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CHANDIGARH, MONDAY JUNE 21 2021; PAGES 12-22



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Eyes on Gupkar Alliance ahead of all-party meet

June 24 talks Centre's bid for political outreach

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

As eyes are set on the formal response of the People's Alliance For Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) to the invitation from Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, to attend the all-party meet convened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on June 24.

The Prime Minister's meeting on June 24 with the political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is expected to be about the delimitation exercise. The meeting is an attempt by the Centre to seek political validation of the administrative exercise which started in the first week of June. But Kashmiri leaders have their own agenda for initiating the talks.

"We have stressed for a collective fight and hence the PAGD will send two representatives to the meeting in New Delhi," a news channel quoted a senior leader, who attended the meeting, as saying.



"Mehbooba has not decided to boycott the meeting. We are in favour of a political process but it's a collective fight and hence we will all meet to decide who all should represent us in the meeting and convey the aspirations of the people," the senior leader stressed on the condition of anonymity.

Modi brainstorms with core team, fuels rejig

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of an expected Cabinet reshuffle and the June 24 Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) political outreach by the Central Government aimed at restarting the electoral process in the Union Territory (UT), a high-level ministerial meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Delimitation panel may meet DCs virtually

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid speculations of an Assembly elections in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), the Delimitation Commission is expected to hold a virtual meet in the next few days with all Deputy Commissioners to discuss various inputs on geographical features of constituencies and the suggestions made by them. Delimitation involves redrawing the boundaries of Assembly and Lok

Sabha constituencies in a State or Union Territory.

Sources said that the Delimitation Commission is likely to visit J&K soon to begin the delimitation exercise which was on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The commission had recently sought data from all Deputy Commissioners on the area of existing constituencies, including geography and facilities available, and had asked them for their suggestions to make them more 'geographically compact'.

Having received the data and suggestions, the commission has decided to hold a virtual meeting with the DCs to take forward the matter.

"As far as possible, the constituency should be fully geographically compact," sources said. After the delimitation exercise, the number of Assembly seats in J&K will go up from 83 to 90. Twenty-four seats of the Assembly continue to remain vacant as they fall under Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir (PoK).

Cheers! Bars to reopen with 50% capacity

DDMA allows opening of public parks too

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The bars in Delhi will be allowed to reopen with 50 per cent seating capacity from Monday. These bars will function from 12 pm to 10 pm. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Sunday released the order allowing public parks and gardens also to reopen for public.

As per the order, the owners of restaurants and bars will be responsible for strict implementation of Covid safety measures and guidelines.

While the parks and gardens will also be opened, the Resident Welfare Association (RWAs) will have to ensure the visitors follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. "Public parks, gardens and golf clubs will be reopened and outdoor yoga activities will also be allowed," the DDMA stated in its order.

Prohibited activities and services, including schools, colleges and educational institutions, cinemas, gyms, spas, all kinds of political, social, cultural, religious gatherings among others, will remain closed till further orders or 5 am on June 28. The lockdown was imposed in Delhi amid a



surge in second wave of Covid-19 on April 19.

Many restrictions have been lifted in a phased manner with improvement in the Covid situation, starting with allow-

Covid-19 IN INDIA	
TOTAL CASES:	2,99,33,497 (+52,092)
DEATHS:	3,88,136 (+1,395)
RECOVERED:	2,88,34,524 (+75,962)
ACTIVE:	6,99,062
MAHA:	58,72,781 (+9,361)
K'TAKA:	28,06,453 (+4,517)
KERALA:	28,09,395 (+11,647)
TN:	24,22,497 (+7,817)
DELHI:	14,32,292 (+124)

India hits back at UN for criticising new IT rules

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The United Nations Special Rapporteurs have criticised the new Information Technology (IT) rules, prompting a strong rebuttal from the Government. In its letter dated June 11, UN special rapporteurs on right to freedom of opinion, peaceful assembly, and privacy said India's Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, in their current form, do not conform with international human rights norms.

The seven-page communication expressed concerns on various other aspects of the IT rules, and asked the Government for a response. The letter is authored by Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Clement Nyauyetezi Vule, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and Joseph Cannataci, Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy.

The UN special rapporteurs in its letter said India's new IT Rules are in violation of rules laid down in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a key international human rights treaty.

CAPSULE

LAKSHADWEEP ADMIN SEKS CHANGE IN HC

Kochi/New Delhi: The Lakshadweep administration, which has been facing widespread protests from the islands' people over some of its policies, has mooted a proposal to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court.

KERALA GOLD: NOTICE ISSUED TO 53 PEOPLE

Kochi: The Customs notice to the Kerala gold smuggling case has issued show-cause notices to 53 people including prime accused Swapna Suresh.

CAN'T PAY ₹4L EX-GRATIA TO VICTIMS: CENTRE TO SC

New Delhi: The Centre has told the Supreme Court that ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh cannot be paid to the families of those who have died of Covid-19 as it is beyond fiscal affordability and the finances of Central and State Governments are under severe strain.

ASSAM AMONG TOP 5 IN SDG INDIA INDEX

Guwahati: Assam's Environment and Forest Department has emerged as a front-runner in the Life on Land category of the 2020 edition of the Niti Aayog's Sustainable Development Goal India Index.

Sore Soren returns to Ranchi after 4-day wait

Gandhis give time to Stalin as Hemant simmers

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

After Punjab and Rajasthan, a trouble is brewing in the JMM-Congress Party-led Government in Jharkhand. Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who camped for four days in Delhi, could not get an audience from either Congress chief Sonia Gandhi or senior leader Rahul Gandhi. The Gandhis, in between, however, found the time to meet the new Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, whose DMK is an ally of the Congress in the southern State.

"Hemant returned to Ranchi on Saturday. He had been repeatedly making attempts to call on Sonia and Rahul but failed. The snub has not gone down well with the JMM. Moreover, their meeting with Stalin has only rubbed salt to the wound," sources said.



Filling up the vacant Cabinet berth, a possible reshuffle in the Council of Ministers and appointments to corporations among others were high on Soren's agenda, sources said.

"Such developments do not augur well for the coalition when there has always been an air of mistrust among the two major coalition partners. Particularly, given the buzz of a possible BJP-JMM alliance, that keeps the Congress and the RJD on their toes. Or for that matter, the BJP getting a sizeable MLAs of the JMM and the Congress to resign just as it did in several States," they added.

An AICC leader, however, asserted, "Sonia could not meet Hemant as she was too busy the entire week due to developments in Punjab, Rajasthan and Maharashtra as well. There is no problem in the Jharkhand coalition." The Congress is saddled with the power tussles between Sachin Pilot and Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan and Navjot Singh Sidhu and Amarinder Singh in Punjab.

Jharkhand Congress chief and Finance Minister in Hemant's Government, Rameshwar Oraon, too, had come to Delhi to discuss 'party affairs' besides appointments in corporations and commissions etc. under the State Government. Both Hemant and Oraon would have participated in the meeting with the Congress top brass to discuss all the pending issues.

Both the JMM and the Congress have staked claim to the vacant 12th berth in the Soren Cabinet. Besides the CM, the JMM has five Ministers while the Congress has four and other ally RJD one ministerial berth.

Millions to bend, stretch on Yoga Day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From political personalities to commoners, from Bollywood celebrities to jawans guarding India's borders, people from all walks of life will stretch and bend in their homes, parks and grounds to mark the International Yoga Day on June 21, which will be celebrated amid the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic for the second year in a row.

The Union Ayush Ministry, which is the nodal Ministry for International Day of Yoga (IDY), said in a statement that in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictions on congregational activities, the lead event of the day will be a televised programme. The highlight of course will be Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation. This year's theme is 'Yoga for Wellness: The Prime



Two girls perform yoga near Taj Mahal ahead of the International Yoga Day in Agra on Sunday. PTI

Minister tweeted, "Tomorrow, June 21, we will mark the seventh Yoga Day. The theme this year is 'Yoga For Wellness', which focuses on Yoga for physical and mental well-being."

Scheduled to start at 6.30

am on all Doordarshan channels on Monday, the event will also include an address by Minister of State for Ayush Kiren Rijju and a live Yoga demonstration by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, the Ministry said in a statement.

With the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbating psychological suffering and mental health problems, many people across the world and in India have been embracing Yoga to stay healthy and to fight isolation and depression.

Indian Embassies in various countries also held events for the D-Day. For instance, over 100 Chinese Yoga enthusiasts took part in an event organised by the Indian Embassy here on Sunday to celebrate the ancient Indian science ahead of the International Yoga Day on June 21.

Similarly, the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, Thailand and South Korea were among those who observed the International Yoga Day on Sunday. Sprinter Usain Bolt from Jamaica too in his tweet on social media wished healthy and peaceful living to all for the D-Day.

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हरि पत आरुके सान्ध

JOBS TO CONGRESS MLAs' SONS

PUNJAB MINISTERS, MPS BACK CABINET DECISION

► **SAV MANY TERRORIST-AFFECTED FAMILIES HAVE BEEN GIVEN PREMIER CIVIL SERVICES JOBS IN THE PAST**
 ► **UNFAIR TO DISCRIMINATE SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE WARDS OF MLAs'**

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

amidst the growing resentment within the party over the Punjab Cabinet's decision to grant Government jobs to two Congress MLAs' sons on compassionate grounds, no less than nine Cabinet Ministers, four MPs, and five MLAs came out in open support of the Government's move.

A joint statement was issued by over a dozen Ministers and parliamentarians, besides another statement by five Congress MLAs from

Ludhiana announcing their support to the Cabinet's decision to appoint the sons of sitting MLAs Fatehjung Singh Bajwa and Rakesh Pandey as Punjab Police Inspector and Naib Tehsildar respectively.

► Punjab Mandi Board chairman and veteran Congress leader Lal Singh also came out strongly in support of the Cabinet's decision and advised all political leaders of the Congress to refrain from making any statement that could potentially weaken the party.

"The collective decision of the Cabinet to give government jobs to sons of sitting MLAs is correct and in line with appointments given to similarly situated persons in the past," said the Ministers and MPs extending their support to the decision. They include Ministers — Rana Gurmeet Singh Sodhi, Sadhu Singh Dharamsot, Vijay Inder Singla, Aruna Chaudhary,

Sunder Sham Arora, Gurpreet Singh Kangar, Balbir Singh Sidhu, OP Soni, Bharat Bhushan Ashu; and MPs Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Raveet Singh Bittu, Jasbir Singh Dimpia and Mohammad Saifuddin.

On Friday, the Punjab Government had decided to appoint the sons of two Congress MLAs as a police inspector and a naib tehsildar as a "special case". The State Government claimed that the decision was taken on compassionate grounds, as a mark of recognition to the "sacrifices" made by their grandfathers who were killed during the height of militancy in Punjab.

Lashing out at the critics for failing to appreciate the state policy that has been in force for many years now, they said that the Congress Government has accorded top priority to "Ghar Ghar Rozgar" persons, rape victims and the families of 1984 riot victims,

ment for about 17.60 lakh youth out of which 62,743 persons have been provided government jobs, 9.97 lakh persons have been assisted in self-employment and 7,01,804 private sector jobs have been facilitated.

The Government has already initiated the process for filling up an additional one lakh government jobs, and this process shall continue until such and the Government shall leave no stone unturned in assisting every unemployed youth in the State, they added.

It was also pointed out that Punjab had always been a welfare state and it has been giving jobs to various classes of persons keeping in view the hardship faced by them as a result of unforeseen and tragic circumstances. Apart from terrorist-affected families, jobs and/or financial assistance has been given to various categories of persons, rape victims and the families of 1984 riot victims,

Defence Personnel killed in action and Government Employees who die in harness to name a few, they added.

Giving details of appointments given in the past to families of terrorist-affected victims, it was pointed out that there are at present, at least five such officers in the IAS cadre of Punjab who had originally been appointed to the Punjab Civil Service (Executive) on these grounds. "The singular case of the Department of Excise and Taxation where 108 jobs, including two ETOs, have been given to the victims on these grounds. Similarly, six terrorist victims had been appointed as Naib Tehsildar and many other victims have been given significant appointments (DSP, Inspector, etc) in other Departments and continue to serve on very senior positions in the State," they added.

The leaders went on to add that the people, critical of the move, have lost sight of the fact that a job of DSP was given to the grandson of former Chief

Minister Beant Singh, who was assassinated by terrorists. A job of Naib Tehsildar was similarly given to the wife of late MLA Baldev Singh.

Citing additional examples, they said that pursuant to the assassination of DIG AS Atwal, his wife was appointed to the PCS (Executive) and subsequently even his son was given a job of Inspector in the Punjab Police.

"In the present case, Fatehjung Singh Bajwa was a minor when the tragic incident occurred, in which he lost his father, while Rakesh Pandey was incapacitated by an accident which did not allow him to take up employment under the State Government. As a result, it is perfectly justified that their children should be offered these jobs," they argued.

It may be recalled that the Chief Minister had also defended the decision of the Cabinet by observing that one

cannot allow such sacrifices to go waste while reiterating that the Punjab Government will continue to recognize each and every contribution to the state's peace and harmony.

Also defending the Cabinet's move, five senior Congress MLAs from Ludhiana said that the decision has been taken as per policy under which kids of the terrorist-affected families, freedom fighters, and those who give their lives for the country get jobs in Punjab.

Lashing out at opposition parties for making hue and cry unnecessarily, the legislators — Kuldeep Singh Vaid, Balwinder Singh Laddi, Santokh Singh Bhalaiapur, Balwinder Singh Dhalival, and Satkar Kaur — in a joint statement said that the Government is duty-bound to take care of the families of those who got martyrdom for safeguarding peace and national harmony of the country.

ANOTHER MLA JOINS CHORUS AGAINST PUNJAB CABINET DECISION

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

After Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar asked Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh to review the decision to give government jobs to the sons of two Congress MLAs while opposing the move, one more party MLA Pargat Singh joined the chorus of the party leaders against the decision on Sunday.

Besides Jakhar, three Congress MLAs — Amarinder Singh Raju, Warring, Kuljit Singh Nagra, Rajat Kamal —

have criticized their own party's government over the move. Also, five Ministers — Charanjeet Singh Chami, Tript Charanjot Singh Bajwa, Sukhinder Singh Sarkaria, Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, and Razia Sultana — had reportedly opposed the decision.

Pargat Singh, an MLA representing Jalandhar Cantonment and a vocal critic of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, said that such decisions could affect the Congress Government's perception a year before assembly elections.

"I don't know on what parameters the sons of MLAs have been chosen for the jobs. Clearly, they have not been chosen on compassionate grounds. I'm surprised what kind of perception we want to create. I thank the five ministers who spoke up. Despite the opposition of five ministers, the Chief Minister is siding with these two MLAs. If this is not horse-trading what else is it? The message is clear, where the Chief Minister is willing, he will do what he wants, even if five ministers oppose it," he said.

Milkha Singh: The 'Flying Sikh' no one could catch

NISHU MAHAJAN ■ CHANDIGARH

The track, to me, was like an open book, in which I could read the meaning and purpose of life. I never felt I would the sanctum sanctorum in a temple, where the deity resided and before whom I would humbly prostrate myself as a devotee... Running had thus become my God, my religion and my beloved."

"This famous quote from "The Race of My Life", an autobiography of legendary athlete Milkha Singh aptly sums up his dedication and passion for running that made him one of the greatest athletes of all time.

The ace sprinter, who was born in 1932 in undivided India, survived some hard-fought battles on both personal and professional fronts before his body lost the fight against Covid-19 on June 18 after a month-long struggle. His wife, Nirmal Kaur (85), former India women's volleyball captain had died due to Covid-19 on June 13.

Married for 58 years, Chandigarh's evergreen couple are survived by their son, renowned professional golfer Jeev Milkha Singh, and three daughters.

Famously known as 'The Flying Sikh', Milkha Singh had contrived the deadly virus last month and his first response to the media after testing positive was "I am 91... I will come out of it in flying colours and beat this virus in no time. I have been keeping

indoors except for morning jogging and exercise. I am in high spirits."

Perhaps, this is how the legend of the Flying Sikh will reverberate for generations to come.

Singh, who settled with his wife in Chandigarh in the 1960s was among the most prominent personalities of the city. The couple worked together in the Punjab Sports Department till 1980s and was a regular at the Chandigarh Golf Course to watch their son play there. In fact, Milkha Singh was himself a golf aficionado and used to play with many prominent personalities including politicians and CCG.

After the news of the death of the legendary athlete, many politicians and other personalities from the region had reached his residence in Sector 8 here to pay their tribute. The same residence had once become a hotspot, with people waiting outside to catch a glimpse of him after the release of blockbuster biopic on his life "Bhaag Milkha Bhaag".

"He (Milkha) fought hard but God has his ways and it was perhaps true love and companionship that both our mother Nirmal ji and now Dad have passed away in a matter of five days," a statement from the family said.

Milkha Singh, who missed an Olympic medal by a whisker in 1960, had set a new dawn in the country with a national record in 400m race that remained untouched for almost 38 years. Despite finishing fourth at the Olympic event,



Singh became a sporting icon who, have lost sight of the fact that a job of DSP was given to the grandson of former Chief

Commonwealth games in 1958 that catapulted him to fame. Milkha won India's first individual Gold medal at these games, a record that stood with him for over five decades.

With a motto "Don't stop till you drop" during his training, Milkha soon became Asia's best and received several accolades during his career as an athlete.

His visit to Pakistan in 1960 remains another turning point in his life when the Pakistan President General Ayub Khan anointed Milkha the 'Flying Sikh' after he outran Pakistani Abdul Khaliq before the Rome Olympics. Haunted by the bitter memories of partition, Milkha had initially refused to go to Pakistan but was persuaded by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to face his demons.

Milkha's pinnacle of glory came when he participated in the 400-meters race at the 1960's Olympic Games. Finishing the 400m final in 45.6 seconds, he had finished at fourth spot, missing a Bronze medal by just 0.1 seconds.

Even though he could not bring home an Olympic medal, Singh had become the only Indian to have broken an Olympics track record in 1960 and the event which made the nation glued to their radio sets later inspired many to take up sprinting to become the next Milkha Singh.

"The one medal I had yearned for throughout my career had just slipped through

my fingers because of one small error of judgement," Singh had written in his autobiography recalling how he had lost steam short of the finishing line.

From a bloody partition to a lost childhood, hard work victories to an unforgettable heart-break at Olympics, the nonagenarian saw it all in his life.

Before his retirement, the legendary athlete became a four-time Asian Games Gold medalist and the 1958 Commonwealth Games champion.

Milkha was briefly imprisoned at Tihar jail, for travelling on a train without a ticket and was bailed out by his sister, who sold her jewellery to obtain his release.

The news of his death on June 18 brought an outpouring of mourning and remembrance in the country. From President to Prime Minister, Governors to Chief Ministers, sporting personalities to actors, all took to social media platforms to mourn the death of the sporting superstar.

For many, the running legend Milkha Singh remains the best ever to grace the sport and he has left behind a legacy and influence that will see him live forever.

The Flying Sikh, whose inspiring story began from the ashes of a violent partition, wanted people to derive inspiration from the famous quote "Destroy your entire existence if you want to reach the zenith. Cos a seed has to become one with the dust to sprout and blossom into a flower."

Students to get extra marks for nurturing saplings in Haryana: Khattar



Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar enjoying a jet ski ride at Tikkar Taal in Panchkula on Sunday. Anillesh Kumar | Pioneer

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday announced a new policy in which extra marks will be given to those students who will cater and nurture saplings from class 8th to class 12.

The announcement was made by the Chief Minister during the inauguration of Panchkarma Wellness Centre, located in panoramic view of Nature Camp Thapli and Nature Trails of Morni hills.

The Chief Minister also digitally laid the foundation stone of Nakshatra Vatika, Navgrah Vatika and Rashi Van, collectively known as Antriksh Van.

Khattar said that the state already has 23 Panchkarma Centres and the 24th such Centre has been inaugurated today. 500 Yogshalas and Vyayamshalas are functional in the state and the government aims to open more Panchkarma Centres, he said.

The state also has set a target of planting three crore saplings in near future, he added.

Khattar said that with the integrated development plan of Panchkula and its neighbouring areas, the local people will get numerous employment opportunities.

He elaborated that Panchkarma is a traditional Ayurvedic process of detoxification, restoring youthfulness with the help of medicated oils.

This Centre is a unique gift to the people and is being run in association with Forest Department and AYUSH Department, he said.

Laying the foundation stone of Nakshatra Vatika, Rashi Van, Sugandh Vatika, the Chief Minister said these Vatikas will be developed in government forest near village Masjidwala in Panchkula. During 2021 Nakshatra Vatika will be developed on ten acres, Sugandh and Rashi van will be raised on five acres each.

He informed that eleven nature trails have also been developed by Forest Department in Morni hills under Panchkula integrated development Project. The local youths will act as guides and will explain about local culture and traditions and also about the flora and fauna of the area, he added.

PARAGLIDING CLUB TO BE NAMED AFTER MILKHA SINGH

The Chief Minister said that the youth from the neighbouring areas will be given training for paragliding and a club would be formed to conduct these activities in Morni Hills. It will be named after legendary athlete late Milkha Singh.

He said that Morni would prove to be a very suitable place for paragliding.

He further said that a tourism information centre and Yatri Nivas will be set up in Panchkula. Five buses will be deployed for Panchkula Darshan.

The Chief Minister said that the use of hot air balloons would also be started in Pinjore.

Yoga For Wellness

International Yoga Day

State-Level Programme in Haryana

Date - 21st June, 2021 | Time - 6:30 am Onwards

Following the Corona safety guidelines, under the joint aegis of AYUSH Department and Haryana Yoga Commission

- Programmes will be organized at 1100 places in all the districts of Haryana.
- 50 programmes will be organized in each district and maximum 50 yoga sadhak will be able to attend each programme.

Practice yoga everyday
Live your life in healthy way
Yoga is the best key
To make the State disease free

- Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

All the people of the State, join the mentioned link to watch the live broadcast of this programme

YouTube <https://youtu.be/AjvpVt3movU>

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana | www.prharyana.gov.in | @Crestory | @DiparHaryana

'Take pride in wearing CRPF combat uniform'



RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The CRPF headquarters has issued a directive to all the formations across the country to take pride in wearing the paramilitary's khaki/combata pattern uniform. The move comes after CRPF chief Kuldip Singh took exception to a number of officers and men wearing the CoBRA pattern fatigue while deployed in Jammu and Kashmir.

Despite repeated reminders for following the uniform rules, even senior officials have been flouting the norms in the Valley.

"During the visit to operational units in Jammu and Kashmir, the DG, CRPF observed that in spite of the instructions, some officers/men are still wearing CoBRA pattern of combat uniform. It is once again reiterated that we

need to take pride in wearing CRPF pattern uniform," an official said, quoting the circular sent recently across the formations.

The official further said, "The competent authority has desired that all officers/men including QATs/CTTs to wear only prescribed pattern khaki/combata uniforms as applicable in the area."

While QAT refers to Quick Action Teams, the CTI implies Counter-Terrorism Team.

Earlier, similar instructions were issued on April 16 and April 19 this year underscoring the need to adhere to the uniform rules.

In the circular issued on April 16, the DG's office had said, "Competent authority has observed that officers are exhibiting complacency towards their uniform. Uniform is a matter of pride and officers must have an

exemplary turn-out at all times. Commandants and senior officers should not hesitate to point out deficiencies. Henceforth, please ensure that officers and the men they command are smartly turned out." It called for a strict compliance of the order.

Likewise, in a separate letter on April 19, the Force reiterated the importance of wearing proper uniform.

Combata Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is a specialized anti-Naxal force within the overall command of the CRPF.

The CRPF was raised in 1939 but despite being in existence for over 80 years, the paramilitary does not have a patented pattern for uniform. Besides the CoBRA, the Rapid Action Force (RAF) also has a distinctive pattern of fatigue. The RAF uniform pattern has been copied by the West Bengal

police and the disruptive pattern of the CoBRA uniform has been adopted by several state police forces in absence of any patents for these uniforms.

Despite being the biggest paramilitary with lead roles in various operational theatres, the provisioning directorate has not been able to properly address the continuity and cohesion factor that is instilled through a consistent pattern of uniform.

A senior official said that during the entire winter season every year, the CRPF has to rely on the Jammu and Kashmir Police pattern of jacket in the absence of any authorised pattern of winter jackets (angola dark shade) of its own.

During various official meetings, even the senior officers have been found asking the delegates to wear the JKP pattern of winter jacket to maintain uniformity.

It is unfortunate that even the police forces are having better and established dress codes and the lead paramilitary force like CRPF lacks any coherent uniform which is so important for inculcating discipline in the ranks and imparting an unique identity," the official added.

During the last 17 years, the CRPF uniform has been changed thrice and the fatigue in vogue currently was introduced during the then paramilitary chief K Vijay Kumar in 2007.

This combat pattern uniform has bright white patches which could give a distinctive advantage to the ultras during operations in various theatres as they may not be so effective in camouflage.

"Frequent changes in the uniform pattern disrupts continuity in outlook and leads to lack of cohesive continuum with regard to the image of the force," the official added.

₹4L compensation to Covid-19 victims not feasible: Centre to SC

New Delhi: The Centre has told the Supreme Court that ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh cannot be paid to the families of those who have died of Covid-19 as it is beyond fiscal affordability and the finances of central and state governments are under severe strain.

In an affidavit filed before the top court, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the Centre submitted that it has by way of "Minimum Standard Relief", under section 12 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, taken several steps providing for substantial and speedy measures by way of increase in health, infrastructure, ensuring food safety to every citizen.

"The prayer of the petitioner for payment of ex-gratia to all deceased persons due to Covid-19 is beyond the fiscal affordability of the state governments. Already the finances of state governments and the central government are under severe strain due to the reduction in tax revenues and increase in health expenses on account of the pandemic.

"Thus, utilisation of scarce resources for giving ex-gratia may have unfortunate consequences of affecting the pandemic response and health expenditure in other aspects and hence cause more damage than good. It is an unfortunate but important fact that the resources of the governments have limits and any additional burden through ex-gratia will reduce the funds available for other health and welfare schemes," the affidavit filed by the Centre said.



It further submitted that under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 12, the "National Authority" is empowered to recommend guidelines for the minimum standards of relief, including ex-gratia assistance and the function entrusted to the authority by the law passed by the Parliament.

"It is well settled through numerous judgements of the Supreme Court that this is a matter which should be performed by the authority, to whom it has been entrusted and not one where the Court will substitute its own judgment for the decision to be

taken by the Executive. "Any attempt to second guess may create unintended and unfortunate constitutional and administrative ramifications. It may also be noted that the term 'ex-gratia' itself connotes that the amount is not based on legal entitlement," the affidavit stated.

The Centre told the apex court that it is wrong to state that the help can be provided only through ex-gratia assistance as "it would be a rather pedantic and narrow approach". "A broader approach, which involves health interventions, social protection, and economic recovery for the

affected communities, would be a more prudent, responsible, and sustainable approach. Globally, the governments in other countries too have followed this approach, and have announced interventions that provide a fiscal stimulus. Government of India has followed a similar approach," it said.

Earlier, on June 11, the Centre told the top court that issues raised in the pleas, seeking directions for ex-gratia compensation of ₹40,000 to the families of those who have died of Covid-19, are 'genuine' and are under consideration of the government. PTI

Centre lost sense of responsibility towards people: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged the Centre has lost all sense of balance and responsibility towards people. The Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said, "Power-drunk Modi government has lost all sense of balance and responsibility towards people. In an affidavit to the Supreme Court, the BJP government claims it doesn't have money to pay even ₹4 lakh as ex-gratia compensation to families of Covid victims." Does Modi Govt even feel the pain and suffering? No money for compensation to COVID-19 victim families but Rs 20,000 crore are being spent on Central Vista and a palace for prime minister. And where are the ₹3,89,662 crore collected in the year 2020-21 from the loot in prices of petrol and diesel?" he asked in another tweet.

Nadda asks party workers to focus on Covid-related works

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping an eye on the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and expected third wave in the country, BJP national president J P Nadda on Sunday reviewed the progress of party's work on the ground towards helping out those affected by the virulent second wave of the Coronavirus infection.

In the backdrop of lives lost due to the pandemic across the country and large-scale unemployment following the lockdown, the BJP has reassessed its approach and asked its central and state ministers, MPs and MLAs to personally focus on Covid-19-related work in their respective areas and mitigate impact of the pandemic.

Six States are going to poll next year including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Gujarat.

Nadda will now be meeting ministers every Sunday for the next 6 weeks to bring party work in sync with the government's development and welfare policies, an exercise that party has been doing in the first inning of the Modi



government. The government has recently been criticised by the opposition for being caught off-guard during the second wave of the Covid-19 in April-May, leading to major casualties.

Nadda's meet will also focus on preparations for the third wave of COVID and be prepared with all that necessary to deal with the pandemic.

Nadda assessed the work done under the programmes 'Sewa hi Sangathan' and 'Vaccination Drive' saying, "Today, a review meeting was held with all the national vice presidents of the BJP, state and district level vice presidents, Sangathan drive and other programmes and all partymen are doing

their best under the able guidance of the Prime Minister."

As part of its 'Sewa hi Sangathan', BJP has plans to train a woman and a youth worker in each of two lakh urban neighbourhoods and villages in the country.

The Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry election campaigns had invited public criticism of Governments and political leaders who were seen to be busy with 'power games, ignoring the surge in the Covid-19 second wave.

The review meeting by Nadda is an attempt to be alert, this time towards the public commitments, and ward off opposition attack in view of the approaching assembly polls.

Chirag to launch 'aashirvaad yatra' from July 5

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Embroided in a power tussle with his uncle, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) leader Chirag Paswan on Sunday announced an "aashirvaad yatra" from July 5, the birth anniversary of his paternal grandfather, Ram Vilas Paswan, from Hajipur in Bihar. The move is to popular legitimacy in his battle for the party's ownership with the rival faction, headed by his uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras.

The decision, which rivals of "stabbing" him in the back, Paswan made the announcement following a meeting of the LJP national executive which endorsed his leadership and hit out at the faction headed by his paternal uncle for working against the party's constitution.

Paras, in turn, dismissed the meeting as an assembly of "rented crowd" and claimed that it held no legitimacy.

The Election Commission will decide whether his group is the real LJP or whether the Chirag-led faction is right, he told reporters.

The meeting chaired by Chirag also urged the Modi government to confer Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, on Ram Vilas Paswan, a popular Dalit leader from Bihar who died last year.

He claimed that over 90 per cent of the national executive members were at the meeting. The decision to launch the yatra from Hajipur is significant as Paswan's father was elected to the Lok Sabha from there for eight times, and Paras represents the seat now.

Chirag said Hajipur had been "karmabhoomi" of his father and the yatra will roll out across the state and culminate with a meeting of the party's national council.

The fight is all out battle to reclaim his father's legacy with all other party MPs, including his cousin Prince Raj, siding with Paras, Paswan launched an emotional attack on the rival members of his family for not waiting for even a first round of the Supreme Court. Ram Vilas Paswan and stabbing him in the back.



Mawya Surda, a resident of Jammu and Kashmir, has become the first woman fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force (IAF) from Rajouri district. Hailing from the village of Lambari, of Border Town of Nowshera in Rajouri, she was commissioned into the IAF as Flying Officer. Mawya has become the 12th woman officer and first from Rajouri to be inducted as a fighter pilot in the IAF. Pioneer photo

Congress alleges scam in land purchase by Ram Temple Trust



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged a scam in the purchase of land by the Ram Temple Trust in Ayodhya and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Supreme Court to "fulfill their responsibility" by ordering a court-monitored probe to find the truth.

AICC chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged that the "loot" of funds collected in the name of Lord Ram is "continuing" at the hands of BJP leaders in Ayodhya and questioned the "silence" of the prime minister and the Supreme Court.

He alleged that a BJP leader brought 890 metres of land in Ayodhya for Rs 20 lakh in February and sold it to the Temple Trust for a whopping Rs 2.5 crore, making a profit of 1250 per cent in only 79 days. "The Ram Temple is being constructed as per the orders of the Supreme Court. Is it not the responsibility of the

Supreme Court and its judges and the prime minister who formed the Trust, to find out the truth and investigate this.

"Shouldn't the Supreme Court take cognisance of the matter? The Supreme Court should discharge its duty, hold an audit of the entire transactions under its monitoring and punish the culprits," Surjewala said when asked if the party would move the court.

"Now the question is whether the Supreme Court and the prime minister will discharge their duty, we leave it to their discretion," he said.

Surjewala said if it is anyone's responsibility, it is Prime Minister Modi's as he formed this trust.

"It is not only a question of morality, but it is also a question of constitutionality," he said, adding that the ball is now in the prime minister's court on what action he takes.

He said the people will never forgive anyone who loots donations in the name of Lord

Ram. The Congress had earlier alleged that land purchased for Rs 2 crore was sold for Rs 18.5 crore to the Trust "within minutes", as per the land deed registered on March 18 this year, and demanded an SC-monitored probe into the "scam".

BJP leaders had hit out at the Congress, claiming those who were opposed to the Ram temple constructions were now trying to derail it by making false and misleading allegations.

Surjewala said with the "facts" now in the public domain, an investigation is required under the supervision of the Supreme Court to ascertain the truth.

Posing five questions to Prime Minister Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he asked, "What is the reason that Modi-Adityanath ji are completely silent on taking action against the sinners who openly looted funds for the construction of the Ram temple.

Covid-19 cases falling in country, lowest in 81 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Covid-19 cases in India continued to witness a declining trend in the country with 58,419 new cases recorded on Sunday, lowest in the last 81 days. In the same time span, 1,576 fatalities were reported which was lowest in 63 days, according to data released by the Government.

India recorded less than 60,000 new coronavirus cases after 81 days taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 2,98,81,965, while the active cases further reduced to 7,29,243. The death toll climbed to 3,86,713 fatalities.

The active cases further declined to 7,29,243 comprising 2.44 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate improved to 96.27 per cent. A net decline of 30,776 cases has been recorded in the Covid-19 case load in a span of 24 hours.

As many as 18,11,446 tests were conducted on Saturday

taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of Covid-19 in the country to 39,10,19,083.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 3.22 per cent. It has been less than 5 per cent for 13 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate has declined to 3.43 per cent.

Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for the 38th consecutive day. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,87,66,009, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.29 per cent, the data stated.

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 10 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

Covid-induced hyperglycemia patients can look towards ayurveda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Those who survived Covid-19 but are now battling with too much sugar in their blood, a condition called hyperglycemia that is a signature feature of diabetes, can look towards ayurvedic formulations like BGR-34 which are based on natural bioactive compounds with Dipeptidyl-peptidase-4 (DPP-4) inhibitory effects to manage the health issues.

According to a global analysis published in the journal, Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism, at least 14.4 per cent of Covid survivors have reported hyperglycemia causing dysfunctioning of their immune response.

Though a plethora of medicines are available in the market to check hyperglycemia, DPP-4 inhibitors have been found to be most safe to arrest the condition, as per a recent study in Elsevier journal. Symptoms of hyperglycemia are frequent urination, excessive thirst, blurry vision, or unexplained weight

loss. Developed by one of the labs of the Council Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), BGR-34 has natural bioactive compounds of Daruharidra with DPP-4 inhibitory effects. In fact, as per a research published in the Journal of Drug Research, the primary source of DPP-4 inhibitors is the herbal plant Daruharidra.

Dr AKS Rawat, scientist from CSIR's lab National Research Institute of Ayurveda (NRI), Lucknow, which has developed the ayurvedic drug, said, "Because of this property, the Daruharidra was added in the herbal formulation BGR-34."

The scientists had researched extensively to study its efficacy."

Besides Daruharidra, BGR-34 has two other herbal elements that control hyperglycemia. One of these is Gymnemic acids, which again, according to a ChemRxiv journal, controls hyperglycemia in the dia-

betes patients. These are sourced from Gudmar herb plant.

Similarly, the chemical element Trigonoside found in fenugreek, yet another herbal plant, checks high blood sugar levels, as has been detailed in the journal, Environmental Challenge. BGR-34 too, among various other herbal ingredients, contains bioactive compounds of both these medicinal plants.

Dr. Jyotsna Vijaysa and Majeeth, all known for their anti-diabetic properties, are already found in BGR-34. Dr Rawat said that these studies are proof that the herbal formulation is also effective in treatment of hyperglycemia in covid survivors.

While nearly one in six people with diabetes in the world being from India which is reeling under Covid-19, cases of hyperglycemia caused by damage of the pancreatic beta cells, leading to insufficient insulin production, is on increase.

Lakshadweep admin mulls shifting HC jurisdiction from Kerala to K'ntka

PTI ■ KOCHI/ NEW DELHI

The Lakshadweep administration, which has been facing widespread protests from the islands' people over some of its policies, has mooted a proposal to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court, officials said.

The islands' new administrator Praful Khoda Patel. These decisions included revising standard operating procedures for Covid approvals, private behaviour, introduction of the 'goonda act' and demolishing huts of fishermen for widening of roads. Patel, who is the administrator of Daman and Diu, was given the additional charge of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep in the first week of December last year, when the former administrator

Dineshwar Sharma died after a brief illness. This year, as many as 23 applications, including 11 writ petitions, have been filed against the administrator of Lakshadweep and also against the alleged high-handedness of either the police or the local government of the islands. However, for reasons best known to the island's administration, which is under the spotlight over its handling of these issues, it has made a proposal for shifting its legal jurisdiction from the high court of Kerala to Karnataka.

Efforts to seek comments from the advisor of the administrator, A Anbarasa, and Collector of Lakshadweep S Asker Ali did not fructify. Mails to their official e-mails and WhatsApp messages did not elicit any response to a question asking the rationale behind moving of the proposal for shifting of legal jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of a high court can be shifted only through an act of Parliament, according to the law.

"Parliament may by law constitute a high court for a Union Territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a high court for all or any of the purposes of this Constitution," according to Article 241 of the Constitution. Section 4 of the same article mentions that "nothing in this article derogates from the power of Parliament to extend or exclude the jurisdiction of a high court for a state, or from, any Union Territory or part thereof". Talking to PTI over phone, Lok Sabha member Mohammed Faizal P P said, "This was his (Patel) first attempt to shift the judicial jurisdiction from Kerala to Karnataka." "Why has he so particular to transfer it... it's totally a misappropriation of the post. The mother tongue of the people on these islands is Malayalam," he said.

"One should not forget the name of the high court is Kerala and Lakshadweep High Court. This proposal was conceived during his first visit to the islands," Faizal said and asked was there a need for this and how could he justify the proposal. Faizal said there have been 36 administrators before Patel and no one had this kind of an idea. "However, if this proposal will see any light of the day, will we pose it tooth and nail on the floor of Parliament as well as with the judiciary," the Lok Sabha member from Nationalist Congress Party said. He said the Save Lakshadweep Front (SLF) has been making appeals to the Centre for changing the administrator at the earliest.

"The SLF is a non-violent people's movement which has been requesting the central leadership to change Patel with someone who can be people's administrator," he added. Legal experts from Lakshadweep said that Malayalam is the spoken as well as the written language both in Kerala and Lakshadweep and, therefore, the process could be streamlined.

Legal experts from Lakshadweep said that Malayalam is the spoken as well as the written language both in Kerala and Lakshadweep and, therefore, the process could be streamlined.

Kerala Covid situation still critical despite long-drawn lockdowns

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

There is no end in sight for the Covid-19 pandemic in Kerala despite the triple lock downs and double lockdowns slapped on the State since April 2021. The State diagnosed 11,647 new cases on Sunday while 112 persons succumbed to Covid-19 on a single day that took the total fatalities till date to 12,060.

The Test Positivity Rate, according to the press release issued by the Department of Health was 10.84 per cent. But elsewhere in Kerala, there were many regions with higher TPR, according to Government Medical Doctors.

More than 300 local self government bodies in the State have TPR of 30 per cent and high. There were 1,05 lakh patients across the State undergoing treatment for the pandemic.

Though the Government claimed that the situation is under control, the number of ambulances blaring their sirens ferrying critically ill patients from homes to hospitals.

The Government release on Sunday said that 1,07 samples were tested in the last 24 hours. Thiruvananthapuram topped the number of districts with the highest number of patients-1,600 while Ernakulam came close behind with 1,461 cases.

Monday will be crucial for Kerala as the lockdown is being lifted in stages. All liquor outlets have been opened while bars, popularly known as watering holes too have started selling drinks, though in parcel mode. Leaders of Islamic organisations are expected to call on Chief Minister Praful Khoda Patel to seek his permission to get the mosques opened.

KERALA GOLD SMUGGLING CASES

Customs issues notice show-cause notice to 53 people

Kochi: The Customs Department probing the Kerala gold smuggling case has issued show-cause notices to 53 people including prime accused Suman Suresh, suspected gold trader officer M Sivrasankar and two former diplomats in the UAE consulate, Thiruvananthapuram, official sources said here on Sunday.

The notices asking why action under Customs Act should not be taken against them in the smuggling cases were issued by Customs (Preventive) Commissioner Sumit Kumar on June 16. The case against them involves smuggling of a total of 167 kg of gold 23 times including the illegal trade of 30 kilograms gold worth nearly ₹15 crore that was seized by the Customs at Thiruvananthapuram Airport from a diplomatic bag on July 5, 2020, the sources told PTI.

Assam among top 5 in Life on Land category of SDG Index

Guwahati: Assam's Environment and Forest Department has emerged as a front-runner in the Life on Land category of the 2020 edition of the Niti Aayog's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index. Assam ranks fifth in the index for SDGs, launched in 2018, evaluates the progress of states and union territories on social, economic, and environmental parameters. Among the 17 broad-based global SDG goals with 173 indicators, Assam ranks fifth in the category 'Life on Land' with a composite score of 78 per cent, according to the Niti Aayog's report.

Arunachal Pradesh tops the list with a composite score of 93 per cent, followed by Madhya Pradesh 84 per cent, Odisha 83 per cent, and Telangana 81 per cent. To be enlisted in the category of front-runners, a state or Union Territory needs to score in the range of 65-99, including both.

TN limping back to normalcy

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu has succeeded in taming the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the data released Sunday by the Directorate of Preventive Medicine and Health.

The State logged 7, 817 new cases of Covid-19 on Sunday while the fatalities for the day were 182. Across the State, 1,66 lakh persons were subjected to RT-PCR tests. Coimbatore, the industrial capital of Tamil Nadu,

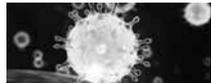
which had showed more than thousand cases on an average per day, registered just 904 new cases on Sunday while neighbouring Erode (870) and Tirunelveli (477) districts too showed that the Covid virus was getting flattened. Chennai logged 455 cases while the death toll rose to 31,197. At the time of going to Press, Tamil Nadu as a whole was in different stages of lifting of curbs, indicating that normal life is returning to the State though with restrictions.

Maha infections rise to 9,361, deaths drop to 605

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Covid-19 deaths in Maharashtra dropped to 605 and the infections rose marginally to 9,361 on Sunday, even as 9,101 patients were discharged after full recovery from various hospitals across the State.

A day after the State logged 8912 infections and 682 pandemic deaths, the infections rose to 9,361, while the daily deaths came down by 77. Of the 9,361 deaths reported on Sunday, 190 were current ones, while 415 were "old unaccounted" fatalities.



With 605 deaths reported on Friday, the Covid-19 toll in the state jumped from 1,17,356 to 1,17,961.

With 9,361 fresh infections, the total infections in the state rose from 59,63,420 to 59,72,781. As 9,101 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the State after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year increased from 57,10,356 to 57,14,547. The recovery rate in the state stood static at 95.76 per cent.

The total 'active cases' in the state dropped from 1,32,595 to 1,32,241. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.97 per cent.

Mumbai recorded 19 deaths and 747 infections. As a result, the Covid-19 toll in the metropolis increased from 15,279 to 15,298, while the infected cases in Mumbai went up from 7,19,266 to 7,20,013.

10 cr people to be vaccinated in UP by Aug-end

PNL ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Government set a target of administering 7 lakh Covid vaccine doses per day which will be ramped up from July 1 and 10 crore people will be jabbed by the end of August.

"The administration has chalked out an action plan and made all arrangements to meet the target smoothly and swiftly," a Government spokesman said. Earlier, the state was administering about 4.5 lakh vaccine doses a day under 'Mission June'.

While chairing a high-level Covid review meeting on Sunday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stated, "The decision of the prime minister to give free vaccines to all citizens above 18 years will boost the vaccination campaign. Taking advantage of the delivery centres and conduct our vaccination campaign to full capacity. Make preparations with a goal to administer 7 lakh doses per day and then ramp it up to around 12 lakh doses from July 1," he said.

In this regard, the CM has ordered to increase the vaccine delivery centres from 6,000 to 10,000. The Health department has directed the district magistrates to make all the arrangements accordingly. The cold chain capacity has been doubled in the state. From 80,000 litres, the capacity has been increased to 2.25 lakh litres to stock up the vaccine doses provided by the Centre, the spokesman said.

He said from July onwards, to meet the target of 10 crore doses, the government will aim to administer nearly 12 lakh doses a day. Therefore, the next task for the state is to ensure that it has enough manpower and vaccine delivery centres. The services of more than 12,000 new nursing students will be taken for the purpose. The UP Government has tweaked its strategy and adopted a 'cluster approach' to ensure maximum vaccination. The entire population will be divided into clusters. Focusing on the villages, more than 97,000 revenue villages of all the development blocks in the state will be divided into clusters. The campaign promising 'ease of vaccination' aims to vaccinate one cluster a week in the village panchayat ghars. The date and place of vaccination will be given to the villagers in advance in the form of 'bulawa parchis'.

In each revenue village of the state, mobilisation teams will be constituted with gram pradhans, lekhpalas, ASHA & Anganwadi workers, teachers of primary schools, panchayat secretaries and Yuvaak Militia Mangal. The SHC said the district teams will start the awareness drive three days prior to the pilot project.



People visit a crowded market near the historic Chaminar after the Telangana Government lifted Covid-induced restrictions, in Hyderabad on Sunday

Amid Cong solo chant, Sena leader Sarnaik asks Uddhav to patch up with BJP

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid the ruling Maharashtra Congress' latest posturing that it wanted to go to the 2024 State Assembly polls, Shiv Sena leader Prapat Sarnaik has shot off a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, saying that the Sena must patch up with its erstwhile alliance partner BJP. In a letter written to Uddhav who is also the Shiv Sena president, three-time MLA from Thane Sarnaik said: "The municipal corporation elections in Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation are being contested by an alliance with the BJP may have ended, but we as the erstwhile alliance leaders are maintaining good relations between us. Instead of letting the relations between us deteriorate further, it is better to come together, we will benefit the party workers like me and the Shiv Sena in the long run. This is what I feel. It is for you to take a proper decision in the matter," Sarnaik said in a letter written to the Chief Minister on June 9. The June 9 letter made its way to the media on Sunday.

that it is because of them that you have become the chief minister. And the Congress is talking about going it alone in the 2024 State Assembly polls. Instead of weaning away leaders and workers from other political parties, the Congress and NCP are trying to break the Shiv Sena. Simultaneously, some MVA Ministers and IAS officers are cosying up to the BJP leaders at the Centre to ensure against the central investigating harassment team," Sarnaik said. "In certain quarters of our party level, the talk that goes around is; the works of the Congress-NCP are being done faster at the State Government level. But, despite having our party's Chief Minister in the state, the Shiv Sena MLAs are not able to get work done in various Government departments. The question that is being asked in the party circles is whether the Shiv Sena broke its alliance with the BJP and formed the MVA to make the Congress-NCP stronger," Sarnaik said.

At a time when the Congress and NCP are trying to weaken our party by weaning away our party workers, I feel personally that it is better that we get closer to Shri Narendra Modi. If the party does that, harassment being meted out to Sena leaders like Prapat Sarnaik, Anil Parab and Ravindra Waikar will stop. This is what the Sena workers feel," the Sena leader said.

Alluding to the bickering within the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), Sarnaik said: "On one hand, setting aside politics you (Uddhav Thackeray) are doing justice as the Chief Minister, while on the other, our alliance partners Congress and NCP have gone to town saying

Malls, restaurants to open in UP from today

PNL ■ LUCKNOW

Restaurants and malls will open from Monday across the state as the government has announced further relaxation, extending the timings of markets from 7 am to 9 pm on weekdays and allowing full attendance in government offices. However, the guidelines issued last Saturday night by Chief Secretary RK Tiwari made it clear that all the relaxations would be withdrawn immediately in the districts where the number of active cases exceeded the 500-mark.

The weekend curbs will stay for while educational institutions, cinema halls, clubs, swimming pools and gyms will remain closed till further orders. According to the fresh guidelines to be enforced from Monday, all the markets can open from 7 am to 9 pm from Monday to Friday. Government offices will open with full attendance while restaurants and eating points will have to follow the 50 per cent capacity rule. Private com-

panies can also function under Covid protocol but they have been asked to promote work from home as far as possible.

The government also allowed the reopening of malls and roadside eateries, fast food joints and sweet shops. Vegetable markets will be open like before, but people have to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour.

The movement of UPSRTC buses has been allowed with some riders. The Transport department has been asked to carry out regular sanitisation of the buses. Only two passengers are allowed in three-wheelers and rickshaws while only four in cars. In closed or open wedding venues, only 50 guests will be allowed at a time while not more than 50 devotees are allowed to gather at religious places at a time.

The corona curfew was clamped in UP on May 1. The Government started extending relaxation from June 1 when the number of Covid cases started coming down.

Sikkim reports 87 new cases, 2 more deaths

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Sikkim reported 87 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the coronavirus tally to 19,296, a health department bulletin said on Sunday.

The Covid-19 death toll rose to 293 as two more persons succumbed to the infection, it said. The new cases were reported from East Sikkim district (57), West Sikkim (22), South Sikkim (6) and North Sikkim district (2).

The Himalayan State now has 2,697 active Covid-19 cases, while 16,056 patients have recovered from the disease, the bulletin said.

At least 250 Covid-19 patients have migrated to other states, it said. Sikkim's Covid-19 recovery rate now is 83.2 per cent.

Idol of Lord Vishnu unearthed from village in UP's Bahraich

Bahraich (UP): A stone idol of Lord Vishnu, which was three feet high, was unearthed during digging work undertaken at an old mound in a village here, police said.

Ramgopal, a resident of Anwanagar village under Nanpara tehsil, had brought some labourers to level his land. As they went about digging the earth, the workers stumbled upon a stone idol.

The labourers dug out the stone idol of Lord Vishnu, which was three feet high, Nanpara police station SHO Sanjay Singh said. As news spread of the finding, villagers gathered at the spot.

Later, police and administration officials arrived at the spot, took the idol in their custody, and deposited it in the tehsil treasury. The SHO said the district administration has informed the archaeology department about the idol.

Minor girl raped in Bihar's Aurangabad

Patna: A 12-year-old girl, residing in a school hostel in Bihar's Aurangabad district, was allegedly sexually assaulted by the school owner, police said on Sunday.

As per the FIR registered with the women police station, the victim alleged that the accused Raju Kumar, the owner of the school, located in Daudnagar locality in Aurangabad, raped her for the last two days.

On Sunday, she managed to escape from the hostel and reached the nearest police station. When she revealed her ordeal, she was immediately sent to the women police station under police custody.

The victim was the only girl student living in the hostel. Her father and mother are employed with a private firm in Guwahati. The owner knew the status of the victim and took advantage of it. He sexually assaulted the victim on Friday and Saturday night. The accused also threatened her to dire consequences if she revealed the incident to anyone," Suman Kumar, investigating officer of the women police station, said. "We have conducted medical examination of the victim which confirms rape. An FIR under POCSO Act has been registered against Raju Kumar. He is at large now," she added.



Hindu devotees perform rituals while offering prayers in the river Ganga on the occasion of Ganga Dussehra at Sangam, in Prayagraj on Sunday

Temple in Karnataka dug up in 'treasure hunt'; 7 held

Hassan (Karnataka): Hunt for treasure purportedly buried under the sanctum sanctorum of a 17th-century-old temple in Karnataka's Hassan district led seven people, including a priest, to try to dig up the structure, police said on Sunday.

This seven-member gang, which also included a prominent astrologer and Assistant Director of Co-operative Societies, however, developed cold feet during digging around a 10 feet pit in front of the chief deity of their village Bosmanahalli, abandoned their mission halfway through, and left the temple. All seven have been arrested.

According to the police statement, the arrested were identified as Manjunath, an astrologer from Bosmanahalli, L. Thippeswarayya, a temple priest, Hassan Co-operative Societies Assistant Director Narayan, B. H. Jayaram, Chetan, Manjunath, and Kumar. The police said that the entire treasure hunt plan was hatched by Manjunath, an astrologer from Bosmanahalli, who often used to visit the old Chowdeshwari (Parvatamma) Temple, of the village's deity, situated on the outskirts of the village. "Most of the arrested are devotees of this temple. The astrologer persuaded these five gullible residents and a priest from a temple in Davangere district. Manjunath thought that under the lockdown, temples which are locked may not attract any notice of residents of this village, besides the incident will only come to public notice once lockdown measures are eased. "Hence, they decided to carry out digging after performing homa-havana" (offerings poured in sacred fire while chanting vedic Mantras) on intermediate night of Friday-Saturday," a police officer said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Afghan landmine

All stakeholders are busy formulating plans so as to have the most power once the US exits

Afghanistan is a worsening quagmire of confusion with the immediately involved parties working towards their own individualist goals. The United States is singularly focused on vacating the military bases and moving tonnes of equipment as a prelude to the withdrawal of its troops before September 11. The Taliban, working to a post-withdrawal plan, are intent only on bringing maximum territory under their control because that alone would give them leverage in the future to either negotiate or grab power. The Afghan Government is caught between a withdrawing ally and an aggressive rival, looking for every scrap of support to be able to wield power after September. There is no dearth of friends for the Afghan Government in the region, but none with the clout to nail a permanent peace agreement with the Taliban. The primary, and only, concern of the world is the prospect of the return of terrorism to Afghan soil once the Americans leave. Even with them around, the US never once felt satisfied that the threat to its national security from terror groups in the country has abated. On the one hand, the Taliban are only waiting to turn the country into an Islamic State and, at worst, what they call a "Caliphate". They are already flashing their religious identity as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, intent on taking the country back into the dark ages with their irrational social codes. On the other, they have convivial relations with terrorist groups active in Afghanistan, including Al-Qaeda, and that makes their peace overtures suspect.

Despite signing the Doha Agreement with the US in 2020, the Taliban never attempted to formally distance itself from the terrorist group. India is at the forefront of nations wanting to ensure that terrorism does not raise its head in Afghanistan once again. It has no formal communication links with the Taliban and the word is that it may be reaching out to sections of the Taliban leadership that consider themselves nationalist and not under the influence of Pakistan. Much of the terrorist leadership is currently holed up in Pakistan; so is the orthodox and aggressive Taliban leadership for that matter. Having invested a lot in Afghanistan — it gave nearly \$2 billion in reconstruction aid already — India wants to have a greater say in the country's return to democracy. However, it will have to contend with Pakistan which to date played a subdued role because of the formidable American presence, and now plans a more direct role because of its links with the Taliban and the protection it extends to some terrorist groups. It is to be seen if the signs of a bilateral thaw in the India-Pakistan ties do not face rough weather because of their clashing positions over Afghanistan. An indication will be available at the meeting of the National Security Advisers of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan — virtual or in person — at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting next week.

PICTALK



Girls perform yoga ahead of the International Yoga Day, in Surat

The third coming

There is an urgent need for our citizens to heed experts and desist from reckless behaviour in public

The third wave of the COVID-19 virus is rapidly stealing upon us, if one were to go by either expert opinion or by the insouciant behaviour of our fellow countrymen in crowded public places. Barely has the nation's nose emerged from the sinking feeling that was the second wave of the Novel Coronavirus and its myriad variants, with what the accompanying horrors of the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and ancillary medical supplies, the scary prediction now comes that the third wave could be far closer to us than we had imagined. Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences director Randeep Guleria has said in no uncertain terms that the third wave is inevitable in the "next six-eight weeks" if people don't adhere to COVID-appropriate behaviour. The virus can make a comeback within two months, much earlier than the trend noticed in India so far, if the unlocking process is not measured. Even though the vaccination drive is going on in full swing, with both the Centre and the State Governments doing their best to make amends for the earlier oversight and the time lost because of it, there is still a disconcertingly huge window during which the virus can stage a dreadful comeback before the effects of the inoculation drive kick in.

So far, India has been able to fully vaccinate only about five per cent of its 950 million eligible population, leaving the other teeming millions vulnerable to infections and deaths. Needless to say, there is an urgent need for aggressive surveillance strategy in the COVID hotspots and even to again order lockdowns in case of significant surge in any particular area. Meanwhile, while the number of cases is still declining in the country, this is the right time to reflect upon past mistakes and take lessons for the future: Remember how the second wave took the complacent nation by surprise and swept the healthcare system off its moorings in many States? The drop in the infection rate in India surely is a positive sign, but that should be no reason for us to slacken our vigil. If there is a sudden jump in the numbers, god forbid, no healthcare system in the world can deal with such a large number of people simultaneously needing intensive care. We need to utilise this time to strengthen our healthcare facilities; each life is worth fighting for.

Brutal tactics to keep the Uyghurs in check



PROF. PRAFULL GORADIA

Why can't the Hans of China learn from the example of Indian Hindus towards Muslims and be considerate enough to let the Uyghurs be?

Reports about the treatment of Uyghurs in general and their pregnant women in particular in Xi Jinping's China sound barbaric. If the purpose is family planning, fair enough, but it should be implemented by law and not by force. Cases were reported in this journal from Istanbul which mentioned several women who were up to six-and-a-half months pregnant being forcibly aborted, evidently posing a threat to their lives. True, Muslims are reputed to procreate much more prolifically than other people but that does not mean that the Government should resort to violent means to achieve smaller families.

According to the *Hadith* (Traditions), Prophet Muhammad once asked a man whether he was married. On being replied in the negative, Muhammad reacted by saying: "Then you are a brother of the Devil." In Islam, even ascetic orders are expected to marry rather than remain single. One of the Prophet's companions, Usman ibn Maz'un, wished to lead a life of celibacy; Muhammad forbade him. Normally such consent is given on condition of the celibate becoming a eunuch. In the same context, the Prophet exhorted his followers to marry women who will love their husbands and be very prolific: "For I wish you to be more numerous than any other people." (*Mishkatul Masabih* book XIII)

We in India have a long and enormous experience of being ruled by Muslim sultans and, of course, coexisting with them for centuries. This led to serious and prolonged oppression in the 50-year reign of Aurangzeb, which ended in 1707. There was a serious emotional parting of ways. In 1857, the then most prominent Islamic leader Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh fame declared in a public speech that the Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. He repeated his contention the following year.

The next eminence to pronounce the same sentiments in the early 20th century was Justice Syed Ameer Ali. Then in 1930, poet Mohammad Iqbal voiced



that Muslims should have a separate homeland even if inside an Indian confederation. Most Hindu leaders, Gandhiji downwards, ignored these statements and continued to believe that the Congress Party represented all communities. Rightly or incorrectly, because the Congress had members of all communities, the leaders presumed that all of their communities followed the Party. Eventually, Mohammad Ali Jinnah had the Pakistan Resolution passed by the Muslim League at its Lahore session on March 23, 1940. Yet, the Hindus took only limited notice. Nor did the British realise how serious was the Muslim desire for a separate homeland, a New Medina.

On August 16, 1946, Bengal Chief Minister HS Suhrawardy directed a massive pogrom, later called the Great Calcutta Killing which over three days saw the bloody end of thousands of people. This was Jinnah's way of proving particularly to the British that Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist in the same country. India had to be divided. This is also based on the Islamic theology that Muslims need a Dar-ul-Islam, wherein the law laid down by Sharia is

INDIA STILL HAS MORE MUSLIMS THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY EXCEPT INDONESIA. THIS IS AN UNUSUAL PARADOX. IF SO MANY MUSLIMS CAN HAPPILY LIVE IN INDIA, WHERE WAS THE NEED FOR PARTITION? YET, THE HINDUS HAVE ACCEPTED THIS CONTRADICTION WITHOUT A PROTEST

the only land wherein Muslims can flourish and fulfil themselves. Today, India still hosts more Muslims than any country except Indonesia. This is an unusual paradox. If so many Muslims can happily live in India, where was the need for Partition? Yet, the Hindus have accepted this contradiction without a protest. My question is if the Hindus can be so tolerant, why cannot the Hans of China be considerate enough to let the Uyghurs be?

After all, China has to coexist with many other peoples and countries. There are 57 Islamic countries and they have not yet protested because of what? Possibly sheer fear or business interests. But for how long? Sooner or later, the Islamic fury must explode. In any case, I appeal to the Han race for tolerance in the cause of peace.

In a spirit of freedom and brotherhood, we allowed the Ayodhya litigation to go on for nearly a century, waiting for a court judgment. Then only we have begun to build a temple for lord Ram whom poet Iqbal had described as "Imam-e-Hind". The Muslims of Ayodhya were in favour of building the temple because it would multiply pilgrimage

and consequently bring prosperity. The fight was about an edifice which had no minarets, no *woozu* for washing hands and feet before proceeding to prayers. In fact, it must have been meant as a *mazar* in Babar's memory after he died.

India has had three Muslim Rashtraipatis, Zakir Hussain, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Abdul Kalam, plus several judges including Supreme Court Chief Justices and election commissioners appointed by, of course, Hindu Governments.

When it comes to elections, all adult citizens have the right to vote. There is no discrimination. In the bargain, Muslims in earlier elections voted *en masse* for one party and it won. The others were slack in casting their votes. But this was tolerant and no solution was applied to stop this practice. The easy solution was compulsory voting; that would have neutralised the *en masse* voting. But the Hindu ethos was too liberal for a drastic measure although nearly a dozen countries, led by Belgium and Australia, practise it.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Sir — In the first political engagement since the August 5, 2019, move by the Centre to end J&K's special status, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on June 24 give an audience to the region's mainstream leadership, including those who were incarcerated for opposing the Centre's move. Modi will chair the meeting. All the leaders have been asked to go for a RT-PCR test before attending the meeting.

It will be the second major peace move in J&K after the successful renewed ceasefire agreement in February this year with Pakistan, which has been demanding a roadmap on J&K to expand the engagement with New Delhi. The sudden move by the Centre also comes in the wake of pressure from the international community, especially the United States, to restore democratic and electoral processes in J&K, which remains under the Centre's rule since 2018. It is a step in the right direction but how far this move will succeed remains to be seen.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY

Sir — Yoga means "to add"; to add to the good habits in life, to add to peace and prosperity. In the current scenario, the COVID pandemic has devastated almost everything but one thing remains that has helped life move on smoothly, and that's HOPE.

During the troubled days, yoga can be a step towards positivity, relaxation of mind and physical strength. The United Nations gave its nod to the idea on December 10, 2014, and from June 21, 2015, the entire world started celebrating the International Yoga Day. The theme for 2021 is "Yoga for the wellbeing". India has contributed a lot but the patent of that invention was in the hands of the white-skinned developed nations.

We have contributed zero, decimal and a lot more to the world. Several inventions by Indians were being taken away and credited to foreigners. However, we never criticised such moves because we wanted peace and prosperity, unity in diversity. Yoga is not

Let Telangana schools remain shut



In these times of the pandemic is a matter of serious concern.

The first wave was severe. The second was ferocious and claimed many lives. The third wave is said to be round the corner. It is likely going to affect children the most. Our vaccination strategy is slow. Only 30 crore people have so far been inoculated. Another one crore are in the queue. Our wards, who are below 18 years of age, are yet to be included in the inoculation drive. It may take another few months to inoculate them since the vaccine supply is not commensurate to the population of India. Without masks or maintaining social distancing, people are seen moving around.

At this point, the move to reopen educational institutions seems to be worrisome, problematic and unproductive. It amounts to inviting trouble. It is hard to enforce discipline among students to adhere to the standing protocols against COVID. The heavens will not fall if schools are not opened right now, when the third wave is likely to hit the nation with more severity in a few weeks. The Telangana Government should roll back its decision of reopening of educational institutions.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

The Centre has advised the States to ease the COVID-19 curbs carefully since we are still living with the virus; it is not fully eradicated. All the States are accordingly easing curbs. In Tamil Nadu, the places of worship have been shut for a long time. Those who believe in God, seek peace and solace by visiting temples. I request the Government to open the temples for the public observing all the norms and COVID protocols.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Government has lifted the lockdown completely. It is shocking that the State has asked the education department to open all categories of educational institutions beginning July 1. Playing with the lives of students

WEAR FACE MASKS TO SAVE LIVES

Sir — As India prepares to battle the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination as many citizens as possible with both doses is unquestionably the most rational way of countering the virus. However, it is equally important for each one of us to prove our pertinacity by wearing face masks.

A face mask is a crucial protective gear to safeguard ourselves. Scientific evidence goes deep into the containment of the Novel Coronavirus by wearing face masks. When

a person expels droplets into the air, they quickly evaporate and shrink to become tiny airborne particles, called "droplet nuclei".

But in a moist atmosphere, between a person's mouth and the mask, it takes nearly a hundred times as long for a droplet to evaporate and shrink into droplet nuclei. This means that nearly any kind of simple cloth mask is great for source control. The mask creates humidity, and prevents the virus-containing droplets from turning into droplet nuclei, allowing the fabric of the mask to block the droplets. Studies suggest that if 80 per cent of people wear masks in public, the COVID-19 transmission can certainly be halted.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

SOUNDBITE

The Congress believes that grant of full statehood to J&K as also holding elections... instead of a rule by Delhi, is the only way forward, so that people are able to elect their representatives

Congress general secretary — Randeep Singh Surjewala

The Government is in no rush to reopen the country's international borders.

Australia's Trade Minister — Dan Tehan

I look at it this way — I want my beard also to tell a story, to define me.

Actor — Arjun Kapoor

Psychologically, I think it (the draw) is a big boost and it definitely will put England on the back foot.

India women's cricket team skipper — Mithali Raj

Over the last two years, Shri @ombirakotaka Ji has ushered in a series of steps that have enriched our parliamentary democracy and enhanced productivity.

Prime Minister — Narendra Modi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

PEOPLE NEED TO TAKE INITIATIVE

World leaders keep meeting on climate change issue but there is no genuine commitment to the cause



VK BAHUGUNA

The Covid-19 lockdown last year had one positive fallout - the sky regained its brilliant blue as the perennial haze of pollution lifted and one could see the Himalayan range from far-off places like Delhi and Chandigarh. Metros like Delhi and Mumbai became pollution-free, wild animals started foraging for food in cities and towns, and rivers became cleaner. This is, however, a grim reminder that humanity must change its materialist, extravagant lifestyle and establish equilibrium with nature. That is the special message of the pandemic.

When the air pollution levels came down, there was a perceptible decline in respiratory diseases. One study said the improved air quality index on account of reduced human activities in Chennai was similar to that of European countries. The forests got a reprieve with reduced instances of forest fires, illegal felling of trees, and poaching. This writer noticed how migratory birds which normally returned home during February-March stayed back till May end. In zoos sans tourists the animals regained their natural composure and behaviours. In the Satpura Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh, tigers, which had got used to regular movement of tourists, started liking their isolation and fretted upon seeing forest guards on patrols. According to Central



Pollution Control Board, the Ganga, Yamuna, and Gomati rivers' water became cleaner. Dolphins were sighted in the Ganga near Meerut.

These examples tell people to adopt climate-friendly behaviours in their day-to-day lives. Look at Jadhav Payeng from Jorhat, Assam who got the Forest Man of India Award in 2010 for turning 550 hectares of barren land into a lush green forest.

National Governments the world over started climate change negotiations after the Kyoto Protocol came into being in 2005. However, there is no genuine commitment to climate change even though world leaders meet every now and then because of never-ending politics. In India too, despite good initiatives like the solar alliance, the bureaucracy is unable to stem the rot in the field of environmental conservation.

Let us consider some citizen's initiatives which can make a big difference to the environment. Let us go for water harvesting and recharging in every home. Climate change was responsible for about 74 per cent of flash floods and droughts in the last 20 years. In cities 90 per cent of rainwater goes waste because of excessive construction activities. In contrast, 90 per cent of the rainwater gets absorbed in forests, recharging the aquifers, streams, and rivers. Every household having a 200 sq. mt. area can recharge around two lakh litres of rainwater every year.

Second, each tree gives oxygen for 10 people to survive. Everybody should plant a tree every year. A big tree absorbs 21 kg of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and in 100 years reduces one tonne of CO₂.

Third, food wastage is the biggest environmental problem as it wastes water and food grains. In 2019, nine billion tonnes of food was wasted in the world, releasing 70.41 lakh tonne methane gas. If we stop this wastage, eight percent reduction in greenhouse emissions can be ensured. Four, we must stop the use of paper cups to save at least 65 lakh trees and billions of gallons of water. Five, we need to use electricity carefully because 40 percent of carbon emissions are due to electricity production. If we can switch off the wi-fi and laptops we can reduce the emissions by 16 percent. Six, cars contribute to huge carbon emissions and if we limit the car speed to 70 kmph, it will reduce emission by 8 percent. The principle is at the speed 100 kmph the emissions increase by 28 percent.

(The writer is Chairman, Centre for Resource Management and Environment. The views expressed are personal.)

Dealing with Delhi CM Kejriwal's 'ration mafia'



UTTAM GUPTA

The scheme mooted by the Delhi Government will only create more avenues for the middlemen to make money at the cost of the taxpayer

Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi has justified his much-trumpeted scheme for door-step delivery of ration on the ground that this will help rein in what he describes as 'ration mafia' while ensuring that every grain of the subsidized food reaches the person (read: the poor) for whom it is intended.

Who is this 'ration mafia'? How does it plunder the subsidized food? Can the scheme prevent it?

Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, the Union Government directs the Food Corporation of India and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and organize its distribution to a mammoth population of 800 million people through an elaborate network of fair price shops (in common parlance, these are called 'ration shops') at the subsidized price of ₹2, ₹3 and ₹5 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals, respectively. Each person is eligible to receive 5 kg of cereals per month.

Considering that the cost of procurement, handling, and distribution is higher (in fact, many times more) than these ridiculously low selling prices, the Centre reimburses the excess amount as 'food subsidy' to the FCI and other agencies and is paid from the Union Budget.

During 2020-21, a total of ₹463,000 crore was paid to FCI. Apart from regular payment of ₹215,000 crore, this included about ₹150,000 crore towards free food given to all the 800 million beneficiaries as also to the migrant labour during April-November, 2020 under the Aatmanirbhar package. The balance amount was used for paying off a good slice of the loan taken by FCI from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) to finance the shortfall in subsidy reimbursements by the Centre in the past. Additionally, Rs 40,000 crore was paid to other state agencies under decentralized procurement (DCP).

During 2021-22, payment to FCI is expected to be about ₹302,000 crore including ₹202,000 crore being the budget allocation and an additional about ₹100,000 crore to provide for free food under Aatmanirbhar till November 2021 (announced subsequently to mitigate the impact of the second pandemic wave). A further ₹40,000 crore is available for DCP.

The scheme is pan-India, covering all the 28 states and eight union territories including the NCT of Delhi. The stuff unveiled by Kejriwal is merely an improvisation of this scheme. Unlike the latter wherein the beneficiary has to go to the ration shop for collecting 5 kg of cereals per month, under the former, the State Government will arrange for delivery of 4 kg of wheat flour and one kg rice at his/her doorsteps. Hopefully, he/she need not pay extra for getting wheat as flour or receiving ration at home.

However, the delivery will be at a huge cost to the state exchequer by way of the Government having to pay vendors for picking up wheat from the ration shop, process it into flour and deliver back to the shop in round one, and then lifting the wheat flour plus rice and delivering the packet to each of the millions of beneficiaries at their homes in round two. This cost will have to be funded by the state as an 'additional subsidy' over and above what is given by the Centre.



THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM CANNOT BE SEEN IN ISOLATION FROM ITS SOURCE. IT HAS TO DO WITH PLENTY OF FOOD AVAILABLE 'VIRTUALLY FOR FREE' WHICH IGNITES THE GREED OF STAKEHOLDERS LEADING TO PILFERAGE AND OTHER ILLS. THIS FREE CULT HAS TO STOP

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)



Fundamentally, the Delhi scheme being the same as the Centre's, if the charge (read: 'ration mafia') leveled by Kejriwal holds for the latter then this will also hold for the former. Let us examine.

When the owner of a ration shop has in his stock wheat/rice meant for distribution to ration card holders (RCH) at ₹2/₹3 per kg, he may get a strong temptation to divert it to the open market where they can fetch a minimum of ₹25/₹35 per kg. He will take deliveries from the FCI godown in the name of a 'fictitious' RCH and sell all those quantities in the market raking in a clear bonanza of ₹23 and ₹32 per kg on wheat and rice, respectively. This indeed is happening on a massive scale all over India and has been recognized by the Prime Minister too.

To stem the rot, the Modi Government has taken several measures including the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme which has at its core, the e-POS machine at all ration shops. Under this modus operandi, supply of the subsidized food to the beneficiary is made conditional upon him/her authenticating - using Aadhaar - taking delivery with the sale getting registered on the e-POS machine. This is uploaded onto the web portal on a 'real time' basis which should help in detecting

dubious sales if any.

Since 2014, reportedly, the Government has weeded out close to 44 million bogus ration cards which are equivalent to 176 million beneficiaries (assuming four persons on a card) or nearly 30 per cent of 800 million covered under NFSA. This is a creditable achievement. However, considering the large-scale diversion which in some states could be as high as 50 per cent, there is still a long way to go.

The menace of bogus ration cards is only a part of a larger problem in the public distribution system (PDS) as pilferage could be happening even at other levels in the supply chain; for instance, at the rake unloading points and godowns of the FCI. Reports of the disappearance of food stocks worth about ₹20,000 crore in Punjab in 2016 is a glaring example. The misuse of budgetary resources also manifests in other forms such as inefficiencies in handling operations of FCI/other state agencies and inflated claims (including bogus claims) towards various expenses.

All this happens because, under the existing system, the agencies get reimbursement for the costs on an 'actual' basis. This indeed is the most serious flaw in the scheme. Camouflaged under the noble banner of 'food subsidy',

albeit, for the millions of poor, this often goes unchallenged even when irregularities are pointed out by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

The scheme mooted by the Delhi Government does nothing to address this flaw. It will only create more avenues for middlemen to make money at the cost of the taxpayer. What is the way forward?

The solution to the problem cannot be seen in isolation from its source. It has to do with plenty of food available 'virtually for free' which ignites the greed of stakeholders leading to pilferage and other ills. This free cult has to stop.

The Government should unshackle the food supply and distribution chains. It should put the subsidy currently built into the sale price of food, say, ₹32 per kg on rice (cost: ₹35 per kg minus subsidized price: ₹3 per kg) or ₹160 per person per month (under the NFSA, he/she is eligible to get 5 kg in a month) in the account of a beneficiary who can use it to buy from wherever he/she chooses. This is the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of subsidy. While fully protecting the poor, it can help in curbing the colossal loot and wastage of public money that is germane to the existing dispensation.

Will Prime Minister Modi bite the bullet?

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

I HAVE REQUESTED THE LOK SABHA SPEAKER TO REVIEW HIS DECISION (OF ACCEPTING PK PARAS AS THE LJP LEADER IN THE HOUSE).
— LJP LEADER
CHIRAG PASWAN



WE HAVE FORMED A NEW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE OF THE PARTY. ALL OTHER PARTY WINGS HAVE BEEN DISBANDED.
— LJP FACTION LEADER
PASHUPATI KUMAR PARAS

Re-inventing privacy in the digital market

Digital markets that emerged as State's attempts to ensure safety for lives of citizens now shape up benefitting organised and powerful corporates

The Covid-19 pandemic has facilitated the rapid expansion of e-commerce and digital trade, commerce, and financial transactions. At the same time, it put paid to socially interactive marketplaces and face-to-face contacts. Safety is the key concern that confines citizens to digital platforms and shrinks the space of personal liberty, social interaction, and human collectives and communities. One is reminded of Benjamin Franklin's warning, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."



PRASENJIT BISWAS

(The author is a philosopher and political analyst based in Shillong. The views expressed are personal.)

(The author is a philosopher and political analyst based in Shillong. The views expressed are personal.)

ern the lives of private citizens in exchange for safety and security, it ends up benefiting the minions of the digital markets that set up a new normal for citizens.

What philosopher Michael Sandel characterized as a transition from market relations in socially necessary fields like health, education, and human security to an overall 'market society' is seemingly taking a digital turn during the pandemic. This picture of digital markets restrains choice-based consent and limits it to partially informed advantages. Digital economy tweaks choices, restrains access to essential resources, and dilutes ethical practices to market sentiments, even if it creates moral hazards. An AI-controlled collusion



behaviour on the part of human traders and customers is the outcome of uncontrolled digital deals that might tamper with the sovereign individuals. A moral hazard of such a digital marketplace is the way the bot called 'Jay on Twitter', which learned abuses from the trolls, heaped it back upon a

feminist activist. Both State and non-state actors use botnets to surreptitiously control infected devices to hack, spy, and disable targets. As botnets cannot be attributed with intent, it helps to distance the actus reus of the perpetrator and allow them to escape with impunity. As a result, botmasters enjoy economic incentives to spread these bot networks that can be used for mining cryptocurrency, credit card fraud and distributed denial of services, etc. The bots can further position themselves as autonomous agents (AA) by camouflaging their point of origin, while they can feed their masters confidential information so that the targeted victim suffers definitive harm in multiple socio-economic parameters.

Given this default and design difficulty in fixing liability on cyber-attackers, there is a greater risk for liberty and freedom of speech of internet users. In a sense, cyberspace itself can be used to curtail and abridge various freedoms like privacy rights and the right to dissent by deploying surveillance and secret watch. Digital marketplaces facilitated a direct connection between cyberattacks and surveillance, as personal data breaches are the route through which these actions are carried out. Though cyberattacks are illegal, surveillance assumes both legality and legitimacy by subjecting users to irrevocable meta consent as the new social contract in digital, virtual, and

cyberspaces. The ecosystem of the digital market, therefore, constructs the human agency and utilizes underlying technological structures to give meanings to both security and surveillance mechanisms. Digital markets create contested information spaces where the defense of users' rights versus the powers of governmental institutions remain locked up in a battle of legitimacy. The digital marketplace makes it possible to reduce the human being to a node, or better, into datasets on its networks. The digital life of such a reduced person is endowed with nominal rights of privacy and liberty, as such rights are subjected to the arbitrary ordeal of policing, profiling, moralizing. This is how digi-

tal marketplaces make it impossible for the marginalized segments of society by making them 'illegible' in political and economic affairs, if not completely 'ineligible'.

In the name of safety and security concerns, privacy breaches have been normalized by thinning down the line between legal surveillance and illicit attacks. The growth of digital trading and the increase in economic transactions in cyberspace now provides both the final reason and justification for increased control by both state and non-state actors. Once the right to privacy is breached in this manner, the resultant insecurity defeats all ethical-legal injunctions that could have given healthy immunity to digital markets.

Ex-Prez Karzai says US failed in Af

AP ■ KABUL

Afghanistan's former President said on Sunday the United States came to his country to fight extremism and bring stability to his war-torn nation and is leaving nearly 20 years later having failed at both.

In an interview with The Associated Press just weeks before the last US and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, ending their forever war, Hamid Karzai said extremism is at its "highest point" and remaining troops are leaving behind a disaster.

"The international community came here 20 years ago with this clear objective of fighting extremism and bringing stability. But extremists won at the highest point today. So they have failed," he said.

Their legacy is a war-ravaged nation in "total disgrace and disaster."

"We recognise as Afghans all our failures, but we want the bigger forces and powers who came here for exactly that purpose? Where are they leaving us now?" he asked and answered: "In total disgrace and disaster."

Still, Karzai, who had a complex relationship with the US during his 13-year rule, wanted the troops to leave, saying Afghans were united behind an overwhelming desire for peace and needed now to take responsibility for their future.

"We will be better off without our military presence," he said. "I think we should defend our own country and look after our own lives... Their presence (has given us) what we have now... We don't want to continue with this misery and indignity that we are facing. It is better for Afghanistan that they leave."

Karzai's rule followed the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 by a US-led coalition that launched its invasion to hunt down and destroy the al-Qaida network and its leader, Osama bin Laden, blamed for the 9/11 attacks on America.

During Karzai's rule, women re-emerged, girls started attending school, a vibrant, young civil society emerged, new high-rises went up in the capital Kabul and roads and infrastructure were built. But his rule was also characterized by allegations of widespread corruption, a flourishing drug trade and in the final years relentless quarrels with Washington that continue even until today.

The (US/NATO military) campaign was not against extremism or terrorism, the campaign was more against Afghan villages and hopes; putting Afghan people in prisons, building prisons in our own country... And bombing all villages. That was very wrong."

In April, when President Joe Biden announced the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 troops, he said America was leaving having achieved its goals. Al-Qaida



Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai speaks during an interview with The Associated Press at his house, in Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday.

Pak to complete fencing of border with Afghanistan by June end: Min

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In the wake of looming uncertainty in Afghanistan due to the withdrawal of the US troops, Pakistan has announced that it will complete the fencing of its border with the war-torn country by the end of June.

Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said this on Saturday on the floor of the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The minister informed the house that 88 per cent work on the fencing of the border with Afghanistan has been completed. The remaining 12 per cent would be completed by June 30, he said. The fencing of the 2,640 km land border with Afghanistan began in March 2017 after a spate of attacks from across the porous border.

Pakistan's long and porous border with Afghanistan, which runs through mountainous terrain and is largely unpatrolled. The Durand Line was drawn by the British rulers in 1896 and is disputed by Afghanistan, which also resists Pakistani attempts to erect any border fence.

Rocket falls near Iraqi military base housing US troops

AP ■ BAGHDAD

At least one Katyusha rocket fell close to the perimeter of a military base that hosts US troops in northern Iraq on Sunday, Iraq's military said. The rocket fell near the sprawling Al-Asad air base in western Anbar province but did not explode, the military said in a statement.

There was no significant damage, the statement said. An American official said a fence at the perimeter of the base was minimally damaged. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

An investigation by security forces found the projectile had been launched from the nearby al-Baghdadi area.

The attack is the latest targeting the American presence in Iraq. Rockets and, more recently, drones have targeted US military bases housing US troops and the US Embassy in the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad. AP

Diplomats: Progress made in Vienna at Iran nuclear talks

AP ■ VIENNA

Top diplomats said Sunday they further progress had been made at talks between Iran and global powers to try to negotiate and restore a landmark 2015 agreement to contain Iran's nuclear development that was later abandoned by the Trump administration.

Enrique Mora, the European Union official who chaired the final meeting of the sixth round of talks between Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Iran, told reporters that "we are closer to a deal, but we are not still there."

"We have made progress on a number of technical issues," Mora added. "We have now more clarity on technical documents - all of them quite complex - and that clarity allows us to have all a great idea of what the political problems are."

He did not further elaborate on the nature of the technical issues. Top Russian representative Mikhail Ulyanov said the members of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, "took stock of the significant progress made at the Vienna talks, including at the sixth round, and decided to make a break to allow participants to consult with their capitals in preparation for the final round of negotiations."

"There are a few controversial points which require political decisions. Apparently diplomatic efforts to find common language have been almost fully exhausted. So the time has come for political decisions," Ulyanov added.

The nations involved in the negotiations have been trying to resolve the major outstanding issues on how to return the US into the landmark agreement, which then-US President Donald Trump pulled Washington out of unilaterally in 2018. Trump also restored and augmented sanctions to try to force Iran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions.

Ulyanov said that after heading back to report on the talks' results to their respective governments, he expected the diplomats to return for the final round of talks in Vienna in 10 days or by mid-July.

Israeli PM: World powers must wake up on Iran nuclear deal

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Sunday opened his first cabinet meeting since becoming Israel's new coalition government last week with a condemnation of the new Iranian president. He said Iran's presidential election was a sign for world powers to "wake up" before it is too late to reach a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Iran's hard-line judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, was elected Saturday with 62% of the vote amid a historically low voter turnout. He is sanctioned by the US. In part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Raisi has not commented specifically on the event.

Bennett said at the Cabinet meeting that Iran's involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Raisi has not commented specifically on the event.

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had been greatly diminished and bin Laden was dead. America no longer needed boots on the ground to fight the terrorist threats that might emanate from Afghanistan, he said.

Still, the US attempts to bring about a political end to a decade or more have been elusive. It signed a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 to withdraw its troops in exchange for a Taliban promise to denounce terrorist groups and keep Afghanistan from again being a staging arena for attacks on America.

There is little evidence the Taliban are fulfilling their part of the bargain. The United Nations claims the Taliban and al-Qaida are still linked. The architect of the US deal and current US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad says some progress has been made but without offering any details.

Karzai has had harsh words and uncompromising criticism of US war tactics over the past two decades in Afghanistan. Yet he has become a linchpin of sorts in a joint effort being launched by the US and Britain to get a quarrelsome Afghan leadership in Kabul united with the Taliban.

The insurgent group has shown little interest in negotiating and instead has stepped up its assaults on government positions.

The Taliban have made considerable strides since the May 1 start of the US and NATO withdrawal. They have overrun dozens of districts, often negotiating their surrender from Afghan national security forces.

But in many instances the fighting has been intense. Just last week a brutal assault by the Taliban in northern Faryab province killed 22 of Afghanistan's elite commandos, led by a local hero Col. Sohrab Azimi, who was also killed and widely mourned.

"The desire of the Afghan people, overwhelmingly, all over the country is for peace," said Karzai, who despite being out of power since 2014 has lost little of his political influence and is most often at the centre of the country's political machinations.

Diplomats, Western officials, generals, tribal elders and politicians on all ends of Afghanistan's political spectrum regularly beat a path to Karzai's door in the heart of the Afghan capital.

The US military withdrawal is already more than 50% complete, the need for a political settlement or even a visible path to an eventual settlement would seem to be taking on greater urgency even as the Taliban in the thousands are seeking an end to the war.

They say they are frustrated by relentless corruption, marauding criminal gangs — some linked to the powerful warlords in Kabul — and worsening insecurity. Few see a future that is not violent.

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Oz accused of 'excessive and unnecessary' secrecy

AP ■ CANBERRA

Australia's suppression of information seen as pivotal to a free and open media as the centre of accusations that the country has become one of the world's most secretive democracies.

Last week, a former Australian spy was convicted over his unconfirmed role as a whistleblower who revealed an espionage operation against the Government of East Timorese capital Dili.

It's the latest high-profile case in a national system in which secrecy laws, some dating back to the colonial era, are routinely used to suppress information. Police have also targeted charge journalists who exposed war crime allegations against Australian special forces in Afghanistan, or bureaucrats' plan to allow an intelligence agency to spy on Australian citizens.

The government cancelled K's removal orders before he was to testify at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2014 in support of the East Timorese, who argued the treaty was invalid because Australia failed to negotiate in good faith by engaging in espionage.

There was no evidence heard in open court of a bugging operation, which media reported was conducted under the guise of a foreign aid programme.

K was given a three-month suspended sentence. If he'd been sent to prison, there were court orders designed to conceal his former espionage career by restricting what he could tell friends and associates to explain his predicament.

He had faced up to two years in prison. Since his offence, Australia has continued to tighten controls on secrecy, increasing the maximum sentence to 10 years.

The only sign that anyone was actually inside the box was when a voice said "guilty" after K was asked how he pleaded.

The Australian government has refused to comment on allegations that K led an Australian Secret Intelligence Service operation that bugged government offices in the East Timorese capital in 2004, during negotiations on the sharing of oil and gas revenue from the seabed that separates the two countries.

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GLOBE TROTTER

LANDSLIDES, FLOODS KILL 18 IN NEPAL. Kathmandu: At least 18 people have been killed due to landslides and floods triggered by heavy rain across Nepal last week, while 21 others went missing, police said on Sunday.

CRASH, 'LIKELY' DUE TO STORM, KILLS 12 IN US. Atlanta: Tropical Depression Claudette claimed 12 lives in Alabama as the storm swept across the southeastern US, causing flash flooding and spurring tornadoes that destroyed dozens of homes.

CHINA: 1 BN VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED. Beijing: China on Sunday said it has administered over one billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines in the country. China has accelerated its pace of free Covid-19 vaccinations for the whole nation since late March and administered a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines in the country. China has accelerated its pace of free Covid-19 vaccinations for the whole nation since late March and administered a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines in the country. China has accelerated its pace of free Covid-19 vaccinations for the whole nation since late March and administered a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines in the country.

BRAZIL TOPS 5L DEATHS, PROTESTS AGAINST PREZ. Rio de Janeiro: Anti-Gov protesters took to the streets in Brazil on Saturday as the nation's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 soared past a million — a tragedy many critics blame on President Jair Bolsonaro's attempt to minimise the toll. Thousands gathered in downtown Rio de Janeiro.

As far as a case this big, there has not been a known, in the history of Jordan," said defense lawyer Ala Khasawneh. The state news agency Petra said the trial starts Monday.

The 41-year-old Hamzah is the central figure, though he is not facing charges. In clashing narratives, he is either a champion of ordinary Jordanians suffering from economic mismanagement and corruption or a disgruntled royal who never forgave Abdullah for taking away his title of crown prince in 2004 in favour of the king's oldest son.

The indictment, leaked to state-linked media, alleges Hamzah "was determined to achieve his personal ambition" of becoming king. It says the prince and the defendants — Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a royal, and Bassem Awadallah, a former royal adviser — conspired to stir discontent.

Security agencies began monitoring them in mid-March, at a time of public uproar over an oxygen outage at a hospital in the town of Salt that killed eight coronavirus patients.

Hamzah met with bereaved families just after the king visited Salt.

Jordan's unprecedented palace drama moves to the courtroom

AP ■ AMMAN (JORDAN)

Jordan's version of a trial of the century gets under way Monday when a relative of King Abdullah II and a former chief of the royal court are to be ushered into the defendants' cage at the state security court to face charges of sedition and incitement.

They are accused of conspiring with a senior royal, Prince Hamzah, a half-brother of the king — to foment unrest against the monarch while soliciting foreign help.

The palace drama erupted into the open in early April, when Hamzah was placed under house arrest. It has since broken taboos in Jordan and sent jitters through foreign capitals, with Western powers rallying behind Abdullah, an indispensable ally in an unstable region.

The case exposed rivalries in Jordan's traditionally discreet Hashemite dynasty and spawned unprecedented public criticism of the monarch. The defendants are the most senior establishment figures to appear before the security court, which typically goes after drug offenders or suspected militants.

FORM G INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST. CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS. E-TENDER NOTICE. Tender Notice No: PCMM/CLW/Dankuni/E-Procurement/21-22/10 Dated: 17.06.2021. PCMM/CLW/DKAE on behalf of the President of India invites electronic bids from established reliable manufacturer for supply of the followings. The following E-Tender's is/are for supply of materials for manufacture of Electric Locomotive. The Prospective/likely suppliers are requested to look up the website www.treps.gov.in. These are E-Tenders; only electronic offer bids shall be accepted. For detailed instructions please refer to website: SE Tender No; Description of Stores; Qty; Due On; Tender Cost; [24]; 34212707; Microprocessor based Electronic Speed Indicating and Recording System with 01 (one) no. Evaluation Software for every 10 (ten) sets of Speedometers (without Memory Card Reader Unit & Communication Cable for master to slave) for WAG-9/WAP-7 & WAP-5 Locomotives to RDSO Spec. No. CLR/S/3/0154/Q (6) Exp. 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Govt open to more measures to boost economy: CEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is open to coming out with more measures to boost the economy which has been hit by the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, says Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) K V Subramanian.

He, however, added that the demand for a fresh stimulus package has to be considered against the backdrop of a huge amount of money taken by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget for 2021-22 presented in February.

The Chief Economic Advisor was responding to a suggestion made by some industry bodies that the government need to come out with a Rs 3 lakh crore stimulus package to boost the economy which was badly hit by the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, he said.

According to an assessment by the Reserve Bank, the second wave has cost the nation about Rs 2 lakh crore in terms of output loss.

"Like last year, we do remain very open to coming up with more measures as well... But I think it is really important to take into account the big differences

between last year and this year when we talk about stimulus," he told PTI in an interview.

Elaborating his point, the CEA said that unlike the previous budget which was framed before the pandemic, the 2021 budget was presented amid the pandemic and had already incorporated significant fiscal expansion.

The focus is particularly on infrastructure spending which leads to construction activity and subsequently creation of jobs in the informal sector and demand generation, he said. It was witnessed during the January-March quarter of the last financial year, he added.

The significant capital spending by the government led to a 15 per cent increase in the construction sector in the fourth quarter and the gross fixed capital formation to GDP rose to 34 per cent, the highest in the last six years.

Emphasising that the final objective is to ensure that the economic recovery gathers pace, he said, the government will do whatever is necessary to ensure that.

With regard to food security for the poor, he said, the government has already

extended the free food programme for 80 crore population till November.

The extension of PM Garib Kalyan Yojana would cost about Rs 70,000 crore, he said, adding free vaccination for all is another important economic measure.

"Vaccine as you would appreciate is by far the most important from the perspective to get back into the path of economic recovery," he said.

On the effect of the second wave on growth, Subramanian said, there will be some impact but it is not likely to be very large.

The Economic Survey 2020-21 released in January this year had projected GDP growth of 11 per cent during the current financial year ending March 2022.

India's economy contracted by less-than-expected 7.3 per cent in the financial year ended in March 2021 after growth rate picked up in the fourth quarter, just before the world's worst outbreak of coronavirus infections hit the country.

The GDP print was better than expected contraction of 8 per cent for 2020-21 as projected by the Economic Survey.

Sebi reconstitutes Takeover Panel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has reconstituted its Takeover Panel, which look into the applications seeking exemption from the mandatory open offer that an acquirer needs to make to minority shareholders.

The regulator has appointed N Venkatram MD and CEO, Deloitte India as the new member of the Takeover Panel, latest update with Sebi showed.

The panel, chaired by N K Sodhi, the former Chief Justice of the High Courts of Karnataka and Kerala, makes its recommendations to Sebi on such applications after which the regulator gives an opportunity to concerned parties before passing an order.

Sodhi was also the former presiding officer of the Securities Appellate Tribunal.

The other members of the panel are Darius Khamati (former advocate general, Maharashtra) and Thomas Mathew T (former chairman of Life Insurance Corporation of India).

Sebi had first constituted a takeover panel in June 2007 in November 2007, under chairmanship of former Bank of Baroda chairman K Kannan.

Draft Cabinet note floated for 100% FDI in oil PSUs approved for disinvestment: Sources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Commerce and Industry Ministry has floated a draft Cabinet note seeking inter-ministerial views on a proposal to allow up to 100 per cent foreign investment under automatic route in oil and gas PSUs, which have an in-principle approval for disinvestment, sources said.

The move, if approved by the Union Cabinet, would facilitate privatisation of India's second biggest oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL).

The government is privatising BPCL and is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in the company.

Sources said that as per the draft note, a new clause would be added in the FDI policy under the petroleum and natural gas sector.

According to the proposal, foreign investment up to 100

per cent under the automatic route would be allowed in cases where an in-principle approval for disinvestment of a PSU has been granted by the government.

For BPCL privatisation, mining-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta had put in an expression of interest (Eoi) for buying the government's 52.98 per cent stake in the PSU. The other two bidders are said to be global funds, one of them being Apollo Global Management.

After collating the views, the commerce and industry ministry would seek approval of the union cabinet on the proposal.

At present, only 49 per cent FDI is permitted through automatic route in petroleum refining by the public sector under the petroleum and natural gas sector.

As part of our study, we used electronic current in aloe vera fruit juice, which brought forth that it has an electronic memory effect chemical, said Dr Rajesh Kumar, Associate Professor of the Physics Department of IIT Indore told PTI on Sunday.

The study was carried out by the Materials and Device (MAD) laboratory of the institution's physics department, he said.

"As part of our study, we used electronic current in aloe vera fruit juice, which brought forth that it has an electronic memory effect chemical, said Dr Rajesh Kumar, Associate Professor of the Physics Department of IIT Indore told PTI on Sunday.

"Synthetic chemicals are used for making data storage devices like memory chips. If experts on the subject go for in-depth research, the natural chemical found in aloe vera fruit juice might open up a new vista in place of synthetic chemicals with which these devices are made," he informed.

Kumar said the study was conducted by the physics department's Materials & Device (MAD) laboratory with the participation of the student Tanuj Ghosh along with Sachita Kulkarni, Chanchal Rani, Manushree Tanwar, Devshu Kumar Pathak and Anjali Choudhary.

Air India has time till mid-July to challenge Cairn lawsuit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India has time till mid-July to challenge the lawsuit filed by Britain's Cairn Energy PLC demanding that a US federal court force the airline to pay a \$1.26 billion arbitration award it had won against the Indian government in December last year, sources said.

Air India is controlled by the Indian Government, so much that they are 'alter egos', Cairn had said in the lawsuit filed with the US District Court for the Southern District of New York. The court should hold the airline company liable for the arbitration award, the company had said.

A three-member international arbitration tribunal that consisted of one judge appointed by India had unanimously in December overturned levy of taxes on Cairn. Cairn had actively and ordered refund of shares sold, dividend confiscated and tax refunds withheld to recover such demand.

The government of India, despite participating in the arbitration proceeding for four years, has not accepted the award and has filed a setting aside petition in a court in The Netherlands - the seat of the process of being privatised, is likely to argue that it is a separate entity and not the alter ego of the Indian government and cannot be forced to pay for any liability of the government, they said.

Air India spokesperson declined to comment on the story.

Cairn has identified USD 70 billion of Indian assets overseas for potential seizure to collect award, which now totals to USD 1.72 billion after including taxes on Cairn.

These assets are across several jurisdictions, they said without giving further details.

Petrol crosses ₹97 in Delhi, diesel nears ₹88 after another price hike

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol price in the national capital crossed ₹97 a litre and diesel nears ₹88 after fuel prices were raised yet again.

Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 28 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

The hike -- 27th in seven weeks -- pushed fuel prices across the country to new historic highs.

In Delhi, petrol hit an all-time high of ₹97.22 a litre, while diesel is now priced at Rs 87.97 per litre.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges.

And because of this, petrol retails at over Rs 100 per litre mark in eight states and union territories -- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Madhara, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Among the metros, petrol is already above Rs 100 in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

In Mumbai, petrol now costs Rs 103.36 a litre and diesel comes for Rs 95.44.

Sebi bars PNB Housing shareholders from voting on ₹4,000 cr-Carlyle deal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a rare regulatory move, Sebi has restrained PNB Housing Finance from going ahead with shareholders' voting on the proposed ₹ 4,000 crore deal with Carlyle group and directed the company to carry out the valuation process as per the relevant legal provisions.

The watchdog said the resolution relating to the deal, which was to be put for shareholders' vote on June 22, was "ultra-vires" of the company's Articles of Association (AOA).

The transaction, which has come under the lens of Sebi after the bank's Registrar (RBI) following concerns raised in certain quarters, including by a proxy advisory firm, would eventually see private equity major Carlyle group taking control of PNB Housing Finance, a subsidiary of Punjab National Bank.

The company's meeting is scheduled for Tuesday (June 22) to take up the matter for approval of the shareholders.

"The current resolution bearing item no. 1 (issue of securities) and other related matters listed therein" of EGM notice dated May, 31,

2021 is ultra-vires of AOA and shall not be acted upon until the company undertakes the valuation of shares as prescribed under 19(2) of AOA, for subscription of shares in June 2021, from an independent registered valuer as per the provisions of applicable laws," PNB Housing Finance said in a late night filing referring to Sebi letter to ensure compliance.

The company, promoted by PNB, said it had received the letter from Sebi on June 18, 2021, calling upon the company to comply with the legal provisions in the matter. The said report shall be considered by the company's board of directors on the preferential issue of shares and warrants, Sebi has asked.

"The company and its board of directors have considered the Sebi letter, and continue to believe that the company is in full compliance with all relevant applicable laws, including the applicable pricing regulations prescribed by Sebi, and the AOA of the company, and that such preferential allotment is in the best interests of the company, its shareholders and other stakeholders," PNB Housing Finance said in the filing.

FPIs infused ₹13 k cr in Indian markets in June so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pumped in a net ₹13,667 crore in Indian markets continued to remain attractive to overseas investors.

However, market experts noted that FPIs withdrew money from Indian equities this month.

According to depositories data, FPIs invested ₹15,312 crore in equities between June 1 and June 18.

"The US Federal Reserve has signalled that it will start raising interest rates in 2023. This caused a sell-off on a global level that caused some money to be withdrawn from Indian equities," said Harsh Jain, co-founder and COO at Groww.

However, India is not a destination where investors put in money based on short-term trends.

India has always been an attractive spot for FPIs and these short-term trends will have short-term effects only, he added.

In the longer horizon, India will continue to get invest-

ments as its economy continues to expand, Jain further said.

Of late, INR depreciation is adding to the natural buying interest in IT stocks, noted VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

During the same period, overseas investors withdrew Rs 1,645 crore from the debt segment.

The total net inflow stood at Rs 13,667 crore.

Prior to this, they had pulled out Rs 2,466 crore in May and Rs 9,435 crore in April.

"The US Fed's hawkish statement that it might raise interest rates much earlier than assumed could further adversely impact flows into Indian debt markets," said Himanshu Datta, managing director, research, Morningstar India.

Regarding other emerging markets, Shrikant Chouhan, executive vice president, equity technical research at Kotak Securities, said that the month-to-date net FPI inflows this month to date except for Taiwan and South Korea.

Aloe vera chemical may be of use in memory chips: IIT-Indore study

PTI ■ INDORE

A study by the Indian Institute of Technology Indore in Madhya Pradesh has found that aloe vera has an "electronic memory effect chemical" that may be useful in making memory chips and other data storage devices, an official from the premier facility said on Sunday.

The study was carried out by the Materials and Device (MAD) laboratory of the institution's physics department, he said.

"As part of our study, we used electronic current in aloe vera fruit juice, which brought forth that it has an electronic memory effect chemical, said Dr Rajesh Kumar, Associate Professor of the Physics Department of IIT Indore told PTI on Sunday.

"Synthetic chemicals are used for making data storage devices like memory chips. If experts on the subject go for in-depth research, the natural chemical found in aloe vera fruit juice might open up a new vista in place of synthetic chemicals with which these devices are made," he informed.

Kumar said the study was conducted by the physics department's Materials & Device (MAD) laboratory with the participation of the student Tanuj Ghosh along with Sachita Kulkarni, Chanchal Rani, Manushree Tanwar, Devshu Kumar Pathak and Anjali Choudhary.

Labour Ministry mulls extending ABRV deadline till March 2022 to boost fresh hiring

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Labour and Employment is considering extending the timeline of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRV) till March next year from the existing timeline of June 30, in a bid to boost fresh hiring in the country amid the pandemic, said sources.

Under the ABRV approved by the Union Cabinet in December last year, the Government pays mandatory employees provident fund contributions of workers as well as employers for new recruits for a period of two years.

Under the scheme with an outlay of Rs 22,810 crore, workers recruited from October 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, were covered.

"The Ministry of Labour and Employment is in the process of circulating a Cabinet proposal for extending the timeline for ABRV till March 2022," sources said.

The source explained that about 21 lakh new recruits are benefited so far which is far less than government's expectation of 58.5 lakh.

Therefore, the labour ministry would push for extending the deadline of the scheme till March next year as the allocation of funds for the scheme was done keeping in mind the 58.5 lakh beneficiaries, the source added.

During the pandemic, the government took a series of steps to boost employment generation and to give relief to workers grappling with job loss and pay cuts.

The ABRV scheme was one of those measures. Government had allocated Rs 22,810 crore for the entire period of implementation of the scheme from 2020 to 2023.

Demand for talent will be key dependency for growth amid rapid digital shift: Rishad Premji

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

"The demand for talent will outpace supply and become a key dependency for growth as enterprises globally accelerate digital adoption with virtual, Wipro Chairman Rishad Premji said.

The Bengaluru-based company has effected "bold changes" in the last six months to help serve customers better and is well-positioned to leverage as well as enable digital transformations for its clients.

Premji said in the company's annual report for FY21. The former Nasscom chairman noted that technology is often at the forefront of economic recovery, but especially now, as the pandemic precipitated structural changes across industries and challenged established ways of working.

Whether it is digital commerce, online education, or telemedicine, technology-enabled business models have emerged across the board, with cloud technology as the cornerstone of this transformation, he added.

"With the rapid shift to digital, the demand for talent will outpace supply, and become a key dependency for growth. Already we see new delivery models, such as 'work from anywhere' and

"Crowdsourcing", become the mainstay. We expect virtual, remote, community-based, and distributed work to be the future of work," Premji said.

He added that as vaccination efforts ramp up globally and economies start seeing a rebound, clients keen to invest in and accelerate their digital transformation and the key to success for IT players would be "to respond to this opportunity with speed and agility."

Premji said the company had triggered its business continuity plans to quickly enable remote working as the pandemic broke out, and less than 3 per cent of its global workforce currently is working from office.

"We have settled well into this new way of working and have continued to make our customers successful. We enjoy their confidence, and I have no doubt that a hybrid model may well be how we work in the future," he added.

Premji said global cooperation is critical, especially in view of the pandemic and that vaccines for COVID-19 are one of the greatest examples of collaboration and pioneering science.

"We must now work to scale the supply chain, build mechanisms for equitable distribution and drive an effi-

cient administration for these life-saving vaccines," he added.

Rishad, who took over as chairman in 2019 succeeding his father Azim Premji, said Wipro Ltd, Wipro Enterprises and Azim Premji Foundation, together comprise Rs 1,125 crore (about USD 150 million) in April 2020, towards tackling the unprecedented health and humanitarian crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

"Over the past 12 months, we have supported more than 1,500 projects covering humanitarian aid, integrated healthcare support, and livelihood regeneration. Cumulatively, we have reached out directly to more than 18 million people through our coordinated and comprehensive COVID-19 response, to provide humanitarian aid and help with livelihood regeneration," he said.

For employees, the company has undertaken a number of initiatives including providing COVID-19 Isolation Care centres for staff and their families, partnering with major hospitals to provide medical support to critically ill employees, additional medical reimbursement and leaves related to COVID-19, as well as vaccination at camps.

Life insurers may see short-term pressure on profitability due to pandemic: ICICI Pru Life

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The domestic life insurance industry may see pressure on its profitability in the short-term as the coronavirus pandemic has cast doubt on the certainty related to morbidity and mortality in the country, ICICI Prudential Life said in its annual report.

India became an epicentre with a spike in cases in the second wave of the pandemic, amidst shortage in medical supplies. It is expected to be an area of concern given the increase in mortality and morbidity rates induced by the pandemic. Even more

than a year after the pandemic first struck, there continues to be uncertainty about its severity regarding its absolute impact on mortality and morbidity experience," the insurer said.

The pandemic has posed multiple challenges for the Indian life insurers. The onset of the pandemic saw a sharp fall in equity prices, while interest rates also declined.

Insurers have exposure to equities in unit-linked and participating business. This has become a challenge for the Indian life insurers. The sharp movements in markets, coupled with any asset liability mismatches that insurers may have, can impact the solvency position.

The report said there are emerging risks related to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues on the insurance industry of which climate change is a bigger challenge.

Part from climate change, there are emerging risks associated with public health trends such as increase in obesity related disorders and demographic changes such as population urbanisation and ageing, said the

report.

Industry's growth even during the pandemic shows promising future for the domestic life insurance sector, however, the pandemic has also exposed the gap in the protection gap in the country, said the report.

The number of Covid-19 related death claims is fraction of the number of overall lives lost, highlighting the vulnerability of the families, ICICI Pru Life said.

The insurer said it has become imperative for traditional working individual to add life insurance as a key ingredient of financial planning.

During the year, the pandemic amplified the need for health trends such as increase in obesity related disorders leading to the category slowly moving from being a "push product" to a "nudge product", ICICI Prudential Life Insurance said.

The company's total premium income during FY21 was Rs 35,733 crore of which Rs 13,032 crore was new business premium.

On the back of the risk-averse behaviour of our customers, there was considerable interest for traditional long-term savings products which grew by 61.2 per cent for the year," said the insurer.

DTPA says many teething problems in new IT portal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Direct Taxes Professionals Associations (DTPA) claimed that many teething problems or teething issues in the revamped Income Tax portal which was launched recently.

The DTPA in a letter to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, form 40 about problems in the new income tax portal for filing of returns.

The DTPA has also urged the Finance Minister to extend by two months date for payment of tax under Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme as also date for furnishing TDS/ TCS statements and for other compliance which are due by June 30 as offices are non-functional in most states due to COVID-19 pandemic.

DTPA Representation Committee chairman Narayan Jain said, "No option for Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme (VSV) although despite the scheme is still on for payments, unable to file TDS/ TCS statements, form 10A for making application for fresh registration of societies and trusts etc, under Sec 12AB and 80G not also available in

this portal while its last date is June 30."

He told PTI that "IT acknowledgements and Intimation under Sec 148 cannot be downloaded, DIN Number is not getting auto-populated, IT payment challan numbers not getting validated, digital signature certificate not getting registered or updated, new incorporated companies are not able to get registered, e-proceedings tab not working."

DTPA president NK Goyal said that many taxpayers have got notices from National Faceless Assessment Officers and Faceless CIT (Appeal) but taxpayers are unable to comply in the absence of e-proceeding tab in the portal.

Taxpayers are also unable to file Income Tax Returns for AY 2020-21 and of earlier years as there is no facility or options even for furnishing income tax return under Sec 148 or making application against issuance of notices u/s 148, Goyal claimed.

Professional urged the government to resolve these issues immediately as the date for compliance is approaching.



Bollywood
 'I am mindful of the fact that I feel centered within my own self.'
 —Malaika Arora Khan

WALK INTO THE FUTURE

RACHNA AGGARWAL ideates on changes the post-pandemic world's entertainment sector can adopt to ensure the health of its patrons while retaining the joy of an outing

Over the past year, we have invariably seen the decline of the entertainment real estate industry due to the pandemic. As people are turning to the internet to help fill the void, OTT platforms are booming, and theatres and cinema halls have been left abandoned, grim and desolate. All other service sectors like salons and restaurants are opening up, but entertainment zones remain at the bottom of the list, given the crowds that throng these places, leaving them jam-packed and gasping for air.

Industry experts have been trying to put together new ration for theatres that help offset the adverse effect of the pandemic by distancing people through strategic and well-planned seating. One or two seats left between each occupied seat compel people to stay at a distance. However, when families go out to entertain, their sole purpose is to spend time together instead of being alienated, thereby failing the designed approach. Entertainment spaces are social areas and a system that tries to separate people becomes the antithesis of its typology. Moreover, ailments similar to COVID-19 in the years to come will remain highly infectious and airborne. So, if one needs to rethink



entertainment design, one needs to go way beyond this basic concept.

Bearing in mind the collapse and turmoil caused by the malady in entertainment industries, one can't expect a sweeping upgrade in these spaces at the moment. Therefore, allotting more area per person is not an option, as it has substantial cost repercussions. How, then, can one stay in the domain of cost-effectiveness and yet keep the spaces safe during these unprecedented times?

When we think of virus transmission, the first thing that comes to our mind is the spread caused by coming in close contact with someone or touching surfaces which have been in contact with someone else who was infected. A practical solution to keep surfaces touch-free and uncontaminated is automation. Sensors and automation technology must be integrated within every micro-system, allowing people to move through doors and

carry out mundane tasks without having to lay a finger on any object. One such example is washrooms. When we open the door to a restroom, we need to press the push-plate that has also been touched by many others, making it a virus hotspot. A door that senses you and opens on its own and sanitary fixtures that can function with the wave of a hand can dramatically reduce virus transmission and enable hygienic safety to a large extent.

Nonetheless, some surfaces like seating upholstery or carpets can be left untouched. To optimise their hygiene value, we need to become mindful of the specifications of the materials we use. Stainless steel was considered a hero material for clean, hygienic spaces, employed everywhere from small door handles to bulkier furniture pieces. The most sought-after metal has now ironically become one of the least preferable ones, quickly being replaced by alternatives to avoid creating habitable sur-

faces for the virus. Swinging away from steel surfaces and carpet materials that are a breeding ground for biological entities, we need to shift our focus towards materials like FloTex, which have a high surface tension, making it difficult to absorb any particles. An alternative is utilising surfaces that can be sanitised in a jiffy at regular intervals. Laminate companies are already leading in the race with newer technologies that enable such safe resources.

The air in urban cities was previously chock-full with pollutants, and the influx of the virus added to the problems, making it much worse. Air purification systems which regulate the PM level of air are now passé; we must upgrade to technologies that can eliminate biological aerosol contents from the air. Air conditioning will become a crucial element since controlling the viral load suspended in these enclosed spaces is tricky when people spend several hours inside the room. Owing to several hazardous accidents that have occurred in the past, the fire safety certification has become a compulsion for all buildings to ensure public safety. The recent turn of events will bring in a 'new norm' wherein air quality certification will be required to gain people's confidence and trust.

Perhaps, a technology that can accommodate social interaction as well as social distancing within the same realm, is a 'bubble' or 'pod system' that can be installed for families to spend

some leisure time while remaining confined within their micro-environments. Similar to this concept is the idea of a drive-in cinema from yesteryear that has begun trending again. But it does not come without cons, as these cinemas take up ample areas and only function in a limited capacity for a limited number of hours during the day.

Another way to relook entertainment design is to change how we perceive these spaces. In the proscenium model, we are accustomed to enclosed rooms that are glammed-up with artificial mood lighting. Breaking this conventional style, lobbies can be redesigned into porous structures that open up to the outside world, allowing breeze and sunlight to wash the interiors. It ultimately boils down to people's choice — whether they prefer open, airy spaces or enclosed ones.

While the world is struggling to release itself from the clasp of the pandemic, people are trying to find newer ways to go out, interact and redeem the lifestyles they had in the pre-pandemic times. While eradicating the deadly disease stays a far-fetched dream, there will be innovations and ideas galore to restore our entertainment spaces to their lived-up state, bustling with people and energy that once offered us some recreational pleasures...

(The spokesperson is founder and design ideator of an award-winning architectural and interior design firm.)

WEBBED



SAMANTAR S2
 S1 of this original Marathi series revolved around the life of Kumar Mahajan, who realises that he is living a life that some other man named Sudarshan Chakrapani has already lived. After S1 ended in a cliff hanger, watch the forthcoming season to know what happens next. It releases on June 24 on MX Player.



SEPTEMBER MORNINGS
 The life of a transwoman who has just gained her independence takes an unexpected turn when an unknown son she had with a woman 10 years ago shows up out of the blue. This series releases on June 25 on Amazon Prime.



BOSCH S7
 Based on Michael Connelly's best-selling novel *The Burning Room*, the final season of Bosch puts Detective Harry Bosch's famous motto center stage — "Everybody counts or nobody counts." Releases on June 25 on Amazon Prime.

With fame comes great sacrifices

While many of us fancy the idea of being a Bollywood actor, it's definitely not as easy as it looks on the outside. By TEAM VIVA

Our B-town stars devote an incredible amount of hardwork and dedication to do justice to their on-screen characters. Celebrating the zeal of such film stars, today we list down 4 Bollywood actors who underwent major physical transformation for their roles. Take a look...

ADITYA ROY KAPUR

Just when the nation tried to label Aditya as the chocolate boy next door, the versatile actor left cinelovers with his massive physical transformation for his blockbuster release *Malang*. A dark thriller which won the audiences with its unpredictable and edgy storyline, *Malang* turned out to be a game changer for Aditya. It was impressive how the actor underwent a massive physical transformation to perform deadly, high-octane action sequences in the film wherein Aditya was seen in two extremely distinct looks in the film, one being lean and the other being a bulky avatar. Even for his next *Om*, Aditya has worked hard to achieve the desired look.

RANVEER SINGH

Known to be a director's actor, Ranveer has time and again undergone physical transformations for his role in various films. The actor had worked really hard on his body for Rohit Shetty's cop drama *Simmba* and underwent weight training to attain a beefed-up body. And yet again, not too long ago, Ranveer worked hard on his physical appearance and looks for his upcoming film *83*, for which he developed a lean physique. We hear that besides the intense workout sessions, the actor also had a meticulous diet regime in place for the same.

RANBIR KAPOOR

Ranbir has earned himself a spot in every top filmmaker's wishlist with his performances. The actor who will be next seen in *Brahmastra*, opposite girl-

friend and actor Alia Bhatt, underwent a solid physical transformation for his critically acclaimed film, *Sanju*. In order to get the required bulked up look for the Sanjay Dutt biopic, Ranbir used to have eight meals a day and woke up at 3 AM to drink a protein shake, along with intense workouts.

VICKY KAUSHAL

Last seen in *Bhoot Part One: The Haunted Ship*, Vicky is known not just for his exemplary acting skills but also for his incredible physical transformations. For the superhero film, *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, Vicky went through a complete change and gained 15 kilos to portray the role of a military man. In order to get the right look for his character in the film, Vicky followed a strict diet regime and did immense training, building muscles for the desired sculpted structure. Next to be seen in *Sardar Udham*, Singh, we hear he will be again seen in a never seen before avatar.

Singer, music director, record producer and occasional actor, Shekhar Ravjiani happens to be a busy man. Currently in Singapore, he talks about his School of Music, which will celebrate its one year anniversary tomorrow.

■ How has your experience been providing personalised musical training to students across 21 campuses of the Global International Indian School?

It has been an exciting and satisfying journey. We are celebrating our one-year anniversary at GIIIS-Singapore, which was mentored by me. We had one-on-one sessions wherein I listened to them, shared my inputs, gave them assignments on the parts they needed to work on et al. Six of them have now been selected for the second level of the mentorship programme for 2021. This year, we have seen a five-fold increase in the number of aspirants and we are excited at the prospect of working with more children.

■ While online classes are a handy tool in the backdrop of

Melodies of life

On the occasion of World Music Day, SHEKHAR RAVJIANI takes a break from work for a quick chat with CHRISTY VARGHESE



the pandemic, did you experience any difficulties while virtually imparting musical training?

I agree virtual classes cannot replace physical classes, no doubt. However, given the situation, virtual classes worked out fine. GIIIS is a smart school. Its infrastructure is state-of-the-art. The founders have really invested in making it a school of the future. GIIIS gave us a great licensed platform to hold virtual classes, gave us audio-visual equipment that was of excellent quality, and the students were given ample time and resources to practise and perfect their art. Of course, there were some technical glitches like

internet lag, but that was nothing compared to what the students walked away with. Overall, there were more positives than there were hiccups, and I am glad we did not let the pandemic dampen our spirits.

■ Do you have any plans for your music school in the near future?

This music school is my dream, so of course, I have a lot of ideas for the school and its talented students. As of now, I am working on pushing them to the next level through proper exposure and guidance. We have planned some collaborative activities with established members of

the industry for the students to get hands-on experience. It is going to be an amazing experience for them and this is just the beginning of our school's journey. In the future, we will ideate on many such avenues to give the best to our students. Depending on the type of talent pool we acquire, we will determine the type of platforms they will have exposure to. We would not like to disclose much at this time but we are brainstorming and we are positive that many more avenues will open up in the foreseeable future.

■ We would love to know what are the forthcoming projects you are working on.

We are currently working on the music for *Pathan* and *Jawabhai Jorlar*. Both of these films are set to release later this year.

I also have an extremely interesting surprise in store, something you will be hearing about, soon.

■ What is your message to people on the occasion of World Music Day?

In a world filled with uncertainty and anxiety, I believe that music has the power to help us all feel centered and loved. Our country has an undiscovered treasure trove of musical talent that is waiting to be heard. I urge music lovers to open their minds and hearts to these musicians and help them find their audience. It is also my dream that more and more kids pursue their love for music and I hope to do my bit in making this happen.

TRENDBLAZER



PLANT SOME SAPPLINGS: DEVGN

Actor **AJAY DEVGN** and son Yug were spotted planting trees in Juhu, as part of the *Mega Vrksa Campaign* by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).
 "I can only try and set an example. I want everyone including all the kids to get involved in this initiative. Things will not change just because I am doing it, they will change when everyone gets involved. The least I can do is create awareness about it."

fairtalk



"This pandemic gave me the time to do a lot of meditation and yoga. I request parents to enroll their children for yoga classes as this would lead them to experience the magic of meditation and change their world for the better. We need to lay enough emphasis on mental health."

dailytalk



"It's great to see Mumbai regaining normalcy, and for the industry to restart. Mumbai has a very different energy and I have loved every bit of my time here. It is a city that has given me wind beneath my wings to aspire and soar creatively, so it really feels great to be back at work here."

DETERMINED TO MAKE IT TO 100: DICK

American actor, comedian, writer, singer and dancer **RICHARD WAYNE 'DICK' VAN DYKE**, 95, is determined to make it to his milestone birthday in 2025.
 "The song says, 'I hope I die before I get old'. And I thought, what a sad thing. Old age can be a great time! The point is to enjoy life. I'm looking forward to 100. George Burns made it and I'm gonna do it too," Richard told *Closer US* magazine.



On the occasion of International Yoga Day, H H SWAMI MUKUNDANANDA says these uncertain times are a reminder that our well-being is connected to those around us and vice versa

Another nature is a constant reminder of living in harmony. A forest, for instance, "has an amazing ability to communicate and behave like a single organism," says Dr Suzanne Simard, professor of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia. Her research studies reveal how underground fungi networks of forests facilitate plants and trees to exchange water, nutrients, defence signals, and much more.

Along somewhat similar lines, the science of Yog has ventured deep and revealed to us that this whole creation is one system and that we are an integral part of one sublime event. The spirit of yoga is the spirit of unity and union. We have a very subtle, yet deep and symbiotic relationship with one another at different levels. Hence, International Yoga Day not only emphasises the sense of oneness and wholeness within an individual but also our intertwined wellness and existence in this universe.

We all are one

Now more than ever we need to help one another achieve all-around wellness while navigating through these formidable times. If we work in unison with one another, cooperate, and share vitality, we will eventually conquer the virus. We have succeeded in doing so before — our coordinated efforts eradicated smallpox, which once killed 35 per cent of its victims.

Developing a vaccine against COVID-19, although the most pressing challenges of our time, is a remarkable achievement of medical science. It is heartwarming to watch the global community donate vaccines to COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access), a global initiative to ensure that everyone, however, success depends upon the



UNITED, WE ARE STRONGER & HEALTHIER



are an integral part of our journey in this world. While some hardships are predictable and preventable, others are inescapable. A degree of emotional maturity is necessary to develop an adequate reserve of mental energy to come up with creative solutions to the problems that arise in life. Empowering the mind through meditation brings stability to emotions. Most ailments have their roots in the mind. When one harbours anxiety, tension, fear et al, it disturbs the mental sheath (one of the five sheaths in the body). This disturbance is then passed on to the pranic sheath, which then manifests in the physical sheath of the body as disease. Meditation on God heals the various ailments of the mind, resulting in the enhancement of vital energy and the improvement of physical health.

Nurture positive inner ecology with yogic practices

Sage Patanjali has given us five *niyama* (observances) that help us to improve the purity of thought, *santosha* (contentment), *tapas* (self-discipline), *svadhyaya* (contemplating on the self/self-reflection), *isvarapramadhana* (devotion and surrender to God). Engaging in these practices sincerely, especially devotion and surrender to God, will ignite the lamp of wisdom.

There is a tremendous organisation manifesting around us in every aspect of God's creation — from a tiny atom to our DNA. If we transcend our internal imperfections, we can then discern the perfect world. The world is perfectly designed in a manner to bring about the gradual flowering of the consciousness of the soul over the continuum of lifetimes. The entire universe prods us towards the evolution of consciousness.

The challenges that we come across are a part of the process that enriches us internally.

A caterpillar takes on strong wings, transforming into a beautiful butterfly only after going through the struggle. Similarly, this creation hurls processes at us to bring about transformation. If we can perceive this aspect of God's design, and align ourselves with it, we begin to understand his grand plan for us. When this dawns upon us, we not only take everything in our stride but also learn the art of dedicating our deeds to the Lord.

(The writer is an author, a yogi, world-renowned spiritual teacher, an authority on mind management, IIT & IIM alumnus and the founder of JKYog)

percentage of the global population that accepts vaccination. As they say, no one is safe, unless everyone is safe.

Enhancing the psychological immune system is equally important

The psychological immune system encompasses all our cognitive mechanisms, which fortify us from experiencing despondent or low-spirited emotions. Over the past 16 months, I have been witnessing several members of our spiritual congregation remaining strong and soldiering through the pandemic. It is the weaving of scriptural knowledge and practise of yoga that has been their paramount aid in riding out the pandemic. The science of yoga provides a holistic approach to develop not only physical resilience, but also mental, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual vigour.

Perils and arduous circumstances

In October, after the body of a COVID-19 patient in Sundergarh town, the district headquarters of Sundergarh in Odisha, reached Ranibaghicha Swargadwar cremation grounds, the administration realised there was no one present to help with the cremation. The son of the deceased waited for a week until one afternoon when the sub-collector and executive officer of Sundergarh Municipality contacted Siddhant Panda, Shishir Kumar Behera, Manoj Kumar Tripathy and Kamlesh Kumar Nathani. The four friends, wearing the PPE suits, cremated the body. The next day, the media covered the story and named these Samaritans *Shamshan Bandhu* (friends at cremation ground).

Their journey of cremating dead bodies began two decades ago. "In those days, when a person died in our colony or *sahi*, all the male members would join to help shoulder the body to the cremation grounds and console family members of the deceased. It was this interest that later transformed into dedication. "My mother would often say that *Shamasane je sa bandhabah* — a real friend is the one who stands with you during the funeral. We never stepped back from our mission," said Siddhant. They also helped

Unsung heroes

RAKHI GHOSH brings to the fore a story of four Samaritan friends who have been cremating COVID-19 infected bodies in a small town in Odisha



with the cremation of abandoned bodies. "In a small tin box, we would collect money from shops and people to cremate those who had no one to help them. During that time we relied on crowdfunding till we set up our respective businesses in 2003. Since then, we stopped collecting money from others and spent it from our pocket. This comes between ₹4,000-5,000 for the cremation of one abandoned body," informed Shishir. To date, they have cremated nearly 700 bodies from Sundergarh town, which has a population of 45,036 (2011 Census).

pandemic, Siddhant said, "We have seen people become inhumane. The fear of infection was such that the relatives didn't come to even light the funeral pyre and claim the ashes. Out of the 240 COVID-positive deaths, we lit the *mukhagni* (funeral pyre) of 56 people." To date, the relatives of the deceased have not turned up to collect the *asthi* (ashes), kept in different earthen pots with names and mobile numbers of the departed persons. "We keep calling their family members to collect the ashes, no one turned up to receive these as they fear the infection," said Siddhant. They shared that they will wait for a few days more, if no one turns up they have decided to proceed with the *asthi varshan* (immersion of the ashes) themselves. "We don't want to disrespect the dead and once the lockdown eases, we would perform *samhik visarjan* (collective immersion) of the ashes," said Manoj.

CHALLENGES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Talking about the challenges while performing this work during the Covid-19 pandemic,

Siddhant shared, "It was terrible during the peak period. In May, every day nearly 12-15 bodies were coming to the cremation ground. In the morning, we would light the funeral pyres for four bodies then after finishing the ceremony (*Agni Shanti*), we would get another call from the municipality informing us that some more bodies were on the way to the crematorium. It was no rest till midnight." As per Manoj, the most difficult part during the peak period of the second wave was to perform the work wearing a PPE suit in the scorching heat of 40 to 45°. "We had to stand for three-four hours in front of the pyre. We couldn't drink enough water as urinating after wearing PPE was a challenge. Sometimes, we felt suffocated while working for long hours," he added.

These four friends have been conducting this work following all the necessary COVID-specific protocols. The local administration has provided them with a vehicle to carry the dead bodies and PPE kits to perform the work.

"After the work is done, we come to the room provided by the municipality where we disinfect ourselves, take off the PPE kit and after a small break, get ready for the next round of cremation work," said Manoj. Besides appreciating their work, Abhimanyu Behera, sub-collector of the district, declared them as COVID-19 Warriors and vaccinated them on a priority basis.

"When the family has abandoned their dead relatives, other community members have come

forward to support their funerals. They have donated 70-80 tonnes of wood, glue, sanitiser, water, bottles and other things which are necessary for the cremation. These four friends, however, need more hands to support them.

FAMILY SUPPORT GETS THEM GOING

When asked how their family and neighbours react to their work, Siddhant said with a smile, "Last year, when media highlighted our work, my father-in-law and brother-in-law asked us to not undertake the task as they believed cremations should be performed by people belonging to the lower caste." His wife, however, stood by his side. Manoj — a Brahmin — also faced such issues. "This work gives us satisfaction, so we never pay heed to what others think of us," he said. Kamlesh explained, "We receive calls from all over the district as people understand the importance of the work we do. Sometimes, we travel to different corners of the district to bring infected bodies for cremation."

Seeing their dedication, the local administration and other organisations have felicitated them and their work. When they were asked about the name of their organisation, both Siddhant and Manoj laughed saying that they have been doing this work voluntarily and never thought of giving any name to it. It was the media that named them *Shamshan Bandhu*, a name people now associate with them. A name they are happy with. (Chirika Features)



Supreme union

RAYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI feels that yoga can do what people waged wars for — help achieve world peace

Yoga. The word has now become omnipresent and is literally on everyone's mind. It's unbelievable how this euphoria has touched the hearts of people across 192 countries. This whole thing started with our PM, Narendra Modi's address at the United Nations in 2014 where he expressed his wish to dedicate one day as the International Day for Yoga. To everyone's surprise, the UN agreed to sanction the event and nine months later, the entire world was preparing for a yoga spectacle and a couple of Guinness world records too.

Yoga as a method and practise has evolved over centuries since the time it was developed in ancient India. As of today, for a seeker, there are so many forms and branches of yoga to choose from, hence at times, one gets confused as to which would be best for them. However, from a practical point of view, real yoga is not the one that just gives temporary health and happiness but one which transforms the world into one with no mental tensions or worries. It won't be wrong to say that it is an ideal method of curing physical and psychological disorders for several ailments.

Today it is being stated by political pundits that yoga is the best soft power that India possesses to bring the world together and end the increasing trend of violence.

Of all the yoga techniques taught by various *yogis* over centuries, Raj yogi has been termed as the king among them all. Before practising this unique method, an aspirant needs to have a clear image of the supreme. The *yogi Gita* says "An ideal *yogi* is the one who has purity and chastity in thought, word and deed, who has knowledge and wisdom. One whose mind is subdued and remains constantly in soul-consciousness and *yogic* meditation. One who has conquered temptation of senses, who has cast aside ego, lust, anger, attachment and neither grieves at loss nor is jubilant with success. Someone in whose eyes all are equal, who is selfless and peaceful, whose diet is pure and in whose life there is austerity, who is upright, who knows the Almighty in his true essence and performs all deeds while in yoga with the Supreme." So, to become an ideal *yogi*, one needs to, first of all, understand the nuances of the definition that is mentioned above and then start his/her journey.

"Yoga in an actual sense means union or link. It is a union of the (soul) with the Supreme (Almighty) for which there is a prerequisite that an aspirant needs to follow. One must understand that we are the soul and not the body. All our physical and mental sufferings are a result of our failure to remain in soul consciousness, and this has made our lives miserable. However, through Raj yogi, we can change this situation because every soul is pure and peaceful in its original nature, and with proper guidance and practise it is possible to live a life without stress, worries and tension. Dedicating few minutes daily to Raj yogi is a meaningful expression of caring for yourself that can help you move through the mire of feeling unworthy. It involves the turning of one's mind and love towards the direction of the Almighty, to communicate with the divine nature. So, be a Raj yogi and rediscover yourself.

Thus, it is a technique of self-exploration, leading to the experience of heightened and expanded awareness, reaching God and letting your soul focus on him. In short, the principal objective of Raj yogi is to bring the self in conscious touch with the Almighty, thus making it increasingly aware of its divine origin, divine destiny and its divine nature. So, be a Raj yogi and rediscover yourself.



“

The unexamined life is not worth living. —Socrates

”

HOW TO BUILD A GOOD TEAM AT WORK

Find it hard to manage your team? Encouraging employees to learn on the job and voice their ideas and suggestions for change can build teams that are more effective and resilient in the face of unexpected situations, according to new research.

The study, led by researchers from Rice University in the US and University of Windsor in Canada, examined what makes employees more resilient and fosters learning in the workplace. The researchers specifically examined the interactions of 48 teams from five Canadian technology startups. They found that teams were more effective and resilient if their bosses encouraged employees to take risks, make suggestions and learn from the process.

Creating a work environment centred around learning and open communication is helpful as teams grow and take on new tasks, said Danielle King, Assistant Professor of Psychological Sciences at Rice University.

SINGLE DOSE SUFFICIENT FOR INFECTED

A single dose of vaccine is sufficient for those who were already infected by Covid-19, revealed a study by Hyderabad's AIG Hospitals.

The hospital announced that it conducted a study on 260 healthcare workers who got vaccinated between January 16 and February 5 to assess the immunological memory response in all those patients. All patients were given the Covishield vaccine. The observations have been published in the *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, a peer-reviewed journal.

The previously infected group showed a greater antibody response to a single dose of vaccine compared with those who had no prior infection. It also revealed that the memory T-cell responses elicited by a single dose of vaccine were significantly higher in the previously infected group compared with those who had no prior infection.

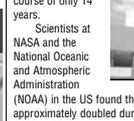


RISKS OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Older adults who struggle to fall asleep and experience frequent night awakenings are at a high risk for developing dementia or dying early from any cause, a new study suggests.

The findings, published in the *Journal of Sleep Research*, indicated that people who reported routinely experiencing difficulty falling asleep had a 49 per cent increased risk of dementia. And those who often woke in the night and had difficulty falling back asleep had a 39 per cent increased risk of dementia, reports CNN.

"We found a strong association between frequent difficulty falling asleep and nighttime awakenings and dementia and early death from any cause, even after we controlled for things like depression, sex, income, education and chronic conditions," said researcher Rebecca Robbins from Harvard Medical School.



CLIMATE CHANGE ALERT: NASA

Raising an alarm over human-caused climate change, NASA-led research has revealed that the amount of heat trapped by Earth's land, ocean and atmosphere has doubled over the course of only 14 years.

Scientists at NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the US found that Earth's energy imbalance approximately doubled during the 14-year period from 2005 to 2019.

To reach this conclusion, scientists compared data from two independent measurements — NASA's Clouds and the Earth's Radiant Energy System (CERES) data from a global array of ocean floats called Argo that enable an accurate estimate of the rate at which the world's oceans are heating up.



POST-COVID GREY MATTER LOSS

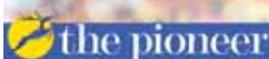
An analysis of brain scans from people once infected with Covid-19 suggest a consistent pattern in loss of grey matter over time, say researchers.

The researchers affiliated with the University of Oxford posted findings ahead of peer review to medRxiv, drawing on data from the UK Biobank.

"Our findings thus consistently relate to loss of grey matter in limbic system, or areas in the brain related to the perception of smell and taste, the authors wrote. The team compared brain scans taken pre-pandemic to scans taken about three years later among 394 COVID-positive patients.



9:30 pm VS 9:30 pm VS 12:30 am VS 12:30 am
LIVE TELECAST ON SONY TEN 1, 2, 3, 4 & SIX NETWORK



Spain face threat of early exit

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Luis Enrique admitted he expected more from Spain at Euro 2020 after a 1-1 draw with Poland on Saturday left his team facing a fight to reach the last 16.

Gerard Moreno missed a penalty and Alvaro Morata squandered the rebound as Spain's scoring woes struck again, with Robert Lewandowski's header earning Poland a valuable point in Seville.

After starting with a stalemate against Sweden, Spain sit third in Group E and may well now have to beat Slovakia in their final game on Wednesday to avoid an embarrassing early exit.

"I was expecting more," said Luis Enrique. "I was expecting six points and zero goals conceded. But this is the situation."

"We're coming into the crunch match now and if we want to progress we need to win. If we win, we'll go through. If not, we'll be out. That's the reality."

Morata poked in from close range to put Spain in front but Lewandowski's 60th goal of the season pulled Poland level before Moreno's penalty hit the post.

The rebound came quickly to Morata but with Wojciech Szczesny committed down to his right, the goal was open for the striker to score his second.

Instead, the whistles that accompanied Morata against Sweden last week were saved for the whole Spanish team at the final whistle.

Poland, meanwhile, formed a huddle on the pitch before going over to salute their supporters, after the deadly Swedish attack came up trumps again to keep his own team's hopes of progress alive.

Luis Enrique had launched



Poland's Robert Lewandowski, right, celebrates after scoring his side's first goal against Spain at La Cartuja in Seville

a passionate and prepared defence of Morata on Friday as he said the team would be "Morata and 10 others."

But he also replaced Ferran Torres in the starting line-up with Moreno, the Villarreal striker whose 23 goals was second only to Lionel Messi last season in La Liga.

Morata's best moment came in the 25th minute and it could hardly have been easier, even if a little shuffle put him in the right position to poke in Moreno's shot from the right.

The offside flag went up and Spain's players appeared to expect the cancellation but instead the goal stood.

Poland came again though and twice went close before half-time, Karol Swiderski hitting the post with a curling shot that came back for Lewandowski, but he smashed

'Barca move will give Depay something extra'

Amsterdam: Netherlands coach Frank de Boer is hopeful Memphis Depay's Euro 2020 form will be positively impacted after the confirmation of the striker will play for Barcelona next season.

Depay has long been linked with a move to the Camp Nou and on Saturday Barcelona announced the 27-year-old had signed a two-year deal to join on a free transfer from Lyon.

"Maybe the transfer to Barcelona will give him something extra to help him perform at his best," De Boer told reporters ahead of the Dutch team's final Group C game against North Macedonia.

"We need Memphis at his best to go as far as we want in this tournament but we have confidence in him and he is a confident player."

Depay, who scored 20 goals in Ligue 1 for Lyon in the season just finished, converted a penalty in the Netherlands' 2-0 win over Austria.

"He has come in for some criticism from some fans and media for failing to take other chances."

"I think Memphis is his first critic and I'm sure the criticism doesn't affect him," De

Boer said of the former Manchester United player, who is a huge star in the Netherlands.

"He knows if he played well or not so let's hope for the Netherlands that he can reach the level that we have in mind."

The Orange have already secured qualification for the last 16 as winners of Group C after beating both Ukraine and Austria in their first major tournament since the 2014 World Cup.

"When we are doing well we can beat anybody. Hopefully we can grow into the tournament and we still have some better performances to come," said De Boer, whose team will play in Budapest in the first knockout round against one of the best third-placed sides on June 27.

Victory there would set up a quarter-final in Baku against the runners-up in either Group A or B.

"We know our path to the final and to get to the final you have to win every game, so I don't really care who we play next," De Boer said. "We have no influence on it."



'Bubbling' Germany back on track: Müller

AFP ■ MUNICH

Thomas Müller said confidence is now sky high in the Germany camp after getting their Euro 2020 campaign back on track with a 4-2 thumping of holders Portugal on Saturday.

"We are allowed to feel a little euphoria," said Müller after Germany moved second in Group F, level on three points with Portugal and a point behind leaders France.

"It's just fun playing in this atmosphere. The cauldron is boiling."

Germany now need to beat Hungary in Munich on Wednesday to be sure of reaching the knock-out stage.

"Now we have the three points, we are well in the tournament and have it in our own hands," added Müller.

"We mustn't get carried away and become arrogant — but we must believe in our quality."



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen reacts after winning the French F1 Grand Prix at the Paul Ricard racetrack in Le Castellet on Sunday

Max wins French GP to extend c'ship lead

AP ■ LE CASTELLET

F1 championship leader Max Verstappen overtook Lewis Hamilton on the penultimate lap to win the French Grand Prix on Sunday and extend his lead over his title rival to 12 points.

Verstappen used the DRS system to catch Hamilton on Lap 52 and pass him on the inside before zooming off to clinch his third win of the season and 13th of his career. A bonus point for the fastest lap made it a great day for Red Bull, which had never beaten Mercedes on the Paul Ricard circuit in southern France.

It was a close call, though, with Red Bull's gamble on a two-stop strategy for Verstappen countered by a one-stopper for Hamilton as Mercedes kept him out on the same tires.

With five of 53 laps left, Hamilton was only 3.5 seconds ahead.

Verstappen quickly ate into that lead, kept calm and then positioned himself perfectly to attack on a long straight in the

way Hamilton has done countless times in his record 98 wins.

"When we made the call to do a two-stop, luckily it paid off," Verstappen said. "We had to work hard for it."

Verstappen, who won by 2.9 seconds, has 131 points to Hamilton's 119 after seven races.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez sneaked past a dejected Valtteri Bottas to take third place and strengthen Red Bull's lead in the constructors' championship: 215 points to 178.

"We pulled the trigger and we went with the two-stopper (for Verstappen) and it worked. And great job from Sergio making the one-stop work." Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said. "It's a team effort, the strategy guys are working the numbers and they go for it."

Verstappen has already matched his career best for a season with three wins and is emerging as a massive rival for the defending champion Hamilton, who is trying to win a record eighth F1 title to move one ahead of Michael Schumacher.

Shafali will be very important for us in all formats: Mithali

PTI ■ BRISTOL

Shafali Verma's spectacular debut has caught the imagination of the Indian women's team Test skipper Mithali Raj, who feels the teenager would be a key member of the side in all the formats of the game in future.

The 17-year-old, who had smashed a stroke-filled 96 in the first innings, made 63 in the second innings, to become the youngest woman and fourth overall to hit twin half-centuries in her debut Test and was rightfully adjudged player-of-the-match.

"She will be very, very important to the Indian batting unit in all formats. She beautifully adapted to this format," Mithali said in a virtual media interaction after India, following on, salvaged a draw in the one-off Test against England.

"She didn't go like she would go bonkers like T20 format. She played sensibly against the new ball and it's great to have her."

Asked what prompted the Indian team management to hand Verma a Test debut in England, Mithali said, "She has great range of shots, and she



Shafali Verma receives her Test cap from Indian skipper Mithali Raj before the start of first day play of Women's Test match against England in Bristol

can be very, very effective in a format like this if she gets going. In no time, we could see that the score would be somewhere else if she gets going."

"Once we knew that it's a used wicket and there won't be much of a movement, we thought it would be a good time to give her a Test debut and she lived up to it."

Mithali rated the young opener's knock in the second

Knight supports 5-day Test match

PTI ■ BRISTOL

England captain Heather Knight has hailed the one-off Test against India as a great advertisement for the women's game and said she would support five-day matches, instead of the current four-day contests.

"What a brilliant game of cricket. It was unfortunate it didn't have the dramatic and exciting finish that it could have done but what a game of cricket," Knight said after the match.

"It's been a great advert and shows that women's Test cricket has a place in the game... Maybe even play a five-day Test match."

Asked if she would be open to women playing five-day Tests, Knight said, "I would definitely be open to it. There has been a lot of draws in women's cricket, so it's definitely something that should be looked at."

"(We were) almost robbed of that finish because there wasn't an extra day and we didn't have the time in the game. So, yes, something I'd definitely be open to."

"I think if there was another day what a great finish it would have been," said Knight who hit 95 in England's first innings and took three Indian wickets in the match.

Jamieson 5/31 holds India to 217

PTI ■ SOUTHAMPTON

Kyle Jamieson continued his fine affair with the Indian team, tormenting the star-studded line-up with disconcerting bounce and swing as New Zealand bowled out the opposition for 217 on day three of the World Test Championship final here.

Jamieson decimated India with marvellous figures of 22-121-5 as New Zealand took control of the Test match by reaching 36 for no loss at tea. Openers Devon Conway (18 batting) and Tom Blundell (17 batting) negotiated the Indian pace attack pretty well.

However, it was 6 feet 8 inch tall Jamieson, who after last year's series in New Zealand, has once again turned into a nightmare for the Indian batsmen.

Having removed Rohit Sharma on Saturday morning, Jamieson was relentless with his length and the bounce did the rest with clever traps laid for keeper Virat Kohli and the dangerous Rishabh Pant.

Kohli (44, 132 balls) could not add a single run to his overnight score as his RCB teammate Jamieson made life



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson, right, appeals successfully for the wicket of India's captain Virat Kohli, left, during the third day of the WTC final in Southampton

difficult for him.

Boult and Jamieson kept bowling outside the off-stump channel and Kohli kept on leaving before the lanky seamer went slightly wide off the crease and got one to aim at rival skipper's boot laces.

Rishabh Pant (4) didn't score a run for 19 balls and

then got a boundary with a flick through mid-wicket. Two balls later, he took the bait and Jamieson angled one on the imaginary fifth off-stump. He went for an expansive drive only to be snatched in the third slip by Tom Blundell.

Once the 61-run stand with Kohli had ended, Rahane (49, 119 balls) sensed that the scoreboard needed a move on and started playing a few shots.

But perhaps, the milestone was working on his mind and despite playing a mistimed pull-shot one ball earlier, he swung with his signature short ball prevented him from reaching a well-deserved fifty.

Rahane's disappointment was evident as he fell into the trap to play the pull-shot despite knowing that Wagner had kept a deep fine leg and long leg for the shot.

Ravichandran Ashwin (22, 27 balls) threw his bat around and got some useful runs but was never going to last long as Tim Southee (22-66-1) took care of him just before lunch break.

Post lunch break, Jamieson removed Ishant Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah off successive deliveries but Mohammed Shami prevented him from completing a hat-trick.

TOCOG working on safe stay & training of Indian athletes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Tokyo Olympic organisers are working on how to ensure safe stay and seamless training of the Indian athletes inside the Games Village, according to a letter they have sent to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

The Indian athletes and officials travelling for the Olympics have been asked by the Japanese Government to undergo daily Covid-19 tests for a week prior to their departure and not to interact with anyone from another country for three days upon arrival, structures that have left the IOA fuming.

Stricter regulations have been put in place for all travellers — including athletes, coaches and support staff — of 11 countries, including India,



Seiko Hashimoto, left, president of the Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee, and Saburo Kawabuchi, mayor of the Olympic Athlete Village, pose for a photo during a media tour at the Olympic Village for the Tokyo 2020 Games

where different variants of Covid-19 have been identified, within 14 days of their arrival in Tokyo.

"Termining the rules as 'unfair and discriminatory', the IOA

had written to the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (TOCOG) to ensure that mechanisms to prevent Covid-19 do not have any "adverse and detrimental impact" on performance of athletes.

In reply to the IOA letter, TOCOG said, "Tokyo 2020 is working to define how athletes of your NOC as well from other 10 countries and all other 195 NOCs can stay safe in the Villages and have training."

"We hope to provide you with those information and discuss together as soon as possible we develop it," the Games organisers said in a letter to the IOA.

The IOA, on its part, said that its president and secretary general were in discussion with TOCOG and seeking clarifications on the conditions imposed on the Indian contingent for Tokyo Olympics.

Uganda Olympic team member tests +ve on arrival in Japan

AFP ■ TOKYO

A member of the Uganda Olympic team has tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in Japan, just over a month before the pandemic-postponed Games, officials said.

The first group to arrive from Uganda — a nine-strong party, including boxers, coaches and officials — landed at Tokyo's Narita airport on Saturday. They are the second team to arrive after Australia women's softball squad on June 1.

But one of the African nation's delegation tested positive during screening at the airport, a Government official told reporters. The person tested twice but their condition



Members of Uganda's Olympic team prepare to leave for Osaka

officer, told reporters, renewing a pledge to take strict measures against infections.

Public broadcaster NHK said the group had all been vaccinated and tested negative in Uganda before they came to Japan.

The team was originally due to have arrived in Japan on June 16, but their flight was cancelled following a surge in Covid-19 cases in Uganda, local media said.

The other members of the Ugandan party have already left the airport for Osaka, western Japan, where they will train ahead of the Games.

This was the first case showing positive Covid test results among Olympic arrivals from overseas, local media said.