPCCum Director JCERT Dr Shailesh Kumar Chaurasia, Director Secondary Harsh Mangala, Administrative Officer, JEPCC Jayant Kumar Mishra, State Program Manager Dr Arvind Kumar, Co-ordinator Sachin Kumar, Executive Engineer Ratan Srivastava etc. were present in the review meeting.

BJP wants judicial probe into ‘conspiracy’ to topple Govt case

Babulal blames Government for spreading rumour



BJP Legislative leader Babulal Marandi along with others during a press conference at party office in Ranchi on Sunday
Vinay Murmu

PNS ■ RANCHI

The State BJP unit on Sunday reacted strongly over the ruling party’s allegations of attempts at destabilising the Hemant Soren Government by the BJP and demanded a probe over the matter by a sitting judge of Jharkhand High Court. BJP legislative party leader and former Chief Minister Babulal Marandi said that the allegations to topple the State Government is a serious issue.

He said, “The State Government should constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by a sitting judge of the High Court to probe the matter.” Marandi slammed the State Government, demanded release of three persons behind the incident and demanded the State Government to disclose the entire matter in public domain.

Three persons were arrested from a hotel in Ranchi on Saturday for allegedly conspiring to topple the coalition Government of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Congress and RJD in Jharkhand. The JMM claimed that the BJP was behind the

conspiracy.

The arrested persons include Abhishek Dubey, Amit Singh and Niwaran Prasad Mahato. Sources said that the special branch of Jharkhand Police seized an undisclosed amount of cash from the three accused.

The BJP leader said that either the DGP or Additional DGP should reveal the entire matter to the public through media, but in this case the state police only issues a press statement. He said that before the police statement, some ruling party leaders have issued statements which aim at diverting the probe.

The BJP busted on State Government is reaction to JMM’s allegation that BJP was trying to execute the ‘Madhya Pradesh’ and ‘Karnataka model’ in Jharkhand, a reference to how non-BJP governments were toppled in the two states. “The BJP is trying to apply the Karnataka and MP Model here in Jharkhand. But we won’t allow BJP to do the same,” JMM general secretary Supriya Bhattacharya.

Reacting to JMM’s allegation of Karnataka and MP Model, Marandi said that the

state government is following Maharashtra model using police in extorting money. He said in the present case, the state government has used the police as a tool. Marandi said that the state government is engaged in recovery of money from coal, sand, liquor, iron ore and stone.

He said that two accused were arrested from Bokaro on the intervening night of July 22-23. A police team had gone there to bring them to Ranchi, but Ranchi Police is showing the arrest of these youths from Ranchi hotel on the night of 23-24. This action of the police is doubtful.

Even before this, raids were conducted at 22 places in the state at the behest of the government. Raising the question, he said that the government should clarify on whose behest and on what information the raids are being conducted in the state.

The tripartite alliance of the JMM, Congress and RJD won 47 out of the 81 seats in the 2019 Jharkhand Assembly election. Hemant Soren of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was then appointed chief minister of the state.

Conspiracy to topple Govt: Police claim low profile accused have high profile links

VIJAY DEO JHA ■ RANCHI

As the political circle and a common people began to doubt Ranchi police arresting three people on Friday night for hatching conspiracy to topple the Hemant Soren Government, Ranchi police have claimed that the accused have confessed that they were the cogs of a high-level notorious game plan.

Arrested accused Amit Singh and Niwaran Prasad Mahto (both native of Bokaro) and Abhishek Kumar Dubey, a native of Palamu district are small fries and their non-descript backgrounds have led people to doubt police theory as superfluous.

Singh is a contractual worker, Mahto a fruit seller and Dubey is an unemployed engineering graduate.

They were arrested from Hotel Le Lac Sarovar of Ranchi. However, family members of Singh and Mahto disputed the claim stating they were picked-up by Bokaro police two days before they were arrested from Ranchi. The hotel manager Chandreshwar Upadhyaya said that any of the occupants of the hotel were not arrested from the hotel. However, some of the employees of the hotel confessed that Ranchi police had picked-up one from the hotel whereas another person quietly walked away from the hotel.

Ranchi police have revealed that Dubey in his confessional statement given before police has said that he along with other accused and three MLAs namely Irfan Ansari and Umashankar Akela of the Congress and Amit Yadav (independent) had boarded a Delhi bound flight on July 15 and returned on the next day. Police said that they had stayed at Hotel Vivanta and the meeting of MLAs with several BJP leaders were arranged where they were also

Police claimed that Dubey in his confessional statement has said that one Maharashtra based person Jaikumar Belkhede had arranged logistics for them

offered ₹1 crore as advance payment to go against the Soren government. MLAs also met BJP MLAs from Maharashtra Chandrashekhar Rao Babankule and Charan Singh.

Police claimed that Dubey in his confessional statement has said that one Maharashtra based person Jaikumar Belkhede had arranged logistics for them. Quoting Dubey, police said that since MLAs were only promised payment and no part payment was made these MLAs were unhappy and returned to Ranchi.

Interestingly, one of the arrested accused Niwaran Mahto had posted a picture on July 17 taken at Birsu Munda airport when he was apparently going to Delhi.

In order to win back their confidence Jaikumar, Mohit Bhartiya and Ashutosh Thakkar came to Ranchi and stayed at the hotel. Four rooms were booked for them including MLA Amit Yadav. From the hotel they were contacting MLAs when Congress MLA Jaimangal Singh came to know about this and informed the police.

GANG RIVALRY 32-year-old man arrested in attempt to murder case in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police have arrested the owner of a local sports club, who was wanted in an attempt to murder case, in the National Capital’s Najafgarh area.

The accused have been identified as Sunil Dahiya, a resident of Uttam Nagar area and he is a member of the Najafgarh-based Krishan Pehelwan gang.

Police said that on January 12, he along with his associates had shot at and injured Amit Shokeen. Police said that Shokeen was close to the Hemant gang, which is a rival of the Krishan Pehelwan gang. It is a case of gang rivalry and Dahiya was booked for attempt to murder by the Baba Haridas Nagar police, police said.

Dahiya has been a Kabbadi coach and player, and runs his sports club at Jafarpur. Dahiya’s associates Rajesh and Jai Bhagwan were arrested earlier, but he was absconding, police said, adding that his brother-in-law, Krishan, is still at large.



According to Alok Kumar, the Joint Commissioner of Police, Crime, on July 22, the police team received specific inputs that Sunil Dahiya would be coming to Najafgarh.

“A trap was laid near Kairi village and the accused was apprehended and a sophisticated 7.65 mm semi-automatic pistol along with two live rounds was recovered from him,” said the Joint CP.

“When interrogated, Dahiya told police that he met Krishan Pehelwan through his uncle Jai Bhagwan and later joined his gang,” said the Joint CP.

Pehelwan’s rival Hemant, is

currently lodged at the Tihar jail, and their rivalry has resulted in a number of cases of murder and attempt to murder in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR),” according to police.

“Dahiya also told police that on the day of the incident, he was at his friend’s house with his uncle when Shokeen came over to discuss an issue related to a property. However, they had a heated argument over their gang affiliations, which turned violent,” said the Joint CP.

“Even though Shokeen managed to escape in a friend’s car, to teach him a lesson, they (Dahiya and his associates) reached Shokeen’s house in Dichau Kalan village. They shot at and injured him and also injured his cousin Ankush, before leaving the spot in their cars,” said the Joint CP adding that efforts are being made to nab Dahiya’s brother-in-law, and police teams are also trying to trace Dinesh, who sold the gun to Dahiya in Daboda in Haryana’s Gurgaon.



Farmers plant paddy saplings on their agriculture field at Hatia area of Ranchi city on Sunday

Vinay Murmu | Pioneer

Online darshan of Baba Baidyanath starts from today

PNS ■ RANCHI

The Baba Baidyanath temple trust will start an online darshan facility of Lord Shiva for the devotees during the auspicious month of Sharvan starting on July 26. The district administration decided to have online darshan and puja of Lord Shiva due to the corona pandemic.

Morning government puja and evening Shringar will be broadcast live for 45 minutes in both hours at Jharkhand TV and other channels, apart from live viewing at different social media platforms. The Deoghar district administration has made elaborate arrangements for this.

Deoghar Deputy Commissioner Manjunath Bhajantri said, “The district administration on the directive of State government has decided to cancel Sharvani mela in view of Covid pandemic.

However, there are arrangements of virtual darshan of Lord Shiva.”

Devotees can perform online darshan of Lord Shiva, as the month long Shravan mela at Deoghar and the Kanwar yatra attached to it - stand cancelled for second consecutive year amid Covid 19 pandemic and possible threat of third wave of pandemic.

Baidyanath Jyotirlinga temple, also commonly referred to as the Baidyanath Dham, is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas in India and is considered to be the most sacred abode of Lord Shiva. Every year in the month of Sharvan the temple used to have a large congregation of devotees.

As this year the Shravan starts on July 25, the State government to stop devotees from coming to the temple and prevent gathering of kanwaris, which can lead to spread of

pandemic, the district administration on the instruction of State government has cancelled the festival the at temple town. The district administration to stop devotees from reaching the temple town has erected five check posts at different parts of the city.

The DC also said that the district administration has made elaborate arrangements to stop the entrance of the devotees in temple town, apart from these messages that are spread that devotees are prevented from entering temple town.

Wide publicity is being done through railway officials and others to spread the message that devotees are prohibited inside temple and ‘jalarpn’ (offering water) is not allowed.

Sources said that police forces will also be deployed at Bihar borders and Deoghar borders to avoid congregations of devotees.

Govt doing all it can to develop Bastar: CM



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

All feasible efforts are being made by the Chhattisgarh government to fulfill the development related needs of the people of Bastar region, including Sukma and Bijapur districts, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Sunday.

He was interacting with a delegation of people's representatives and villagers of the two districts here.

Baghel sought details of the status of ground level implementation of public welfare and development schemes in both the districts, an official communication stated.

He said it was the duty of the

public representatives to connect the villagers with government schemes. Villagers should be motivated to come forward to take advantage of the schemes in rural and remote areas.

The villagers told the Chief Minister that they wanted roads, electricity, hospitals, ambulances and ashram-hostel facilities for the

education of children.

They said the law and order situation had improved and people now visit their relatives for marriage, death and more.

The villagers also praised the health facilities. Solar lights have been installed in villages. Weekly markets have re-opened in the interior areas, they said.

Girls outshine boys in 12th board exam in Chhattisgarh



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Board of Secondary Education (CGBSE) on Sunday declared results of the Class 12 examination, with girls again outshining boys.

The overall pass percentage is 97.43 percent, with girls' percentage pegged at 98.06 percent against the boys' 96.69, an official communication said.

School Education Minister Premsai Singh Tekam, who announced the results of CGBSE Higher Secondary School Certificate Examination here, said 289,023 students

registered for the exams and 286,850 appeared.

Of these, results of 284,107 students were declared and 276,817 (97.43 percent) passed.

Of those who passed, 271,155 (95.44 percent) qualified in Grade I category, 5,570 aspirants passed in Grade II and 79 in Grade III, which is 1.63 percent and 0.03 percent respectively.

Due to the pandemic, the students collected the question papers from centres, took them home and submitted the answer sheets within five days.

Schemes are to uplift last person in society: Baghel



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Many welfare schemes are being implemented in Chhattisgarh with a view to uplift the most displaced people in the society, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Sunday.

He was virtually addressing the oath taking ceremony of the Chairman and members of the Chhattisgarh Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board here, an official communication said.

The newly appointed office bearers of the Board are Chairman Sushil Sunny Agarwal and its members are Shyam Jaiswal, Anil Singh, Manju Singh, Balram Maurya and Durgesh Jaiswal.

The Chief Minister urged everyone to take all possible initiatives to bring marked changes in the standard of living and prosperity of the workers in the entire state. The targeted beneficiaries should get maximum benefits from government schemes.

Congress asks activists to prepare for elections



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Congress in Chhattisgarh on Sunday asked its activists to prepare for the 2023 Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

A meeting of the party was held here in the presence of AICC Chhattisgarh in charge P.L. Punia

and under the Chairmanship of PCC chief Mohan Markam.

AICC Secretaries Chandan Yadav and Saptagiri Ulka attended the meeting along with PCC office bearers and others. The meeting stressed the need to highlight the state government's schemes for the common man. "In a bid to charge-

up everyone including at the booth level, a revamp in the body is desperately needed," underlined Punia. Talking to the media, Markam denied any problem in coordination between the party and the government. He denied there were resentments after appointments were made in the boards and corporations.

Incorporate yoga in daily routine: CM



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday asked everyone to make yoga a way of life. Addressing investiture ceremony of the Chairman and members of the Chhattisgarh

Yoga Commission virtually, Baghel described yoga an ancient knowledge which keeps both body and mind healthy, an official communication said. He told the Yoga Commission to give wide publicity about yoga's importance and connect more people to it a part of their life.



A view of paddy plantation in Lormi village in Mungeli district in Chhattisgarh. The plantation is being done after getting good rainfall which had inundated the farm, an ideal condition for paddy crop.

Source: Social media

BJP women flay Lakhma comment on Purandeshwari



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The BJP women's wing on Sunday denounced Chhattisgarh Excise Minister Kawasi Lakhma for calling BJP leader D. Purandeshwari a "bandit queen".

In a press conference here, the BJP leaders said the com-

ment was an insult to women. Could the Minister address Congress leader Sonia Gandhi as Phoolan Devi, they asked.

Women's wing Vice President Meenal Choubey asked Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel to fulfill his election promise to ensure women's security.

"Today the state has become a hub of crime," she said.

Man held for smuggling diamonds worth Rs 22L

STAFF REPORTER ■ GARIABAND

A 47-year-old man was arrested on charges of smuggling 204 pieces of rough diamonds valued at Rs 22 lakhs in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district, police said on Sunday.

Speaking to The Pioneer over telephone, Gariaband Superintendent of Police Parul Mathur identified the smuggler as Neelam Das Kashyap of Buddhupara village in the district.

Acting on a tip, the man was apprehended near a grocery shop in Bardula village.

The police swung into action after learning that a man with a huge quantity of rough diamonds was headed towards Mainpur from Deobahog, a diamond-rich belt in Gariaband, she said.

The police also seized his motorcycle and mobile phone.

Prima facie, it seems he illegally brought the diamonds from the Deobhog area.



Naxalite killed in gunfight in C'garh

STAFF REPORTER ■ SUKMA

A Naxalite was killed in a gun battle with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Sunday, police said. The gunfight took place in a forest near Minpa village when a joint team of security forces was out on a search operation, Sukma Superintendent of Police Sunil Sharma said. The District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were involved in the operation that was launched based on the movement of Maoists in the area, a rebel stronghold. The exchange of fire lasted for about one-and-a-half hours following which the rebels escaped into the forest, the official said. Later, the body of a male Naxalite was recovered from the spot. Sharma said blood stains at the site indicated that many other Naxalites were either injured or killed in the fighting.

‘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, Bapu’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 Bapu’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 occa-

sion 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 outh 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 Shastri 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, Jhabua, 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.

Maha rain: Death toll touches 149, CM visits flood-hit area

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The toll in the rain-flood ravaged Maharashtra mounted to 149 on Sunday, even as the number of people evacuated from the affected areas of the State climbed to 2,29,074 and the various agencies continued relief and rescue operations in the State.

A day after the rain-flood mishap casualties rose to 112, the various central and state agencies recovered 37 more bodies, taking the total number of people killed in landslides, house crashes, floods and various other rain-related incidents to 149.

While a maximum of 60 people were killed in Raigad district in Konkan region, Satara district in western Maharashtra

accounted for 41 persons. The death tally in other places comprised: Ratnagiri-21, Thane-12, Kolhapur-7, Mumbai-4, Sindhurg and Pune-2 each. authorities pegged the number of injured persons at 50 and the killed cattle and other animals at 3249, while 64 persons were reported missing from various rain-flood affected areas of the State.

With the floods having not receded in most parts of the coastal Konkan region, the relief and rescue agencies evacuated as many 2,29,074 people to safer places in western Maharashtra and Konkan region. The worst flood-hit district of Sangli in western Maharashtra accounted for a maximum 1,69,998 evacuations, while 40,882 people were shifted to safer places in the neighbouring Kolhapur district.

The number of people evacuated in other affected districts is as follows: Satara-7530, Thane—6930, Ratnagiri—1200, Sindhudurg—1271, Raigad—1000 and Pune—263.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who visited flood-affected district of Ratnagiri, said merely for the sake of getting some publicity, he would not make any announcement about compensation to the affected people immediately, but would such an announcement after taking stock of the rain-floods situation in the entire State.

“The rain and the consequent floods wreaked havoc in places like Chiplun, Mahad and Khed. The people have suffered huge losses. The state government will do everything to ensure that you are back on your



Army personnel during a rescue operation at a flooded area after rain in Kolhapur

PTI

feet.”

The Chief Minister said he had already spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. “The Centre has promised deployment of more teams of NDRF, Army and Indian Air Force (IAF) to tack-

le the flood in the affected areas in the State. Let’s wait and see as to what kind of assistance we will get from the Centre”.

“Let me complete my on ground assessment first. Then we will sit across, discuss things and make a realistic demand to the Centre...Because of Covid-19 pandemic, the economy is in

TMC praises Cong for supporting Abhishek

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With the Congress airing — a day ahead of the Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s strategic visit to Delhi—an open condemnation of the Narendra Modi Government for hacking senior Trinamool Congress’ MP and Chief Minister’s nephew Abhishek Banerjee’s telephone the State ruling out fit on Sunday showered praises on the Akbar Road saying it was a “positive sign towards a broad based unity against an autocratic rule.”

Even as the pro-Trinamool critics in the State promptly saw in the Congress’ “gesture” early signs of “national unity against Pegasus and all” senior TMC MP Saugato Roy said “we thank the Congress for showing the gesture” at a time when Mamata Banerjee had taken up the cause of uniting all the opposition line under one umbrella.

Another senior Trinamool Rajya Sabha leader Derek O’ Brien re-tweeted a loaded one-liner “Khela Hobey” a slogan that the Trinamool Congress successfully

used in the Bengal Assembly elections under Banerjee and the Chief Minister on her July 21 public rally re-invoked at the national level in her bid to “work in advance and work fast” to unite anti-saffron forces in the country.

Earlier the Congress presented a life-size photograph of junior Banerjee— who is the official number two in the Trinamool line-up—on its social media handle writing “PM Modi took the adage, ‘keep your enemies closer’ a little too far.”

The Congress also wrote that Banerjee was targeted ahead of Bengal Assembly elections “because Government insecurities are endless.” The TMC insiders promptly interpreted the remarks “as dropping sufficient hints of a rapprochement” between the two tri-colour outfits.

On whether the Congress social media “soft corner” for junior Banerjee carried a positive sign for the Trinamool Congress chief who had taken the lead in uniting rest of India against BJP apparently under her leadership, a senior Minister in the State Cabinet

said “Mamata Banerjee has proved her mettle as a national leader and should be allowed to lead the country against the communal forces ... hope all the opposition parties including the Congress and the Left will understand that.”

Congress MP from Bengal Pradip Bhattacharya however refused to see much into the Congress social media “gesture” saying “this are times when the entire country has united against the BJP’s Pegasus conspiracy and Mamata Banerjee is one of them ... so the Congress has shown its support for the cause she like many others have taken up.”

Earlier referring to the Chief Minister’s announcement that she would call an all-India rally of opposition parties at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata Bhattacharya said “She had earlier too called a meeting at Brigade Parade ground and Mallikarjun Kharge had attended that meeting. She is doing that again... However ... all opposition parties under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi should come together to fight against the BJP.”

Engineers, PGs apply for lab assistants’ job in WB

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In what could come as an egg on the face of the ruling Trinamool Congress— credited with introducing a number of pro-people schemes like free ration to free health—which has won the recently concluded Assembly elections by a huge thumping majority qualified engineers and postgraduates have swelled the ranks of 8,000 applicants for the posts of lab assistants popularly called “Doms” in the mortuary parlance.

According to reports about 100 engineers, 500 postgraduates and 2,200 graduates have applied for the job of so-called “lab assistants” in the Forensic Medicine and Toxicology Department of state-owned Nil Ratan Sircar Medical College and Hospital, a senior official said adding out of the total number of applicants 784 people including 84 women had been called for written test scheduled on August 1.

“This is quite surprising because overqualified including engineers, postgraduates and graduates have applied for this post... whereas usually relatives of ‘lab assistants’ who are used to do such jobs only apply for these posts ... This has happened for the first time,” the official said.

The authorities had last December issued a notification seeking application for the post of lab assistants entitled to a monthly remuneration of ₹15,000 per month.

The notification for the job-seekers was put at “at least class 8 pass” who had to be between 18 and 40 years old.

“Several applicants are overqualified for the job. It is quite a shock that engineers, post-graduates and graduates have applied for this post. This has happened for the first time. We generally get applications from people whose family members have been working as ‘dom’, the official added.

When contacted one of these applicants said he had no other option but to apply for the job because he had to take care of his old parents and pay off the loans taken for studying engineering. “I have to pay the loan ... there is no job for me here in Bengal ... I am a mechanical engineer and had been working with a private bank’s insurance department on commission basis ... I earn roughly about ₹8,000 which has further dipped in corona times ... I cannot go to Bangalore or elsewhere leaving my parents ... so I had to apply for the post,” said the candidate.

Another aspirant a postgraduate in Education said he was working in a private school for ₹2,500 per month “but now even that is gone because of on-line classes ... I had been earning some money giving tuitions but that too has been stopped due to pandemic ... There is no hope in getting scanty government jobs which are either sold or get entangled in court cases ... what do I do ... I have to feed my family.”

Kerala doctor has ‘musical solution’ to cancer

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The future cancer hospitals all over the world would feature musical instruments and libraries housing various categories of music instead of high-tech medical gadgets like scanners and radiation therapy machines.

The day is not far off when chemotherapy and radiation would find their way out from cancer clinics across the world. It has been proved that music, let it be western classical, Carnatic or Hindustani, has the potential to cure a series of medical disorders like cancer, epilepsy and even Alzheimer’s disease,” Dr Tara Rajendran, a young medical doctor from Kerala’s Palakkad told The Pioneer.

Fresh from medical school



after completing her MBBS with distinction, Dr Rajendran got an opportunity to study in medical schools of Harvard and Stanford Universities. “Being a Veena exponent, I was

put in the cancer centres of these hospitals where I got hands-on experience in Music Therapy,” said Dr Rajendran who has been giving Veena concerts across Kerala and Tamil Nadu since the age of seven.

Her passion for music and medicine became strong after she watched her grandmother Vijayalakshmi succumbing to blood cancer. “She suffered a lot and was yelling in pain most of the time. But when we played Carnatic Kritis, especially in Raaga Shanmughapriya and

Kalyani, it soothed her emotions to a great extent,” said Dr Rajendran. But how music plays a role in alleviating pain and offering comfort to the patients? “Live music can create a mood of tranquillity an improve the level of comfort. Listening to music while receiving chemotherapy can help patients distract themselves from the discomfort besides assisting them to get through the challenging phase of fear, stress and isolation,” explained Dr Rajendran.

Recognition for her works in Music Therapy came recently when the Journal of the Science of Healing Outcomes, an international peer reviewed medical journal published

“Music and Palliative Care”, a research paper authored by Dr Rajendran.

Prof B M Hegde, who has been awarded Padma Vibhushan by the President of India for his comprehensive contribution to world of medicine and the founder editor-in chief of the journal said that the observations and conclusions by Dr Rajendran are important. “It is going to be the future as conventional medical methods are on their way put,” said Prof Hegde.

Dr Rajendran opined that the National Medical Commission should seriously consider declaring Music Therapy as a diagnostic and curing process like what they have done in USA. “We have a vast repertoire of music in the sub-continent ranging from

Hindustani, Carnatic and even Lok Sangeeth. There were instances when patients undergoing chemotherapy told me that their anxiety, depression and tension reduced by more than 70 per cent when the process was accompanied by Music Therapy. While working in Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, I witnessed music therapists using interventions such as Gato box and Ocean disc for premature babies to stimulate the sound of maternal heartbeats and timbre of the whooshing amniotic fluid as how they would listen within the uterus,” she said.

According to Dr Rajendran, these interventions along with parent-preferred lullabies, positively influenced the infants’ autonomic nervous responses and sucking reflexes.

TN society moves SC, seeks benefits for linguistic minorities in running educational institutes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Tamil Nadu-based educational organisation has moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Centre to issue a notification to identify linguistic minorities, like religious ones, as units for granting benefits in running academic institutions.

Citizens Education Society, which runs schools for Malayalam-speaking linguistic minority students in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, has sought to intervene as a party in a pending PIL on grant of minority benefits to Hindus in 10 states including Punjab and Mizoram.

The apex court, in August last year, had issued notice to

the Centre on a PIL filed by lawyer and BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay seeking directions for framing of guidelines identifying minorities at the state level claiming that the Hindus are in a minority in 10 states and still they cannot avail benefits available to minorities like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in running educational institutions.

“Direct the Respondent-Union of India to issue a notification under 2(f) of National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 notifying linguistic and religious minority communities in respective states as a unit, in conformity with the law declared by this Hon’ble Court in case of in T.M.A. Pai

Foundation ...” the Tamil Nadu-based society said in its plea.

Referring to the constitutional scheme of Article 30, the plea said that it, being the linguistic minority in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, should get the benefits available to religious minorities in these states.

“Article 30 of the Constitution protects the interests of minorities, based on religion as well as language, and inheres in them the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. It is well-settled that Article 30(1) cannot be read in a narrow and pedantic sense and being a fundamental right, it should be given its widest amplitude,” it said.

No fresh Covid case in Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Port Blair: The Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not record any new Covid-19 case in the last 24 hours, a health department official said on Saturday.

The Covid-19 tally in the archipelago remained at 7,525. The Union Territory now has 17 active Covid-19 cases of which 15 are in the South Andaman district and two in the North and Middle Andaman district. The Nicobar district is now Covid-19 free as it has no active case, he said. Two more persons recuperated from Covid-19 during the period, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,379, he said.

The Covid-19 death toll in the archipelago remained at 129 as no fresh fresh death due to the contagion was reported in the last 24 hours. The Andaman and Nicobar administration has so far tested 4,31,486 samples for Covid-19, and the positivity rate stands at 1.75 per cent, the health department official said.

A total of 2,72,312 people have been inoculated so far, of which 1,84,076 have been administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and 88,236 have received both doses, he said, adding that the total population of the union territory is around 4 lakh. **PTI**

Kerala’s Covid toll crosses 16,000-mark

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Covid-19 situation in Kerala continued to be critical on Sunday despite the two-day long total lock down during the weekend. By Sunday evening, the Health Minister’s office said in a release that out of the 1.42 lakh samples tested in the course of the day, 17,466 new persons were diagnosed with Covid-19. The Test Positivity Rate (average) stood at 12.3 per cent.

Though there was a dip in the number of new patients logged on Sunday, the hike in TPR is a cause of concern, according to various doctors working in Government Hospitals in the State. On Sunday, 66 deaths were recorded from various places in Kerala and this took the death toll till date to 16,035.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who used to regularly brief the media every evening at 6 pm has chosen to stay away from briefing the reporters. No reason has been furnished by the Chief Minister’s Office for the cancellation of the media briefing.

Malappuram with 2,684 patients topped the table of 14 districts in the State and was closely followed by Kozhikode (2,379), Thrissur (2,190), Ernakulam (1,687), Palakkad (1,552), Kollam (1,263) and Thiruvananthapuram (1,222).

Gujarat sees 30 Covid-19 cases, 42 recoveries

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat’s Covid-19 tally rose to 8,24,713 as 30 new cases were reported on Sunday, while the toll remained unchanged at 10,076 as no death was reported from the infection during the day, an official said.



A view of the Yamuna river flowing behind the Taj Mahal in Agra on Sunday

The discharge of 42 people from hospitals took the recovery count to 8,14,307, which is 98.74 per cent of the tally, leaving the state with 330 active cases, he said.

Dahod and Surat districts led with six cases each, followed by five in Ahmedabad and four in Vadodara, among other

districts, he added.

A release said 3,22,664 people were vaccinated against Covid-19 on Sunday, taking the total number of doses administered in the state so far to 3,16,30,218.

Neighbouring Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu reported no new cases, recoveries or deaths. Its tally is 10,609, recovery count is 10,560 and the active caseload is 45.

Gujarat’s Covid-19 figures are as follows: Positive cases 8,24,713, new cases 30, death toll 10,076, discharged 8,14,307, active cases 330, people tested so far - figures not released.

CM Yogi reviews healthcare facilities in Ayodhya

PNS ■ AYODHYA

Ensuring presence of adequate medical resources to fight the anticipated third wave of Covid-19 with complete preparedness, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday reviewed the medical and health facilities in Ayodhya.

The chief minister visited the Raja Dashrath Medical College in Ayodhya and took stock of the facilities available there for treatment of Covid-19 patients. He also went for on-ground inspection of the recently installed oxygen plant and reviewed the other healthcare facilities available for Covid-19 patients.

To firm up preventive measures in view of the anticipated third wave, the Chief Minister also asked the district administration to formulate a detailed action plan to check any further spread of the novel coronavirus.

“Medical colleges are important institutions for better, superior and special healthcare facilities. But in the last 70 years, the state had only 12 medical colleges. The present government either built or sanctioned 32 medical colleges,” the Chief Minister said while addressing the media,

adding that there were no medical colleges in 16 districts.

“We are planning to set up medical colleges in these districts on a public-private partnership (PPP) model before December,” he said. Yogi Adityanath reiterated the importance of double masking, distancing and hand hygiene and said that the masks should seal the air passage around the nose and mouth for proper protection.

Committed to strengthening the existing and expanding the health and medical infrastructure in the state, the chief minister said, “UP has made rampant progress from getting the first Covid test conducted from the lab at National Institute of Virology in Pune in 2020 to becoming the leader by conducting maximum number of Covid tests.”

Emphasising that testing was the backbone for curbing the transmission of coronavirus as it helped in early detection of cases, their isolation and contact tracing, the chief minister asserted that the state government had been making its best efforts to expand the facilities to further enlarge the testing capacity which was already now nearly four lakh tests a day.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

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 estimated 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.

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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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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 Princeton, 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.

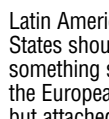


Olympic silver medallist
— Saikhon Mirabai Chanu



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 Nadda



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 Harsha empires, the Cheras, 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

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.

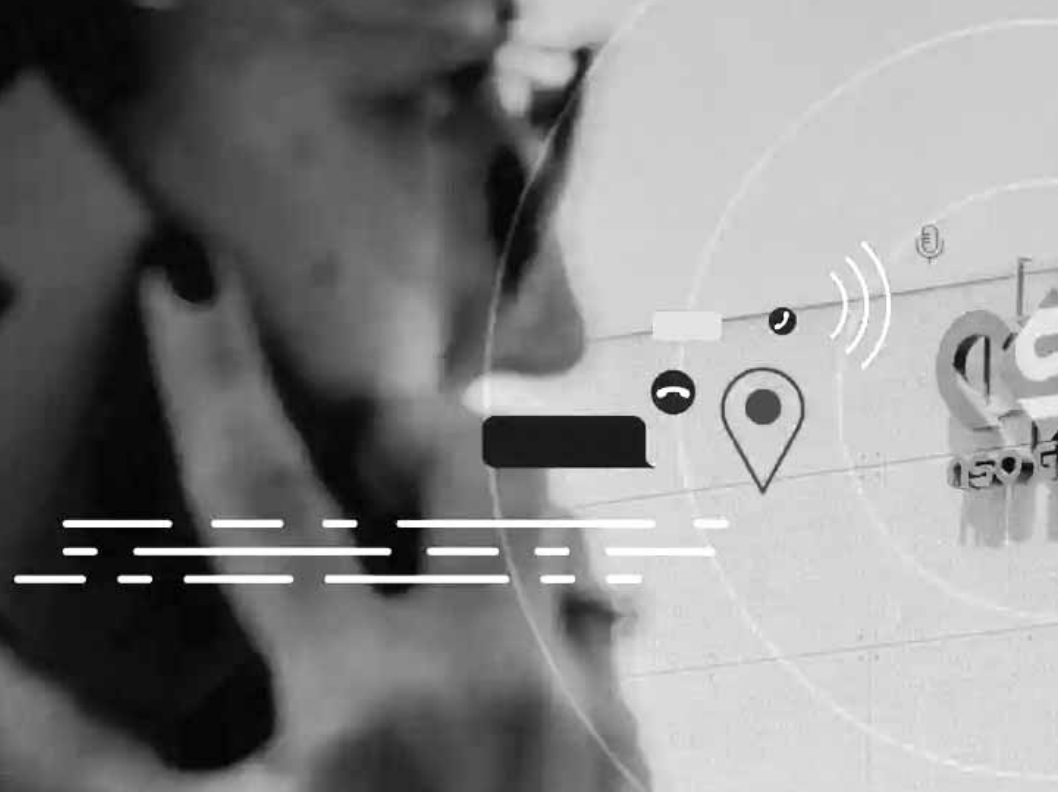
India is a democratic nation. At the heart of democracy are its people. When incidents like this (Pegasus snooping) happen, it infringes on the basic fundamental rights of the citizens. The right to privacy, though not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, is inherent under various provisions of 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 of 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

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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.

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 rising and hospitalizations are spiking.

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 Transshipment Regulations, 2018, is that the existing licenses/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 varsity.

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 Cover 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.

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 countrys 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 Q11 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 67per 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

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.

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 amid 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, Aglawewadi, Burangewadi, Bopsewadi, Khilarwadi, Nijaampur, Hanmantgaon and Tarangewadi. Apart from these villages, the Gram Panchayats of Jahanpura in Baarshi Block, Khed in North Solapur Block, Bople 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



tance 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 Belvarkar, 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 Fhallon Ware-Gilmore, 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.



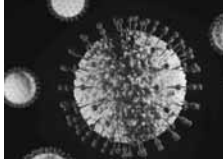
CUT DOWN STEROIDS TO AVOID BONE DEATH

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.





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-

11, 11-5, 11-7 in a second round match that lasted 57 minutes.

She meets Austria's Sofia Polcanova on Monday for a place in the round of 16. If Manika manages another upset, it will be a significant achievement for the Indian in her second Olympics.

Earlier, world number 38 Sathiyam had a commanding 3-1 lead but lost four games in a row to lose 3-4 to lower-ranked Lam from Hong Kong.

"It is heartbreaking but I will come back stronger. I was playing really well initially. I was aggressive and serving well but after the fourth game he started to slow down the pace and started receiving better," Sathian said.

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 what ever 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 bower, 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-

making unforced errors. Sindhu entered the break with 11-5 lead.

Soon, Sindhu was on a roll, grabbing 13 straight points. The Indian used her trademark straight and cross court smashes and drops to trouble the Israeli, who couldn't utilise the few opportunities that came her way.

Sindhu sealed the first game in her favour when Polikarpova missed a shot.

Polikarpova, who was playing with a strapped knee, continued to struggle with her strokes as Sindhu opened up a 9-3 lead in the second game and then entered the mid-interval with a massive seven-point advantage.

It was business as well after the break, with Sindhu riding on the errors of her opponent.

Another wide shot from Polikarpova gave Sindhu 13 match points. The Indian squandered three of them before Polikarpova once again sent the shuttle out to end the match.

On her approach to playing a lower-ranked opponent, Sindhu said: "I think it's important to make sure that you play all of your strokes and get used to them."

"All of a sudden if you're playing with a higher-ranked player or a stronger opponent, it's not that you can just play that type of strokes, it's important to get used to the situations also."

'WORK ON AGGRESSION'

In the post match Press conference Sindhu said she has worked on her aggression in the past five years and promised a very 'different' version of herself after making a winning start.

"Mentally, physically and experience-wise, a lot has changed. Coming to (Tokyo) 2020 is completely different; back then there were no expectations," the reigning world champion said.

"I know that I have worked hard and given all my heart all of these years and I think it's time to show now. I've been working on my aggression and my technique and you will definitely see a different Sindhu."

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.

Barty exits



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

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.

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.

PTI

Surya takes India to 164-5

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Suryakumar Yadav continued this 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 Chammaras (2/24 in 4 overs) outwinger 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