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ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY:
KATRINA
10 VIVACITY

CAPSULE

NO CLARITY ON VAX PROCUREMENT: HOSPS

New Delhi: Several private hospitals across the country said they have no clarity on procuring Covid vaccines under the new policy announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that it has led to vaccination drive being put on hold at their centres. The hospitals have sought a proper mechanism. P4

RAJNATH OK'S ₹499 CR FOR DEFENCE SECTOR

New Delhi: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved budgetary support of nearly ₹499 crore for research and innovation in the defence sector for the next five years. P4

MILKHA SINGH'S WIFE DIES DUE TO COVID

Chandigarh: Nirmal Kaur, former Indian women volleyball team captain and wife of sprint legend Milkha Singh, died at a Mohali hospital due to Covid-19 related complications on Sunday. She was 85 and is survived by her husband, one son and three daughters.

U'KHAND LOP PASSES AWAY

Dehradun/New Delhi: Leader of Opposition in the Uttarakhand Assembly Indira Hridayesh passed away after suffering a cardiac arrest in New Delhi on Sunday. P4

'Work as one to meet challenges'

Modi tells G-7: India bound to democracy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday stressed the need for open and democratic societies to work together to defend the values they hold dear and to respond to the increasing global challenges. This message during the three-day G-7 summit ending Sunday was in apparent reference to the growing economic might of China and its human rights record, which emerged as a topic of concern for the G-7.

India is a natural ally for the G-7 countries in defending the shared values from a host of threats stemming from authoritarianism, terrorism and violent extremism, disinformation and economic coercion, Modi said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi participates in the Outreach Session of the G7 Summit virtually in New Delhi PTI

He, however, did not name China during his speech.

Participating in the high-profile event virtually at a session on 'Open societies and open economies' at the G7 summit, the Prime Minister highlighted India's civilisational commitment to democracy, freedom of thought and liberty, the Ministry of External Affairs said here after Modi's address.

The Prime Minister underscored the vulnerabilities inherent in open societies and

called on technology companies and social media platforms to ensure a safe cyber environment for their users, Additional Secretary (Economic Relations), External Affairs Ministry, P Harish said.

Asked if the Prime Minister raised the issue of Chinese aggression during the summit, the official said it was not raised and there are other fora where such issues are discussed.

Continued on Page 2

Bengal Guv has six OSDs, Raj just one

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

West Bengal's Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, who has been in the news for his frequent run-ins with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, has six Officers on Special Duty (OSD) while Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra has only one OSD.

According to the websites of the different State Governments, there are four OSDs to the Bihar Governor and two OSDs to the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Governor. Similarly, Chhattisgarh and Odisha Governors have two OSDs each.

An OSD is an officer in the Indian civil service of the status between a secretary and an under-secretary in the Government of India. Recently, a controversy arose after the All India Trinamool Congress

(TMC) MP from Krishnanagar Mahua Moitra shared details of six OSDs to Governor Dhankhar and claimed that all of them are somehow related to him, or are from his known circle.

The Governor's Office and the BJP have rubbished the charge.

As per the Bihar Government's website, Governor Phagu Chauhan has four OSDs — Vinod Kumar Tiwari, OSD (J), Sanjay Kumar, OSD (Estb.), Mahabir Prasad Sharma, OSD (U) Vinay Thakur, OSD. The Governor also has two ADCs — Major Dhiraj Bishd ADC (M) and Rakesh Kumar Dubey IPS ADC (P).

As per the Madhya Pradesh Raj Bhawan, there is no OSD to Governor Anandiben Patel. There is only one post of OSD to Governor in Haryana which is lying vacant.

Continued on Page 2

Opp: Land fraud by Ram temple trust

AAP, SP charge Ayodhya trust of multi-crore shady purchase deals

PRABHA SHANKAR ■ LUCKNOW

In a serious allegation that raised the political temperature in Uttar Pradesh, AAP and Samajwadi Party leaders, in different Press conferences, leveled a sensational charge of financial irregularities in land purchase by the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, which was set up by the Centre for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

AAP MP Sanjay Singh held a Press conference in Lucknow while former SP MLA and former Minister Pawan Pandey addressed reporters in Ayodhya. Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said that they will study the charges of land purchase anomalies and will then reply to the allegations.

In a brief statement here on Sunday Rai said: "People had charged us with the killing of Mahatma Gandhi hence we are not afraid of such allegations. We will reply at the appropriate time after examining the entire matter."

Singh said a multi-crore scam was committed by the trust and its associates through embezzlement of funds with the cost of the land increasing by ₹5.5 lakh per second in a gap of five minutes between two different purchase deeds for the land.

He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to set up a high-level inquiry into the alleged land scam by the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust members for purchasing land in Ayodhya.

Presenting documents, Singh said the scam amounted to ₹16.50 crore and the illegal act came as a big onslaught on the faith of the millions of Ram bhakts who had given donations for the construction of the grand Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Continued on Page 2



People throw caution to the wind and crowd the Sarojini Nagar market on Sunday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Congress high command to take final call on Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

The Congress high command is expected to soon take a final call on the prevailing crisis in its Punjab party unit. Before that, the high command may again hold talks with Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh to settle down on an "all-acceptable" resolution.

Days after the party's three-member panel, set up to resolve the prevailing crisis, submitted its report to the party's interim president Sonia Gandhi, former party chief Rahul Gandhi on Sunday met the committee members — the Leader of Opposition in Rajya

Continued on Page 2

Delhi shops to open on all days, eateries to run at 50%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

There is good news for shoppers and diners in the national Capital. Delhi's shops will open all days and restaurants will operate with 50 per cent seating capacity from Monday. Announcing the third phase of the unlocking process, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said, "Last week, we had allowed shops in markets to operate on an odd-even basis, whereas standalone shops could operate all day. From this Monday, all shops will be allowed to operate all day. However, they have to operate between 10 and 8 pm."

"Likewise, weekly markets will be allowed to operate but with restriction," he added. This means that only one market in one municipal zone in a day. Delhi has 12 municipal zones.

Importantly, amid the potential threat of third wave of Covid 19, the Delhi Government and other law enforcement agencies will be responsible for strict regulation of Covid appropriate behaviour.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) later issued an order to this effect.

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Strict police vigil on restaurants, pubs to enforce Unlock 3.0

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the Delhi Government announcing the opening of restaurants in the national Capital with 50 per cent occupancy, the Delhi Police has pulled up its socks to enforce the order from Monday. Police said that action will be initiated against those found violating the directions issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). Police teams will be keeping a vigilant eye on the restaurants, hotels and eateries

across the city. With people expected to return to restaurants and pubs, the two agencies, Delhi Police and Delhi Excise Department have prepared themselves to intensify checks at restaurants from Monday.

Police have issued instructions to Market Associations across the city to follow and implement new guidelines. Besides the police, the members of market associations will be keeping an eye on the restaurants.

Full report on Page 3

'How can I get my grandson's ma back?'

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Tales of despair

PART IV

When will ma come," enquires seven-year-old Montu (name changed), as he sits in the lap of his dadi (paternal grandmother). She keeps quiet, but when Montu persists with his query she replies, almost in a whisper, that his mother will come soon.

The elderly lady faces similar queries from Montu almost the whole day. He along with his elder brother Rajesh (name changed) lost their parents within a span of five days in May. Though 13-year-old Rajesh understands what had happened, the little boy, Montu,

still yearns for his mother. "From where do I bring his mother back," asks Janved Singh, a resident of a village in Agra and the grandfather of the two boys. "How long can we placate him by telling him that his mother has gone to school and will come back soon," he says in a voice choked with emotion.

Singh, 71, is a security guard in a private company in New Delhi. His 41-year-old son was employed in a private construction company and his

daughter-in-law was a Shiksha Mitra. His life was getting along despite his wife being a cancer patient and the younger son, 38, being mentally challenged.

Once in a week he used to go to his village, Gudi Rampuri just to spend time with his grandsons. "Now, the thought of going to the village sends shivers down my spine. I feel scared. What will I tell Montu when he asks me about his mother," Singh tells this reporter on the phone from Delhi.

Singh's life changed suddenly in May. His daughter-in-law, 37, was deployed on duty for the Panchayat election.



Soon she developed fever and cough but the family initially treated it as a viral fever. "On May 12 her condition deteriorated and she was taken to a private hospital. The doctors asked for exorbitant fees. Still we continued with the treatment in that hospital.

Continued on Page 2

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K'taka to step up search for illegal Pak, Bangladeshi citizens

PTI ■ SHIKARIPURA (K'TAKA)

Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said he has instructed officials to step up search for Pakistani and Bangladeshi citizens staying illegally in the State. His statement came in the wake of the recent arrest of some Bangladeshi nationals in Bengaluru who had brutalised and sexually assaulted a woman after trafficking her from their country and forced her into prostitution in the city.

A Pakistani woman was recently arrested for entering India and staying in the state illegally for more than six years. "I have directed the officials to intensify the search for Pakistani and Bangladeshi citizens staying in the State illegally," Yediyurappa told reporters here in his hometown in Shivamogga district. He was on a two-day visit to inspect various development projects in the district including the upcoming airport, slated to be completed by June 2022.



A view of a fruit shop partially submerged in a waterlogged street, in Prayagraj on Sunday

PTI

Facilitating legitimate travel top priority: American diplomat on allowing Indian students to go to US

New Delhi: The US mission in India is "actively working" to accommodate as many student visa applicants as possible in July and August, and facilitating their legitimate travel remains a top priority for it, a senior American diplomat said on Sunday.

Don Heflin, the Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs at the US embassy, also said that the US-bound students will not require any proof of Covid-19 vaccination to enter the country. They will need a negative report of their Covid-19 test taken within 72 hours prior to their departure.

There has been growing anxiety among a sizeable number of Indian students aspiring to fly to the US for higher studies in view of certain restrictions in getting visa appointments due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The embassy will start giving visa interview slots for Indian students from Monday.

"We recognise the stress and anxiety this has

caused to students and their families, and we are actively working to accommodate as many student visa applicants as possible in July and August. Facilitating legitimate student travel to the United States remains a top priority for the US Mission to India," Heflin told PTI in an interview.

The official was asked about the rising uncertainty among the Indian students wanting to travel to the US, which had imposed fresh travel restrictions in May.

"Students returning to academic programmes that resume on or after August 1 may travel to the United States up to 30 days before the programme resumes. There is no National Interest Exception required in this situation," he said.

"We recommend continuing students discuss their specific resumption plans with their respective universities to develop a travel timeline," Heflin said.

PTI

Sachin leaves Delhi with 'promise' that his demands will be met shortly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Congress leader Sachin Pilot left Delhi on Sunday evening with a 'promise' that his demands will be met shortly.

Sources in the party said Congress chief Sonia Gandhi is likely to speak to Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in a day or two to resolve the one year long crisis between Pilot and Gehlot.

Pilot, however, could not meet any of the top leaders of the party which includes Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi on who's request reached Delhi.

Pilot has also been offered to take over as the AICC General Secretary which he however refused, sources said. Pilot was able to meet only Rajasthan incharge Ajay Maken and AICC General Secretary Organization KC Venugopal and a few leaders with whom he has been friendly.

Tensions continued to simmer within the Congress in Rajasthan on Saturday with the Pilot camp getting increasingly restless over allegedly not being given their due in the government, and were seen closing ranks for pressing their demands strongly.

Pilot had openly revolted against the leadership of Gehlot which ended after the party high command convinced him that his camp would be given its due in the State Government.

An All India Congress Committee (AICC) panel was also formed to iron out differences. Jitin Prasada's switch to the BJP last week made the party high command to resolve the year long crisis in the State sooner.

AICC sources said "cabinet will be expanded in Rajasthan soon" to induct five loyalists from Sachin Pilot's camp. The others from his camp can be given a place in the organisation and other Government bodies.

Maha records 2,771 Covid-19 fatalities

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In what appears to be a never-ending fatality reconciliation exercise that is throwing up more questions than providing answers, the daily Covid-19 deaths peaked to all-time 2,771 in Maharashtra, as the authorities added a whopping 2,288 old deaths to the current tally of 483 fatalities. On a day when the State recorded 10,442 new cases, the total infections breached the 59 lakh mark.

The death reconciliation exercise has exposed the health authorities' failure to plug the loopholes in the death reporting process in the state. For, the state health authorities have been adding the previous unaccounted deaths to the daily fatality almost on a day-to-day basis for nearly five weeks now.

Between May 1 and June 13, a

whopping 32,733 deaths were recorded in the state, of which 16,385 old deaths were added to the State's cumulative fatality tally, after reconciliation of figures.

During the last six days alone, 8436 deaths (June 8-407, June 9-400, June 10-1,522, June 11-2,213, June 12-1606 and 2288) have been added to the state's cumulative tally.

Meanwhile, with daily deaths reported on Saturday, the Covid-19 toll in the state jumped from 1,08,333 to 1,11,104. Similarly, with 10,697 new infections reported on Saturday, the total number of cases in the state went up from 58,98,550 to 59,08,992.

As 7504 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 56,31,767 to 56,39,271.



Dark clouds hover over Krishna and Koyna river, in Karad on Sunday

PTI

Congress...

From Page 1

Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, Punjab party affairs in-charge Harish Rawat, and former MP JP Agarwal. What actually transpired in the hour-long meeting is yet to be known, but it has been learnt that Rahul was briefed by the panel members regarding the key recommendations of the report, besides the other findings.

Notably, the party high command has become active to resolve the intra-party conflicts simmering in several States, including Rajasthan. The Congress currently has its own Governments in just three States, while it is holding power in three other States in coalition with regional outfits.

Punjab being the only State which turned the tide when the entire country was swept by the Modi wave in 2019 polls, the Congress party did not want to affect its poll prospects because of the infighting.

The high command has been making efforts to prevent winds of dissidence from eroding the party in Punjab. Not only Sonia, but also the Gandhi siblings - Priyanka and Rahul - had apparently taken upon themselves to carry out parallel sessions with the State party leaders in an attempt to save the House from being pulled down by the swirling storm inside. While the Kharge panel was holding parleys with the State leaders, the Gandhians were also holding meetings, or telephonic or videoconferencing sessions with them.

Notably, Rahul had held telephonic session with more than a dozen party leaders from the State, which included disgruntled partymen too, to get hold of the entire situation.

As a part of the same, the committee members explained its recommendations in a sequential manner to Rahul, besides the role it has suggest-

ed for the Chief Minister, his bete noire Navjot Singh Sidhu and his close aide Pargat Singh, and also the Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar. It has been learnt that a detailed discussion was held on all recommendations, especially about the role of Sidhu, Pargat Singh, the State party president Sunil Jakhar. It was stressed that Sidhu could play a very significant role for the party and thus should be suitable accommodated.

Sources informed The Pioneer that even though Rahul heard all the recommendations of the committee, including regarding Sidhu, he did not give any reply or any response to the same. The panel also informed Rahul regarding the complaints against the Chief Minister and his style of functioning and the urgent need to correct the same, coupled with fulfillment of all pre poll promises, including sacrilege.

The members also reportedly apprised Rahul about the recent statements by the party MLA and Olympian Pargat Singh despite the instructions to all party leaders to not to air their grievances in the public.

It has also been learnt that Pargat has been reprimanded by the party State affairs in-charge Harish Rawat for his public statements against the Chief Minister. Pargat has reportedly been warned that strict disciplinary action could be taken against him if he does not stop.

Meanwhile, indications are that Capt Amarinder will remain in the driver's seat while his bete noire Sidhu will sit pillion with Punjab moving towards the Assembly elections. A change in party's organisational structure is also expected. Amidst all this, the senior Congress leaders, including his critics, have started approaching the Chief Minister not only to get their incomplete works done, but also to show their support amidst the prevailing crisis within the State party unit.

Raj CM: High Power Committee will be formed for child labour prevention



Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that child labor is a stigma which snatches away from childhood from children. We have to get to the root of this problem and eradicate it. He said that the State Government is trying to make Rajasthan a model State in preventing child labour and rehabilitating child labour.

A high power committee will be formed for prevention of child labour in the State, in which experts will be included.

'How can I get...

From Page 1

She died on May 14," Singh recalls. A few days later his son also showed similar symptoms and was also shifted to the same private hospital where he died five days later on May 19.

There was a long pause when Singh was asked whether the Panchayat election was responsible for the spread of coronavirus infection among families. "I do not know ... whom to blame now. Yes, my daughter-in-law had gone for some training and after a few days she reported sick. She died and a few days later my son died too. I am left with the enormous responsibility of my grandsons," he says.

Rajesh is a student of Class 9 and Montu of Class 5. Both study in a school near their village.

"I will ensure good education to my grandsons. We are not rich. I work as a security guard in Delhi. If a 71-year-old is working as a security guard you can understand his compulsions. When my son and daughter-in-law were working we were comfortable. They used to take care of our daily needs. They were also giving me money for the treatment of my wife and the other son. Now, what will happen? I am left alone in this world," says Singh.

He continues: "Now, their dadi is taking care of the kids. But how long will we live? My wife is already a cancer patient and my son is mentally challenged and is getting treatment from AIIMS, Delhi. I do not want people to call my grandsons orphans. I have to live till they grow up."

The family desperately needs financial help. Singh has heard that the Government is giving financial support to such children who have lost their parents to Covid. The SDM of the area had met him a few days ago.

Bengal Guv...

From Page 1

According to Rajasthan Raj Bhawan website, Govind Ram Jaiswal is the OSD to Governor Kalraj Mishra, while Jammu and Kashmir's Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has also one OSD namely Prashant Jankar. Uttarakhand Governor Baby Rani Maurya has one OSD rank officer and two ADCs.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor has no OSD, only staff officers to his office.

Delhi shops to open on all...

From Page 1

"It is directed that all district magistrates, districts DCPs, deputy commissioners of municipal corporations, and all other authorities concerned shall be responsible for ensuring Covid-19 appropriate behaviour, which is wearing of masks, maintain social distancing, no consumption of liquor, pan, gutkha, tobacco, etc., in all shops, malls, market complexes, weekly markets, restaurants, mandis, ISBTs and railway station, however, only restaurants are allowed to open with certain conditions this week. Bars are not allowed."

The relaxations implemented last week will continue including metro operations with 50 per cent sitting capacity, factories and industries, construction activities, government offices with full attendance for officer above Grade-1, and 50 percent for below that, private offices with minimum attendance between 9am and 5pm, and all-day operations of standalone.

Taxis, auto and other vehicles will also be allowed with a cap of maximum passengers.

Weddings with maximum presence of 20 guests either at court or inside residential premises will be allowed and funerals can be attended but not more than 20 guests will be allowed. Religious sites will also be opened but visitors not allowed. Home delivery of goods will be allowed.

Importantly, schools, colleges, coaching centres and education institutes will continue to remain closed while social, political, religious and academic gatherings will not be allowed.

Besides, swimming pools, gymnasiums, yoga centres, cinema halls, theatres and multiplexes; banquet halls; auditoriums and business to business exhibition arenas; entertainment parks, water parks and public parks will also remain closed, as per the DDMA order.

The graph of Covid 19 cases in the National Capital is curving down with positivity rate of 0.35 per cent but the city administration will closely monitor trends of fresh cases after the latest relaxation remain in force for a week.

Cautioning the people against third wave and urging for Covid appropriate behaviour, Kejriwal said, "If cases continue going further down, all restrictions can be removed in a phased manner, however, if cases go up, we may have to impose restriction again."

The city was under a hard lockdown since April 19 with only essential activities allowed. Citing Covid-19 health bulletin, Kejriwal said that the situation is under control now but he is concerned mainly about recovering the economy and preparing infra to face third wave. "We have launched 22 oxygen plants on Saturday, and Friday, three oxygen plants were inaugurated. From Monday (June 14th), economic activities will start functioning in a restricted manner," Kejriwal said.

What is new?

1. There will be no odd-even formula for shops in markets and malls. Shops can stay open only between 10am and 8am. Essential services shops can remain open beyond 8pm.
2. Dine-in services will be allowed but with 50 per cent sitting capacity, this will be on trail basis till June 20; liquor will not be served at restaurants.
3. Cinemas/multiplexes are not opening. Barber shops to be opened but spas, gymnasiums and yoga institutes will remain closed.
4. Parks and gardens will remain shut. Sports complexes have also not allowed to reopen.
5. Metro and buses will operate at 50 per cent seating capacity. Standing commute will not be allowed. Also, cabs, autos, e-rickshaws can ferry up to two passengers per ride.

'Work as one...

From Page 1

Harish said the G-7 leaders underlined their commitment to a free, open and a rules-based Indo-Pacific and resolved to collaborate with partners in the region.

India's participation at the G7 sessions reflected understanding within the bloc that resolution to "the biggest global crisis of our time" is not possible without India's involvement and support, he said, in a reference to the coronavirus pandemic.

The leaders of the world's advanced economies held a summit in Cornwall in the UK from June 11-13. It is for the first time that the leaders of the grouping met in person since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Modi spoke in two sessions on Sunday on topics of climate change and open societies. On Saturday, he exhorted the international community to come together as "one earth one

health" in fighting the corona pandemic.

Giving details of the three-day summit with special focus on Modi's participation, Harish said there was also widespread support at G-7 deliberations for text-based negotiations on proposals by India and South Africa for patent waiver on Covid vaccines.

Moreover, the Prime Minister's participation highlighted the understanding within the G-7 that resolution to the biggest global crisis is not possible without India's involvement, he said.

Britain was heading the summit this year and Prime Minister Boris Johnson had invited Modi to take part in the outreach session of the G-7.

Given the corona situation at home, Modi preferred to participate virtually. Australia, South Korea and South Africa were the other countries invited for the outreach sessions this year.

Johnson conveyed to the

Indian Government that he was disappointed for not being able to welcome Modi in person at the G7 summit, Harish said. Johnson, however, was understanding and supportive of Modi's decision to attend the G-7 summit virtually, reported news agency ANI.

On the issue of climate change, Modi called for collective action, recognising that this challenge cannot be addressed in silos. He also pointed out that India is the only G-20 country on track to meet its Paris commitments.

As regards the ongoing fight against the pandemic, the G-7 was in consensus to provide capacity in various regional hubs manufacturing vaccines by providing finance and technology transfer.

In fact, French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday urged the G-7 countries to make efforts to provide raw material to India for manufacturing vaccines in large numbers.

Harish said India's engage-

ment with G7 and other guest countries stands on its own, and, for the first time, India has engaged in ministerial and working-level tracks as a guest country.

He further added that India's engagement was fruitful, productive and the Government hopes to take forward the engagement in various initiatives, including in the run-up to the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP26, scheduled for November.

The G-7 summit focussed mainly on three issues, including vaccines and recovery from the pandemic, the environment and climate change, open societies and open economies.

The main theme for the summit was 'Build back better' in the backdrop of the pandemic over the last 18 months. Harish said leaders of the G-7 grouping and guest countries including India had a detailed discussion on the need for reforming global health governance.

60 lakh got jab in Capital: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 60 lakh people have been vaccinated in the national Capital, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Kalkaji Assembly seat, Atishi, said presenting the vaccination bulletin on Sunday.

"In Delhi, 30 per cent of the total population above the age of 18 years has been given the first dose of the vaccine. So far, 46,33,650 people have been given the first dose of the vaccine, which is 30 per cent of Delhi's total population above 18 years of age. Apart from this, 14.40 lakh people have received both the doses of the vaccine. On June 12, 83,113 people were given vaccine doses in Delhi. In which 54,788 people were given the first dose and 28,325 people were given the second dose," she said.

Delhi has less than two days of stock of Covaxin left for youth and less than one day of Covishield. "61,000 doses are left for the youth of 18 to 44 years, including 18,000 doses of Covaxin and 43,000 doses of Covishield are available, the AAP leader said. "We would like to appeal to the central Government to maintain a regular supply of vaccines for the people of 18 to 44 years. Because the more vaccines we make available to the youth, the more hesitation about the vaccine will be removed," she added. She said that 53,59,910 vaccine doses have been



Ranjan Dimri

received for those above 45 years of age, out of which 5.58 lakh doses are left. Available in stock for 11 days of Covaxin and 24 days of Covishield for

45+. Meanwhile, on Saturday, Delhi received 72,800 doses of Covaxin yesterday for the above 45 years age category.

255 Covid cases

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 255 new Covid-19 cases while the positivity rate dipped to 0.35 per cent. Besides, 23 more fatalities were reported on Sunday, taking the total number to 24,823 till now, according to data shared by the health department.

The number of active cases as on Sunday, stood at 3,466, of which 1,037 are in home isolation, according to the latest health bulletin.

A total of 72,751 tests, including 53,885 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

Anticipating the "possi-

ble" third wave of Covid-19, the Delhi Government has speeded up revamping several existing hospitals to increase the number of beds and also building new hospitals.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had also announced the setting up of a paediatric taskforce and two genome sequencing labs as well as a plan to ramp up oxygen capacity to prepare for a possible third Covid wave that could peak at 37,000 cases a day.

The Government had also announced plans to create a buffer stock of important medicines besides other initiatives to deal with the 'possible' further outbreak.

Unlock 3.0: Cops to keep eye on violators

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the Delhi Government announcing the opening of restaurants in the national Capital with 50 per cent occupancy, the Delhi Police has pulled up its socks to enforce the order from Monday. Police said that action will be initiated against those found violating the directions issued by Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). Police teams will be keeping a vigilant eye on the restaurants, hotels and eateries across the city.

With people expected to return to restaurants and pubs, the two agencies, Delhi Police and Delhi Excise Department have prepared themselves to

intensify checks at restaurants from Monday.

Police have issued instructions to Market Associations across the city to follow and implement new guidelines. Besides police, the members of market associations will be keeping an eye on the restaurants.

"If restaurants are found violating the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) guidelines, the market association can also inform Delhi Police and a strict action will be initiated against the owner and restaurant," said Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police.

"The police teams will be patrolling continuously in all

districts and they will be conducting surprise checks to ensure restaurants follow guidelines issued by the DDMA. Those violating the rules will be penalised," said Biswal.

Police said that those found guilty will be booked under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act.

As per DDMA order, the restaurants can now function with 50 per cent occupancy and will open from 10 AM to 8 PM.



DMRC conducts drive to raise awareness about benefits of vaccination



Ranjan Dimri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro is organising a unique awareness campaign about the benefits of vaccination against coronavirus at metro's construction sites across the national Capital Region (NCR).

As part of this week-long campaign, a series of Nukkad Natak (street plays) targeting small groups with a limited number of workers are being organised at the construction sites since last Wednesday while ensuring social distancing and all other protocols, the DMRC said in a statement.

Professional artists who work in commercial movies, TV shows and web series have been roped in to perform Nukkad Natak. Since most of the workers come from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, the shows are designed and written in different dialects spoken in rural

parts of these states, so that the workers understand it better, it said.

Popular folk songs from these regions are being used in these shows where the actors also interact with the workers. Informative leaflets about vaccination benefits are also being distributed among the workers. All relevant information about the benefits of vaccination has been compiled in a very lucid manner in Hindi.

"Approximately, 3,200 workers are currently working at DMRC's construction sites across Delhi-NCR. The number is gradually increasing as the lockdown restrictions are lifted," it said.

Vaccination drives have already been conducted at some of DMRC's construction sites.

DMRC authorities are in touch with the local administrations and private health-care providers to organise more vaccination drives at its sites.

Target to set up 1,213 plants of O2 across India: Pradhan



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) at Maharaja Agrasen Hospital, Punjabi Bagh on Sunday.

While inaugurating the oxygen plant, he said since there are indications of the third wave of corona in the country, the Central Government wants to make

sure that the health system of the country is completely sound and this time there will be no panic regarding oxygen. No life should be lost at least not due to lack of oxygen. There is a target of setting up 1,213 PSA oxygen plants across the country from the PM Care Fund which will be completed by July next month. "The production capacity of the new plants to be set up will be 35000 metric tonnes per day,"

he said. State BJP President Adesh Gupta, Member of Parliament Parvesh Sahib Singh, State BJP Media Head Naveen Kumar, State Secretary Sunita Kangra, Former MLA Dr. Nandkishore Garg, District General Secretary Sunil Mittal, President of Maharaja Agrasen Hospital Shri Ashok Gupta and General Secretary Sunil Aron was present.

"All the companies under the Ministry of Petroleum are setting up such plants from place to place with their CSR funds," "IGL in Delhi has installed a plant, installed with the funds of ₹2.5 crore, has a capacity of 2.5 tonne. With this 400 to 500 cylinders can be filled per day," the minister said. "Gas can also be supplied from here and cylinders can also be filled. This step has been

taken keeping in view the problems that were faced by the people of Delhi for home treatment during this second wave," he added further.

State BJP President Gupta said that, when there was acute shortage of gas in Delhi, people were wandering here and there with cylinders, BJP workers went door to door and delivered 100 oxygen cylinders daily. "Everyone saw the way BJP workers worked in the whole country with the spirit of service and unity. Within the three corporations, 6 PSA oxygen plants have been approved and the work is going on at a fast pace. With this plant, which has been installed in Maharaja Agrasen Hospital today, people can get the cylinder filled and take home, so the same can be used in an emergency," he added.

PICTALK



Rohingya Muslim refugees look at the charred remains of their homes after a fire broke out on Saturday night, at Madanpur Khadar in New Delhi

Ranjan Dimri

AAP accuses East Civic body of corruption



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and MCD in charge Durgesh Pathak accused the BJP ruled East Corporation of issuing tenders for the last five consecutive years to clean a non-functional drain constructed to solve the water-log-

ging problem in areas around Swami Dayanand Hospital. Pathak said that the Corporation has been spending lakhs of rupees every year in the name of cleaning of this non-functional drain for the last five years.

"The drain was fully complete by 2016 on paper but in reality, it was never functional. Even the contractor who was supposed to clean this drain wrote to the civic body in 2021, saying that there is nothing to clean because it is non-functional," he said.

The AAP leader demanded immediate action against the alleged corruption.

G'gram most suitable city to live in during Covid, says study

Gurugram: Gurugram is the most suitable city to live in during Covid-19 times considering factors such as population density, open area ratio and hospital infrastructure. It says that these are far more important than the distance from work or affordability to decide where a homebuyer wants to live during Covid-19. As per the analysis, Gurugram is the most suitable city to live from a Covid-19 perspective. As per the report, localities in the East zone such as sectors 52-56, 58, 40-44, 30, 24-27 were found to be the most suitable for living as per the index.

The report ascertains the suitability of these cities on the basis of factors such as population density, open area ratio and hospital infrastructure.

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Former CM of Haryana hurt in road accident



STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Former Chief Minister of Haryana Om Prakash Chautala had a narrow escape after his car met with an accident on the Gurugram-Jhajjar Road on Sunday.

Chautala sustained a fracture in his arm. His Personal Security Officer (PSO) and driver did not sustain any

injuries. He was taken to hospital in another car by his PSO. According to the police the incident took place in front of the SGT University on the Gurugram-Jhajjar Road at around 1.00 pm on Sunday.

"The former CM was on his way to Badli in Jhajjar from Gurugram after his routine health checkup. When an Auto car occupants bearing registration number (DL9CAE 7177) coming from the opposite direction took right turn to enter the University premises hit Chautala's SUV Volvo (HR29AP 1562)," Praveen Kumar, station house officer (SHO) of Rajendra Park police station said.

625 challans, 2,580 legal notices for mosquito breeding



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has slapped 625 challan and 2,580 legal notices to various establishments after finding mosquito breeding in their premises. SDMC Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti has asked health officials to take all the steps to stop mosquito breeding ahead of monsoon.

Bharti said that mosquito breeding takes place in waste articles like desert coolers, pots, tyres, etc that get filled with water. "Preventing the breeding is an effective way to control vector-borne diseases," he said.

The Commissioner also directed officials to step up work to remove silt from drains so that anti-larval/insecticidal spray can be done in these drains. "Focus should also be given to check mosquito breeding at construction sites, government offices, hospitals, police stations, DTS bus depots, fire stations and education institutions. Besides, solid waste should be removed from the parks while waterfalls and

fountains need to be kept dry to prevent water collection," he added.

The city has reported 61 cases of dengue much ahead of the season of the vector-borne disease, which is between July and November, according to a civic report released on Monday. Incidentally, the cases of dengue reported this year are highest compared to that of last three years.

The civic report released on Monday stated that 10 cases of malaria and five cases of chikungunya have also been reported till June 5 this year.

To stop mosquito breeding, the public health department of the SDMC has also contacted 1,157 RWAs and has sent five lakh awareness messages to the citizens. Dengue breeding checkers workers have conducted checks at 18,69,259 households.

Dengue mosquito larvae breed in clear, standing water, while those of malaria thrive even in dirty water. Cases of vector-borne diseases are usually reported between July and November, but the period may stretch till mid-December.

Suvidha Complex inaugurated at police headquarters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an initiative to provide facilities to police personnel deployed across the city, Delhi Police Commissioner SN Shrivastava on Sunday inaugurated 'Suvidha Complex' at the Ground Floor of the New Police Headquarters in the national Capital.

Police said that the complex will have facilities including Axis bank, staff canteen, staff lounge, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED) bazaar and officers lounge.

"Salary accounts of all Delhi Police personnel have been maintained in Axis bank since November 2002. The bank's branch at PHQ will

extend all facilities including an ATM and Cash deposit machine as well," said Chinmoy Biswal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO) of Delhi Police.

"The canteen in PHQ has been provided a bigger and better space at the ground floor which can accommodate more visitors. Facilities including air conditioning, WIFI, DTH connection, water cooler and a separate washroom have been provided. Canteen also has modern cooking equipment where food is cooked in a hygienic environment," said Biswal.

"Staff lounge is a dedicated space for all police personnel from various districts and units who are visiting PHQ for official work. Drivers and oper-



ators attached with officers may also avail this facility," said Biswal.

"A Nafed Bazaar opened in the complex will provide food

grains, pulses, oils and oilseeds and other daily needs will operate six days a week from 8 AM to 8 PM.

Officers Lounge is a dedi-



cated space for officers who are visiting PHQ for official purposes," said the PRO.

"Special Commissioner of Police, GA & Headquarters,

Sundari Nanda and her team played a crucial role in conceptualising the facility and organizing the event," the PRO added.

Private hosps see lack of clarity in new jab policy



PNS ■ NEW DELHI
In the absence of any clear direction from the Centre and the State governments about the Covid-19 vaccine availability under the new national jab policy, several private hospitals across the country are a confused lot. Some of them have also flagged the service charge for vaccination being capped at ₹150, saying it may not be feasible for them to organise sessions outside their own centres at that rate. The hospital managements

said they were clueless on procuring Covid-19 jabs under the new policy announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that it has led to the vaccination being put on hold at their centres. They have now sought a proper mechanism and a single-window system to be put in place for procurement of vaccine doses. They also claimed that they had approached both the vaccine manufacturers, Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India (SII) -- and also state governments, but to no avail.

Lowest number of cases after 71 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India reported 80,834 fresh Covid-19 cases, the lowest after 71 days and below one lakh for the fifth day in a row, while the daily positivity rate further dropped to 4.25 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The country's tally of cases has climbed to 2,94,39,989 while Covid-19 death toll surged to 3,70,384 with 3,303 daily deaths, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The active cases further declined to 10,26,159 com-

prising 3.49 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 95.26 per cent.

A net decline of 54,531 cases has been recorded in the Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

Also 19,20,477 tests were conducted on Saturday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 37,62,32,162 while the daily positivity rate has further dropped to 4.25 per cent.

It has been less than 10 per cent for 20 consecutive

days, the Ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate fell below 5 per cent and was recorded 4.74 per cent.

About vaccines, the Ministry said that more than 26 crore (26,64,84,350) vaccine doses have been provided to States/UTs so far. "More than 1.53 crore (1,53,79,233) COVID Vaccine doses are still available with the States/UTs to be administered," it said adding that furthermore, more than 4 lakh (4,48,760) vaccine doses are in the pipeline and will be received by them within the next three days.

Meanwhile, in a recent communication to the Union health ministry, Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at SII, is learnt to have

written, "As per your direction, we are not accepting any further orders/payment from any private hospital in the country. We await your further direction with regard to the roadmap for future supplies to private hospitals."

S C L Gupta, medical director, Batra Hospital said, "The problem is that there is no clarity on how we will be procuring the vaccines. When we ask the state government officials, they say wait till June 21 stating that the policy is not yet clear."

"The central government also has asked us to wait. We have approached the companies too, but they are also not clear on the methodology of procurement," he said.

In the whole process, Gupta said, vaccination of people is getting delayed. "With fear of a possible third wave hitting India, we want to vaccinate as many people as possible. Also several people and many of our healthcare workers who

The vaccinations at most of the private hospitals are on hold and the public, especially those patients who need to get the second doses, are at the receiving end

have taken the first dose are waiting for their second dose," he said.

P K Bhardwaj, Chief Executive Director and Head of Department of Surgery, Saroj Hospital also said that nothing has been clearly spelt about procurement by private hospitals and how much vaccines will be given to each private hospital.

The vaccinations at most of the private hospitals are on hold and the public, especially those patients who need to get the second doses, are at the receiving end.

Sarvesh Saran Joshi, president, Rajasthan Doctors' Association and also Managing Director of Shekhawati

Hospital, Jaipur said, "We have spoken to manufacturers of both Covishield and Covaxin and they said the government has asked them not to supply the vaccines directly to private hospitals. So, the majority of medium to small hospitals are suffering the most."

"At a service charge of Rs 150, we can provide vaccination only at our centre. We had started to go to RWAs and private sector companies, but now organising such sessions at this rate will not be possible."

Capping the price at Rs 150 will also impact the entire vaccination drive. So a mechanism needs to be worked for this too," Gupta said.

Under the revised guidelines, which will come into effect from June 21, the Centre will procure 75 per cent of the COVID-19 vaccines being produced by manufacturers while private hospitals can procure the remaining 25 percent directly from the manufacturers.

Chinese researchers find virus in bats similar to Covid-19



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chinese researchers have claimed they have found a batch of new coronaviruses in bats including one - Rhinolophus pusillus - virus that may be the second-closest yet (genetically) to the Covid virus that has swept the world since it was identified in December 2019, claiming lakhs of human lives.

In a report published in the journal Cell, the Chinese researchers from Shandong University said they had assembled 24 novel coronavirus genomes from different bat species including four SARS-CoV-2 virus and have found the new batch of virus.

The discoveries in a single, small region of Yunnan province in China indicate just how many coronaviruses can exist in bats and how many have the potential to spread to people and a wide range of domestic and wild animals, including pigs, cattle, mice, cats, dogs, and chickens, as per the CNN News.

The researchers collected 283 fecal samples, 109 oral swabs and 19 urine samples from small, forest-dwelling bats in a tropical botanical garden and adjacent areas in a county in Yunnan province between May 2019 and November 2020. The Chinese researchers said one of the viruses was very similar, genetically to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that's causing the ongoing pandemic.

"It would be the closest

strain to SARS-CoV-2 except for genetic differences on the spike protein, the knob-like structure that the virus uses when attaching to cells," they said.

The researchers further said, "Together with the SARS-CoV-2 related virus collected from Thailand in June 2020, these results clearly demonstrate that viruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2 continue to circulate in bat populations, and in some regions might occur at a relatively high frequency."

Now researchers are trying to locate the original source of SARS-CoV-2. The researchers said it's quite likely that the virus infected an intermediary animal. The SARS virus that caused the 2002-2004 outbreak was traced to an animal called a civet cat.

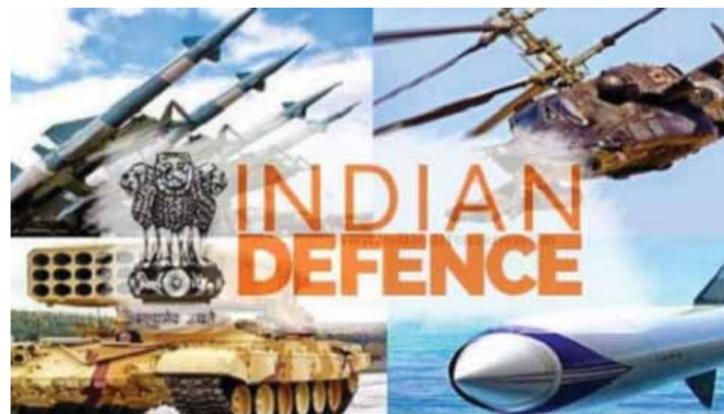
It would be the closest strain to SARS-CoV-2 except for genetic differences on the spike protein, the knob-like structure that the virus uses when attaching to cells, they said.

"Together with the SARS-CoV-2 related virus collected from Thailand in June 2020, these results clearly demonstrate that viruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2 continue to circulate in bat populations, and in some regions might occur at a relatively high frequency," they wrote.

"Our study highlights the remarkable diversity of bat coronaviruses at the local scale, including close relatives of both SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV," they wrote.

The bat species they sampled are common across Southeast Asia, including southwest China, Vietnam, Laos and elsewhere.

Rajnath OK's ₹499 crore for innovation in defence



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to encourage new ideas and concepts, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday approved a ₹499-crore budget for innovations in defence manufacturing. This step will help the small and medium scale enterprises and start-ups with India aiming to become a major hub for weapon production.

The ₹498.9-crore budgetary support to Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) - Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO) is for the next five years. The budgetary support will provide a big boost to the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' as iDEX-DIO has the primary objective of self-reliance and indigenisation in defence and aerospace sector of the country, the defence ministry officials said here.

The creation of the iDEX framework and establishment of DIO by the Department of Defence Production (DDP) is aimed at creating an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in defence and aerospace by



engaging industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, research and development (R&D) institutes and academia and provide them grants to carry out R&D development which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.

The scheme is aimed at providing financial support to nearly 300 start-ups/MSMEs/individual innovators and 20 partner incubators under the DIO framework. It will support increased awareness in the Indian innovation ecosystem about defence needs and, conversely, in the Indian Defence establishment about the potential of the Indian innovation eco-system to deliver innovative solutions to meet their needs, officials said.

The DIO, with its team, will enable the creation of channels for innovators to engage and interact with the

The scheme aims to facilitate rapid development of new, indigenised and innovative technologies for defence sector

Indian Defence production industry. The long-term effect to be realised by the group is the establishment of a culture, where enlisting the effort of innovators by the Indian military is commonplace and frequent.

The scheme aims to facilitate rapid development of new, indigenised and innovative technologies for the Indian defence and aerospace sector to meet their needs in shorter timelines, create a culture of engagement with innovative start-ups to encourage co-creation for defence and aerospace, empower a culture of technology co-creation and co-innovation within the defence and aerospace sector and boost innovation among the start-ups and encourage them to be a part of the ecosystem.

Left to stage protest against hike in fuel prices

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Left parties on Sunday announced nationwide two-week-long protests (June 16-30) demanding a roll back of fuel price hike and controlling prices of essential commodities and drugs. The five Left parties in a joint statement accused the Central Government of increasing petrol and diesel prices "at least 21 times" since the Assembly elections ended on May 2.

"More assaults on people's livelihood are being mounted by this relentless rise in prices of all essential commodities. Instead of helping people to combat the ravages of the Covid health catastrophe, the Modi government hiked the prices of petroleum products by at least 21 times after the announcement of results of the recent assembly elections on May 2, 2021. This is leading to a cascading inflationary spiral with the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) rising to a eleven year high, said the joint statement signed by Sitaram Yechury, D.Raja, Debabrata Biswas, Manoj Bhattacharya and Dipankar Bhattacharya, the general secretaries of the five Left parties CPI(M), CPI, Forward Bloc RSP, CPI(ML) Liberation.

The Left leaders pointed out that the prices of food articles have raised by nearly 5 per cent in April. Primary commodities saw a rise of 10.16 per cent and manufactured products have risen by 9.01 per cent. By the time these commodities reach the retail markets, the consumers are charged much more.

This is happening while the economy is witnessing a deep recession, galloping unemployment, collapsing purchasing power and rising levels of hunger, they said.

U'khand Cong leader Indira Hridayesh dies of heart attack in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in Uttarakhand Assembly Indira Hridayesh passed away in the national Capital on Sunday. She breathed her last at Uttarakhand Sadan after suffering a heart attack. The 80-year-old prominent leader of Congress was in Delhi for meetings to review the party's preparation for the next year's assembly elections in Uttarakhand.

Hridayesh, who was an MLA from Haldwani in the Nainital district, was always a contender of the party's CM face in the state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed condolence on the death of Hridayesh. "Dr Indira Hridayesh Ji was at the forefront of several community service efforts. She made a mark as an effective legislator and also had rich administrative experience. Saddened by her demise. Condolences to her family and supporters," the prime minister posted on Twitter.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi and party leader Rahul Gandhi said the demise of a tall leader is a huge loss to the party. Sonia said that Dr Hridayesh served the Congress till her last breath and leaves behind a legacy of public service as an MLA, MLC, Minister, Leader of Opposition in Uttarakhand, and above all as a dedicated lifelong Congressperson. She was particularly popular amongst her colleagues for her knowledge of legislative processes and procedure as also her performance as an able



administrator. Her contribution to the Congress party will be treasured and cherished by all, Sonia said in her condolence message.

Rahul mentioned that Indira Hridayesh remained active for the social service and the Congress till her last breath. "Her social and political contributions are inspiring," Gandhi tweeted.

Condoling her demise, AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the Congress has lost a brave leader and popular public representative. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also expressed condolences.

Congress general secretary and former state Chief Minister Harish Rawat said it is an irreparable loss for the country and the state.

Hridayesh was a member of the legislative council in undivided Uttar Pradesh for five times. She was elected MLA in Uttarakhand in 2002, 2012, and 2017. She served as a cabinet minister in the governments of ND Tiwari, Vijay Bahuguna, and Harish Rawat. "She had a great organisational and administrative capability. She had the legislative experience of 50 years," said senior Congress vice-president Suryakant Dhasmana.

Chand Bai a fighter against Covid vax hesitancy in her village

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when instances of wastage of vaccine in Rajasthan hog limelight and when 'vaccine hesitancy' is being reported from different places in the country, the non-descript Khatauti village in Bansur development block of Alwar village has stood out. Each one of the 723 villagers above the age of 18 years has either received the first dose or both. And it has been made possible by a 48-year-old woman, Chand Bai, whose persistent efforts ensured that the villagers shed their initial inhibitions and apprehensions to get inoculated.

Chand Bai is a nominated Common Service Centre (CSC) Village Level Entrepreneur at the remote village of Rajasthan.

A few weeks ago when the Central Government roped in the CSCs, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics and IT, for registrations for vaccines in rural areas, Chand Bai, who was just a semi-literate housewife till a year ago before opening her CSC, started contacting people



CSC VLE Chand Bai at her CSC Kiosk at Khatauti village in Alwar, Rajasthan. Pioneer photo



Awareness programme being conducted by CSC in the village which has all eligible people vaccinated. Pioneer photo

of her village for registrations. But seeing the resistance from

residents of her villagers because of various myths sur-

rounding the vaccines, she decided to vaccinate her full time to the vaccination drive.

"As part of the CSC awareness drive for the vaccination,

I launched a door-to-door campaign in my village. I had a tough time to convince people, particularly the senior citizens, about the urgent need for

getting the vaccine. After initial resistance, people started getting registrations done through my CSC. But another challenge was to make them

visit a vaccination centre which was a few kilometres away from my village," she said.

With the help of local CSC officials, she then contacted her block's health authorities who agreed to send their special medical vans for carrying out the vaccination drive in her village. "In the first phase, I got all the 210 residents - 86 in the 45-60 age group and 124 in the above 60 years segment - registered for the vaccination. Soon, all of them got their first jab. And out of these, 74 have got their second dose also," she pointed out.

When the second phase of vaccination for the 18-45 age group commenced, Chand Bai immediately started getting the remaining villagers registered. Last week the vaccination of 513 residents between 18-45 years of age also got completed. "I am very happy to have got all my residents' receive their first dose of vaccine. I have a record of all my residents who have got vaccinated and I am keeping a tab on when to give them the second dose too. It gives me great satisfaction to see that I have been able to give protection from Covid-19 to the people with

whom I live and share my social bonding," she added.

Chand Bai's efforts are not just confined to her village. She is also getting registrations for vaccination done in her neighbouring villages of Dheerpur and Harnath ki Dhani in her development block. "Vaccination drives in my neighbouring villages are also going on smoothly and within the next few days all its around 1000 residents will get their first dose of vaccine," she said with a sense of happiness.

Stating that VLEs like Chand Bai were an inspiration for lakhs of her counterparts across the country, CSC Managing Director Dr Dinesh Tyagi said: "VLEs like Chand Bai, who is a true social worker, will make India's vaccination drive a big success. Our 3.7 lakh VLEs who run CSCs in all the states are carrying out the registration process and organizing massive awareness drives. So far, we have registered over 14.5 lakh residents for vaccination drives. We have already stepped up our drive and within a few weeks we hope to register crores of residents, particularly in rural areas, across India."

BJP leaders persona non grata in Lakshadweep

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

BJP leaders, activists and supporters have become persona non grata in Lakshadweep islands since Saturday. Most of the shops have started displaying boards stating that leaders, activists and workers of BJP would not be offered goods.

Though some of the islanders blamed the Islamists for the 'social boycotting' of the BJP, the national vice president of the BJP and K P Muthukoya, the party's in-charge of the Islands are responsible for the state of affairs. The move by BJP activists to file cases against a hitherto film model who made some unprintable comment against the Government of India has boomeranged on the party," Koya told *The Pioneer*.

He said the proposal by the Lakshadweep Development Authority to widen the roads was an inn-conceived proposal. "We do not need such roads in these islands because the length of each island is about four to five km," said Koya who

was the BJP's candidate in the 2014 Lok Sabha election.

Though he could poll only 182 votes, he said the party had popularity in the islands. The 2019 Lok Sabha election saw Abdul Khaer Haji, the BJP candidate polling 125 votes. When asked what was the total strength of the BJP in the islands, Koya said: "Please do not count the popularity of a party by the number of votes polled by it in elections." Koya had left the party the moment LDA launched its reform moves. Vernacular media in Kerala say that thousands of BJP workers have left the party over the last one week.



Clouds hover over Taj Mahal as monsoon approaches the city, in Agra on Sunday

PTI

Mother of Kerala woman languishing in Afghan jail hopes Modi Govt will pardon, bring her back

Thiruvananthapuram: The mother of Nimisha Fathima, a Keralite woman who landed in a jail in Afghanistan following the killing of her IS fighter husband in an attack there, hopes that the Narendra Modi Government will pardon her daughter and bring her back to India.

"I've heard that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a very kind-hearted person. I have full faith in him," Bindu Sampath, Fathima's mother told PTI. She was reacting to reports that the Central government was not interested in bringing back her daughter and three other IS widows of Indian origin, now lodged in a Kabul jail.

Sampath said no communication has been received from the Government on the issue

and reports about the Government's disinterest could be one view of the Centre.

"But I am very positive because there will be other views also in the government. I am banking on that. I believe in God. I am sure that God will create a situation for her return," she said.

Sampath said she wanted to meet Modi and submit a memorandum, seeking the return of her daughter.

"But no one is there to help me out," she said.

The mother said she would seek the legal route to get her daughter back home if all efforts with the Government failed. "I have consulted some lawyers of the Supreme Court. They have said there is a legal option," Sampath said. Nimisha Sampath was a Hindu before

embracing Islam. She changed her name to Fathima Isa.

She married an alleged Islamic State (ISIS) operative from Kerala and both were reported missing, along with 19 others from the southern state in June 2016 before reaching an ISIS-controlled territory in Afghanistan. Fathima gave birth there. She and three other women had surrendered to the Afghanistan Government in 2019 after their husbands were killed in the fight with the forces there.

When reports about the government's disinterest appeared in the media on Saturday, Sampath had said she feared that her daughter would fall into the hands of Taliban once the US troops withdraw from Afghanistan in September this year. **PTI**

Bhoomi poojan of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Jammu popularly known as "City of temples" on Sunday added address of another "architectural grandeur" in its long list of 'historic' temples after Lt Governor Manoj Sinha performed 'Bhoomi Poojan' ceremony for construction of Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in Majeen village of Sidhra.

The temple complex with various amenities for pilgrims and other allied infrastructure is expected to be ready in 18 months on a piece of 62.10 acres of land at a cost of 33.22 crores in two phases.

Union Ministers G Kishan Reddy, Dr Jitendra Singh, OSD in the Commerce Ministry and former Chief Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam, Chairman TTD Board, Y V Subba Reddy, Ram Madhav, Member, National Executive, RSS, and several other dignitaries also attended the ceremony.

The ambitious project when completed is also expected to boost pilgrim traffic in the region.



Lt Governor Manoj Sinha takes part in Bhoomi Poojan of Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams at Majeen, Jammu

Before Covid-19 pandemic jammed wheels across the nation an estimated population of 70-80 lakh pilgrims were arriving here to perform Mata Vaishno Devi and Amarnath pilgrimage. The local economy is also expected to gain with the creation of huge infrastructure alongside the famous temple complex.

While speaking on the occasion, the Lt Governor said that the magnificent divine temple when completed will be a centre of faith as well as destination of spirituality.

He further informed that the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Board will establish a Gurukul/Veda Pathshala to promote the Sanskrit language and ancient culture of Vedic teachings and learning. The board has also agreed to set up centres of excellence in the field of health-care on the lines of its excellence centres in Andhra Pradesh.

Terming the occasion as a historic and proud day for J&K, the Lt Governor expressed gratitude towards

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Board and the Union Government for fulfilling the long pending wish of people of J&K and North India for establishing the temple of Lord Balaji on the land of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi.

"Lord Balaji's divine blessing is a state of inner celebration. Ved Pathshala in the second phase will strengthen the foundation of Indian culture. The construction of the temple will also open up opportunities across sectors and it will certainly change the economy of the region," observed the Lt Governor.

The temple will become a major religious and pilgrimage destination attracting a lot more tourists, which will ultimately give boost to the religious and pilgrimage tourism, besides providing ample livelihood opportunities, and socio-economic upliftment of the people of the region, added the Lt Governor.

The Lt Governor said that except for the main pujaris of the temple and the core supervision team, it will also have a large number of local people for the management, thus pro-

viding direct and indirect opportunities to the people of the region.

The prestigious project will include a host of pilgrimage facilities and other Educational & Developmental infrastructure like Veda Pathshala- classrooms, hostel building & staff quarters; pilgrims' amenities complex, Kalyanamandapam, Vahanamandapam etc.

The government of Jammu and Kashmir on March 31, 2021 had granted the state land measuring 62.10 acres under Khasra number 243 in Village Majeen of Jammu tehsil in favour of TTD for building of a temple and its allied infrastructure on lease basis for a period of 40 years on payment of nominal ground rent of Rs 10 per kanal per annum without charge of any premium.

An amount of Rs 1.98 lakhs was paid to Government of Jammu and Kashmir towards lease charges for a period of 40 years. The possession of the land was taken into the fold of TTD on April 19, 2021 from the government of J&K, duly concluding lease agreement.

NGT directs UP Govt to specify Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary boundary within 6 months

New Delhi: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttar Pradesh Government to issue notification specifying the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary boundary within six months.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel noted that a status report has been filed on behalf of Uttar Pradesh to the effect that steps have been taken and proposal was pending consideration before the Na

"It is stated by the counsel for the State that delay has taken place due to pandemic and the Rationalisation Committee is now likely to complete its work within three months and thereafter the State Government will issue final notification within three months.

"We direct the Commissioner, Meerut to ensure that the rationalisation process is completed within three months and report sub-

mitted to the State Government and thereafter, the Additional Chief Secretary,

Forest and Environment, UP, may ensure that further action is completed within next three months," the bench said.

The NGT made clear that in case of failure, it will be open to either party to move the tribunal after six months, seeking coercive measures against the erring officers.

The counsel appearing for the State of UP submitted that after approval of the proposal by the Environment Ministry, a committee for rationalisation with the Commissioner, Meerut as Nodal Officer has been appointed on November 17, 2020. The counsel for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) confirms that the proposal received from the State was duly approved in 59th meeting of the National Board for Wildlife. **PTI**

TN Min tasks officials to retrieve nearly 100 plots of land owned by Chennai temple

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A 32-ground land parcel here worth crores of rupees and owned by a Shiva temple was taken over by authorities on Sunday while officials were directed to initiate action to take possession of nearly more 100 plots of land belonging to the same shrine, the government said.

The temple's executive officer took over possession of land and buildings on Poonamallee High (PH) Road in downtown Kilpauk here, an official release here said adding Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Minister P K Sekar Babu and top officials were present. The HR & CE Minister directed officials to initiate action including taking up survey work to take over an additional chunk of 96.5 grounds, also belonging to the same temple.

In total, Sri Ekambaranathar temple in Kancheepuram owned 141 grounds (each ground is 2,400 sq ft) on PH road here, the release said. The total land parcel is estimated to be worth at least ₹350 crore.

Following completion of a 99-year lease to a charitable trust which ran a school on the premises, the matter went to the Madras High Court. After the court's ruling, the trust administration handed over the land and buildings to the temple's executive officer here on Sunday in the presence of senior officials including Principal Secretary (Tourism, Culture and Endowments) B Chandra Mohan.

Years ago, land measuring 12.5 grounds, also owned by the same temple was handed over by the trust, which ran Seetha Kingston School on PH road to authorities and with the present handover, the trust has handed back 44.5 grounds that it had in its possession previously.

Out of the total 141 grounds owned by the temple, 44.5 grounds have been taken over by authorities and in respect of the remainder of 96.5 grounds, action would be taken, the Government said.

'Kerala, TN need comprehensive law to ban begging'

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI/ TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

What Kerala and Tamil Nadu need immediately is a comprehensive law banning begging of any kind, according to Pidi Arisi Krishna Iyer, a social activist of repute based in Tiruchirappalli.

"Though there are many institutions that help persons who do not earn anything by themselves and have to beg for their daily survival, nearly 80 percent of them prefer to be in the streets begging for alms. But what is disturbing is that they are all part of a mafia operated by cruel dons who do not come out in the open," Iyer told *The Pioneer* amidst his daily chore of offering free food to the needy in times of Covid-19.

Iyer (42) is a familiar figure in Tiruchirappalli city and surroundings because of his daily

routine of feeding people whose livelihood has been thrown off the rails. "There are certain people begging for alms in certain areas, like Toll Plazas and in front of places of worship who politely decline my offering of food. I deployed people to track their antecedents and the findings were shocking," said Iyer.

He saw most of the beggars getting food (mutton or chicken biriyani with drinks) brought to the spot by persons who come riding their bikes. "The riders bring backpacks containing food and drinks. The beggars need not depend on the vegetarian dish offered by me," he said.

Further investigation took Iyer to many shocking realities. "The bike driver who delivers the backpack was found to be the son of the beggar and he owns many houses in Tiruchi which have been rented out.

The daily collection of each of these beggars crosses ₹2,000 per day," said Iyer. This is not an isolated incident as syndicates operating all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala make a "giant kill" by deploying beggars at vantage points.

Sudheer Damodaran, social activist based in Kerala's Thrissur has a similar incident to tell. "The rape and murder of Sowmya, a Thrissur girl by a person named Govindachamy in 2012 has a lot to do with the begging mafia in Kerala. Govindachamy was a beggar who was returning to his base in Thrissur by train when he came across Sowmya. The hunter pushed down the victim from the slowing train, raped and murdered her. Though the trial court sentenced him to death, the High Court quashed the death sentence," said Damodaran.

He said beggars in Thrissur

and Kochi are conduits for the drug mafia who use them to push narcotic materials to regular customers. "The beggars decline the offer of food from all good Samaritans and prefer to be in dirty surroundings. This is to ward off the police," said Damodaran who has studied their antecedents. According to Damodaran, beggars in Thrissur and Kochi are getting free biriyani and liquor for the services they render.

"It is not possible to ban begging by legislation because the mafias get political and religious patronage. The lawyer who argued in the High Court for Govindachamy was charging millions per appearance and you can imagine the hold of the dons," said Damodaran.

Krishna Iyer continues his fight for the establishment of Tiruchirappalli free of begging menace despite the non-cooperation of officials.

Mumbai monsoon blues: Well swallows parked SUV, efforts on to retrieve it

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

A video clip showing an SUV being sucked into a sinkhole that had developed after an RCC slabs covering a well gave way in a suburban housing society following heavy rains, went viral in Mumbai and other parts of the country on Sunday.

The freak incident took place at around 8.30 am in Ramnivas Society on Cama Road at Ghatkopar in north-east Mumbai. The owner had parked the vehicle on the RCC slabs covering a community well.

Following the heavy incessant rains witnessed during the past four days that had led to inundation in the housing society, the slab's either apparently were swept away or they fell into the well, causing the huge sink-hole. The residents



noticed the unusual sight when the vehicle was beginning to cave into the well through the sinkhole.

The video that went viral shows the rear half of the vehicle getting completely sucked into the well through a large sink-hole.

Kiran Doshi, the owner of the vehicle, came to know about the incident, when his cleaner told him that the vehicle was tilting and going under the ground. Even the driver had not realised that the vehicle was being sucked into the well through the well.

"When I ran out of my

home to check, the vehicle got sucked into the well in front of my eyes. Everything happened in a few seconds. It took a few minutes before I realised what had happened," Doshi told local police.

Before long, the incident – thanks to the video that had gone viral – became talk of the town. On its part, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) rushed its team with pumps to empty swollen water in the well. The police also rushed to the scene.

On its part, the society management requisitioned a crane to lift the vehicle from the bottom of the well, which is nearly 50 feet deep. Efforts were on till late in the night to retrieve the vehicles from the bottom of the well.

Fortunately, there was no one in the vehicle when it sank into the well.

More BJP leaders may join Mukul in TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Days after BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy joined the Trinamool Congress, a number of his loyalists in the saffron outfit are making efforts to cross the floor. Among them are at least 3 MPs, 13 MLAs, and some other state-level functionaries.

According to sources, Roy has given TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee a list of BJP leaders including some MPs and MLAs who could switch over to the TMC. Some influential BJP politicians from North Bengal, where the saffron outfit has a good support base, could also switch sides under the influence of Roy, insiders say.

Roy, a former Railway Minister, on Friday re-joined the TMC – a party that he had founded with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in 1998 and left in 2017. Roy's son Subhrangshu, also a former Trinamool MLA joined his old party along with his father.

Already BJP MLAs like Ashok Kirtaniya, Biswajit Das, the saffron party's State SC/ST cell chairman Dulal Bar, and former MLA Sunil Singh have started dropping hints

of their "future plans."

A powerful Matua leader and BJP MP Shantanu Thakur and MLA Subrata Thakur from Bongaon too are in the "tentative list" of turncoats, sources said adding both the leaders have not attended crucial party meetings post elections.

Supporting Roy's move Kirtaniya, another MLA from Bongaon North seat, said "of course Mukul da's exit will hurt the BJP. A leader of his status should have been given more responsibility in the party."

Another leader Sunil Singh, a former MLA and relative of BJP NP Arjun Singh, said "Mukul da has a huge contribution in the party's winning 18 seats in the Lok Sabha elections," adding he would love to be with him all the time.

Another BJP MLA Biswajit Das boasted of his "good family relations with Mukul da and Abhishek Banerjee. When asked whether he too would try to find a toehold in the ruling outfit the BJP leader gave a cryptic reply. "Let us see what happens in future."

Roy had not been properly dealt with by the BJP leadership, Dulal Bar the State president of

BJP's SC/ST cell said, adding "no one can live in the BJP with honour ... Though I don't say that I am quitting immediately, I can't ignore Mukul da's presence in my political career ... he has always been my leader."

Yet another Roy loyalist Sabyasachi Dutta too has started sounding

"incoherent" within the BJP. Dutta, a former TMC MLA who had followed Roy into the saffron outfit, blamed the BJP for its loss in Bengal. "They had employed so many Hindi-speaking leaders who were not properly understood in interior parts of Bengal ... it was a strategic blunder ... there was no face against Mamata Banerjee, a powerful national leader," Dutta said. When asked as to whether he was planning to join the TMC he said "for now I am in the BJP."

Roy's loyalists apart there are other leaders like Rajib Banerjee, a former minister who too left the TMC before the elections, former Bengal Deputy Speaker Sonali Guha, who quit Trinamool after failing to get a nomination, are also in the race to join the TMC.

Former TMC MLA Dipendu Biswas on Sunday said that he had "done a great mistake by leaving

Didi ... but I have understood my fault and am willing to return to her party."

Rajib Banerjee on Saturday made a "courtesy call" at TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh's residence saying he had not decided about his future yet. The lesser Trinamool leaders have however expressed their reservations about taking him back in the party.

On whether these leaders would be taken back into the party the Chief Minister earlier categorized the group of turncoats into "extremists" – those who attacked the party and its leadership brutally – and "moderates" – like Roy "who did not make provocative statements and was not vehement in his remarks."

She said "the party will consider the case of "moderates, but will not forgive the extremists."

Meanwhile, in a cutting remark Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari who himself left the Trinamool a couple of months before the elections, warned the possible deserters saying, "all the MLAs who are planning to quit will be tackled legally ... I know how to use the anti-defection laws in an appropriate manner."

Assam Police foils cattle smuggling attempt, fires in air in self-defence

Dhubri (Assam): The Assam Police resorted to firing in the air after being attacked by a group of cattle smugglers, and rescued 30 bovines from them along the India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri district, a senior officer said on Sunday. The incident took place on Saturday night near Birshing Char (sandbar) bordering Bangladesh when the cattle smugglers were on their way to the neighbouring country through

the river route. Acting on a specific input, two teams of police personnel were sent in as many boats around 8 pm, Dhubri ASP Rosyrani Sarma said. The teams of police personnel chased the smugglers' boat and signalled them to stop but they tried to escape from the spot.

A boat carrying cattle was intercepted at around 10.40 pm, the additional superintendent of police said.

Sarma said when the police chased the smugglers, the boatman anchored it on the bank of the river and then they attacked the police teams with sharp weapons.

"The police personnel retaliated and were forced to fire about six rounds in the air in self-defence. The smugglers managed to escape from the spot taking the advantage of darkness," the officer said. **PTI**



Indian rhinoceroses graze inside the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, in Morigaon on Sunday

PTI

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Opening up

The Government is quite right in deciding to declassify details of all of India's wars

The Government has taken a welcome step in deciding to declassify, on a case-to-case basis, details of the wars fought by India. The new policy for archiving, declassifying, compiling and publishing such records is going to be put in place. The modalities for taking up declassification one by one are being worked out. For a country that has fought as many as six wars since Independence but has managed to declassify the operations of just the 1948 Jammu and Kashmir operations, this is a giant step in transparency. The new policy says records should ordinarily be declassified in 25 years and transferred to the National Archives of India once the war or operations histories have been compiled. The policy statement alone should mean that the official records of the 1962, 1965 and 1971 conflicts, Operation Pawar of the IPKF in Sri Lanka (1987-1990) be declassified right away. The Kargil affair still has over a couple of years of secrecy left. There are two issues with this policy. First, the implications of opening secret details of the past. In a country like India where political leaders and their actions are assessed not in terms of their times but by current political standards, the declassification can become a Pandora's box. Take the Henderson-Brooks-Bhagat report on the 1962 India-China war, for instance. Technically, the report is yet to be made public though a foreign journalist did just that with part of the report he accessed. That section of the report has some startling revelations about India's

Forward Policy adopted by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

One can well imagine the implications of judging Nehru's thinking at that time by today's standards. The BJP, which till early 2014 was demanding release of the report, made a U-turn once it came to power. If much of any war report is to be kept hidden either on ground of military relevance or political sensitivity, the purpose of the new policy will be lost. Two, there is a clear case for the bull being taken by the horns and past war records being declassified at once. A Defence Ministry official rightly said: "Timely publication of war histories would give people an accurate account of the events, provide authentic material for academic research and counter unfounded rumours." Even though the United States faced condemnation for its reasons for the war on Iraq, it did declassify records in 2013 to mark the 10th anniversary. The documents showed how ineptly it caused and handled the war, but the country did not hide the secrets from the American public. Secrecy is also redundant because it has no place today when technology has turned war into an algorithm and where every military moment can be recorded live and strategies assessed and analysed in real time. At best, old files can muddy the records of individuals — political or military — who made controversial decisions. Unclassified records can at best keep the past buried.

PICTALK



Clean Ganga Mission workers spray bioremediation solution in the river, at Dashashwamedh Ghat in Varanasi

PTI

Compassion

The world froze in prayers for a good half hour when Christian Eriksen collapsed during a UEFA match

The past weekend had barely tiptoed into infancy when the entire world suddenly went numb and stood still. Apart from praying lips, the only other thing that moved were zillions of nimble, and concerned, fingers on Twitter and other social media sites. No, it wasn't because of a hallucination-inducing party drug but because Denmark's ace attacking midfielder Christian Eriksen had suddenly gone down. For no apparent reason. Inexplicably. Right there on the field, near the touchline, just four minutes before the referee would have blown his whistle to indicate half time. The boisterous Copenhagen stadium suddenly went into mute mode; not only the home crowd but even the visiting Finnish spectators were taken aback by the sudden turn of events as millions of pairs of palm after palm pierced through the evening air in its hurry to clasp the unbelieving eyes and quivering lips. The palpitation in the hearts is an altogether different story. In sadness, in wonderment, in care, in concern, in poignancy, it was an emotional union of the two rivals and their spectator fans in the face of the fear of the unknown. As a dark hush fell down upon the stadium, clamorous as hell only a few seconds ago with the hosts dominating the on-field proceedings and the Finland natives egging their team on to put some spirit into the game, the Finnish fans also fell quiet with discernible distress.

For their part, the Finland players — who had been getting the short shrift in the exchange of affairs thus far — also now stood as heroes, shoulder to shoulder with their Danish counterparts to shield Eriksen from the view of the public and roving television cameras so that he could receive immediate medical attention in relative peace and privacy. It reminds one of several similar incidents where competing players and the spectators immediately forged into one entity, a solid mass of humanity, in the face of unanticipated adversity; the most notable being in the 1982 FIFA World Cup when West German goalie Toni Schumacher deliberately thudded into French player Patrick Battiston and knocked him down unconscious. But Saturday night's scene was a tad more touching, perhaps a reminder as it were in these trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic that whatever our nationality, religion, gender or belief, we are one race, one people: Humans, first of all and after everything else!

MPLADS: A boon or necessary evil?

The fund allocated to all MPs for local area development is hardly utilised for above-board projects that would really benefit the locals



PRAFULL GORADIA

Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, or MPLADS, which allots ₹5 crore annually to every MP, was suspended for 2020-21 and 2021-22, and for good reason. But several MPs feel the scheme should be revived. There are 543 Lok Sabha and 250 Rajya Sabha MPs, a total of 793. Each was last entitled to ₹5 crore for this purpose. If fully utilised by every member, the Government of India would spend ₹19,825 crore over five years (the Rajya Sabha's term is six years but let us ignore the sixth year for the time being). Over five years, the Government's outlay would total up to ₹99,125 crore or nearly ₹1 lakh crore on account of MPLADS.

Individual MPs are not accountable to anyone regarding what they have done with their ₹25 crore during their terms. There is no audit at all. At its most practical, it is money for jam. At its inaction, it remains unspent. It was introduced by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, in my view, to keep the MPs happy as his Congress Government was some 50 MPs short of a majority. The figure then was ₹2 crore annually; Manmohan Singh increased the figure to ₹5 crore, again to keep the MPs happier. In both cases, this scheme was a *baksheesh* to every MP in exchange of support, present or future, to the Government — as cynical as that.

Rather than comment, let me give my own experience of the ₹4 crore allocable to me for my two-year membership. My party allocated to me Vadodara, the city as well as the district. We are talking of the period towards the end of 2000. The party held a meeting of local workers, of whom some 30 persons turned up. They warmly applauded my coming and garlanded me. I had never before been so honoured. In my brief speech, I thanked them but asked jocularly whether their warmth



was out of regard for me or in expectation of our spending ₹4 crore. The audience laughed, which eloquently meant the latter. I said we would meet again to decide what development works we should do and where.

The next day I went to see the District Collector, who was warm and friendly. My request to him was to help me implement this scheme as I had no machinery. I went on to say that I did not wish to mix it up with my business. His advice was that I should set up an NGO and get the scheme implemented through it.

Another wise man I consulted advised me to get my party MLAs together and a few active workers, and then verbally distribute the total fund amongst them. That meant that if an MLA was to get ₹20 lakh, up to this figure, whatever work he recommended in his constituency, I would sign on. He would do the rest and I would ask no questions, except go to inaugurate his work if he invited me. The wise man went on to say: "Then you see how these people work for you at elec-



INDIVIDUAL MPs ARE NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO ANYONE REGARDING WHAT THEY HAVE DONE WITH THEIR ₹25 CRORE DURING THEIR TERMS. THERE IS NO AUDIT AT ALL. AT ITS MOST PRACTICAL, IT IS MONEY FOR JAM. AT ITS INACTION, IT REMAINS UNSPENT

tion time in case you contest for the Lok Sabha next time."

Meanwhile, someone non-political suggested that I should build as many Sulabh Shuchalayas as possible on Vadodara's streets. The common people, especially the women, would bless you. This suggestion not only gave me confidence but also a reliable, known and professional implementer.

It took two odd years to get all the piece of land too for 10 bus stops in the city. In the rural sector, 88 brick and mortar bus stops were built, fortunately obliged by the same agency. Medical equipment for Ahmedabad's public hospital Sheth Vadilal Sarabhai, a computer system in a school in Vadodara city and several *anganwadis* in a few villages were also set up. Imagine the amount of work that could be done with a mere ₹4 crore!

In many cases, the MP finds it difficult to implement projects. In my time, no particular item could entail more than ₹10 lakh. This meant that I had to spend my total grant on at least 40 small projects.

Therefore, some MPs have a go at a few projects and leave the remaining funds unspent. Some distribute the money among local MLAs and others. Others use their own NGOs. The whole scheme is so clumsy that it is wasteful. It was comprehensively useful if the purpose was only to distribute perquisites to the MPs.

In spite of these shortcomings, if there be a parliamentary consensus for resuming the grants to MPs, be it so. But a change in procedure is necessary; let a keen MP apply to the Finance Minister giving what s/he proposes to do and how, within how much time. If an earmarked joint secretary finds the proposal viable and useful for the particular area, an approval could be given but subject to audit by a licensed auditor empanelled for MPLADS. The result would be beneficial to the area's people, executed economically and with a degree of uprightness.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COVID: ACCURACY IN FIGURES NEEDED

Sir — The official COVID-19 toll so far in India is around 4 lakh lives. However, experts are of the opinion that this is not an accurate figure. They think that the real figure will be much higher. It is assumed that over a million people may have lost their lives due to COVID-19, which is considered the second largest cause of death in the country. It is worrisome that COVID-related data is not properly collected and maintained. Recording of accurate data helps understand the enormity of the disease and the steps to be taken to combat it. Further, demographic and geographical data will help combat the third wave.

As any kind of death is a great loss to the families concerned, the families of COVID victims too deserve to be treated fairly by the Government. However, unlike railway accidents or industrial disasters, the families of COVID victims are not compensated. Just as the Government holds the responsibility to compensate those rendered jobless or destitute, it has the responsibility to compensate the families of COVID victims.

A number of factors have contributed to India's underreporting of COVID death data. As a consequence, it has raised doubts about India's real COVID-related death toll. In fact, many countries have not reported accurate COVID death toll.

Venu GS | Kollam

ECOLOGY MORE PRECIOUS THAN ECONOMY

Sir — This decade has been designated as the "decade of ecosystem restoration" by the UN. The ongoing pandemic must serve as a wake-up call for humanity to revisit the concept of GDP as a true measure of a country's growth. In fact, economic parameter alone does not present the true picture of a nation's growth and development, even as half of the world's GDP is dependent on natural resources alone.

But several developed and developing countries, in the guise of developing natural areas, resort to commercial plantations and designate them as forested areas, which goes against the tenets of natural law. It is no wonder then that the UN has declared

Revised vax policy makes sense



The Government's revised vaccination policy has brought fresh hope to students eyeing admission at foreign universities, job offers and also for the States that have faced difficulties in procuring vaccines and managing funds. Changing the previous policy of making the States procure 25 per cent of the doses through open market to vaccinate the 18-44 age group, now the States will have no role in procurement and the Centre will distribute vaccines to States for free, who will inoculate their populations.

From June 21, every Indian citizen will receive free vaccination at the Centre and State

Government-run centres. Earlier, the Centre provided free vaccination only to three priority groups: Healthcare workers, frontline workers and people aged above 45 years. Else, for the 18-44 age group, the vaccines were free only at the State-run centres. As the Centre moved to a centralised procurement mechanism, the Union Government said that both the State and Central centres will administer vaccines to all free of cost.

The vaccination at private centres will not be free; they can charge up to the maximum price as set by the Centre, besides a service charge. The Centre will directly procure three-fourth of the doses that the vaccine makers manufacture to distribute among States and administer doses. The number of doses allocated to a State will be based on three factors: Population, the progress of vaccination and degree of the spread of infection and the degree of wastage of vaccines. A number of measures in the revised policy will help smaller private centres based at remote locations to procure vaccine supply. From June 21, all centres will start on-site registration.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

the (2021-2030) decade a time for ecosystem restoration, and called on the world to restore at least 1 billion hectares (2.5 billion acres) of degraded land in the next decade.

It is also an alarming situation that if the ecosystem services decline at a steady rate, an estimated \$10 trillion in global GDP may be lost by 2050. In this context, Uttarakhand, also called the Dev Bhumi (god's paradise), has become the first State in the country to assign monetary value to natural resources like air, water, forest and soil to arrive at Gross Environmental Product (GEP) in evaluating the GDP.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

GST COUNCIL AND COVID-19 RELIEF

Sir — The GST Council meeting has turned its back on COVID-19 relief. The lone decision we might be satisfied with was the waiver of the tax levied on two critical drugs against COVID-19 and mucormycosis, Tocilizumab and Amphotericin B.

Instead of reducing tax on Remdesivir and anticoagulants like heparin, medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, BiPAP machines, pulse oximeters and testing kits from 12 per cent to 5 per cent, and from 18 per cent to five per cent for hand sanitisers, temperature checking equipment, gas or electric furnace for crematoria and from 28 per cent to 12 per cent for ambulances and keeping the tax on COVID-19 vaccines unchanged at five per cent, the GST Council should have made all COVID-19 related products, technologies and service tax-free.

It is inconceivable that the Government is insisting on raising revenue by taxing what is needed to fight the battle against the pandemic. Why on earth should any Government with compassion and empathy tax electric/gas furnaces used in crematoria?

G David Milton | Kanyakumari

SOUND BITE

Stalin had opposed the opening of Tasmac shops under the AIADMK Government. Now in power, the DMK-led Government is opening these liquor shops.



Tamil Nadu BJP president
— L Murugan

Historically, the people of Mongolia and we Tibetans have been like twin brothers and sisters.

Tibetan spiritual leader
— Dalai Lama

Buzzed Asymmetry. #HairMajesty #supershort #oneside #love. Few people know, I had a boy cut for a large part of my childhood.

Singer
— Sona Mohapatra

This (English) batting line-up is fragile. We have to now start looking at players and wondering if they are good enough.

Former England skipper
— Michael Vaughan

We will observe the situation of the markets and restaurants for one week. If the cases do not increase, we will continue with the phase-wise unlock.

Delhi Chief Minister
— Arvind Kejriwal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

HONOUR SANCTITY OF ECOLOGY

Disrupted ecology invites virulent viruses; India must cut dependence on scant natural resources



KOTA SRIRAJ

As a result of rapid industrialization, the ever-hungry industrial nations consumed natural resources at an alarming rate. The collateral damage became evident through adverse impacts on environment - air and water pollution of air and water to the global problem of climate change. Today every nation is suffering contamination of ecology due to anthropogenic intervention. Issues like dwindling groundwater or soil erosion apart, the world faces serious consequences of 'development' virulent viruses such as the novel coronavirus SARS-COV-2 for example.

Covid-19 has unleashed unimaginable fury on people's lives and livelihoods. The Scientific Reports (Nature research) Journal said an astounding 20,507,518 life years have been lost worldwide including India due to the pandemic. Statista Data figures show that the world lost over \$4 trillion in economic output. These consequences are a direct result of overzealous human activities that have disrupted normal ecological conditions causing rare virus strains to surface. Sixty per cent of the world's ailments stem from animals, of which 72 per cent is from wild animals. Usually referred to as the 'reservoir' species they do not infect humans directly; the infection happens through an 'inter-



mediary animal' or the 'carrier animal' because the virus in the latter undergoes mutation and becomes contagious. Virus mutations are normal processes in the evolution of a virus and occur at gene level and, therefore, cannot be avoided.

Various studies point out that intact ecosystems and bio-diverse nature hotspots are supremely successful in drawing the crucial line of separation between humans and animals. But insatiable human hunger for natural resources-driven economic prosperity means that mankind is crossing the invisible line and driving into the 'prohibited' sphere of the wild plant and animal world that are replete with hitherto unknown viruses that quickly latch on to the 'human hosts'. This trespass into nature's domain has its own set of penalties and associated costs.

The breakage of ecosystem integrity usually occurs when deforestation, change in land use and mining sort of activities abound. These activities triggered by human intervention have an irreversible impact of the ecosystem biodiversity as they forever alter the indigenous species population and density. This helps viruses to spill over, mutate and multiply finally leading to more toxic and contagious phenotypes against which humanity has no known remedy or protection available.

Given these conditions, it is easy to comprehend that restoration of lost ecosystems and ensuring preservation of existing ones is a primary priority for mankind. India must understand that the biodiversity of the ecology is irreplaceable and that the disruption of the same means inviting certain death and destruction. Towards that end, India must take immediate measures to preserve the sanctity of its ecology by first gently encouraging the population to adopt environmentally friendly lifestyles which are less and less dependent on precious natural resources.

A resource-exploitative lifestyle that is intensely dependent on harvesting precious natural assets of the environment is also unable to develop and retain natural immunity against common infections and viruses. This is due to over dependence on medicine regimes. An eco-friendly lifestyle will ensure resurrection of biodiversity which in turn will help revive the natural immunity that humans are born with.

(The author is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

India gets poorer, investors richer

Imagine if all of ₹2100,000 crore under Atmanirbhar package had been distributed among 40 crore workers in the informal sector; it would have boosted demand

The Corona pandemic may have brought about sharp deceleration in India's economic growth - the sharpest ever during the last four decades or so - but has yielded a bonanza for the investors.

The wealth of investors in the stock market as represented by the market capitalization of Indian equities (market value of shares multiplied by their number) almost doubled from around Rs 113 trillion (a trillion equals 100,000 crore) as on March 31, 2020 to Rs 226 trillion as on March 31, 2021. In contrast, India's GDP at current prices declined from Rs 203 trillion during 2019-20 to Rs 197 trillion during 2020-21. As a result, the market capitalization to GDP ratio almost doubled from 56 per cent during 2019-20 to 115 per cent during 2020-21.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country is the total value of goods and services produced during a specific time frame say a quarter or a year. Used worldwide, it is the most crucial economic indicator for reflecting on the economic health of a country. For developing countries such as India, a high year-on-year GDP growth should result in increasing prosperity for its people and vice versa.

During 2020-21, when the Corona pandemic destroyed economic activity on a mammoth scale, annihilated millions of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), took away jobs of tens of millions and severely impacted earnings of others, one section that went unscathed was the corporate sector in particular, the investors who made huge gains from their shareholdings in corporate entities across all categories such as large-caps, mid-caps, small-caps etc. So, what explains this anomalous situation?

The market value of a share depends on the demand or investors' interest which in turn, is a function of the company's current profitability and their assessment of how this is expected to be in the years to come.

During the year, profitability of majority of the listed firms increased despite decline in revenue. This was made possible due to higher prices of their products on the one hand and reduction in expenditure (that included expenses on wages and salaries, other fixed costs, interest outgo, etc.) on the other. As regards expectation for the future, investors including foreign investors have confidence in the fundamentals of firms and their ability to deliver good returns in the medium to long-term. This is vindicated by a record FPI (foreign portfolio investment) of about US\$37 billion during 2020-21.

Even the measures announced by the Union Government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) purportedly to revive growth, boost aggregate demand and promote 'inclusive' development with emphasis on reinvigorating MSMEs ended up adding to the fortunes of the corporate sector.

The steep reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new enterprises set up after October 1, 2019 and to 22 per cent for existing entities (subject to their foregoing exemption and deductions available under existing dispensation) meant leaving an additional about Rs 150,000 crore in the hands of corporate in a full year. The corporate entities also benefited from the reduction in the policy rate (interest rate at which RBI lends money to commercial banks) by 1.15 per cent during 2020 over and above a total cut of 1.35 per cent delivered during 2019.

Of the much trumpeted special package of Rs



TO SUM UP, THE HIGHLY INEQUITABLE OUTCOME DURING 2020-21 WAS DUE TO THE GOVERNMENT RELYING TOO MUCH ON MONETARY SUPPORT WHICH WAS AVAILABLE MOSTLY BY CORPORATE ENTITIES AND TOO LITTLE FISCAL SUPPORT (FREE FOOD, SUBSIDISED LPG, PM-KISAN ETC) WHICH BARELY HELPED TENS OF MILLIONS LOW-INCOME EARNERS KEEP THEIR HEAD ABOVE WATER

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



2100,000 crore announced by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman (May, 2020) under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan', a mere about Rs 200,000 crore was spent on catering to food and other bare basic needs such as higher subsidy on LPG, hike in wages under MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), financial assistance to farmers under PM-KISAN, ex-gratia to Jan Dhan (JD) account holder etc. under PM Garib Kalyan Yojna (PM - GKY).

The rest Rs 1900,000 crore was given as (i) liquidity support by RBI (measures announced by Governor, Shashikant Dason March 27 and April 17, 2020 injected close to Rs 500,000 crore followed by another Rs 300,000 crore on May 22); (ii) increasing resources of banks and other financial institutions (FIs) to enable them on-lend; (iii) releasing pending dues to agencies tasked with implementation of welfare schemes of the Union Government. A big slice of these funds either landed with corporate entities or remained un-utilized.

For instance, out of the Rs 100,000 crore auction of targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO - 1) of three-year tenor by the RBI, Rs 75,000 crore went to the big corporate. The apex bank tried to rectify this anomaly when under the TLTRO 2.0 (April 17, 2020) it reserved 50 per cent of additional liquidity injection Rs 50,000 crore for small and mid-sized non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and micro-finance institutions

(MFIs). One wonders whether this reserved quota of Rs 25,000 crore actually went to small players.

Consider Rs 300,000 crore meant for MSMEs or identified stressed sectors under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS). As against a target of eight million MSMEs beneficiaries, only four million got loan aggregating to Rs 150,000 crore. Even today, the money available under the scheme remains un-utilized; this has prompted the Government to extend the scheme till September 30 and even relaxed the conditions to allow firms with outstanding up to Rs 50 crore (up from existing Rs 25 crore) avail of the facility.

Look at the payment of Rs 65,000 crore to fertilizer manufacturers (in addition to Rs 71,000 crore allocated in the budget for 2020-21) towards subsidy dues being carry forward from previous years. These payments went towards bolstering their bottom-line. Likewise, Rs 90,000 crore given to power distribution companies (PDCs) (amount since raised to Rs 130,000 crore) eventually landed with power generation companies being former's pending dues to the latter. As for food subsidy, the Government paid to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) Rs 350,000 crore (as per RE) over and above the budget provision of Rs 116,000 crore for 2020-21. A good chunk of this was used by the FCI for clearing dues to its creditors/companies.

Thus, contrary to the stated

intent of the Atmanirbhar package to provide succor to MSMEs and millions of workers in informal sector etc., on ground zero, the money was given mostly by way of tax cuts, reduction in interest rate, loans, liquidity support and clearance of dues which contributed to enrichment of those (read: corporate) who were already well-off. The latter also gained a lot from the reckless spending by governments in developed countries (a gargantuan US\$9 trillion was pumped in) even as a lot of that money found its way to emerging market economies including India.

To sum up, the highly inequitable outcome during 2020-21 was due to the Government relying too much on monetary support - which was availed mostly by corporate entities and too little fiscal support (free food, subsidized LPG, PM-KISAN etc) which barely helped tens of millions low-income earners keep their head above water. In contrast, imagine if all of the Rs 2100,000 crore under the Atmanirbhar package were to be distributed among 40 crore workers in the informal sector. This would have given the much-needed boost to demand across all sectors and resultant fillip to inclusive growth, but that was not to be.

Even as the pandemic continues to bite during the current year as well (though, to a lesser extent), will the Government give a big fiscal push directed at these most vulnerable people? Going by Finance Minister's stance thus far, it seems unlikely.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

DIGVIJAYA SINGH TELLS A PAKISTANI JOURNALIST THAT IF CONGRESS COMES TO POWER, THEY WILL RECONSIDER THE DECISION ON ARTICLE 370. — BJP IT CELL CHIEF AMIT MALVIYA



CERTAIN UNEDUCATED PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE NOT UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "SHALL" AND "CONSIDER". — SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER DIGVIJAYA SINGH

India-UK trade talks: Case for tariff optimisation

A notion worth dispelling is that Scotch whiskies are costlier to produce; it is 50 per cent more expensive to produce it in India than in Scotland

In wake of the Indo-UK trade discussions, many 'experts' argue for reduction in tariff, particularly slashing custom tariffs on imported Scotch and on 'Intermediate' products which they say are nothing but high-strength, potable, undenatured ethyl alcohol used for bottling and blending in India.

They argue on three main grounds. One, that India has a large trade surplus in the category and can afford greater imports; two, customs duty reduction on intermediate products will encourage 'Make in India'; and three, even if tariff is reduced the bulk of consumption will remain locally produced whiskies -- so why bother. This industry contributes nearly Rs 250,000 crore in taxes



VINOD GIRI

(The author is Director General of the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies. The views expressed are personal.)

and for most states it constitutes 15-30 per cent of revenue. Customs duty is not even Rs 5000 crore in comparison. Second, this industry uses agricultural products as primary raw material and nearly 50 lakh farmers depend on it. It provides employment to 20 lakh people. Any disruption will have widespread ramifications for the government, farmers and labour market.

The problem with the first argument is that it hides the true balance of trade on alcoholic beverages using a wider head of 'Food and Drinks'. If one separates alcoholic beverages/products for human consumption from the wider clubbing of Food and Drinks, a very different picture emerges. As per DGFT data for

2018-19, India exports only Rs 5 crore worth of alcoholic products/beverages to the UK, against import of Rs 1300 crore. Clubbing alcohol under a much bigger Food & Drink category to claim favourable balance of trade is highly misleading.

The second argument is also a misconception. Scotch whisky goes through two major stages of productions -- distillation and bottling. The 'Intermediate' Scotch whisky is actually the output of the first stage, it has been produced and matured in Scotland. What happens in India is only bottling. Therefore, while incentivising Intermediate products through reduced or zero duty will lead to an increase of usage of bottling plants in India, which will be a big loss for



Indian farmers and manufacturers.

The third argument misses out on three vital points. One, in product categories with multiple price segments like whisky, consumers seamlessly shift to the next category up or down depending on affordability.

So, when a Scotch whisky is sold at a lower price it takes away consumers from products in the price segment, starting a

domino effect that makes the domestic industry the net loser. Two, introduction of Scotch whisky at lower price attacks the profit driving end of portfolio of Indian companies, thus jeopardising their viability. Third, Indian premium whiskies like Amrut, Paul John or Rampur are now regarded amongst the best in the world but are unable to make the same headway in the domestic market due to an unsupportive regime and reducing customs duty further just will not help.

Another notion worth dispelling is that Scotch whiskies are costlier to produce. Rather, it costs at least 50 per cent more to produce a whisky of similar quality in India than in Scotland. This is primarily on account of a higher cost of cap-

ital and higher taxes in India, interstate restrictions and higher evaporation losses.

Also, many states offer concessionary taxes on imported products, but reduction in customs tariffs cannot be done without removing compensatory state-based concessions as otherwise it will create a hugely discriminatory tax regime against Indian products.

If we talk about reciprocal duty concessions, the problem is that barriers put up by the UK are not tariff based but non-tariff ones. India, being a sugar producing country, has evolved whisky recipes based on spirit distilled from molasses. The UK does not accept this as it is not 'recipe standards'. The result of these non-tariff barriers is that of the 70 lakh cases of whisky

exported from India every year, the whole of the EU including the UK accounts for less than 30,000!

Indian industry is not against reducing customs duty on alcohol, but it should be in a phased manner and up to a point where it creates a level playing field.

Accordingly, it has put forward its recommendation to reduce import taxes, aggregate of customs duty and AIDC, from 150% to 100% now and to 75% in five years' time. It has also recommended a threshold import price for taxation at \$5 per bottle, and reciprocal concessions from the UK allowing whiskies from India to be allowed in the UK market as 'Indian Whisky' without minimum maturity conditions.

Gas blast kills 12 in China, 150 hurt

AP ■ BEIJING

At least 12 people were killed and 39 seriously injured on Sunday after a gas line explosion tore through a residential neighborhood in central China.



In this image taken from a video footage run by China's CCTV, a firefighter walks near the aftermath of a gas explosion in Shiyuan city in central China's Hubei Province on Sunday

Responders to the early morning blast in the city of Shiyuan in Hubei province sent more than 150 people to the hospital, according to officials quoted by state media.

The cause of the explosion remains under investigation. Stall keepers and customers buying breakfast and fresh vegetables at a food market were the majority of victims when the explosion hit shortly after 6 a.m., according to the reports. The blast struck a two-story building built in the early 1990s, which includes pharmacies, restaurants and other businesses. More than 900 people were evacuated from the area.

idents at companies and on campuses, all must work together to shoulder their responsibilities, strengthen their political comprehension and root out the causes of such hazards," Xi was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

The Shiyuan explosion came a day after eight people died and three others were injured when toxic methyl formate leaked from a vehicle at a chemical handling facility in the southwestern city of Guiyang.

pipelines ripped open following a leak. Frequent deadly accidents are usually traced to weak adherence to safety standards, poor maintenance and corruption among enforcement bodies. Those responsible are often handed harsh punishments, but high demand and the desire for profits often trump such concerns.

Among the worst accidents was a massive 2015 explosion at a chemical warehouse in the port city of Tianjin that killed 173 people, most of them firefighters and police officers. The blast was blamed on illegal construction and unsafe storage of volatile materials.

G-7 pledges 1 billion vaccines

AP ■ CARBIS BAY (ENGLAND)

Leaders of the Group of Seven wealthy nations stated their claim on Sunday to leading the world out of the coronavirus pandemic and crisis, pledging more than 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses to poorer nations, vowing to help developing countries grow while fighting climate change and backing a minimum tax on multinational firms.



At the group's first face-to-face meeting in two years, the leaders dangled promises of support for global health, green energy, infrastructure and education.

The leaders wanted to show that international cooperation is back after the upheavals caused by the pandemic and the unpredictability of former US President Donald Trump. And they wanted to convey that the club of wealthy democracies — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States — is a better friend to poorer nations than authoritarian rivals such as China.

Speaking at the end of the three-day summit in southwest England, US President Joe Biden, who was making his first foreign trip as leader, said it was an "extraordinary, collaborative and productive meeting."

Johnson said the G-7 would demonstrate the value of democracy and human rights to the rest of the world and help "the world's poorest countries to develop themselves in a way that is clean and green and sustainable."

"It's not good enough for us to just rest on our laurels and talk about how important those values are," he told reporters after the 3-day meeting on the Cornwall coast. "And this isn't about imposing our values on the rest of the world. What we as the G-7 need to do is

demonstrate the benefits of democracy and freedom and human rights to the rest of the world."

But health and environmental campaigners were distinctly unimpressed by the details in the leaders' final communiqué.

"This G-7 summit will live on in infamy," said Max Lawson, the head of inequality policy at the international aid group Oxfam. "Faced with the biggest health emergency in a century and a climate catastrophe that is destroying our planet, they have completely failed to meet the challenges of our times."

Despite Johnson's call to "vaccinate the world" by the end of 2022 the promise of 1 billion doses for vaccine-hungry countries — coming both directly and through the international COVAX program — falls far short of the 11 billion

doses the World Health Organization said is needed to vaccinate at least 70% of the world's population and truly end the pandemic.

Half of the billion-dose pledge is coming from the United States and 100 million from Britain. Canada said it also would give 100 million doses, and France pledged 60 million.

The vaccines are due to be delivered by the end of 2022, but Biden said the leaders were clear that the commitments they made to donate doses wouldn't be the end.

The U.S. President said getting shots into arms around the world was a "gigantic, logistical effort" and the goal may not be achieved until 2023.

The G-7 also backed a minimum tax of at least 15% on large multinational companies to stop corporations from using tax havens to avoid taxes.

Italy premier says talks on China dominated G7

AP ■ NEWQUAY (ENGLAND)

Italian Premier Mario Draghi says the dominant theme of the Group of Seven summit was how to respond to China and other autocratic governments.

Draghi said Sunday that China has the right to a great economy but that practices like coercive detention and using forced labour were out of step with the vision of the world's democracies.

He said the position taken wasn't particularly tough, but was rather realistic, in view of the necessity to cooperate on climate change, rebuilding the world after the coronavirus pandemic and other issues.

He also said his Cabinet would be reviewing the controversial 2019 trade and infrastructure deal Italy's previous government signed with Beijing. Over U.S. and other objections, Italy in 2019 became the first G7 country to sign onto China's "Belt and Road" initiative,

Erdogan and Biden meet at a tense moment for Turkish-US ties

AP ■ ANKARA

President Joe Biden and Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan have known each other for years, but their meeting Monday will be their first as heads of state. And it comes at a particularly tense moment for relations between their two countries.

The list of disagreements is unusually long for the two NATO allies: There's U.S. support for Kurdish fighters in Syria, as well as Turkey's purchase of a Russian weapons system. And in April, Biden infuriated Ankara by declaring that the Ottoman-era mass killing and deportations of Armenians was "genocide."

Previous U.S. Presidents had avoided using the term out of concern that it would complicate ties with Turkey, which is fiercely proud of its Ottoman history and insists that those killed in the early 20th century were victims of civil war and

unrest. However, besides blasting the decision in speeches, Erdogan didn't immediately hit back at Washington. The muted response suggests he wants a good relationship with Biden, said Rachel Ellehuus, an analyst at the Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Not least because he needs that economic relationship with the U.S. And the appearance of a cooperative relationship in order to retain his base, which is very much built on a functioning Turkish economy that is tethered into the West," Ellehuus said.

However, before leaving Sunday for the NATO summit in Brussels where he will meet Biden, Erdogan described the president's comments on the killings of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire as "very negative" and an "approach (that) has seriously upset us."

Biden takes subtle jabs at Trump at end of G7

AP ■ NEWQUAY (ENGLAND)

President Joe Biden is taking a series of subtle jabs at Donald Trump at the end of the Group of Seven summit, suggesting there was a "genuine sense of enthusiasm" among foreign leaders that the United States was engaged on world issues.

The president is highlighting very fundamental differences with Trump over climate change and national security at a news conference Sunday.

Biden says that he does not view NATO as a "protection racket." That's a contrast to Trump who said that foreign countries should pay for the presence of the U.S. Military abroad.

Trump said that the United States was engaged on world issues.

China hits back at G7 summit

Days of 'small group' of countries dictating global decisions are long gone: Beijing

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Sunday asserted that the days when global decisions were dictated by a "small group" of countries are long gone, hitting back at the G-7 summit where Beijing was at the centre of severe criticism over the COVID-19 origins, human rights violations and its mega Belt and Road Initiative.

As the leaders of G-7 — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States — met in London where US President Joe Biden made a strong bid to rally the allies against China's economic clout, human rights besides its reluctance to agree for a probe into the COVID-19 origin, Beijing appeared defiant and firm questioning the relevance of the bloc.

While there is no direct response by the Chinese government here, state-run Global Times quoted statement issued by China's Embassy in London, rebutting G-7 criticism against Beijing. Answering a question on issues covered by the G-7 Summit on pandemic response, economy, trade and global supply chains and US efforts to "seize" the opportunity to bond with other Western countries to safeguard the "rules-based international system," the Chinese embassy statement said there is only one system, the international system, which is led by the UN.

"We always believe that countries, big or small, strong or weak, poor or rich, are equals, and that world affairs should be handled through consultation by all countries," it said.

"The days when global decisions were dictated by a small group of countries are long gone," it said.

"There is only one system and one order in the world, that is, the international system with the United Nations at the core and the international law, not the so-called system and order advocated by a hand-

ful of countries," it added.

To another question that an announcement will be made at the G7 summit on the provision of one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine to countries in need, the statement listed about what China has done including providing free vaccines to more than 80 developing countries exporting vaccines to 43 countries.

"We have delivered 350 million doses to global partners, more than any other country in the world," it said. "China is fully implementing the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative for Poorest Countries and has so far deferred repayment of more than USD 1.3 billion worth of debt. This is the highest deferral amount among the G20 members," it said.

While Biden's efforts making headway to forge a consensus with other G-7 and EU countries came as a surprise to China, analysts here cautioned Beijing about the US successfully pushing its Build Back Better World (B3W) plan to counter Beijing's multibillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

At an arms control crossroads, Biden and Putin face choices

AP ■ WASHINGTON

At a low point in US-Russian relations, President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin appear to agree broadly on at least one thing — their first face-to-face meeting Wednesday is a chance to set the stage for a new era in arms control.

Whether that leads to actual arms negotiations is another matter, complicated by the

soured relationship and accusations by each country that the other has cheated on past arms treaties.

The fabric of arms control has been fraying, notably with the abandonment in 2019 — first by Washington, then by Moscow — of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which had governed a whole class of missiles for more than three decades.

13 killed in hospital attack in opposition-held Syria town

AP ■ BEIRUT

Missiles hit a hospital in a northern Syrian town controlled by Turkey-backed fighters, killing at least 13 people, including two medical staff, and putting the facility out of service, activists and an aid group said.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the shelling, which came from areas where government troops and Kurdish-led fighters are deployed.

attack on Saturday killed 13 civilians and injured 27, adding that it involved rocket and artillery shelling of the hospital. The governor's office blamed the attack on Syrian Kurdish groups.

A war monitor, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, put the death toll at 18. The discrepancy could not be immediately reconciled.

The Syrian American Medical Society, or SAMS, an aid group that assists health centers in opposition areas, said al-Shifaa Hospital in the town of Afrin was targeted by

two missiles. The attack destroyed the polyclinic department, the emergency and the delivery rooms, the group said.

Two of the 13 people killed were hospital staff and two were ambulance drivers, said SAMS, which supports the hospital. Eleven of its staff were injured. The hospital has been put out of service and patients were evacuated, the group said.

SAMS called for an investigation into the attack on the hospital, one of the largest facilities in northern Syria that offered thousands of medical services each month.

Pope demands food aid for starving people of Tigray

Rome: Pope Francis demanded Sunday that humanitarian aid reach hungry people in the war-torn Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, where Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers are blocking food deliveries and other assistance.

Francis called for an immediate end to the fighting in Tigray, the return of social harmony and for "all food aid and health care assistance to be guaranteed."

Speaking at his Sunday noon blessing, Francis said he was thinking of the people of Tigray who have been "struck by a grave humanitarian crisis that has exposed the poorest to famine."

New Israeli Govt to be sworn in, ending Netanyahu's uninterrupted twelve-year premiership

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's parliament is set to vote on Sunday on a new government led by Yamina head Naftali Bennett, ousting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from power after an uninterrupted 12 years at the helm of affairs.

The prospective government — an unprecedented coalition of ideologically divergent political parties drawn from the Right, the Left and the Centre, along with an Arab party — has a razor-thin majority of one seat.

The Knesset (Israeli parliament) is scheduled to meet at 4 PM local time and sans last-minute grand surprises, Bennett, an old-time associate of Netanyahu and leader of the right-wing Yamina party, would take over the mantle from his one time mentor leading a fragile government with a razor-thin majority of 61 lawmakers in a 120 member house.

Ahead of the vote in Parliament, heads of the eight factions constituting the new

coalition met to confirm the government.

Informed sources said that "they all re-affirmed their commitment and it was all set to go ahead."

The approval by the Knesset would bring to an end 12 years of uninterrupted rule by Netanyahu, 71, who holds the record of being the longest-serving Prime Minister in the country's history.

Having served in the position earlier between 1996 and 1999, Netanyahu last year surpassed the record held by one of the Jewish state's founding leaders, David Ben-Gurion.

The formation of the new government would end the political impasse in the country that saw four elections in less than two years leading to inconclusive results.

But opinion polls suggest that majority of the Israelis do not look too hopeful regarding the longevity of the coalition of eight disparate parties who do not see eye-to-eye on most of the critical issues facing the country.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MANIYARI WATER RESOURCES DIVISION, MUNGELI DISTT - MUNGELI (C.G.)
e-Procurement Tender Notice
 eProcurement Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>
(FIRST CALL)
SYSTEM TENDER NO. 77952/ NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO. 01/SAC/2021-22 DATED: 09-06-2021
 Online Tenders are invited for the following works up to 30-06-2021 (17.30 hours IST).

System Tender No.	Group No.	Name of Work	Probable amount of contract
77952		RENOVATION OF HEAD WORK & CEMENT CONCRETE LINING ON MAIN CANAL FROM RD. 1170 M TO 2670M INCLUDING CONSTRUCTION OF 2 NOS STRUCTURE WITH REPAIR OF 4 NOS V.R.B. AND 7 NOS FALL OF LOTANALLA TANK SCHEME.	Rs. 210.00 Lakhs

The details can be viewed & downloaded online directly from the Govt. of Chhattisgarh Integrated e-Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) from dated 16-06-2021 at 17.31 hours (IST) onwards.
 Note: All eligible/interested contractors/bidders are mandated to get enrolled on the integrated e-Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) and get approval on specific vendor class from PWD under centralized contractor/ supplier registration in order to download the tender documents and participate in the subsequent bidding process.

sd/-
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
MANIYARI W.R. DIVISION MUNGELI DISTT-MUNGELI (C.G.)
 R.O. NO.: 61170/9
 R.O. DATE: 10/06/2021

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EXTRACT OF AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 2021

S. NO.	Particulars	Amount Rs. In Lacs		
		Quarter Ended	Year Ended	Quarter Ended
		31.03.2021	31.03.2021	31.03.2020
		(Audited)	(Audited)	(Audited)
1.	Total Income from Operations	1942.13	5823.58	1880.02
2.	Net Profit for the period (before tax & exceptional items)	278.60	122.19	268.20
3.	Net Profit for the period before tax (after exceptional items)	278.60	122.19	268.20
4.	Net Profit for the period after Tax (after exceptional items)	498.60	252.19	401.20
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	498.60	252.19	401.20
6.	Paid-up Equity Share Capital (Face Value of Rs. 10/- per share)	5787.29	5787.29	5787.29
7.	Earnings Per Share			
	I Basic in Rs.	0.71	0.44	0.69
	II Diluted in Rs.	0.71	0.44	0.69

Notes:
 1. Operating Expenses include raw-material consumed, packing, labour, power & fuel.
 2. C & S.A. (General, Sales & Admin Exp. of India & USA including logistics cost).
 3. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly / Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly / Annual Financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange BSE Limited (www.bseindia.com) and the Company Website (www.himalayainternational.com).
 By Order of the Board
Man Mohan Malik
 Managing Director
 DATED: 12.06.2021
 PLACE: Poonja Sahib

Britain calls EU view of N Ireland offensive in Brexit spat

AP ■ FALMOUTH

Britain accused European Union leaders on Sunday of holding the "offensive" view that Northern Ireland is not fully part of the United Kingdom, as Brexit cast a shadow over the Group of Seven summit.

Britain and the EU are in a spat over post-Brexit trade arrangements that could see British sausages banned from entering Northern Ireland, the only part of the UK that borders the 27-nation bloc. The dispute is raising political tensions in Northern Ireland, where some people identify as British and some as Irish.

British media reported that Prime Minister Boris Johnson asked French President Emmanuel Macron when they met Saturday in the English seaside resort of Carbis Bay how he would feel if sausages from Toulouse could not be moved to Paris. They said Macron replied the comparison did not work because Paris and Toulouse were part of the same country.

The French presidency did not deny Macron had made the comments. It said he was explaining "that Toulouse and Paris were on a geographical unit of territory, Northern Ireland is on an island. The president wanted to stress that

the situation was quite different and that it's not appropriate to hold that kind of comparison."

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said the idea Northern Ireland was not an integral part of the UK was "not only offensive, it has real world effects on the communities in Northern Ireland, creates great concern, great consternation."

"Can you imagine if we talked about Catalonia, the Flemish part of Belgium, northern Italy, Corsican France, as different countries?" he said on Sky News. "We need a bit of respect here. And also, frankly, an appreciation of the situation for all communities in

Northern Ireland." Relations between Britain and the EU have soured since the UK made its final break from the bloc at the end of 2020, more than four years after voting to leave.

The EU is angry over the British government's delay in implementing new checks on some goods coming into Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, as was agreed in the Brexit divorce deal. The bloc is threatening legal action if the U.K. Does not fully bring in the checks, which include a ban on chilled meats such as sausages from England, Scotland and Wales going to Northern Ireland beginning next month.

Cong-ruled States should cut tax on petrol, diesel: Pradhan

MINISTER MUM ON HIGH TAXES IN BJP-RULED STATES

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With petrol and diesel prices climbing to record high, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asked Congress Governments in Rajasthan and Maharashtra to cut sales tax if the party was concerned about fuel price burden on common man, but did not say if BJP-ruled States like Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, where petrol has crossed ₹100 mark, would do the same.

Petrol and diesel have risen to an all-time high across the country after fuel rates rose by ₹5.72 to ₹6.25 per litre in less than six weeks. This is due to a combination of rising international oil prices and record-high central and State taxes.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of an event organised to inaugurate the oxygen plant set up by Indraprastha Gas Ltd at Maharaja Agrasen Hospital, he said central and State Governments need additional money from the taxes on petrol and diesel to meet expenses for fighting pandemic as well as development work.

"Accept that fuel prices are pinching consumers," he said, adding the government is spending ₹1 lakh crore on providing free food grains to

poor this year alone besides spending money on vaccines and healthcare infrastructure. Asked about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's repeated attacks on the Modi government for skyrocketing fuel prices, Pradhan said, "Why is fuel expensive in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Punjab (which are ruled by the party)?"

"If Rahul Gandhi is concerned about the poor being hit by fuel prices, he should ask chief ministers of Congress-ruled states to cut taxes. He should ask (Maharashtra Chief Minister) Uddhav Thackeray to reduce taxes," he said.

He, however, did not say if BJP-ruled states like Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, which too have seen petrol price cross Rs 100 a litre mark due to local taxes, would follow suit.

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 ₹100 per litre mark in seven states and union territories -- Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Ladakh.

Of these states, Congress is in power in Rajasthan and is a coalition partner with Shiv Sena and NCP in Maharashtra. BJP rules Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka and Ladakh too is under central rule. Andhra Pradesh has YSR-Congress in power while TRS rules in Telangana.



Rajasthan levies the highest value-added tax (VAT or sales tax) on petrol and diesel in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka.

Petrol, diesel prices remain unchanged on Sunday

New Delhi: Fuel prices which have been rising over the past one month remained unchanged in the national Capital on Sunday. In Delhi, petrol was sold for ₹96.12 while diesel was priced at ₹86.98 per litre, both at the same levels on Saturday. Fuel prices have increased in the last two consecutive days across the country. In the financial capital of the country, Mumbai, both petrol and diesel were sold for ₹102.30 and ₹94.39 per litre, respectively. **PTI**

Sharpening income inequalities telling story of uneven economic recovery amid pandemic: Ex-RBI Guv Subbarao

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former RBI Governor D Subbarao has expressed concerns over "extreme unevenness" in economic recovery and "sharpening inequalities" between upper income segments and lower income households in the country, cautioning that the trend will hit growth prospects going forward.

Terming the uneven recovery "morally wrong and politically corrosive," he said liquidity in the domestic market and foreign fund inflows are leading to soaring of prices of stocks and other assets despite disruptions due to Covid pandemic.

The ex-central bank governor further said that earlier expectations of a sharp economic recovery this year have been dashed by the new pandemic wave.

"The economy contracted last year, for the first time in four decades, by as much as 7.3 per cent. That was less deep than we had first feared but still deep enough to have caused distress to millions of families in the informal sector. There was expectation of a sharp recovery this year but those expectations are now tempered by the impact of the second wave," Subbarao told PTI.

The RBI too reduced its growth forecast for the current fiscal by one percentage point, from 10.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent, he said adding that even 9.5 per cent growth might



seem impressive but note that this is coming on a very low base of last year.

"Even if we clock this growth rate, the output during this fiscal 2021/22 will still be less than the output two years ago before the pandemic hit us. Compare that with China which never fell below its pre-pandemic level and the US which is expected to recover to its pre-pandemic level this year," the former RBI chief said. Expressing concerns, Subbarao said that while the majority of people have lost jobs and saw reduction in their income, the wealth of some rich individuals have increased during the pandemic period.

"The positive wealth effect of the upper income segments juxtaposed with the negative income effects of the lower income households tells a story of a very uneven recovery and sharpening inequalities. This is morally wrong and politically corrosive," he said adding that it will also have a big impact on growth prospects going forward.

Discoms' outstanding dues to gencos fall 11.2% to ₹81,628 cr in April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Total outstanding dues owed by electricity distribution utilities or discoms to power producers fell 11.2 per cent to ₹81,628 crore in April 2021 from a year ago.

Distribution companies (discoms) owed a total ₹91,915 crore to power generation firms in April 2020, according to portal PRAAPTI (Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators).

However, outstanding dues of discoms towards electricity producers have been increasing year-on-year as well as month-on-month for years showing perennial stress in the power sector till February this year. It has started tapering off from March 2021.

Total dues in April increased sequentially compared to ₹78,841 crore in March this year.

Total outstanding dues of discoms had dipped 3.4 per cent in March this year from ₹81,687 crore in the same month last year.

The PRAAPTI portal was launched in May 2018 to bring in transparency in power purchase transactions between generators and discoms.

In April 2021, the total overdue amount, which was not cleared even after 45 days of grace period offered by generators, stood at ₹68,732 crore as against ₹76,117 crore in the same month a year ago. The overdue amount stood at



₹67,656 crore in March this year.

Power producers give 45 days to discoms to pay bills for electricity supply. After that, outstanding dues become overdue and generators charge penal interest on that in most cases. To give relief to power generation companies (gencos), the Centre enforced a payment security mechanism from August 1, 2019.

Under this mechanism, discoms are required to open letters of credit for getting power supply. The Centre had also given some breachers to discoms for paying dues to gencos in view of the Covid-19 induced lockdown. The government had also waived penal charges for late payment of dues.

In May, the Government announced ₹90,000 crore liquidity infusion for discoms under which these utilities would get loans at economical rates from Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and REC Ltd.

This was a government

initiative to help gencos remain afloat. Later, the liquidity infusion package was increased to ₹1.2 lakh crore and further to ₹1.35 lakh crore. Under the liquidity package, over ₹80,000 crore has been disbursed.

Discoms in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu account for the major portion of dues to gencos, the data showed.

Overdue of independent power producers amounted to 53.04 per cent of the total overdue of ₹68,732 crore of discoms in April 2021. The proportion of central PSU gencos in the overdue was 30.52 per cent.

Among the central public sector gencos, NTPC alone has an overdue amount of ₹5,167.11 crore on discoms, followed by Damodar Valley Corporation at ₹5,156.34 crore, NLC India at ₹3,416.18 crore, NHPC at ₹2,261.05 crore and THDC India at ₹1,134.17 crore in April 2021.

Exchanges to suspend trading in DHFL shares from Monday

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



from June 14.

The approved resolution plan provides for delisting of equity shares of the company. As per the circulars, the company made an announcement on June 9, saying that "no value was attributable to the equity shares as per the liquidation value of the company estimated by registered valuers appointed under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016".

According to the circular issued by BSE, "to avoid market complications, trading in the securities of Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Limited will be suspended w.e.f June 14, 2021".

In November 2019, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had referred DHFL -- then the third-largest pure-play mortgage lender -- for resolution under the IBC. It was the first finance company to be referred to the NCLT by RBI using special powers under Section 227 of the IBC.

In separate but similarly-worded circulars issued on Friday, BSE and NSE said they would suspend trading in the shares of DHFL with effect

WTO convenes key meeting of trade Mins on July 15 on fisheries subsidies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing.

The chief of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has convened a meeting of all trade ministers on July 15 to iron out differences with regard to providing fisheries subsidies, sources said.

The aim is to conclude the negotiations soon and after that a text is finalised so that an agreement on fisheries can be reached in the forthcoming Ministerial meet of WTO in December in Geneva.

Hectic negotiations are going on in Geneva on the matter. The objective of these negotiations is to discipline subsidies with the overall objective to have sustainable fishing and to eliminate IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing subsidies and prohibit

Fishing communities of developed countries use highly mechanised boats for fishing, which are called mother boats wherein they have processing units also.

As India's subsidy is minimal and provided to small and marginal fishermen, it has sought more time to implement the norms or disciplines, which would be finalised after complete negotiations, on the prohibition of subsidies for fishing activities in Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

There are primarily three areas of fishing - territorial waters (12 nautical miles from the sea shore), EEZ (exclusive economic zones - 200 nautical miles), and high seas.

India wants that fishing activities in territorial waters should be completely out of the ambit of the agreement, while adequate time should be given to implement commitments of the agreement in EEZs.

For this, the country has asked for the necessity of an appropriate and effective special and differential treatment (S&DT) for developing countries and LDCs (least developed countries) in the negotiations.

Amazon India to impart core machine learning skills to make students industry-ready

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



applications through an immersive three-day course, it added. Participants of the ML Summer School will be identified through an online assessment.

It is open to engineering students in their pre-final/final year of Bachelors, Masters or PhD studies across select tech campuses in 2021, including Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Delhi, International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Hyderabad, Birla Institute of Technology (BITS), National Institute of Technology (NIT) Tiruchirappalli and Anna University among others.

Amazon India on Sunday announced the launch of an integrated learning programme for students to learn applied Machine Learning (ML) skills, making them industry ready for careers in the new technology. The programme - ML Summer School - has been introduced to help train students in ML and address the growing demand for talent with this skill set across various industries. Amazon India said in a statement. The curriculum will cover the fundamental concepts in ML, while linking them to practical industry

NTPC invites EoI for hydrogen fuel cell-based pilot projects

PTI

New Delhi: State-run power giant NTPC has floated a global expression of interest (EoI) for setting up hydrogen fuel-based power backup system and a standalone fuel-cell based microgrid system, a statement said on Sunday.

Through these projects, NTPC is looking to further strengthen its footprint in green and clean fuel, the company said. NTPC will collaborate for implementation and further commercialization of the projects. This is in line with NTPC's initiatives towards adopting hydrogen technologies. The power PSU is exploring the use of hydrogen-based fuel cells-electrolyser systems for backup power requirement. Currently, the backup power requirement and micro grid applications are being met from diesel-based power generators. Looking at these as early adopter use case of hydrogen based technologies, NTPC is working towards creating solutions which are a green alternative to diesel generators.

Axis Bank stake in Max Life likely to rise to 20% in 12-18 months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



In line with the proposed deal, Axis Bank is likely to raise its stake in Max Life Insurance to about 20 per cent over the next 12-18 months, said the insurance company's CEO Prashant Tripathy said.

Currently, Axis Bank and its two subsidiaries - Axis Capital Ltd and Axis Securities Ltd - collectively own 12.99 per cent in Max Life Insurance post approval of the deal in April this year. With this, Axis entities have now become co-promoters of Max Life with three board seats. "Axis Bank is to increase to 19.99 per cent in tranches. Thirteen per cent is already done over the next two quarters, we will seek approval for the balance seven per cent. So, it will reach about 20 per cent and that will be the ownership of Axis Bank," Tripathy told PTI.

IPO pie set to grow as financial services players join the fray

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With payments major Paytm's board reportedly approving a bumper share sale plan running north of ₹22,000 crore, the IPO market is set for a big days as over a dozen financial services players, including fintechs, are set to mop up over ₹55,000 crore this fiscal from the market, according to investment bankers.

With more than a dozen insurance, asset management, commercial banking, non-banks, microfinance, housing finance and payment bank players already filing draft documents with the market regulator Sebi for public offerings, the financial services sector is set to dominate the primary issues or initial public offerings (IPOs) over the coming months.

Some of those who have already filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHPs) with the Sebi include Aadhar Housing Finance (₹7,500 crore), Policy Bazaar (₹4,000 crore), Apts Housing Finance (₹3,000 crore), Star Health Insurance (₹2,000 crore), Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC (₹1,500-2,000 crore) Arohan

Financial Services (₹1,800 crore), Fusion Microfinance (₹1,700 crore), Fincare Small Finance Bank (₹1,330 crore), Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (₹1,000-1,300 crore), Medi Assist (₹ 840 crore) and Jana Small Finance Bank (₹700 crore), among others.

And the board of the biggest payments bank Paytm has reportedly cleared an over ₹22,000 crore IPO. Together, these financial services companies are set to garner around ₹55,000 crore from the public. If materialised, the Paytm issue will be the largest IPO ever in the country, eclipsing the hitherto largest issue - the ₹15,000-crore share sale by the government in national miner Coal India in October 2010, says investment bankers seeking not to be quoted. Investment bankers and analysts consider the IPO boom to be reflective of the ongoing bull run and thus advice retail investors to be cautious while parking money in new companies. VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services in Kochi, said the performance of the IPO market usually has a strong correlation to the performance of the secondary market.

CAIT fully geared up to fight Amazon & Flipkart

IANS ■ NEW DELHI



For more than five years, Amazon, Walmart-owned Flipkart and many other foreign-funded e-commerce companies have indulged into all kinds of unethical business practices with an objective of taking control of not only the e-commerce but even the retail business of India, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said.

Their sinister designs have greatly vitiated the e-commerce landscape of the country, the traders body said. In view of such a situation, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has launched an "e-commerce purification week" from Monday to June 21, which is gaining massive support from thousands of trade associations across the Country. During the e-commerce purification campaign, the trade organizations across the country will handover a mem-

Baba Ramdev's Ruchi Soya files FPO document to raise up to ₹4,300 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eddible oil firm Ruchi Soya, which is owned by Baba Ramdev-led Patanjali Ayurveda, has filed draft document with SEBI to launch a follow-on public offer (FPO) for raising up to ₹4,300 crore.

The FPO is being launched to meet the SEBI norm of minimum public shareholding of 25 per cent in a listed entity. Ruchi Soya filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with market regulator SEBI on Saturday, sources said, adding that the company plans to raise up to ₹4,300 crore through the share sale.

Simultaneously, the trade associations will send an e-mail to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal urging them for an immediate direction to the CCI for initiating an investigation of the business module of Amazon and Flipkart, issuance of a fresh Press Note removing the flows of Press Note 2, and setting up of a Regulatory mechanism at the Centre to monitor e-commerce business in India. The CAIT has also declared to launch a digital signature campaign across the Country on this issue.

Centre may front load capital provisioning for PSBs this year

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

As the Central Government draws a plan to privatise at least two public sector banks (PSB) this fiscal, it has also decided to front load capitalisation of State-owned banks so that the balance sheets of some of these entities are strengthened ahead of possible sale.

Sources said that PSBs may be provided this year just after their first quarter results before October. This would be a departure from the practice of previous year when bank capitalisation was undertaken late in the year and towards the end of fiscal.

Even in FY21, a substantial portion of capital was released right at end of the fiscal year in March.

"Front loading of capital will help PSBs to strengthen their financials that may again get impacted this year with weak lending and stress coming back on a lot of their credit assets with Covid pandemic continuing to disrupt businesses.

This could also help in taking out weak banks out of the PCA (prompt corrective action) framework that would be helpful in their possible privatisation this year," said an official source on the condition of anonymity.

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GREEN AT WORK

PARTHA NEOG makes out the case for environmentally sustainable offices

Corporate sustainability has become increasingly significant over the last few years. Lately, it has been observed that employees, especially from the millennial workforce, look out for companies focused on environmentally sustainable practices and programmes. These programmes are crucial in building a positive brand image, retaining top talent, and driving profit for any organisation. Employers and leaders will be surprised to notice the sincerity and mindfulness of the workforce in perfecting sustainability initiatives. Moreover, involving employees in such practices leads to a more engaged and motivated workforce.

Sustainable practises for the workplace

Some simple but effective everyday practises add to building a sustainable workplace in the long run. Here are some steps that you can adopt:

- Keep recycling bins around the workplace as a part of a recycling programme.
- Go paperless. Opt for electronic files, cloud storage, and cloud-based collaboration options.
- Switch to motion-activated lights that turn off automatically when no one is in the room.
- Replace disposable utensils with reusable ones.
- Ask employees to keep computers and laptops in sleep mode to save energy.

The practises mentioned above take little effort but go on to produce tangible, long-term results.

As one of the most populous countries, with a huge consumer base for any thriving business, India's role in sustainability cannot be undermined and many businesses and organisations are rising to the challenge already. They are doing so by integrating the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with their business strategies. Such mindful strategies will drastically ease the environmental costs resulting from the patterns in production, consumption, resource, and energy usage of a company.

It is high time for all businesses to be conscious about their environmental footprint. Employers and leaders must innovate ways to transform

their organisation into an eco-friendly and sustainable one. Many top companies have already started their journey in achieving environmental sustainability. If MNCs can implement sustainable policies at work, small and medium businesses will follow in their footsteps. Listed below are a few practical and effective sustainable practises that should be employed in every workplace.

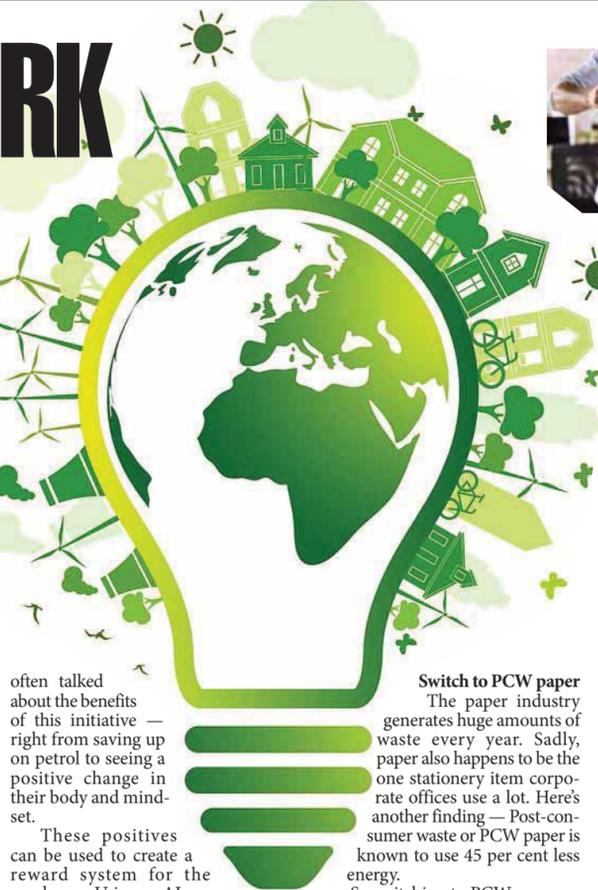
Introduce and implement a recycling programme

Recycling programmes in the workplace will give a head start to employees on their journey to sustainability. These programmes enable employees to learn about adequate waste disposal and the recycling process. There should be accurate signage for disposing of degradable, non-degradable, and recyclable waste. Asking employees to recycle discarded paper or reuse the paper for photocopies can ensure optimal use of resources while generating minimum waste. Another way to go about this initiative is by using refillable pens only. These small steps have a rather positive impact on the waste management of the company.

Encourage employees to cycle to work

In a pre-Covid world, using public transportation could significantly contribute towards reducing CO2 emissions. Now, public transportation is out of the question due to the ongoing pandemic. But, if we were to talk about alternatives, employees can use eco-friendly modes of transport like cycles and e-bikes. Cycling to work reduces the carbon footprint and helps employees stay fit while increasing their savings.

Our organisation has always encouraged employees to cycle or even walk to work. We started this initiative as a sustainable practise on World Environment Day, 2018. Even after the nationwide lockdown eased last year, many employees continued cycling to work. The employees have



often talked about the benefits of this initiative — right from saving up on petrol to seeing a positive change in their body and mindset.

These positives can be used to create a reward system for the employees. Using an AI-powered corporate wellness solution in the form of a mobile application, weekly targets can be set for employees. The app can be designed to help employees achieve health and wellness through various activities and fitness challenges. Whenever employees reach their targets, these can be incentivised with redeemable rewards.

Recognising their effort helps motivate them and all corporate leaders should try something along similar lines. The results would not disappoint them.

Install eco-friendly lighting in the workplace

After conducting an employee survey sometime in May 2019, we switched to eco-friendly lighting to further enhance our green practises.

Something as simple as changing a light bulb can have a considerable environmental impact. LED lights are also easier on the surroundings. Moreover, they produce far less toxic gases and use 75 per cent less energy as well.

Switch to PCW paper

The paper industry generates huge amounts of waste every year. Sadly, paper also happens to be the one stationery item corporate offices use a lot. Here's another finding — Post-consumer waste or PCW paper is known to use 45 per cent less energy.

So switching to PCW paper or recycled paper will drastically reduce waste generation. This is a common practise in our company and employees are more than happy to be active contributors in reducing waste generation as well as greenhouse gas emissions.

Encourage employees to volunteer in community environmental drives

Companies can either participate in or host environmental drives from time to time. Community participation and involvement are crucial to bringing about large-scale changes locally. These eco-friendly drives and programmes can be anything from cleaning up the locality to planting a few dozen saplings around the neighbourhood. Participating in such drives makes employees feel engaged and proud of the organisation they work in and the values it stands for.

Use solar energy

Using solar energy at workplaces and organisations can do wonders. This form of energy is not only

cleaner than others but is also inexhaustible.

Implementing this solution speaks volumes about a company's stance on sustainability and green practises. Installing solar panels will directly reflect an organisation's commitment to achieving sustainability in the workplace.

Organise employee awareness programmes

Employee awareness programmes should be a regular occurrence. Aware employees will become mindful employees who are conscious of the environmental impacts of their actions in their daily lives.

Hosting environmental awareness programmes, recommending educational documentaries can educate the employees and make them aware of the need for being extremely responsible about their actions and life choices. Moreover, they are more engaged in creating an eco-friendly and green workplace, ending up with a sense of satisfaction.

Keep indoor plants around the workspace

Indoor plants are known to reduce 87 per cent of indoor pollutants within 24 hours. It is recommended for all employees to invest in quite a few indoor plants for the workspace as this also eases anxiety to a great extent.

Time for mindful action!

Creating an eco-conscious workforce has become a top priority for corporations around the world. Such actions not only create a green and sustainable workplace but also drive business growth and profit. Research shows that 77 per cent of consumers want brands to be sustainable and environmentally responsible while 57 per cent are willing to change their purchasing habits to reduce the negative impact on the environment.

Building sustainable practises in the workplace is all about taking those seemingly tiny but meaningful steps on the ground level. Employers need to recognise the beauty and power of an eco-friendly workplace and take initiatives to achieve the same every day of the year.

(The author is co-founder and CEO of a leading employee engagement solutions company.)

WEBBED



LUCA

One young boy in a seaside town on Italian Riviera experiences an unforgettable summer filled with gelato, pasta and endless scooter rides. Luca shares these adventures with his newfound best friend, but all the fun is threatened by a deep secret. It releases on June 18 on Disney+.



PUNCCH BEAT S2

Two years after you were introduced to the students of Rosewood High, they are back with new friendships, new rivalries and a rush of adrenaline along with a dark twist. It releases on June 27 on ALT Balaji.



K.G.F CHAPTER 2

The blood-soaked land of Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) has a new overlord now — Rocky. Bloodier battles and darker days await as Rocky continues on his quest for unchallenged supremacy. It releases on July 16 on Amazon Prime.



Two decades and counting

Lagaan and Gadar: Ek Prem Katha, path-breaking films of Indian cinema, released at the box office on the same day 20 years ago. **TEAM VIVA** hits the nostalgia button.

Lagaan needs no introduction. It was a film that made its mark not just in Hindi cinema, but the world stage too. The national award-winning documentary *Chale Chalo* highlights the making of this masterpiece, showing us the struggle and belief that went behind Ashutosh Gowariker's dream project.

Made on a then-unprecedented budget of approximately ₹25 crores, *Lagaan* is a story of perseverance and inspiration which also reflects through its team's conviction. The movie production went through multiple challenges like gathering a crowd of 10,000 people for the cricket match sequence, shooting under severe weather conditions, limited supply of water and electricity, transforming a building into a hotel in a small village in Gujarat for the accommodation of the cast, A K Hangal braving an injury to finish shooting his part and even Ashutosh directing from a cot after suffering a slipped disc.

Elaborating about the film,

Ashutosh said, "The box office response to my first two films jolted me. It also enlightened me to come back with a story that I believed in; a story that would encompass a cinema-loving audience. And the outcome was the script of *Lagaan*. I was fortunate to have Aamir Khan back me on this one, despite our previous film not doing well at the box office. I thank the audiences for showering so much love and admiration to *Lagaan* over the years"

At the same time, 20 years ago, Sunny Deol roared to save his love and beloved nation in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* and the echo has stayed alive with the audience even today. Directed by Anil Sharma, no stone was left unturned while giving the 'real touch' to each scene in the movie. The train sequence, at the beginning of the movie, was shot at the Amritsar station where the historical events shown in the movie had actually occurred. The station was given the look of the 1940s to give an authentic

feel. The steam engine used for the shooting was hired from the Railway Museum in Delhi to bring alive the realistic feel of that era.

Talking about the film, Sunny Deol expressed, "*Gadar* is a beautiful love story. I was in Ooty shooting for a film when Anil narrated the story to me and I instantly fell in love with the project. Like always, I went with my instincts and that's how it all started. I have had the opportunity to play some great characters throughout my career but there was something special about the character of Tara Singh. He is soft and sweet but can turn the world upside down when it comes to his family and country. Back then, we didn't predict that the dialogues and songs of the movie would become a rage."

Despite releasing at the same time, these blockbuster films individually created history on their merit and have left a lasting impression for generations to come.

Hair fall is a huge concern for many women across the world, and if you are one of them, you should know that many treatments can help with this issue.

The only problem is that not everyone has enough time to visit the salon to get one of these treatments. With a busy schedule, taking time out to get your hair treated can be a hassle. However, an efficient and smart way to prevent and stop hair loss permanently is by trying out some homemade hair masks.

For sun-damaged hair

Sun-damaged hair needs proper care especially if you are out in the sun often or if your hair has been chemically treated. The UV rays weaken the shaft of your hair and fade the colour of your hair.

Make a nourishing pack at home by mixing one banana with one teaspoon of cream and a quarter teaspoon of castor oil. Put it on for half an hour and rinse it off thoroughly. It might take one or two washes for the banana to completely go from hair, it's the best nourishing hair pack that you can easily prepare at home

For oily hair

Oily hair can be very difficult to maintain. You are always busy scheduling your hair wash and thinking whether you are over-shampooing your hair. Moreover, oiling becomes impossible. Besides, hair masks make the scalp oilier and you just wish you had dry hair. Coconut milk is the healthiest natural ingredient for healthy hair. If you have oily hair, you should try mixing freshly extracted coconut milk with a squeezed lemon and

Mask that mane

Summers can spell woes for your hair. But **DR BLOSSOM KOCHHAR** has some remedies up her sleeve



four-five drops of lavender essential oil. Leave it on for four hours and then rinse it off.

To aid hair growth

For those who want to know the best solution for hair growth, there is a very simple one sitting in your kitchen. The vitamins, minerals and fatty acids in ginger promote hair stimulation which leads to hair growth. Ginger contains gingerol which improves blood circulation, leading to hair growth.

Take one teaspoon each of coconut oil, argan oil, ginger juice and onion juice. Combine it with half teaspoon castor oil, two drops of lavender essential oil and one drop of rosemary essential oil. Mix all these and finally add one tea-

spoon of your conditioner. Apply it thoroughly on your scalp and hair strands, keep it on for 30 minutes and then rinse it off with your shampoo. You can use a light conditioner afterwards if your hair is too dry. This will not only make your hair grow faster but will also add lustre to your hair.

For dry and brittle hair

Excess use of hair colour, chemicals and exposure to the sun can lead to dry, brittle and dull hair. But who would want that? So a simple solution is to make a conditioning pack at home.

Take one or two tablespoons of hair conditioner, depending on the length of your hair, and mix it with one teaspoon glycerine and a

quarter teaspoon of vinegar to add shine to your hair along with a few drops of sandalwood essential oil. This pack gives instant sheen and lustre.

To treat dandruff

We all have a common enemy. Yes, dandruff. No matter how much oiling we do, having dandruff in summers due to sweating is inevitable. To combat this enemy the best thing you can try is a pack made of half a tablespoon of lemon juice and a quarter teaspoon of vinegar. Use a cotton ball to apply this mix all over your scalp. Comb your hair after application. It might cause some irritation or itching but don't worry that means it is working. Do this no more than once a week as too much may lead to hair fall.

Nothing beats a good hot oil massage

There is one thing we completely forget when we have damaged hair, we will go to salons for treatments and apply the most expensive hair care products but we ignore the most potent thing that can reverse hair damage — a good hot oil massage.

Take a tablespoon of coconut/olive oil and add a teaspoon of castor oil along with three or four drops of lavender essential oil to it. Heat the mix a little and massage it gently in your scalp and hair at night. Shampoo it out in the morning. Follow this routine at least once in two weeks as it is extremely beneficial.

(The author is founder & chairperson of an aromatherapy cosmetic brand.)

TRENDBLAZER



REGAINING ENERGY: KATRINA KAIF

Actor **KATRINA KAIF** opened up on getting back to normal life after recovering from COVID-19. She recently posted on social media, "Back at it. Post-Covid I've had to be extremely patient with myself in terms of getting back to exercise. You have to take your time and listen to your body. You have good days and then there are days when you feel exhausted again. Going slow and trusting my body's healing process. Step by step"

fairtalk



"Being locked down at home, let's take this opportunity to follow our interests and start working on them. I took an online mandala course recently and I must say it's extremely refreshing and therapeutic. This form of art seems so intriguing and difficult but they break it down to simple steps which makes it seem quite easy."

dailytalk



"The kind of love that has been captured in the melody, lyrics and visuals of '*Haate haat dhoi*' is the one we all long for. I dedicate this song to my parents, who sang together for 50 years and offered their lives to music. It is a very sweet composition and it conveys the message of eternal love without any extravagance."

EXPLORING NEW AVENUES: DERULO

American singer-songwriter **JASON DERULO** has taken up a new hobby amid the pandemic. He has started trying different recipes in order to put his creativity to good use. "I started off with trying different recipes because we are at home. I had to figure out where to put my creativity. I've never been a cook. This is definitely something new that happened during the pandemic," Derulo said on *The Drew Barrymore Show*.



RURAL AREAS TURN TO QUACKS

The flawed healthcare system means that villagers are forced to look for other credible alternatives, says AMRITANJ INDIWAR

Last week, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported a 13 per cent decrease in new COVID-19 cases in India. However, the number of new infections in the country remains the highest in the world. As the pandemic continues to hold sway over large swathes, rural areas with no proper health infrastructure are bearing the brunt. This has forced villagers to turn to quacks (medical practitioners who have received no formal training) for treatment.

The lack of information about government hospitals, medicines, treatments and vaccinations has affected the regulation of the virus in rural areas. Furthermore, the villagers' concerns have been heightened by the fact that there are few or no doctors in the government hospitals in their areas. In such a situation, the quacks have assumed a larger role, ironically so, in several villages across the country.

The situation in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district is no better. The district has the highest number of reported cases in the country. While the government reported 208 COVID-19 deaths between April 1 and May 20 in the district, according to a report published in an online portal, 315 people were cremated at Muktidham crematorium during this time. The rural areas of Sikanderpur, Mothijheel, Town Thana, Khabda, Ramdayalu, Patahi, Bhagwanpur, Patahi, Bhikhanpura and Mushahari block were most affected. The lack of proper treatment resulted in the death of many patients in these areas. Ragini, a resident of Alkapuri colony in Muzaffarpur, expressed that people were terrified at the mere mention of COVID-19.

"Those who test positive are isolated in rooms. However, because the virus is highly stigmatised, the infected person is not treated well by the public. Imagine the situation of the infected families without any support from their neighbours," said Ragini.

Ankush Singh, a resident of Manika village in Mushahari block, while expressing widespread fear among the rural population, added that even after he recovered from the virus, no one was concerned about his well-being. He also pointed out



the unprofessional behaviour of the staff at block hospitals. "Both my brother and I had tested positive. After several attempts to be examined, the doctor at the block hospital prescribed medicines like Paracetamol, Doxycycline and vitamins with no guidance or concern for patients," Ankush informed. According to him, chemists and quacks are more concerned than doctors about the well-being of the villagers.

In Paru block, which reported several positive cases, dispensary employees and quacks were treating people. Accepting quacks as the first line of defence against COVID-19, District Councillor, Devesh Chandra stated that they are a lifeline for more than 50,000 people in the block. These quacks, who do not have medical degrees, but practice medicine based on their practical experience, have kept the situation in the villages from going haywire.

Quacks Balram Shah, Umesh Prasad, Ganesh Pandit, Asharfi Bhagat, Parmeshwar Prasad, and others in



Paru Block had decided to come forward and assist the villagers. "Whatever medical experience we have gained over the years, the villagers are benefiting from it. The situation was such that people

were scared and unwilling to get vaccinated and, therefore, we decided not to leave them under such circumstances. We are likely to get infected in the process, but helping people is the

need of the hour," said these quacks. The block medical officer, on the other hand, stated that trained healthcare workers are going to villages for inspection, vaccination, and to provide medicines on a regular basis. At the block level, consultation, medicine and inspection are available.

Regardless, the pandemic has undoubtedly exposed the condition of health infrastructure in rural areas. The situation in Bihar's Vaishali district is also similar. Basant Kumar, a homoeopathic practitioner from Chaklahlad village in Vaishali district, while sharing his experience, said, "I went to the block health centre to get the rapid antigen test done. The centre was crowded with no COVID-19 guidelines being followed. Although I had registered myself, due to the huge crowd, I had to return without getting tested. Two days later, I received a message on my mobile number informing me that I had tested negative. I was shocked to receive that message."

Basant claimed that several people in his village received negative reports without being tested. He believes that even in medical colleges, Covid positive patients are not being cared for. Villagers have become hesitant about visiting government hospitals and started relying on these quacks.

It should be noted, however, that the purpose of this article is not to recognise or glorify quack doctors. But, at the same time, it is equally important to note that if properly trained, these quacks can play a critical role in reaching out to villagers. The government should consider training these quacks on COVID-19 protocols and benefitting from their knowledge and the relationship they share with villagers in creating awareness about preventive measures and vaccination in these hard-to-reach areas. West Bengal government has already ordered to train and tag quacks with health workers to help in surveillance so that the COVID-19 treatment (of patients) can start early; specifically in remote rural areas where proper doctors are not readily available. If successful, other states should also follow suit.

(Charkha Features)



The Liberator

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI feels that God being regarded as omnipresent is a misconception. If he was within us, why would we pray to be freed from the troubles of this life?

Today we all are living in an age where technology rules, yet many of us believe that God is everywhere and in everything around us. According to most religious scholars, God is present in every creature and every particle is his manifestation. However, is it really so?

Since the infiniteness of God leaves no room for any other existence, some people put forth arguments to say that, besides God, whatever else appears has no real and separate existence. They say that what you call 'souls', embodied in various forms, aren't separate from and identical with infinite God.

The distinction which we notice between the embodied souls and God is, according to them, only in appearance. They call it a dream or an illusion. Is that really the case? If that's true then why is there so much strife, hatred and sorrow in this world? For ages, humans have prayed to God and undertaken penances to get a glimpse of him or receive his blessings.

Now, from a rational point of view, the very act of prayer is contrary to the belief in God's omnipresence, because if he is present everywhere and in every one what is the need to pray? And why have saints, seers and other holy people searched for the supreme God if he is everywhere? Furthermore, dreams, as far as man understands them now, are representative of suppressed wishes, reminiscent of past events and certain emotions which are waiting to be fulfilled or exteriorised. They are not unreal but are correlated to the real world.

Thus, it is unphilosophical and illogical to theorise that God is infinite and that the souls or *jivas* are not different from him and that the world is a mere dream. The truth is that souls are infinitesimal points of light, eternal in their existence and God is a supreme point of light.

When souls are suffering, they call out to God to come and liberate them from their bondage and end their misery. It is thus obvious from this that the soul is not God. If it were God, then it would not be undergoing suffering in the first place. And this also shows that God is not omnipresent. If he was present everywhere, then there would have been no need for anyone to pray and beg him to come and end their sorrows, right? Because he comes and liberates human souls from the bondage of vices, which are the root cause of all human suffering, God is called a liberator. Remember, human souls come into these bondages precisely because they are not God, who is never captured by bondages as he is pure. That's the reason why can purify another soul because all souls are caught in the same quagmire of vices. So, let us connect to that one supreme source and enlighten ourselves with his positive energy and powers to live a life of abundance.

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In a nutshell, keep yourself at ease with light foods and exercises. You wouldn't want to miss out on healthy ingredients in your diet, therefore incorporate them into your food in different ways. It is possible to have a tasty and healthy diet at the same time.

(The author is director and founder of an entrepreneurial venture in the wellness and skincare space.)



Beat the heat

Summers are bound to drain the energy out of you.

DOLLY KUMAR suggests some options you can adopt to stay on the path to your health goals during these lethargic times

Summers can be difficult in a lot of ways as the heat has drastic effects on us in the form of heat stroke, sunburn and dehydration among other things. With the soaring temperature, even when most of us are restricted indoors, it is easy to lose focus on our health. Severe sweating can cause an electrolyte imbalance due to the loss of sodium from the body and often demotivates people from working out. The same is followed by a loss of appetite and an absence of cravings for oily, high-calorie foods. These factors can be used to your advantage if you wish to lose weight, by following certain dietary habits and fulfilling the cravings for light and cold foods.

Drink lots of water and healthy beverage alternatives

The best way to remain hydrated in summers is by drinking a lot of water. You can put a sliced lemon and some mint leaves in your water jug for added

benefits and flavour. You can replace your tea and coffee with green tea. As per research, if drunk in moderate amounts, it can be as hydrating as water. Its anti-inflammatory properties will help with other summer issues like cooling down the redness and swelling of sunburn, acne or irritation.

Meditate to stay away from stress

When you lose appetite during summers, it is easy to fill yourself with finger foods or other junk food, often resulting in overeating. To avoid unhealthy food habits, opt for healthier alternatives. Add foods like quinoa, trail mix, seeds, and olive oil to your diet. Not only will this keep you full, but its added benefits will help lose weight. Quinoa is one of the healthiest and most versatile ingredients out there, which is power-packed with nutrients and can be easily incorporated into most dishes.

Don't overeat and add healthy alternatives to your diet

While it is unimaginable to indulge in a heavy workout during the summer months, you don't want to lose your gains in terms of weight loss by missing exercise. Hence, do yoga and other low-impact exercises that, apart from helping you keep fit, act as a stress-buster. This can include walking, swimming, cycling or elliptical cardio too.

Similarly, incorporating seeds and olive oil will provide you with a fibre-rich diet.

Do yoga and low-impact exercises to remain fit

Reduce sugar intake and replace it with healthy alternatives

We may not want to eat heavy foods but craving cold soft drinks during the summers is

something we all succumb to. But it increases our sugar intake, which is the case even when we make smoothies and shakes at home. Instead of using sugar, use healthier alternatives like honey and stevia. Stevia is a non-nutritive and zero-calorie sweetener that is made of *steviol glycosides* extracted from the leaves of a plant with the same name. It is known to reduce calorie intake, blood sugar levels and risk of cavities.

Healthy snacks

For your hunger pangs, always keep healthy snacks and cookies with you, especially if you are diabetic. Sort out your snacks for midday, post-lunch, midnight in the form of trail mix, cookies and granola bars. It will deter you from indulging in eating unhealthy snacks.

Start your mornings with healthy food

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. How you start your day essentially determines the rest of your day. It is recommended to start the morning with light and healthy food like corn flakes or muesli. It will keep you filled for longer and won't be heavy on the gut. One can also go for summer fruits as they will keep you hydrated as well.

In a nutshell, keep yourself at ease with light foods and exercises. You wouldn't want to miss out on healthy ingredients in your diet, therefore incorporate them into your food in different ways. It is possible to have a tasty and healthy diet at the same time.

(The author is director and founder of an entrepreneurial venture in the wellness and skincare space.)



“ Good actions give strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others. —Plato ”

NITROGEN OXIDE EMISSIONS CUT

As the novel coronavirus pandemic slowed global commerce to a crawl in early 2020, emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) — which create ozone, a threat to human health and the climate — decreased by 15 per cent globally, according to a study led by scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in southern California.

As a result of the lower NOx emissions, by June 2020, global ozone levels had dropped to a level that policymakers thought would take at least 15 years to reach by conventional means, such as regulations.

The more stringent the lockdown a nation imposed, the greater the reduction in emissions. For example, China's stay-at-home orders in early February 2020 produced a 50 per cent drop in NOx emissions in some cities within a few weeks; most US states achieved a 25 per cent drop later in the spring.

EFFECT OF VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY

Vitamin D deficiency strongly exaggerates the craving for and effects of opioids, potentially increasing the risk for dependence and addiction, a new study suggests.

The findings suggest that addressing the common problem of vitamin D deficiency with inexpensive supplements could play a part in combating the ongoing scourge of opioid addiction.

"Our results suggest that we may have an opportunity in the public health arena to influence the opioid epidemic," said researcher David E. Fisher from the Massachusetts General Hospital.

The lab data suggesting that vitamin D deficiency increases addictive behaviour was supported by several accompanying analyses of human health records.

AI PREDICTS INFECTION-RISK

A team of researchers has used an Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithm to sift through terabytes of gene expression data to look for shared patterns in patients with past pandemic viral infections, including SARS, MERS and swine flu. The researchers, including Pradipta Ghosh from the University of California San Diego, indicated two telltale signatures.

One, a set of 166 genes, reveals how the human immune system responds to viral infections. A second set of 20 signature genes predicts the severity of a patient's disease. For example, the need to hospitalise or use a mechanical ventilator.

The algorithm's utility was validated using lung tissues collected at autopsies from deceased patients with Covid-19 and animal models of the infection. With each new set of data, the team tested it in their model. They saw the same signature gene expression patterns every time.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CRISIS IN INDIA

A new review by the global think tank, ODI, laid out how rising temperatures will jeopardise India's economic development through different channels, including falling agriculture productivity, impact to public health, reduced labour productivity and sea level rise.

Different threats will interact to devastating effect, as exemplified by cyclones Tauktae and Yaas during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study is a first-ever literature review on the economic costs of climate inaction in India. At one degree Celsius of global warming, the country is already experiencing damages. Flooding in India over the last decade caused \$3 billion in economic damage — accounting for 10 per cent of global economic losses due to floods.

COVID AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

US researchers have found an overlap between Covid-19 and brain changes that are common in Alzheimer's. While some studies suggest that SARS-CoV-2 infects brain cells directly, others found no evidence of the virus in the brain.

The study, led by researchers from Cleveland Clinic, discovered close network relationships between the virus and genes/proteins associated with several neurological diseases, most notably Alzheimer's, pointing to pathways by which Covid-19 could lead to AD-like dementia.

"These findings indicate that the virus may impact several genes or pathways involved in neuroinflammation and brain microvascular injury, which could lead to Alzheimer's disease-like cognitive impairment," said lead author Feixiong Cheng, from Cleveland Clinic's Genomic Medicine Institute.

shortpasses

CILIC WINS STUTTGART FINAL
BERLIN: Felix Auger-Aliassime suffered more heartbreak on the ATP Tour as he lost his eighth straight final on Sunday, going down to Marin Cilic in straight sets at Stuttgart's grass-court tournament. Cilic won the 19th career title with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 victory.

MCKEOWN SMASHES WR
ADELAIDE: Australia's Kaylee McKeown threw down the Olympic gauntlet to American rival Regan Smith by smashing her 100m backstroke world record on Sunday, while Ariarne Titmus fired a warning shot to superstar Katie Ledecky with the second fastest 400m freestyle ever.

MALVIKA REACHES FINAL
KAUNAS: India's Malvika Bansod defeated France's Anna Tataranova 21-13, 21-10 to enter the women's singles final at RSL Lithuanian International badminton tournament on Sunday.

DU PLESSIS RECOVERING
ABU DHABI: Much to the cricket community's relief, South African star Faf du Plessis on Sunday said he was back from the hospital and 'recovering', after suffering a concussion during his Quetta Gladiators' PSL match against Peshawar Zalmi.

MILKHA'S WIFE NO MORE
MOHALI: Nirmal Kaur, former Indian women volleyball team captain and wife of Milkha Singh, died at a Mohali hospital due to Covid-19 related complications on Sunday.

MANKAD IN ICC HALL OF FAME
DUBAI: The ICC on Sunday inducted 10 icons of the game, including India's Vinoo Mankad, into its illustrious Hall of Fame with two players each from five eras, dating back to cricket's early days, making it to the list.

HASAN ALI TO MISS PSL
ABU DHABI: Islamabad United fast bowler Hasan Ali will miss the remainder of the PSL because of family commitments. Agencies

Greatest Of All Time

Djoker completes sensational fightback from two sets down to win 19th Major & earn his second Roland Garros title

AP ■ PARIS

Talented and tenacious as they come, Novak Djokovic was not about to concede a thing after dropping the first two sets of the French Open final against his younger, fresher foe, Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Djokovic looked diminished and depleted at the outset Sunday. By the end, he was at his imperious best. The top-seeded Djokovic came all the way back to beat the fifth-seeded Tsitsipas 6-7 (6), 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 for his second championship at Roland Garros and 19th Grand Slam title overall.

Djokovic is now just one major trophy away from tying the men's record of 20 shared by Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. And reigning Australian Open champion Djokovic now stands halfway to a calendar-year Grand Slam, something no man has accomplished since Rod Laver in 1969.

The 34-year-old Djokovic eliminated 13-time French Open champion Nadal — a challenge the



Novak Djokovic thumbs up with the cup after defeating Stefanos Tsitsipas in their final match of the French Open tournament at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris on Sunday. Djokovic won 6-7, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4

Serb likened to scaling Mt Everest — in a semifinal that lasted more than four hours Friday night.

That was only Nadal's third career loss in 108

was waiting on Sunday. Djokovic looked drained early, and the 22-year-old Tsitsipas had the upper hand for two sets.

"It was not easy for me, both physically and mentally," Djokovic said, "especially over the past two or three days."

Eventually, though, Djokovic started making fewer mistakes, got his best-in-the-game returning on track and served so flawlessly down the stretch that he did not face a single break point over the last three sets.

That enabled him to complete his sixth career comeback from two sets down — and second of the past week.

Indeed, the International Tennis Federation said Djokovic — who trailed 19-year-old Lorenzo Musetti two sets to none in the fourth round — is the first man in the professional era to win a Grand Slam tournament after twice facing a 2-0 deficit in sets.

Experience could have been a factor, too.

This was the first major final for Tsitsipas and 29th for Djokovic, who also won

the French Open in 2016, along with nine titles at the Australian Open, five at Wimbledon and three at the US Open.

Of just as much, if not more, significance to the ultimate outcome on Sunday: Djokovic entered the day with a 34-10 record in five-setters — including a men's-record 31 wins in Grand Slam matches of that length — while Tsitsipas was 5-4.

On a sunny and breezy afternoon, with the temperature approaching 80 degrees Fahrenheit, Tsitsipas needed just over 100 minutes to grab a big lead on Sunday.

A supreme returner and imposer of his will, Djokovic grabbed early breaks of serve in each of the third, fourth and fifth sets.

Shadows were spreading across the court as the sun descended in the early evening and, though Djokovic complained that the artificial lights were switched on, he shined when it mattered the most.

This was another match that lasted more than four hours, and Djokovic was up to the task again.



Barbora Krejčíková, right, and compatriot Katerina Siniakova kiss the cup after defeating Bethanie Mattek-Sands and Iga Swiatek in women's doubles final

Barbora completes rare sweep, wins women's doubles crown

AFP ■ PARIS

French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková completed a rare sweep of titles at Roland Garros as she won a third women's doubles major trophy with fellow Czech teammate Katerina Siniakova on Sunday.

Less than 24 hours after she claimed her maiden singles slam title, Krejčíková became the first woman since Mary Pierce in 2000 to lift both trophies at the clay-court major. Only seven women have completed the titles sweep at Roland Garros.

"Right now after all of this happened, this last two weeks, last two days, I feel really relieved and relaxed," Krejčíková said.

"I just know from now

on I can really enjoy because I have pretty much achieved everything I really wanted. Now I can just improve, that's the only thing I can do, just improving."

In addition to her pair of trophies, Krejčíková will reclaim the No 1 spot in the doubles rankings next week.

"We will have a little bit glass of champagne," Krejčíková said. "I already said I don't really drink but I think it's a time to actually celebrate it. I think we going to really enjoy."

Krejčíková, who defeated Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova for the women's singles title on Saturday, also became the first player to sweep both titles at any Grand Slam tournament since Serena Williams at Wimbledon in 2016.

Sterling saves England's day

Three Lions make winning start as Raheem's strike sinks Croatia

AFP ■ LONDON

Raheem Sterling ignited England's Euro 2020 campaign as the Manchester City forward's clinical finish sealed a 1-0 win against Croatia in their Group D opener on Sunday.

Gareth Southgate's side were struggling to break down Croatia until Sterling struck in the second half at sun-baked Wembley.

The 26-year-old's first goal at a major tournament — in his 13th game — was the perfect riposte to critics who questioned Southgate's decision to select him instead of Jack Grealish.

Sterling has endured a chequered relationship with England fans after being hounded following his tame performances at Euro 2016.

He also struggled to hold down a place with Premier League champions City this term, culminating in his lacklustre display in their Champions League final defeat against Chelsea.

But, days after he was given an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his anti-racism campaigning, Sterling enjoyed a perfectly-timed moment of redemption.

In a rematch of the 2018 World Cup semi-final won by Croatia, England were hampered by a lack of cutting edge until Sterling came to the rescue.

Sterling's winner eased the tension at Wembley and got fans believing "Football's coming home" in the hope England can emulate their run to the semi-finals when they hosted Euro 96, and maybe



Raheem Sterling, center, celebrates after scoring England's opening goal against Croatia at Wembley stadium in London

even win a major tournament for the first time since the 1966 World Cup.

In truth, this was a far from convincing performance, but Southgate will take heart from the way his team kept their nerve on a pressure-packed occasion.

England host neighbours Scotland in their second Group D match on Friday before taking on the Czech Republic in their final game of the first stage on June 22.

AUSTRIA'S 1ST SUCCESS

Bucharest: Austria finally earned a victory at the European Championship, and they got the goals they needed from the bench.

Michael Gregoritsch and Marko Arnautovic both came on as

substitutes and scored late to help Austria beat North Macedonia 3-1 Sunday in Group C.

It was Austria's first win at a major football tournament in 31 years and its first ever at the European Championship.

Austria defender Stefan Lainer scored the first goal in the 18th minute, and then grabbed a white shirt from the bench to deliver a message to Christian Eriksen, the Denmark midfielder who collapsed on the field on Saturday in Copenhagen.

"Eriksen, stay strong," the message read.

Austria's lead didn't last long, though.

North Macedonia captain Goran Pandev equalized 10 min-

utes later, making the 37-year-old veteran the second oldest player to score in the tournament's history. Only Ivica Vastic was older when he scored for Austria against Poland at Euro 2008 when he was 38.

FINLAND SNATCH WIN

Copenhagen: Finland beat Denmark 1-0 in their opening match of Euro 2020 which was overshadowed by Christian Eriksen collapsing and having to be revived on the field by medics.

Joel Pohjanpallo scored the only goal on the hour mark of a Group B match which was stopped for nearly two hours after Danish playmaker Eriksen slumped to the turf towards the end of the first half.

No 1 for a reason

Lukaku scores brace in Belgium's 3-0 win



Belgium's Thomas Meunier, right, celebrates with Romelu Lukaku after scoring his sides second goal against Russia on Saturday

St Petersburg: Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku sent a message of support to his stricken Inter Milan team-mate Christian Eriksen after scoring, as his double helped the Red Devils open their Euro 2020 campaign with a 3-0 win over Russia on Saturday.

Lukaku gave Belgium an early lead in Saint Petersburg, then shouted "Chris, Chris, stay strong - I love you" into a pitch-side camera during the celebration for his opening goal.

"I am really happy with the win, but it was hard for me to play because my thoughts were with Christian Eriksen," said Lukaku, who revealed he cried tears of concern before kick-off for his Inter team-mate.

Substitute Thomas Meunier doubled Belgium's lead on 34 minutes before Lukaku put the result beyond doubt with a late second goal.

Belgium, the world's top-ranked team, are under pressure to deliver at the European Championship as some pundits claim this is Martinez's last chance to win a title with an ageing squad.

Yet even with Manchester City playmaker Kevin De Bruyne and Borussia Dortmund midfielder Axel Witsel sidelined by injury, Belgium were too strong for Russia.

Before kick-off, the Belgium team were booed for taking a knee to highlight racial injustice, while their Russian opponents stood.

Black Caps win Test series India up for NZ challenge: Pujara

AFP ■ BIRMINGHAM

New Zealand overpowered England by eight wickets in the second Test at Edgbaston on Sunday as they sealed a 1-0 series win with more than a day to spare.

Set a target of just 38 after England tailender Ollie Stone was out to the very first ball of the fourth day, the Blackcaps finished on 41-2.

Tom Latham, captaining the team in place of the injured Kane Williamson, hit the winning boundary to be 23 not out after the first Test of a two-match series at Lord's last week ended in a draw.

Victory gave New Zealand just a third win in 18 Test series in England, and a first this century after their 1986 and 1999 triumphs.

And it means they will head into next week's inaugural World Test Championship final against India at Southampton in confident mood.

"It's great to get an extra day



New Zealand players celebrate with the winner's trophy after win in 2nd Test

of rest before India but we'll celebrate as well — we've not won here since 1999, so it's important to celebrate those achievements," said Latham at the presentation ceremony.

By contrast, this was England's first series loss at home since a 2014 defeat by Sri Lanka.

"It hasn't been our best week, has it?" England captain Joe Root told BBC Radio.

"I think we've massively

underperformed. Credit to New Zealand, they have outperformed us throughout the game."

Matt Henry was named player of the match following overall figures of 6-114.

South Africa-born opener Devon Conway was named New Zealand's player of the series after he followed a remarkable 200 on Test debut at Lord's with 80 in the first innings of this match.

Southampton: Indians batsman Cheteshwar Pujara says New Zealand will have the advantage going into the WTC final after playing a Test series against England but India will utilise the available time to prepare well for the title clash, starting here on June 18.

While the Indian squad is training by playing intra-squad matches after completing their quarantine period, New Zealand trumped England 1-0 in a two-match series in the run-up to the World Test Championship final.

The Indian players played in the IPL before the T20 league was suspended due to coronavirus.

"They will obviously have advantage having played two Test matches before the final but when it comes to final we will give our best and we know that our team has the potential to do well and win the cham-



Tom Latham, second left, shakes hands with England's Zak Crawley

ampionship," Pujara told bcci.tv.

"So we are not worried about that, we will try and focus on these 10 to 12 days which we have for preparation. We are also going to play a practice game and we will try and make the most of what we have. If we utilise these days well I feel that our team will be up for the final."

The middle-order bats-

man from Saurashtra said more than anything, adjusting to the fickle England weather is a big challenge for the players.

"Playing in different conditions in a single day here is the most challenging part for a batsman because if it rains you go off the field and then suddenly it stops raining and you start again.

"So there are breaks in

between and this is where you need to understand and accept the challenge. Mentally you have to be strong, your concentration needs to be up to the mark."

Pujara, who has scored 6244 runs in 85 Tests, said reaching the WTC final is a special achievement for the Indian team.

"Personally it means a lot to me because I am playing this one format and this is the most challenging format in cricket. We have worked really hard as a team for a period of time to reach here.

"So, I am sure all the guys are looking forward to the final and winning this final will mean a lot to us. But even to reach the final the team has worked really hard for two years."

The 33-year-old said the Indian team is a well-knit unit as the players have spent considerable time together in the bio-bubble. PTI

EURO2020 BRIEFLY

VERRATI CLOSE TO RETURN

ROME: Italy midfielder Marco Verratti is close to regaining fitness after missing his country's opening Euro 2020 match with a knee problem, the team's medical chief said on Sunday. PSG's Verratti sat out Italy's 3-0 win against Turkey, but has returned to training this weekend. The team are now hopeful the 28-year-old could be fit for the final Group A games against the Swiss on Wednesday and Wales four days later.

PORTUGAL'S CANCELO OUT

LISBON: Portugal's Joao Cancelo has tested positive for Covid-19 and is out of Euro, the defending champions' announced on Sunday. Manchester United's Diogo Dalot, on loan to AC Milan, has replaced the Manchester City right-back in the Portuguese squad with the titleholders opening their Group F campaign against Hungary in Budapest on Tuesday.

BENZEMA, GRIEZMANN FINE

PARIS: France coach Didier Deschamps gave Karim Benzema and Antoine Griezmann a clean bill of health on Sunday ahead of the world champion's Euro 2020 opener against Germany on Tuesday. The pair emerged from team's final friendly win against Bulgaria five days ago with niggling injuries — a dead leg for Benzema and calf issue for Griezmann.

RUEDIGER READY TO GET DIRTY

MUNICH: Chelsea defender Antonio Ruediger insists Germany need to get a little dirty in their Euro 2020 opener against France on Tuesday in order to subdue the world champions' forward firepower. France start as clear favourites for the Group F clash while Germany's defence faces a stern test having leaked 20 goals in 13 games this season. Fresh from winning the Champions League final with Chelsea, Ruediger insists the Germans can ill afford to allow France's star forwards like Kylian Mbappe and Antoine Griezmann room to attack. "Of course, they have good forwards, we have to be ready to win the one-on-one challenges," Ruediger said. We have to be a little dirty, not always be nice or try to play nice football. "Against players like them, you have to throw down a marker."

ITALY'S HUNGER IS LIKE CHELSEA

ROME: Italy midfielder Jorginho said on Sunday that he sees the same hunger in his national side's Euro 2020 squad as his Chelsea team that recently lifted the Champions League trophy. "This group resembles Chelsea, it's wonderful, they are so hungry and want to prove something, from the youngest to the most experienced," former Napoli player Jorginho told a press conference. "We have learned (coach Roberto) Mancini's philosophy, what he wants is in our heads. I still have a great desire to win. I don't want to stop now. I would like to experience those same emotions with the national team."

ERIKSEN STABLE POST COLLAPSE

COPENHAGEN: Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen remained in hospital but is in a 'stable' condition after collapsing in his country's Euro 2020 game against Finland on Saturday, the Danish Football Union (DBU) said Sunday. "This morning we have spoken to Christian Eriksen, who has sent his greetings to his teammates. His condition is stable, and he continues to be hospitalized for further examination," the football body said in a post to Twitter.

MATCHES TODAY

Scotland vs Czech Republic (6:30pm)
Poland vs Slovakia (9:30pm)
Spain vs Sweden (12:30am)

Live telecast in Sony Ten 2 Network