



India got a defence policy only after Modi became PM: Amit Shah

Page 7



New academic session in universities to begin on October 1: UGC

Page 8



India takes on Sri Lanka in ODI series from today

Page 14

NEARBY



No CET, DU admissions to begin on Aug. 2

NEW DELHI
Delhi University on Saturday announced that registration for its undergraduate courses will begin from August 2. Admissions to undergraduate courses will be based on merit and not Central Universities Common Entrance Test as speculated earlier.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Hold fresh U.P. local polls, demands Priyanka

LUCKNOW
Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday demanded that fresh elections be conducted in those block *pramukh* seats which witnessed violence, and alleged that candidates had been intimidated. She met two women who had been assaulted during the nomination process.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 6

BJP expels former Rajasthan Minister

JAIPUR
The BJP on Saturday expelled former Rajasthan Minister Rohitash Sharma from the party for six years. The BJP had recently issued a show-cause notice to Mr. Sharma for speaking out against the State leadership.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 5

MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGES 4

Taliban won battles, we will win the war: Ghani

Focused on political solution, says Afghanistan President

SUHASINI HAIDAR
TASHKENT

The Afghan national forces will prevail over Taliban militants who are making advances on towns and border checkpoints, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani has said, conceding, however, that the Taliban had won some battles thus far.

In an interview, shortly after a fiery speech accusing Pakistan of failing to prevent "jihadi" fighters from crossing the border and for not pushing the Taliban hard enough on talks, Mr. Ghani said he would keep dialogue open with Islamabad and continue the intra-Afghan negotiations with the Taliban in Doha.

"Winning battles is not winning the war. They [the Taliban] have won battles. But they are going to lose the war, and we are determined," Mr. Ghani said, when asked about recent Taliban gains, particularly on the border with Pakistan at the Spin Boldak-Chaman crossing, where Indian photojournalist Danish Siddiqui was killed on Thursday.

Mr. Ghani, who condoled the death, said there might be a need to "rebalance" the situation to win the war militarily but the larger goal of his government was to arrive



at a political settlement in Afghanistan.

The President stressed that he would want to avoid the fate of countries such as "Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen" that continued to see strife.

As a result, after several changes in its plans, an Afghan delegation, led by High Council chief Abdullah Abdullah, travelled to Doha on Saturday to begin "high-level" talks with Taliban leaders in an effort facilitated by the Qatar government and other countries to restart the stalled intra-Afghan dialogue.

Asked if he felt abandoned by the West, after the abrupt U.S. pull-out and after comments by the British Defence Secretary that the

New quad group to focus on connectivity

The U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have agreed in principle to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity, the Biden administration has said. ▶ PAGE 9

U.K. was prepared to engage with the Taliban if it came to power in Afghanistan, he said, "No, no, I don't. We have an engagement."

India a true partner

Mr. Ghani emphatically denied having asked India for military assistance in the face of the Taliban's advances. India was "true partner" in Afghanistan's development, he said.

"This [defeating Taliban] is our job. The period of international engagement, or use of force in Afghanistan is over," he told *The Hindu* during his visit to Dushanbe to attend the Central and South Asia connectivity conference on Friday.

INTERVIEW ▶ PAGE 7

Sidhu may captain Congress in Punjab

Amarinder says he will abide by Sonia's decision

VIKAS VASUDEV
CHANDIGARH

The decks seem to have been cleared for the appointment of former Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu as president of the Pradesh Congress Committee after Harish Rawat, All India Congress Committee's State in-charge, held a meeting on Saturday with Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, who said he would abide by the decision of party president Sonia



On the front foot: Navjot Singh Sidhu leaving for Amritsar from his residence in Patiala on Saturday. ▶ PTI

Gandhi. Amid the power tussle between Capt. Singh and Mr. Sidhu ahead of the 2022 Assembly election in the State, Mr. Rawat flew to Chandigarh from Delhi to meet them and settle the "differences".

Mr. Rawat tweeted, "I have just returned to Delhi

after meeting @capt_amarinderji. I am happy that many things which are being discussed outside have proved to be completely baseless and Captain Sahib has again reiterated his important statement.. In which he has said that whatever decision will be taken by honourable Congress president regarding the post of Punjab president, that decision will be acceptable to him, I will respect it."

"#Thankyou_Captain for your great statement," he added.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Uttar Pradesh cancels annual Kanwar Yatra

SC had frowned upon govt's nod for it

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW



The annual Kanwar Yatra was scheduled to start on July 25. ▶ FILE PHOTO

The court had said it could not allow the U.P. government "to hold the physical Kanwar Yatra in view of COVID-19".

The judge observed that the "danger to our freedoms

SC with people to protect civil liberties: CJI Ramana

Justice Chandrachud flags intolerance

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana on Saturday asserted that the Supreme Court would stand by the people to protect their civil liberties, while Justice D.Y. Chandrachud cautioned that any semblance of majoritarian tendencies or clampdown on civil or religious freedoms would upset a sacred promise made to the ancestors who accepted India as their Constitutional Republic.

Chief Justice N.V. Ramana may not only originate from those who are tasked to govern but also originate in the intolerance of persons in society as well".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Delta variant found in most COVID cases in the Capital

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Over 88% of 92 samples from Delhi, for which genome sequencing was done in June, had the Delta variant of COVID-19. In May, out of 745 samples, 83.4% were found to have the Delta variant, which was first found in India, according to Delhi government data shared with *The Hindu*.

The Delta variant became dominant in April (55% of 1,967 samples) when the city witnessed a deadly second wave and the daily new cases were reported as high as 28,000.

Also, the percentage of Alpha variant of the virus, first found in the U.K. and a dominant strain in the city earlier, fell from 47.4% in March to just 3.3% in June.

"The Delta variant is the dominant strain of the virus in Delhi at this moment. It has seen a steady rise in the past few months. Also, till now, there is no Delta Plus variant of the virus reported here," a Delhi government official said. Results of more samples from June are awaited, the official said.

The data is based on genome sequencing of COVID positive blood samples from Delhi by the National Centre for Disease Control.

"The data show that the second wave in Delhi was in a way due to the Delta variant. This variant is highly infectious and that's why Delhi registered a sudden spike in cases," said Jugal Kishore, head of Community Medicine Department, Safdarjung Hospital. He said a similar trend was observed in several other States as well.

"Now the percentage of Delta variant may fall and another variant could become dominant. That is what happens during pandemics," Dr. Kishore said.

Thanking Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji for creating the Ministry of Co-operation



Hon'ble Prime Minister
Shri Narendra Modi

Hon'ble Home & Cooperation Minister
Shri Amit Shah

**Sahkar Se Samridhi
Sarkar Ka Desh Ko Uphaar**

On behalf of the entire IFFCO family consisting of 36,000 cooperative societies, more than 5 crore farmers, the Board of Directors and other members, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji for creating the Ministry of Co-operation.

Heartiest Congratulations

to the dynamic and visionary leader, Hon'ble Shri Amit Shah ji
on being appointed as the first Minister of Co-operation of India.

Inspired from the government's vision of 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat, AatmaNirbhar Krishi', IFFCO introduced the world's first nanotechnology based fertiliser, **Nano Urea Liquid** for farmers across the world. The revolutionary product will maintain the fertility of soil and reduce soil, air and water pollution & substantially increase productivity and reduce their input cost, paving the way for Sustainable Agriculture.

IFFCO has developed 21 co-institutions that are wholly dedicated to and working in the best interest of farmers. Bio-fertilisers, bio-pesticides bio-decomposers and biostimulants (Sagarika Liquid and Granules) are also being produced and sold at reasonable prices to promote organic farming in India.

IFFCO is confident that the creation of the new Ministry of Cooperation, under the able guidance of Shri Amit Shah, will ensure multi-dimensional development of the cooperative sector in the country and help us realize the dream of **Sahkar Se Samridhi**.

मिट्टी की जान,
किसान की शान इफाको

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**GEOGRAPHY
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ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

It has been more than two years since the local health department abandoned the dilapidated district civil hospital building in Old City in April 2019, but the wait for the proposed 500-bed hospital could be longer.

"It will take at least three years to complete the building after the construction starts. At present, the designs for the proposed building are being prepared by the architecture department. The designs would then be sent to our client, the Health Department, for final approval before the rough budget estimates are prepared and cleared by the government," said Sandeep Singh, executive engineer, Gurugram, Public Works Department (Buildings & Roads).

Land dispute

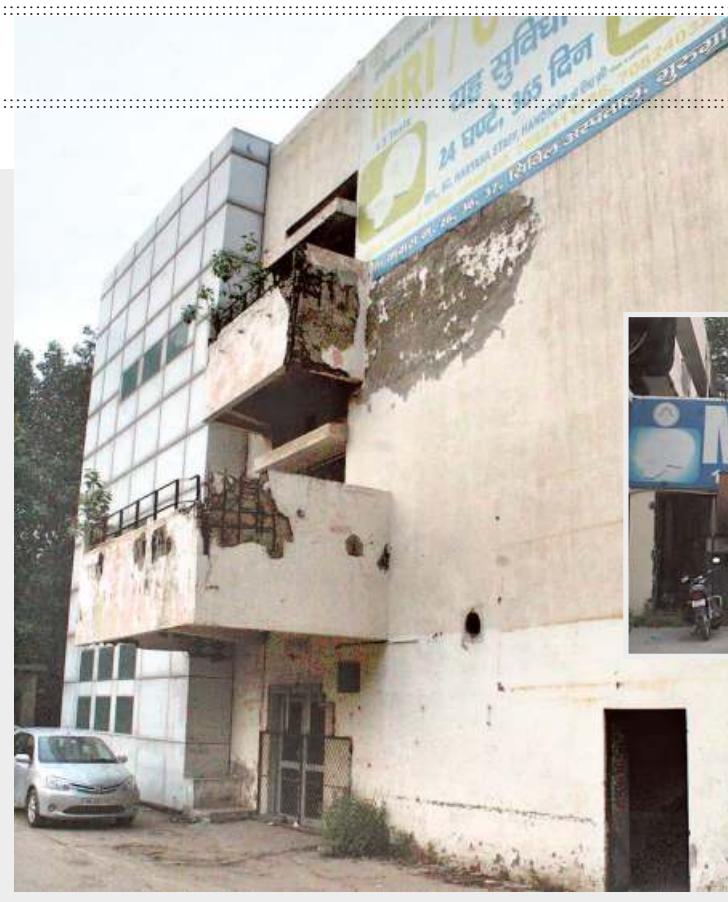
Manoj Bhardwaj, junior engineer, Civil Hospital, blamed the delay on the dispute over the four-acre land of a government school adjoining the hospital building.

"Initially, the Health Department had proposed to encompass the adjoining school land for the hospital project. The Public Works Department prepared a design for the new hospital premises spread across nine acres, including 5.73-acre land of the existing old hospital, but the Education Department refused to part with the entire land parcel," said Mr. Bhardwaj.

The matter was finally resolved and the government recently gave in-principle approval to use the two-acre school land for the project and the PWD was directed to prepare the designs.

In another twist to the tale, the Civil Surgeon again wrote to Director General, Health Services on July 2 this year to try and encompass the entire four-acre land belonging to the government school for the hospital project. If this is cleared, the PWD will have to work on the project ab initio, further delaying it.

But the dispute with the Education Department over the land is not the only hurdle. The Health Department may also need to seek relaxations from the Indian Public



The abandoned building of district civil hospital in Old City, (below) CT scan and MRI facility is still being run at the building. ■ MANOJ KUMAR



surgeries, Ayush OPD, and round-the-clock maternity services," said Dr. Rathee.

Hospital burdened

The hospital infrastructure, which was not enough for the pre-COVID daily load of patients, has been further burdened due to the pandemic outbreak. "We now run a round-the-clock flu OPD, COVID laboratory and also carry out COVID sampling as an added job. Though the number of paramedical staff, lab technicians and nurses has gone up, the number of doctors remains the same," said Dr. Rathee.

Though the hospital has been shifted to a new building, CT scan and MRI facility through public-private mode continues to run from the old building forcing patients to run between the two buildings located at a distance of around 30 minutes.

Waiting in the OPD service queue at Sector-10 hospital, Ramesh Kaushik, a resident of Patel Nagar, grumbled that Gurugram was a medical hub with world-class health facilities and fancy hospitals, but a large section of its population, including migrants, could not afford the expensive treatment and suffered due to lack of good quality health facilities in government set-ups. "Not just that the Sector-10 hospital is not centrally located unlike the old civil hospital, the physical infrastructure and manpower, too, are far from adequate at this hospital to cater to the growing population," he said.

Fate of hospital project hangs in the balance

Gurugram residents suffer due to lack of adequate health facilities, especially during the ongoing pandemic, as the proposed govt. hospital is yet to see the light of day

Health Standards (IPHS) guidelines which say that a minimum of 16-acre of land is required for a 500-bedded hospital.

"It is almost impossible to get 16-acre land at the present location. So we have decided to go vertical. With regard to relaxations from IPHS guidelines, it is the responsibility of the Health Department," said Mr. Singh.

Even as the fate of the project hangs in balance, the residents suff-

er because of lack of adequate health facilities, especially during the ongoing pandemic. Maneesh Rathee, Deputy Civil Surgeon at Civil Hospital, Sector-10, said the 200-bedded hospital running from the old building was shifted to the present building, which earlier housed a mother and child care unit, as a stop-gap arrangement. "Our doctors attend to 1,700-1,800 OPD patients daily across a dozen departments, besides the routine

Capital likely to receive rain today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Monsoon activity over the Capital is likely to resume on July 18. After receiving show-

ers for two consecutive days, the temperature started rising. On Saturday, the maximum temperature was 38.8°C. The forecast for July 18 reads "generally cloudy sky with moderate rain/thundershowers. Heavy rain is likely at isolated places in afternoon/evening."

Govt. of Jharkhand Energy Department Jharkhand Renewable Energy Development Agency (JREDA)

3rd Floor, S.L.D.C. Building, Kusai Colony, Doranda, Ranchi-834002.
Ph.: 0651-2491161, Fax: 0651-2491165,
E-mail: info@jreda.com; Website: www.jreda.com

e-Procurement Notice

Tender reference no.: 02/JREDA/SPV/AIRPORT/21-22 Dated: 16.07.2021
Online bids are invited for the work of Design, Manufacture, Testing, Supply, Installation & Commissioning of 600 kWp of Grid connected SPV Power Plants including five years Comprehensive Maintenance Contract (CMC) on Turnkey basis for solarization of 5 different Airports in Jharkhand. The details are as follows:

1.	Name of the work	Design, Manufacture, Testing, Supply, Installation & Commissioning of 600 kWp of Grid connected SPV Power Plants including five years Comprehensive Maintenance Contract (CMC) on Turnkey basis for solarization of 5 different Airports in Jharkhand.
2.	Estimated cost (Rs.)	Rs. 12,75,00000.00
3.	Tentative quantity (kWp)	5X600 kWp
4.	Completion of work	06 (Six) Months
5.	Period of contract	5 years and 6 Months
6.	Date of publication of NIT on website: http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in	16.07.2021 (Friday)
7.	Date & time of Pre-bid meeting	26.07.2021 (Monday) at 2.00 P.M.
8.	Last date & time for receipt of online bids	10.08.2021 (Tuesday) upto 05:00 PM
9.	Submission of original copies of Bid fee & EMD (Offline)	10.08.2021 and 11.08.2021 up to 5.00 P.M.
10.	Technical Bid Opening Date	12.08.2021 (Thursday) at 3.00 P.M.
11.	Name & address of office inviting tender	Director, Jharkhand Renewable Energy Development Agency(JREDA) 3rd Floor, SLDC Building, Kusai, Doranda, Ranchi- 834002 (Jharkhand)
12.	Contact no. of procurement officer	0651-2491163/67/61
13.	Helpline no. of e-procurement	0651-2491163/67/61

Any corrigendum/addendum can be seen on website: http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in & www.jreda.com. Further details can be seen on website: http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in & www.jreda.com

PR 249791(Energy)21-22*D

Terminal 2 to reopen on July 22

DIAL expects to process around 25,000 passengers daily

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) on Saturday said flight operations at Indira Gandhi International Airport's Terminal 2 will commence from July 22.

Flight operations from T2 were suspended on May 18 following a significant drop in domestic air traffic.

Gradual rise

The decision to resume operations was taken after the airport started witnessing gradual rise in passenger footfall post relaxation in lockdown and travel norms by various States since June.

Services will initially start with around 200 air traffic movements (100 departures and 100 arrivals) per day and increase to around 280 by the end of August.

Operations will resume with IndiGo's 2000-2999 series flights and GoAir. Around 25,000 passenger footfall per day are expected in the initial phase. About 27 counters, 11 for



Flight operations from Terminal 2 were suspended on May 18 following a significant drop in domestic air traffic. ■ FILE PHOTO

GoAir and 16 for IndiGo, will be open.

The first plane to take off will be a Kolkata-bound IndiGo flight, which will depart at 3 a.m.

Safety measures

DIAL said it has taken several safety measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the safety of passengers without compromising their comfort and experience.

"Teams have worked round-the-clock to sanitise

the terminal. DIAL will encourage passengers to wear face masks and maintain social distance while at the airport," said Videh Kumar Jai-puri, CEO, DIAL.

Arrangements have been made for thermal scanning. To avoid close contact and crowding at the check-in counters, passengers are encouraged to use e-boarding facility, and the security hold area has been expanded for adequate seating arrangements and enhanced retail options.

New NMRC timings from tomorrow

Metro services will be available between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) on Saturday announced a revised schedule of operations and said services will be available between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. from July 19. Metro services will continue to remain suspended on weekends due to imposition of a partial curfew in Gautam Buddha Nagar.

NMRC officials said trains will be available at an interval of 10 minutes during

peak hours - 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., and at intervals of 15 minutes during non-peak hours.

Curfew timings

"The NMRC has decided to reschedule its metro train services as night curfew timing in Uttar Pradesh has been revised to 10 p.m.-6 a.m. against the earlier 8 p.m.-7 a.m. As weekend curfew is in effect in Gautam Buddha Nagar, train services will not be available on Sa-

turday and Sunday," said Ritu Maheshwari, NMRC managing director.

Officials stated that the Noida-Greater Noida Aqua Line was seeing an increase in ridership since resumption of services on June 9. The highest ridership recorded was on July 12 when 9,489 passengers travelled on the corridor.

According to NMRC data, 8,895 commuters travelled on the corridor on July 16, and 7,675 on July 9.

Python rescued near Saket metro station

NGO also rescues monitor lizard

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A six-foot-long python was rescued by Wildlife SOS after it was spotted crossing the busy road near Saket metro station and brought the busy area to a halt.

Wildlife SOS 24x7 said after receiving a call on its emergency helpline number, a team of two rescuers from the NGO was dispatched to the location.

Equipped with necessary equipment, the team carefully transferred the python into a snake bag, much to the relief of the onlookers.

The NGO also rescued a monitor lizard from the tracks at Shastri Park metro depot. It took nearly 20 minutes for the Wildlife SOS rescuers to safely transfer the monitor lizard into a transport carrier.



The reptile was spotted crossing the busy road near the metro station.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kartick Satyanarayan, CEO and co-founder of Wildlife SOS, said, "We are thankful to the DMRC authorities for considering the well-being of the reptile and contacting our team. Monitor lizards are non-venomous but can bite or even use their strong claws in retaliation if threatened or provoked."

IN BRIEF

Man held for selling salt under noted brand name

NEW DELHI

A 33-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly running a salt factory and packaging it in counterfeit packets of a noted brand, in Outer North Delhi's Barwala. DCP (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said the accused has been identified as Mahesh alias Tony, a resident of Barwala. "The packing was so intelligently printed that if the customer scanned the QR code printed on the duplicate packing, it would lead to the brand's genuine website," he said.

ASSAM POLICE HEADQUARTERS ULUBARI, GUWAHATI

Corrigendum

Refer this office NIT No. S/V-684/2018-19/CCTV/All Dist/8 dtd. 02-07-2021.

The BoQ has been amended due to technical error.

Further, the bid submission start and end date & time is also extended as below.

Bid Submission Start Date	24-07-2021 from 5:00 PM
Bid Submission End Date	02-08-2021 upto 2:00 PM
Bid Opening Date (Technical Bid)	02-08-2021 at 4:00 PM

The other terms and conditions of the NIT remain the same.

Janasanyog/C/2296/21 Dy. Inspector General Of Police (A)

Timings
DELHI

SUNDAY, JUL. 18	
RISE 05:36	SET 19:20
RISE 13:28	SET 00:16
MONDAY, JUL. 19	
RISE 05:36	SET 19:20
RISE 14:34	SET 00:53
TUESDAY, JUL. 20	
RISE 05:37	SET 19:19
RISE 15:43	SET 01:36

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 39 28
Safdarjung 39 28
Palam 39 29

Delhi Palam Today
35°C Moderate to heavy rain or thundershower likely at some places with gusty winds and lightning strike.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
31°C Few spells of light to moderate rain and thunder-shower likely at some places with humid condition.

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THE HINDU
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Sisodia asks Baijal not to take decisions in matters falling under govt. ambit

Stop meeting officials, he tells L-G

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Saturday wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal, saying it has come to his notice that for the past many months, the latter has been giving directions to government officials on matters, which are under the ambit of the Delhi government, without consulting with the Ministers.

He also urged the L-G to not take any decisions on subjects falling under the Delhi government's ambit. "It has also come to my notice that you have been issuing directions to officials in meetings about matters that fall under the ambit of the elected government of Delhi. Also, officials from L-G office pressure government officials for implementing those decisions," Mr. Sisodia wrote.

Mr. Sisodia said it is a chance for Mr. Baijal to take a stand. He said in the future, people will remember him as someone who took a stand "against the BJP" and protected democracy.

Murder of democracy'

"I want to request you with respect to please stop taking decisions on matters, which are under the ambit of the elected government of Delhi. Please stop calling meetings with officials on these matters and giving them orders. These meetings and the decisions being taken in these meetings are not just unconstitutional, but against the orders of the Supreme Court," the letter read. Mr. Sisodia also termed it as a "murder of democracy".

"Whatever political pressure you may have, being on the post of L-G, you should do only what strengthens democracy," the letter said.

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THE HINDU CLASSIFIEDS

thehinduads.com

MATRIMONIAL

MATRIMONIAL

BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

COSMOPOLITAN

NAIR GIRL, age 46 US citizen, PhD, Assistant Professor Chicago, Caste, Language no bar. Alliance invited from US settled boys. Contact 9895824803

PQM (DOCTOR/ Engineer/ Civil services) for 1988 born, 5'3", MD, Brahmin girl. Upper caste no bar. 9872073702

GROOM NEEDED for G.Sai Jyosha B.Tech M.B.A. DOB: 3/4/1991, Divorced, Contact: 9348633455

DIVORCE

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

AP, WG Dist well Settled, Brahmin 34yrs N. Pushyame / Slim Good look fair M.Sc., AU (Divorce) Rq any Brahmin Good look Boy & Good Job/ Good Package. Age 4 Yrs, Direct Contact: 8309610955

DOCTOR

RC CHRISTIAN, MBBS MS (OBG), Repudiated School, College, 26 yrs, Fair, Good looking, Affluent, Parents well educated. Father own industry with 200 employees, Seeks doctors from God family. WhatsApp Profile 7550065082, Mail ID : jesuschrist0014@gmail.com

DOCTOR 24 yrs fair, Tamil, Affluent doctor parents ECFMG shortly proceeding to USA for residency. 9677026459

BALJA NAIDU M.B.B.S Ketai, Viruchikam 23/165 fair good looking girl, Kanchipuram seeks Doctor (or) Higher qualified from same caste. Contact: 9443380196, 9442202555

FAIR PRETTY Doctor girl 31/165 completing final MD Annales, good looking girl, Kanchipuram seeks Doctor (or) Higher qualified from same caste. TN: Bangalore. Ct: 9840050381/ 9840985363

MAHALYAM EZHAVA MBBS, 29, Atham. Chennai Settled. Seeks Groom from U.S, Canada, UK, Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai. Ph: 9926595959

NAIR GIRL MBBS (24/163 /Revathi/ chennai seeks doctor from same caste. Ph:7358232767/9445359921

MATRIMONIAL

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

TAMIL

PILLAI, 26/160, Fair, Beautiful, MBBS, MD Doing, Doctors Family, Well Settled, CNB, 7299576644, 7299576666

HINDU NADAR 26, BE/MS 180cm Sst: 1L, PM Working in Chennai seeks suitable Groom KA Raman Nadar 9380791999

NADAR, DIVORCEE, 35 yrs, MCA MBA, with male child, from affluent family, seeks professional / businessman between 35 to 43 yrs, Contact: 667805712, emmanuel.ediz28@gmail.com

HINDU, MBBS, Indian Revenue Service (IRS) Bride seeks Bridegroom, Caste / State No bar. Contact 9176203593

TAMIL GIRL 28/172cm BE, LLB(IIT) SSE in Railways seeks PGM Govt Family, Settled, Caste no bar Ct: 8836052540

HINDU NADAR 33 BE MS 180cm 6Lac Monthly Working in Canada seeks Suitable Groom KA.Raman Nadar 9380791999

TAMIL BRAHMIN Iyer girl, B.E., Vadimal Baradhwajam Thiruvadrai, 25 yrs / 165 cms / Sudha jathagam / Chennai, seeks Professionally qualified / Chartered Accountants from same community. Subject no bar. Please send details and horoscope to asvaralakshmi31@gmail.com

HINDU VANNIAKULAKSHTRI Coimbatore F 25 / 163.5CM MBA from middle Class family, Brother studying in USA Seeks Software Engineer looking for groom working / settled in USA from same Community. Contact Mob- 9566605164.

AGAMUDI MUDALIAR (Vellore), Elite Family, 29/165, PG, Working HR in MNC Seeks MS/ M.Tech Groom 9176780777

HINDU NADAR 37 BE MS 180cm 6Lac Working in Chennai. Hailing from a reputed Thiyya family in North Kerala. Suitable proposals invited. Husband expired in 2016. No kids. 938722086, anandtr1972@gmail.com

NAIR GIRL Revathi 27/153, BE Chennai settled, employed, seeks Chennai settled Nair family, 9500012855

NAIR GIRL, Age : 37 Thiruvonam,Msc Bioinformatics Currently working at a research Institute in Bangalore(Ready to relocate). Seeks alliance from professionally Qualified, well employed boys. 9447913459.

MALAYALAM DOCTOR Hindu Ezhuva Giril Makayiram 27/154, MBBS, MD (Paediatrics) Fair, Good Looking base in Chennai settled in Mavelikara Kerala Rich Educated family seeks alliance. Tel: 7305329677, 9176251309.

SC-AD BDS 25 / 160 cm medium complexion seeks BDS/MBBS, Chennai based teetotaler groom Ph: 9444301934

SC ARUNTHATHIYAR Thiruvathirai / Mithunam 09-09-85 SCs employed seeks suitable groom Ph:150331377

RC NADAR, M.A, 37/155cms, Railways, CT: 7305411849/ chella.ranis@gmail.com

MUDALIAR /PILLAI 5.1, 33 yrs, MCA UG, UG GPA 3.8, MCA, seeking suitable Chennai settled Caste no bar. WhatsApp: 8925640261

NAIR GIRL Nadar 27/153, BE Chennai, seeking alliance for their elder daughter 28/ 5.3 Height, MBA Looking for a God fearing Groom, well settled family, with God job or Business. Ct: 7811999777

CHRISTIAN NADAR well settled family from Chennai, seeks alliance for their elder daughter 28/ 5.3 Height, MBA Looking for a God fearing Groom, well settled family, with God job or Business. Ct: 7811999777

CHRISTIAN GIRL 31years Engineering Graduate working in Chennai Wanted an Engineering Graduate Groom from a decent family. Contact 944325317

Muslim Rowther 26 years M.Tech Working Bride Seeks Suitable Tamil Speaking G.M.E. and N.E. Countries and Tamil Nadu 9842898610.

CSI Nadar Girl 29 yrs/151cm/Doctor Lecturer in Clinical Anatamy at Central Kingdom. Seek Groom. Caste No Bar. Ct: 9443281191

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IN BRIEF



Sabarimala temple opens for five-day puja

PATHANAMATHITTA
Devotees have begun trekking to Sabarimala after a brief gap. The Lord Ayyappa temple opened on Saturday for the five-day puja in the Malayalam month of Karkidakam.

BCs, SCs, STs get half of Chairperson posts in A.P.

GUNTUR
The Andhra Pradesh government has allocated 56% of the 135 nominated posts of Chairpersons of corporations to party leaders from the backward communities, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and minorities. Of 135 posts, 68 were given to women.

Kokapet auction drove away bidders'

Telangana Congress chief Revanth Reddy asks government to call for fresh tenders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Telangana Congress chief A. Revanth Reddy has claimed that the auction of Kokapet lands in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana exposed how those close to the government had secured land "cheaply", driving away national bidders.



Serious charges: Telangana Congress chief A. Revanth Reddy at a press meet in Hyderabad on Saturday. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

At a press conference here on Saturday, he questioned the huge variation of price for each acre of land in the same place. "One acre is sold at ₹60 crore but the majority at ₹30 crore per acre. All these plots have same quality of roads abutting them. There can't be such a huge variation," he said, alleging that "this itself exposes some secret dealings".

"I will lodge a complaint

with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to investigate the auction. I will also provide them with all the evidence. I want to see whether the State BJP leaders take this forward," he said.

He demanded that the go-

vernment call for fresh tenders, the base price as ₹60 crore per acre (the highest bid for an acre) under the "Swiss challenge method". "This will ensure the government earns an additional ₹1,000 crore. If the CM doesn't respond, it means

there is some underhand dealing," he claimed.

Mr. Reddy claimed only five companies participated in the bidding and national bidders had been threatened to not participate or else they would face administrative problems, making the bids financially unviable. "A Collector working in a district close to the twin cities personally intervened to prevent their participation."

Mr. Reddy claimed the five companies that had bought the lands were close to those in power, and the powerful ruling party leaders and their relations were known to all. He said Aqua Space Developers Private Limited, which bought 17.684 acres at ₹663.54 crore, belonged to the sons of a top realty group

promoter, "who is very close to the ruling dispensation", he alleged.

Similarly, Raj Pushpa Properties Private Limited, which bought 9.405 acres for ₹428.14 crore belongs to the family of a Collector, he said, adding that the Collector's son was also a director in the company. Another 7.721 acres was bought by the brother of a Telangana Rashtra Samithi MP.

Mr. Reddy further alleged that Varsity Education Management Private Limited bought 7.575 acres for ₹296.94 crore while Prestige Estate Projects Limited bought 7.564 acres for ₹285.92 crore.

"Both these companies are close to a senior Minister," he claimed.

WEATHER WATCH



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

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh, central Maharashtra, coastal Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Mahe

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	46	33.3	25.8	Kozhikode	29	28.8	23.5
Ahmedabad	0.4	35.4	27.3	Kurnool	3	32.5	24.6
Aizawl	0.8	24.0	19.0	Lucknow	31	29.5	29.1
Altahabad	—	38.5	29.9	Madurai	—	36.0	25.7
Bengaluru	1.3	28.2	20.7	Mangaluru	44.4	27.2	23.2
Bhopal	—	36.3	25.8	Mumbai	31	29.7	25.0
Bhubaneswar	—	35.8	26.5	Mysuru	4	28.8	20.0
Chandigarh	—	39.1	29.6	New Delhi	—	38.5	28.2
Chennai	61	33.5	23.8	Patna	—	30.3	27.6
Coimbatore	—	32.7	22.1	Port Blair	5	29.5	24.6
Dehradun	1	30.6	23.5	Puducherry	6.9	31.5	22.0
Gangtok	32	20.7	18.2	Pune	2	31.8	23.0
Goa	95	27.6	22.9	Raipur	—	36.2	26.6
Guwahati	—	31.8	26.9	Ranchi	—	32.9	23.7
Hubbali	—	26.0	22.0	Shillong	47	23.2	18.1
Hyderabad	2	32.6	23.6	Shimla	—	27.0	21.3
Imphal	8	30.4	22.0	Srinagar	—	34.2	20.5
Jaipur	0.8	39.0	26.7	Thiruvananthapuram	7	33.2	23.8
Kochi	33.4	31.0	23.2	Tiruchi	—	34.3	26.4
Kohima	25	26.4	18.2	Vijayawada	0.4	34.4	25.4
Kolkata	5	35.6	28.3	Visakhapatnam	0.6	33.0	26.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	24	37	22	42	45	■	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Sonipat, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 221, indicating unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Shillong, Meghalaya recorded a healthy AQI score of 12
Bengaluru	.6	43	152	37	.49	■	
Chennai	.3	33	113	22	.27	■	
Delhi	.9	17	.68	.292	.141	■	
Hyderabad	.2	.63	.17	.18	.33	■	
Kolkata	11	.19	.20	.33	.60	■	
Lucknow	.8	.44	.100	.61	.113	■	
Mumbai	74	.10	—	.65	.102	■	
Pune	32	.30	.111	.80	.58	■	
Visakhapatnam	13	.34	.36	.27	.53	■	

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

SO₂: 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.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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_{2.5} & PM₁₀: 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

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

The virtual Open House, an interactive session with the readers hosted by *The Hindu* on Saturday, served as a platform for readers from different regions to exchange their views on news coverage and the impact of digital media.

Moderated by Readers' Editor A.S. Panneerselvan, the meeting had many participants who gave their suggestions about news coverage and the areas that could be improved. Alan Herbert, one of the readers, felt the newspaper must balance between positive and negative news. He noted that the sports pages had more "positive" news.

Responding, Editor of *The Hindu* Suresh Nambath said the newspaper does not serve

as a platform for regional and local news.

There were also queries and suggestions on content in the Sunday Magazine and supplements and change in the font size and look of the newspaper. While some

Raje loyalist Rohitash Sharma removed for 6 yrs. for 'breach of party discipline'

C The charges of indiscipline against Rohitash Sharma were proved correct after an inquiry

SATISH POONIA
BJP State president

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday expelled senior leader and former Rajasthan Minister Rohitash Sharma from the party's primary membership for six years on the ground of breach of party discipline.

Show-cause notice
The party had recently issued a show-cause notice to Mr. Sharma for speaking out against the State

Vehicles of BJP leaders attacked

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

The leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party continue to face the farmers' backlash on the Centre's farm laws.

On Saturday, a group of protesters allegedly attacked and damaged vehicles in which Chandigarh mayor Ravi Kant Sharma and senior party leader Sanjay Tandon were travelling. Both the leaders were returning after attending an event in Sector 48 of the city. They, however, escaped unhurt.

Mr. Tandon, who is coin-charge, BJP Himachal and Chandigarh, said the protesters blocked their vehicles and smashed the windshields.

The protesters were shouting slogans and raising black flags as a mark of protest against the BJP and the controversial farm laws. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha in an official statement said the farmers held a peaceful protest against the BJP leaders, but the police detained over a dozen of them without any reason.

Information Commission upset over pension delay

Rajasthan depts. acted only after the State panel intervened

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan Information Commission has expressed displeasure over the failure of government departments to provide information about the release of pension to the heirs of deceased employees. The departments acted in two such cases only after the Commission intervened and issued notices.

Information Commissioner Narayan Baretal said the pension given to an employee was a mark of respect for the services rendered by him. In the event of death of a retired employee, his dependents should not be harassed in getting their entitlement, he said.

The widows of two government employees had moved the Commission following the refusal of the departments to part with the information about the action taken to release pen-

Odisha SHGs to get aid of ₹453.50 crore

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has announced ₹453.50 crore assistance for women self-help groups (SHG) as part of a comprehensive COVID-19 package.

While ₹169 crore has been earmarked for the construction of block-level buildings for the women's SHG federations, ₹84.50 crore will be made available as a revolving fund. The members of the groups will undergo training and can sell their products at the new buildings, which would be known as 'Mission Shakti Bhawans'. The State government will provide ₹200 crore towards interest subvention, which is likely to help women SHGs pay back loans provided to them.

Mission Shakti

"Mission Shakti is an organisation comprising 70 lakh women of Odisha. They are a development force," said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

A separate department called 'Mission Shakti' has recently been carved out of the Women and Child Development Department.

Products purchased

In the past two years, different products worth ₹2,800 crore have been purchased from women SHGs.

Mission Shakti Secretary Sujata Karthikyan said women SHGs would be provided bank loans to the tune of ₹6,000 crore in the financial year 2021-22.

possibility of the PM," he said.

Mr. Singh was in Aligarh for a party meeting as part of the membership drive in the State ahead of the Assembly elections. Afghanistan's president expressed remorse, Chief Ministers of the country condoled his death, but the PM remained quiet. Is he scared of the Taliban?" asked Mr. Singh.

Aiming to make one crore party members in Uttar Pradesh in one month,

AAP leader criticises PM for silence over journalist's death

ANUJ KUMAR
GAZIABAD

Criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Aam Aadmi Party's Rajya Sabha Member Sanjay Singh said on Saturday that it was surprising that the PM didn't express condolences over the death of award-winning photo-journalist Danish Siddiqui during a Taliban attack in Afghanistan

FROM PAGE ONE

Sidhu may captain the Congress in Punjab

Capt. Singh had been reportedly annoyed with the proposal of Mr. Sidhu being appointed party chief. Sources said that at the meeting, he firmly conveyed it to Mr. Rawat that unless Mr. Sidhu apologised for his unpleasant remarks against him recently through tweets, he would meet the latter.

A day after he met party president Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Sidhu on Saturday met State party leaders, MLAs and Ministers in an effort to take everyone along. He met party's State president Sunil Jakhar, besides Minister Sukhjinder Randhawa and Balbir Singh Sidhu. He also met MLAs Raja Warring, Kulbir Zira, Darshan Brar and Barindermeet Singh Pabra among other leaders.

'A foregone conclusion' A senior party leader told *The Hindu* that it was a foregone conclusion that Mr. Sidhu would be the next PCC chief. "An official announcement is merely a formality now. Mr. Sidhu has been asked by the high command to start working. Meeting party leaders to seek their support and cooperation is what Mr. Sidhu has started with," he said. The party leader added that it was only "out of respect" that Mr. Rawat held a meeting with the Chief Mi-

nister. Otherwise the decision on Mr. Sidhu had been finalised by the central leadership.

Mr. Jakhar said Mr. Sidhu paid him a courtesy visit at his residence. "Strength lies in unity and Mr. Sidhu should strive to work with everybody in whatever position he holds.. While no official announcement has been made, he [Sidhu] should take everybody along," he told *The Hindu*.

The party leadership is desperate to resolve the stand-off between Capt. Singh and Mr. Sidhu, who had been at loggerheads since the 2019 Lok Sabha poll.

How it began

It started with Mr. Sidhu's wife, Navjot Kaur Sidhu, accusing Capt. Singh of blocking her Lok Sabha ticket from Chandigarh. Later, the Chief Minister alleged that Mr. Sidhu did not handle his Local Bodies portfolio well which, he claimed, resulted in the Congress's "poor performance" in urban areas in the general election.

Capt. Singh later distanced Mr. Sidhu of Local Bodies and allocated him the Power and New and Renewable Energy Sources portfolios. Mr. Sidhu then quit the Cabinet and since then, the stand-off between them has only intensified.

Uttar Pradesh govt. cancels Kanwar Yatra

The court stressed that sentiments, including religious ones, are subservient to the right to life.

On July 9, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath even convened a meeting for the preparation and security arrangements for the yatra.

Possible third wave

The shrawan month according to the Hindu calendar starts from July 25 and Mr. Adityanath had instructed officials to make all preparations in time. He had directed officials to ensure that the COVID protocol was fully followed. The yatra was scheduled to start on July 25.

The Uttarakhand government has already called off the Kanwar Yatra citing

(With PTI inputs)

'SC with people to protect civil liberties'

The CJI said the people of India knew that "when things go wrong", the Supreme Court, as the guardian of the largest democracy, "will stand by them".

The Constitution, together with the immense faith of the people in the judicial system, brought to life the Supreme Court's motto *Yato Dharma Sthato Jaya*. "Where there is dharma, there is victory," CJI Ramana stated in the keynote address to a global audience at the Indo-Singapore Media Summit of 2021.

Majoritarian tendencies At a separate event to commemorate the 101st birth anniversary of his father and longest-serving CJI Y.V. Chandrachud, Justice Chandrachud, who is line to be the CJI, stated: "Majoritarian tendencies, whenever and however they arise, must be questioned against the background of our constitutional promise. Any semblance of authoritarianism, clampdown on civil liberties, sexism, casteism, otherisation on account of religion or region is upsetting a sacred promise that was made to our ancestors who accepted India as their Constitutional Republic."

"Our nation was forged and united, with a promise of certain commitments and entitlements to each and every citizen. A promise of re-

ligious freedom, a promise of equality between persons, irrespective of sex, caste or religion, a promise of fundamental freedoms of speech and movement without undue State interference and an enduring right to life and personal liberty," he stressed.

Chief Justice Ramana noted that conflicts were unavoidable in any society. But with conflicts, there was also the need to develop mechanisms for conflict resolution. The CJI took a leaf from the Mahabharata to illustrate that peace through amiability was better than violence. "Mahabharata, actually provides an example of an early attempt at mediation as a conflict resolution tool. Lord Krishna attempted to mediate the dispute between the Pandavas and Kauravas... failure of mediation led to disastrous consequences," he said.

It was both "uncharitable" and an "overstatement" to blame pendency on judicial delay. Even a case filed a day back was added to the oft-quoted pendency statistic of 45 million cases. One of the chief reasons for delays was "luxurious litigation", he pointed out. "It is a specific type of litigation, wherein parties with resources attempt to frustrate the judicial process and delay it by filing numerous proceedings," he said.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyoti Raditya Scindia said a probe team was being sent to the spot.

Trainer aircraft skids, pilot safe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SAGAR

A trainer aircraft skidded off the runway while taking off from the Dhama airstrip in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar district on Saturday afternoon. The trainee pilot who was flying solo did not suffer any injuries, the police said.

The Cessna 172 belonged to Chimes Aviation, a private institute which had once been banned from using the airstrip, 20 km from here, after one of its aircraft crashed last year and two people onboard were killed. The ban was lifted later.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyoti Raditya Scindia said a probe team was being sent to the spot.

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CM YK This pdf was originally uploaded to Brills Express Official (https://t.me/The_Hindu_Express) before anyone else. Don't forget to join backup channel Thehindu000

Pawar meets PM, submits letter

Meeting two days ahead of monsoon session of Parliament raises questions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday had an over 50-minute meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also wrote to Mr. Modi on the problems with the new Union Ministry of Cooperation, which is headed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"Rajya Sabha MP Shri Sharad Pawar met PM Narendra Modi," the PMO tweeted with a photo of the meeting.

The timing of the meeting has raised questions, two days ahead of the monsoon session of Parliament.

There are reports of a strain in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government led by the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, of which the NCP is a key constituent.

Earlier this week, Mr. Pawar's meeting with political strategist Prashant Kishor triggered a rumour that he might be a candidate for the presidential election sche-



Surprise visit: NCP chief Sharad Pawar with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Saturday. •PTI

duled for next year. Mr. Pawar had denied the speculation.

Baseless yarns'

NCP spokesperson and senior leader Majeed Memon said unnecessary and baseless yarns were being woven about the Pawar-Modi meeting. The meeting should not be viewed from the political perspective alone, he said.

"I do not understand why eyebrows are being raised

about today's meeting. A leader of Mr. Pawar's stature has many issues to discuss and resolve. Should he not meet the Prime Minister of India, just because he happens to be on the other side of the political fence?" he remarked.

Mr. Pawar raised various issues from the Ministry of Cooperation, farmers' agitation, Maratha reservation and so on, he added.

In his letter to Mr. Modi,

Mr. Pawar flagged concerns at the amendment to the Banking Regulation Act that seeks to bring in changes in the functioning of "cooperative banks".

The letter pointed to the constitutional provisions that clearly lay out that the cooperative societies come solely under the purview of the State governments. "The Amended Act does little to promote the well-being and growth of the cooperative sector as envisaged by the government," the letter stated.

The growth of the cooperative sector was crucial for the holistic development of the country. It was also attuned to Mr. Modi's own call for "Atmanirbhar Bharat" since the cooperative banks have the expertise of lending to first-time borrowers and contributing more than 23 per cent of their total advances to small and micro industries, it said.

Suspended policeman Sachin Vaze seeks bail

'No chargesheet filed within 90 days'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI



Sachin Vaze

ay 25. The police said the car was stolen from Airoli Mulund Bridge on February 18. The car's owner, Hirani, an auto parts dealer, was found dead on March 5 in Kalwa creek. The case was transferred from the Maharashtra police to the NIA on March 8.

Mr. Vaze was arrested on March 13 for his "role and involvement in placing the explosives-laden vehicle near Carmichael Road." On March 12, a court in Thane rejected Mr. Vaze's pre-arrest bail in Hirani's murder.

Freelance journalist's bail rejected

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A special court on Saturday rejected the bail application of Rajeev Sharma, a freelance journalist who was recently arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on money laundering charge. The accused was arrested by the Delhi Police last September for allegedly supplying confidential information to Chinese intelligence officials.

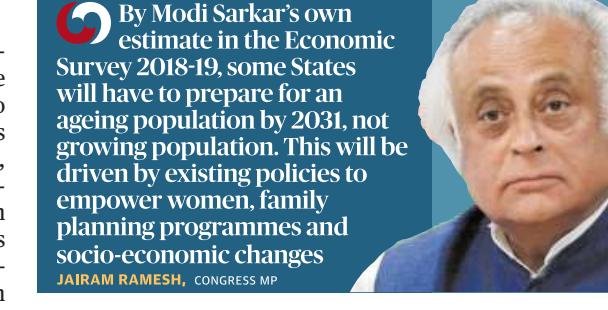
The court in its order said, "the investigation is at a crucial juncture as the complete money trail is yet to be traced and releasing the applicant/accused on bail at this stage would not be salubrious to the cause of justice, as the applicant/accused would attempt to wipe off the footprints and cover up the traces".

The Centre had told the top court that the State governments must not permit any kind of Kanwar Yatra because of the pandemic and arrangements should be made for water from the Ganges to be available through tankers at designated places.

(With PTI inputs)

U.P. polls led to population debate'

India will have an ageing population by 2031, says Jairam Ramesh



By Modi Sarkar's own estimate in the Economic Survey 2018-19, some States will have to prepare for an ageing population by 2031, not growing population. This will be driven by existing policies to empower women, family planning programmes and socio-economic changes

JAIRAM RAMESH, CONGRESS MP

debarred from contesting local body polls, applying for government jobs or receiving any kind of subsidy.

Mr. Ramesh said the U.P. Assembly election in 2022 was the trigger for this "ill-informed" debate started by the BJP. In a long tweet thread, he explained the futility of bringing such a law since the majority of the States had crossed the crucial tipping point when the decline in population starts.

Taunting the ruling party, Mr. Ramesh wondered how many in the BJP were aware

of the basic facts that the Modi government's own 2018-19 Economic Survey had presented in Parliament in July 2019.

The 2018-19 Economic Survey, which Mr. Ramesh quoted in his tweets, says States will start transitioning to an ageing society by the 2030s. It also pointed out that the 0-19 age bracket has already peaked in many States due to sharp decline in total fertility rates (TFR).

"By now, a large majority of States have achieved replacement levels of fertility. By 2026, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh will also do so with Bihar being the last by 2030."

Taunting the ruling party, Mr. Ramesh wondered how many in the BJP were aware

ED arrests Dutch citizen of Indian origin

DEVESHK PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday arrested Shivpal Pabbi, a Dutch national who allegedly ran "hawala" operations in the garb of ready-made garments trade in the Netherlands. The accused got the proceeds of the crime laundered via some Pakistan nationals based in Dubai.

Mr. Pabbi was allegedly trying to flee the country by a flight to Paris when the agency arrested him at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi on money-laundering charge. He was produced before a special court that sent him to the Enforcement Directorate's custody till July 23.

The ED initiated the money-laundering probe against him on the request of the Netherlands government. He is originally from Phagwara in Punjab.

Centre's hand seen in ED probe: Sawant

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Congress on Saturday asked why the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had not yet arrested the bar owners who claimed they had paid money to former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh via the dismissed Mumbai Police officer Sachin Waze.

State Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant said, "Our suspicion gets strengthened that all these selective actions are at the behest of the Modi government and politically motivated to defame the Maha Vikas Aghadi government."

Editors Guild pays tribute to Siddiqui

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Editors Guild of India (EGI) on Saturday condemned the death of Pulitzer Prize-winning Indian photojournalist Danish Siddiqui in Afghanistan, saying his demise was "an irreplaceable loss" to journalism.

In a joint statement, the Press Association and the Indian Women Press Corps said Siddiqui's death while on duty has highlighted the poor safety conditions of scribes.

They also condemned the "hateful campaign" being run against Siddiqui on social media after his demise.



men and Child Development received on the 2018 Bill on the same issue.

Ms. Banerjee who is associated with Tafteesh, a platform of anti-trafficking stakeholders, pointed out that the Bill also defines human trafficking as an organised crime with international implications and attempts to move away from conflating trafficking with sex work, while upholding the right of survivors to rehabilitation and

compensation independent of criminal proceedings.

Experts working in the area of human trafficking said the draft Bill, which has been put on website of Ministry of Women and Child Development, is not clear about how the NIA as a nodal agency will gather information and intelligence through anti-human trafficking Units (AHTUs) at the district and State levels. The Ministry of Home Affairs had mandated the AHTUs for conducting inter-State probe in cases of human trafficking and allocated budgets to them.

Rescue protocol

Kaushik Gupta, a Calcutta High Court lawyer who has taken up several cases of human trafficking, said the draft Bill at present was largely silent on rescue protocols except the "reason to believe" by a police officer not below the rank of a sub-inspector. "This makes the role of AHTUs unclear in the rescue and post-rescue processes," Mr. Gupta said.

There are also concerns about absence of community-based rehabilitation.

Representatives of Durbar, the largest sex workers collective based out of Kolkata, have said that the Bill criminalises sex work and the choice of sex work as a profession. "The Bill mixes up the issue of trafficking and sex work," said a statement from Durbar. Prostitution and pornography have been added to the definition of exploitation and are considered to be trafficking, while the issue of consent has been made irrelevant, the statement said.

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Ms. Banerjee who is associated with Tafteesh, a platform of anti-trafficking stakeholders, pointed out that the Bill also defines human trafficking as an organised crime with international implications and attempts to move away from conflating trafficking with sex work, while upholding the right of survivors to rehabilitation and

had been deprived of her constitutional right to file nomination and contest election.

After meeting the women, Ms. Vadera demanded that the election to all such seats in U.P. be annulled and fresh polling be conducted. She said the woman candidate

"Can someone get 10 goons, beat up people and win elections? Is this our democracy today," the Congress leader asked.

"Can someone get 10 goons, beat up people and win elections? Is this our democracy today," the Congress leader asked.

Ms. Vadera said she wanted the two women, who had recently also met Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav in Lucknow over the incident, to know that all the women of U.P. and the country stood by them.

"This is a fight for democracy," she said, adding that a situation had come where a woman going to file nomination gets beaten up.

The ruling BJP had claimed victory in 635 out of the 825 seats in the block *pramukh* elections. The Opposition parties led by the Samajwadi Party accused the BJP of misusing administrative machinery to intimidate candidates and of orchestrating violence to capture these rural body posts.

They also condemned the "hateful campaign" being run against Siddiqui on social media after his demise.

INTERVIEW | ASHRAF GHANI

'Our goal is to reach a political settlement that will ensure lasting peace'

Afghanistan needs Pakistan for peace, and it wants an enduring and predictable relationship with the neighbour, says the Afghan President

SUHASINI HAIDAR

Afghanistan is facing a "Battle for the Republic's values", says President Ashraf Ghani, referring to the Taliban's advances and a desire to establish an Islamic emirate in the country. He conceded the militants had won some battles, but remains confident the Afghan forces would prevail.

The situation at the border with Pakistan seems to be getting more and more violent, and an Indian photojournalist has been killed. Pakistan has denied it threatened missile strikes on the Afghan Air Force if it tries to clear Taliban from the area. Could you give us some clarity on the situation there?

■ I cannot give you any clarity, because I've been in non-stop meetings from early morning [in Tashkent], and that clarification will have to come from Kabul. But I would like to give my deepest sympathies to the family of the Indian journalist, to the journalistic community of India, and to all to journalists around the world.

There were some strong words at your speech at the connectivity conference here, especially as you named the Pakistan PM for making promises on the Taliban that haven't been kept, right as he was sitting a few feet away. Why do you feel so disappointed?

■ We need Pakistan for peace. We need an enduring relationship, a predictable relationship with Pakistan. We are a plain-speaking people. And I need to reflect with logic and rigour, about the emotions of our people... because if they are not given expression, they will find other channels, and I don't want further destructive relationships between us.

The Taliban have made

gains on different towns, different border checkposts as well. Do you think the Afghan National Defence and Security forces (ANDSF) are going to be able to hold them back, or do they need to change tactics?

■ Firstly, winning battles is not winning the war. They [the Taliban] have won battles. But, they're going to lose the war, and we are determined. We need to rebalance [the situation], but our goal is not winning the war militarily. Our goal is to arrive at a political settlement that will ensure a just and lasting peace. I don't want my country to become Algeria or Iraq, or Syria, or Lebanon or Yemen.

But does the ANDSF have enough equipment, training they need?

■ If we went on a needs-based assessment, the world would not be able to fulfil our needs. Because what do we not want? This is a "Kennedy

moment" for us combined with a "Lincoln moment". A "Kennedy moment" because we have to give for our country, and a "Lincoln moment" because like Lincoln in 1861, we're now facing the Battle of the Republic, which is for the values that the Islamic Republic [of Afghanistan] stands for. I don't want the world to look at Afghanistan through the perspective of that America was here. It's gone.

What is your expectation from India at this time... has



C We're now facing the Battle of the Republic, which is for the values that the Islamic Republic [of Afghanistan] stands for

Afghanistan asked for military support of any kind?

■ No, it has not. India has been a remarkable partner. I have the best of relations with the Prime Minister [Narendra Modi], who is wise.

He has not asked of us something that will result in sacrificing our short, medium or long-term interests. India is a true partner. It's the country with which we have a positive balance of trade. And what India stands for is the Salma dam, is the parliament building, Shahoot dam, transmission lines. And India is going to be booming. We want to be a participant in the immense shift that India is witnessing in terms of leadership of the fourth industrial revolution.

Do you feel that Afghanistan becomes a casualty to the hostilities between India and Pakistan?

■ We hope that India and Pakistan will be able to reach a resolution because that will change all of Asia. But accusations are often made, that India is in every corner of Afghanistan, or there are 21 Indian consulates....

[interrupts] A former Pakistani Minister just said

India had seven bases in Afghanistan...

■ It has none. None. And when [Pakistani leaders] engage in that kind of fabrication, there is no credibility.

The U.S. has said it is pulling out its troops, and along with NATO has nearly completed that pullout from Afghanistan. Britain says it will engage whoever comes to power in Afghanistan is acceptable, suggesting that even a Taliban government by force and the Islamic emirate would be acceptable. Do you feel abandoned?

■ No, no, I don't. We have an engagement. As I mentioned, the assets that are left behind [by U.S.], the capabilities that are left behind, the immense transformation that has taken place in our lives, is a product of these 20 years of [Afghan-U.S.] partnership. But so is the other side of the equation, the violence, the disenchantment,

etc. President Biden's decision [to pull out troops] was not a surprise to me. We've respected it and I have the very best of relations with President Biden.

The U.S. also had a proposal which saw you step aside for a government of consensus. Would you be willing to do that?

■ My condition is that my successor be elected by the people of Afghanistan. It's the greatest honour of my life to serve them. I will serve them till it's necessary. At this moment, they need a Commander-in-Chief and that's what they've got.

If the Taliban come in by force, do you think that the international community should come back to help?

■ No. This is our job. The period of international engagement or use of force in Afghanistan is over.

Full interview at <https://bit.ly/GhaniInterview>

Independent defence policy in place now, claims Amit Shah

'Before Modi became Prime Minister, it was influenced by foreign policy'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the country had an independent defence policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Delivering the Rustamji Memorial Lecture at the 18th Investiture Ceremony of the Border Security Force (BSF), he said that before Mr. Modi became the Prime Minister, India did not have an independent defence policy. It was influenced by, or overlapped with, the foreign policy.

Mr. Modi provided an independent defence policy and this was a major achievement. India intended to live in harmony with others, but if anyone challenged its sovereignty and threatened its borders, the country would respond in the same language. The government had implemented this policy on the ground.

Border safety was at the core of the national security policy, Mr. Shah pointed out and listed infiltration, drugs/weapons trafficking and drones as challenges before the BSF. Agencies such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation were



Proud moment: Home Minister Amit Shah at the BSF's 18th investiture ceremony in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ PTI

working on developing an anti-drone mechanism.

Drones were used to trigger explosions inside the Air Force Station in Jammu last month.

New challenges

Mr. Shah said there was a need to develop a long-term strategy for countering the possible use of artificial intelligence and robotic technology from across the border.

Earlier this month, the BSF held one such event in coordination with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. The Ministry of Home Affairs was planning to make it a regular practice, he noted.

Border fencing

Before 2022, all the gaps in border fencing would be plugged. A pilot project of the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System had been implemented

for effective surveillance along the border. A new model was also being developed with certain modifications.

Several measures were being taken to prevent the exodus of people from bordering villages. It was vital for border security. The paramilitary forces had been made nodal organisations for the implementation of government projects in those villages. Infrastructure development works were being undertaken to provide basic services to the residents. They should be made aware of their rights, he said.

Compared with about 3,600-km road stretches constructed along the border from 2008 to 2014, the Modi government laid 4,764 km of roads from 2014 to 2020.

Funds to the tune of ₹44,000 crore were allocated for road construction, as against ₹23,000 crore during the previous regime. The length of bridges constructed had now doubled. In place of just one tunnel, six had been constructed. The pace of border road resurfacing and associated works along the India-China border had also doubled, he added.

'Ravi Shankar Prasad ousted for corruption in BharatNet'

Thousands of crores diverted, says Cong. after CAG report

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

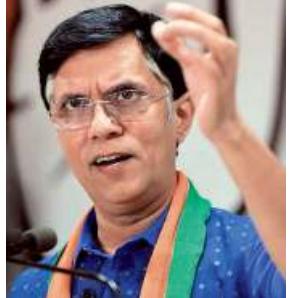
Flagging a preliminary report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) on the BharatNet project, the Congress on Saturday alleged that large-scale corruption was the primary reason for shunting out Ravi Shankar Prasad from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

In its preliminary finding, the CAG has said the Narendra Modi government's BharatNet programme, which intends to connect six lakh villages with high-speed Internet, failed to take off due to financial irregularities.

At a press conference on Saturday, senior Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera demanded an independent, high-level and time-bound inquiry into the findings.

Poor maintenance

In a 94-page draft report, the CAG said despite a huge payment to the common service centres (CSCs) set up by the Ministry, the maintenance of cable and other infrastruc-



ture was not found efficient in various circles. This resulted in poor quality of service at the gram panchayat and village block levels, the report said. It has also quoted many instances where work was completed only on paper.

The report has pointed out that a payment of ₹386.42 crore and ₹116.5 crore was made between July 2019 and December 2020 to the CSCs under this Ministry. The arrangement is part of a tripartite agreement for operations and maintenance of optical fibre cable network, telecom equipment and Wi-Fi access points bet-

ween the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), Bharat Broadband Network Ltd. and the CSCs done in July 2019 and approved by the Digital Communication Commission in September 2020.

The USOF is a ₹55,000-crore state reserve for bridging the digital divide, and is also funding the ambitious BharatNet project that aims to connect 2.5 lakh gram panchayats or village blocks encompassing more than six lakh villages across India.

Quoting the report, Mr. Khera said a devious *modus operandi* was used for redirecting the government money to private companies without following due process.

He asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to tell the country what action would be taken against persons who siphoned off funds to the tune of thousands of crores. "Is this the reason for removing Ravi Shankar Prasad from Cabinet and is the removal of a Minister enough?" he asked.

5 behind blog in Kashmir arrested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday claimed to have arrested five persons who were running a blog, which ran smear campaigns and prepared a hit list of prominent personalities in Kashmir, including *Rising Kashmir* editor Shujaat Bukhari.

"The culprits behind the terror and intimidation machinery, *kashmirfight.wordpress.com*, have been arrested in a major breakthrough," Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar said.

The police said they recovered a large number of cell phones, digital storage devices and computing platforms, following raids at houses and properties belonging to the five persons across the Union Territory. In one house, the police said they found 32 mobile phones.

With the arrests, it is expected that the plans behind the murder of Shujaat Bukhari, advocate Babar Qadri and businessman Satpal Nischal would come to the fore.

Chaotic House adds to gloom: Venkaiah

Ensure smooth session, he urges all members

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A dysfunctional Parliament adds to the prevailing gloom, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said on Saturday, urging the Opposition and the Treasury bench leaders to ensure a smooth and productive monsoon session.

Mr. Naidu was speaking at an all-party meeting he chaired at his residence in Delhi, ahead of the session beginning Monday.

The meeting was attended by floor leaders of all major Opposition parties and 15 Ministers. "A dysfunctional Parliament adds to the prevailing gloom and hence, all sections of the House should ensure a smooth and productive session as it offers an opportunity to address the concerns of the people af-



The monsoon session will begin on July 19. ■ PTI

fected by COVID-19," he said.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi said the government had identified

29 Bills for the session.

Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge said the House should discuss the impact of the pandemic on the economy and the possibility of a third wave. The Congress also wants discussions on the farmers' agitation, cooperative federalism, China's actions along the border and Jammu and Kashmir.

Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien called for more scrutiny of Bills by the parliamentary committees.

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On behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Rajasthan, PWD, Rajasthan invites sealed bids in specified format from interested Bidders for Package No WB/RSHDP II/Annuity/02 Development, Operation & Maintenance of (i) Neem Ka Thana - Khetri Section of SH-13 from km 55+300 (at Junction with SH-37 B - Village Sirohi) to km 102+450 (at Junction with NH 31 at Jasrapur Mod near Khetri), total length 45.850 km and (ii) Jhunjhunu - Rajgarh Section of SH-41 from km 49+750 to 83+000 in Jhunjhunu district and 28+000 to 0+000 (Ch 0/0 at Rajgarh) in Churu district total Length 62.730 km, in the state of Rajasthan under RSHDP-II, to be financed through the World Bank on Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM) through Two Envelope e-Procurement bidding through National Competitive Bidding process as per the World Bank Guidelines. The Bidding documents can be viewed or / and downloaded from website: <http://sppr.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://www.pwd.rajasthan.gov.in> and <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> from 15.07.2021; any further amendments shall only be viewed on above websites.

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BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE

90 oxygen plants ready soon: CPWD

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Out of 100 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants that were allotted to the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) to construct, around 90 had been completed or are nearing completion, a senior CPWD official said on Saturday.

The plants, being constructed using the PM CARES fund, are a part of over 1,000 such plants sanctioned to augment the availability of medical oxygen at healthcare facilities in all the States and Union Territories.

A senior Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry official wrote to the CPWD team responsible for the project on Wednesday that "all the work on the plant sites" was targeted to be completed by August 15. The letter also shared the "branding" to be displayed on the plants, a total of 1,222 of which had been sanctioned under PM CARES, the official said. The plant would carry stickers declaring that it is a "PSA plant under PM CARES".

New academic session in universities by Oct. 1

Admission process to be completed by Sept. 30, says UGC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The new academic session in universities and colleges across the country will begin from October 1, while the admission process has to be completed by September 30, according to new guidelines of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) have been asked to ensure that the admission process for undergraduate courses begins only after the declaration of results by the CBSE, ICSE and all State Boards.

"It is expected that all school boards will declare their results for class 12 exams by July 31. If there is any delay in declaration of the result of qualifying exams, the new academic session may begin by October 18," the UGC said in the guidelines.

The Commission has said that the teaching-learning process must continue in offline, online or blended modes.

"The institutions may



New normal: Most higher education institutions have asked students to apply online for admission. ■ R. ASHOK

plan for classes, breaks, conduct of examinations, semester break, etc. during October 1 [2021] to July 31 [2022], following necessary protocols and advisories issued by Central and State governments from time to time in view of the COVID-19 pandemic," the guidelines said.

Fee refund

In view of the financial hardships faced by parents during the pandemic, the UGC has asked universities and HEIs to ensure the fee is fully refunded in cases of cancellation of admission or migration of students.

It has also been made mandatory for universities and colleges to conduct final year or end semester exams by August 31. The exams can be conducted in either offline, online or blended modes.

"For intermediate semester students assessment shall be based on internal assessment and previous semester results," it said.

"In case of higher education institutions located at places where the government has imposed restrictions or public gatherings, HEIs may plan accordingly," the UGC said.

Vaccine procurement rates revised

Centre will buy Covishield at ₹205 per dose and Covaxin at ₹215 per dose

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Centre has placed an order to procure 66 crore more doses of Covishield and Covaxin to be supplied between August and December, at a revised price of ₹205 and ₹215 a dose, respectively, excluding taxes, official sources said.

They said 37.5 crore Covishield doses from the Serum Institute of India and 28.5 crore Covaxin doses from Bharat Biotech will be procured by December.

"An order to procure 66

crore more doses of COVID-19 vaccines – Covishield and Covaxin – to be supplied between August and December, at a revised price of ₹205 and ₹215 per dose respectively, excluding taxes, has been placed," a source said.

The price of a dose of Covishield amounts to ₹215.25 and Covaxin ₹225.75, including taxes, the source said.

The Union Health Ministry, which was procuring both the vaccines at ₹150 per dose, had indicated that the prices would be revised after the new COVID-19 vaccine procurement policy came into effect from June



In the pipeline: A total of 37.5 crore Covishield doses and 28.5 crore Covaxin doses have been ordered. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

21. Under the new policy, the Ministry will procure 75% of the vaccines being produced by the drug manufacturers in the country.

While the Centre has asked both the vaccine manufacturers to scale up their production, the manufacturers had indicated that getting ₹150 for each dose while making investments to ramp up the production was not viable for them.

The Union government had earlier allowed States and private hospitals to procure 50% of the vaccines following demands for decentralisation.

However, after several

States complained of problems, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the revision of the vaccine guidelines on June 8.

Domestic vaccine manufacturers are given the option to provide 25% of their monthly production of vaccines to private hospitals.

According to the revised guidelines which came into effect on June 21, vaccine doses provided free of cost by the Centre will be allocated to States and Union Territories based on criteria such as population, disease burden and the progress of vaccination, and all above the age of 18 will be eligible for

the free jabs.

Any wastage of vaccine will affect the allocation negatively.

The States and Union Territories would aggregate the demand of private hospitals keeping in view equitable distribution between large and small private hospitals and regional balance.

"Based on this aggregated demand, the Government of India will facilitate the supply of these vaccines to the private hospitals and their payment through the National Health Authority's electronic platform. This would enable the smaller and remote private hospitals to obtain a timely supply of vaccines, and further equitably access and regional balance," the Ministry had said.

The price of vaccine doses for private hospitals would be declared by each vaccine manufacturer, and any subsequent changes would be notified in advance, it had said. More than 41.69 crore vaccine doses have been provided to States and Union Territories so far, through all sources, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Live-streaming court proceedings is key: CJI

'People have a right to be informed'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Formalising live-streaming of court proceedings is crucial for dissemination of information. The spread of information is sacrosanct to free speech, Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said on Saturday.

The Chief Justice was inaugurating the launch of live-streaming of proceedings at the Gujarat High Court in the presence of Supreme Court e-Committee Chairperson Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Supreme Court judge Justice M.R. Shah, Gujarat High Court Chief Justice Vikram Nath.

The CJI said the Supreme Court is "keen" to commence live-streaming of its proceedings. "We are working out the logistics and working on the full consensus of the full court... We can introduce live-streaming in a cost-effective manner without much of a burden on the exchequer," Chief Justice Ramana explained. The people have a right to be informed about the institutions which serve them, the CJI said.

"Currently, the public obtains information about court proceedings through the media. In effect, the information from the courts is being filtered by agents of transmission. In the pro-

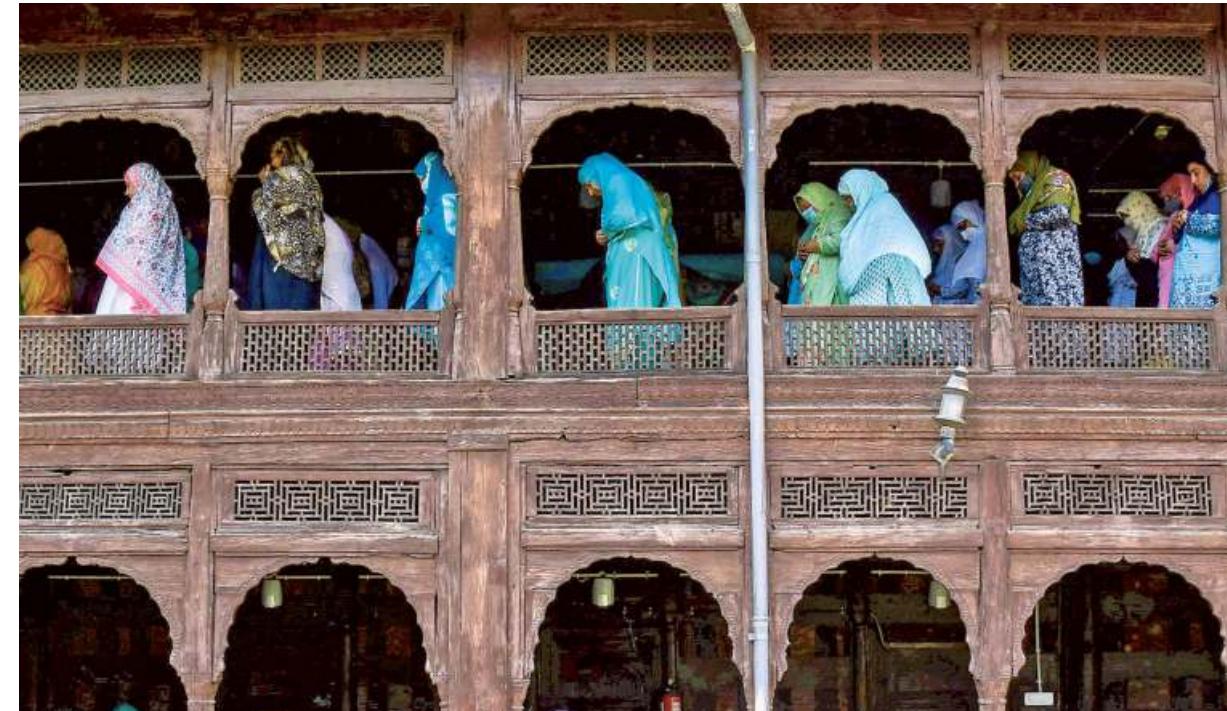
cess, there is sometimes a transmission loss leading to misinterpretation of questions asked and observations made by the Bench due to the absence of context. Vested interests are eager to amplify these misinterpretations in order to embarrass or discredit the institution," the CJI said.

However, the CJI said live-streaming was a "double-edged sword". Judges, working under public scrutiny, may face a stressful environment.

"A judge cannot be swayed by popular opinion. Yes, with increased public gaze, he might become a subject of multiple debates, that should never deter him from his duty to protect the right of one against the might of many. Always remember, as a repository of people's faith, a judge cannot afford to lose objectivity," Chief Justice Ramana advised.

The CJI said the rules of live-streaming should be calibrated to protect the privacy and security of victims and witnesses.

Serene moment



In supplication: Women gathering for prayers on the occasion of the 656th Urs of Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamdani at Khanqah-e-Moula in old Srinagar on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Assam CM justifies heavy crackdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
DIPHU

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday advised his detractors to think of the families drug dealers have destroyed with them and criticising the State police for being "trigger-happy".

The police have since May 10 killed or injured more than 25 alleged criminals, some of them drug traffickers, inviting criticism from Opposition parties and rights activists.

"Section 46 of CrPC gives power to the police to shoot in the leg if someone tries to snatch a pistol and flee. There are debates, but before sympathising with the drug dealers one should think about the families they have destroyed, the social damage they have done," Mr. Sarma said, before setting fire to a pile of seized drugs, including 3.47 kg heroin, at Sutia-nala near Diphu.

About 250 km east of Guwahati, Diphu is the headquarters of Karbi Anglong district that has gained notoriety over the decades as the corridor of the drug trade from Myanmar. Intelligence agencies say the drugs find their way via Manipur and Nagaland, which adjoin Karbi Anglong. Mr. Sarma said his government was determined to fight the drug menace with the most extreme measures permitted by law.

Paper recall sparks churn in NCBS

TIFR reviews research practices amid allegations of 'harassment' of students

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Underlying the recent retraction of a scientific paper by the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, because it relied on manipulated data, are allegations of inordinate pressure on students from superiors, often at the threat of their careers being harmed, *The Hindu* has learnt.

While the controversy in one of India's most prestigious labs erupted over a research paper, the issues it has thrown up have now prompted a relook at research practices as well an investigation by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) academic ethics committee. The TIFR is the parent body of the NCBS.

On Friday, a press note from the Director, TIFR, said: "Recently, allegations of academic malpractice have been levelled in the press and social media against TIFR-NCBS faculty member Dr. Arati Ramesh. The retraction of the *Nature Chemical Biology* paper with Dr. Ramesh as the senior author took place after a full inquiry, as required by the NCBS Research Misconduct policies, into the data trail related to images that showed evidence of manipulation. The NCBS Management Board was informed about this investigation. The committee's final report is currently under review by the TIFR Academic Ethics Committee, who will determine



A view of the NCBS campus in Bengaluru.

mine if further investigation and/or action are warranted."

On October 5, 2020, the paper "Discovery of iron-sensing bacterial riboswitches" was published online in the well-regarded journal *Nature Chemical Biology*.

Media attention

Its listed authors were Siladitya Bandyopadhyay, Susmitnarayan Chaudhury, Dolly Mehta and Arati Ramesh, the last of whom was the group leader and is faculty at the NCBS.

The paper evoked significant media attention basis its findings, as it was the first instance of an RNA molecule being able to detect iron, opening the possibility of designing specialised iron sensors. Mr. Bandyopadhyay was a Ph.D. student.

Within days of publication, anonymous reviewers on PubPeer – a site that enables research papers to be discussed after publication – pointed out anomalies in the images submitted along

with the research paper by way of proof. Dr. Ramesh initially defended the sanctity of the images but informed the institute, which after an investigation, recommended that the paper be retracted. *The Hindu* had reported this on July 7.

A post-script, warning that there were problems with the paper's data, appeared with online versions of the paper as far back as December 2020 but the paper was formally retracted only on June 30, 2021.

The committee concluded that the images were manipulated by a single individual, Mr. Bandyopadhyay. In the first week of December, Mr. Bandyopadhyay left NCBS after getting a No Objection Certificate from the institution.

Independent journalist Leonid Schneider, on his website *For Better Science*, on July 14 first disclosed email correspondence between Mr. Bandyopadhyay, the investigating committee as well with the institute director, Satyajit Mayor.

In the correspondence, Mr. Bandyopadhyay said he and other members of the lab found that while the RNA molecules were sensitive to iron, the numbers to prove it weren't near the expected theoretical value and Dr. Ramesh repeatedly insisted that the results correspond to what she thought it ought to be.

While not contesting manipulating data, he suggested that the overall culture of pressure,

the lab was oppressive. "I was told that I have to replicate the data that was generated by someone in the lab and if that does not happen, I will never get to stay in the lab," the emails say. "...Since the first day I stepped into the lab in Dec 2017, I have seen someone manipulating data."

Student concerns

The Hindu has independently verified that these emails were indeed written by Mr. Bandyopadhyay to the investigators. A person privy to proceedings in the Ramesh lab around the RNA-sensing experiment said that while it wasn't unusual for lab leaders or Principal Investigators to be tough on their associates or students, Dr. Ramesh threatened members with dire consequences, such as stalling their academic progress, if the results didn't conform.

"There have been other students, and members in her lab who've complained of harassment. Several students leave the lab because of the hostile work environment," this person told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Ramesh didn't respond to requests for comment. Institute Director Satyajit Mayor told *The Hindu* that the committee's mandate was specifically to determine the stage at which data was manipulated.

However, beyond the issue of data fraud, the institution was "seriously taking up" these allegations of pressure, he said.

Producers seek extension of shoot time

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday asked the film and television producers to strictly adhere to the COVID-19 norms laid down by the State government and coordinate with police authorities about the place of shoot as well as extension for timings.

The guild members said the shooting of Hindi and Marathi films and television series have been going on by following all norms, but timings need to be extended.

They told Mr. Thackeray that shooting beyond 4 p.m. was possible by taking all precautions and following rules.

Filmmakers Rakeesh Omprakash Mehra, Ritesh Sidhwani, Ravi Jadhav, Naresh Manjule and Subodh Bhave were among those who participated in the virtual meeting.

Strict compliance
Mr. Thackeray asked the producers to ensure that norms are followed, crew members are vaccinated and routine tests for the virus are conducted.

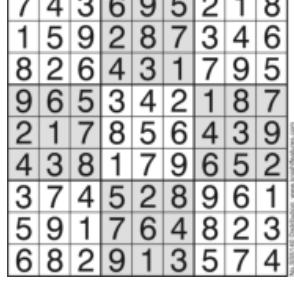
He has directed the Mumbai police to appoint a nodal officer to whom producers will submit the shooting timetable, location and timings. "Permissions will be given once the officer is satisfied that all precautions are being taken," he said.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



This pdf was originally uploaded to Brills Express Official (https://t.me/The_Hindu_Express) before anyone else. Don't forget to join backup channel Thehindu000

AN-ND-NE

U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan to form quad group

Diplomatic platform to focus on expanding trade and building transit links

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON
The U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have agreed in principle to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity, the Biden administration has said.

"The parties consider long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan critical to regional connectivity and agree that peace and regional connectivity are mutually reinforcing," the State Department said on Friday.

Recognising the historic opportunity to open flourishing interregional trade routes, the parties intend to cooperate to expand trade, build transit links, and strengthen business-to-business ties, it said.

"The parties agreed to



New equations: Joe Biden speaking about the situation in Afghanistan in Washington, in this file photo. ■ AFP

meet in the coming months to determine the modalities of this cooperation with mutual consensus," said the State Department.

Strategic location

Afghanistan's strategic location has for a long time been touted as a competitive advantage for the country. Afghanistan is bordered by Pa-

kistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast.

Located at the heart of the historic Silk Road, Afghanistan was long the crossroads of commerce between Asian countries connecting them to Europe, and enhancing religious, cultural, and com-

mercial contacts.

The formation of the new quad group is important amid China's desire to extend its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) to Afghanistan.

The BRI, a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping when he came to power in 2013, aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

By virtue of its location, Afghanistan can provide China with a base to spread its influence across the world.

Since the announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. forces by August 31, violence has been rising and efforts to broker a peace settlement between the Afghan government and insurgent Taliban have slowed.

Afghan Ambassador's daughter abducted, assaulted in Pakistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

ing a quick investigation, saying she was "severely tortured".

A hospital medical report, seen by the Associated Press, said she suffered blows to her head, had rope marks on her wrists and legs and was badly beaten. There was a suspicion that she had several broken bones and X-rays were ordered, the report said.

The report also said her abductors held her for over

five hours and that she was brought to the hospital in Islamabad by the police. There were no details about the abduction or the circumstances of her release.

Pakistan called the attack "disturbing" and said that security at the residence of the Afghan Ambassador in Islamabad had been reinforced.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry said it strongly condemns this "heinous act".

White House, Mr. Biden said the Justice Department would appeal the ruling by Texas-based Judge Andrew Hanen, while adding that "only Congress can ensure a permanent solution by granting a path to citizenship for Dreamers," the young people brought to the US as children.

DACA supporters received a temporary reprieve in June 2020 when the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-to-4 vote that the Trump administration had not provided sufficient justification for its attempts to end the programme. It made clear it was ruling largely on procedural issues, and left open the possibility of further challenges.

President Joe Biden denounced the ruling as "deeply disappointing".

In a statement from the

ets of infection among the over 90 million Americans who have yet to get shots. Just four states with low vaccination rates made up 40% of new cases last week, and nearly half of them came from Florida alone.

However, there is little appetite in the White House for a return to broad mandates for masks.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Friday that in low-vaccination areas with rising cases, "local policymakers might consider whether masking would be helpful for their community."

A U.S. federal judge on Friday dealt a fresh blow to an immigration programme protecting undocumented migrants brought to the country as children, ruling it unlawful and blocking the enrollment of new applicants.

Instituted by former president Barack Obama in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) covers around 7,00,000 people known as Dreamers.

For many, America is the only country they have ever known.

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In a statement from the

'Dreamers' programme is illegal, U.S. court rules

President Biden vows to appeal ruling

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

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Correct the course, Nasheed tells Solih

'Pandering to extremists could take the Maldives to a dangerous place'

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Maldivian Parliamentary Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed, who survived a bid on his life in May, has asked President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to "course-correct before it is too late".

In a statement issued on Saturday, Mr. Nasheed accused President Solih of renegeing on his pledge to address religious extremism, referring to the government's "withdrawal" of support for a recent Bill – criminalising hate crimes – tabled after the May 6 explosion targeting him. "When the conservative religious parties who are part of a political alliance with the government objected, the government withdrew support for its own Bill," the statement said, naming the Adhaalath party.

His comments come amid growing tensions within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) over the government's policies, mainly on corruption and religious extremism.

While some MPs back President Solih's "re-trained" approach that they find politically prudent, other disgruntled members support Mr. Nasheed's "bold" ways. The friction seen within the top echelons of the Maldivian government that is facing the pandemic's blow and incumbency has set off speculation over political stability in Indian Ocean island nation.

Mr. Nasheed was critically injured in the May 6 incident that police called a "terror attack", and has since undergone multiple surgeries in Male, before being flown to

Germany for further treatment. In his first media remarks since the blast, Mr. Nasheed, currently in the U.K., told *The Hindu* over telephone that "pandering to extremists" is often deemed necessary for political expedience in the Maldives, especially during polls.

Extremist votes

"We have had three elections under the new Constitution. The MDP won twice

– in 2008 and 2018, and President Yameen's PPM won in 2013. All three victories were possible only with the extremist vote."

But the tendency could take the country to a "dangerous place" in the next few years, he warned, adding: "Look at Afghanistan today." Emphasising that he has nothing against President Solih, his "very good friend", Mr. Nasheed said he did not want the MDP to split, although some fear Mr. Nasheed's actions could divide the party.

"As long as I am there, I will make sure that doesn't happen." All the same, he said those committed to moderate values must come together in a common platform. "And that could include the PPM too," he said, despite his differences with the political rival and jailed former President, Mr. Yameen.

On his own ambitions to run for the country's top office in 2023, Mr. Nasheed said: "Well, I have merely indicated that I have not resigned yet, and that I am available."

According to MDP spokesman and legislator Imthiyaz Fahmy, there is no imminent threat to the party's unity, but the differences within



Mohamed Nasheed

pose a challenge. Mr. Nasheed, he said, is "really concerned about the government's lukewarm reaction" to the terror attack, and its response to growing Islamist extremism in the country.

"The very ideology and principles that the MDP stands for have been sidelined by the government, according to President Nasheed, and he believes that is detrimental to the party," he said.

Meanwhile, some legislators in the party are increasingly disillusioned, according to MP Mickail Naseem, in whose view President Solih's pledge to address religious extremism, including undertaking operations in islands to identify such groups, and pressing charges against suspects.

"It is not correct to say the President is under pressure from coalition partners. It is really a commitment he made when he assumed office to work with this coalition. He will not be the one to break it," she said. "If he had succumbed to what some call pressure, then the Bill would not have come to Parliament in the first place. It has only gone to the committee stage now and will be taken up after wide consultation. President Solih is not stepping back from any of his promises."

Doha talks resume amid Taliban gains

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DOHA

Representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban met in Doha for talks on Saturday as violence raged in the country with foreign forces almost entirely withdrawn.

The two sides have been meeting on and off for months in Doha, but the talks have lost momentum as the insurgents have made battlefield gains.

Biden grapples with a 'pandemic of unvaccinated'

COVID-19 cases triple over past three weeks, deaths rise

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Two weeks after celebrating America's near "independence" from the coronavirus, President Joe Biden is confronting the worrying reality of rising cases and deaths – and the limitations of his ability to combat persistent vaccine hesitancy.

Cases of COVID-19 have tripled over the past three weeks, and hospitalisations and deaths are rising among unvaccinated people. While the rates are still sharply down from their January highs, officials are concerned by the reversing trend and what they consider needless illness and



A nurse administering a vaccine dose in Seattle, Washington. ■ AFP

death. And cases are expected to continue to rise in coming weeks.

"Look, the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated," Mr. Biden said on Friday.

The rising numbers are being driven by large pock-

ets of infection among the over 90 million Americans who have yet to get shots. Just four states with low vaccination rates made up 40% of new cases last week, and nearly half of them came from Florida alone.

However, there is little appetite in the White House for a return to broad mandates for masks.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Friday that in low-vaccination areas with rising cases, "local policymakers might consider whether masking would be helpful for their community."

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White House, Mr. Biden said the Justice Department would appeal the ruling by Texas-based Judge Andrew Hanen, while adding that "only Congress can ensure a permanent solution by granting a path to citizenship for Dreamers," the young people brought to the US as children.

DACA supporters received a temporary reprieve in June 2020 when the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-to-4 vote that the Trump administration had not provided sufficient justification for its attempts to end the programme. It made clear it was ruling largely on procedural issues, and left open the possibility of further challenges.

President Joe Biden denounced the ruling as "deeply disappointing".

In a statement from the

South Africans clean up after deadly unrest

Violence was pre-planned: Ramaphosa

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DURBAN

South Africans on Saturday cleaned up shopping centres and stores looted during a week of shocking violence that rocked the country and left more than 200 dead.

Aid organisations also handed out food in communities that had been cut off from main roads or where food shops were ransacked in the unrest.

The violence – the worst in post-apartheid South Africa – erupted after former President Jacob Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail for snubbing a corruption inquiry.

His successor President Cyril Ramaphosa, who came to office promising to curb graft, said the riots were a "coordinated and well-planned attack" on the country's young democracy.

"Using the pretext of a political grievance, those behind these acts have sought to provoke a popular insurrection," Mr. Rama-

phosa said in a televised address on Friday night.

The rioting caused widespread destruction, leaving thousands of businesses trashed, including many retail shops that were specifically targeted.

Behind them walls topped with spikes and razor wire had been spray painted with the words "Free Zuma".

Mr. Zuma, whose home province is KwaZulu-Natal, commands support among loyalists in the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

Traffic was back to normal along a main highway linking the north to the port city of Durban after it had been closed for much of the week.

Elsewhere



Syria's Assad takes oath for fourth term

DAMASCUS

President Bashar al-Assad took the oath of office for a fourth term in war-ravaged Syria on Saturday, after taking 95% of the vote in a controversial election dismissed abroad. The vote extending Mr. Assad's grip on power was the second since the start of a decade-long civil war that has killed almost half a million people and battered the country's infrastructure. AFP

France to allow those who have taken Covishield

PARIS

France will allow travellers who have had Covishield, AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured in India, into the country starting on Sunday. France still doesn't recognise vaccinations by Chinese or Russian vaccines. The move came after a global outcry over the fact that the EU's COVID-19 certificate only recognises AstraZeneca vaccines manufactured in Europe. AFP

idco NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Invitation of bids under EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) mode for RE-DEVELOPMENT OF KALINGA STUDIO, Bhubaneswar

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

File No. T&E-E-4557 - Letter No: 11478, Bhubaneswar, 15th July, 2021

Name of the Work : Re-development of Kalinga Studio on EPC mode in Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Period of Completion: 15 (Fifteen) Months

Estimated Project: Rs.120 Crore

Availability of Bid Document: 26.07.2021 to 24.08.2021

Last date of receipt of pre-bid queries: 2.08.2021 till 4 P.M.

Pre-bid Meeting: 4.08.2021 at 11.30 A.M.

Issue of pre-bid clarification: 6.08.2021

Receipt of bids: 24.08.2021 till 4 P.M.

SNAPSHOTS



Roots of bias

Earlier research of the last decade had shown that in lab settings, a rat would rather help a fellow rat who is in distress rather than an unfamiliar newcomer to the lab. Now, a study by scientists at University of California, Berkeley, finds the brain regions that drive the rats to focus on others dear to them, when in a crisis. The study, published in *eLife*, further suggests that humans, being so similar, may very well share this ingrained neuronal bias.



Volcanoes on Venus

Last year, scientists were excited by traces of phosphine in Venus's atmosphere, because it could imply the presence of life there. This has been displaced by what Cornell University researchers have suggested - that there are explosive volcanoes on the surface of Venus that emit phosphides which forms the phosphine. This study, published in *PNAS*, suggests that phosphine points not so much to the biology but the geology of Venus.

Waiving testing for the fully vaccinated is ill-considered'

Vaccinated people can potentially get infected once more and spread the virus to others

R. PRASAD

On July 14, Maharashtra announced that people who have received both doses of a Covid-19 vaccine can travel to the State by air without a negative RT-PCR report. However, they should carry certificates stating they are fully vaccinated. Earlier rules mandated that a test had to be taken 48 hours prior to the travel and only those with a negative RT-PCR test could enter Maharashtra. In an email to The Hindu, Dr. Giridhara Babu, Epidemiologist at the Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru, explains why doing away with RT-PCR testing is not correct and how it could endanger others.

Since fully vaccinated people can still get infected, is it a correct decision by the Maharashtra government to do away with the requirement of RT-PCR testing for fully vaccinated people?

We need to understand that testing is done to identify people with infections so that they can be isolated. This applies to everyone irrespective of the vaccination status. Increasingly, it is seen that the vaccinated persons can get infected. Not testing vaccinated persons is an ill-considered and unjust decision, mostly to reduce the inconveniences to the vaccinated persons.

From the perspective of rights of the unvaccinated, it is important to protect them from getting the infection from everyone, including vaccinated persons. There is also evidence that there is high incidence of breakthrough infections in vaccinated persons, even among those who have taken two doses of mRNA vaccines. The efficacy of the vaccines is tested against hospitalisation and in preventing deaths. While reductions in infection is the ultimate goal of higher vaccination cover-

COVID-19 vaccination safe for pregnant women

In India, based on all that we know, all vaccines currently available are safe and should be used in pregnant women

GAGANDEEP KANG

and Prevention (CDC) listed pregnancy as one of the risk factors for severe disease in May 2021, and recently, the World Health Organization revised its recommendation for vaccination to include pregnant women in Category II to be prioritised for vaccination, along with other co-morbidities.

Almost 100 countries now have policies that allow some levels of permission for the vaccination of pregnant women. The Government of India made a recommendation for the vaccination of pregnant women in early July 2021, and many states have started or are set to start, but many questions remain.

Matter of safety

A key area of concern for pregnant women is safety. Pregnant women are generally excluded from vaccine trials as a precaution, but this creates a complication because without testing it is not feasible for regulators to make a recommendation for the use of a vaccine in this group. Many of the complications are in pregnant women who also have other comorbidities, such as overweight, diabetes, hypertension or cardiac and chronic respiratory diseases. Further, detection of viral RNA in the placenta or in foetal membranes shows that while likely to be rare, it is possible that infection with SARS-CoV2 can be passed from mother to baby. Based on a series of studies, the US Centers for Disease Control

Vaccination and pregnancy | Several factors point to the importance of vaccination of pregnant women



■ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention listed pregnancy as a risk factor for severe COVID-19 in May 2021

■ WHO included pregnant women in Category II to be prioritised for vaccination

■ Almost 100 countries now have policies with some levels of permission for vaccinating pregnant women

■ So far, there is no evidence that vectored vaccines increase the risk of the thromboembolism in pregnancy, but this will continue to be monitored

■ Anti-vaxxers' claim that the lipid nanoparticles of mRNA vaccines bind

to ovaries is in the complete absence of such findings from DART studies

■ To avoid any future mistaken attribution of congenital anomalies or abortions to the vaccine, vaccination might be considered later in pregnancy

the risk of venous thromboembolism four to five times for women, a frequently asked question is whether the adenovirus vectored vaccines like Covishield or the Janssen should be used, because they are associated with a small risk of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS) in young people. It is important to understand that TTS occurs when the body has or makes antibodies to a platelet protein leading to clot formation, which is a different process for thromboembolism in pregnancy. So far, there is no evidence that vectored vaccines increase the risk of the thromboembolism in pregnancy, but this will continue to be monitored in countries that have widely used these vaccines in women of reproductive age. For India, based on all that we know, all vaccines currently available are safe and should be used in pregnant women to safeguard them and their babies. A pregnancy registry is an important part of the overall safety monitoring of vaccines for the first few years after they are used and must be encouraged, especially in India, where we have a large birth cohort, and thus an opportunity to contribute to the global literature on vaccine safety.

(Dr. Gagandeep Kang is Professor, Wellcome Trust Research Laboratory at the Christian Medical College, Vellore.)

Finally, the timing of vaccination during pregnancy is frequently discussed. This is because of the general prin-

most 36,000 women given mRNA vaccines showed a small increase in pain at the injection site, but no other difference in side-effects. Over 1,10,000 pregnant women are enrolled in the CDC's safe registry and data on safety will continue to accumulate. Some data shows that mothers can pass their antibodies to the baby through the placenta, but to verify whether the antibodies will protect the baby needs more data.

Vectored vaccines

The data available so far is largely from mRNA vaccines, but for vaccines that have or could be used in pregnant women, the recommendations are clearly in favour of use of inactivated vaccines or non-live vaccines or their

equivalent. An issue that has been raised with regard to mRNA and vectored vaccines is lack of data on whether the vaccine or vector persists in the body or is widely distributed beyond the vaccination site. Such studies are usually done for drugs which are expected to enter the systemic circulation and not always required for vaccines, except with new adjuvants or other new components are used. It appears unlikely given the rapid breakdown of mRNA and what is known about vectored vaccines, but this has not stopped anti-vaxxers from claiming that the lipid nanoparticles of mRNA vaccines bind to ovaries, even in the complete absence of such findings from DART studies.

Since pregnancy increases

algorithms. In comparison, he said that the top performing tool, or FATHMM, achieved an accuracy of 91% on the same dataset.

For the future, the group aims to develop an easy-to-use drag-and-drop web interface that will enable cancer researchers with limited computational or programming skills to get predictions and extract genomic information on their preferred set of mutations. "We will also be pursuing further studies on the context [or neighbourhood] of these mutations, and how they impact the evolution of cancer. Why do we see differences in the context between the driver and passenger mutations in the first place?" said Prof Raman.

The group also plans that NBDriver will be a part of a broader cancer genomic sequence analysis "pipeline" being developed at the centres.

AI tool developed to study cancer-causing mutations

Active and neutral mutations are distinguished by studying their neighbourhoods

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The 'frequentist' approach [which is more common] often missed out on relatively rare driver mutations.

KARTHIK RAMAN

Researchers at IIT Madras have developed an AI tool called NBDriver (neighbourhood driver) for use in analysing cancer-causing mutations in cells. By looking at the neighbourhood, or context, of a mutation in the genome, it can look at harmful "driver" mutations and distinguish them from neutral "passenger" mutations.

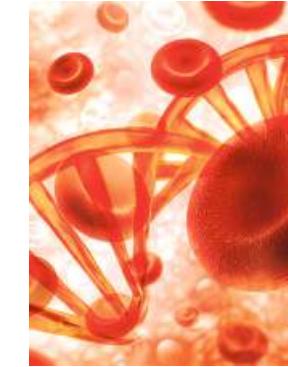
This technique of looking at the genomic neighbourhood to make out the nature of the mutation is a novel and largely unexplored one. In a paper published in the journal *Cancers*, the researchers explain that the nature of the mutation depends on the neighbourhood, and how this tool may be used to draw the line between driver and passenger mutations.

In previously published techniques, researchers typically analysed DNA sequences from large groups of cancer patients, comparing sequences from cancer as well as normal cells and determined whether a particular mutation occurred

more often in cancer cells than random, said Prof. Karthik Raman, from the biotechnology department of IIT Madras and another corresponding author. "However, this 'frequentist' approach often missed out on relatively rare driver mutations," he noted, adding that some studies have also looked at the changes caused by the driver mutations in the production of essential biological products such as proteins.

Statistical modelling

The method of distinguishing between driver and passenger mutations solely by looking at the neighbourhood is novel. "Through robust statistical modelling, we show that there is a significant difference in the pattern of sequences (or context) surrounding the driver and passenger mutations," said Shayantan Banerjee, who is a master's student in



Novel approach: Looking at the neighbourhood to gauge the mutation is unexplored largely. ■ GETTY IMAGES

the Department of Biotechnology, IIT Madras, and the lead author of the paper.

Accuracy of tool

The researchers studied a dataset containing 5,265 mutations to derive the model. According to Prof. Raman, NBDriver, had an overall accuracy of 89% and ranked second out of 11 prediction

Rare Arctic lightning storms strike north of Alaska

REUTERS

Meteorologists were stunned this week when three successive thunderstorms swept across the icy Arctic from Siberia to north of Alaska, unleashing lightning bolts in an unusual phenomenon that scientists say will become less rare with global warming.

"Forecasters hadn't seen anything like that before," said Ed Plumb, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Fairbanks, speaking about the storms that started on Saturday.

Typically, the air over the Arctic Ocean, especially when the water is covered with ice, lacks the convective heat needed to generate lightning storms. But as climate change warms the Arctic faster than the rest of the world, that's changing, scientists say.

Tripled in frequency
Episodes of summer lightning over the Arctic's treeless tundra regions, as well as above the Arctic Ocean and pack ice. In August 2019, lightning even struck within 100 kilometers of the North Pole, the researchers found.

In Alaska alone, thunder-



Unusual storms: These will become less rare with global warming. ■ GETTY IMAGES

storm activity is on track to increase threefold by the end of the century if current climate trends continue, according to two studies by scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, published over the last year in the journal *Climate Dynamics*.

"What used to be very rare is now just rare," said Rick Thoman, a climate scientist with the University of Alaska Fairbanks. As the parade of Arctic storms this week demonstrated, lightning is already appearing in unexpected places, he said. "I have no memory of three consecutive days of this kind of thing" in the Arctic.

On the water

On the water, the lightning is an increasing hazard to mariners, and vessel traffic is increasing as sea ice retreats, Holzworth said.

People can become lightning rods and usually try to get low for safety. That's tough to do on flat tundra or ocean expanse. "What you really need is to pay better attention to the lightning forecasts," he said.

In Alaska alone, thunder-



Question Corner

Mercury's iron heart

Why does Mercury have such a big iron core?

A study by researchers from the University of Maryland disputes the prevailing hypothesis on why Mercury has a big-sized core relative to its mantle (the layer between its core and crust). Scientists had argued that hit-and-run collisions with other bodies during the formation of our solar system resulted in much of Mercury's rocky mantle being removed, leaving behind the big, dense, metal core inside. But new research reveals that Sun's magnetism is the reason for this and not the collisions.

The researchers developed a model showing that the density, mass and iron content of a rocky planet's core are influenced by its distance from the Sun's magnetic field.



New theory: This invokes the Sun's magnetic field. ■ GETTY IMAGES

(Progress in Earth and Planetary Science).

There is a gradient in which the metal content in the core drops off as the four inner planets of our solar system get further from the Sun. The current work explains this by showing that the distribution of raw materials in the early forming solar system was controlled by the Sun's magnetic field.

The new model shows that during the early formation of our solar system, when the young Sun was surrounded by a swirling cloud of dust and gas, grains of iron were drawn toward the centre by the Sun's magnetic field. When the planets began to form from clumps of that dust and gas, planets closer to the sun incorporated more iron into their cores than those further away.

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



In trouble: The ban has unsettled banks that use Mastercard's services to issue a variety of cards. ■ REUTERS

Curbs on Mastercard

What are the rules on data storage and why has the RBI barred the U.S. company from taking on new customers in India?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL J.

The story so far: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday banned Mastercard from issuing new debit and credit cards to customers in India with effect from July 22. According to the RBI, the U.S. card-issuer has failed to comply with the local data storage rules announced by the central bank in 2018. The ban has unsettled banks operating in India that use Mastercard's services to issue a variety of cards to their customers.

What is the RBI's data localisation policy?

In 2018, the Indian central bank had issued a circular ordering card companies such as Visa, Mastercard, and American Express to store all Indian customer data locally so that the regulator could have "unfettered supervisory access". This meant that foreign card companies had to store complete information about transactions made by Indian customers in servers located within India. Companies were initially required to comply with these rules within six months. The reason offered by the RBI to back up its data localisation rule was that local storage of consumer data is necessary to protect the privacy of Indian users and also to address national security concerns.

Existing Mastercard customers will be allowed to use their cards. Earlier, the RBI banned American Express and Diners Club from issuing new cards after they failed to comply with the 2018 circular on data localisation

however, has not been impressed. It has banned Mastercard from issuing new cards to customers from July 22. Reuters reported Mastercard as having said it was "disappointed" with the RBI's decision and it had provided regular updates on its compliance with the rules since 2018. The company was quoted as saying it would continue to work with the Indian central bank to provide any additional details required to resolve its concerns.

Existing Mastercard customers, however, can continue to use their cards. Earlier this year, American Express and Diners Club International were also banned by the RBI from issuing new cards after they failed to comply with the 2018 circular.

What is the need for local data storage?

Experts believe that customer privacy and national security are genuine concerns that need to be taken seriously. However, many also believe that data localisation rules are too stringent and they could simply be used by governments as tools of economic protectionism. For instance, they argue, it may not be strictly necessary for data to be stored locally to remain protected. Broadly speaking, formal international laws to govern the storage of digital information across borders may be sufficient to deal with these concerns. Governments, however, may still mandate data localisation in order to favour local companies to foreign ones.

China, for example, has used its cyber-security laws to discriminate against foreign companies. A similar trend may be playing out in India with the Centre's emphasis on economic self-sufficiency. In 2018, Mastercard had launched a complaint with the U.S. government that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was actively promoting Indian cards like RuPay and that it was affecting the business of foreign card companies. Governments may also believe that mandating foreign companies to set up local infrastructure can boost their local economies.

What lies ahead?

Indian banks that are currently enrolled in the Mastercard network are expected to make alternative arrangements with other card companies. The process is expected to take a few months, and their card business is expected to take a significant hit meanwhile. The RBI's data localisation policy, as it burdens foreign card companies, may end up favouring domestic card issuers like RuPay. Mastercard owns about one-third of the market share in India, and the RBI's ban is likely to significantly benefit its competitors. RBL Bank, for instance, has decided to enter into an agreement with Visa after the RBI's ban on Mastercard. Similarly, the ban on American Express and Diners Club earlier this year benefited the Indian card network RuPay. Some believe that even Visa, a foreign company which dominates card payments in India, may come under regulatory pressure in the near future. Thus, the card payments sector may end up being restricted to a few domestic companies, which in turn can lead to reduced competition. This could mean higher costs and lower quality services for customers.

It is also worth noting that in today's digital economy data have turned out to be a valuable commodity, which companies as well as governments have tried to gain control over. Information about spending patterns and other customer data can be monetised by companies in a variety of ways. With no clear rules on who owns customer data and to what extent, conflicts over data ownership are likely to continue for some time.

Why is there a COVID spike in Kerala?

Has the State lifted the lockdowns too quickly? What should be the strategy to contain transmission now?

C. MAYA

The story so far: The second wave of COVID-19, which began rising in Kerala in the second week of April, peaked mid-May, when the State was reporting around 44,000 cases daily and had about 4.45 lakh active cases in the community. The test positivity rate (TPR) hovered around 30%. The State then went into a total lockdown for over a fortnight, after which the case graph came down. But since the past one month or more, the epidemic curve has remained on a plateau, logging around 10,000 cases-12,000 cases every day, and the TPR is at 10%-11%. At a time when COVID-19 cases across the nation have come down sharply, Kerala accounts for about 30% of the country's active caseload. In the past two weeks, the case graph has been rising again, recording a 20% growth. On July 17, Kerala reported 16,148 fresh COVID-19 cases. Maharashtra, which has also seen cases rising, registered 8,172 fresh cases on the same day.

Why is the epidemic curve not coming down?

Public health experts point out that what is happening in Kerala now is no different than what was witnessed in the State after the first wave. The first wave peaked in Kerala by the end of last October, the curve plateaued and remained unchanged for a long time. In January-February, recording between 1,500 and 3,000 fresh cases daily, Kerala accounted for over 45% of the active cases in the country.

The epidemic curve never hit the baseline after the first wave in Kerala because of two things – the large-scale mixing of people and huge gatherings and rallies during the campaigning in February ahead of the election in April, which was followed by the arrival of the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The first wave was yet to taper down, when Kerala rode into the second wave with a daily caseload of over 2,500 in the second week of April. The case graph then rose exponentially to reach a daily tally of almost 45,000 cases by mid-May. Other States had already experienced the worst of the second wave when the curve began rising in Kerala. Because the second wave was delayed, the epidemic curve in the State is expected to remain on a plateau for a prolonged period and at a higher daily average of fresh cases (because of the Delta variant).

What is the rate of community transmission?

The third round of the national sero-prevalence survey, conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in three districts of Kerala in January, revealed that only 11.6% of the population had been exposed to the virus, against a national average of 21%. This meant that when the second wave struck, 89% of the State's 3.5-crore population was immunologically naive and at risk of contracting COVID-19.

When a highly transmissible virus variant like Delta is in circulation among a susceptible population, the level of efficiency with which the community was maintaining non-pharmacological means of protection against the virus (masking and physical distancing) will no longer be enough to check transmission. Cases will continue to occur till a chunk of the population is affected or the transmission is reduced substantially through vaccination. Testing has been consistent in Kerala, with an average of 1.3 lakh samples tested daily. The official stance is that Kerala is picking up one out of every three infections in the community, while the national rate is one in 25 infections.



Norms forgotten: The Vizhinjam fishing harbour was crowded on July 14 after the curbs were eased. ■ PTI

Kerala's current strategy of allowing relaxations, solely on the basis of test positivity rate, has turned out to be unscientific and counter-productive, and has been widely criticised by the scientific community

capacity. At the peak of the second wave too, though the health infrastructure was severely stressed, the State managed to tide over the situation fairly well. There were tense situations but people were never denied care nor were there distressing scenes of people running around for oxygen beds or ventilators.

Unlike the sharp rise and fall of the epidemic curve in most States, Kerala's epidemic curve had a gradual rise and decline. This means that while the duration of the epidemic would be longer, the impact on the community would be less.

What is the current situation?

A prolonged plateauing of the epidemic curve and a slight increase in transmission after the lockdown was expected. However, a 20% growth in cases after the plateau over the last two weeks is beginning to look worrying. Cases are going up mainly in the northern districts. The active caseload, which came down below the 1-lakh mark, has climbed to 1.24 lakh again, and while ICU occupancy is down, new hospital admissions are showing a rising trend.

Did something go wrong post-lockdown?

The State's current strategy of allowing relaxations, solely on the basis of TPR, has turned out to be unscientific, counter-productive and has been criticised by the scientific community as well as the people. The reliability of TPR as an epidemiological indicator of disease transmission is dependent on who is being tested. Testing among primary contacts of the known COVID-19

cases and high-risk individuals will show more infections in the community but this will mean an increased TPR and another round of lockdown. Now that the government has linked TPR to lockdown relaxations, the reduction of TPR has become the goal for local bodies. Rather than targeted testing, the focus is now on reducing TPR by organising mass testing camps where asymptomatic people are offered incentives to test themselves. Increasing the denominator by testing a large population and testing within a relatively low-risk population can artificially bring about a reduction in TPR.

The State has to break the transmission now by finding active pockets of disease in the community through diligent targeted testing and tracing of primary contacts and high-risk individuals. "What is needed is micro-containment, rather than closing down an entire panchayat based on TPR. Skewed policies such as restricting the opening of shops to certain days of the week is actually leading to overcrowding and super-spread events," a Health official admitted.

What happens next?

Going forward, increasing the pace of vaccination and keeping a sharp eye on the circulation of SARS-CoV-2 variants through continuous genomic surveillance assumes importance.

Compared with the rest of India, Kerala has managed vaccination very well, administering the first dose to 45% of its population above 18 years and the second dose to 17% as on July 17. Though the State has the capacity to administer 2.5 lakh-3 lakh doses a day, erratic vaccine supply has made this impossible.

The State is ahead as far as genomic surveillance goes, with institutions doing targeted sequencing, apart from the whole genomic sequencing done at national institutes. Over 80% of the samples analysed in the State in recent months have been the Delta variant, though more cases of Delta Plus have also been surfacing.

Kerala is also planning to do a sero-prevalence survey soon, including among children. The sero-positivity is expected to be much higher than what it was during the ICMR survey in January, given that over 31 lakh people have already had COVID-19, and have natural immunity, apart from the proportion of the population who have vaccine-derived immunity.

Is Twitter acceding to takedown requests?

How has the social media platform reacted to pleas for information data from governments around the world?

SRI RAM SRINIVASAN

The story so far: On Wednesday, social media platform Twitter released its Transparency Report for the second half of last year (July 1 to December 31), in which it was revealed that India was the single largest source of government information requests. India also was one of the prominent sources of legal demands for removal of content, according to the report.

What's the transparency report all about?

Twitter started publishing a biannual report – Twitter Transparency Report – in 2012. The original goal, it says in its blog, "was to provide the public with recurring insights into government pressures that impacted the public, whether through overt political censorship or by way of compelling account data through information requests".

It further says, "A lot has changed since 2012. It is now more important than ever that we also shine a light on our own practices, including enforcement of the Twitter Rules and our ongoing work to disrupt global state-backed information operations."

Over the years, the scope of the report has been expanded gradually. Additional categories such as non-government legal requests, trademark notices, coordinated manipulation, and so on, have been added from time to time. This aspect of reporting isn't rare any more.

Google, which has been issuing its transparency reports since 2010, says in its blog that "transparency reporting is an increasingly common practice across industries". It then goes on to list over 40 brands, from Facebook to Reddit, and from Uber to Yahoo!, that undertake transparency reporting.

What are the highlights of the latest report?

As mentioned above, there are different categories under which Twitter provides the data. One of the main categories is 'Government Information Requests,' and this includes "both emergency and routine legal demands for account information issued by law enforcement and other government agencies". The report noted that there was a 15% increase in such requests (and more than a 100% increase in the number of accounts specified in these requests) compared with the January-June 2020 period.

Notably, for the first time in the history of the transparency report, the U.S. wasn't the "top global requester". India was. It accounted for 25% of the global



True picture: India is one of the prominent sources of legal demands for removal of content, says the report. ■ AP

volume and 15% of the global accounts specified. The U.S., however, submitted the highest volume of global emergency requests, at 34%, followed by Japan (17%) and South Korea (16%).

Twitter describes routine requests as "legal demands issued by government of law enforcement authorities (e.g. subpoenas, court orders, search warrants)" that compel it to turn over account information. Emergency requests, on the other hand, may be entertained "if we are provided with sufficient information to support a good faith belief that there is an imminent threat involving danger of death or serious physical injury to a person, and we have information relevant to averting or mitigating the threat".

Under the category of "Government Information Requests," Twitter says it "narrowed or did not disclose information in response to 70%" of the requests.

One of the other significant sub-categories is 'Legal Demands', which provides data about court orders and other formal demands to remove content. The source of such demands can be "governmental entities and lawyers representing individuals". While the number of global legal demands fell 9% to 38,524, a whopping 94% of the demands came from just five countries (Japan, India, Russia, Turkey and South Korea).

Japan was the top requester in this category, accounting for 43% of the total. India was next, at 18%. Japan's requests, Twitter says, were largely related to "laws regarding narcotics and psychotropics, obscenity, or money lending".

A large portion of Russian requests related to its laws prohibiting the promotion of suicide. This section of the report also notes that "199 accounts of verified journalists

and news outlets from around the world were subject to 361 legal demands, a 26% increase in the number of accounts since the previous reporting period. These included removal requests from India (128), Turkey (108), Pakistan (52), and Russia (28)".

The compliance rate, which is the "percentage of information requests where Twitter produced at least some sort of requested account information", in the case of requests emerging from India was far less compared with the average of the worldwide data.

On July 11, it published 'Twitter's India Transparency Report,' under the new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. It will be a monthly report unlike the biannual Transparency Report

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Was there another report specific to India?

On July 11, it published 'Twitter's India Transparency Report,' under the new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. It will be a monthly report from now on. This comes after months of uneasiness between the government and Twitter over the latter's non-compliance with the new rules, including the delay in the appointment of a grievance officer. The social media platform has just complied with that requirement. This report dealt with user grievances and proactive monitoring, which Twitter says refers to "content proactively identified by employing internal proprietary tools and industry hash sharing initiatives". In the May-June period, it reportedly suspended over 18,000 accounts for child sexual exploitation and a further over 4,000 accounts for promotion of terrorism.

What else is notable about the new report?

Twitter has started reporting about two additional things. One is an impressions metric, which "captures the number of views violative Tweets received prior to removal". The other is about the adoption of two-factor authentication "to keep accounts safe and secure". About the first, Twitter said violative tweets accounted for less than 0.1% of all impressions for all tweets globally during this period,

and it had removed 3.8 million tweets that flouted its rules. Only 6% of the removed tweets had more than 1,000 impressions.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA

Barricades on the revolutionary road

Faced with a crippling U.S. embargo, a worsening economic crisis and a deadly pandemic, Cuba's leaders struggle to manage growing public anger

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

July 11, 2021 marked a critical moment for post-revolutionary Cuba. In what was an unprecedented outpouring, hundreds of Cubans came on to the streets shouting slogans across 40 towns and cities. They were registering their protests against the communist government's handling of the pandemic and some even asking for a change in regime. The popular slogans included "Patria y Vida" ('Fatherland and Life'), a play on the revolutionary slogan popularised by late President Fidel Castro – "Patria o Muerte" ("Fatherland or Death"), in response to the embargo imposed by the U.S. that sought to undermine the socialist regime.

Measures such as restricting subsidies and ending the unpopular dual-currency system have exacerbated problems, resulting in scarcities and inflation. But the Cuban government blames the decades-long economic embargo imposed by the neighbouring U.S. for the situation. The embargo was tightened up further by the Trump administration after some relaxations were brought about by President Barack Obama and the fact that these measures have had the support of the politically powerful emigrant Cuban community in Florida has forced the Biden presidency from reversing them.

The consequences of the economic crisis have been scarcities in many basic necessities such as electricity, available of medicine and food. As *The Economist* reports, Cuba, which imports nearly 70% of its food from abroad, is going through its most severe food shortage crisis since the Special Period of the 1990s following the Soviet Union's collapse.

Cuba has an expansive welfare programme that focuses on basic education and healthcare being available to all, but shortages of essential items have made things worse for the citizenry, which is affected by the pandemic as well. This explains the unprecedented outpouring of protests, which took a coordinated shape because

of the spreading of discontent over social media across the country.

Regime response

Cuba's President and secretary of the ruling Communist Party, Miguel Diaz-Canel, initially denounced these protests as being externally driven and called for regime sympathisers to come to the

The PCC was conceived as the "vanguard of the people" with the polity dominated by a single party system and decision-making thrust to a party-led government

travel still being limited, it remains to be seen if these measures will immediately help ease the shortage situation.

President Diaz-Canel was designated the first secretary of the ruling party in April. He is the first top leader who doesn't belong to the revolutionary generation that took part in the overthrow of the Fulgencio Batista regime in Cuba in 1959. That generation helmed by late President Fidel Castro and his comrades Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Raul Castro, Juan Almeida, among others, led an armed struggle that began as a movement against a dictatorship that was seen as being propped up by external interests.

But once they succeeded in the overthrow of the regime, the Fidel-led 26th of July Movement, during period of "national liberation" between 1959 and 1961, subsumed itself into a group featuring others as part of the 'Integrated Revolutionary Organizations' (ORI), which included the extant communist party known as the Popular Socialist Party and the student-based Revolutionary Directory. The ORI became the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC), which later became the Communist Party of Cuba (Partido Comunista de Cu-

ba, or PCC) in 1965. By now, the Cubans had firmly engaged in nationalisation of assets and properties owned by oligarchic and foreign owners, and agrarian reform, and developed a stronger economic and trade ties with the Soviet Union.

Vanguard of the people'

The PCC was conceived as the "vanguard of the people" with the polity dominated by a single party system and decision-making thrust to a party-led government

with political dissidents given harsh punishment for promoting ideas that are seen as critical of the regime or socialism itself.

In the last decade or so, the PCC has been cognisant of the frailties of the country's economic system and Mr. Diaz-Canel's predecessor, Raul Castro, had undertaken a series of cautious but steady reforms that furthered liberalisation of the economy by allowing small businesses, self-entrepreneurs and cooperatives more autonomy and recognition of private property with restrictions, besides greater flexibility in foreign investment.

These measures did not

come up easily with hardliners, who are keen on retaining the orthodox Marxist-Leninist principles of state ownership of the means of production. But the PCC had learned from the experience of the Communist Party of China and the impact of the economic reforms there, and after intense inner party debate, they decided to embark upon liberalisation, albeit cautiously.

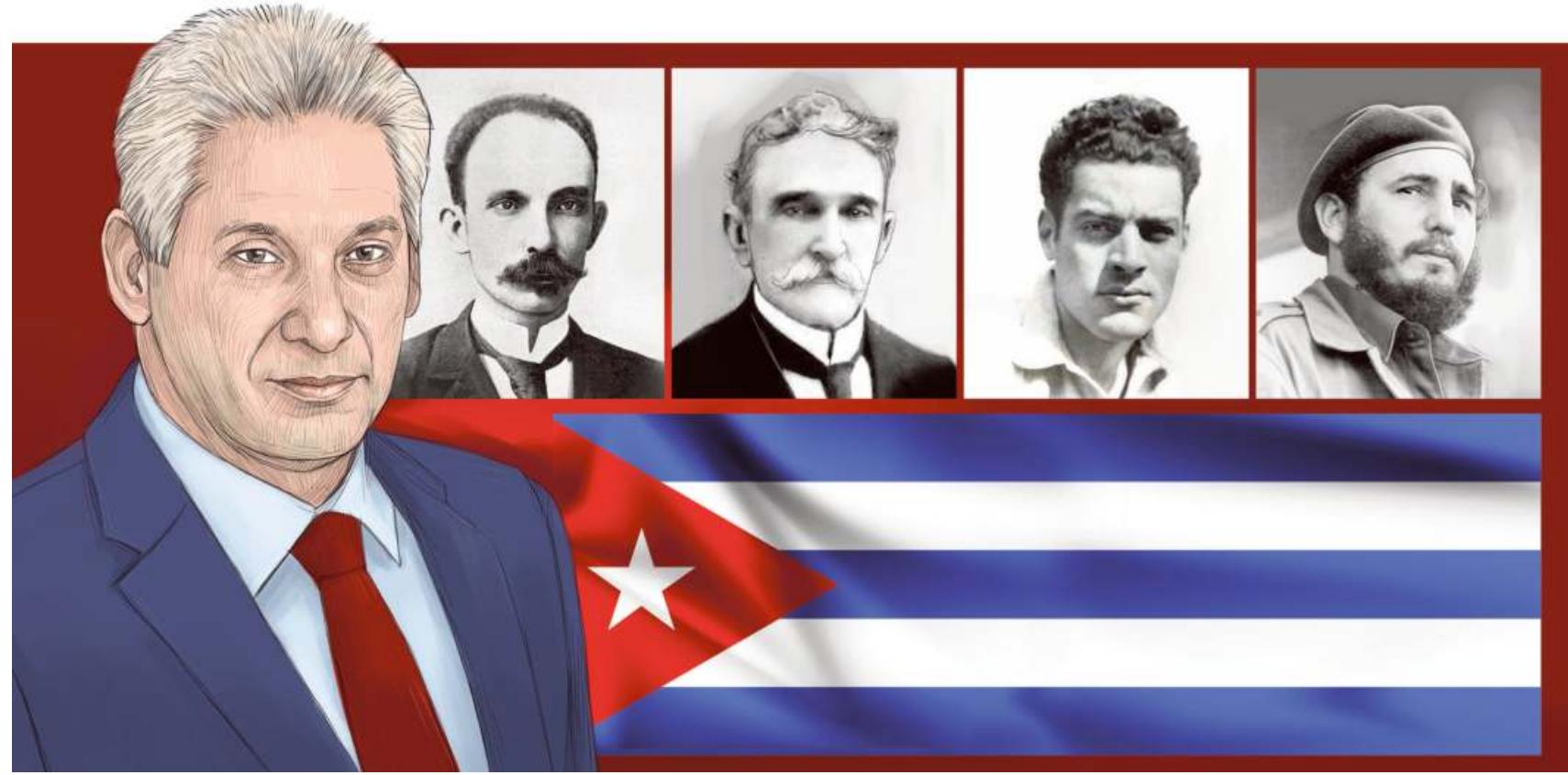
Despite these piecemeal economic reforms, Cuba still suffers the impact of the U.S. embargo and has had to struggle to maintain its strengths in the social sector. Besides, unlike the older generation with memories of

constant struggle and incremental progress in post-revolutionary Cuba, younger people demand more political freedoms and an end to the shortages of essentials, which many see as not only a consequence of the embargo but also the failures of the highly regulated economy.

This has meant that it will be tougher for the current regime led by the post-revolutionary generation to retain the legitimacy of communist rule than its predecessors.

Economic reforms

Mr. Diaz-Canel and his party colleagues will have to not just extinguish the slowly spreading flames of the pandemic – a quicker deployment of the home grown vaccines will play a vital role – but also implement economic reforms to quickly address the shortages without the use of repressive measures. The vaccines could also be a source of revenue for the beleaguered regime if it can find buyers from other countries. Mobilising public opinion as the regime did in the 1990s and achieving social peace would be the key imperative and it can only happen if the government backtracks from blaming the protests as being entirely the handiwork of external actors. The PCC and Mr. Diaz-Canel have their task cut out.

**In Focus**

■ The PCC was formed in the 1960s after Fidel Castro and his comrades overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959

■ The party, headed by Fidel for decades, nationalised assets and properties owned by oligarchic and foreign owners, implemented agrarian reforms and built a single-party rule based on socialist ideas

■ The party and the party are now led by Miguel Diaz-Canel, the first leader who doesn't belong to the revolutionary generation

Cuba is mired in a severe crisis after its economy shrank 11% following the pandemic. The contraction

ASHRAF GHANI

The President in his labyrinth

Afghanistan's leader faces a daunting challenge with the Taliban's surge

STANLY JOHNY

In a direct attack on a neighbouring country in a public platform with its Prime Minister sitting a few feet away, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani came heavily on Pakistan on Friday for its "support for terrorists". Speaking at the Central and South Asia Connectivity Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Mr. Ghani said "more than 10,000 jihadi fighters" have crossed into Afghanistan from Pakistan in the last month. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, who sat through Mr. Ghani's speech, later denied the allegations.

Mr. Ghani is known for his mercurial ways. But a direct public outburst against a foreign government was rare even by his reputation. It shows the desperation of Kabul, which lost swathes of territories to the Taliban. Since May 1, the day the remaining western troops started withdrawing from Afghanistan, the Taliban have taken dozens of districts, especially in the country's north. Amid mounting losses and growing uncertainty, Mr. Ghani is visibly under pressure.

A trained anthropologist, Mr. Ghani rose to power in 2014, promising to end corruption and fix Afghanistan's institutions. This had been his favourite theme for decades. His doctoral thesis at Columbia University, 'Production and Domination: Afghanistan, 1747-1901', is a study on the coun-

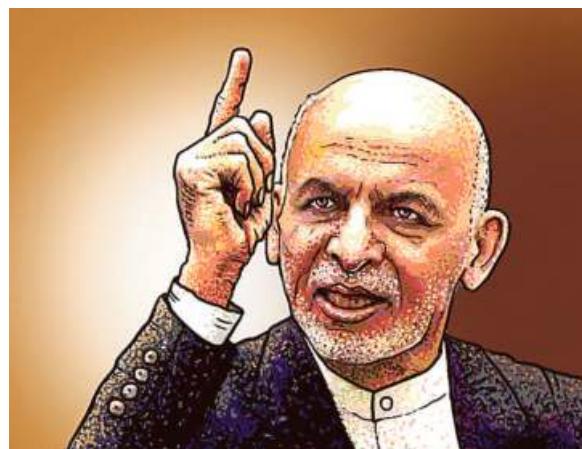


ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

try's difficulties in building institutions amid economic backwardness. In 2008, a consultancy Mr. Ghani co-founded in Washington, published a paper titled, 'Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World', which outlined the measures to be taken to build institutions.

'Double failure'

In his first presidential campaign in 2009, Mr. Ghani blamed a "double failure" for Afghanistan's miseries – a failure by the international community and a failure by the country's elites in rebuilding the nation. So when he was finally elected President in 2014, it was a chance for "Afghanistan's theorist in chief", as George Packer called him in *The New Yorker*, to put his ideas into practice. But ironically, under Mr. Ghani's watch, Afghanistan's institutions have further slipped away from Kabul while the Taliban kept making gains.

When the Taliban regime was overthrown by the Americans in 2001, Mr. Ghani travelled to Afghanistan as a UN official. Later he became a special adviser to Hamid Karzai, who headed the transition government, and then went on to become his Finance Minister. But by

2004, Mr. Karzai and Mr. Ghani fell out and the latter left the government.

The fall of the Taliban and the formation of a democratic state had opened up Afghanistan's polity for the country's elite. Like many others, Mr. Ghani also didn't hide his political ambitions. He quit the government, but stayed active in Afghan civil society. In 2009, he made his first attempt in the presidential election, but failed. In 2014, Mr. Ghani contested again, and was declared winner after a disputed election.

On both occasions, election disputes with his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, were settled through talks. But a much bigger challenge Mr. Ghani faces is from the Taliban. He appeared helpless when the Taliban swept through the countryside. The intra-Afghan peace talks haven't reached anywhere. His administration rejected a proposal from the Biden administration to form a transition government with the Taliban. "Be assured that as long as I am alive, they will not see the formation of an interim government," Mr. Ghani said in February. But now, his cities are surrounded by the Taliban. The Americans will be out of the country within weeks. Hopes for a political settlement are slim. Mr. Ghani is entering perhaps the most critical phase of his presidency.

For Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, the post is quite a familiar one. This is his fifth time being the Prime Minister of the country, having served in the post during the constitutional monarchy period in the 1990s and early 2000s, including a stint under the rule of then King Gyanendra, who suspended Parliament in the early 2000s and later in 2017 after Nepal became a republic.

Ironically, after the thumping victory of the K.P. Oli-led Nepal Communist Party – formed with the merger of Mr. Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Pushpa Kumar Dahal-led Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist-Centre) – in the 2018 elections, Mr. Deuba and his Nepali Congress had been reduced into a smaller opposition force. But following the power struggle between Mr. Oli and his detractors within the NCP and later its demerged constituents, the UML and the Maoists, Mr. Deuba emerged

on to rule that Mr. Deuba should be made the PM on account of the support he had across parties – 149 members in the 275-member Parliament.

The members included the rebels within the UML led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal, besides Mr. Dahal from the Maoists and Baburam Bhattarai of the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP). All four of them had been Prime Ministers in the past and had been engaged in power struggles.

Broad support

That they chose to support Mr. Deuba was a consequence of their mutual animus towards the increasingly authoritarian Mr. Oli to some extent, but was also an endorsement of Mr. Deuba's ability to both consolidate support within the Nepali Congress (NC) and to reach out to different players in the fractious polity.

Mr. Oli's attempts to dissolve Parliament and call for fresh elections and to browbeat his way to retain power came to naught after the Supreme Court reversed his decisions (endorsed by the President Bidhya Devi Bhandari) twice in six months. The apex court then went

to the first time in September 1995 and remained in that office till March 1997. An active campaigner during the 1990 Jan Andolan that paved the way for constitutional monarchy after then King Birendra dissolved the Panchayat system and instituted parliamentary democracy, Mr. Deuba's first tenure as PM also marked the beginning of Maoist insurgency in the country. His second stint began in the backdrop of the massacre of the royal family in the Narayanhiti Palace in the heart of Kathmandu on June 1, 2001. The Maoist insurgency had by then managed to spread and retain control over several parts of interior Nepal. King Gyanendra used this as a ruse to suspend Parliament, remove Mr. Deuba from power, only to appoint him later and then remove him again before declaring the return of absolute monarchy. Soon, the beleaguered monarchy lost support following Jan Andolan-2, paving

the way for the conversion of Nepal into a constitutional republic.

Mr. Deuba, hailing from Sudoor Paschim, or the Far Western province of Nepal, had the political capital to survive the long exile that followed his third stint, mainly because of his ability to present his centrist politics as a solution for the country's problems. In 2017, Mr. Deuba resurrected himself within the NC and took advantage of Mr. Dahal's quest for power. He set up a government based on a rotating leadership that collapsed the very next year, paving the way for Mr. Oli's second premiership. Now in his fifth stint as the PM, Mr. Deuba will still not have it easy. While Mr. Nepal had hitched his wagons to the opposition against Mr. Oli, he has not committed support for Mr. Deuba in the upcoming trust vote. As things stand, he needs the full support of the NC, the Maoists and the JSP if he has to win the trust vote without Mr. Nepal's support.

In administration, Mr. Deuba faces tremendous challenges. Nepal has been ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. He will also have to deal with the southern and northern neighbours in a far more efficient manner than he ever did in the past. More than before, China's influence is larger in Nepal and on the other hand, the Indian establishment is keen on normalising relations that have soured during Mr. Oli's tenure.

SHER BAHADUR DEUBA

The consensus Prime Minister

The NC leader was appointed PM after the top court reinstated Parliament

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

ing the way for the conversion of Nepal into a constitutional republic.

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Hiring activity saw uptick in most sectors in June: report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

With the gradual easing of lockdowns, overall hiring activity witnessed positive growth for most sectors in June, according to a report.

Hiring activity improved, suggesting a recovery for the non-tech sectors as well, based on newly added job listings during the month, job site SCIKEY Market Network said in a report.

While the IT sector had so far been hiring at a fast pace, June's data revealed that a lot of other sectors had started showing improvement in hiring activity, SCIKEY Market Network said based on job postings.

The data revealed that there had been a 21% improvement in hiring in the banking sector in June, compared with May.

Key industries like IT and BPO showed 18% growth each, the pharmaceuticals sector logged 16.9% growth, while hiring demand in healthcare improved by 20%, it stated.

Other sectors like insurance, retail, education and FMCG also showed a progress of 12%, 5%, 12.1% and 16%, respectively.

"It's been a rough patch for most sectors since the lockdown took place," said SCIKEY co-founder Karunjit Kumar Dhir. "We are hopeful that the recovery will become more robust in the coming months," Mr. Dhir added.

HDFC Bank Q1 net rises 14%, second wave hits performance

Lender says disruption may cause continued rise in defaults, push up provisions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI HDFC Bank's consolidated net profit for the June quarter rose 14% from a year earlier to ₹7,922 crore, but slid sequentially from the ₹8,434 crore recorded in the three months ended March 31.

Core net interest income grew 8.57% to ₹17,009 crore, on advances growth of 14.4%, and the net interest margin was 4.1%, while other income grew 54.3% to ₹4,075 crore.

The year-earlier quarter had been impacted by the national lockdown and the ensuing hit to economic activity, while the just-concluded quarter had been affected by localised lockdowns.

"These disruptions led to



Tough time: Lower business volume, higher slippages led to lower revenue and higher provisions, it said. • VIJAY SONEJI

a decrease in retail loan originations, sale of third party products, card spends and efficiency in collection efforts," the country's largest private sector lender said in a statement. "The lower business volumes, coupled

with higher slippages, resulted in lower revenues, as well as an enhanced level of provisioning," it added.

Loan loss provisions jumped 54% to ₹4,219 crore, while overall provisions, including ₹600 crore set aside

as contingency provisions, stood at ₹4,830.8 crore as against ₹3,891.5 crore.

GNPA ratio rises

HDFC Bank also said that the disruptions may lead to a continued rise in the "number of customer defaults and consequently an increase in provisions".

The bank said the gross non-performing assets ratio rose to 1.47% as of June 30, from the 1.32% seen in March and 1.36% a year earlier.

Its deposit growth was 13.2% during the quarter and the share of the low-cost current and savings accounts balances in the overall base stood at 45.5%. Its total capital adequacy ratio was at 19.1% as on June 30.

Commodity prices are rising. Why is cement alone as input material facing an issue?

■ Commodity prices have increased all over due to the sharp increase in prices of diesel, coal, pet coke and polymer. Thus, the cost of production for cement has sharply increased. In the construction sector, a few industries like steel and cement are in the organised sector whereas land, sand, bricks, aggregates and construction labour are still under the unorganised sector.

While steel prices have risen sharply, it is not talked about much because a major portion of the steel is coming from outside the State; whereas, when it comes to an increase in cement prices, this industry alone is easily targeted, being native players. This could be due to bullying by various groups with vested interests on political grounds.

Addressing shareholders at his first annual general meeting as the head of the lender, Mr. Jagdishan said a technology audit was also over and the RBI would now be "independently" taking a view on when to lift penal actions taken against the bank.

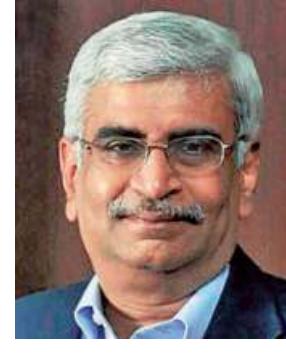
LTI also announced a special dividend of ₹10 per equity share to commemorate the completion of five years since its listing on the Indian stock exchanges.

In the period, the company grew at a compounded annual growth rate of 13.5%.

Ramco well placed to take advantage of likely buoyancy: CEO

N. ANAND

Cement demand is expected to grow by about 20% in FY22 following increased budgetary allocation for infrastructure in the Union Budget 2021-22 and the expected revival of urban housing, said A.V. Dharmakrishnan, Chief Executive Officer, The Ramco Cements Ltd. Excerpts:



Rise in fuel prices like diesel, pet coke and coal may spur costs which could affect the overall cost of production

achieve a common agenda and hence, cartelisation, which requires certain understanding among the companies, is not possible. Therefore, there is no question of cartelisation and such accusations are baseless.

How about competition from the unorganised sector?

■ There is no significant player in the unorganised sector. First of all, manufacturing units compulsorily require BIS certification and that calls for heavy investment to maintain quality. Besides, being a capital-intensive sector, brand awareness among the users is also very high. Hence, the entry of unorganised players is very much restricted.

What is your capacity?

■ Clinker capacity as at June is 11.4 MTPA. It will rise to 13.65 MTPA once the clinkering unit in Kurnool is completed in September. Cement grinding capacity is 19.4 MTPA. It will rise to 20.4 MTPA once the cement-grinding facility in Kurnool is completed by 2022-23.

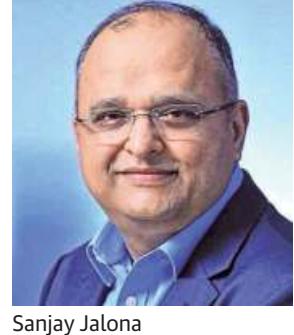
Are you looking at acquisitions or going North?

■ As of now, good assets are available in the North. If any opportunity is there, definitely we will examine to expand or diversify markets.

Market recovering, digital seeing quicker adoption: LTI

Pandemic brought local IT firms into the global limelight'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU



Sanjay Jalona

L&T Infotech's revenue grew 17.4% in the June quarter. Net income climbed 19.3% in the period

cloud and data opportunities which will be the main drivers of technology and business transformation in the years to come," Mr. Jalona said.

LTI also announced a special dividend of ₹10 per equity share to commemorate the completion of five years since its listing on the Indian stock exchanges.

In the period, the company grew at a compounded annual growth rate of 13.5%.

"We are excited about the

tion of millions of youth of our nation," he added.

LTI registered a revenue growth of 17.4% to ₹3,462.5 crore for the quarter ended June 30. Net income grew 19.3% to ₹496.8 crore.

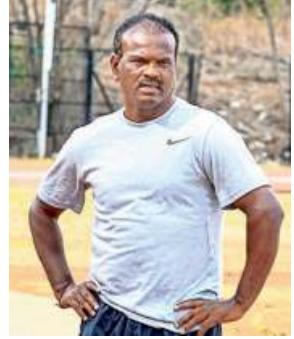
"The pandemic has brought domestic tech players under the global limelight," Mr. Jalona said. "I would like to acknowledge the commendable contribu-

+ +

SPORT

Country first for Baig & Ramesh

Personal issues take a back seat for these dedicated coaches



N. Ramesh.
• FILE PHOTO: V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM



Ismail Baig.
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tested COVID-19 positive a few weeks ago.

Baig couldn't even think of leaving the bio-bubble at ARN even for a day as that would mean breaking pandemic protocols. He didn't want the efforts and planning of months go down the drain.

"I preferred to stay back

and fortunately my family understood.

"I was monitoring their treatment from Pune and by God's grace, they could come out of the crisis," Baig said.

The rowing coach added he was with his family only for a brief period during the last six months as ARN was

his "second home".

The 55-year-old Ramesh's case is no different. His wife was bed-ridden a few weeks ago and Dutee Chand's coach faced a similar crisis.

Ramesh, too, stayed back in Patiala with the Tokyo-bound athletes because of the bio-bubble.

Family support

"I didn't dare to think of even moving out of the National camp. Fortunately, my family members insisted that I focus on coaching," he said.

There were many instances when the coaches stayed away from personal issues to be with the trainees.

"There is no better joy for us than to see our trainees scale the pedestal of stardom. Everything else is secondary for us," the spirited coaches said.

Lewis shines as Windies triumph

Walsh is the star of hosts' 4-1 series win over Australia

AUSTRALIA IN WI

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
(GROS-ISLET, SAINT LUCIA)



Evin Lewis. • AFP

Opener Evin Lewis was at his rampaging best with an innings of 79 in setting up the West Indies' 16-run victory over Australia in the final T20 International of their five-match series at the Darren Sammy Stadium here on Friday.

Lewis' punishing innings off just 34 balls, highlighted by nine sixes and four fours, lifted the home team to 199 for eight and earned him the Man-of-the-Match award as the West Indies also took the series 4-1.

Three wickets each
Pacers Sheldon Cottrell and Andre Russell then claimed three wickets each as Australia was restricted to 183 for nine.

Mitchell Marsh, who posted three half-centuries in his previous four innings, looked set for another substantial contribution but fell for 30 of 15 balls.

Despite being hampered by what appeared to be an ankle injury, Australia captain Aaron Finch sought to keep his team in the hunt.

Walsh, the Antiguan leg-spinner, was named Man-of-the-Series for his haul of 12 wickets, one short of the T20I series record of New Zealand spinner Ish Sodhi, also against Australia, earlier this year.

The West Indies and Australia meet in three One-Day Internationals in Barbados starting next Tuesday.

The scores: West Indies 199/8 in 20 overs (Evin Lewis 79, Nicholas Pooran 31; Andrew Tye 3/37) bt Australia 183/9 in 20 overs (Aaron Finch 34, Mitchell Marsh 30, Matthew Wade 26; Simon Cottrell 3/29, Andre Russell 3/43).

Toss: West Indies.

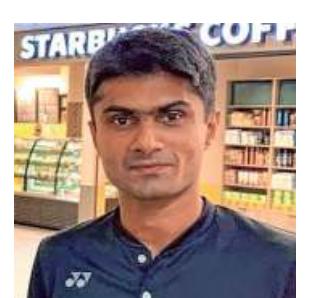
MOM: Lewis.

Mos: Hayden Walsh; West Indies won match by 16 runs and series 4-1.

Shuttler Suhas has made it to Tokyo

It is a huge honour and a dream come true, says the District Magistrate

PARALYMPICS



L.Y. Suhas.

gold medals in Asian Championship 2016 in Beijing and Turkish Open in 2017.

"I have played at the Olympic Stadium court in 2017 when I won the silver medal at the Japan Open. It has a high air volume. So the moment I got the call, I shifted my preparation to Great Noida stadium which also has high air volume," says Suhas. "I have some strong sparring partners," he adds.

Isn't it hectic? "It is just like watching a movie after a tough day. The time spent in court helps me relax."

He counts top-ranked Lucas Mazur of France as the biggest threat. "He has a better win-loss record against me. Being 6'3", he has the

advantage of height but I have my plans. When you are playing Olympics, you need to have an all-around game," says the 5'10" tall Suhas.

Social concern

Hailing from Hassan in Karnataka, Suhas who counts his father as his inspiration says, he started as a cricketer but soon fell in love with badminton. "It is a social concern that in our country sports and studies could not be taken together. So much so that when someone excels in both, it becomes news. As a society, we have broken many glass ceilings and I feel this one is waiting to be smashed."

A great opportunity for Gokulam'

Coach Priya says players ready to take on tough opponents

AFC C'SHIP

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
KOZHIKODE



P.K. Priya.
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Barely a month after the women of Gokulam Kerala were given a warm reception in front of a big crowd at the Corporation Stadium here last year, India went into a lockdown. A year on, they have a strong reason to be cheerful again: they would be playing at the AFC Women's Club Championship.

It will be held in Jordan in November. Gokulam is the first club from an India to take part in the tournament.

It may be four months away, but Gokulam's coach, P.K. Priya is already looking forward to it. "This is a huge

opportunity for the girls," she said on Saturday.

"Yes, the COVID-19 lockdown has hampered our training, but I hope we would be able to get back on the field in September. I

think the players will be ready for the tournament with a two-month camp."

She said Gokulam was drawn in a tough group. "All our rivals, Amman Club (Jordan), Shahrdari Sirjan (Iran) and FC Bunyodkor (Uzbekistan) are strong. But we will give our best," said Priya.

She hopes Gokulam would be able to field most of the players that made the team the Indian Women's League champion last year. "We could also look at some foreign recruits as five of them are allowed in a team," she said.

Gokulam's matches: Nov. 7: vs. Amman Club; Nov. 9: vs. Shahrdari Sirjan; Nov. 12: vs. FC Bunyodkor.

Toss: England; **MOM:** Afidi; **Pakistan won by 31 runs to lead three-match series 1-0.**

PAK. IN ENGLAND

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NOTTINGHAM

Captain Babar Azam (85) led from the front as Pakistan beat England by 31 runs in the first Twenty20 International at Trent Bridge on Friday despite a blistering hundred from Liam Livingstone.

<p

Tough but familiar challenge awaits Sindhu

The World champion has to beat the likes of Tai, Yamaguchi and Chen in order to clinch gold

TOKYO OLYMPICS

RAKESH RAO

World champion P.V. Sindhu returns to the Olympic arena determined to do one better than her runner-up performance in 2016.

Though the men's 13th seed B. Sai Praneeth and the unseeded duo of Satwicksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will also be around, the quality of opposition they are drawn to face could prove too much for them to handle.

In the absence of defending champion Carolina Marin, Sindhu and other medal contenders can breathe a bit easy. Nevertheless, the journey to the podium is going to be tough.

After the two-match preliminary league, Sindhu's first serious challenger could be Mia Blichfeldt (Denmark) in the elimination round. Sindhu has a 4-1 record against Mia. This year, it is 1-1.

Thereafter, Sindhu's prospective rivals are World No. 1 Tai Tzu Ying (Chinese Taipei) in the quarterfinals, former World No. 1 Akane Yamaguchi (Japan) in the semifinals



Acid test: Sindhu, Sai Praneeth and the duo of Chirag and Satwik have all drawn formidable opponents. ■ FILE PHOTOS

and top seed Chen Yufie (China) for the gold. Though these challengers appear intimidating, Sindhu knows she is treading a familiar path.

Make-or-break match
Tai holds a 13-5 advantage in their clashes but three of Sindhu's victories have come in big-ticket events like the 2016 Rio Olympics, 2018 BWF World Tour Finals and the 2019 World Championship. Since then, Sindhu has lost thrice. Therefore, this could well be a make-or-

BADMINTON

Since the Chinese have not played competitively since the pandemic set in, their form is unknown.

After losing the 2020 All England final to Tai, Chen re-

turns as the seeding favourite. Sindhu holds a 6-4 record but Chen emerged triumphant in their last meeting in the 2019 BWF World Tour Finals.

Unless Sindhu reproduces the sublime form that brought her the world title, she could end up justifying her sixth seeding, in the quarterfinals. Praneeth, like Sindhu and Satwik-Chirag combination, is drawn to play the top seed Kenta Momota. Before the prospective quarterfinal against the Japanese, Praneeth will have to

deal with eighth seed Ng Ka Long (Hong Kong).

Satwik and Chirag are unlikely to go beyond the league stage. Clubbed with the top seeded Indonesians Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Ken Sanjaya Sukamuljo, besides World No. 3 Lee Yang and Wang Chi-lin (Chinese Taipei) for company, the debutants can only hope to cause a flutter.

The participants: Men: Singles: B. Sai Praneeth; Doubles: Satwicksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty; Women: Singles: P.V. Sindhu.

Indians will find the going hard

Unlikely to challenge for honours on the greens in Japan

GOLF

RAKESH RAO

Anirban Lahiri, Udayan Mane and Aditi Ashok will be the Indian representatives in golf. Considering the quality of the field and their form, they could well end up as part of the results, and away from the frontrunners to the podium.

After all, Lahiri and Mane are the last two names in the Olympic Golf Ranking list of 60 qualifiers.

Rahm heads the list

World No. 2 Jon Rahm (Spain) heads the list that includes five others from the world top-10 list.

Four of those are Americans – Justin Thomas, Collin Morikawa, Xander Schauffele and Bryson DeChambeau – and the star from Ireland, Rory McIlroy.

Such being the creamy layer of the select field, including golfers from 35 countries, it is difficult to visualise Lahiri and Mane staying in the medal-hunt.

No great form

Going for his second straight Olympics, Lahiri has not shown any great form this season on the PGA Tour. He



Up against it: Lahiri, Aditi and Mane will face a quality field at the Tokyo Games. ■ FILE PHOTOS

has two top-10 finishes after making the 'cut' in nine events from 19 outings. A bout of COVID kept Lahiri away from action till the first week of May.

For Lahiri, the news of qualification came as a pleasant surprise while a wait-listed Mane made it following the withdrawal of Argentina's Emiliano Grillo.

Mane has only played in India and made it to Tokyo based on the world ranking points gained from the domestic tour.

Key role
Three wins in the 2020-21 PGTI season played a key role in Mane getting the necessary points to be considered on the waiting list.

A worry
Aditi's form remains a worry since her best finish this season is a distant 23rd in the LPGA Drive On Championship. Placed 45th on the list of 60 qualifiers, Aditi will find it tough to be in contention in a field that has world's top-15 players, headed by American Nelly Korda.

Realistically, the Indians are set to be among the also-rans.

The participants: Men: Anirban Lahiri, Udayan Mane; Women: Aditi Ashok.

Verstappen sprints to pole



Max Verstappen.

GETTY IMAGES

Red Bull's Max Verstappen won Formula One's first Saturday sprint race to secure pole position for the British Grand Prix and extend his championship lead over Lewis Hamilton to 33 points.

Seven-time World champion Hamilton will start alongside his Dutch rival on the front row after finishing second for Mercedes in a 17-lap race that offered three points for the winner, two for runner-up and one for third.

Hamilton's teammate Valterri Bottas was third in an experimental race that replaced the usual Saturday qualifying for the 10th round of the championship.

Indian 'rookies' raring to go

Sri Lanka beset by injury, indiscipline

INDIA IN LANKA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO

SRI LANKA vs INDIA

1ST ODI

STARTS TODAY,
2:00 PM ONWARDS

LIVE ON
SONY
TEN 4

SONY
SIX

TAMIL ENGLISH

ALSO AVAILABLE IN HD

ENGLISH

Match starts at 3 p.m. IST.

INDIA IN LANKA

COLOMBO

A bunch of fresh faces will be desperate for a fair T20 World Cup audition when India's different-looking yet formidable white-ball squad faces an under-fire Sri Lanka in the six-match limited-overs contest, beginning with the first One-Day International here on Sunday.

The series, delayed by five days due to a COVID-19 scare in the Sri Lankan camp, comprises three ODIs and as many T20Is.

Dasun Shanaka is Sri Lanka's 10th captain in four years and leads a team short on quality barring a classy batsman in Dhananjaya de Silva and a steady pacer in Dishantha Chameera.

The suspension of Kusal Mendis and Niroshan Dickwella following a bio-bubble breach in the UK along with injury to former skipper Kusal Perera puts Sri Lanka in a tight spot.

The squads: India (from): Shikhar Dhawan (Capt.), Prithvi Shaw, Devdutt Padikkal, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Suryakumar Yadav, Manish Pandey, Nitish Rana,

Ishan Kishan (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, K. Gowtham, Yuvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakaravarthy, Rahul Chahar, Deepak Chahar, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Chetan Sakariah and Navdeep Saini.

Sri Lanka: Dasun Shanaka (Capt.), Dhananjaya de Silva (Vice-Capt.), Avishka Fernando, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Pathum Nissanka, Charith Asalanka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Ashen Bandara, Minod Bhanuka, Lahiru Udara, Ramesh Mendis, Chamika Karunaratne, Dushantha Chameera, Lakshan Sandakan, Akila Dhananjaya, Shiran Fernando, Dhananjaya Lakshan, Ishan Jayaratne, Praveen Jayawickrama, Asitha Fernando, Kasun Rajitha, Lahiru Kumara and Isuru Udana.

Match starts at 3 p.m. IST.

Dhawan backs his spinners

ASHWIN ACHAL

Spinners Yuvendran Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav, both of whom have failed to establish permanent spots in the Indian team over the last couple of years, are back together for the ODI series against Sri Lanka commencing on Sunday.

Skipper Shikhar Dhawan is confident that the duo can hit top form. "Kuldeep and Chahal share a great chemistry. They have won so many matches and series for us. They are bowling very well," Dhawan said at a media interaction on Saturday.

It remains to be seen if the team management fields them in the eleven, given that the squad has four more spinners – Rahul Chahar, Varun Chakaravarthy, K. Gowtham and Krunal Pan-

dy. Asked if regular skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri – both are in England with the Test team – have spoken to him about possible team combinations, Dhawan said, "No conversation has happened yet."

"Whichever series we play, we have an eye on the upcoming T20 World Cup. If the selectors, Ravi bhai or Virat have an eye on any player, this is a great platform to see them play."

On the differences in coaching styles of Rahul Dravid and Shastri, Dhawan said, "They are both very positive. Their way of motivating is different."

"Ravi bhai's energy is very strong, while Rahul bhai is very calm and composed. I enjoy playing under both of them."



Let's do it! Dhawan will expect his boys to fire on all cylinders in the white-ball series. ■ TWITTER/SDHAWAN25

Sindhu improved on Saina's London bronze

Kashyap, Srikanth best among men

REWIND

RAKESH RAO

Since the introduction of badminton in 1992 in Barcelona, Indian men and women have participated in each edition. In the last two editions, India collected medals – bronze for Saina Nehwal in 2012 and silver for P.V. Sindhu in 2016.

No Indian has ever entered the semifinals of the men's event. In all three doubles events, India has never made it past the preliminary league phase.

Saina's medal came after her Chinese rival Wang Xin was injured during the

bronze-medal match and pulled out when leading 21-18, 1-0.

In Rio, Sindhu bounced back from 16-19 down in the first game of the final against Carolina Marin but, thereafter, could not keep pace with the fitter Spaniard.

Among the men, the best came from P. Kashyap and K. Srikanth, who reached the quarterfinals in 2012 and 2016.



Proving their mettle: Sindhu and Saina are the only medalists in badminton for India. ■ FILE PHOTOS

TOKYO TITBITS



IOC backs transgender weightlifter's selection

The IOC backed New Zealand's selection of transgender weightlifter Laurel Hubbard for the Tokyo Olympics despite criticism, saying under the current rules she can compete. The super-heavyweight is set to become the first transgender to compete at the Games. REUTERS

First coronavirus case in Olympics Village

Tokyo Olympics organisers revealed the first COVID-19 case in the Games Village on Saturday as they sought to reassure competitors the pandemic-delayed event would be safe. Organisers said an unnamed person had tested positive for coronavirus in the Village, where thousands of athletes and officials will stay during the Games. AFP

German football team quits friendly

The German men's football team left the pitch five minutes before the end of its warm-up game against Honduras on Saturday after defender Jordan Torunarigha was allegedly racially abused. The game was tied 1-1 at the time of the incident. REUTERS

Can Pranati pull it off?

GYMNASICS

A. VINOD

This could be hotly contested, but the fact that gymnastics in India is yet to get to the big league remains a truth with only a few thousand pursuing the sport – which calls for innovation, sublime skills and absolute balance – in right earnest.

Yet, the fact that there will be one in action at the Tokyo Olympics is a big boost to Indian gymnastics. Pranati Nayak will attempt to go the distance and bring home the medal that India so keenly awaited from her idol Dipa Karmakar.

The sport's pin-up girl Dipa finished fourth in vault at Rio 2016. A faulty dismount on her second attempt dashed the Tripura girl's chances of a podium finish.

Pranati, hailing from a village in Midnapore, the third and youngest daughter of a bus driver, had to run from pillar to post to even get a chance to train at the SAI centre in Kolkata.

Without even a chance to perform, the Bengal girl was dismissed from the trials as too weak and frail to take up the sport seriously.

It was only the timely intervention of SAI coach Minara Begum that ended Pranati's misery.

Pranati would first look to reach the vault final. If she gets there, she surely has the talent to surprise one and all.

Dipa's exploits at Rio gave India prominence

REWIND

A. VINOD

Gymnastics caught the imagination of the Indians only in 2010 when Ashish Kumar, hailing from Allahabad, won bronze in floor and a silver in vault at that year's New Delhi Commonwealth Games.

Though she fell short in Rio 2016, where she finished fourth, two years later Dipa did the country proud by becoming the first Indian – male or female – to win the top place in the FIG Artistic World Challenge Cup, taking the gold in vault.

The Uttar Pradesh gymnast, prior to his exploits in the New Delhi CWG, had tied for a bronze medal along with his Syrian rival Fadi Bahalwan, at the 2006 Asian Championships in Surat. However, it was the twin-medal strike that helped Ashish grab attention.

Begum then took Pranati under her wing, paid for the costs involved and helped the young gymnast continue training.

Hogging the limelight
Pranati shot into the lime-light when she won a bronze medal in vault at the 2019 Asian Championships. It came as a surprise, though, when she was selected as one of the two last quota places from Asia to get to Tokyo.

Pranati would first look to reach the vault final. If she gets there, she surely has the talent to surprise one and all.

Missing out
Ashish had a chance to represent the country in London 2012, but was unlucky to miss out on qualification by a mere 0.7 points.

The de-recognition of the Gymnastics Federation of India by the government too