

on Sunday



Kerala moves SC against HC order in Assembly ruckus case  
page 5



Goa-bound Rajdhani derails inside tunnel; all 309 passengers safe  
page 6



Partnership between Afghanistan, U.S. to continue, says Biden  
page 9



Mithali's India meets Knight's England in ODI series from today  
page 14

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## NEARBY



City parks, gardens and golf courses will open from Monday, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority stated in an order on Saturday. Apart from these, guests at marriage ceremonies will be allowed up to 50% of the banquet hall's capacity, gyms and yoga institutes too will be allowed to work at 50% capacity from June 28.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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## Govt. raises alert on Delta Plus

Advisory to States calls for more samples for epidemiological correlations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union government has warned the States that the Delta Plus variant, which is currently a variant of concern, has increased transmissibility, stronger binding to receptors of lung cells and potential reduction in monoclonal antibody response.

Directing the States to initiate more focused and stringent measures to contain the spread of the virus, the Union Health Ministry said adequate number of samples from positive persons should be sent to designated laboratories so that clinical epidemiological correlations can be established.

"The Ministry, in its writ-



Virus check: Swabs collected for testing being arranged at a centre in Delhi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ten communication, advised immediate containment measures which must be put in place in districts and clusters where the variant has been detected, including preventing crowds and intermingling of people. It has also advocated for widespread testing, prompt tracing as

## Concerned over Delta: WHO

The Delta variant, identified in at least 85 countries, is the "most transmissible" of the SARS-CoV-2 variants identified so far and is spreading rapidly among unvaccinated populations, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned on Saturday. ▶ PAGE 8

well as vaccine coverage on a priority basis," a Ministry of official said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## Omar seeks delimitation, statehood before election

Centre's timeline not acceptable, says NC leader

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah on Saturday said his party will keep pushing for delimitation first, followed by statehood and election.

"Not delimitation-election-statehood but delimitation-statehood-election. If you have to conduct an election, return the statehood first. Whenever and wherever we get a chance, we will keep stressing this," Mr. Abdullah told presspersons at



Making a stand: NC president Farooq Abdullah and son Omar addressing a press conference in Srinagar. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Azad expressed the view on behalf of all of us and said that this timeline [delimitation-election-statehood] is not acceptable to us."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## Farmers complete 7 months of protest



No let-up: Farmers protesting against the three farm laws in Amritsar on Saturday. ■ PTI

### 'Undeclared emergency in country'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Thousands of farmers, marking the seven-month anniversary of their agitation against the three agricultural reform laws, marched to Raj Bhavans on Saturday.

They submitted a memorandum to President Ram Nath Kovind through the Governors, alleging an "undeclared emergency" in the country.

As June 26 is also the date the Emergency was declared in 1975, the farm unions under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) observed the day as Kheti Bachao, Loktantra Bachao Diwas (Save Agriculture, Save Democracy Day). The Morcha said protesters were detained at several locations across the country.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## '186 cr. doses needed to cover all over 18'

Free vaccines for everyone, Centre tells apex court

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Union government informed the Supreme Court on Saturday that it will require 186 to 188 crore vaccine doses to twice inoculate the 93 to 94 crore population aged above 18.

It said 51.6 crore doses would be "made available" by July 31. The government said it was looking at a deadline of December 2021 and had procured a total of 35.6 crore doses as on date.

The government assured the top court that every single eligible person above 18, no matter what their financial capacity, would get free vaccine doses.

### 93-94 crore target

"The total population of the county aged 18 and above is 93-94 crore," the government said.

ment affidavit, filed through Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, said. "Administering two doses to these beneficiaries would require an estimated 186 to 188 crore vaccine doses... 51.6 crore doses will be made available for administration by July 31, leaving a requirement of approximately 135 crore vaccine doses for complete vaccination to the eligible population."

The vaccination drive would obviously get a boost if the Government of India succeeds in its attempts to procure vaccines available outside India such as Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, etc," the government said.

The government also said that the Zydus Cadila vaccine may be made available to children aged between 12 and 18 in the "near future".

The Centre said the States are free to fix their own priorities for vaccine coverage and supply schedules.

## In deep waters



A shopkeeper waiting for customers on a flooded road following high tide in the Ganga, in Kolkata, on Saturday. ■ PTI

## Guleria terms oxygen audit report 'interim'

Sub-group member says consumption figure was a collation of data for one day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The audit by the Supreme Court-appointed sub-group on Delhi's oxygen demand is an interim report and not the final word, AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria said on Saturday as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, under fire for purportedly exaggerating the city's needs, insisted that acute shortage of oxygen during the second wave of COVID-19 was "real". He also appealed for an end to political bickering.

"The virus will win if there is a fight among stakeholders," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted on Saturday after his Aam Aadmi Party and the BJP hit out at each other over the report. While the BJP accused the Delhi government of "criminal negligence", AAP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia alleged that the "bogus" report was "cooked up" at the BJP office. Dr. Guleria, who heads the



It is [oxygen audit] an interim report. The oxygen needs are dynamic and change from day to day. The matter is sub judice  
RANDEEP GULERIA,  
DIRECTOR, AIIMS, AND HEAD OF  
SC-APPOINTED SUB-GROUP

five-member sub-group, said: "It is an interim report. The oxygen needs are dynamic and change from day to day. The matter is sub judice."

**CM calls for joint fight**  
"May we work now if your fight over oxygen is finished? Let us together make a system so no one faces shortage of oxygen in third wave," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

The report of the sub-group constituted to audit oxygen consumption in hospitals in Delhi during the second wave in April-May

stated in the note accessed by The Hindu, was 550 MT around May 12-13, about 10 days after the peak of COVID-19 in the Capital.

The draft interim report was circulated to the members of the sub-group "for kind perusal and approval" through emails on May 30.

Mr. Bhalla said he had sent his detailed written objections and comments on the report on May 31 to the members by email.

His objections were added at the end of the report (pages 110-119) "just for posterity" leaving it to the reader "to make the effort, if he/she so decides, to interpret the entire report together". Mr. Bhalla termed this "unfortunate and unacceptable" and said the report, as submitted, "does not have the approval of all the members".

(With inputs from Special Correspondent)

OXYGEN DEMAND FALLS ▶ PAGE 3



Eye in the sky: The Army has recently leased four Heron-TP drones from Israel Aircraft Industries. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Army Aviation raises tempo in operations along the LAC

Efforts on to replace ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters, while gearing up for inductions of modern choppers

DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

While the Army's repeated attempts to replace its ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters continue, there has been a quantum jump in the employment of helicopters of the Army Aviation in the last one year along the northern borders during the ongoing stand-off, according to defence sources.

The recent induction of third generation night navigation goggles provides our helicopters with the requisite capability to operate almost during the entire moon phase. Adding to this capability, the recent induction of fresh lot of ammunition for the fleet of Rudra, weaponised variant of Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), also

ensured a quantum jump in terms of capability of the Army Aviation helicopters," a defence source said. "The growth of Army Aviation has been exponential in the past one year or so."

During the ongoing stand-off and recent tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the Army Aviation assets were deployed all along as a proactive stance giving troops on ground the much-needed surveillance support and confidence in terms of available fire support, the source said.

**Surveillance system**  
The Army has 90 ALH and 75 Rudra helicopters in service which are indigenously designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited

(HAL). Very soon, the Army Aviation is also likely to conduct a surveillance downlink system, anti-aircraft missiles, countermeasures against missile systems, new generation surveillance pods among others which will enhance the existing role manifold, the source said, adding,

The Army Aviation is also gearing up for some major inductions in the next couple of years including the AH-64 Apache, considered the world's best attack helicopter. These helicopters will be delivered as early as 2023 and will be operational within a year, the source said, adding,

ding, "This massive game changer will ensure that the western borders are well secured."

The Army will soon also receive the indigenous Light Combat helicopter (LCH) from HAL. HAL has received the letter of intent for five IAF and five Army LCH for delivery pending contract finalisation of 15 limited series production variants, a source said. "In the current year, we are producing four LCH for Army and two for IAF."

In addition, to augment its surveillance capabilities along the LAC, the Army has recently leased four Heron-TP Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) from Israel Aircraft Industries. Two UAVs would be delivered by August and remaining two by year end, two defence sources confirmed.

Heron-TP is an advanced version of the Herons in service with the forces. It is satellite communication-enabled and can fly up to an altitude of 45,000 feet and has an endurance of over 30 hours.

However, about 75% of the Army's fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters, which are its mainstay, is over 30 years old and some of them are about 50 years old. The Ka-226T utility helicopter deal with Russia along with the indigenous Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) meant to replace them has been held for several years over the percentage of indigenisation.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## Relief for man held under U.P. anti-conversion law

Lower court erred in rejecting plea: HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
ALLAHABAD

The Allahabad High Court has set aside the order of a lower court in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district and granted bail to a man arrested under the new unlawful conversion law in the State.

The High Court said the lower court had "erred" in rejecting the bail application of Mehzan Malik.

On April 4, a special court under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, Gautam Buddha Nagar, rejected his bail plea in a case of alleged rape and unlawful conversion of a Dalit woman aged 20. Mr. Malik was booked under Sections 376 (rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation).

The counsel for the accused submitted in court that from a bare perusal of the FIR it was apparent that physical relations were developed by him with the consent of the victim. In her statement under Section 161 CrPC, the victim had said that the man had a physical relationship with her on false assurances of marriage.

Setting aside the lower court order, Justice Vipin Chandra Dixit on June 25 allowed the criminal appeal filed by Mr. Malik.

M ND-NDE

Interim relief for Lakha in Republic Day violence case

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI  
A Delhi court on Saturday granted interim protection from arrest to gangster-turned-activist Lakha Sidhana in connection with his alleged involvement in violence that ensued at the Red Fort on Republic Day.

On January 26, protesting farmers had clashed with police during their tractor rally and stormed into the Red Fort, hoisting religious flags on its domes and injuring scores of policemen. Fearing arrest, Mr. Sidhana moved Delhi's Tis Hazari court seeking anticipatory bail in the case.

The judge posted the matter for July 3 and directed the police to not arrest him until then.

## DDA plans webinars to discuss draft master plan

## STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Saturday said a series of webinars will be organised between July 1 and July 20 on the various aspects of the draft Master Plan for Delhi - 2041, which was recently put in the public domain for suggestions and objections from stakeholders.

In a statement, the DDA said: "As part of the MPD 2041 preparation, a series of webinars are being organised. This will facilitate citizens to understand the draft plan better and give more constructive suggestions to the draft plan."

Environment, economy, culture, heritage and public spaces will be discussed in a webinar on July 1. Shelters and social infrastructure, and transport and mobility on July 6. Physical infrastructure and spatial development framework on July 13, and the last session on July 20 will cover plan monitoring evaluation, development code and development control norms.

## Ready to stay at borders till 2024, say protesting farmers

'Our demands are the same as when the movement started seven months ago; more people will be joining the agitation in the coming days'

## STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Marking the seven month of their ongoing agitation against the three agricultural reform laws, farmers at the Singhu border agitation site on Saturday said they are ready to stay put till 2024 – when the next general elections are due.

Avtar Singh, who runs the makeshift hospital at Singhu border, said the protest has grown just like the hospital.

"This hospital started from a table and now it is a full-fledged hospital with almost all services, tens of beds, and a fully equipped pharmacy. Just like this, the protest started from a two day-event and now it's been seven months," he said.

The Central government is claiming that only a handful of people are left for the protests, but we are not gathering people in lakhs because we do not wish to be blamed for COVID-19, he said.

"Also, we are now prepared to stay here till at least 2024. We have struck a balance between living here at Singhu and our houses in Punjab and Haryana. I spend half a week in Punjab and half here. People help each



Farmers take part in a protest march at the Singhu border; Delhi police personnel form a barrier near the protest site on Saturday. ■ PTI



other with farming," he said.

## Fund collection

Sukhwinder Singh from Ludhiana said people have started collecting funds in villages to fund the protest.

"Initially, donations were coming in abundance. Now, they have lessened. Collection points have now been made in villages and each family donates at least ₹500-₹1,000 a month towards the protest," he said.

Stating that the demands of the farmers have re-

mained consistent since the first day of the movement, Sukhjeet Singh Sidhu, a farmer from Punjab's Patiala district, said: "The government recently said they are open to dialogue and want the farmers to bring a proposal. What more proposal will we bring? Our demands have remained the same since the beginning. On the day we are completing seven months, farmers across the country are submitting memorandums to governors of various States. This has brought in a

new momentum to the movement."

Mr. Sidhu said the agitating farmers are prepared for a long haul and that the protest sites will witness an increase in the number of protesters in the coming days.

"This movement is bound to continue and we are not going to quit. We are even ready to continue the movement till 2024 when the next general elections are due. The government has been persistent in trying to create hurdles for us but that will

not stop us from moving forward with the movement. We will act according to whatever calls the unions and leaders give," he added.

## 'Done with farm work'

Gurmeet Singh, a farmer from Moga district, said: "If the Centre comes up with a solution then it is fine else

they can expect to see people in large numbers back at the borders soon. People are almost done with their work on the farms and they are set to return soon in larger num-

bers. It has been seven months and the government has still failed to explain to us how the laws are favourable to us. Rather the farmers have already explained why we do not want the laws. The ruling dispensation will see how people reject them in the upcoming elections."

In the wake of farmers' rallies in different parts of the country, Delhi Police had also beefed up security in central Delhi. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation closed three stations, including Vishwavidyalaya, Civil Lines and Vidhan Sabha.

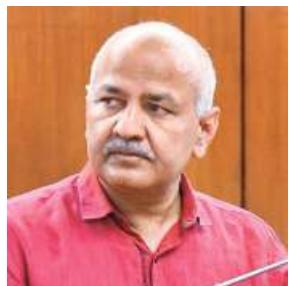
## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Directorate of Education on Saturday announced its strategy to conduct teaching and learning activities in government and government-aided schools for nursery to Class 12 during the 2021-22 academic session till the time schools reopen.

Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister Manish Sisodia reiterated that schools will remain closed till the pandemic situation eases but that engagement between teachers and students will resume immediately using online and semi-online approach.

"With the onset of the pandemic, learning loss has been massive. This year, we not only need to reduce learning loss but provide deep emotional support to our children. They need to



be mentally prepared for any teaching-learning activities," he said, adding: "This year, we will have close alignment between teaching-learning strategies and assessment so that dependency on one-time exam for year-end result is reduced."

## Staggered approach

According to the DoE, the action plan for the 2021-22 session includes a staggered approach for students to ease

into the teaching-learning process and is divided into three stages.

The first stage will unfold during the week starting June 28 with teachers and heads of schools contacting students and parents, updating contact details, making WhatsApp groups and preparing a list of students with smartphones, normal phones or with no phones.

In the second stage, starting from July 5 till the end of the month, teachers will enquire about students' well-being, understand their situation and need for support, and introduce light activities such as reading, writing and numeracy for students up to Class 8 through worksheets.

Meanwhile, in Classes 9-12, the focus will be on understanding current learning level of the child and worksheets, apart from support-

ing emotional well-being.

Stage three will begin from August onwards. It will

focus on class-specific activities to bridge learning loss.

While nursery to Class 8 students will receive generic and subject-specific worksheets, students of Classes 9-12 will have online classes from subject teachers.

The focus of online classes for Classes 9-12 will be to guide students on how to learn. Students who have difficulty in accessing digital devices will be provided short notes capturing the points of online classes.

Parents who do not have smartphones can collect the worksheets on a weekly basis from the school.

In terms of assessing students, there will be regular monthly assessment based on project, activities and assignments.

## Govt. to take control of private school

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday said it had decided to take over the management of Swami Sivananda Memorial School in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh after receiving several complaints from parents that the school authorities were arbitrarily charging extra fees from students.

The government added the school had also been failing students and asking them to re-take the same grade "intentionally".

An inquiry panel, formed to look into the matter, also found "inadequacies" in the functioning of the school.

sional and unethical. The officials got carried away by the celebrity status of the accused," the officer said.

Senior officers will decide on action to be taken, if any, against the erring officials.

Police officials posted with the Special Cell and 3rd Battalion of the Delhi Armed Police took pictures with Kumar when he was being shifted from Mandoli jail to Tihar jail on Friday morning.

Kumar was arrested in connection with the murder of wrestler Sagas Dhankar, who was beaten to death in a clash involving two groups inside Chhatrasal Stadium.



Olympic medalist wrestler Sushil Kumar while being shifted from Mandoli jail to Tihar jail on Friday. ■ PTI

## Policemen seen taking photographs with Sushil

'Conduct of personnel unprofessional'

## STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has initiated an inquiry after its personnel were seen clicking photos with Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar, who is an accused in the killing of a young wrestler at Chhatrasal Stadium.

The matter came to light after the selfies started doing the rounds on the Internet.

## 'No major lapse'

A senior police officer said the inquiry was initiated on Friday and a report was submitted on Saturday. "There is no major lapse. However, the conduct was unprofes-

sional and unethical. The officials got carried away by the celebrity status of the accused," the officer said.

Senior officers will decide on action to be taken, if any, against the erring officials.

Police officials posted with the Special Cell and 3rd Battalion of the Delhi Armed Police took pictures with Kumar when he was being shifted from Mandoli jail to Tihar jail on Friday morning.

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## OBITUARY &amp; REMEMBRANCE

## DEATH

**Dr.V.RAVINDRANATH (Urologist)**, S/o. Late Dr. R. Jeena Bai, Rajeev Hospital, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Former Dist. Governor (R.I.Dist. 3000), Former President Indian Medical Association, Madurai. Former President Urology Association of Southern India, passed away on 26.06.2021. Funeral held on 26.06.2021. Wife: Mrs. Rtn. PP. R. Nalin Plot No: 772, First North Cross Street, Anna Nagar, Madurai-625020, Tamil Nadu. Ph: 98948-51884 & 99843 - 52797

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## APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that an unidentified person Namely: Unknown, S/o Unknown, R/o Unknown, Age: about 25-30 years, Height: 5'6", Face: Round, Complexion : Unknown (Decomposed), Built : Medium, Identification : Kada in right hand, Wearing : Grey colour underwear only has been found dead at Yamuna River, Delhi on 19.06.2021. In this regard a case vide DD No. 78-A dated 19.06.2021 has been lodged at Police Station Wazirabad, Delhi. The dead body has been preserved in Subzimandi Mortuary, Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this found dead person may kindly inform to the following:-

**SHO :**  
**P.S. Wazirabad, Delhi**  
**North Distt., Delhi**

DP/1296/N/2021 Tel. No. 011-23810069, 23810073

**Office of The Superintending Engineer**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Circle Public Work Department Dehradun**  
Office of the Superintending Engineer, 9<sup>th</sup> Circle PWD, Dehradun Uttarakhand  
Website- <http://pwd.uk.gov.in>  
E-mail:[sepwdddun@rediffmail.com](mailto:sepwdddun@rediffmail.com)

Letter No. 2915/1C-9/21

**NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING**  
e-tender Notice (Short term)

Dated: 26/06/2021

The Superintending Engineer 9<sup>th</sup> Circle, Public Works Department, Dehradun on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tender in two bid system for the following work. Information regarding tender shall be available on <https://www.utktenders.gov.in> from date **30.06.2021**.

SI No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (Rs. in Lacs)	Validity of Tender (in days)	Cost of Tender Document (In Rs.)	Period of Completion (In Month)	Contractor Category of Registration
1	Renewal work by PC and SDBC of following roads in Vidansabha Vikasnagar in Distt. Dehradun under Annual Repair (2021-22). (i) Yamunapur - Hathiapa motor road km 5 to 10 (ii) Pasta khwaangaon Dhalani Chadhra road km 1,2 (iii) Prithvipur jungle motor road km 1,2 (iv) Kedarwala Baaluwala motor road km 1 to 5 (v) Link road from the main road to Lakhnawala km 1 to 3 (vi) Link road from the main road to Bairagiwala km 1 (vii) Main road in Selauqi (N.H.) to Vidaib college Jamanpur link road.	3.68	60	5000.00 + 18% G.S.T.	03	Registered in 'B' & above category in Road works in Central Govt. / State Govt / any Govt. Undertaking

Superintending Engineer,  
9<sup>th</sup> Circle, PWD, Dehradun

**Government of Union Territory Jammu & Kashmir**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR**  
Telefax:- 0194-2496089, Email ID:- [xenmhchdk@yahoo.in](mailto:xenmhchdk@yahoo.in)

**Gist of e-tender**  
NIT No: MHCHD/TS /2021-22/50/e-tendering  
Dated:-22.06.2021

On the behalf of Lt. Governor of J&K Union Territory, e-tenders are invited from original equipment manufacturers or their authorized dealers/ representatives or reputed and experienced firms for the below mentioned works:

Name of Work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Cost of T.Doc. (In rupees)	Time of completion (in days)	AA Accorded Vide No:	TS No	Position of Funds
1	97.00	2000	45	HU-II/ Sgr/225-27 Dt:-12.06.21	MED/KTS/61 Dt:-19.06.21	Under Languishing

1. Downloading of Bids:- The NIT Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q.), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen from the departmental website [www.utktenders.gov.in](http://www.utktenders.gov.in) from 22.06.2021 (18.00 hrs) and can be downloaded from 23.06.2021 (18.00 hrs).

2. Uploading:- The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site [25.06.2021 \(10.00 hrs\)](http://www.utktenders.gov.in) to 08.07.2021 (14:00 hrs) in two (02) covers.

3. Opening of Bids :- The bids received upto due date and time shall

<b>Timings</b>
<b>DELHI</b>
SUNDAY, JUN. 27
RISE 05:26 SET 19:23
RISE 22:04 SET 07:50
MONDAY, JUN. 28
RISE 05:27 SET 19:24
RISE 22:45 SET 08:55
TUESDAY, JUN. 29
RISE 05:27 SET 19:24
RISE 23:22 SET 09:58

<b>Delhi Weather</b>	max	min
Delhi City	39	26
Safdarjung	39	26
Palam	39	23

**Delhi Palam Today**  
39°C A comfortable morning turn hot and humid day with partly cloudy sky. Thunderclouds development likely at few places.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
40°C Dry and hot weather would prevail. Light moist winds during day likely with partly cloudy sky.

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**Light rain expected today: IMD**

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Parts of the city received light rainfall on Saturday evening. There is forecast of "light rain" and "partly cloudy sky" on Sunday, as per the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

"Mostly central and north Delhi received light rain. Our station in Palam did not receive any rain," said Kuldeep Srivastava, head of the regional centre of the IMD, said.

"Prevailing meteorological conditions suggest that no favourable conditions for further advancement of southwest monsoon into remaining parts of Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and Punjab during next 7 days," the IMD said.

# Oxygen demand dips to 82 MT, expected to fall further: govt.

'About half of the new COVID-19 cases in June were people between 30-60 years'

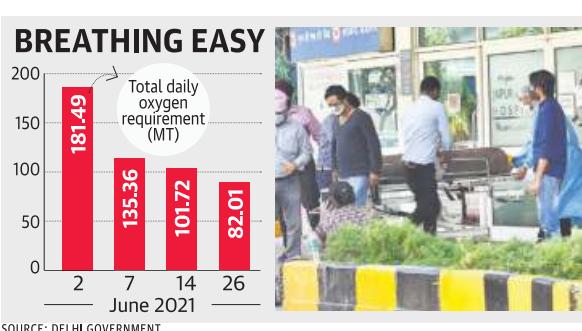
**NIKHIL M BABU**  
NEW DELHI

The daily medical oxygen demand of the city has dropped to 82 MT from 972 MT in the beginning of May and is expected to fall further for the rest of June, according to Delhi government data shared with *The Hindu*.

Also, about half of the new COVID-19 cases in the city in June are people between 30-60 years of age and of these cases, 267 were children below the age of 14 years.

**Dip in cases**

The oxygen requirement has steadily decreased through June, from 181.4 MT on June 2 to 82.01 MT on June 22. It has been going down as both new and active COVID-19 cases have been decreasing



SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT

in the city.

In April-May, during the peak of the second wave, the city had faced a grave oxygen crisis and people had died in hospitals as healthcare facilities ran out of oxygen.

There were 7,093 new cases during the period, of which 3,358 cases (47.3%) were people between 30-60 years of age, according to

the data. Also, 2,369 (33.3%) were people less than 30 years of age.

"The COVID-19 infections have always been more among younger people as they move around more. But severe cases, who need hospitalisation, are mainly elderly people and people with comorbidities," said Sumit Ray, Head of Department of Critical Care at Holy

Family Hospital.

However, the breakdown of data on new cases is not the same as the data from the official bulletin.

**Only Delhi residents**

"The Delhi government gets a list from the ICMR every day which has details of positive cases from tests conducted. That data is divided district-wise and age-wise," a government official said.

"However, the districts then check this data and many people in the list turns out to be not living in Delhi and coming from Noida or Gurugram and getting tested in Delhi. These cases are excluded from the health bulletin as they do not live in Delhi. So, the cases in the bulletin will be lesser," the official added.

"The Delhi government has proved to be a complete failure in dealing with the second wave of the pandemic in the Capital despite claiming to have spent nearly ₹47,000 crores on

## BJP wants Kejriwal to quit over oxygen 'misuse'

Party protests outside GTB Hospital

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

healthcare infrastructure in the last six years," Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said.

**No facilities upgraded**

"Not a single new hospital was opened nor were healthcare facilities upgraded; not even a single ventilator was purchased nor new ICU beds added in hospitals; only publicity was being carried out at the expense of taxpayers' money," Mr. Bidhuri also alleged.

BJP Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta sought CVC's intervention to punish the alleged culprits and cited the "arbitrary manner" in which the work order for 1,000 low-floor DTC buses was put in abeyance.

"The timing of withdrawing the purchase order of 1,000 low-floor DTC buses is suspicious. Just when financial bungling has come out in the public domain and an investigation ordered, the Delhi government seems to have hurriedly put the lid on the matter, hoping the allegations would die down," Mr. Gupta alleged.

## BJP seeks CVC intervention in DTC matter

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday apprised the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) of the alleged "grave financial irregularities" in the procurement of 1,000 low-floor DTC buses.

BJP Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta sought CVC's intervention to punish the alleged culprits and cited the "arbitrary manner" in which the work order for 1,000 low-floor buses was put in abeyance.

"The timing of withdrawing the purchase order of 1,000 low-floor DTC buses is suspicious. Just when financial bungling has come out in the public domain and an investigation ordered, the Delhi government seems to have hurriedly put the lid on the matter, hoping the allegations would die down," Mr. Gupta alleged.

## RSS chief should clear stand on Ram Mandir land scam: AAP

Party MP questions silence of probe agencies on issue

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

AAP MP Sanjay Singh on Saturday urged the head of RSS to state his stand on the alleged scam related to the Ayodhya temple land deal.

He also questioned why various government investigation agencies are silent on the issue.

"I have written a letter to RSS head Mohan Bhagwat and have asked for a time to meet him. I will hand over all these documents to him

as proof of the scam related to land and corruption by the BJP and members of the trust. I would like the RSS head to take note of it and objectively clear his stand on the scam," Mr. Singh said.

The AAP leader said that the alleged scam is an attempt of the BJP to hurt the feelings of Hindus.

"Today, the Prime Minister convened a meeting with the members of the Ram Janmabhoomi trust working for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Only the BJP and its malice is to be blamed for the construction work that has halted since the last one and a half years," Mr. Singh said.

"I want to ask the PM, did you ask them why they failed to pay the dues for the construction of the Ayodhya Temple yet? Who all are receiving the share from the scam money that is reaching the top? Which members from the BJP and the trust are involved in this," he asked.

## City parks, golf courses to open tomorrow

Capital witnesses highest number of daily vaccinations; 85 new infections reported

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

City parks, gardens and golf courses will be allowed to open from Monday, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) stated in an order on Saturday.

Apart from these, the order stated, marriage ceremonies at banquet halls will be allowed up to 50% of their capacity, gyms and yoga institutes, too, will be permitted to open up to 50% capacity from Monday.

The Capital reported 85 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total



People coming out of a vaccination centre after getting their jabs in Nand Nagri on Saturday.

■ R.V. MOORTHY

cases to 14,33,675, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday.

Also, nine deaths were reported and the total number of deaths stood at 24,961. A total of 72,920 tests were done in a day and that test positivity rate was 0.12%. Of the total cases, 14,07,116 people have recovered and there are 1,598 active cases.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that more than 2 lakh people were vaccinated on Saturday, the highest number of daily vaccinations till now.

"In Delhi, 2,05,170 people have been given vaccine doses. For the last three days, more than 1.5 lakh people

are being vaccinated continuously. The Delhi government is rapidly trying to protect people from a possible third wave by vaccinating them," Mr. Sisodia said.

AAP MLA Atishi said about 1.5 lakh doses of vaccines are being administered daily and according to this, the Central government should give at least 45 lakh doses to Delhi in July.

She said that the vaccination stock of Delhi is currently around 8.39 lakhs and vaccine stock is available for five days as per the current vaccination pace.

## Delhi govt. aims to plant 33 lakh saplings this year

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Saturday inaugurated the yearly plantation drive 'Van Mahotsav' from Garhi Mandu. All 70 Assemblies will witness plantation under the leadership of MLAs on Sunday.

**THE HINDU**  
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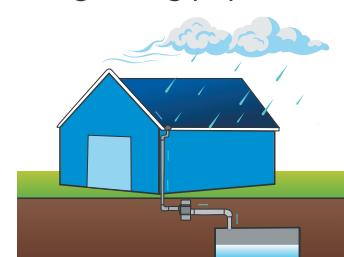
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**India's National Newspaper**

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S.No.	District	Address	Phone No.
1	Central (HQ)	ERWH, Varunala Complex, Room No. 208, Phase - I, Jhandewalan, New Delhi	78380 28278
2	East	Office of the Suptd. Engineer (East) ChitraVihar B.P.S. Delhi-110092	87003 55576
3	North- East	EE(NE)-II, R-Pocket OH Tank, Dilshad Garden, Delhi-95	96505 69988
4	Shahdara	Office of Executive Engineer (NE)-I Janta Flats, GTB Enclave, Delhi-110093	96502 90935
5	South	DJB Office, E-Block opposite PVR Cinema, Saket, New Delhi-110017	95999 42466 96502 91239
6	South East	Room No. 002, Andrews Ganj building complex Adjacent to Defence Colony New Delhi-110024	96500 85754
7	South West	Sector-5, DDA Central Nursery, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075	96503 03799
8	Central	Office of EE (Central) Delhi Jal Board, JLN Marg. Opposite Ramila Ground UGR & BPS New Delhi	88009 95542
9	New Delhi	Sector 10, RK Puram Water Emergency Complex New Delhi 110022	96500 94407
10	West	Office of Supt. Engineer Office G-17, OHT 1st floor, Room No. 2, Pashchim Vihar	96502 91617
11	North West	DJB Office, Room No. 26, First Floor MU Block, Pitampura, Near Hotel City Park, Pitampura	96502 91531
12	North	Shakti Nagar, ZE DJB Office near Shakti Nagar Chowk	96252 02927

Pulse Polio Ravivar - 27th June 2021

Urban Development Department, Government of NCT of Delhi



## Sorry for Kimin row, says Border Roads Organisation

'Arunachal town renamed by mistake'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has issued an unconditional apology to the people of Arunachal Pradesh for the "inadvertent mistake" of using the wrong name of a place without any "mala fide intention".

The organisation had attracted flak for "renaming" Kimin, a small town in the State's Papum Pare district about 75 km from capital Itanagar, as Bilgarh of Assam, during a programme attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on June 17.

"The unfortunate incident is nothing more than an inadvertent mistake, just hap-

pened in the pressure of organising the event while racing against the time. In no way, BRO had even an iota of mala fide intention of hurting the sentiments of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. It should be taken as an unconditional apology, due to the emotive connection that BRO has with people of the State," the organisation said in a statement on Saturday.

The BRO said the confusion was created due to mis-communication. It claimed that someone in their rank had mistakenly noted Kimin being in Assam during a casual discussion over the proposed event to inaugurate a road.

Four former Chief Ministers Mehboba Mufti of the PDP, Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah of the National Conference and Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress were at the meet along

## 'Centre must follow-up on meet outcome'

Create a conducive atmosphere for early restoration of democracy in J&K: Mir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
JAMMU



The Centre must follow-up on the positive outcomes of the recent all-party meeting in Delhi for early restoration of democracy in Jammu and Kashmir, Congress leader G.A. Mir said on Saturday.

Mir, who is the president of the Congress' Jammu and Kashmir unit, was among 14 leaders of eight different parties from the Union Territory who attended the meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 24.

Mr. Mir said all the political parties responded to the call of the Prime Minister and this was a positive indication for the way forward.

"Now, it is for the Prime Minister to respond to this gesture, and the ball is in the court of the Centre to follow-

up the positive outcome of the meeting and create a conducive atmosphere for the early restoration of democracy in Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Briefing senior Congress functionaries here on his return from Delhi, Mr. Mir said the party's delegation, which was led by Mr. Azad, played its role in the right earnest, according to the guidance of the Congress high command.

"Ball is in the court of the Centre now for the positive outcome of the deliberations of the all-party meeting, in which the Congress placed people's priorities rightly, as per the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Mr. Mir said that Mr. Azad initiated the deliberations and highlighted the priorities of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to move ahead for restoration of democracy at the earliest.

### Issues highlighted

The issues highlighted by the Congress in the meeting were heard with great patience and attention by Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the J-K Congress chief said.

Restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's Statehood at the earliest before Assembly elections and transparent delimitation exercise were among many issues that were raised by the Congress, Mr. Mir said.

## DCs in Odisha asked to find 'a day for children'

Bid to bolster child rights in the State

STAFF REPORTER  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has directed all District Collectors to spare a day in a quarter for addressing grievance of children and protection of their rights.

The order came in wake of allegations over non-convening of different committees meant for protection of child rights.

### Nine committees

There are at least nine different committees constituted for children in the district as well as panchayat level. But, members of committees fail to meet regularly.

Seven district-level com-

mittees have been formed from monitoring and evaluation of schemes to reviewing and sanctioning foster care funds and from monitoring standards of child-care institutions to hearing of cases related to juveniles in conflict with law.

When asked, Director of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Arvind Agarwal said, "though there are many committees, members do not meet at regular interval which defeats very purpose of formation of committees. Collectors have been asked to fix one day in a quarter and review all activities of all committees at one place."

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**FAIR/ MUDALIAR** Girl 30/162, 10th, No issue seeks suitable groom, caste no bar, Chennai only. 9840353368

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**VANNIYAR, BDS**, 26, Avittam, fair and rich girl seeks alliance from same caste MDS/MBBS groom. Contact: 9844157888

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**CSI CHRISTIAN** Nadar Girl, Fair, Good Looking, 30-04-1986 born 152cm / M.Sc M.Phil, working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private). Suitable Alliance. Employed / Settled in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 9841182514

### HINDU

**HINDU** SC 25 yrs / 5.6, P.M., MBBS, MBBS, Parents Govt, Seeks MBBS with MD/MS/MCH / ongoing PG / MBBS Groom preferably Govt, below 28 years. Contact: 94446 53869

### HINDU AGAMUDAIA

**HINDU AGAMUDAIA** Mudhalaiyer Fair Vegetarian, Tamil girl 25/4', MDS Dentist, Seeks groom with good education and decent family background. WhatsApp 9940514101

### DOCTOR 24 yrs fair, Tamil, Afflu-

ent doctor parents ECFMG shortly proceeding to USA for residency. 9677026459

### FAMILY

**BALIJA NAIDU** M.B.B.S Ketai, Viruchikam 23/15 fair good looking girl, Kanchipuram seeking Doctor (or) Higher qualified from same caste. Contact: 944330196, 944202555

### FAIR PRETTY

**FAIR PRETTY** Doctor girl 31/165 completing final MD Anesthesiology August 2021, Chennai based affluent family seeks smart, handsome Doctor groom DM MS ChM DPhil Kerala, TN, Bangalore. Ct: 9840050381/ 9840985363

### ENGINEER

**GROOM FOR** chennai based muslim dakkani girl 26, BE, 8056205795/shk.affa@gmail.com

### GOVT / QUASI GOVT

**RC SC 31/152 BE** Good-looking Fair Slim Disciplined Settled Working for TN Govt, UPSC aspirant. Divorcee No children Preferring the same. Contact: C7:708467103, emmanuel.ediz28@gmail.com

### HINDI

**SARYUPARIN** 30/ 5'4" beautiful M.Tech Biotechnology, Working for HDFC ast. M.Tech, M-Tech, MBA, Phone: 94703388749 947013887

### MALAYALAM

**CHRISTIAN RC** Girl (27) – MBBS, pursuing MD (3rd year, Bangalore), Ht. 163 cm, Inviting alliances from RC, LC, Malankara Catholic, Prefer MBBS, MD, B-Tech, M-Tech, MBA. Phone: 94703388749 947013887

### MALAYALI MUSLIM

**MALAYALI MUSLIM** girl (26/154), B.Arach, Fair, well-to-do family, divorced within 2 weeks of marriage (no liabilities). Working Professionals from Malappuram & Kozhikode districts are preferred. 998508737

### EZHAWA GIRL

**EZHAWA GIRL** 28/178, M.E. MNC in Chennai, seeking suitable alliance. CNB. Ct: 9380648656

### AUSTRALIA SETTLED

**AUSTRALIA SETTLED** and Australian citizens doctor parents (inter caste Muslim hindu) seeks alliance from suitable doctors / dentists for their only daughter 24 years, doctor, currently doing post graduation in Australia. Contact: 9447244665

### SEEKING SUITABLE

**SEEKING SUITABLE** match for Hindu, Malayalee, progressive girl, 26, IT, MNC. Ph: 9488167570

### WANTED GROOM

**NAIR GIRL**, 29/155 cms, fair, beautiful, slim, homely, MBA, Pooram star, Kochi based reputed Menon family, working at Bangalore looking for a smart, well qualified, Bangalore employed Nair boy. Contact: 8847912664, Email: menonvijayakumar@mail.com

### PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

**CNB** 37 yrs 100% visually challenged girl doing Ph.D. in Middlesex University London needs soulmate/Bridegroom Christian

### TAMIL

**Kamma girl(27)B.E.,M.B.A (IMB)**, 5.4 ft, Ayiyam belongs to a reputed business family seeks kamma boy,well educated, Business / profession / service commission, with clean habits from Elite, affluent family. Contact No. 94433 35699, email id: kaanan212@gmail.com

### TELUGU

**HINDU TAMIL** Pallan / 44 / BE Comp / Works in Public Sector Bank seek from the same caste equal age, Computer Engg, foreign deputation employment delayed marriage proposal. Ct. 9444752894, Chennai

### HINDU NADAR

Girl, 28, B.E., working in Govt, Sector well educated Groom, Ct: 9758380379,

### LOOKING EMPLOYED

Bridegroom for 36yrs/MBBS, 162cm, S. E. Textile Mills, Etc., Rich Family, Fair Girl seeks Groom. Ct: 9884510869

### SOZHIYA VELLALAR

40/167 Uthratadi BE Mba emploied SW Chennai no encumbrance seeks educated groom, Subcaste no bar, 9283433069/ 9840329160

### 26, FAIR, M.S.

in U.S. Working, affluent, seeks well settled groom, CNB, 9489935653

### MUDALIAR

Divorcee, 42/168cm, Working as University Professor in USA, CNB. Seek Suitable Well Settled Groom in USA of Eligible and willing to Settle USA, Now Bride in Chennai for 2months, Ct: 73584 28843

### YADAVA/ FAIR

MBBS, MS, SRM, SRM, Raja, 36yrs, 162cm, Good looking, very fair girl seeking suitable groom, from same caste, Contact: 9443301999

### HINDU

SC 37/152, B.E. Middle Class. Divorcee, Seeks Suitable Groom, Caste No Bar, Ct: 94896 95984

### ALLIANCE INVITED

for Hindu Deva girl working in USA, B.E./SWE, Born Jan 1986 , 5'5/Good looking. Looking for suitable groom/ boy working in USA only , well educated , Age between 35 to 38, CNB, Contact Father - +91 98745 59152

### EMPLOYED QUALIFIED

bridegroom is wanted for SC/AD/MS/DB 1983/ Vishakan, Dhulam bride 9498313625, 9448662676

### MUDALIAR 26

M.Tech, 165cm, Good looking, wellsettled family seeks suitable Groom,Ct:877851465/ 720866346

### KONGU VELLALAR

Manian kulam, Coimbatore, educated, affluent business families around Coimbatore for their daughter (DOB:12/03/97), convert, educated, good looking, MIB, Mesham, Ashwin, 4, Rishaba Lakham. CT: 94431 56244.

### HINDU

SC 37/152 B.E. Middle Class. Divorcee, Seeks Suitable Groom, Caste No Bar, Ct: 94896 95984

### ALLIANCE INVITED

for Hindu Deva girl working in USA, B.E./SWE, Born Jan 1986 , 5'5/Good looking. Looking for suitable groom/ boy working in USA only , well educated , Age between 35 to 38, CNB, Contact Father - +91 98745 59152

### HINDU

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for a reputed family

### ELITE BRIDES WANTED

for a reputed family

### ELITE GROOMS WANTED

for a reputed family

### ELITE BRIDES WANTED

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for a reputed family

### ELITE BRIDES WANTED

IN BRIEF



**Chetan files defamation case against Minister**

BENGALURU  
Actor Chetan Kumar, who is facing two FIRs based on complaints by members of the Brahmin community for his critical comments on 'Brahminism', has sued Karnataka Labour Minister A. Shivaraj Hebbar for civil defamation for his "defamatory" tweets against him. Mr. Chetan Kumar has sought ₹1 and a public apology from the Minister.

**NCB raids illegal drug manufacturing unit**

BENGALURU  
The Narcotics Control Bureau, on Friday, busted a drug manufacturing and trafficking unit in Bidar, and seized 91.5 kg of alprazolam, a short-acting tranquiliser. Officials arrested five people in Hyderabad, including the kingpin of the racket.

**SVBC of TTD receives ₹2 crore donation**

TIRUMALA  
The Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on Saturday received ₹2 crore in the form of donations, which was the highest it received in a single day. While the representatives of Indian Minerals and Granite Company handed over a DD for ₹1 crore, the Patabhi Agro Food Private Limited gave a DD for ₹1 crore.

**Undertrial escapes from Chittoor sub-jail**

CHITTOOR  
The Chittoor police have intensified search for remand prisoner, Gajendra, who escaped from the sub-jail here on Friday. Gajendra was remanded in an alleged murder case. The jail staff reportedly used the services of Gajendra in the kitchen, during which he reportedly escaped by scaling a wall.

# Assembly ruckus case: Kerala moves SC

'Legislators' actions protected from legal action by parliamentary privilege'

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The Kerala government has moved the Supreme Court challenging a High Court dismissal of prosecutor's request to withdraw a case of criminal trespass, mischief and destruction of public property involving Education Minister V. Sivankutty and others who created a ruckus on the Assembly floor during a budget presentation in 2015.

The televised images showed MLAs coming to blows on the House floor and hurling chairs, computers and other public property soon after Finance Minister K.M. Mani began his budget speech during the UDF government's tenure.

The State argued that the legislators' actions were protected from legal action by

parliamentary privilege.

"When the act of the accused persons was in relation to their function to protest as Members of the Legislative Assembly, are they not entitled to get protection?" the State asked the apex court.

The Assembly Secretary should not have complained against the MLAs to the police without taking the prior sanction of the Speaker, the government argued. Besides offences under the IPC, the legislators were booked under the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

The Public Prosecutor's application to withdraw the cases was dismissed by the Thiruvananthapuram Chief Judicial Magistrate on September 22, last year. The Magistrate had concluded that the request was made "with-



**Pandemonium in house:** A file photo of V. Sivankutty protesting inside the Kerala Assembly.

our good faith and under external influence". The High Court confirmed the Magistrate's decision in March.

A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud is scheduled to hear the petition on June 29.

UDF leader Ramesh Chennithala has filed a caveat in the case.

In its appeal, the State government, represented by advocate G. Prakash, said a Magistrate's role is limited

when the Prosecutor seeks withdrawal of the case under Section 321 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. All the Magistrate needs to examine is whether the Prosecutor has applied his mind "independently and properly".

The reason for the Prosecutor's decision to seek withdrawal of a case need not be confined to paucity of evidence alone. It could also depend on "other relevant grounds as well as to further broaden the ends of public justice, public order and peace is the settled law".

"The broad ends of public justice will certainly include appropriate social, economic and political purposes," the State argued in its special leave petition before the Supreme Court.

The State also argued that it should be left to the House to decide whether it would want to exercise its jurisdiction or hand over the 'offenders' to the criminal courts.

## Kerala mints special courts to try dowry cases

**Victims should get speedy justice: CM**

**STAFF REPORTER**

ALAPPUZHA



Pinarayi Vijayan

The Kerala government will consider establishing special courts to try cases related to dowry harassment and violence against women, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said.

The Chief Minister said the victims of dowry harassment and female victims of violence should get speedy justice. "We should ensure that the culprits in these cases receive swift punishment. The government will contemplate setting up special courts," Mr. Vijayan said.

"Dowry has been legally banned. But dowry harass-

ment cases are still being reported. Dowry-related deaths have brought shame to the State. Women are subjected to torture and are killed in the name of dowry. These kind of things should not happen in Kerala," the Chief Minister said.

## Four of a family drown in Telangana

**STAFF REPORTER**

HYDERABAD

Pilgrimage to a dargah turned fatal for four members of a family as they drowned in Manjira, a tributary of Godavari river, at Birkur village, around 200 km from here, on Friday.

The victims were identified as Anjavva, 45, her daughter Sony, 8, and her co-sister's children, Gangothri, 12 and Prashanth, 9.

Police said the victims boarded an autorickshaw to reach Birkur and from there, they decided to cross the river to avoid taking the Manjira bridge. "At a certain point, water flow was high and they drowned," the police said.

## After 50 years, relief for kin of slain Kerala naxal

Varghese killed in 1970 fake encounter

**STAFF REPORTER**

KALPETTA

The Kerala government handed over a compensation of ₹50 lakh to the siblings of Naxalite leader A. Varghese, who was shot dead by the police in the Thirunelli forest of Wayanad in 1970.

The Cabinet on February 24 had approved the recommendation of the Secretary-level committee to compensate the family.

The amount was recently deposited in the bank accounts of Varghese's brothers – A. Thomas and A. Joseph – and sisters Mariyam and Annamma.

"Had the government an-

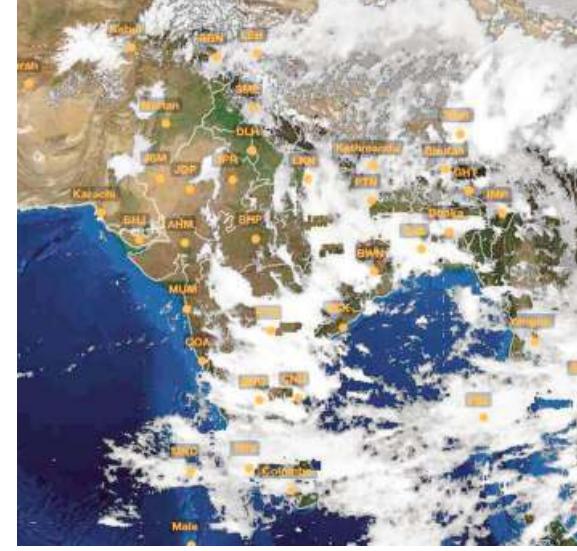
nounced the transaction through the media, it would have been useful, especially at a time when fake encounter deaths and human rights violations are so common," A. Varghese, a lawyer and the naxal leader's nephew told *The Hindu*. He has been in the forefront of the five decade legal battle over the fake encounter.

The family is planning to set up a memorial for the slain leader at Vellamunda in Wayanad district utilising the compensation amount.

The family had moved the High Court of Kerala after it came to light that Varghese was killed by the police in a fake encounter.

**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: AQICN, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Sunday:** Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.6...34.3	26.6	24.5	Kozhikode	10...30.8	24.5	24.5
Ahmedabad	—...36.3	26.1	26.5	Kurnool	—...34.8	26.5	26.5
Aizawl	—...—	23.1	23.1	Lucknow	0.9...36.4	26.2	26.2
Allahabad	—...34.2	26.0	24.8	Madurai	—...39.2	24.8	24.8
Bengaluru	—...27.0	20.5	20.5	Mangaluru	9.1...29.5	23.4	23.4
Bhopal	—...35.3	24.2	24.8	Mumbai	26.7...32.5	24.8	24.8
Bhubaneswar	2.5...33.4	25.8	25.6	Mysuru	—...28.0	21.4	21.4
Chandigarh	0.2...37.6	24.6	25.6	New Delhi	—...38.7	25.6	25.6
Chennai	—...34.1	29.2	29.2	Patna	146...30.4	23.2	23.2
Coimbatore	—...33.0	23.4	23.4	Port Blair	11...30.5	23.3	23.3
Dehradoon	20.4...33.9	20.5	20.5	Puducherry	—...37.2	25.4	25.4
Gangtok	7...22.8	17.8	17.8	Pune	2.6...31.1	22.1	22.1
Goa	36...29.8	22.5	22.5	Raipur	—...33.8	24.8	24.8
Guwahati	4...35.3	26.5	26.5	Ranchi	—...31.2	23.6	23.6
Hubballi	—...27.0	22.0	22.0	Shillong	5...25.2	18.4	18.4
Hyderabad	—...33.8	24.0	24.0	Shimla	16...26.7	14.3	14.3
Imphal	—...31.9	22.1	22.1	Srinagar	—...27.5	15.6	15.6
Jaipur	—...36.2	25.7	25.7	Thiruvananthapuram	0.4...32.3	25.0	25.0
Kochi	8...30.6	24.4	24.4	Tiruchi	—...38.5	26.0	26.0
Kohima	1...25.8	18.0	18.0	Vijayawada	15...35.4	26.0	26.0
Kolkatta	—...33.9	28.0	28.0	Visakhapatnam	—...36.4	29.0	29.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

Yesterday

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	13	10	7	79	67	—
Bengaluru	—	7	4	68	59	—
Chennai	—	4	2	113	56	—
Delhi	16	12	327	354	—	—
Hyderabad	2	16	4	72	72	—
Kolkata	42	7	4	100	59	—
Lucknow	4	2	4	163	75	—
Mumbai	6	3	9	107	88	—
Pune	—	40	51	78	69	—
Visakhapatnam	5	34	10	102	81	—

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**CO:** Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

## Will restore OBC quota in local bodies if given power: Fadnavis

Maharashtra BJP leader vows to retire from politics if he fails to fulfil promise

**STAFF REPORTER**

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress held protests across the State on Saturday demanding restoration of reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in local governing bodies, which was quashed by the Supreme Court in March this year.

Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis, who participated in a protest in his home district of Nagpur, claimed that if his party was brought back to power, he would ensure that the quota for OBCs was restored within four months, and if not, he would quit politics.

Addressing BJP workers in Nagpur, Mr. Fadnavis said, "Unrest within the OBC community is a result of the incapability of the State government. This government did nothing in the court to ensure that the reservation remained. It did not even form the Backward Classes Commission. If this govern-

ment is not able to restore

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Govt. ramps up alert on Delta Plus variant

"The Ministry has written to Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana, J&K, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh where some districts have this variant," he said.

Doctors across India have also cautioned against any relaxation in adherence to COVID-appropriate behaviour. Archana Dhawan Bajaj, director, Nurture IVF said that the Delta variant has been labeled as 'Variant of Concern' by World Health Organisation (WHO) for multiple reasons.

"Delta variant is more resistant to medication, treatment, and vaccination. Therefore, people who have been vaccinated can still be affected by this variant and can go on to get the clinical illness. Neutralising antibodies against this variant post-vaccination seem to be nearly five times lower in people who have already been vaccinated than the other variants," she said.

"Vaccinations specific against variants like Delta variant need to be synthesised or manufactured and rolled out on an urgent basis. If this variant is not controlled in a timely manner, this could lead to a rapidly occurring ferocious third wave of the COVID pandemic. Delta Plus variant has been instrumental in causing a new wave of COVID pandemic in the UK and parts of U.S. There are con-

cerns that it can bypass vaccine immunity, a phenomenon called immune escape. Countries like India with a big population size are always at risk of having extensive effects," said Arunesh Kumar, HOD, Paras Chest Institute and senior pulmonologist, Paras Hospital, Gurugram.

With multiple cases detected in Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, and Maharashtra, the Delta Plus variant and impending third wave of coronavirus, it becomes important to strictly follow the directions of the Health Ministry to engage in immediate containment measures, said Piyush Goel, senior consultant- Pulmonary and Critical Care, Columbia Asia Hospital, in Gurugram.

The Delta Plus variant is a variant of concern that has been recently declared by the government. It has already been identified and isolated in over 10 countries and nearly 50 cases have already been seen in India especially in Maharashtra.

"Looks like the third wave will hit Maharashtra in the next six to eight weeks. Like the last wave which has been driven by the Delta variant, it is feared that the next wave will be driven by the delta plus variant," said Shuchin Bajaj, Internal Medicine, founder director, Ujala Cygnus Group of Hos-

## Omar seeks delimitation, statehood before polls

Keeping his cards close to his chest on the participation of the three NC members of Parliament in the Delimitation Commission, Mr. Abdullah said, "Dr. (Farooq Abdullah) Sahib is to take the view as and when necessary. There has been no fresh approach from the Delimitation Commission. As and when Commission makes an approach, Dr. Sahib will take the view. We will convey our stand to the Commission."

He said all the Gupkar alliance members made it clear that "they don't accept August 5, 2019 decisions".

The former Chief Minister made it clear that the struggle to restore J&K's special status is a long one. "It

took BJP 70 years to fulfil its agenda. If it takes us 70 weeks or 70 months, or whatever time it takes, we will not retract from our mission," Mr. Abdullah said.

He said the Prime Minister listened to the stand of the members of the Gupkar alliance. "We conveyed to him that people are unhappy," he said.

Mr. Abdullah said the people of Kashmir were facing an "unchecked bureaucracy".

NC president Farooq Abdullah described the meeting with Mr. Modi as "very good" and said people should wait to see if the Centre was ready to remove mistrust existing on the ground in J&K.

## Army Aviation raises tempo in ops along LAC

However, the Army is now hoping for some progress in the coming few weeks on the long-delayed deal, another source said, adding that it is making a pitch to procure a small number of Ka-226T helicopters.

**Putin visit**

With the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the works for year end for the annual summit, there are expectations that this deal along with other held up proposals like the AK-203 as-

sault rifle deal will get a push, a third source said.

At present, the Army is holding 160 of the 246 Cheetah and Chetak helicopters with a serviceability rate of 60%.

In addition, around 20 helicopters are with HAL for overhaul for around a year at any point of time. As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, the technical life of these helicopters will start finishing from 2023 onwards, which will only further exacerbate the deficiencies.

## Farmers complete 7 months of protest

Farmers successfully delivered the memorandum to Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and his Himachal Pradesh counterpart Bandaru Dattatreya, and to designated officials at the Raj Bhavans in Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.

In Delhi, though protesters were originally detained at Civil Lines and held at the Wazirabad Police Training Centre, they were later able to hold a brief virtual meeting with the Lt. Governor and hand over the memorandum to a representative.

Agriculture Minister Na-

rendra Singh Tomar reiterated his appeal to farmers to "end their agitation." Posting a video statement on Twitter, he said the Centre was also "ready to discuss and to resolve any provision of the laws" which the farmers were protesting against. However, the farmers are insistent on demanding a full repeal, "as there are fundamental flaws in the laws and their very objectives".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted his support for the protesters. "It's simple. We are with the Satyagrahi Annadada," he said.

CM K

## U.P. panchayat poll candidate alleges kidnap

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAZIABAD

The Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD)-Samajwadi Party (SP)-supported candidate in the upcoming Baghpat Zila Panchayat election alleged on Saturday that she and her husband were kidnapped and forced to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

However, they claimed they somehow managed to escape from the Delhi residence of the BJP MP from Baghpat, Satyapal Singh.

Jai Kishore, husband of the candidate Mamta Kishore, told reporters that they were forcibly taken to the residence of Mr. Singh in the early hours of Saturday. Ms. Kishore held a press conference in Baghpat and filed her nomination for the seat.

"We were draped with BJP stoles and photographed with Mr. Singh. When we resisted, we were told that false cases will be filed against us and that our life would become hell. We somehow managed to escape from their custody and reached the RLD office in Baghpat. I am a true soldier of the party," claimed Mr. Kishore.

BJP district president Suraj Pal Gurjar denied the charges. The duo went to the MP's house on their own, he said.

## Ailing woman dies during traffic hold-up

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW

An ailing woman, head of the women's wing of the Kanpur chapter of the Indian Industries Association (IIA), died after being stuck in traffic while she was being taken to a hospital during the visit of President Ramnath Kovind.

Commissioner of Police, Kanpur, Aseem Arun personally apologised for the incident.

"This is a big lesson for us in future. We pledge that our route system in future will be such that citizens are stopped for minimal time so that such incidents are not repeated," Mr. Arun said in a statement.

## Four suspended

Four police personnel – a sub-inspector and three head constables – had been suspended for stopping traffic longer than directed, said a police officer.

Mr. Arun said President Kovind was anguished by the untimely death of Vandana Mishra, the women's wing president of the Kanpur Chapter of IIA.

sault rifle deal will get a push, a third source said.

At present, the Army is holding 160 of the 246 Cheetah and Chetak helicopters with a serviceability rate of 60%.

In addition, around 20 helicopters are with HAL for overhaul for around a year at any point of time. As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, the technical life of these helicopters will start finishing from 2023 onwards, which will only further exacerbate the deficiencies.

MEA statement indirectly refers to role of Turkey

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

India and Greece have held discussions over the situation in Cyprus during the visit of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Athens. The Ministry of External Affairs said both sides emphasised upon respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity by all members of the international community.

"Both sides discussed the recent developments pertaining to the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus and Libya. They agreed that the rule of law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity are fundamental principles of international relations and must be observed by all," said a joint press release issued by the MEA on the discussions that Mr. Jaishankar had with his counterpart Nikos Dendias.

The condition in nearby

## HCs are taking steps to fill vacancies, says CJI

CJI Ramana writes to Prasad, seeks better IT infrastructure

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana has written to Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad that the Chief Justices of the High Courts have promised "positive and accelerated action" to fill vacancies of judges in their courts.

In his letter, the CJI said that during an interaction, he had impressed on the Chief Justices the "need to expedite the process of sending recommendations through Collegium to fill up the vacancies in the respective High Courts".

"This was in furtherance to my communication addressed to the Chief Justices of all the High Courts soon after I had assumed the Office of the Chief Justice of India. I have been assured of positive and accelerated action by the Chief Justices," the CJI wrote.

He has also asked the Centre to intervene immediately to strengthen network and connectivity in rural and tribal areas.

## Digital divide

In his letter to Mr. Prasad, who is also the Minister for Communications and IT, the CJI said his interaction with the Chief Justices revealed

... blueprint of the proposal to set up the National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation is in the final stages of preparation and will be shared with the Union government shortly

I am of the firm belief that concerted efforts need to be put in, in order to materialise this concept, in view of the challenges put forth by the pandemic  
N.V. RAMANA Chief Justice of India

that the digital divide between urban and rural India was adversely affecting the functioning of courts during the pandemic.

## ICT tools

He highlighted the need to augment judicial infrastructure with the latest information and communication technology tools to facilitate access to justice during and after the pandemic.

The top judge wrote to the Law Minister that a "blueprint of the proposal to set up the National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC) is in the final stages of preparation and will be shared with the Union Government shortly".

"I am of the firm belief that concerted efforts need to be put in, in order to materialise this concept, in

view of the challenges put forth by the pandemic," he wrote.

The CJI also asked the government to take up at the highest level certain issues which include augmenting the vaccination of court staff and their families across the country to facilitate "full-scale functioning" of the courts.

He said his interaction with the Chief Justices brought to the fore the need to recognise court functionaries, including advocates, as frontline workers for the purpose of providing pandemic-related relief.

He flagged a requirement to provide financial support to advocates, especially juniors, who are struggling to make ends meet because of loss of work for more than a year.

## CJI cites a letter that showed him the way

It was written by ex-judge Raveendran

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana on Saturday said a letter from a former Supreme Court judge, at the time of his appointment as top judge, to act with courage in "these testing days", became the road map for his tenure.

"I feel that this message is indeed the road map for my journey as the Chief Justice of India. I shall treasure this message forever," Chief Justice Ramana said of the letter from former Supreme Court judge Justice R.V. Raveendran.

The Chief Justice was speaking on Saturday at the virtual launch of *Anomalies in Law and Justice*, a book authored by Justice Raveendran.

## Testing days

Chief Justice Ramana read out Justice Raveendran's letter, which said, "These are difficult days. Challenging days. Testing days. Being a Chief Justice requires courage to act, commitment to the cause of justice, concern for the common man, tact to deal with and obtain the cooperation of the brother judges in addition to the qualities expected of a judge. You possess all of them in abundance. Let the



Justice R.V. Raveendran  
almighty lead you to a purposeful, meaningful and successful tenure."

Chief Justice Ramana referred to Justice Raveendran's rise to the top court from a humble background, with "no family pedigree in the profession". The CJI is also a first-generation lawyer. Chief Justice Ramana took a leaf from Justice Raveendran's legacy in the Supreme Court.

## Low profile

"He never tried, or made an attempt, to project himself as the saviour of the judicial process. He continued to be humble and believed that the office which he held did not exist for himself... He believed in the dictum, as Lord Denning said, 'that the best judge is one who is less known and seen in the media,'" Chief Justice Ramana said.

## IN BRIEF



## Akhil Gogoi granted two-day parole

GUWAHATI  
Sibsagar MLA and Rajoir Dal president Akhil Gogoi was on June 25 allowed to go home after almost 550 days in captivity, but for two days. A special court of the National Investigation Agency granted him 48-hour parole after he wished to visit his wife and teenage son in Guwahati and mother in Jorhat.

## Civic body gets notice for death of egret chicks

GUWAHATI  
The authorities of Assam's Udaguri district have served a show-cause notice on the officials of the Tangla town for causing the death of more than 250 egrets and cormorant chicks due to a COVID-19 scare. The district's Deputy Commissioner, P. Uday Praveen said the show-cause was served to the civic body officials under the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 and COVID regulations of 2020.

## Punjab CM reiterates call for national drug policy

CHANDIGARH  
Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Saturday reiterated his demand for a national drug policy to tackle the scourge, saying there's a need for more synergy between the Special Task Force (STF), the police and the Intelligence wing to eliminate drugs from the State. Capt. Singh said while the neighbouring States of Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi had agreed to put in place an effective mechanism for tackling drug smuggling, no significant progress had been made.

## Assam drug bust hero made police constable

GUWAHATI  
A lowly-paid Assam home guard, who became a hero after he refused a bribe from drug dealers and helped the police seize high-grade crystal methamphetamine worth more than ₹12 crore, has been appointed as a constable in the State police. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma handed him his appointment letter at a function marking International Drug Abuse Day on June 26. Borsing Bey, a resident of Karbi Along district, had failed to get through to the police despite several attempts at cracking the exams. His integrity earned him the job.

## ED arrests Deshmukh's two aides

After summons, former Maharashtra Home Minister seeks more time to appear



Money trail: NCP leader Anil Deshmukh's personal assistant Kundan Shinde being taken to a court in Mumbai. ■ PTI

with the agency and has nothing to hide.

It all started after former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh alleged in his letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray that Mr. Deshmukh directed former assistant police inspector Sachin Waze to collect ₹100 crore from hotel and bar owners in Mumbai. The Bombay High Court directed the CBI to launch an investigation after which Mr. Deshmukh resigned.

Following the preliminary inquiry, the CBI filed an FIR against Mr. Deshmukh and subsequently the ED started its own independent investigation.

Last week, the ED recorded a statement of one Mumbai police officer who works in the enforcement wing of the force.

The officer was earlier posted with the social service branch of the police and was part of a team which searched several pubs, hookah parlours, dance bars, bars and restaurants. Sources said that several more police officers are likely to be questioned.

According to ED sources, the agency is following a trail of ₹4 crore which is believed to be the money given to Mr. Deshmukh by 12 bar owners in Mumbai.

These searches come weeks after the Central Bureau of Investigation conducted searches of the houses and properties of Mr. Deshmukh and his aides.

The sources allege that the money was deposited in the accounts of shell companies and diverted to the accounts of establishments related to Mr. Deshmukh. The former Minister has already said that he is cooperating

## Rajdhani Express derails inside tunnel in Ratnagiri

All passengers safe, traffic restored

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

The Goa-bound Rajdhani Express from Hazrat Nizamuddin, with 309 passengers on board, derailed inside a tunnel in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra early on Saturday. Nobody was injured in the incident, officials said.

The front wheel of the locomotive of the special service (train no. 02414) to Madgaon derailed around 4.15 a.m. in the Karbude tunnel, approximately 325 km from Mumbai, the officials said.

The derailment led to disruption of traffic, which was



## INTERVIEW | ANURAG AGRAWAL

# 'No immediate threat from Delta Plus in places that had Delta outbreaks'

There will be reasonable cross-neutralisation by antibodies raised against Delta, says Anurag Agrawal, Director, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR)

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

**Anurag Agrawal**, Director, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR), Delhi, speaks on the Delta variant of the coronavirus being a global concern, the impact of mutation on the efficacy of vaccines, the cause of mutation in a virus and the difference between a strain and variant of a virus.

**What is the Delta variant? How is it different from the Delta Plus variant? Why has it become a global concern?**

A mutant variant of SARS-CoV-2, B.1.617.2 is now named the Delta variant. It has mutations in its spike protein, which makes it more transmissible and able to evade immunity. It has already spread to 80 countries across the world. After India, now it is spreading fast in the U.K., some States in the U.S., Singapore and southern China.

When the Delta variant develops additional mutations of possible importance, it is called Delta Plus. As of now, the K417N mutation,

which was previously seen in the Beta variant, is what people usually mean when they say Delta Plus. This is not a Delta/Beta hybrid, but a case of convergent evolution where mutations develop independently. The more correct name is AY.1 or AY.2.

In my opinion, regions that have already suffered from Delta outbreaks should not have a major problem with Delta Plus, since I expect there to be reasonable cross-neutralisation of Delta Plus by antibodies raised against Delta. Thus, I do not see an immediate threat or any reason to panic. Delta Plus is not rising faster than Delta in the previous month, so that is somewhat confir-

matory. However, the Central government is keeping a close watch, since any Delta sub-lineage is a variant of concern meriting further investigation.

**Are we going to see a third wave soon as some are predicting?**

A viral outbreak begins by infecting the most exposed or vulnerable population in an area and then spreads by infecting more and more people who are susceptible. People who get the infection and recover develop some natural immunity against the virus. Then, there are people who acquire immunity post vaccination.

When enough people become immune resistant, the virus cannot propagate easily and cases diminish. After some time, when the immunity fades or the virus evolves to evade it, the virus strikes back and starts



**The Central government is keeping a close watch, since any Delta sub-lineage is a variant of concern**

spreading again. You may call this cycle a wave.

If we look at the entire country, we cannot say that the recent wave was just a second wave. For example, in Delhi, it was the fourth wave – the first in June last year, then in September, followed

by one in November, and now. Many people want to know when there will be the next surge. I don't think it will come anytime soon as the Delta variant caused this surge across the country. A majority of people will have immunity against it right now. So, while I expect localised outbreaks, I don't expect a big national wave any time soon.

Of course, if the virus mutates drastically to evade this immunity and, more importantly, if people lower their guard as they did a few months back, there could certainly be another wave.

Right now, vaccination is going on fast, viral evolution takes time and we are tracking the mutations, so I am hopeful that the size of future waves can be kept small. Do remember that the virus is still there and while we have some time, we must use it well. So, we need to take reasonable precautions and

promote vaccination, but not panic.

**How does mutation impact the efficacy of the vaccines? And what leads to mutation in a virus?**

Some mutations on the virus's spike protein may not allow the antibodies developed after immunisation to bind to it. In such cases, the mutant can escape the immunity and cause disease. So far, currently available vaccines are efficient to prevent severe disease by mutants but have reduced effectiveness in preventing infection.

When a virus multiplies in a host's body, it makes millions of copies. But some copies are not perfect replicas, they develop some differences, which are termed as mutations.

The ability to escape human immunity makes some mutations advantageous. These may then propagate

better than parent lineages.

**What are double mutations or triple mutations in a virus?**

**Does India track mutations through genome sequencing? Why is it important?**

These are wrong choices of words used to oversimplify things. All current lineages carry many mutations. But only a few mutations, which lead to more infections or increase the severity of the disease, matter.

**What is the difference between a strain and a variant of a virus?**

Technically, it is one strain until there is a very major change in the virus, which is not yet the case. Variant or lineage is a better word to describe mutations in a virus that are leading to the changes being seen.

**Does it mean scientists will have to invent new vaccines for each mutation happening?**

We don't need to redesign the vaccine for every mutation. Some, for example, E484K mutants, may need tweaks to the vaccine. We are already seeing such versions for mRNA vaccines.

**Do vaccines that are currently available in India give protection against mutant COVID-19 virus?**

Yes, all available vaccines are protecting against severe disease. Mutations in a virus are inevitable. There is no need to panic. People need to take precautions and follow COVID appropriate behaviour (CAB). CAB is effective against all mutations. Also, as said earlier, vaccines are protecting against severe disease.

## WB sets up panel to probe fake vaccination

Health camps held for those duped

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA

West Bengal government on Saturday set up an expert committee to examine the effect of fake vaccination administered to the people and take corrective action. Hundreds have been administered fake vaccines at camps set up by Debanjan Deb, who posed as an IAS officer and official of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

The four-member committee has been tasked with submitting a detailed report immediately. During the day, the West Bengal Health Department organised health camps for people who had been administered fake vaccines. Doctors said there were no serious reactions to the fake vaccines. Primary investigation has revealed that people were administered antibiotic Amikacin instead of vaccines.

Meanwhile, the Kolkata police have arrested three more persons in connection with the scam. They have been identified as Sushanta Das, Rabin Sikdar and Santanu Manna, and, according to police, they aided Debanjan Deb in opening bank accounts.

Former Kolkata Mayor and Chairman of Board of Administrators Firhad Hakim said that anyone, including officials of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, found to be involved in the scam will not be spared. Mr. Hakim wondered how the banks could allow the fraud-



At present, no adverse effects have been noted in those who got the fake jabs.

sters to open and operate a bank account in the name of KMC.

A special investigation team has been set up to investigate the scam and officers from Kolkata Police's Detective Department were charged with leading the investigation.

Several people, including businessmen, have lodged complaints against Debanjan Deb, son of a retired bureaucrat, who had for months pretended to be the joint commissioner of the KMC.

The police have also questioned businessmen who provided holograms of KMC to him. In the past 24 hours, another case against the accused was registered by a contractor who alleged that he was cheated of ₹90 lakh.

A pharma company also alleged that Mr. Deb duped the firm.

The fake vaccination racket was busted after Trinamool Congress MP Mimi Chakraborty raised an alarm after she did not receive any message or certificate after getting vaccinated at one such camp.

## 61.9 lakh vaccine doses given

Seven-day rolling average of daily jabs in the country continues to increase

STAFF REPORTER  
CHENNAI

India administered 61.9 lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccines until 9 p.m. on Saturday. Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest number of vaccinations (9.7 lakh) followed by Maharashtra (7.2 lakh) and Uttar Pradesh (5.2 lakh).

Between June 1 and 25, 39.5 lakh doses were administered daily in India on average.

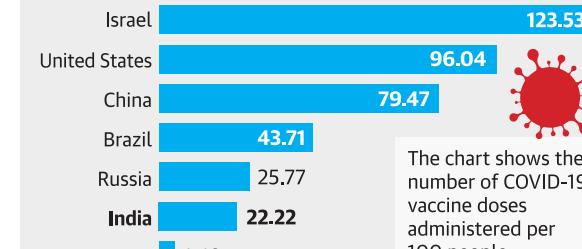
At the current rate, a total of 106.5 crore doses can be administered by December 31, 2021, which is around 81.5 crore doses less than those required to fully vaccinate all adults (188 crore doses).

To fully inoculate all adults by the end of this year, 82.4 lakh doses need to be given daily on average in the country.

The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccinations in the country continues to in-

### A smaller fraction

For every 100 people, India has administered a COVID-19 vaccine dose to around 22 so far. In comparison, vaccine coverage per 100 people is relatively higher in other BRICS countries such as China, Brazil and Russia



The chart shows the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered per 100 people

crease. It stood at 60.9 lakh on June 25, which is more than the 33.5 lakh recorded a week before (June 19).

### Significant rise

The figure was also significantly higher than the average daily doses recorded a month before (May 25), which was 21.2 lakh.

About 28% of adults in In-

dia, 59.1% of those aged above 45 years, and 66.4% of people aged above 60 years, were administered at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, until 9 p.m. on Saturday.

Only 4% of the country's population is fully vaccinated. The figures are based on the estimated population in 2021.

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# 'U.S. will continue to back Afghanistan'

Biden says America will 'help maintain Afghan military, provide economic and political support'

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

As violence increases in Afghanistan with the Taliban making territorial gains, U.S. President Joe Biden met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the Chairman of its High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, in the Oval Office on Friday. The meeting comes as the U.S. approaches a September 11 deadline to withdraw its troops from the country.

With the Afghan leaders in the Oval Office, Mr. Biden pledged the U.S.'s economic and political support. A handful of reporters were permitted to be present during cursory remarks prior to the meetings beginning.

"Our troops may be leaving but our support for Afghanistan is not ending in terms of support and maintenance of helping maintain their military as well as economic and political support," Mr. Biden said, adding that the Afghan's had to determine their future.

"Afghans are going to have to decide their future, what they want," he said. "The senseless violence has to stop but it's going to be very difficult. But we're going to stick with you and we're go-



Looking ahead: Joe Biden, right, meeting with Ashraf Ghani, centre, and Abdullah Abdullah, in the White House. ■AP

ing to do our best to see to it you have the tools you need," he added.

The U.S. President was joined by Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Sumantra Guha, who is the Senior South Asia Director at the National Security Council, USAID Administrator Samantha Power and others for the bilateral. Afghan Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar and National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib were among the representatives on the Afghan side.

The White House released a 'fact sheet' on Friday afternoon, highlighting its assistance to Afghanistan, includ-

ing a commitment to provide 3 million Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines and \$266 million in humanitarian assistance. Mr. Biden has requested the U.S. Congress for \$3.3 billion for the Defense Department's Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, the sheet said.

## Relocating Afghans

On Thursday, Mr. Biden said the U.S. would start relocating Afghans who were in danger of being targeted for working with U.S. troops.

Around 650 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan to protect the U.S. Embassy while additional troops will cover the airport until a Tur-

kish-led operation will likely take charge of that facility, the *Associated Press* reported earlier this week.

On Friday, Mr. Ghani said he respected Mr. Biden's decision to withdraw troops. He also said that the Afghan forces had recaptured six districts in the South and North.

"Just for your information, today, the Afghan Defence and Security Forces have retaken six districts, both in the south and the north," Mr. Ghani said. In a number of areas, local security forces have surrendered to the Taliban.

"Let us understand that in great moments of transition, things happen but you will see that with determination, with unity and with the partnership, we will overcome all odds," he said.

Earlier in the day, following his meeting with Mr. Austin (Mr. Abdullah was also there), Mr. Ghani was asked about a report on a U.S. intelligence assessment that the Afghan government could fall within six months of U.S. troop withdrawal.

"There have been many such predictions, and they have all proven – turned out false," Mr. Ghani replied.

After meeting Mr. Ghani,

Senate Minority Leader (Republican) Mitch McConnell said that the withdrawal of troops would leave Afghan forces alone to confront threats.

"The Taliban, emboldened by our retreat, is rolling back years of progress, especially for the rights of Afghan women, on its way to taking Kabul," he said.

Asked how the administration would respond to Mr. McConnell, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday, "I would first say it's important to take a step back and remember what we inherited."

She cited factors including an agreement between the Trump administration and the Taliban that U.S. troops would be withdrawn and the relatively low levels of U.S. and allied forces on the ground.

"That's the hand we were dealt. The President made a decision – which is consistent with his view that this was not a winnable war – to bring the U.S. troops home... after 20 years of fighting this war. And a big part of that decision was also around the fact that if we left our troops there, our troops would be at risk because the Taliban would be shooting at them by May 1st."

## Three killed in Germany knife attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WURZBURG

Investigators were racing on Saturday to pinpoint the motive of a man who went on a knife rampage in the German city of Wuerzburg, killing three people and leaving five seriously injured.

The suspect, a 24-year-old Somali who arrived in Wuerzburg in 2015, staged the attack in the city centre on Friday evening, striking at a household goods store before advancing to a bank. He was later overpowered by police after they shot him in the thigh.

Investigators found records showing that the man had been treated at a psychiatric institution, and police said he was not a known Islamist.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said the investigations will show what drove the man to go on his rampage.

But the far-right AfD party immediately seized on the violence that has erupted just three months before elections. The anti-immigration party's co-leader Joerg Meuthen noted that a witness had reportedly heard the suspect shouting "Allah Akbar" (God is greatest).



People take out a rally after the sentencing of Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis. ■AFP

the colour of their skin. That would be real justice."

Outside the courthouse, a crowd of about 50 people clapped hands or placed them on each other's shoulders. The reaction was subdued as people debated whether the sentence was long enough.

## "We'll take it"

At George Floyd Square, as the intersection where Floyd was pinned to the pavement is now known, members of the crowd broke into applause, and several said, "We'll take it."

Chauvin was immediately led back to prison. He showed little emotion when the judge pronounced the sentence.

Judge Peter Cahill went beyond the 12 1/2-year sentence prescribed under state guidelines, citing Chauvin's "abuse of a position of trust and authority and also the particular cruelty" shown to Floyd.

Floyd family attorney Ben Crump said the family had gotten "some measure of accountability" but is hoping Chauvin gets the maximum at his upcoming federal civil rights trial. Mr. Crump said this was the longest sentence a police officer has ever received in Minnesota.

But he added: "Real justice in America will be Black men and Black women and people of colour who will not have to fear being killed by the police just because



THE HINDU GROUP

# U.S. Justice Department to sue Georgia over election law

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

U.S. Attorney-General Merrick Garland announced that the Justice Department would be suing the State of Georgia over controversial voting rights laws passed in March this year on the grounds that they infringed on black voters' right to cast their ballot.

"Our complaint alleges that recent changes to Geor-

gia's election laws were enacted with the purpose of denying or abridging the right of black Georgians to vote on account of their race or colour," Mr. Garland said, adding that voting rights expansion had often been met with counter-efforts.

Georgia's Election Integrity Act cut the period during which potential voters could ask for absentee mail-in ballots, restricted locations for

ballot drop-boxes, outlawed the provision of food or water to those standing in line at the polls and prohibited breaks for ballot counters during counting. It also increased the control the state legislature has over the election apparatus.

Mr. Garland said Georgia casting a record number of ballots in the 2020 elections was a "cause for celebration", but in March 2021

the State's legislature passed laws to make it harder to vote. Mr. Biden was the first Democrat in nearly three decades to win Georgia, buoyed by support from African-American voters.

Georgia's Governor Brian Kemp criticised the lawsuit on Twitter. "This lawsuit is born out of the lies and misinformation the Biden administration has pushed against Georgia's Election In-

tegrity Act from the start," Mr. Kemp wrote.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump had alleged widespread fraud in the elections and has continued to seek to overturn the results.

Florida and Arizona are among states that have also passed laws to restrict voter access. These could be challenged by the DoJ.

Mr. Garland hinted that his department could take

on other cases where access to the ballot was being restricted.

"The Civil Rights Division [of the DoJ] continues to analyse other State laws that have been passed and we are following the progress of legislative proposals under consideration in additional states," he said, adding that where the DoJ believes civil rights have been violated, it would "not hesitate to act".

The fired white officer was convicted in April of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for pressing his knee against Floyd's neck for up to 9 1/2 minutes as the 46-year-old man gasped that he couldn't breathe and went limp on May 25, 2020.

Bystander video of Floyd's arrest on suspicion of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a corner store prompted protests around the world and led to scattered violence in Minneapolis and beyond, as well as demands for overhauling police departments.

# Colombia President says his chopper was hit by gunfire

The attack reportedly happened near the Venezuela border

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BAGOTA

President Ivan Duque said the helicopter he was flying in on Friday near the border with Venezuela was hit by gunfire in the first attack against a Colombian head of state in nearly 20 years.

No one was injured, and authorities did not say which side of the border the shots came from. Colombia regularly accuses Venezuela of harbouring Colombian rebels on its territory.

"It is a cowardly attack, where you can see bullet holes in the presidential aircraft," Mr. Duque said in a statement.

Mr. Duque said he was flying with the Defence and Interior Ministers and the Governor of Norte de Santander province, which borders Venezuela, when



Ivan Duque surrounded by bodyguards close to the presidential helicopter in Cucuta, Colombia. ■AP

the helicopter was attacked.

Photos released by the President's office showed the tail and main blade had been hit.

Mr. Duque said the aircraft's "safety features" prevented a "lethal" attack. "I have given very clear instructions to the entire security team to go after those who shot at the aircraft," he said.

## Delta variant forces new lockdowns

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SAINT PETERSBURG

Australia's largest city Sydney entered a two-week lockdown on Saturday to contain a sudden coronavirus surge and Russia's Saint Petersburg announced a record death toll, as several European nations lifted restrictions despite the global spread of a highly contagious COVID-19 variant.

While vaccination drives have brought down infections in numerous – mostly wealthy – countries, the rise of the Delta variant has stoked fears of new waves of a virus that has already killed nearly four million people.

Bangladesh announced that it would impose a new national lockdown from Monday over the variant, with offices shut for a week and only medical-related transport allowed.

Sydney's normally bustling harbourside centre was nearly deserted after people were ordered to stay home except for essential trips.

New Zealand, citing "multiple outbreaks" in Australia, announced a three-day suspension of its quarantine-free travel arrangement with its larger neighbour.

Meanwhile in Europe, Spain brought an end to mandatory outdoor mask-wearing on Saturday, a year after the rule was first introduced during Europe's devastating first wave of the virus.

The Netherlands also ended its rules on outdoor mask-wearing.

Israel, which has one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns, has seen infections linked to the variant surge.

Infections are also surging at an alarming rate in at least 12 countries in Africa, with the Delta variant fuelling unprecedented hospitalisations in the continent.

# IS YOUR CHILD AFRAID OF PUBLIC SPEAKING?

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Introducing

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**STEP**  
Standardised Test of English Proficiency  
from THE HINDU GROUP

ELSEWHERE



Iran grants clemency to over 5,000 prisoners

TEHRAN

Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei granted clemency to more than 5,000 prisoners to mark a Shia holiday, a statement on his official website said on Saturday. It gave no details of the identity of the 5,156 prisoners. AFP

U.S. report on 144 UFO sightings 'inconclusive'

WASHINGTON

A U.S. intelligence report on 144 sightings of aircraft or other devices apparently flying at mysterious speeds or trajectories, said most could not be explained, but did not rule out that some could be alien spacecraft. AFP

CM YK

## SNAPSHOTS



**Earth-borne aliens**  
An article in *Nature* describes over 2,000 nearby star systems at distances of less than 326 light years that could find and observe the Earth, if they were so inclined. The researchers used the Gaia eDR3 catalogue to perform this analysis. If there are curious lifeforms in these systems, they might want to observe us - aliens from their point of view.



**Missing link**  
An article in *Science* describes how researchers have unearthed, from Nether Ramla site, fossils dated 140,000 years to 120,000 years ago. These belong to a hitherto unknown species of humans and share resemblances with Neanderthals (teeth and jaw) and archaic *Homo* (skull). They had no chin and large teeth, which sets them apart from modern humans.

# Tackling vaccine hesitancy challenge in rural India

Addressing vaccine hesitancy in rural India would first of all require health systems to be honest and transparent

CHHAYA PACHAULI  
ANANT BHAN

In rural India concerns about COVID-19 vaccines are now increasingly commonplace. People voice their concern about what will happen to them if they get vaccinated and have doubts that the government is sending inferior quality vaccines to them. Vaccination sessions in local health centres often see very few or no takers.

From a public health and equity perspective, this is a cause for worry. The fear of vaccines and rural communities not only resisting but also outright rejecting vaccination is a reality. A few weeks ago, villagers in Barabanki (UP) jumped into a river to escape COVID-19 vaccinators. Efforts by local health authorities to create awareness are of little avail. There are contrasting dimensions to COVID-19 vaccine rollout: one where people are enthusiastically accepting it and the other of resistance. There are many diverse factors at play in this, which may go beyond the health concerns and have more to do with socio-anthropological aspects of health-seeking behaviour.

**Vaccine hesitancy**  
Vaccine hesitancy is not a recent phenomenon. It is neither limited

to a particular community or country, nor have we seen it only in the context of COVID-19. Various studies have shown that the acceptance of vaccines among African-American communities is relatively low in the U.S. Polls have also shown significant hesitancy among Hispanics and people in rural areas.

We have also seen vaccine hesitancy among the urban and the more educated or 'aware' populations, with pockets of populations of socio-economically well-off communities refusing to get their kids vaccinated. While vaccine hesitancy can lead to a firm rejection of vaccines, there's also a possibility of people changing their perceptions over time.

#### Socio-cultural context

Most of our fears and apprehensions stem from a deep impact of something adverse or unfavourable that we have personally experienced or our social circles have experienced. Over time these become our beliefs, our innate guards. In the context of the concerns described at the beginning of this article, we must look at vaccine hesitancy from a distinct lens of fear and not necessarily scepticism for new vaccines. These individuals,

and the communities they belong to, are probably not really challenging medical science, or questioning vaccine trial results, adequacy or inadequacy of evidence. Rather, they seem to indicate deep-seated fears and belief in conspiracies, the fear of perhaps being discriminated and deceived and of being omitted (from societal benefits).

Parts of rural Rajasthan, where we have seen high vaccine refusal rates, are also often poorly resourced, and often tribal. Communities in this region here have believed that the widespread poverty and the general backwardness that they had been pushed into is a result of historically institutionalised discrimination imposed on them by those in power. They believe that they have been systematically alienated of their land rights, forest rights and kept deprived of basic education and health care. All of this has led to a state of despondency and, more than that, a very strong feeling of distrust and resentment against government institutions and those in power.

Such contexts cannot be ignored while we try to understand what might be fuelling the extreme fear and resistance around COVID-19 vaccine. .

#### Building trust

Communities might not see the impact of a vaccine instantly, as

it's usually preventive in nature rather than curative. People are used to taking medications when they are unwell or in pain, and they may feel better almost immediately, but that's not the case with vaccines. On the contrary, vaccines administered to a healthy person may lead to occasional side-effects like fever, body aches, etc. Add to that rumours about deaths post-vaccination, and it may not be so easy for people to get convinced about the vaccines.

Responses to vaccines must also be discussed and analysed in conjunction with and in comparison to uptake of other health care services by a particular population. Addressing vaccine hesitancy in rural India would first of all require health systems to be honest and transparent. Create awareness, let people know how vaccines work, how they help prevent a disease, what are the probable side effects and how they can be managed. Health authorities need to be comfortable about people raising questions, while providing them answers as best as possible. Moreover, it's important to be patient with them. In most cases, it would take time before they change their minds, if at all. Being cognisant of local cultural sensitivities and working with trusted intermediaries is important in this effort.

Sustained and meaningful efforts need to be made to build



**Universal:** Vaccine hesitancy is not a recent phenomenon. It is neither limited to a particular community or country, nor have we seen it only in the context of COVID-19. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

people and systems accountable for gaps without the fear of being subjugated. Also, governments at both Union and State level must commit to investing more on health care and prioritising primary health care services. Quality health services in all aspects, and not just in sporadic efforts such as pandemic vaccination campaigns, should be delivered. Once we establish these, we might start seeing communities respond favourably and supportively to public health efforts.

(*Chhaya Pachauli is associated with Prayas, Chittorgarh, and Jan Swasthya Abhiyan and works on public health issues. Anant Bhan is a researcher in global health, bioethics and health policy.*)

## Clues from meteorite to Earth's mantle

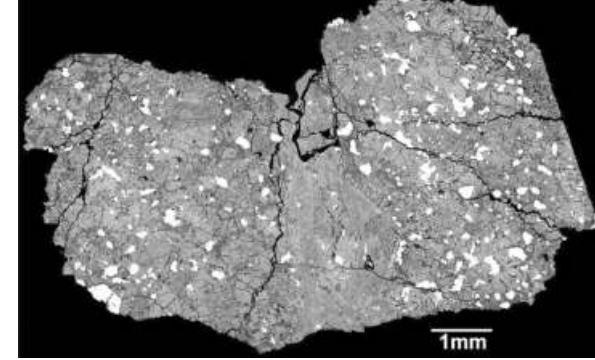
The meteorite originated in the asteroid belt, was sucked in by Earth's gravity

ASWATHI PACHA

On November 13, 2015, a meteorite fell near the town of Kamargaon in Assam, India. It weighed a little over 12 kg and scientists decoded its mineral composition and classified it as a chondrite, a variety of stony meteorite. A new study has now shown that by studying this meteorite and its minerals we may find new clues about the Earth's lower mantle.

#### Layers of the Earth

"We are always interested in knowing how this planet of ours was formed. The Earth has different layers - the upper, very thin crust, followed by the intermediate silicate mantle which starts from 30 km to 2,900 km depth, and then the centre iron-nickel alloy core. The mantle faces high temperature and pressure. So by studying these meteorites which may have experienced similar high pressure and temperature conditions, we can understand the inaccessible mantle



**Heavenly clue:** Back-scattered electron microscope image of the Kamargaon meteorite. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tion of olivine. "It is possible that when materials are transported to the lower mantle by convection or subduction, there would be high-temperature conditions in the lower mantle that would cause this dissociated reaction," adds Dr. Ghosh. The results suggest what processes and reactions may be involved in the formation of Earth's lower mantle.

**Sucked by gravity**  
"This meteorite originated from the asteroid belt, between Mars and Jupiter, and was somehow sucked by Earth's gravity. By studying different meteorites, we can understand in detail about their parent body and in the process understand our own planet and its formation," adds first author Kishan Tiwari, research scholar, IIT Kharagpur. "The question remained, however, if this process we identified could actually occur in nature. The mechanism needs to be verified in natural terrestrial samples in future studies."

#### Olivine dissociation

Using new high-resolution electron microscopy and spectroscopy, researchers studied this dissociation reaction of olivine in the Kamargaon meteorite. They noted an alternative mechanism and reactions that may be driving the transformation

## Why bacteria develop multi-drug resistance

*E. coli* were evolved in fluctuating and steady environments and observed

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

During evolution, the fitness costs experienced by bacteria under constant and fluctuating environments pose an unsolved problem. One way of seeing this is through the example of multi-drug resistance.

It is not clear why some bacteria evolve multi-drug resistance while others do not. New research from the Population Biology Lab at IISER Pune could hold a key to this and a similar class of puzzles.

#### Public health menace

Multi-drug resistance is a menace in public health, however it is a fascinating problem to an evolutionary biologist who sees it from this angle: possessing multi-drug resistance implies that the bacteria is adept at handling multiple antibiotics simultaneously. This would increase its fitness appreciably. Given that antibiotics exert a very strong selection pressure, it would appear that every bacteria in nature

can become multi-drug resistant, which is not the case. "One of the reason given for why that does not happen is fitness cost," says Sutirth Dey, in whose lab the study was carried out.

When bacteria become fit in one environment, they either lose fitness or fail to increase fitness in other environments. "Our study is showing that when the environment is fluctuating, large (but not small) populations can by-pass this effect," he adds.

Yashraj Chavhan, Sarthak Malusare, and Sutirth Dey studied populations of small and large sizes across different constant and fluctuating environments and then subjected the evolved populations to whole-genome, whole-population sequencing analysis. They found that small populations acquire a certain set of mutations which allow them to survive in one environment while paying a cost in others. Large populations also develop these mutations but, in addition,

carbon sources similarly. "Which carbon source is available impacts the bacterium's ability to survive and grow. Since this is a very basic requirement for survival and growth, we decided to study what the availability of different kinds of carbon sources does to their evolution," says Prof Dey.

The study showed that, all else being equal, whether the bacteria pay fitness costs or not will depend on the population size they evolve in. Further, on doing whole-genome, whole population sequencing, the researchers found that the larger populations contained greater number of mutations. The smaller populations only had mutations related to metabolism of one kind of carbon source whereas the larger populations had known mutations for metabolism of multiple types of carbon sources. "We believe that this is the reason that the larger populations were able to bypass the costs," he clarifies.

**Our study is showing that when the environment is fluctuating, large (but not small) populations can by-pass this effect.**

SUTIRTH DEY  
IISER, PUNE

tion, have certain compensatory mutations that together give them fitness to survive in different environments. Thus, population size determines the kind of mutations available to the bacteria, which in turn, leads to the type of fitness costs they evolve.

#### Population size matters

In the paper, published in *Ecology Letters*, the group studied approximately 480 generations of *E. coli* in four types of steady environments consisting of different carbon sources: galactose, thymidine, maltose and sorbitol; also in one fluctuating environment in which the carbon source changed unpredictably between these four. Bacteria cannot use all

## Blindness burden in India: restoring vision to the needy

As populations age, there is increasing burden of vision-related disorders



#### SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

About 9.1% of the world's population in 2019, 703 million people, were 65 and over: the result of an acceleration in the ageing of the world populace. By 2050 it is estimated that this will rise to 1.5 billion (15.3%). As populations age, there is an increasing disease burden of vision-related disorders. Several of the most common reasons for blindness or moderate-to-severe visual impairment - cataract, under-corrected refractive error, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy are avoidable if there are mechanisms available for early detection and intervention. Offering treatment to prevent or restore vision would be a noble deed of great value. Indeed, many nations across the globe are bravely doing their best, offering vision restoration with great commitment.

Data for the last 30 years, from a major study on the

global burden of eye disease, published in *The Lancet* in February 2021, has noted that although much progress has been made in reducing blindness in this period, there is much scope for reducing the impact of blindness and vision impairment in our society. There is considerable variation between countries. There are over 1.5 crore people over the age of 50 with cataracts in the world today. A further 8.6 crores have severe refractive errors which can be corrected by properly prescribed spectacles. It is vital that more countries should get involved in this effort in their regions so that the number of needlessly blind people reduces in number.

**Needless blindness**  
Peninsular India, comprising Karnataka, some eastern parts of Maharashtra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Pudu-



**Early detection:** Several reasons for moderate-to-severe visual impairment such as glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy are avoidable if there is early intervention. • GETTY IMAGES

cherry, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, has a population of about 36 crores. About 13 lakhs of these are blind, with 76 lakhs suffering from easily correctable cataracts and refractive errors. If we can devise viable methods to reduce this needless blindness by offering treatment modes, that would be a major advancement in reducing this burden.

**Notable centres**  
Indeed, there are three notable centres in the peninsular area, the Aravind Eye Care System at Madurai, Sankara Nethralaya in Chennai (and Bengaluru), and the L. V. Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad. The former two cater to the needs of blind people in

the city and its suburbs, and Aravind also caters to people in several districts in Tamil Nadu through mobile facilities, and free treatment for the needy; so does Sankara Nethralaya through similar facilities in Chennai and its suburbs, and at Bengaluru and its suburbs, catering to the needy poor for free). L V Prasad Eye Institute has set up a system that covers the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, (and Nanded in Maharashtra) by establishing what has become known as the Rural Eye Health Pyramid. This pyramid comprises over 208 rural "Vision Centres", situated at the bottom tier of the pyramid, each of which offers eye care services to a local rural

population of about 500 people, essentially free of charge, by providing spectacles, and advising the cataract patient to go to the nearest ophthalmologist and so forth. A crucial link to communities is the number of 'vision guardians', individuals trained to be involved in their local environment and communicate with people about eye health.

In the second tier of the pyramid are 21 Secondary Centres such as rural eye care clinics, for people in the districts. We have three Tertiary Centres (each with its branches), which also do research work in ophthalmology, besides their regular clinical activities.

The Quaternary Centre at the top of the pyramid at LVPEI Hyderabad oversees and monitors in real-time the work being carried out at the tiers and corrects what needs to be done, around the clock.

What is most appreciable

mid have come forward to support the cause of the Rural Eye Health Pyramid: a total of about 1,000 at the village level (bottom of the pyramid) and about a dozen at the secondary centres at the district level. These are the local equivalents of the Gates or the Tata Foundations, and we are deeply obliged to their philanthropy.

#### More pyramids needed

What about other ophthalmology centres across India? Yes, e.g., Aditya Jyot Centre, which caters to Mumbai, particularly Dharavi, where a million people live in a little over 2 square km of space; Project Prakash in Delhi and Western U.P., and at Ahmedabad, Haryana, and elsewhere. They are no doubt analysing the Pyramid Model, improving on it and will come out with their versions, based on the geographic and demographic conditions, and we welcome them and help them, in case they need to. Indeed, we need more pyramids across the whole of India so that no one in our nation be needlessly blind at all; let all of India enjoy Vision 20-20!

dbala@lpeio.org



#### Question Corner

Long journeys

**Do insects migrate? Which insect has the longest migration route?**

Many dragonflies, beetles, butterflies, locusts and moths are known to migrate during the breeding season and the distance travelled varies with species. Most insects travel in large groups and scientists have been studying these movements for several years.

A recent study (*PNAS*) noted that the painted lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) can make 12,000 to 14,000 kilometre round trips. This is the longest annual insect migration circuit so far known.

Found in sub-Saharan Africa, the butterfly is able to travel to Europe, crossing the Sahara Desert when weather conditions are favourable. The

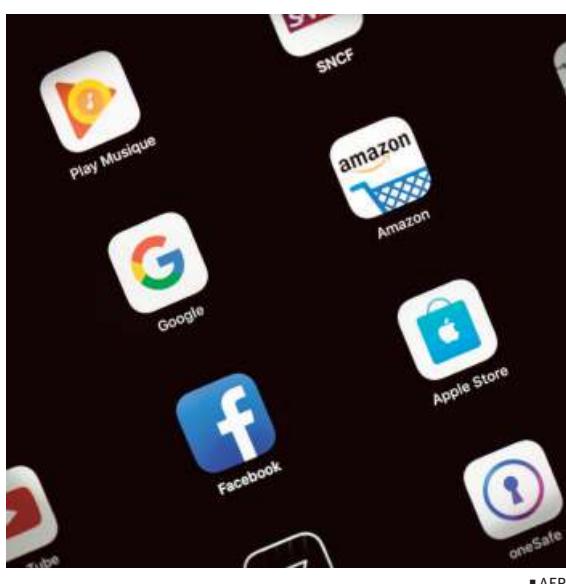


**Painted lady:** This butterfly is a long distance migrant. • GETTY IMAGES

caterpillars thrive in wetter winter conditions of sub-Saharan Africa and the adults migrate to North Africa during wet spring. They then cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe.

Simulations in the laboratory showed that favourable tailwinds between Africa and Western Europe help these insects in transcontinental travel. They fly about one to three kilometres above sea level with a maximum speed of around 6 metres per second. The researchers studied a similar butterfly species and calculated that the painted lady may have enough body fat to sustain 40 hours of non-stop flying.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



## Reining in the Big Four

Why is the U.S. readying new rules for the tech giants and how will they impact the industry?

P.J. GEORGE

**The story so far:** On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee voted to advance six Bills outlawing business practices that sit at the core of tech companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple. The package of Bills, which would stop the Big Tech from competing on the platforms they run, will become law once they are passed in the House and in the Senate. These Bills constitute the biggest action to come out of the anti-trust scrutiny these companies have been facing in the U.S. over the last few years. While many nations have taken legal or legislative routes to limit the influence of the Big Four, this is the first major move on their home turf.

**What is 'anti-trust'?** Anti-trust is an American term for laws meant to prevent unfair business practices such as monopolisation, which leads to fewer choices for consumers and higher prices. A prime example of anti-trust law in action is when Microsoft was sued in 1998 for giving away the Internet Explorer web browser for free with its Windows operating system, which led to the collapse of browser-maker Netscape. Microsoft was found guilty of using its market dominance in operating systems to build a monopoly in browsers and was forced to open up Windows to other developers.

The major anti-trust laws in the U.S. are the Sherman Act of 1890 and the Clayton Act of 1914, and the Federal Trade Commission is charged with upholding them. The evolution of technology has, however, taken the edge off these anti-trust laws. A report submitted in October last year after a 16-month probe by the U.S. Congress stated that since rise in consumer prices is the currently accepted indicator of unfair practices, it is difficult to gauge the actions of companies like Google and Facebook that make money off advertising and give many products away for free.

The new package of six Bills that is now in Congress is an attempt to add more teeth to anti-trust proceedings against new-age tech firms.

**What's in the Bills?** The Platform Competition and Opportunity Act would prevent big tech companies from nipping competition in the bud by buying up smaller rivals, like what Facebook had done by buying up Instagram for \$1 billion.

The Ending Platform Monopolies Act would prevent companies from becoming players on their own platforms, like how Amazon sells its own brands, competing with smaller retailers that use its e-commerce platform; Apple's chokehold over developers on App Store is another example.

The Augmenting Compatibility and Competition by Enabling Service Switching (ACCESS) Act promotes interoperability, forcing platforms to let users take data such as contacts lists and profile information with them while migrating to other platforms.

The Merger Filing Fee Modernization Act increases the government fee on large corporate mergers to help fund anti-trust law enforcement.

The American Choice and Innovation Online Act would prevent companies from giving preferences to their own products in the marketplaces they run, such as Google search results prioritising YouTube videos or Amazon highlighting its own brands.

The State Antitrust Enforcement Venue Act would prevent companies from shifting anti-trust cases to courts that could be favourable to them.

**Will they become law?** Over the last few years, the Big Tech has lost favour with both political parties in the U.S. While Republicans perceive an anti-conservative bias in these companies on issues such as free speech, Democrats have been up in arms over weak data privacy and fake news proliferation.

These Bills enjoy support primarily from the Democrats, with some Republicans thrown in. However, legislative procedures such as a filibuster may force the Bills' supporters to get more Republicans on board. The 50-50 split in the Senate, which is the Upper House, will be another obstacle to surmount.

The tech companies also have their supporters in both camps. According to news reports, some Republican legislators see these laws as excessive government control on private enterprises, which is anathema to the conservatives. On the other hand, for some Democratic legislators from California, on whose turf these companies sit, any loss to these companies translates to a loss in incomes and employment in their domains.

**How will the move affect India?** Any behavioural change that these companies may be forced to adopt in the U.S., which is their largest market, would likely be adopted in all their global markets as well. India already has versions of some of these laws, such as the one that prevents Amazon from selling brands that it owns on its platform. If implemented globally, a level playing field for brand visibility on Google and Amazon will benefit retailers in India.

## ED transfer of defaulters' assets to PSBs

Will handing over the properties of Mallya, Modi and Choksi to banks help tide over the bad loans crisis?

PRAKASH PERUMAL J.

**The story so far:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday came out with a statement saying that it had seized assets worth ₹18,170.02 crore belonging to three fugitive businessmen. The seized assets belong to liquor baron Vijay Mallya and diamond traders Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi – all three left India before law enforcement agencies could nab them for fraud. The ED estimated that the seized assets would help public sector banks recuperate about 80% of their losses from the loans given to companies connected to these three individuals. It also noted that assets worth 40% of the total loss amount had already been handed over to the banks concerned. This included cash worth approximately ₹6,600 crore obtained through the sale of shares. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman later said that fugitive and economic offenders would be actively pursued by the government and that their properties would be attached for the dues to be recovered.

### Why did the ED seize and sell the assets of the businessmen?

The three fugitive businessmen have been outside India for a few years now after allegedly cheating banks. The ED stated that these businessmen caused a total loss of ₹22,585.83 crore to banks by "siphoning off the funds through their companies". Mr. Modi and Mr. Choksi have been pursued for committing fraud using unauthorised letters of undertaking (LOUs) that caused a loss of about ₹11,500 crore to the Punjab National Bank. It has been alleged that Mr. Modi colluded with Punjab National Bank employees in Mumbai to create unauthorised LOUs in his favour. On the other hand, Mr. Mallya has been accused of cheating banks of ₹9,000 crore by siphoning business loans towards other purposes. Banks also alleged that Mr. Mallya had offered personal guarantees for the loans taken by his business.

Indian authorities have been trying to extradite these businessmen to India to prosecute them under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and other laws. In 2019, the ED managed to convince courts to declare Mr. Mallya and Mr. Modi fugitive economic offenders under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, allowing it to seize assets owned by them. Of the ₹18,170.02 crore seized by the ED under the PMLA, assets worth ₹9,041.5 crore have already been handed over to banks, according to the agency.

### Will the recovered money help banks?

The actual cash worth ₹6,600 crore transferred by the ED will obviously help public sector banks, which have been troubled by bad loans, to recoup some of their losses. However, the recovered amount is unlikely to have any major impact on the overall health of banks. This is simply because bank losses attributed to these fugitives are tiny compared to the overall amount of bad loans in the books of banks. It is estimated that the total bad loans of Indian banks stood at more than ₹8 lakh crore at the end of September 2020. Some believe it could easily cross ₹10 lakh crore by the end of the financial year 2022 due to the impact of the two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic on repayments.

Further, doubts remain over the actual value of the remaining assets that have been seized by the ED. The money that has been transferred to banks came from the sale of Mr. Mallya's shares in United Breweries Holding Limited (UBHL). Other assets seized by the ED belonging to these fugitives may not be as liquid as the UBHL shares. For example, when banks tried several times in the past to sell assets, such as various properties, owned by Mr. Mallya, the sales did not attract significant buyer interest. So, it is likely that banks may face hurdles trying to sell illiquid assets owned by the trio and may not actually be able to recover the amounts cited by the ED in



Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi used unauthorised letters of undertaking that caused a loss of about ₹11,500 crore to the Punjab National Bank. ■ REUTERS

Addressing the problem of crony lending will require structural changes in the banking system in India.

Currently, according to experts, the sector is dominated by public sector banks, which are prone to political influence of various kinds

its statement on Wednesday.

### Why is the recovery process long?

It is also worth noting the delays that have plagued the entire recovery process and the costs associated with such delays. Banks were unable to sell the UBHL shares belonging to Mr. Mallya as the sale was contested in courts by various parties. In fact, it was only after a PMLA court order last month restored the UBHL

shares from the control of the ED to the banks that the current sale has transpired. The ED had earlier moved the PMLA court after the Debt Recovery Tribunal, Bengaluru, also ruled in favour of transferring the shares to the banks.

The true scale of the losses to banks may also be higher when the cost of interest foregone by banks since the defaults is taken into consideration. Even when a borrower defaults, banks need to continue paying interest to lenders. There is also the opportunity cost of the interest that the banks could have earned if they had lent the money to a more eligible borrower.

### What are some systemic issues?

The seizure and the liquidation of assets may help in paying back a significant share of the liabilities that these fugitives owe to banks. However, efforts to extradite them are likely to continue as they are accused by banks of not just default but also various other frauds, including siphoning off loans that were sanctioned for business purposes. It is unclear when the trio will actually reach India, given the legal procedures involved in their extradition process.

More importantly, many still believe that these asset seizures do not go far enough to address the root

problem of banking scams in India, which is systemic. For one, loans given by public sector banks to powerful industrialists were often influenced by crony, non-business considerations. When the Indian economy was booming, most of the loans that were disbursed by public sector banks were concentrated towards a small group of industrialists. There was also very little oversight of the purposes for which these loans were put to use. At one point, these loans to corporates constituted almost three-fourths of the total bad loans in the banking system. This issue was brought to light by former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Raghuram Rajan, during his tenure.

Addressing the problem of crony lending will require deep structural changes in the banking sector. Currently, India's banking industry is dominated by public sector banks, which are heavily prone to political influence of various kinds, according to experts. This affects the health of banks, which are forced to lend as per special interests while ignoring any business sense. Structural reforms against this, however, are hard to come by, given that they will upset special interest groups.

### Is the new debt resolution regime robust?

Despite laws such as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016, recovery of dues from defaulters remains a prolonged process for banks as courts are burdened with cases.

Under the new regime, the amount lenders have managed to recover from defaulters has improved significantly when compared to the pre-IBC regime. This is true even as a few large corporate resolutions may have skewed the numbers in favour of the IBC regime. The time taken for recoveries from corporate defaulters has also improved from about four years to about 400 days. However, cases have been piling up and the existing Benches of the National Company Law Tribunal have been unable to dispose of cases within deadlines. This may extend the resolution process of troubled companies into several years, which was the case before the IBC regime. Further, when the resolution of a company is deemed infeasible and the company is liquidated, the recovery made by lenders is abysmal due to the absence of a robust market for the sale of stressed assets.

## Jet Airways revival plan gets NCLT clearance

Given the present state of the aviation sector, what are the challenges the airline faces before it can take off again?

JAGRITI CHANDRA

**The story so far:** Two years after Jet Airways – at the time India's second-largest full-service airline – halted operations in 2019 as it ran out of cash, the carrier has a real chance at getting airborne again. The Mumbai Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) this week approved a resolution plan from a consortium comprising UAE-based businessman Murari Lal Jalan and U.K.-based Kalrock Capital, clearing the decks for the airline's takeover and a potential revival.

**What is the resolution plan approved by the NCLT?** Against the claims totalling ₹15,432 crore that the resolution professional had admitted from operational and financial creditors, the Jalan-Kalrock consortium has offered to pay creditors, including banks, ₹1,183 crore over a five-year period.

Of this, the first tranche of ₹280 crore would be paid in cash after 180 days of the new promoters taking ownership of the beleaguered airline. A second instalment of ₹105 crore would follow in 730 days. The balance would be paid through a mix of cash, proceeds generated from the sale of assets and from the cash flows generated by the airline annually.

Banks would also get a 9.5% stake in the airline, while the consortium would hold 89.79%. Employees would get to own 0.5% of the airline's equity capital, while public shareholding would be at 0.21%.

Based on this offer, the Committee of Creditors, led by the State Bank of India, had voted the consortium as the winning bidder last October. "That the lenders agreed to such a massive clean-up is surprising and it can at best be termed as a face-saver," said Kapil Kaul, CEO & Director, CAPA Advisory.

**Are there any caveats to the proposal?** When Jet Airways halted operations in 2019, the government distributed its airport slots (the time-specific landing and take-off rights at various airports) among various other Indian carriers. At the time, the government had stated that the move was only "temporary" and that the airline's new owners could get the slots back. However, the government has since reversed its position. It informed the NCLT that the slots could not be returned to the new owner of Jet Airways as other airlines had made investments in acquiring



Jet Airways aircraft parked at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai in 2019. ■ REUTERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a drastic fall in passenger demand. The number of domestic travellers shrank to 53 million in FY21 from 140 million in FY20, forcing airlines to ground 50%-70% of their fleet and fly half-empty planes, which led to massive losses for airlines

slots, such as early morning departures out of Delhi and Mumbai, which Jet Airways had previously held, could end up being a thorny issue.

**What other issues need to be addressed before the airline can take to the skies?** Resolution Professional Ashish Chhawchharia has said the airline could start flying by the end of this year. Before that, it will have to obtain various approvals and certifications, including

an air operator's permit, security clearances for the new owners, airworthiness of planes, permission to import planes, etc. The induction of pilots and their refresher training could take two to three months if the new owners rehire old employees. Similarly, cabin crew and engineers would also have to undergo refresher training.

The consortium will also need to hire a dedicated management team to run the airline and help it negotiate fresh contracts for the supply of a range of flight-related services, including fuel, catering and ground handling.

### How viable could Jet Airways be and what is the current aviation industry scenario?

Jet Airways may face big challenges once it resumes operations, given the present state of the sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a drastic fall in passenger demand. The number of domestic travellers shrank to 53 million in FY21 from 140 million in FY20. This forced airlines to ground 50%-70% of their fleet and fly half-empty planes, resulting in massive losses. The country's largest airline, IndiGo, saw a decline of almost 60% in revenue from flights in the financial year 2021.

CAPA has forecast total losses for Indian airlines over two years of the pandemic to be about \$8 billion and has estimated that airlines would need almost \$5 billion of capital infusion just to survive. In such an environment, a new player would need deep pockets.

CPC

# Back to the future for China's communists

The ruling party, which turns 100 on July 1, is moving away from the Deng-era principles of collective leadership and hide-and-bide policies to the Mao-inspired strongman politics

ANANTH KRISHNAN

In February, the ruling Communist Party of China, which turns 100 on July 1, came out with a new edition of *A Short History of the Communist Party of China*, a text that provides the authoritative version of party history.

This text matters. It offers the template for how party history is taught everywhere in China, whether in schools and colleges, study sessions for party officials or the military, or even in the increasingly active party units of private enterprises.

The 2021 edition, coinciding with the party's centenary, comes with noteworthy changes. Past versions of the text noted Mao Zedong's great successes – chiefly, his leading a ragtag group of ill-equipped revolutionaries to an unlikely victory, against tall odds, in a brutal civil war with the Kuomintang and amid Japanese occupation, and laying the foundations for the country's progress, for which Mao remains venerated in China.

They did, also, acknowledge his failures, in keeping with the formula set by the party's second-generation leader, Deng Xiaoping, whose pronouncement that Mao was "70% correct and 30% wrong" allowed for some discussion of his mistakes after decades of blind deification. The texts, for instance, mentioned the calamitous Great Leap Forward, which devastated agriculture, led to famine, and caused more than 30 million deaths, and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that led to the persecution of mil-

lions, as it warned of the historical lessons.

The latest edition, however, has seemed to ignore the Deng formula. Gone is any discussion of Mao's wrongs, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, with the Maoist years only remembered for industrial and technological progress. Also gone is another important Deng formula, which stressed the need for what the party calls collective leadership. His state-

**In 1978, China's GDP was \$149 billion, 1.75% of global GDP. Forty years later, its \$12.2 trillion economy would account for 15% of global GDP and become the second-largest**

ment that "building a nation's fate on the reputation of one or two people is very unhealthy and very dangerous" no longer finds mention. Instead, the text says, referring to China's fifth-generation – and current – leader, Xi Jinping, "Amid ten thousand majestic mountains, there must be a main peak."

## Rebels to rulers

History, anywhere in the world, is written and rewritten by the victors. Historical narrative is, for rulers, a key source of legitimacy. In China, how the Communist Party tells its history – what it chooses to emphasise, and what it chooses to downplay

or entirely leave out – has seen as many twists and turns as the changes it has presided over since coming to power, as it evolved from a revolutionary party to a ruling one.

The CPC was founded in 1921 by two Chinese intellectuals, Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu. The party, in its early years, offered an attractive alternative to young Chinese, especially during the corruption of the Kuomintang period, as it drew inspiration not only from Marx and Lenin, but from the idealism of the May 4, 1919 movement. The Peking University scholar Jiang Shigong, who has grown into one of the more influential intellectuals of the Xi era, described in a 2018 essay the party's first stage, from 1921 until 1949, as one of revolution and nation-building. The second stage from 1949 to 1978, he wrote rather charitably, was of "standing up", thanks to the achievements of the Mao years – including land reform and vastly improved health and education – although, in keeping with the recent trend, he ignored the calamities.

**Reform and revival**  
Regardless of the current tendency to recast the Mao years, it is what Mr. Jiang describes as the third stage (1978-2012) of "getting rich" that turned around the fortunes of a party in crisis. In one sense, 1978 was a far more significant liberation than 1949, as Deng pushed China into the reform era and sought to free it from the two vice-like grips of ideology and one-man totalitarianism.



On one of his "spark lighting trips" to push reform in Sichuan in 1978, Deng would, as Ezra Vogel writes in his biography of Deng, mock those who said "if a farmer has three ducks he is socialist, but if he has five ducks he is a capitalist". "Socialism is not poverty," he argued, as he made the case for "reform and opening up". Deng, Vogel argues, was a pragmatist with a knack for changing things without saying he was changing them. He criticised "collective responsibility" as being a system where "no one was responsible" but sang praises to communism. He said "it does not matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches the mouse"

but officially extolled "Mao Zedong Thought" as the party's abiding ideology. He said "some will get rich first" without saying that economic growth would, inevitably, bring inequality.

Deng's view was simple. "If we can't grow faster than the capitalist countries," he said, "then we can't show the superiority of our system". And grow faster China did. In 1978, China's GDP was \$149 billion, 1.75% of global GDP and only slightly higher than India's \$140 billion. China's \$156 per capita GDP was less than India's \$203. Forty years later, its \$12.2 trillion economy would account for 15% of global GDP, grow to five times India's, and be-

come the world's second-largest, establishing a once isolated state as a powerhouse of trade and lynchpin of global supply chains.

The transition was not without hiccups, and Deng's liberalisation was firmly limited to matters economic, as the brutal crushing of the 1989 protests would show. Neither was Deng as powerful as Mao, with the continued conservative resistance stalling his reforms process, which were given a second wind after his famous "southern tour" of 1992 that would usher in years of double-digit growth. The Deng legacy of China focusing on growth, while "biding time, hiding brightness" in foreign

affairs, was broadly carried forward by his successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. That famous maxim, too, was among those that no longer merited mention in the party's latest official history.

## Growing strong

Mr. Jiang, the Peking University scholar, says the current – and fourth – stage of the party's evolution, starting in 2012 (nearly coinciding with the ascension of Mr. Xi) is about "growing strong". There is no longer a need to bide or hide. It is a time for resolving the contradictions that emerged from the third phase, from income inequality and calls for political reform to corruption and the absence of ideological tethers for the party, and ending a growing debate within that looked to "pit the Deng Xiaoping era against the Mao Zedong era".

Mr. Jiang justifies the Mao-inspired strongman solution favoured by the current leader, Mr. Xi, who ended two of Deng's most significant legacies. Collective leadership – as well as the term limits instituted by Deng – has been disbanded, while ideology is back with a bang, with stricter enforcing of what Mr. Xi calls political discipline. Some of the modest freedoms of the Deng, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras are being narrowed. As China opened up to the world, so did its media and universities. Scholars embraced exchanges, while journalists pushed the bar where they could, exposing local-level corruption and power abuses even if the central leadership remained off limits. Today, classrooms and newsrooms are the most controlled they have been since the 1970s.

Others, such as Xu Zhan-grun at Tsinghua University, disagree, viewing the dismantling of collective leadership and term limits as "a negation of the last 30 years" and ending a system "that afforded the people of China a measure of political certainty and bolstered international confidence that our country seemed on the way to becoming a modern polity". As the party turns 100, it stares at yet another inflection point in its history, but what the next chapter will say remains anyone's guess.

## GREAT BARRIER REEF

# A fabled wonder in danger

Climate change has led to 3 events of coral bleaching in 2016, 2017 and 2020

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

As a fabled wonder of the natural world, Australia's Great Barrier Reef and its diversity of marine life ranging from corals to whales found a place on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1981. Made up of a couple of thousand individual reefs off the continent's northeastern coast, it has a geological history going back an estimated 23 million years to the Miocene epoch, and has survived many challenges.

The GBR is about 2,300 km long and extends across a breathtaking 346,000 sq. km. area, hosting an assemblage of fishes and invertebrates in the reefs, dugongs, green turtles and other species in seagrass meadows, and sharks, rays, anemones, sponges, worms and myriad other forms all of which need a delicate ecological balance to thrive.

Idealistic as it appears, the reef system faces severe environmental threats, and this year, the World Heritage Committee has sounded a warning by drawing up a resolution to inscribe the reef on the 'List of World Heritage in Danger'. The Committee took note of the 2019 Outlook Report of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which says in no uncertain terms that the long-term state of the ecosystem has further deteriorated from poor to very poor. At the heart of the crisis is climate change, which has led to three big events of



coral bleaching in 2016, 2017 and 2020. UNESCO's move to list the GBR as 'in danger' brings pressure on Australia's government to review its record on responding to climate change. As a continent that has recorded a rise in its average temperature by 1.4 degrees C since 1910, the devastating fires of 2019-20 were another wake-up call on climate change aggravating extreme events.

## Destructive impacts

The World Heritage Committee resolution calls upon Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government to heed the conclusions of the Outlook Report, particularly on accelerated action needed to address climate change with the Paris Agreement goals in focus. The updated Reef 2050 Plan that the country is pursuing for conservation should incorporate this. Further, the government should stop destructive impacts of human activity such as land-

based and farm run-off that has polluted waters, coastal development and other commercial uses, it adds.

The World Heritage Centre, the administrative body, had sent a letter to Australia in 2019 raising concerns "about the approval of the Carmichael Coal Mine", a controversial project with impacts for the reef and the climate, to which it got a response noting "that the project's approval is subject to over 180 regulatory conditions and that compliance with these conditions will be monitored."

Canberra's response to the UNESCO Committee's move was to allege a conspiracy, hinting at pressure from China, which holds the chairmanship of the panel.

Close scrutiny of the GBR shows a variety of ecological impacts from environmental stresses, including climate change. The Outlook Report records harm to "the abundance and health of many species groups, in-

cluding corals, invertebrates, some bony fishes, marine turtles and seabirds" from the rising sea temperatures and thermal extremes due to global warming. It adds that since 2014, there has been widespread and significant declines in many coral species. In 2018, coral larvae declined by 89% averaged across the region, arising from consecutive bleaching events, as the adult broodstock was reduced.

Warmer temperatures led to "feminisation of green turtles originating from nesting beaches in the northern Region, potentially leading to significant scarcity or absence of adult males in the future". Coral growth is also endangered by the proliferation of crown-of-thorns starfish, which consumes them.

Some relief is available from the reported recovery of humpback whales, and slow gain in southern populations of green turtles. Urban coastal dugong populations also show an improved breeding rate. But overall, the reef is under threat.

A magnet for eco-tourists, the vast expanse coloured by algal hues draws thousands annually. The report says that in 2015-16, tourism, fishing, recreational uses and scientific activities contributed an estimated \$6.4 billion to the Australian economy, a rise of about 14% since 2011-12. Without resolute action on climate and pollution threats, though, all sectors stand to lose.

PEERZADA ASHIQ

The People's Alliance for the Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a group of five political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, was in the spotlight on June 24 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met leaders from eight political parties in J&K, the first such meeting since the erstwhile semi-autonomous State was split into two Union Territories (UT) of J&K and Ladakh and its special status was taken away on August 5, 2019.

Otherwise sworn rivals in the battlefield of electoral politics, the five parties – the National Conference (NC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the People's Conference (PC), the Awami National Conference (ANC), the CPI(M) and the J&K People's Movement – forged the alliance on October 15, 2020.

The sole motive of the alliance, according to its head Farooq Abdullah, "is to fight for the restoration of the August 4, 2019 position".

The journey of the Gupkar Alliance, as the PAGD is widely called, has already witnessed many ups and downs. It was after the sun-down of August 3, 2019 that the PDP's Mehbooba Mufti started visiting her rivals' houses amid speculation that the Centre was planning something big.

J&K's political class was clueless then and could not read the reasons for the unprecedented security measures taken by the Centre in

the State, such as asking tourists to leave and stopping the Amarnath yatra in the middle.

On August 4, 2019, the Gupkar declaration was signed at the residence of Mr. Abdullah, located on Srinagar's Gupkar Road, by eight political parties, including the Congress. The 169-word declaration unanimously resolved to protect the identity, autonomy and special status of J&K, fight against modification or abrogation of Articles 35A, 370 and oppose any bid to carry out the unconstitutional delimitation or trifurcation of J&K. "It (such actions) would be an aggression against the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh," the declaration reads. All the leaders sought an audience with the President and the PM but failed.

Finally, Prime Minister Modi met the Gupkar Alliance leaders on Thursday, but only after the government put them in jail for

eight to 13 months, with Ms. Mufti, Mr. Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah booked under the controversial Public Safety Act. The incarceration, however, seemed to have cemented the bond between the local rivals who nursed a deep sense of hurt, betrayal and despair.

**DDC elections**  
Despite many second-rung leaders and workers remaining in jails, the Gupkar Alliance emerged a formidable force during the District Development Council (DDC) polls in J&K in November-December 2020, amid allegations that the State machinery favoured BJP candidates during the campaigning.

In the run-up to the polls, Union Home Minister Amit Shah even termed the alliance 'Gupkar Gang', which became a catchphrase for the electioneering carried out by top BJP leaders. When results came in, the alliance won 110 out of 280

segments, while the BJP managed to win only 75. The results and the alliance's domination in most districts of Kashmir as well as in Jammu may have contributed to the softening of the Centre's approach towards the grouping.

The Gupkar Alliance first saw the Congress distancing itself in 2020 because it did not want to be seen clamouring for Article 370, which would have impacted the party's electoral prospects in the rest of the country. They suffered another setback when Sajad Lone, who was the alliance spokesman, decided to quit the group, alleging "the partners fought against each other during the DDC polls". Omar Abdullah also started maintaining a conspicuous absence from the amalgam's key meetings in recent months. The alliance is now reduced to three key faces: Farooq Abdullah, Ms. Mufti and M.Y. Tarigami of the CPI (M). The trio is both the binding and frictional force within the group, with each leader professing politics contrarian to each other.

The meeting with the PM was both an opportunity and a challenge for the alliance. It's an opportunity because the Centre reached out to them and they could push for their declared goals with the government. It's a challenge because there would be questions whether the decision to meet the leaders who ended the special status to J&K yielded any tangible result.

## GUPKAR ALLIANCE

# A diverse coalition

The multi-party bloc remains a formidable force in J&K's political landscape



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On August 4, 2019, the Gupkar declaration was signed at the residence of Mr. Abdullah, located on Srinagar's Gupkar Road, by eight political parties, including the Congress. The 169-word declaration unanimously resolved to protect the identity, autonomy and special status of J&K, fight against modification or abrogation of Articles 35A, 370 and oppose any bid to carry out the unconstitutional delimitation or trifurcation of J&K. "It (such actions) would be an aggression against the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh," the declaration reads. All the leaders sought an audience with the President and the PM but failed.

Finally, Prime Minister Modi met the Gupkar Alliance leaders on Thursday, but only after the government put them in jail for

# More I-T relief sought for COVID-19 bills

Accountants call for tax breaks to those footing their own medical expenses, especially senior citizens

VIKAS DHOOT

NEW DELHI  
Tax practitioners have urged the government to consider some tax relief for those who footed their own COVID-19 bills, particularly senior citizens, even as they await the fine print on the Income Tax exemption announced for all such treatment costs funded with the help of employers and well-wishers.

On Friday, the Centre promised legislative changes to the Income Tax Act to exempt any amounts received by a taxpayer for COVID-19 medical treatment retrospectively from 2019-20.

"If an employer or a well-wisher paid a person's hospital bills directly, then the treatment costs are not taxable for the patient in any case," said Gautam Nayak, partner at CNK & Associates



**Costly care:** Anecdotal evidence suggests COVID treatment costs can often run into lakhs of rupees, says Bhalla. ■ AFP

LLP. "This exemption will help those whose taxable incomes may not be very high, but their accounts would have shown higher receipts if employers or others remitted funds to them to help meet medical costs," Mr. Nayak added.

Delhi-based chartered accountant Geetanshu Bhalla said one would have to wait for the notification of the tax break to assess its impact, particularly as the word 'well-wisher' mentioned in the press note does not figure in the tax law.

Mr. Bhalla also called for a rethink on the deduction provision for taxpayers who tapped their own savings to meet healthcare costs.

#### Inequitable situation'

"We have a slightly odd and perhaps inequitable situation now, whereby all financial aid from employers or other persons for treatment is tax-free, while taxpayers who paid their own bills can only claim a deduction up to ₹25,000 under section 80D

of the IT Act, with senior citizens allowed ₹50,000," he said.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests COVID-19 treatment costs can often run into lakhs of rupees, so these thresholds are quite inadequate," he added. Senior citizens who do not have an employer to fall back on and are living off pensions and interest income could in fact find it particularly difficult.

Separately, while the government has temporarily allowed cash payments of more than ₹2 lakh for COVID-19 patients, section 80D deductions are only permissible for medical expenditure incurred in non-cash mode. In the absence of requisite changes to the provision, no tax break could be availed for medical bills paid in cash, accountants noted.

What is your focus area?

■ We see a lot of opportunity in the Make in India initiative, especially in our sector.

We feel there are good prospects in the consumer ap-

plicances segment, and produc-

tion wise we are aligning our resources accordingly to

play a significant role in the coming years.

Currently we have six man-

ufacturing units with pre-

sence in sectors like plastic

moulding, tool manufac-

turing, PU paint shop, PCB as-

semblies and final product

assembly.

We are a major manufac-

turer of washing machines,

air conditioners and coolers

for clients like LG Elec-

tronics, Whirlpool, Haier, Lloyd,

Blue Star, Voltas, Carrier, Mi-

dea, Godrej, Lava, Flipkart,

Reliance Retail, Jabil, Honey-

well, Kohler, Jaquar, Orient

and Crompton.

In automotive, we are

working with Tata, Mahindra

and Maruti. We are trying to

diversify and move into oth-

er industries also. But in the

next 2-3 years, our major fo-

cus will be on consumer ap-

plicances because we see

strong traction in that field.

The same would be sub-

ject to any directions that

may be issued by the National

Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) in this regard.

■ We are a third party con-

tract manufacturing compa-

ny and do not have our own

brand. We wish to remain

B2B, as having our own

brands will be a conflict of in-

terest with our clients

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Apart from existing prod-

ucts, we will be starting LED

TV product manufac-

turing also.

We are trying to fund this

expansion through a combi-

nation of sources like debt,

internal accruals, and some

fund raising.

Recently, our board had

passed a resolution to raise

₹76.6 crore from investors.

Baring Private Equity India

Alf, Ananta Capital (promot-

ed by the Taparia family) and

the Patni family office are

participating through prefer-

ential allotment of equity

shares of ₹40.30 crore and

compulsorily convertible de-

bentures (CCD) of ₹36.30

crore in the company.

Through this funding, the

number of employees working with us

will definitely increase as we

are building capacity. Cur-

rently we are employing about 2,000 employees over-

all in the company.

We are anticipating a

growth of about 25-30% in

the current financial year as

compared with the last fi-

nancial year.

Secondly, the number of

employees working with us

will definitely increase as we

are building capacity. Cur-

rently we are employing about

2,000 people in the com-

ing 8-9 months.

## SPORT

# Manu and Saurabh win silver

Go down to the Russians in the mixed air pistol final



**Podium finish:** Saurabh and Manu started off well but could manage only second place. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Bajrang Punia allays fears over injury

lived. "Thank God! There are no problems. He walks and it does not hurt," Bentini told *The Hindu*.

A Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) official said Bajrang should be fit sooner than later. "What we gather is that it is not a major injury. He should get well in a few days," said the official.

The Indian was trailing 4-0 when he injured his right knee in the semifinal bout against Abdulmazid Kudiev of Russia and withdrew from the contest.

"Thanks for your affection and sympathy. Very soon you will see me back on the mat, everything is alright and there is nothing to worry," Bajrang tweeted on Saturday.

Bajrang's personal coach Shako Bentini was re-

## Adhiban well placed

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

With the draw out for the chess World Cup beginning at Sochi on July 12, the prospects for GM B. Adhiban look better

# Denmark makes a statement with classy win

Dolberg leads the 4-0 hammering of Wales as the Danes motor into quarterfinals; Maehle, Braithwaite also score

## EURO 2020

### AGENCIES

AMSTERDAM

Forward Kasper Dolberg struck in each half while Joakim Maehle and Martin Braithwaite also got in on the act late on as Denmark overpowered Wales to win 4-0 and reach the quarterfinals of Euro 2020 on Saturday.

Dolberg, making his first start of the tournament, gave his side the lead with a fine individual goal in the 27th minute, curling into the top corner from outside the area.

He doubled Denmark's advantage in Amsterdam early in the second half, ruthlessly pouncing on a loose ball after Wales failed to clear a

cross following a galloping run down the right wing from Dolberg's strike partner Braithwaite.

### Glaring opportunity

Braithwaite missed a glaring opportunity to add to Denmark's lead but Maehle sealed the win in the 88th minute.

Wales' frustrations spilled over when Harry Wilson was sent off for a wild tackle on Maehle in added time.

Braithwaite finally got the goal he had craved by netting at the death, though he had to wait for the goal to be awarded following a lengthy VAR review.

Wales needed a moment of magic from captain Gareth Bale or Aaron Ramsey bu

that never came.

Earlier, a framed Wales national team shirt with Christian Eriksen's name on it was given to Denmark captain Simon Kjaer before the teams played.

### Welsh wishes

The Wales jersey had "CHRISTIAN" written on top of Eriksen's No. 10 and BRY-SIA WELLIA underneath. Bry-sia wella means get well soon in Welsh.

Kjaer, Wales captain Gareth Bale and the three match officials in Amsterdam then posed for a photo with the framed jersey moments before kickoff.

**The result:** Wales 0 lost to Denmark 4 (Dolberg 27, 48, Maehle 88, Braithwaite 90+).



On fire: Kasper Dolberg's, right, brace set Denmark on its way past Wales on Saturday. ■ AFP

## India, England to battle it out in limited-overs format

Shafali to make ODI debut as visitors look to build on the Test performance

## INDIA IN ENGLAND

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BRISTOL

Teen sensation Shafali Verma is set to make her One-Day International debut as India takes on World champion England in the first game of a three-match series here on Sunday.

The 17-year-old, who has taken world cricket by storm, has so far played 22 T20 Internationals but was inexplicably not picked for the last home series against South Africa. India lost the series 4-1.

The team management is well aware of Shafali's value. Especially after her stellar Test debut against England last week with scores of 96 and 63.

Smriti Mandhana and Sha-

fali could open the batting, with Punam Raut at No. 3, followed by skipper Mithali Raj and her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur.

### The teams (from):

**India:** Mithali Raj (Capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Punam Raut, Harmanpreet Kaur (Vice-Capt.), Deepti Sharma, Taniya Bhatia (wk), Sneh Rana, Jhulan Goswami, Shikha Pandey, Jemimah Rodrigues, Arundhati Reddy, Puja Vastrakar, Ekta Bisht, Radha Yadav, Poonam Yadav, Priya Punia and Indranil Roy (wk).

**England:** Heather Knight (Capt.), Tammy Beaumont, Kate Cross, Nat Sciver, Sophia Dunkley, Lauren Winfield-Hill, Anya Shrubsole, Katherine Brunt, Sophie Ecclestone, Amy Jones (wk), Freya Davis, Tash Farrant, Sarah Glenn, Mady Villegas, Fran Wilson, Sarah Glenn, Emily Arlott and Tash Farrant.

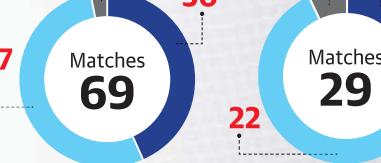
Match starts at 3.30 p.m. IST.

## The rivalry resumes

As Mithali's India gears up to take on Knight's England in the ODI series, a look at how the contests between the two have panned out

### HEAD-TO-HEAD IN ODIs

	INDIA	ENGLAND	NR
37	2	30	22



### TOP PERFORMERS IN INDIA-ENGLAND ODIs IN ENGLAND

FOR INDIA						
Most Runs	M	Inns	N.O.	Runs	HS	Avg.
Mithali Raj	24	22	4	773	94 n.o.	42.94
						8/0
FOR ENGLAND						
Most Runs	M	Inns	N.O.	Runs	HS	Avg.
Sarah Taylor	20	16	3	495	75 n.o.	38.07
						2/0
Most Wkts.	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.
Isa Guha	13	12	20	4/29	13.85	3.06
						1/0



SOURCE: ESPNCRICINFO

THE SCHEDULE						
JUNE 27:	Bristol, 3.30 p.m.					
JUNE 30:	Taunton, 6.30 p.m.					
JULY 3:	Worcester, 3.30 p.m.					
ALL TIMES IST						

## Will encourage Shafali to enjoy her batting: Mithali

'She is a young kid and will learn with experience'

### P.K. AJITH KUMAR

Mithali Raj wants Shafali Verma to play her natural game at Bristol on Sunday. The free-stroking opener is expected to make her ODI debut in the first of the three-match series against England.

The expectations are high about the 17-year-old after her sensational start to her Test career a few days ago at the same venue, with scores of 96 and 63. Mithali said, as a captain, she would encourage her to play the way she enjoyed playing.

"There will be times when she gives us head starts, and we would love her to be consistent, but she is a young kid and will learn with experience," said Mithali at a virtual press conference on Saturday.

The skipper said India was going into the three-match series in a confident frame of mind, after doing well to save the one-off Test, though she conceded England would have the advantage.



Shafali. ■ GETTY IMAGES

tage of playing at home. "England is one of the best sides in the world," she said. "But we have players who have had the experience of playing the league here and we would get inputs from them about preparing against the England squad."

About the early end to the Test match, when debutants Sneh Rana and Taniya Bhatia had chances of reaching a hundred and fifty respectively, she said she was surprised. "Sneh told me it was a bad-light call taken by the umpires," Mithali said. "When the umpires saw both the teams congratulating each other, it was pretty much taken the match was over."

## Arjun stuns Dubov; Firouzja shocks Carlsen

### ASIAN RAPID CHESS

#### RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI