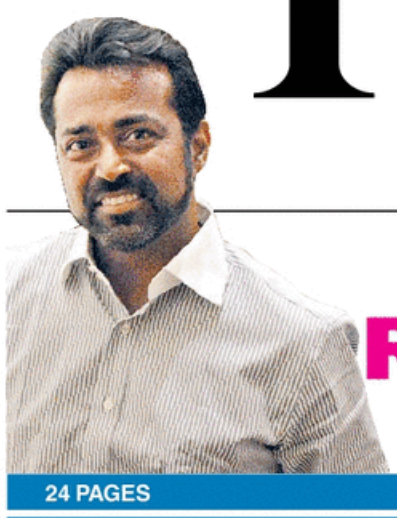
The Telegraph



READY TO
REINVENT
Sport P12

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In t2

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IN BRIEF

Biden takes lead in poll

■ **NEW YORK:** Joseph R. Biden Jr has taken a commanding lead over US President Donald Trump in the 2020 race, building a wide advantage among women and non-white voters, according to a new national poll of registered voters by *The New York Times* and Siena College. Biden has also made deep inroads with some traditionally Republican-leaning groups that have shifted away from Trump following his ineffective response to the coronavirus pandemic.
FOREIGN P2

Bengal lockdown

■ **CALCUTTA:** Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said the lockdown would be extended till July 31 in Bengal, with possible relaxations.
EAST P5

LOCKDOWN
92 DAYS OVER
6 DAYS TO GO

INDIA COUNT

Updated Covid-19 figures on Wednesday

- Confirmed cases: **456183**
- Active cases: **183022**
- Overnight addition: **15968**
- Total deaths: **14476**
- Discharged: **258685**

Hinduja split

■ **LONDON:** A split has opened up in the Hinduja family, with a daughter of Srichand — eldest of the four brothers — taking her uncles to court to seek a partition of the family business. Vinoo has been allowed by the high court in London to act on behalf of her father, who is unwell.
BUSINESS

Diesel 'milestone'

■ **NEW DELHI:** The price of diesel crossed that of petrol for the first time ever in Delhi on Wednesday, the 18th consecutive day that rates were hiked. Diesel in Delhi now costs Rs 79.88 a litre while petrol costs Rs 79.76 a litre. In the rest of the country, however, petrol continues to cost more.
BUSINESS

QUOTE

It is the policy of Modi 2.0 to fight for every inch of India's land

RAM MADHAV
BJP general secretary

China milks 'no-intrusion' gift

Stoked: greed for Galwan

ANITA JOSHUA

New Delhi: Just as designated officials from India and China were preparing for another round of the border mechanism talks, Beijing on Wednesday struck an aggressive posture, repeating its claim on the Galwan Valley and accusing India of making false statements.

In separate briefings, the Chinese defence ministry and the foreign ministry accused India of provoking the border clash in Galwan on June 15, and breaching the commander-level understanding to not cross the estuary of the Galwan river to patrol or build facilities.

China, from both accounts, is sticking to its contention that Galwan falls within its control line, pushing India's claim westwards to start at the estuary of the river.

India had rejected China's claim twice last week, billing it as "exaggerated and untenable". But Prime Minister Narendra Modi had delivered an ambiguous speech on Friday, saying no intrusion had taken place and compelling the PMO to issue a clarification that he was referring to the post-June 15 situation.

Some analysts feel that the undefined LAC lies at the heart of the mess, and Modi's ambiguous "no-intrusion" claims have made it easier for the Chinese army to push the envelope.

On Wednesday, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, a spokesperson for the Chinese defence ministry, said: "China has sovereignty over the Galwan Valley region. Over the years, the Chinese border troops have been patrolling and guarding this region."

India did not respond on Wednesday to China's renewed assertion of sovereignty over Galwan. Until April-end, there was no dispute over the Galwan region of the LAC despite it being a site of action during the 1962 war.

Accusing India of "provoking" a border clash, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said: "The onus is not on China's part."

He added: "This risky behaviour by the Indian side greatly violated the agreement between the two countries and the basic norms guiding international relations. It's very serious, with very severe consequences."

Asked why he was repeating the allegations after the second meeting between the corps commanders of the two armies on Monday, Zhao said: "What I have just said is meant to clarify the whole situation, tell the truth to everyone. We made this statement because the MEA in India and also Indian media have made some false reports."

He did not dwell on what these "false reports" were.

Earlier, Wu had repeated a blow-by-blow account of events in the Galwan Valley over the past month that had been released by the Chinese foreign ministry on Saturday, adding that India should take "full responsibility for the (June 15) incident that was solely and completely triggered by its breach of consensus and unilateral provocations".

Both officials continued to stress the importance of neighbourly relations and how peace and tranquillity in the border region was important for both countries.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 ▶

China again blames 16th Bihar

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has again sought to accuse troops of the 16th Bihar Regiment of triggering the violent June 15 border clash in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed and wants India to punish the unit.

"The Chinese side demands that India should severely punish those who are accountable for the clash on the evening of June 15, and work with China together to maintain the peace in border region.... The Chinese side demands that India should severely punish those who should be held accountable, strictly discipline its frontline troops so as to ensure that such incidents do not happen again," PLA senior colonel and defence ministry spokesperson Wu Qian said on Wednesday in Beijing.

By demanding action specifically against "those who are accountable for the clash" and blaming "frontline troops" and at the same time promising to work with India, the PLA appears to be suggesting two things: that the flare-up was the result of a "rogue" mission and that China's issues lie with the unit, not with the Indian government or the Indian armed forces.

The 16th Bihar Regiment was led by Col Santosh Babu, who was among those killed on June 15.

"On the evening of June 15, India's front-line troops, in violation of the agreement reached at the corps commander-level meeting, once again crossed the LAC for deliberate provocation, and even violently attacked the Chinese officers and soldiers who went there for negotiation, thus triggering fierce physical conflicts and causing casualties," Wu said.

In its first comment on the clash on June 16, the Indian external affairs ministry had blamed China and said the violent face-off happened "as a result of an attempt by the Chinese side to unilaterally change the status quo there". The ministry had also underscored that the Indian army's activities were within the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control.

Four days later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a speech with ambiguities about any possible intrusion that gifted China's propaganda machine a chance to claim vindication.

The Prime Minister had remained silent on June 16, when the deaths were made public, but paid tributes to the fallen soldiers the following day. "Their supreme sacrifice will never be forgotten.... India is proud of the valour of our armed forces," Modi had said.

On Saturday, the Prime Minister told an event linked to Bihar that "I will say every Bihari is proud of the valour of the Bihar Regiment".

By then, Chinese outlets had translated that part of Modi's June 19 speech in which he had said: "Neither has anyone intruded into our frontier there (Ladakh)...."

Although the PMO later clarified that Modi was speaking about the post-June 15 situation, Chinese agencies have tried to gain the maximum mileage from the statement, which gave an impression that the Prime Minister was agreeing with Beijing's stand.

On Wednesday, Wu claimed that Indian soldiers had crossed the border, provoked PLA soldiers and attacked them. "India should bear the full responsibility for the incident that was solely and completely triggered by its breach of consensus and unilateral provocations," Wu said.

Modi pays tribute to the soldiers who lost their lives in the clash between India and China at a virtual conference with the chief ministers in New Delhi on June 17. (AFP)

Satellite tells troubling tale

IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI

New Delhi: Satellite images that emerged on Wednesday suggested a fresh Chinese build-up in the Galwan Valley, a site of the 1962 war that was kept out of the dispute list until two months ago.

A red line added by the Twitter handle that posted the images to denote the Line of Actual Control (LAC) showed the structures on the Indian side. The LAC is undefined, making it difficult to pinpoint the side on which a precise point falls, but a military veteran said the structures appeared to be "1.5km into the Indian side".

The Indian Army did not comment officially. Off the record, army sources said the camps in the images showed structures "on the Chinese side".

However, the just two-day-old satellite images and a report by a news agency preferred by the Narendra Modi government strengthened a perception that China was reinforcing its presence in the area. The disclosures came on a day the army chief, General M.M. Naravane, visited forward areas in eastern Ladakh and reviewed the operational situation.

■ The satellite images, dated June 22, were put out by Twitter handle @detresfa on Wednesday. The @detresfa Twitter handle has been releasing satellite images since the border tensions began in early May.

The Twitter handle tweeted: "Images via @Maxar of the #GalwanValley face-off point on 22 June 2020 show possible defensive positions being set up by #China, small walls, trench type areas have now appeared on site #IndiaChinaFaceOff". Maxar is a US space technology company.

■ Quoting sources, the news agency ANI reported that "in the Galwan river area, where the violent face-off took place between the two armies resulting in a high number of deaths on both sides, the Chinese have built some of their structures after the clash".

"An observation post-like structure of the Chinese removed by the Indian army troops on June 15-16 night has also come up again near the Patrolling Point 14," it added. PP-14 is the site where the carnage took place on June 15.

Brigadier (retd) M.P.S. Bajwa, who had commanded the brigade that captured Tiger Hill in the Kargil War, tweeted: "Updates — Ladakh Area. China adamant to take control of Galwan Valley & trying to fortify PP-14 area along Galwan River. China also reported to move troops in areas of Depsang to provide depth to Karakuram pass and dominate Our Road — Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO)."

He added: "Chinese have refused to withdraw from Finger-4 in Pangong Tso lake area, an intrusion of almost 8km from Finger-8 area, which is a LAC as per our perception. Chinese build-up seen with armourer/mech (mechanised) & artillery in East of areas of Gogra in Hot Springs area."

Another veteran, Colonel (retd) Ajai Shukla, tweeted about the satellite images: "Large Chinese camp in Galwan Valley, 1.5km into Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), shown as the red line. There is no Indian camp in the Galwan Valley, after India agreed on June 6 to demilitarise the valley to where the Galwan joins the Shyok."

There have been suggestions that after May 5, when the first scuffle this summer was reported, the Chinese had expanded their "claim line" into Indian territory.

Indian Army sources said they are still hopeful of Chinese disengagement.

ONLINE GAP BRIDGED IN 2 WEEKS

All hands on deck, Kerala moves digital mountain

K.M. RAKESH

Bangalore: ***Otthupidichaal malayum porum.*** **The tongue-twister needs to be repeated by those who lament the digital divide in the country and then do nothing about it.**

The Malayalam saying means a mountain can be moved by joining hands. People, political parties of multiple hues and celebrities in Kerala have been practising what the proverb preaches, bringing online schooling to every deprived child in the state in just over a fortnight.

In end-May, a survey had shown that 2.5 lakh pupils of the Kerala school board lacked access to online classes. The tipping point that jolted the state's conscience came on June 2 when a schoolgirl committed suicide because she lacked a working TV set at her home and could not attend the initial classes.

Soon afterwards, political parties, individuals, NRIs, businessmen and film stars succeeded in bridging the digital divide, donating smart TV sets, mobile phones and tablets.

Some were given directly to students but most were provided to the village libraries or anganwadi centres that have turned community classrooms, particularly in the more remote areas where homes have poor electricity or Internet connectivity.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ▶

IMF forecasts growth contraction

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday poured more misery on the Narendra Modi government with its latest forecast that India would see its growth contract by 4.5 per cent this fiscal, sliding into a recession along with the rest of the world.

The IMF warned that the global economy would shrink by 4.9 per cent this year, sharply lower than the April forecast of a 3 per cent contraction.

Back in April, the IMF had forecast that India would buck the global contraction along with China. It had forecast a growth rate of 1.9 per cent for India at that time, faster than the 1.3 per cent for China.

But in less than three months, any fleeting comfort that the Centre may have drawn from that earlier forecast in the IMF's World Economic Outlook has simply vanished.

"This is the worst recession since World War II," said IMF's chief economist Gita Gopinath.

"India's lockdown has lasted longer than we expected. The recovery has been slower, resulting in a downward revision," she added.

The IMF's forecast of a contraction in the Indian economy is worse than the World Bank's projection of a 3.2 per cent contraction this fiscal but better than the global credit rating agency Standard and Poor's prediction of minus 5 per cent.

However, the IMF expects the Indian economy to bounce back to 6 per cent in fiscal 2021. But China — which is projected to grow 1 per cent this year — will grow at a pacier 8.2 per cent.

This would suggest a V-shaped recovery that many economists remain sceptical of. The recovery will, however, be slower than the sharp rebound of 7.4 per cent that the IMF had forecast for India back in April.

The forecasts for the world's major economies this year are numbing: the US is expected to contract by 8 per cent this year, the UK by 10.2 per cent, Germany by 7.8 per cent, France by 12.5 per cent, Italy and Spain by 12.8 per cent each, and Japan by 5.8 per cent.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has had a more negative impact on activity in the first half of 2020 than anticipated, and the recovery is projected to be more gradual than previously forecast," the IMF said on Wednesday in its World Economic Outlook update.

"The strength of the recovery is highly uncertain as there is no vaccine to cure the Covid-19 infection," Gopinath added.

The Fund downgraded its global GDP forecast for 2021. It now expects a growth rate of 5.4 per cent from the 5.8 per cent forecast made in April.

It said the downward revision was due to social-distancing measures that were likely to remain in place during the second half of the year, with productivity and supply chains being hit.

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Lee Hsien Yang, the brother of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, after joining the Opposition Progress Singapore Party in Singapore. (AFP)

Singapore PM's brother joins party in Opposition

Singapore: The Singapore Prime Minister's brother, Lee Hsien Yang, said on Wednesday that he had joined an Opposition party competing against his sibling in a July 10 general election but that he was undecided on whether he would run as a candidate.

Lee Hsien Yang, the son of Singapore's modern-day founder, Lee Kuan Yew, has been embroiled in a bitter dispute with his brother over his late father's house. He said he had joined the new Progress Singapore Party (PSP).

Lee has criticised his brother Lee Hsien Loong's People's Action Party (PAP), which their father founded and which has governed the city-state since its independence in 1965. "The PAP has lost its way," Lee Hsien Yang said in a video posted on PSP's Facebook page, adding that the current government is "distinctly different" from when his father was prime minister.

"It is possible to be loyal Singaporeans... to love Singapore and yet not vote PAP," he said. Reuters

New York Times poll finds former Vice-President ahead of President by 14 points

Biden takes dominant lead over Trump

ALEXANDER BURNS, JONATHAN MARTIN AND MATT STEVENS

New York: Joseph R. Biden Jr has taken a commanding lead over President Trump in the 2020 race, building a wide advantage among women and non-white voters and making deep inroads with some traditionally Republican-leaning groups that have shifted away from Trump following his ineffective response to the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new national poll of registered voters by *The New York Times* and Siena College.

Biden is currently ahead of Trump by 14 percentage points, garnering 50 per cent of the vote compared with 36 per cent for Trump. That is among the most dismal showings of Trump's presidency, and a sign that he is the clear underdog right now in his fight for a second term.

Trump has been an unpopular President for virtually his entire time in office. He has made few efforts since his election in 2016 to broaden his support beyond the Right-wing base that vaulted him into office with only 46 per cent of the popular vote and a modest victory in the Electoral College.

But among a striking cross-section of voters, the distaste for Trump has deepened as his administration failed to stop a deadly disease that crippled the economy and then as he responded to a wave of racial-justice protests with angry bluster and militaristic threats. The dominant picture that emerges from the poll is of a country ready to reject a President whom a strong majority of voters regard as failing the greatest tests confronting his administration.

Biden leads Trump by enormous margins with black and Hispanic voters, and women and young people appear on track to choose Biden by an even wider margin than they favoured Hillary Clinton over Trump in 2016. But the former Vice-President has also drawn even with Trump among male voters, whites and people in middle age and older — groups that have typically been the backbones of Republican electoral success, including Trump's in 2016.

Former Vice-President Joseph Biden (left) and the US President Donald Trump. (AFP)

Arlene Myles, 75, of Denver, said she had been a Republican for nearly six decades before switching her registration to independent earlier this year during Trump's impeachment trial. Myles said that when Trump was first elected, she had resolved to "give him a chance", but had since concluded that he and his party were irredeemable.

"I was one of those people who stuck by Nixon until he was waving goodbye," Myles said. "I thought I was a good Republican and thought they had my values, but they have gone down the tubes these last few years."

Myles said she planned to vote for Biden, expressing only one misgiving: "I wish he was younger," she said.

Most stark may be Biden's towering advantage among white women with college degrees, who support him over Trump by 39 percentage points. In 2016, exit polls found that group preferred Hillary Clinton to Trump by just 7 percentage points. The poll also found that Biden has narrowed Trump's advantage with less-educated white voters.

The exodus of white voters from the Republican party has been especially pronounced among younger voters, an ominous trend for a party that as already heavily reliant on older Americans. Fifty-two per cent of whites under 45 said they supported Biden while only 30 per cent said they supported Trump.

And their opposition is intense: More than twice as many younger whites viewed the President very unfavourably than very favourably.

Tom Diamond, 31, a Republican in Fort Worth, Texas, said he planned to vote for Trump but would do so with real misgivings. He called the President a "poor leader" who had mishandled the pandemic and said Biden seemed "like a guy you can trust". But Trump held views closer to his own on the economy and health care.

"Part of you just feels icky voting for him," Diamond said. "But definitely from a policy perspective, that's where my vote's going to go."

Some unease towards Trump stems from voters' racial attitudes. According to the poll, white voters under 45 are overwhelmingly supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, while older whites are more tepid in their views towards racial activism.

New York Times News Service

Volunteers look for survivors of the plane that crashed in a residential area of Karachi on May 22, 2020. (AP)

'Pilots talked about virus before Pak crash'

Islamabad: The pilots of a Pakistan airliner that crashed last month, killing 97, were distracted and preoccupied as they talked about the coronavirus pandemic while preparing for an initial failed landing bid, the country's aviation minister said on Wednesday.

The Airbus A320 of national carrier Pakistan International Airlines crashed on May 22 in the southern city of Karachi, killing all but two of those aboard as it came down a kilometre (0.6 mile) short of the runway on its second attempt.

The aircraft had landed on its engines on the first attempt, before taking off again, the minister, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, told parliament as he presented an initial report on the disaster.

The flight data recorder showed the landing gear was lowered at 10 nautical miles, Khan said, but then raised again 5 nautical miles from the runway, which he described as "beyond comprehension".

The aircraft was "100 percent fit to fly" and there was no technical fault, he said, but added that the pilots were not "focused" because of the pandemic. "The discussion throughout was about corona," Khan said, referring to exchanges between the pilot and co-pilot he said he had listened to on the voice recorder.

"Corona was dominant over their mind. Their family was affected (by the virus)."

The report, reviewed by Reuters, did not spell out the pilots' conversation on the virus, but said they did not follow set protocols.

"Several warnings and alerts such as over-speed, landing gear not down and ground proximity alerts, were disregarded," it added. "The landing was undertaken with landing gear retracted. The aircraft touched the runway surface on its engines."

Both the pilots and officials at air traffic control did not follow set procedures, Khan said.

"The captain and the co-pilot were experienced and medically fit," the minister said. Khan added that the data showed flight PK8303 from Lahore was at an altitude of just 2,200m when 16km from the runway. Reuters

Second virus wave 'a risk for UK'

London: A second coronavirus wave is a real risk for the UK and local flare-ups are likely, major health bodies said on Wednesday, in one of the strongest warnings yet to Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he eases lockdown to help the economy.

The UK has one of the world's third highest death tolls from Covid-19 but, with infections falling, plans to lift many restrictions from July 4 to help an economy facing the deepest contraction in three centuries.

A major second spike is the nightmare for leaders across the world as they would face blame for more deaths and may have to shutter economies again. Some of Britain's most eminent health leaders, though, want urgent preparations for such a scenario. "While the future shape of the pandemic in the UK is hard to predict, the available evidence indicates that local flare-ups are increasingly likely and a second wave a real risk," the medics said in a letter in the *British Medical Journal*.

It was signed by 15 of the most eminent health professional groups and trade unions including the heads of the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine and the British Medical Association.

"Many elements of the infrastructure needed to contain the virus are beginning to be put in place, but substantial challenges remain," they wrote.

European nations emerging from painful shutdowns are nervously watching a new outbreak at a meatpacking plant in Germany, where two municipalities have regressed to lockdown.

Medical workers in masks wait for a briefing at a hospital in Slough, near London. (AFP)

Announcing that England was rising from "hibernation", Johnson is letting pubs, restaurants and hotels reopen from July 4.

"While we remain vigilant, we do not believe that there is currently a risk of a second peak of infections that might overwhelm the NHS," he said on Tuesday.

The UK on Monday reported the lowest daily increase in deaths since lockdown in mid-March — just 15 — though the suspected overall toll has hit 54,139, the second highest after the US.

Johnson, who was treated in intensive care for Covid-19 complications, has faced criticism from Opposition parties for imposing the lockdown too late, failing to supply enough protective equipment and dithering over a test-and-trace system.

The medics' letter called for a review focussing on "areas of weakness" to prevent a second wave in the interests of protecting lives and restoring the economy as fast as possible.

Others signatories included Anne Marie Rafferty, president of the Royal College of Nursing, Maggie Rae, president of the Faculty of Public Health, and Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of the *Lancet*.

"We need to understand how best to learn from other countries which seem to have managed the crisis differently and perhaps managed it better than we have in the UK," Martin Marshall, president of the Royal College of General Practitioners, told the BBC.

The medics' letter called for a review focusing on "areas of weakness" to prevent a second wave. A spokesman for Johnson said authorities would continue to guarantee resources for health and care services. Reuters

Twitter has repeatedly clashed with Trump since it began challenging his tweets in May. (AFP)

Twitter bars Trump favourite's account

New York: Twitter Inc has permanently suspended the account of a Right-wing online personality for violating its copyright policy, a week after he posted a doctored video of toddlers that was tweeted by President Donald Trump.

The move was the second action Twitter took related to Trump's tweets within 24 hours. On Tuesday it hid a tweet from Trump threatening "serious force" against protesters in Washington DC, which Twitter said violated its policy on threatening violence.

Twitter has repeatedly clashed with Trump since it began challenging his tweets in May. The President has threatened to change laws on social media after Twitter labelled one of his tweets about postal voting inaccurate and hid a tweet about looting.

Last week, Twitter put the "manipulated media" designation on a tweet from Trump that showed a doctored news clip from CNN. The original clip was a cheerful story of a viral video showing Black and white toddlers who were best friends. Reuters

India-origin scientist to head top US foundation

Washington: Indian-American scientist Dr Sethuraman Panchanathan has taken charge as director of the National Science Foundation, the top American body supporting fundamental research in non-medical fields of science and engineering in the country.

Unanimously confirmed by the Senate last week, Panchanathan, 58, from the Arizona State University, replaced White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director Dr Kelvin Droegemeier who served as acting director of the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The term of previous NSF director France Cordova's term ended in March 2020.

On Monday, President Donald Trump formally appointed Panchanathan as the 15th director of the NSF, the top American science funding body that has an annual budget of $7.4 billion, the White House said on Tuesday, adding that it is a six-year term.

Droegemeier is expected to swear in Panchanathan on July 2, 2020. "Dr Panchanathan has the creativity, tenacity, communication skills, understanding of the research enterprise, and commitment to lead this agency successfully and continue moving the scientific enterprise forward." PTI

Ads dry up for FB

New York: Facebook put on an upbeat presentation to advertisers on Tuesday, the same day the clothing chain Eddie Bauer, the film distributor Magnolia Pictures and the Ben & Jerry's ice cream brand announced that they would stop advertising on the platform through July.

Those companies joined Patagonia, the North Face, REI and others in a growing boycott that has targeted Facebook's content moderation practices.

In a short video, part of a week-long showcase for digital companies hoping to attract advertising dollars, Facebook displayed posts that companies like Delta Air Lines and Calvin Klein ran during the coronavirus pandemic. The pre-recorded presentation did not specifically address the boycott.

Companies have suspended campaigns over the platform's content moderation practices. (AFP)

While several large companies have pulled away from Facebook, smaller businesses that make up the bulk of its eight million advertisers have been considering their options.

Jason Dille, who oversees media planning for 20 clients at the ad agency Chemistry, said many of them had considered putting a halt to buying ads on Facebook but that the pandemic had complicated their plans.

"Some of my clients are just starting to come back," Dille said. "If they don't create sales and get business to turn around, they're going to go under." He added: "Facebook is a double-edged sword. You don't want to support it, but you have to use it in order to reach a large audience."

New York Times News Service

United States
v.
Elagoon Business Solutions Pvt Ltd., d/b/a Computer Phone Assist
United States District Court
Western District of Washington
Case No. 19-cv-00324

You are hereby notified to appear and defend the above entitled action in the above entitled court, answer the Complaint of the Plaintiff, and serve a copy of your answer upon the undersigned attorneys for Plaintiff, their office below stated, within 60 days of June 18, 2020; in case of your failure so to do, judgment will be rendered against you according to the demand of the Complaint, which has been filed with the clerk of the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington, USA. The Complaint alleges that the Defendant's telemarketers pose as computer technicians, contact American consumers, falsely state that their computers have serious problems, and misrepresent services rendered. Plaintiff seeks temporary and permanent injunctive and other relief barring Defendant from executing its scheme to defraud and conducting technical-support services. For additional information and to serve your answer, you may contact the Consumer Protection Branch, United States Department of Justice, P.O. Box 386, Washington, D.C., 20044-0386, U.S.A., and at telephone 00-1+202-307-0066. The Summons and the Complaint discussed above may be viewed at https://www.justice.gov/file/1282741/download.

Tender

Govt. of West Bengal
P.W.(Roads) Directorate
Notice Inviting e-Tender

SE/WHC-II invites online tenders for e-NIT No. 01 of 2020-21 for the work of "Bishnupur to Patrasayer Road from 0.00kmp to 2.90 km, widening and strengthening work under Bankura Highway Division in the Dist. of Bankura. [2nd call]".
Estimated amount (Rs.): 4,98,00,396.00, Tender Id: - 2020_WBPWD_286223_1, Bid Submission End Date: 17.07.2020 up to 02.00 PM. Details may be obtained from the website **https://etender.wb.nic.in** & Office Notice Board. For any clarification regarding upload & download, Bidder may contact PWD e-Tender Help Desk through Phone No. (033) 2223-6236. Corrigendum or Addendum if issued will be published only through Website.

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e-Tender invited by the Executive Engineer, Howrah Division, P.H.E. Dte. Vide No:- **WBPHED/EE/HD/NIeT_04/2020-2021** details of works shown in the NIeT. Bid submission End date: 15.07.2020 at 16.00 P.M. All details can be obtained from the website – https://wbtenders.gov.in

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Trump bid to bar niece's book

MAGGIE HABERMAN

New York: President Trump's family is seeking a temporary restraining order to try to block publication of a tell-all book by the President's niece, Mary L. Trump.

Mary Trump is the daughter of the President's late brother, Fred Trump Jr, and her book, *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man*, is scheduled to be published by Simon & Schuster on July 28.

Trump's younger brother, Robert S. Trump, requested the restraining order on Tuesday in a filing in Queens County Surrogate's Court, where the estate of the President's father, Fred Trump Sr, was settled.

The filing names Trump and Simon & Schuster, and it seeks to stop publication on the grounds that Trump is violating a non-disclosure agreement related to the settlement of the estate of Fred Trump Sr, the father of Donald and Robert Trump and Mary Trump's grandfather.

Officials at the Trump Organisation declined to comment on the legal efforts to stop the book, which is described by the publisher on its website as a "revelatory, authoritative portrait of Donald J. Trump and the toxic family that made him."

Trump, the website says, will show the "dark history of their family in order to explain how her uncle became the man who now threatens the world's health, economic security and social fabric".

In the book, Trump, 55, is expected to say she was a chief source for *The New York Times*'s coverage of the President's finances, and that she provided the newspaper with confidential tax documents. A spokeswoman for *The Times* declined to comment.

Robert Trump said in a statement that he was "deeply disappointed" in his niece's decision.

"Her attempt to sensationalise and mischaracterise our family relationship after all of these years for her own financial gain is both a travesty and injustice to the memory of my late brother, Fred, and our beloved parents," he said. "I and the rest of my entire family are so proud of my wonderful brother, the President, and feel that Mary's actions are truly a disgrace."

Theodore J. Boutrous Jr., a lawyer for Trump, said in a statement that the President and his family were trying "to suppress a book that will discuss matters of utmost public importance".

US President Donald Trump's niece Mary

"They are pursuing this unlawful prior restraint because they do not want the public to know the truth," he said.

Adam Rothberg, a spokesman for Simon & Schuster, said the attempt to prevent the book's publication would fail.

"As the plaintiff and his attorney well know, the courts take a dim view of prior restraint, and this attempt to block publication will meet the same fate as those that have gone before," he said.

But the book itself and the attempt to prevent it from appearing are only the latest chapter in family tensions that have divided the Trumps for years.

Mary Trump's father, Fred Trump Jr, turned his back on his own father's real-estate business, becoming permanently estranged from him, to work for Trans World Airlines. He suffered from alcoholism and died in 1981 at age 42.

When Fred Trump Sr died in 1999, he all but cut out Fred Trump Jr's two children, Mary and her brother, Fred Trump III, from his will, leaving them only a small cash bequest. Mary Trump and her brother contested the will and sued Donald Trump and his siblings, arguing that they poisoned Fred Trump Sr against them and coerced him to change how he left his fortune.

It was a nasty court battle, and at one point Donald Trump and his brother and sister cut off the medical benefits to Fred Trump III's infant child, who was born with severe medical issues.

In 2001, Mary Trump and her brother settled the lawsuit. The exact terms are not known, but the settlement did include a financial payment to them both. In his court filing on Tuesday, Robert Trump wrote that the settlement also included a confidentiality agreement barring Mary Trump from writing the type of book she seems to have written.

New York Times News Service

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Prod against pen-and-paper exams

BASANT KUMAR MOHANTY

New Delhi: The government wants final-year students of undergraduate and postgraduate courses not to have to take any pen-and-paper exams this year because of the Covid-19 threat.

It has nudged the higher education regulator to revise its guidelines that mandated exams for final-year students, although sources said that online exams were still an option for universities capable of conducting them.

If the University Grants Commission revises its guidelines and the universities accept the latest recommendation, which looks likely, some final-year students may be awarded grades on the basis of their average scores in previous semesters and internal assessment.

The successful among them will then be awarded their degrees without a final exam. Several IITs have adopted this approach.

Internal-assessment scores are based on assignments, mid-term examinations and projects.

Human resource development minister Ramesh Pokhriyal's nudge to the UGC came in a tweet on Wednesday.

"I have advised the @UGC_india to reconsider the guidelines issued earlier for Intermediate and terminal semester examinations and academic calendar. The foundation for revisited guidelines shall be health and safety (of) students, teachers and staff," Pokhriyal tweeted.

A UGC official said a committee headed by R.C. Kuhad that had earlier suggested holding final-year exams had handed in a revised proposal recommending their cancellation.

However, some universities like Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University have already begun the process for conducting online final-year exams.

The UGC official said the commission would meet soon "to look at these universities' preparations and take a final decision on its recommendations".

Even if some well-prepared universities are allowed to conduct online exams, the UGC will discourage pen-and-paper exams, the official said.

The Delhi University Teachers' Association, which has been opposing the university's proposal to hold online or "open-book examinations", construed Pokhriyal's stand as one against any kind of exam and welcomed it.

Association president Rajib Ray said the minister's announcement had vindicated the teachers' and students' "collective efforts" against the online-exam proposal. He urged the vice-chancellor to accept the expert panel's revised suggestion and end the uncertainty.

Ray said online exams would "discriminate" against students from the deprived sections "and erode the sanctity of the examination process".

The UGC had in April issued guidelines saying exams should be held in July for final-year undergraduate and master's students. It said students of the intermediate semesters would be graded on the basis of their internal assessment scores in the current and previous semester.

The guidelines said that academic session 2020-21 might start from August 1 for old students and from September 1 for fresh students. With the Covid-19 infections still rising, the calendar may now be revised.

'Missing' TB patients hurt drive

G.S. MUDUR

New Delhi: India's tuberculosis control programme has recorded a 12 per cent increase in treatment success rates over a one-year period, but infection and treatment outcomes for over 230,000 patients remain unknown, the programme's annual report released on Wednesday said.

The national TB report from the Union health ministry has also estimated that the programme was unable to register an estimated 2.9 lakh patients with new infections and 2.5 lakh patients who have had a TB relapse or need retreatment — or 5.4 lakh "missing" TB cases across India.

However, improvements in case detection have led to a decrease in such missing new incident cases from around 10 lakh in 2017 to 2.9 lakh, the report said.

The TB control programme — renamed as the National TB Elimination Programme — has set a target of reducing the country's TB incidence rate from 217 patients per lakh population in 2015 to 77 by 2023 and 44 by 2025.

India in 2019 registered 24 lakh TB patients, a 14 per cent increase over the previous year, and treatment success rates improved from 69 per cent in 2018 to 81 per cent in 2019. But the estimated incidence of 199 per lakh population is still distant from the 2025 goal.

Around 86,000, or 4 per cent, of the TB patients who were offered treatment were lost to follow-up, the report said, analysing the treatment outcomes in 2018. Over 144,000, or 7 per cent, of patients were "not evaluated" after registration.

Public health experts say such patients who are lost during follow-up or are not evaluated may suffer from worsening infection and spread it to other people.

"These figures point to gaps in follow-up efforts to ensure that all patients continue their full treatment," said Nerges Mistry, director of the Foundation for Medical Research, Mumbai, a community medicine specialist involved in tracking TB treatment services for patients in Mumbai and Patna.

A "joint monitoring mission" of the TB control programme by the health ministry with the World Health Organisation has also cautioned that nearly 5 lakh people with TB disease remain "missing" to TB surveillance, notification and services and are likely in private health care or the community.

"Those who are found experience attrition through the cascade of care, hundreds of thousands are lost along their journey through diagnosis and treatment, particularly among those reported by private (healthcare) providers," the mission has said in its report.

Vishwa Bandhu Gupta

Media group chief dead

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi: The Indian Newspaper Society (INS) has condoled the death of Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, who was the chairman and editor-in-chief of the Tej-Bandhu group.

Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, a former member of Parliament and known as the Balloon Man, passed away on June 1. He was 93.

Shailesh Gupta, the president of the INS, said Vishwa Bandhu Gupta was a former INS President and the Society had immensely benefited from his vision and leadership during his tenure. His passing away is an irreparable loss to the entire print media industry, Shailesh Gupta added.

Shailesh Gupta conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the family members and prayed that the Almighty grant them strength and courage to bear the irreparable loss, the INS said in a statement.

Visa-split families are collateral damage

New York: In early March, Poorva Dixit rushed to buy a ticket to India from the US, her home for more than a decade, after she learned her 72-year-old mother had fallen from her bed and was in a critical condition.

She decided to leave her two young children and husband in California because of the risks of the novel coronavirus spreading around the world. Dixit and her husband are both Indian nationals while their children are US citizens.

A software developer with a temporary permit to work in the US, Dixit knew that to return home she would have to go to the US consulate in Mumbai to get a new visa stamped in her passport, a requirement for some visa holders when they travel abroad.

On March 16, a day before her visa appointment, the consulate shut down due to coronavirus restrictions. Eight days later, her mother passed away.

Now a new immigration order issued by President Donald Trump on Monday that bars the entry of holders of certain temporary work visas, could leave Dixit trapped in India, far from her children, until at least the end of the year.

"I've already lost my mother and I am being kept away from my motherhood as well," Dixit, who is staying with relatives on the outskirts of Mumbai, told Reuters. "At this point my brain is just a fog."

Dixit is one of nearly 1,000 people in India trapped in similar situations who joined a private group on the messaging app Telegram.

Many like her have lived and worked in the US legally for years but were in India when Trump made his announcement on Monday. They are confused and worried about their options for return, the administrators of the group told Reuters.

Trump's proclamation temporarily suspends the entry of people arriving on a range of work visas, including the H-1B, for skilled workers, often those in the tech industry, such as the visas Dixit and her husband have. The ban, which comes into force on Wednesday, also applies to L visas used for international transfers of high-level employees, as well as different categories for seasonal workers and intern and trainee programmes, in addition to accompanying family members.

There are some exemptions to the ban, including those working in the food supply industry and some medical workers involved in combating the coronavirus. But while the proclamation exempts spouses and children of US citizens, it is silent on parents of children who are US citizens.

An undated picture of Poorva Dixit with her family in San Francisco. (Reuters)

Dixit's husband, Kaustubh, has been trying to juggle his full-time job with child care for their six- and three-year-old daughters.

Dixit calls her children, sometimes for hours a day, trying to keep them occupied by reading books and singing songs so her husband can work. But she fears the separation will cause long-term psychological damage, especially for her younger daughter, who has grown frustrated with the phone calls. Her older daughter wrote above a family portrait on the fridge, "living sadly ever after."

'Collateral damage'

The White House said the visa measure was necessary to make jobs available for Americans when millions were out of work due to the pandemic. But six Indians, including Dixit, in the Telegram group told Reuters they had held on to their US-based jobs during the pandemic.

Vinod Albuquerque, a 41-year-old business consultant, has continued working remotely for his company in Atlanta since he had to make an emergency trip to Mangalore when his father had a stroke in February.

He left his pregnant wife, due in September, and six-year-old son in the US. He, too, was not able to get a visa appointment before the consulate shuttered and is now stranded.

"It feels so unfair," Albuquerque said. "We understand maybe something like this for new H-1Bs that have never been to the US, but people like us are collateral damage."

"I still contribute to the economy, I am still being taxed in the US," he said. Reuters

Protests

New Delhi: The Congress on Wednesday announced protests against the Chinese incursions and the steep hike in petrol and diesel prices, reports our special correspondent.

Friday will be observed as "Shaheedon Ko Salaam Divas" to pay homage to the 20 soldiers who died in Ladakh. Party workers will sit in silence at the statues of Mahatma Gandhi or other freedom fighters across the country.

On Monday, Congress workers will hold a dharna at every district headquarters against the rise in oil prices.

Covid pill licence rap on Patanjali

PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA

Lucknow: The Uttarakhand government on Tuesday evening served a notice on Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved Limited over its claim to have developed a Covid-19 cure, hours after the Centre asked the company to stop advertising or touting remedies for the coronavirus disease.

The state government's notice asks the Haridwar-based company to explain its conduct, saying it had never been given a licence to manufacture a medicine for Covid-19.

"Patanjali has licences to make medicines to boost immunity or cure fever and cough. It never acquired a licence to make a medicine for the coronavirus. We have served a notice on the firm," the joint director of the state medicinal licensing authority, Y.S. Rawat, told reporters on Wednesday.

However, Balkrishna, Patanjali managing director, said: "Our medicine and our claim are completely valid. The ayush department had sought some information, which we have provided to them."

On Tuesday, the Union ministry for ayurveda, yoga, unani, siddha and homoeopathy (ayush) had said it had asked Patanjali for details of its Covid-19 medicine and any studies on it, underlining that all ayush research on the virus must comply with mandatory conditions.

Balkrishna also tweeted in Hindi: "This government is for the promotion and pride of ayurveda. There was some communication gap, which was clarified. The standard parameters of all randomised placebo controlled clinical trials were fulfilled 100 per cent and the ayush ministry was informed about it."

The Centre's rap had come hours after Patanjali held a media conference in Haridwar at 1pm on Tuesday to claim it had developed a herbal cocktail that cures Covid-19.

Ramdev in Haridwar on Tuesday. (PTI)

It later issued a statement saying: "Patanjali is the first to make the much awaited medicine for corona, a global epidemic. Pujya Swami Ramdev ji Maharaj has said on this occasion that hundreds of scientists of Patanjali Research Institute have worked effortlessly, first on clinical case studies and later on controlled clinical trials while following all the protocols of drug discovery to find a complete ayurvedic medicine for corona: Coronil and Swasari Vati."

The Coronil and Swasari pills — to be taken together — are available in a small carton containing three cases, named the Divya Corona Kit and priced at Rs 545. A label on the carton says: "Tested & verified medicine from Patanjali Research Institute."

The medicine has to be taken for a month, the company says.

A source in the Uttarakhand health department said late on Wednesday afternoon that the company was yet to reply to the notice.

China claim

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The statements issued by both capitals after the 15th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, as always, did not reveal much except for agreeing to remain engaged at various levels — diplomatic and military — on the situation in eastern Ladakh.

The Indian readout on the video conference between the joint secretary (East Asia) in the external affairs ministry, Naveen Srivastava, and the director-general of the department of boundary and oceanic affairs in the Chinese foreign office, Hong Liang, said the two delegations had agreed that expeditious implementation of the June 6 understanding, in accordance with the bilateral agreements and protocols, would help ensure peace and tranquillity in border areas and the development of a broader relationship between the two countries.

They also took into account the second commanders' conference held on Monday.

The Chinese statement was similarly worded, the immediate focus being on the implementation of the understanding arrived at the two commanders' meetings.

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Dear weekly lottery sold by Mr. Beni Madhab Gon, Sutraghat has won the First prize of Rs. 1 Crore in the draw held on **22.06.2020.** The Winning ticket number is **83H 54833.** The seller said, "I have been selling lottery tickets for several years. This day is the most memorable day for me as a customer has become Crorepati through me. I also get an incentive amount of Rs. 1 lakh as I have sold this winning ticket. I am getting reasonable income from this lottery selling business but more than that I do my own business without asking for employment from others. It gives me satisfaction. Selling of Dear Lotteries plays a major role in the welfare of many sellers like me. Dear Lottery draws are shown on live and hence the customers trust it very much and has been buying to try their fortune. The authenticity is what makes people buy Dear Lotteries."

IN BRIEF

HC seeks AAP stand on will woes

NEW DELHI: Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued a notice to the AAP government seeking its response on a plea claiming that sub-registrars in the national capital are refusing to register "wills" and other documents of senior citizens, persons with co-morbidities and pregnant women by citing risk of Covid-19 infection. The petition by advocate Gautam Gambhir has also sought that some special facility or assistance be provided to senior citizens and other vulnerable persons to get their wills registered. PTI

MLA's son booked

BALLIA: An Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA's son and nephew were among seven booked for rioting. Complainant Anil Kumar Rathore said he had gone to the Bairia tehsil office to lodge a complaint against the sale of illicit liquor when the incident happened. The accused have been booked under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act. PTI

PITTER PATTER

Women cross a road during pre-monsoon rain in New Delhi on Wednesday. (PTI)

Murder, suicide

LUDHIANA: A labourer in Ludhiana's Gurudev Nagar allegedly killed his wife and then committed suicide on Wednesday after she asked him not to drink liquor. Police said Manish and Pooja had a heated argument over drinking, following which he allegedly slit his wife's throat. He then ate a poisonous substance. Manish died on way to hospital. The couple had three children. PTI

Ladakh plastic ban

LEH: Ladakh has ordered a complete ban on the use of plastic water bottles and other plastic objects in government offices and other institutions, an official spokesperson said on Wednesday. The move aims to realise the long-term goal of "carbon-neutral Ladakh". PTI

HIGH TIDE

A Mumbaikar walks on the promenade as a high tide wave hits the sea wall at Marine Drive. (PTI)

Bribe heat on cops

BALRAMPUR: An SHO and two constables were suspended in this Uttar Pradesh district after they allegedly demanded money from one Ram Pravesh Pandey for "adding charges" against his opponents in a case "involving a fight". The action was taken after an audio clip of the incident went viral on social media. PTI

Love letter & threat

COIMBATORE: A 66-year-old man in Coimbatore was on Wednesday arrested for allegedly giving a love letter to a 16-year-old girl and threatening her. The man has been booked under Pocso Act. PTI

Guide to grasp the Ladakh challenge

SANKARSHAN THAKUR

New Delhi: Over the last seven weeks a tense, and often violent, military confrontation has unfurled across three fronts in eastern Ladakh — the Galwan Valley, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been on the aggressive, trying to push deeper into geographies hitherto claimed by India; Indian forces have been trying to hold them back to their own understanding of what should not be transgressed.

The standoff has spawned its very own lexicon, with several words or terms repeatedly bandied about during the description of the course of events. They may have served more to confound the understanding of what's transpiring on the remote and barren frontier than to clarify matters. A sample of just how:

LAC or the Line of Actual Control: No such thing exists. Not on the ground, not on the maps, not in any agreed diplomatic or military protocols of the two sides. The LAC is notional and elastic. It is defined merely by previously, or currently, held positions by the two armies and remains subject to de facto, might is right, redrawing and re-definition.

Intrusion: The lack of a defined line — as in the Line of Control (LOC) between India and Pakistan — which both sides have signed up on clouds the whole notion of intrusion. Where there lies no clear or agreed frontier, intrusion is tough to pin down, practically or even legally. Political intention and military ability dictate the state of play on the ground. As they are in eastern Ladakh today, with the PLA reportedly pushing and consolidating on multiple fronts.

The use of "intrusion" along an undefined line is also tricky and double-edged: it can be used as a tool for deniability, it can be used to deliver setbacks.

To use an example: What are we to understand from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that there has been no "intrusion"? Tough to tell. Intrusion into where? Intruding across what? It was a cleverly open-ended claim the Prime Minister made because there is no defined line.

It was, equally, a risk-ridden claim. Because the claim of "no intrusion" by the Prime Minister can be used, or is being used, by the PLA to press further into areas India earlier treated as its own. The Galwan Valley, for instance, over which China is now laying claims of sovereignty.

Or posts along and overlooking Pangong Tso, where the PLA has reportedly been moving in and squatting with military hardware. Military sources as well as local inputs from Ladakhis suggest the PLA has moved right along ridges from Finger 8 to Finger 4, which was until recently patrolled by Indian forces. One local resident has been quoted as saying: "Where our horses used to graze, there are Chinese now."

De-escalation and Disengagement: Troublesome terminology when the Indian government is claiming "no intrusion". If there has been no intrusion, why the requirement for disengagement and de-escalation? Both terms suggest contrary scenarios to claims of all-is-well and of "no intrusion" made by the government and its agencies; they are an admission something is going wrong along the frontiers in eastern Ladakh and needs correction.

Friction: Prior to the June 15 clash, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, more than 70 injured and at least 10 taken captive by the PLA, the government was speaking of reducing "friction" without ever clarifying what the friction was over.

June 15 in a sense outed its all-is-well and all-will-be-set-right claims. There is reason to believe that the government was indulging in considerable doublespeak in the lead-up to the deathly clash of June 15. There is reason to believe it may still be doing so, because the "no intrusion" claim made by the Prime Minister is not borne out by the tensions — and negotiations — that have persisted thereafter.

An Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter flies over a mountain range near Leh on Wednesday. (AFP)

Timeline

April 19: First intelligence inputs are sent out over the PLA mounting a build-up in the Galwan Valley.

May 5: Several soldiers from either side are injured in a violent clash involving fisticuffs and stones near the north-eastern fringes of Pangong Tso.

May 18: The Prime Minister reportedly chairs a high-level security meeting to review the unfolding events in eastern Ladakh. Sources in the army say that the PLA has pitched tents close to Indian positions on Pangong Tso and is "hindering" patrolling by the Indian troops.

May 26: Modi chairs a meeting with national security adviser Ajit Doval and the Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat, and discusses the border impasse.

May 30: In his first remarks on the building confrontation, defence minister Rajnath Singh says the Chinese troops have "arrived in quite large numbers" along the LAC, but assures all that efforts are on to defuse tensions.

June 6: The first meeting between top commanders of the Indian and Chinese armies is held at the Chushul-Moldo border junction. Both sides speak of efforts to de-escalate.

June 9: Reports emerge that Indian and Chinese soldiers have disengaged at three locations in eastern Ladakh. ANI, a news agency widely considered the government's media mouthpiece, claims China has moved back troops by 2-2.5km; there is no confirmation or denial of this from the army.

June 13: The army chief, General M.M. Naravane, claims "the situation along our borders with China is under control" and a lot of disengagement has taken place. He also expresses hope that "through the continued dialogue, all perceived differences will be set to rest".

June 15: 20 Indian soldiers, including the commanding officer of the 16 Bihar Regiment, are killed in a violent face-off with Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley; more than 70 Indian soldiers are injured and several taken captive. There is no confirmation yet from the Chinese on the casualties the PLA took in the clash at Patrol Point 14.

June 18: The PLA releases 10 Indian soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel and three majors, after long border negotiations between army commanders.

June 19: Modi tells an all-party meeting categorically that there has been no intrusion into Indian territory. A few hours after the meeting ends, the Chinese foreign ministry and the Chinese mission in New Delhi claim all of the Galwan Valley as Chinese territory.

June 20: The PMO and the ministry of external affairs (MEA) issue long-winded clarifications on Modi's remarks at the all-party meeting but neither addresses issues specifically. There is no clarity on whether there has been intrusion into Indian territory by the PLA. The MEA statement disputes the Chinese claim over the Galwan Valley but stops there.

June 21: Chinese media outlets begin quoting Modi's remarks from the all-party meeting to assert there have been no violations by the PLA. Reports continue to stream in from the ground of increased activity and ingress by the PLA around Pangong Tso.

June 22: Corps commanders meet again, in the backdrop of the violent clash on June 15; the 11-hour meeting ends inconclusively.

June 23: The Chinese put out a cryptic statement that both sides have decided to "cool down". Whether this cooling down will hold, and whether it is to happen along an LAC newly defined and dominated by the Chinese, we still have no clarity over.

June 24: General Naravane begins a two-day trip to forward locations in Ladakh. China remains aggressive of posture, iterates unequivocal claim over the Galwan Valley, and lays the blame for the recent tensions and violence squarely on the Indian forces.

Digital move

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Several cable operators have provided free connections for three months to students' homes and community classrooms.

The effort was being tracked closely. "As on June 17, the number of students who had no access to a television or a smart phone had come down to 45," K. Anvar Sadath, the CEO of Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education, told **The Telegraph** on Wednesday morning.

"This number would have changed by now," he added.

By afternoon, he was able to confirm: "Our figures show that all the 2.5 lakh students have been provided access to a TV, some of them through community learning centres."

He added: "Our initial plan was to move all the smart classroom equipment like laptops (from the schools) to the community classrooms. But what we witnessed was a massive movement that provided TV sets and mobile gadgets too."

On June 1, Kerala had begun a "virtual classroom project", beaming content in four languages — Malayalam, English, Kannada and Tamil — through a dedicated TV channel and via Facebook and YouTube.

The state said it was setting up community classrooms, which would become operational by mid-June. The next day, the schoolgirl committed suicide.

The Kannur unit of the SFI, the CPM's student arm, launched a drive to collect smart TV sets for poor students. The state unit of party youth wing DYFI too joined the campaign, drawing a massive response from film stars who donated a large number of smart TV sets.

"Now all the students in Kannur have access to TV, either directly or through community classrooms in the tribal areas where electricity connections are an issue," district SFI secretary Shibin Kanay told this newspaper.

The only problem the SFI unit faced was a shortage of TV sets to buy. "When the stores in Kannur ran out, we had to go to Kozhikode (a neighbouring district) to buy some," said Kanay.

The campaign cut across political affiliations. When Haris Muthoor, Malappuram district president of the Congress's Kerala Students Union, circulated a message seeking a TV for a student, it was district SFI secretary K.A. Sakeer who donated a set to arch-political-foe KSU to be handed over to the student.

MLA and state Youth Congress vice-president K.S. Sabarinathan said the Congress had donated at least 4,000 TV sets.

"We bought 50 TV sets and got a lot more from my friends. We are waiting for fresh stocks to arrive so we can buy more with the money some friends have sent us," he said.

"Our only regret is that the government left it to the people to provide TV sets. Anyway, all the political parties joined hands to bridge the digital divide in Kerala."

Arunachal incursion query

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: The Congress on Wednesday referred to a BJP parliamentarian's claim on Chinese incursions in Arunachal Pradesh and asked the Narendra Modi government why it was downplaying the trend of the neighbouring country grabbing India's land in different sectors.

In an interview to an Assamese news channel, Tapir Gao, who represents Arunachal East in the Lok Sabha, has detailed the extent of encroachment by the Chinese in the northeastern state, parts of whose territory the Chinese claim as theirs.

Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari recalled that Gao had earlier raised the issue in the Lok Sabha in November 2019, warning the government of a standoff in Arunachal Pradesh similar to the one in Doklam in 2017. Indian and Chinese troops had been eyeball-to-eyeball for over two months at the Doklam plateau at the India-China-Bhutan trijunction.

Tewari asked the government to clarify whether the BJP MP was right.

"Tapir Gao has claimed that the (Chinese) People's Liberation Army has occupied territory on both sides of the Subansiri river in the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh on the Indian side of the McMahon Line. The Chinese army has also taken an army base called Majha, forcing the Indian Army to set up another base deep inside Indian territory called New Majha. The Prime Minister said at the all-party meeting that no Indian post had been taken over," Tewari said.

At the meeting on Friday to brief the Opposition on the clash in Ladakh that left 20 Indian soldiers dead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said: "Neither has anyone intruded into our frontier there, neither is any intruder there, nor is any of our posts occupied by someone else."

Tewari recounted that Tao had lamented in the Lok Sabha that Parliament, the Indian media and the government do not take encroachments by the Chinese seriously. The MP had said future generations would not forgive him if he didn't bring these facts on record in Parliament.

Tewari said on Wednesday that it was unfortunate that the Modi government had tried to obfuscate facts on the ground and initially downplay reports of encroachments in Ladakh till videos of scuffles between Indian and Chinese soldiers surfaced.

Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, who was also present at the media conference, said: "The government should not take these as isolated incidents, rather it should see this as a trend and a grand design by the Chinese that needs to be rebuffed strongly."

Nadda rails at 'dynast'

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: BJP president J.P. Nadda on Wednesday sought to draw a distinction between the Congress and other Opposition forces, equating the party with a "dynasty" and calling it an "exception" that had been "rejected and ejected".

In a series of tweets, Nadda claimed that at Friday's all-party meeting where Prime Minister Narendra Modi had briefed the Opposition on the Ladakh clash in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed by the Chinese, "one family was an exception" as other Opposition leaders backed the government on its handling of the border episode.

"It is the Opposition's right to ask questions. The All Party Meeting saw healthy deliberations, with several Opposition leaders giving their valuable inputs. They also fully supported the Centre in determining the way ahead," Nadda tweeted.

"One family was an exception. Any guesses who?" he added.

Nadda's attack came a day after the Congress Working Committee questioned Prime Minister Modi's handling of the Ladakh crisis.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi had attended Friday's all-party meeting. She had sought an assurance from the Prime Minister that "status quo ante" would be restored on the China border while suggesting the government's failure to provide timely political and diplomatic interventions had cost the lives of soldiers.

The BJP often tries to separate the Congress from the wider Opposition and succeeds as most regional parties who have significant numbers in Parliament rarely take a firm stand on key national issues.

In keeping with that line, Nadda tweeted on Wednesday: "One 'royal' dynasty and their 'loyal' courtiers have grand delusions of the Opposition being about one dynasty...."

"A rejected and ejected dynast is NOT equal to the entire Opposition. One dynasty's interests are not India's interests," the BJP chief wrote.

Without naming Rahul Gandhi, Nadda tweeted: "Today the nation is united and supportive of the armed forces. This is the time for unity and solidarity. Relaunch of 'the scion' for the nth time can wait."

Ally niggle at Bihar Opposition unity meet

SANJAY K. JHA

New Delhi: The Bihar Opposition alliance on Wednesday held its first pre-election meeting amid suspicion over the intentions of a restive partner although the theme was solidarity among the allies and the focus was on ousting the NDA government.

Sources said there were misgivings about Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) leader and former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi as a view had been gaining ground that he could defect to the BJP-JDU camp in the next few days. Bihar is set to go to polls later this year.

Several leaders in private questioned the desirability of calling a meeting at this stage. A Congress leader from Bihar told **The Telegraph** over phone from Patna: "Manjhiji is in the departure lounge and we are planning strategy with him. Our political acumen has dipped so low."

The suspicion deepened when Manjhi launched an attack on the RJD at Wednesday's meeting, accusing the leading partner in Bihar of "arrogance and unilateralism".

Although Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, was not present at the meeting, sources said Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha chose not to counter Manjhi.

Congress leaders tried to pacify everybody, insisting that unity among allies was the prerequisite for mounting a credible challenge to the ruling alliance.

Although Congress president Sonia Gandhi did not attend the meeting, the party was present in full force, disproportionate to its political clout in Bihar.

Congress Bihar in-charge Shaktisinh Gohil told **The Telegraph**: "The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere. Our objective is to remove every hurdle in the way to ensure total unity among the allies. We are very sure of being able to project a formidable combination as the people of Bihar are desperately waiting for a change."

One thorny issue, however, is the possible projection of Tejashwi as the chief ministerial candidate. While Manjhi is strongly opposed to such a proposition, some other allies also nurture inhibitions about fighting the election under the young leader's command.

CONSIGNMENTS FROM CHINA AWAIT CUSTOMS CLEARANCE

Stuck at ports: Containers of US companies

New Delhi: Apple, Cisco and Dell products are among the goods from US companies being caught up in India's border tensions with China, as Indian ports hold up imports from China, two sources told Reuters on Wednesday.

Though no government notice has been issued, customs officers at major Indian port have held back containers coming from China, seeking additional clearances, government and industry sources have said.

The move comes amid heightened tensions between India and China after border clashes last week that saw 20 Indian soldiers killed.

The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), a lobby group representing American firms, told India's commerce ministry in a letter dated June 23 that lack of clarity and delays could disrupt business and manufacturing operations.

"Authorities have abruptly halted the clearance of industry consignments coming in from China (and perhaps other destinations) at most major ports and airports," USISPF said in the letter, seen by Reuters.

"This will send a chilling signal to foreign investors who look for predictability and transparency," it said.

The commerce ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Two industry sources said Apple, Cisco, Dell and Ford Motor Co products were among those held up. Electronics components of Taiwan's Foxconn, a contract manufacturer for Apple in India, were also affected, a third source said.

It was not immediately clear which ports were holding back the goods.

Apple, Cisco and Foxconn did not respond to requests for comment. A Dell spokesperson declined to comment, while Ford said a consignment of auto parts was held up at a port in Chennai and the company was providing information sought by the authorities.

The delays come as India is restarting factory operations after a nationwide lockdown to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian electronics and mobile industry group ICEA said its members had been told Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi airports would have a new examination procedure for all consignments coming from China.

Normally, goods for regular importers are cleared automatically, ICEA said in a letter to the finance ministry, urging it to intervene.

The finance ministry, which oversees the customs department, did not respond to a request for comment. Reuters

A mobile crane prepares to stack a container at the Chennai port. (Reuters file picture)

Covid-19 claims Trinamul MLA

MEGHDEEP BHATTACHARYYA

Calcutta: Trinamul Congress MLA Tamonash Ghosh breathed his last on Wednesday, becoming the first lawmaker in Bengal to succumb to Covid-19. He was 64.

The party's treasurer since its inception in 1998 and three-time MLA from Falta, South 24-Parganas, Ghosh had been hospitalised for weeks after testing positive last month.

Ghosh, according to party colleagues, had health complications like diabetes, deemed a serious comorbidity in a novel coronavirus infection.

"Very, very sad. Tamonash Ghosh, 3-time MLA from Falta & party treasurer since 1998 had to leave us today. Been with us for over 35 years, he was dedicated to the cause of the people & party. He contributed much through his social work," tweeted chief minister and Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee.

"He has left a void that will be difficult to fill. On behalf of all of us, heartfelt condolences to his wife Jharna, his two daughters, friends and well wishers," she added.

Several party leaders expressed shock at Ghosh's demise and rued the loss of a "true gentleman" with no enemies despite over three decades in public life.

Bengal's Covid-19 toll rose by 11 to 591 on Wednesday, Calcutta accounting for 345. The state government reported 437 or 73.94 per cent of deaths with comorbidity "present".

Tamonash Ghosh

While Bengal's mortality rate stands at 3.89 per cent, that of Calcutta is 6.94 per cent and national is 3.15 per cent.

Otherwise, Bengal continued on its path of steady improvement. The total active cases now stand at 4,880, reflecting a steady slide. Recoveries, on the other hand, are increasing, 484 of them in 24 hours pushing the total to 9,702. The recovery rate improved to 63.94 per cent, substantially better than the national rate of 57.31.

Since June 13, Bengal has had 5,160 recoveries, which account for over 53 per cent of all recoveries. A month ago, the state had 1,414 recoveries and a recovery rate of 37.05.

Of the 445 new Covid-19 cases reported on Wednesday, around 99 per cent were reported from districts with a high volume of returnees. Calcutta alone reported 155.

The state reported 9,489 tests in 24 hours, taking the total test count to 4,29,766, with 4,775 tests per million.

However, owing to the rise in new cases, positive confirmation rate or percentage of people found infected among those tested deteriorated from 2.58 a month ago to 3.53 per cent.

Tests for all before Rath returns

SUBHASHISH MOHANTY

Bhubaneswar: All 5,000 servitors, policemen, civic workers and Shree Jagannath Temple employees involved in the Puri Rath Yatra on Tuesday will undergo Covid-19 tests before they are cleared for the Bahuda Yatra (return journey) of the Lord on July 1.

The vice-chairman of the Shree Jagannath Temple Management Committee, Suresh Chandra Mohapatra, told reporters on Wednesday that they needed to ensure only those who test negative took part in the return journey. "Tests will be done before June 28," he said.

Mohapatra, an IAS officer who is the government's representative in the temple committee, said the precaution was being taken after a servitor tested positive on Monday.

Lockdown in Bengal extended till July 31; task force on Covid and cyclone relief measures

Mamata's first: All-party panel for advice

MEGHDEEP BHATTACHARYYA AND ARKAMOY DATTA MAJUMDAR

Calcutta: Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday set up a "task force" comprising representatives of all major political parties in Bengal to assist the state government in implementing relief and rehabilitation measures for people affected by Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan.

The chief minister also said the lockdown in Bengal would be extended till July 31.

A panel of leaders of different political hues was the first-ever initiative by Mamata after the Trinamul Congress had come to power in Bengal in 2011. The task force was announced at an all-party meeting chaired by the chief minister on Wednesday when she faced a barrage of allegations of graft and favouritism from Opposition leaders in the relief and rehabilitation measures.

Mamata had even asked CPM state secretary Surjya Kanta Mishra to head the committee, but he declined, saying it should be helmed by somebody in the ruling party. Hence, Trinamul Congress secretary-general Partha Chatterjee was made the chief of the task force.

"All political parties will take a resolution, especially on Amphan-related matters, for which a committee has been formed," Mamata said, adding that the committee would also include the likes of BJP state chief Dilip Ghosh, Left legislature party leader Sujan Chakraborty and Congress Rajya Sabha member Pradip Bhattacharya.

"This committee will decide on the all-party resolution, they will draft it," Mamata said after the three-hour meeting at Nabanna.

"Whatever they draw up, we will accept. It will also be sent to the Centre.... The committee will also draft suggestions for helping out migrant workers, unorganised sectors, hawkers, etc., which we will look into," the chief minister said. "The committee will also talk about more monetary aid (from the Centre) for the Amphan-affected.... In the greater interest of the state, I hope we will all say the same things so that nobody has any problem," she added.

The all-party meeting chaired by Mamata Banerjee at Nabanna on Wednesday

Although several leaders in the Opposition later dismissed the committee as "eyewash", some admitted that the gesture was "unprecedented" in the Trinamul regime. Sources in the ruling party attributed Mamata's accommodative move "partly" to the advice from Trinamul poll consultant Prashant Kishor.

"We will not hesitate in taking stern action against those engaged in malpractice.... This is not the time for politics. Let us all work together to stand by the people," said Mamata.

The meeting — not televised live — initially saw heated exchanges between the ruling party, represented by ministers Chatterjee, Subrata Mukherjee and state president Subrata Bakshi, and the delegations of the BJP and the Left Front.

"Our leaders, even MPs and MLAs, and our workers are being regularly harassed by police. If we are regularly manhandled by the administration, how can the government expect our cooperation?" asked BJP's Dilip Ghosh.

He claimed that most political leaders affected by the novel coronavirus were from Trinamul, citing the death of MLA Tamonash Ghosh earlier in the day. Ghosh also questioned the quality of treatment available in Bengal through which, according to him, even VIPs couldn't be cured.

"Ghosh's remarks sparked rage as the Trinamul delegation (Chatterjee, Mukherjee and Bakshi) opposed him vehemently and accused him of poor taste," said a source present at the meeting.

"Although the Left and the Congress, too, were criticising the government, they did not hit below the belt.... She (Mamata) was, however, constantly looking to calm things down and soothe nerves," the source added.

Mamata, according to a Trinamul insider, mounted a "charm offensive" and worked towards finding a middle ground.

Neither the BJP nor the CPM shared her optimism regarding the meeting or the task force.

"The idea of a committee with representatives of all parties, for something like this, is absurd. We will have to wait and see how many meetings the committee holds," said a leader of an Opposition party.

After the meeting, Mamata also announced the extension of the lockdown in the state — with relaxations wherever possible — till July 31.

"About the lockdown, I discussed with everybody. Not everybody agreed.... This is the government's decision, but all political parties have been informed. Sought their opinion," said Mamata.

"Because Covid-19 continues to grow nationally, if we, as a state, can help the nation even a little bit to reduce the extent of the outbreak... for that, let's try to extend the lockdown a bit more, with relaxations in place," she added.

Hill tour sites to reopen from July 1

VIVEK CHHETRI

Darjeeling: The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration has decided to open sightseeing points in the Darjeeling hills in a staggered manner from July 1 when hotels and homestays also will start accommodating guests.

The decision comes at a time hoteliers are receiving enquires about travel and staying protocols in the hills. Even though there are enquires, the travel industry is worried about local people's response to tourist arrivals amid Covid-19 pandemic.

Suraj Sharma, assistant director of tourism, GTA, said the hill body had held a meeting with tourism stakeholders and the Darjeeling district administration on Monday. "We will open sightseeing points in a staggered manner from July 1," said Sharma.

To start with, the GTA will throw open the gates of Tiger Hill, Rock Garden, Ganga Maya Park and Batasia Loop in Darjeeling, and Deolo Park in Kalimpong from July 1.

"We will first test the waters. Depending on the feedback, we will reopen rest of the properties under the GTA, like the lake in Mirik," said Sharma.

The hill body also plans to write to authorities of Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and ropeway. These are popular tourism sites in Darjeeling but are not under the GTA.

All tourist places will be properly sanitised on a regular basis. "We will adopt standard operating procedures (to fight Covid-19) and direct hotels also to do the same from July 1," said the GTA official.

According to government guidelines, hotels are open but the industry is still in lockdown mode in Darjeeling and has no bookings at the moment.

Tourists from Calcutta had to return from Darjeeling recently after locals had objected to their stay at a hotel.

Taxis will be allowed to carry passengers in 50 per cent of the seating capacity.

The GTA said it would request travel agents and tour operators to encourage visitors to ride in private vehicles.

More thermal screening centres will also be set up in the hills. "We are planning to set up single entry points for tourists, like those coming from Sikkim," said Sharma.

Tourism is a major source of revenue in the hills and the sector has been badly affected by the novel coronavirus .

It is estimated that more than 4.5 lakh tourists visit the hills annually.

A hotelier said properties at "standalone locations" and a bit further from settlements might be benefited by the decision to open the sightseeing points. "Fingers are, however, crossed," he said.

HC prod on jute mill wages

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta: A division bench of Calcutta High Court headed by Justice T.B.N Radhakrishnan on Wednesday gave the state labour department the liberty to take legal steps against jute mill owners across Bengal if they failed to pay their workers during the lockdown period.

The order came in the wake of a petition by Sharmistha Chowdhury, general secretary of the Trade Union Centre of India (TUCI)-affiliated jute mill employees' union.

The petition alleged that by not paying salaries, the management of the mills had violated the state labour commissioner's March 29 order.

The labour commissioner had in his order asked mill owners to pay workers their salaries during the lockdown.

Live wire kills jumbo

OUR BUREAU

Alipurduar/Siliguri: A wild elephant died on touching a power cable in Alipurduar district early on Wednesday.

Around 3.30am, a herd of some 25 wild elephants from the Jaldapara National Park entered a nearby betel nut plantation. In the ensuing chaos, a betel nut tree crashed on the electric wires and one of the cables snapped. A female elephant came in contact with the live wire and was electrocuted to death.

7 days to fix Amphan relief anomalies

PRANESH SARKAR

Calcutta: Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday gave seven days' time to administrative officials to include the names of all people affected by Cyclone Amphan in the list of beneficiaries of schemes announced by the Bengal government to provide compensation and put the same up on the notice boards of respective block development offices.

The chief minister has set the deadline after complaints surfaced at an all-party meeting at Nabanna that many genuine victims had been deprived of government compensations.

"I am giving seven days' time to include all genuine people in the list of beneficiaries. The lists have to be put up at BDO offices within the time-frame," Mamata said after the meeting.

While a section of officials think the step would bring transparency to the entire process of delivering the cyclone compensation, another group of bureaucrats said the chief minister's directive had shown that the government was in a spot over thousands of complaints over selection of the beneficiaries.

"I had received 2,100 complaints and I took steps on each of them. I am issuing an instruction to officials through the chief secretary to attend to each of the complaints and ensure that no genuine person is left out," said Mamata.

On May 29, the chief minister had announced a Rs 6,800 crore compensation package for people who had suffered losses in the cyclone.

Destruction caused by Cyclone Amphan at Serampore in Hooghly district. File picture

"There were several schemes for farmers, fishermen and others who suffered losses. But the majority of the complaints were coming up against the selection of beneficiaries of the scheme to repair damaged houses. Thousands of people lodged complaints that they had been deprived of the benefits," said an official.

At the all-party meeting, Opposition parties accused Trinamul Congress-led gram panchayats of ignoring genuine beneficiaries, sources said.

"As the scheme ensures Rs 20,000 to each person whose house had been damaged, local leaders of the ruling party were pushing names of their close aides. Genuine victims are denied the money in that way," a leader of an Opposition party said at the meeting.

Much to the discomfiture of the state government, Opposition parties have been stoking protests for weeks across the Amphan-hit districts of South 24-Parganas, North 24-Parganas, East Midnapore, Nadia and Hooghly over irregularities related to distribution of compensation.

The string of protests has compelled district administrations to put on hold disbursement of compensation at many places to correct anomalies in the list of beneficiaries.

Mamata's seven-day deadline is seen as a ploy to assuage discontent simmering in the rural belt.

A Trinamul insider said the chief minister did not hesitate to send a stern message to both ruling party leaders and officials that she would not tolerate any malpractice.

Sunderbans plan

The chief minister said the state government would approach the Niti Ayog to send a team to the Sunderbans to prepare a master-plan to save the delta from natural calamities.

The move was based on a decision taken at the all-party meeting.

BJP & ally to 'work together' in Manipur

UMANAND JAISWAL

Guwahati: Assam minister and North East Democratic Alliance convener Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday night said the BJP and its ally National People's Party "will continue to work together for the development of Manipur", as both the parties stepped up efforts to save the N. Biren Singh government.

Sarma said this in a tweet after a delegation led by Meghalaya chief minister and NPP national president Conrad Sangma and "deputy chief minister" Y. Joykumar Singh, had met Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP national president J.P. Nadda in Delhi during the day. Conrad, too, subsequently said the NPP and the BJP would continue to work together in Manipur.

Earlier, senior BJP leader Ram Madhav flew to Imphal to hold talks with the disgruntled leaders, including three who resigned as MLAs and also from the party. Madhav said the BJP-led government would complete its term.

The political crisis began on June 17 when nine MLAs, including four from the NPP, withdrew support, reducing the government to a minority.

The Opposition Congress accused the ruling BJP of misusing the CBI to delay the fall of its government.

CBI officials visited the official residence of former chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh in Imphal, and questioned him for two hours in connection with an alleged Rs 332 crore scam. Congress spokesperson Ningombam Bupenda Meitei said it was a "political vendetta" and the former chief minister had "not taken a penny". "Instead of sending the CBI, the Centre should have recommended to the governor to convene a special Assembly session for a floor test to prove the majority of the BJP-led government."

Ibobi Singh told reporters at Patsoi, around 6km from Imphal, that he would cooperate with the CBI and denied having any hand in the alleged misuse of funds. He said he was ready for any punishment if found guilty.

He did not speak on the political crisis.

State BJP president S. Tikendra Singh said its government was stable.

BULK OF SALARIES GO TOWARDS HELPING JOBLESS

Teacher couple walk the talk

ABHIJEET CHATTERJEE

Durgapur: A schoolteacher couple in West Burdwan's Andal have spent a big part of their salaries to help people rendered jobless in the lockdown buy food.

Government primary schoolteacher Priyanka Sarkar, 29, said she visited the homes of some of her students of Damodar Colony Primary School to find out how they were doing during the lockdown. What she saw left her shaken, she added.

"I found many of my students and their families going without proper food. Fathers of many of these students are daily wage earners. I realised they are struggling to arrange two square meals because of the lockdown-induced job loss," Priyanka said.

She added that she told her husband Sobhan about their plight and discussed how they could help.

Sobhan, who teaches at the Jiara Primary School at Burdwan Sadar in East Burdwan, said: "When my wife told me we should help those in dire straits. I agreed."

Teachers Priyanka and Sobhan Sarkar speak to a man in Andal about his basic needs. Picture by Swapna Barua

The couple decided to spend a major part of their salaries — Sobhan and Priyanka earn Rs 36,000 and Rs 32,000 a month, respectively — and personal savings to help out families without jobs.

"We are at home because schools are closed amid the pandemic and yet getting paid by the government. So we decided to reach out to those who lost their jobs during the lockdown," said Sobhan.

Since April, the couple had spent around Rs 75,000 in their efforts to help the people, he added.

In April and May, the couple distributed grocery items to around 150 poor families in Andal's Ramprashadpur.

In June, they stopped distributing relief at homes. Instead, they handed over 150 coupons valued between Rs 250 and Rs 1,000 to people of Ramprashadpur, Arabindanagar, Daspara, Schoolpara and Kuldanga in Andal. People with coupons could exchange them for groceries and other basics from a shop that the couple had selected.

"We paid Rs 60,000 to the shop owner in advance after doing a survey of what the families need. Then we distributed coupons among the families," said Sobhan.

Shop owner Mohammad Murshad Alam said he knew NGOs and political parties were helping people but "an individual initiative like this is unprecedented".

Primary School Council chairman of East and West Burdwan Achintya Chakraborty said this was a great initiative. "I will be happy if other teachers come forward to help the poor."

Putula Mandal, 35, of Ramprashadpur, whose daily wage earner husband lost his job during the lockdown, had the last word. "This teacher couple helped me with food during the lockdown. I have never seen god, but these two are really gods for us."

Furore over soil theft near river

SUBHASISH CHAUDHURI

Santipur: Angry residents in Balirchar village of Nadia's Santipur grabbed two mechanised boats and sank one in the Hooghly river on Wednesday morning when they found men with sharp-edged weapons illegally extracting soil from the river bank and piling it on the boats.

Illegal soil extraction erodes the embankment, putting farmland and homes at risk of flooding, farmers said.

A big stretch of farmland in the village got submerged in the Hooghly earlier this week triggering panic among 500-odd families in the area. Residents blamed random and illegal extraction of earth for the inundation.

Criminals allegedly supply soil to brick kilns that have mushroomed on the other side of the river under Kalna subdivision of East Burdwan.

On Wednesday, villagers chased the boats laden with illegally extracted soil. The men in boats jumped in the river and swam off to escape. Villagers sank one boat in anger. They pulled another ashore and called the police.

A boat caught by villagers at Balirchar. (Abhi Ghosh)

The police have assured the villagers of increasing vigilance along the river bank.

An officer of Santipur police station said: "The area is isolated and that helps the soil mafia. We will deploy civic volunteers to work in coordination with the villagers. We will also take up the matter with district officials, requesting them to urge the East Burdwan administration to take action against soil theft."

An officer of Nadia district land and land reforms department said they would continue with their raids to stop illegal excavation of soil, otherwise land erosion would increase.

Left-Cong protests

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta: The Left Front and the Congress will hold joint protests in all Bengal districts against the petroleum price hike on June 29, it was decided at a meeting on Wednesday.

The Left and Congress leaders said the protests would be first of the many joint programmes the two political forces would take up in the run-up to the Assembly polls next year.

I would like to be remembered as someone who did the best she could with the talent she had

J.K. Rowling, writer

The Telegraph
GLAMOUR
THURSDAY 25 JUNE 2020
XXCE

Lipstick: an obituary

Lipstick, born 3500 BC, ancient Ur, died 2020 AD, worldwide. Suffocated by tiers of protective gear, this two-inch colour bar that bestowed an instant shine to the lips and lives of legions of women (and men), died all too premature a death because of a fat-layered pathogen.

Too soon to write an obit? We hope yes. But lipstick is rapidly losing out to the eye palette. And the grieving, masked women of the 21st century, who often traipsed to the nearest MAC colour bar for a little colour therapy, now stare at those luscious bullets in magentas, burgundys, nudes and black-purples, their kohl-rimmed eyes brimming. Insta posts vouch for the mounting mental stress over useless large collections of lipstick. Each lipstick had cost anything between Rs 800 and Rs 4,000.

The Lipstick Index drummed up by Leonard Lauder of Estee Lauder during the 2000 recession had good news. Lauder had said that even as the purchase of costly items like expensive clothing falls during recession, people buy more of the less expensive lipstick. But now it's not just recession. It's a severe health scare, which makes us cover our lips, and the allure of lipstick.

Allure

And lured it has since early civilisation. A paper from the Harvard University dashboard on lipstick regulation says the history of lipstick began with Queen Schub-ad of ancient Ur, Circa 3,500 BC. This Sumerian Queen used lip colourant made with a base of white lead and crushed red rocks. An excavation of the royal cemetery tells us that Sumerian women preferred to be buried with their favourite lip colour.

From the Sumerian to the Egyptian, Grecian, Roman empires, lip colours have cut across centuries, classes and genders, from those above law to "fallen women". Popular colours have been red, with Cleopatra, the avant garde, apparently using carmine as a primary red dye on her thin straight lips. Orange, magenta and even blue-black have been favourites. Take a bow, Goths. Men in many cultures have painted their lips.

Ingredients for lip paint have been as diverse as mulberries and seaweed and the less safe vermillion to the outright poisonous fucus.

Power

The very act of applying lipstick is sensuous. And reapplying it after a meal in full public glare in a restaurant is a sexy and bold. Movies have fuelled this idea of lipstick as power, with an Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction* with her jet black bob, white shirt and red lips as Mia Wallace, or a Madhabi Mukherjee with her defiant act in *Mahanagar*.

'Read My Lips, a Cultural History of Lipstick' says how fashion dictated the colours since the 50s. *Vogue* introduced a colour of the season and persuaded cosmetic companies to supply supplementary shades.

Lipstick has fancy names depending on shape: fish tail, or a teardrop, a wedge or a doefoot. As do the shades: there is Indecent Exposure or But, Officer, the latter conjuring up an innocent pout in front of a traffic police pleading not guilty. When we jump a red light now, we have nothing but our bare lips shielded by a mask to fall back on.

But please note that when I die, I will want my Lakmé Misty Rose from the 90s, that is now a broken stub without a cover, to be buried along with me.

Anasuya Basu

Bringing the store back

Calcutta designer **Tanya Jaiswal** on opening her boutique after lockdown

Our store in Ballygunge, known for its Indo-modern pret-wear, has opened with a "Welcome Back" sale. But before we welcome shoppers, each day we greet a trained cleaning professional who performs in our store the first sanitisation of the day.

The new normal

This is what we need to get used to now. A new normal, where opening your shop feels like an endeavour of great strategy and planning to face a world still coping with a pandemic. As the founder of our store July, and the employer responsible for the well-being of my team members as well as their job security, I'm still extremely cautious about how we go about the day-to-day business. But at this moment, I just feel glad to have my team healthy, and the store equipped and ready under the latest government-approved SOP.

Business unusual

Of course, we are still far from business as usual. To begin with, we prefer it if customers call in advance to book their visit. This usually means they shop with a set agenda, be it a wedding or a specific occasion, rather than just browse around. Currently we cater to a maximum of three customers in the shop at a time, which is appreciated as they love having the store just to themselves. This ensures that at no point does our shopper stress about safety or social distancing.

Sales later

It's still in everyone's best interest to not let our guards down even as life "unlocks" around us. For instance, a customer is let in by our doorman so that she can enter the store without touching the door handle. She is then directed to the hand sanitiser, offered a disposable mask, and her body temperature is measured. Once she signs a health declaration form, she can proceed to search for a trousseau piece. A stylist helps her to choose but remembers to keep the appropriate distance. She picks her favourite, and pays at the counter while her parcel is sent to get re-sanitised and packed. Of course, shopping has changed, but with the right protocol, it's not any less enjoyable.

Timely moves

While every precaution is in place, bringing back hesitant customers is still a challenge and will continue to be for some time. However, the lockdown encouraged business-owners like me to innovate and start taking the store to the customers' homes. During lockdown, we streamed virtual shopping experiences to customers, shared digital lookbooks, and even sent short-listed selections to customers' homes through a safe delivery service. It also gave us time to work on our upcoming website, so that we are always prepared to move the shopping experience completely online if we need to.

My privilege

I've come to realise that the simple act of opening my boutique has been a great privilege. Today, I open the shop accepting that we never can predict what lies ahead, but with the knowledge that if my team and I are healthy, we can to the best of our abilities rise to any new challenge that life may throw at us.

- **Designs:** July, Ballygunge Circular Road, Calcutta
- **Photographs:** Gautam Vir Prashad Photography
- **Contact:** @julykolkata

Children need a way out and play

GO FIT

MAYUKH BANERJEE

For a child, March to June every year symbolises an end to exams, summer holidays, vacation plans, splashing in the pool, ice creams, friends and the excitement of starting a new academic year. But, alas, this year is different. The "new normal" spells fear, uncertainty, caution and social distancing with COVID-19 hanging over us all like the Sword of Damocles.

This forced confinement is turning out to be troubling for children, especially for those without siblings. Online schooling can impart education, but cannot create companionship. Access to parks, playgrounds and extracurricular classes that was so normal a few months ago remains woefully absent. Children are, by and large, bored at home and are turning to increasing screen time for recreation and mobiles, tablets and television are coming to the rescue.

Exercise comes naturally to children. Sitting around for endless hours in front of an animated screen is actually quiet depressing. We have received several reports of children suffering from insomnia, weight gain and lethargy and developing poor habits such as texting and accessing internet till late at night. There is no knowing how long this "new normal" will last. Hence, a strategy must be formulated to replace this growing trend of passive recreation with more active ones. Let us take a look at what we can do.

Walks

A walk or a hike with your child is a good option. With proper PPE, social distancing and common sense, the possibility of infection is minimal. To remain safer, choose a time when the place is sparsely populated. A walk not only burns calories, but is also a good conversation starter. A lot can be discussed during a stroll. A one-hour walk will cover 4 to 5 kilometres and burn around 300 calories. Walking at least three times a week is recommended and children will certainly enjoy their time outdoors.

Cycling

Not only is cycling a great exercise for children (and adults), but it also ensures social distancing. Each cycling session should last at least half hour and be repeated at least three times a week.

Games

If space is available at home, set up a badminton court. It need not be large. Even a moderate-sized terrace or backyard will do! If your dining table is large enough, it can be temporarily converted into a table tennis board fairly easily. For the more privileged, several clubs in Calcutta have opened their golfing facilities and tennis courts. In short, with a little bit of thought, there are a number of physical activities that children can participate in with relative safety, even today.

Online fitness

This is a game changer! A number of really good coaches are conducting online fitness programmes for children. Ranging from yoga and dance to martial arts, there is a wide variety of choices. The coach guides the participants through live interaction. Enrolling in an online fitness programme introduces a fixed routine and is especially beneficial for hyperactive children. Developing fixed routines and daily timetables also help increase focus and attention span. Each online session should not last longer than 40 minutes to one hour.

But whichever form of exercise is adopted, regularity must be established. Exercising at least one hour a day is as important to a child's development as academics, perhaps more so.

Always consult a professional before starting on a workout.

The writer is the founder of Mike's Martial Arts, a Calcutta-based martial arts and advanced functional fitness studio. Contact: mayukhpb@yahoo.co.in.

SELFIE CONTEST

During lockdown, event organiser from Calcutta Bhavna Hemani created a page on Facebook called 'Fun from Home' with more than 80 activities. One of them was a selfie contest, where one could also post "dualfies" and "groupfies". The contest was judged by Indraneel Mukherji, a selfie expert.

The results were wow! The winning selfie was by **Julie Mehta** (above).

Bhavna Hemani

I look better with zero diet

A leading Calcutta model on his changed eating habits during home stay

RAMP ART

NICK RAMPAL

1. Stopped: Junk food, bottled drinks, sweets.

2. Cut down: On portions. For breakfast I have two cups of black coffee, two bananas and some dry fruits. For lunch I have 50 gms white rice, eggs or chicken. Black coffee and a cheese cube for snack. In the evening a simple dinner.

3. Increased: *Sabzi, dal* and salad portions.

4. Can't get: The protein supplements, on which we would spend thousands. But believe me, I am looking and feeling better without them!

5. Started on: Regularity. Before I was irregular with my meals. No longer.

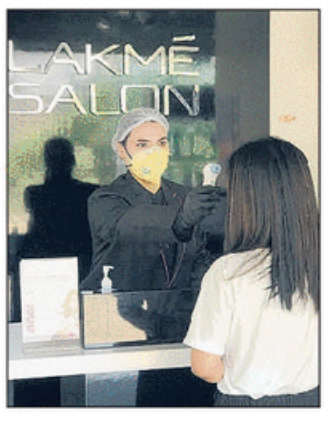
My new habits are transforming me, in my body, and mind.

Photograph: Tarun Paul

Ten-point salon agenda

The Lakmé Salon chain has adopted a 10-point agenda to keep its parlours safe and hygienic against the coronavirus.

1. Rigorous, continuous screening of salon teams and customers with an app and self-declaration forms.
2. Social distancing through 50% staff. Appointments are pre-booked.
3. Deep cleaning and disinfection of every touchpoint through the day with a biosurfactant cleaner.
4. Protective gear — masks, gloves, visors, disposable aprons — for the team.
5. Single-use kits for 90% services.
6. Revised processes for skin, hair and make-up services to reduce touch.
7. Biodegradable disposables in all services.
8. Sterilisation of tools and equipment after every use.
9. Contactless billing and payments.



10. Contactless home delivery for post-care products.

"In the new normal, the safety of our team and customers is the key focus area," said Pushkaraj Shenai, CEO, Lakmé Salon. As many as 55 new hygiene practices have been implemented across the outlets, the salon said.

Lakmé Salon is a part of Hindustan Unilever Limited, which has pledged Rs 100 crore to support the fight against COVID-19.

The minimalist icons

STYLE COACH

SANIKA KAKIRDE

Some individuals take to one simple style, making it their own. This minimalist approach is aimed at being comfortable and functional. Now more than ever, we can think minimalist: the focus is on basics as the pandemic rages.

A few greats and their minimalistic style statements. Despite their simplicity, their choice of dress reflects they were/are connoisseurs of style.

Indira Gandhi: Elegant and understated, she chose Indian handloom saris with simple blouses as her trademark. The colour palette was mostly earthy tones.

Nelson Mandela: Made the colourful batik shirts famous. They got named 'Madiba', after his nickname. Usually he chose earthy tones with occasional bursts of colour. He got this casual attire a formal status.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Tasteful and timeless. The pastel chiffon saris are a classic, offset with pearls, diamonds and other jewels. She set the standard for graceful fashion.

Albert Einstein: He wore the same kind of grey suits, socks with slippers and much later the famous brown leather "Cossack" jacket from Levi's.

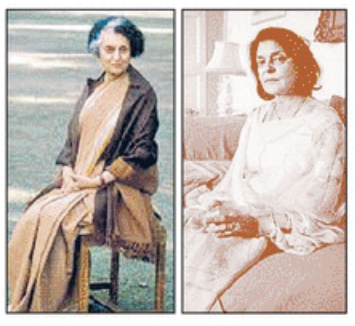
Lata Mangeshkar: Her choice is as fine as her voice. She mostly wears white saris, which could also come in shades of cream, ivory or ecru. She has worn colours, but the statement has always been white with diamond jewellery. Eternally iridescent.

Ratan Tata: As classic as it gets, basic with a touch of flamboyance. He is mostly seen in black or grey suits and is known to be sporting silk ties from the brand Hermes.

Rabindranath Tagore: The "*jobba*" was Tagore's personal design and style. Said to have experimented with various versions, he settled for the long loose silhouette, comfortable and stylish, and undeniably bespoke.

Roger Federer: The tennis superstar has stuck to classics. Even though some colours have shown up over the years, it's evident that his wardrobe is made up of basic colours and very simple silhouettes.

We will not mention Steve Jobs and his turtleneck because that's such a cliché.



Indira Gandhi and Maharani Gayatri Devi

The columnist speaks her mind on everything about fashion. Contact sanika.kakirde@gmail.com

goodlife

TT Connect Initiative

ACCESSORIZE YOUR CAR

Time to make the most of the lockdown blues and look to your four-wheeler.

Today, it is all about embracing the latest technology to stay abreast with the times. This is applicable for all the gadgets you use. And no, don't think about your household devices only, but also your vehicle.

Now when the lockdown is being lifted in phases, accessorize your car to enhance its functionality. Add a dash to the style quotient. Build on the comfort, care and convenience factor.

Look to automation

Take for example an automatic car lock. Your car doors open or close at the simple click of a button. And if you look at the technical aspect, this device protects your key from excessive usage and thus prevents its wear and tear. This is all the more important if you consider the fact that, say if your key is spoiled due to continuous friction; or if you use a duplicate key on losing the original one, you will have to change the whole lock system of your car to get a new key.

Look to functionality

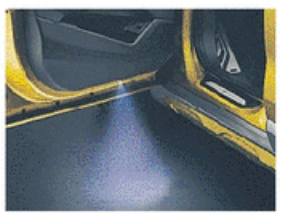
Mobile holders have become increasingly common in cars these days. They are an important accessory too, considering that it is dangerous to talk on the phone while driving. Simply attach your mobile phone to the holder, and you can accept that all-important call while driving. Moreover, these come in many different shapes and sizes, as also rotate to varying degrees, thus allowing multiple users to come closer to the phone. Also, importantly, using such holders facilitates easy access to map applications on your mobile, thus allowing you to navigate on the roads easily.

Look to technicality

Moving on, the portable USB car chargers are an important accessory when you have to frequently take the road. Never fear of getting your cell battery discharged when this device is there in your car. These are available to fit the port of different mobile phones and also charge multiple devices at the same time, including your tablet.

Look to care

Door lights are also an important accessory, especially when the car is used by the senior members of the family. These lighten up the edge of the doors to guide passengers when getting into or out of the car. This is a boon when it comes to travelling in the night, when the illuminated areas guide the traveler to not miss a step.



Here's to hassle-free mobility!

The Telegraph NO ONE KNOWS OUR CITY BETTER

METRO

3 MEN HELD, MINOR DETAINED ON EXTORTION CHARGE

CMC TO BUILD TWO MORE ELECTRIC PYRES AT DHAPA P9 ● NUJS SENDS WORKERS HOME P9

CALCUTTA THURSDAY 25 JUNE 2020 XXCE

To write or not to write, ICSE council clarifies

MITA MUKHERJEE AND TAPAS GHOSH

Calcutta: The June 24 deadline for students to decide whether they will write their remaining ICSE/ISC papers or be assessed on the basis of their school performance has "ceased to exist", the ICSE council told its schools on Wednesday.

The Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations said it would not take action against schools for failing to send data on students' choice within the deadline. But action will be taken against schools forcing students to make a choice, the council said.

In the circular issued to school heads, the council said a decision on the pending exams would depend on the outcome of the cases at Bombay High Court and the Supreme Court.

The council on Wednesday was to submit before Bombay High Court the methodology it intended to use to grade students who opt to be assessed on pre-board exams.

The matter came up for hearing in the high court on Wednesday.

The council's advocate told the court that the methodology was ready. A case regarding the remaining papers of the CBSE would come up for hearing in the apex court on Thursday. So, if the court allows, the council will submit its report after the apex court's hearing, the council's advocate told the high court.

The court gave the council its permission.

The council circular cautioned schools against forcing students to make a choice regarding the remaining exams. "(The) CISCE wishes to clarify that no such action is proposed by the CISCE against schools. Further, it wishes to reassure principals that no such coercive action as apprehended will be taken against schools and on the contrary, if candidates are being forced to make a choice then in that event CISCE may take action against such schools," the circular said.

The council has asked schools to forward a copy of the circular to all students.

CA murder

K.M. RAKESH

Bangalore: Chartered accountant Shilpi Agarwal, who was allegedly killed at her flat here by her husband hours before he shot her mother and himself in Calcutta, was smothered to death, sources said.

The cause of death was revealed in a post-mortem. There were no injuries on her body.

Her father and brother arrived from Calcutta and cremated the body here on Wednesday.

WEATHER

YESTERDAY

Maximum: 35.5°C (+3)

Minimum: 28.1°C (+1)

RAINFALL: 0.5mm;

HUMIDITY: Max: 94%, Min: 63%

THE FORECAST

Maximum: 36°C

Minimum: 28°C

EXPECTED: Thundershower

SUNSET: 6.25pm

SUNRISE: 4.54am

Fliers from abroad 'flout' quarantine rule

SANJAY MANDAL

Calcutta: Stranded Indians flown back from Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan refused to go to a paid quarantine facility and instead headed home from the airport on Tuesday and Friday, in alleged violation of a rule aimed at restricting the spread of Covid-19, officials said.

The alleged lapse has led to a blame game among government departments.

Most of the passengers from Malaysia are labourers, who have been without income for months because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Officials said altogether 283 fiers from Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan had left for home saying they did not have the money to stay at a paid quarantine centre. The state government, in an attempt to slow the spread of the coronavirus, has made it mandatory for all people returning from abroad to spend a week at a paid quarantine centre before going home.

Airport officials said 168 passengers had arrived from Kuala Lumpur on an evacuation flight of IndiGo on Tuesday. The flight landed in Calcutta around 7pm.

"Only 28 fliers agreed to go to a paid quarantine unit, while the remaining 140 refused. The 140 passengers said they were labourers and had no money left. They had been stuck in various parts of Malaysia for months," an airport official said.

They stayed put in the arrival section for more than seven hours, while state government and airport officials tried to convince them to move to paid quarantine centres, set up at hotels or other private facilities.

Some of the passengers who arrived from Kuala Lumpur at Calcutta airport on Tuesday

A person has to pay Rs 1,800 a day to stay at a paid quarantine unit. The tariff does not include food bills.

"Most of these labourers lay down on the floor following an altercation with government officials, telling the police to forcibly remove them," another official said.

Relatives of many of the passengers approached the airport authorities and state government officials, saying the fliers would stay at quarantine facilities in their home districts. Most of the labourers were from Nadia, Malda, Murshidabad and Burdwan.

Finally, sources said, the passengers were allowed to leave around 2.30am.

On Friday, an Air India flight from Kyrgyzstan had brought 143 stranded people to Calcutta. Many of the passengers are medical students. "None went to a paid quarantine centre. All of them said they had run out of money," an official said.

Metro spoke to officials of the health department and the micro small and medium enterprises (MSME) department, as well as an officer of the Bidhananagar commissionerate. The nodal officer for handling such passengers is from the MSME department.

None of the officials could say why the passengers were allowed to head for home.

"It's the responsibility of the police," said an official of the MSME department. "The MSME department will be able to say," said the officer of the Bidhannagar commissionerate.

A health department official said action would be taken according to rules and the matter would be discussed on Thursday.

Sources said all 283 passengers were allowed to go under a clause in the health department's guideline.

The guideline states: "Before boarding, all travellers shall give an undertaking that they would undergo mandatory quarantine for 14 days — 7 days' paid institutional quarantine at their own cost, followed by 7 days' isolation at home with self-monitoring of health."

It also states: "Only for exceptional and compelling reasons such as cases of human distress, pregnancy, death in family, serious illness and parent(s) accompanied by children below 10 years... home quarantine may be permitted for 14 days."

Asked why free quarantine facilities were not offered to the passengers, sources said they had refused such offers, too.

Virus casts shadow on club's financial health

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: A letter from the secretary of an over 150-year-old club, with copies marked to each member, is a pointer to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The letter from Dalhousie Institute's secretary is addressed to the general secretary of the employees' union of the club. The immediate context is "delay in payment of salary of May 2020" to its 90-odd employees, permanent and contractual.

The club has been shut since March 23.

The office-bearers said that in the absence of revenue from liquor and food and following a dip in monthly subscriptions because of the lockdown, it was virtually impossible to make payouts like before.

The Ballygunge club, spread over 60 cottahs, has a sprawling lawn, bar, dining room, two lounge areas, a swimming pool, three tennis courts, a multi-sport turf and a badminton court, and rooms for indoor games like table tennis and snooker.

Over 80 per cent of the club's revenue comes from bar sales, said an official, adding that it was "pointless to reopen the club without an operational bar".

Members of the council — the decision-making body of the club — said salaries and maintenance were the main expense components. The source of income, apart from food and beverage sales, was monthly subscriptions of the 2,000-odd members.

The club was already reeling under a financial crunch and the Covid-19 crisis brought things to a grinding halt, said an official.

"We were able to pay monthly salaries to the workers because we earned something every month. The shutdown has stopped income. As a result, we are having trouble in giving full salaries," said Miraj D. Shah, the treasurer.

Workers of Dalhousie Institute in front of the club's closed gate on Wednesday afternoon. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

The letter also speaks of members "themselves facing financial crisis", aggravating the club's financial crunch.

The problems will find an echo in other legacy clubs of the city as well. In normal circumstances, the tinkling of glasses on a sun-kissed evening on a lush green lawn makes a perfect picture. But a virus that has made socialising an almost dreaded word threatens to change all of it.

The DI letter points out that the admission of "3000 plus new members" would offset the mounting losses. But in the same breadth, it also adds that the existing club infrastructure "can never support" the admission of so many new members.

The letter says the club "incurred a loss of Rs 203.39 lakh for the year ended 31st March 2019".

"One of the primary reasons for the loss has been high salary costs of the club... The total income of the club from subscription and surplus from food and beverages for the year ended 31st March 2019 was Rs 254.69 lakh and the salary cost for the same period was Rs 352.84 lakh," says the letter from the honorary secretary, Michael N. Rao.

The other operational costs, like annual maintenance contracts with outsourced agencies and electricity consumption, made up the remaining components of the loss, said Shah.

"The pandemic is nothing but sort of a death knell to our club," the letter says.

The letter says the council (the decision-making body of the club, elected by its members) "has decided to pay 50 per cent of the salary/wages for the month of May 2020 and the salary/wages for the subsequent months will be solely dependant on the financial ability of the club and the monetary resources".

A section of the workers, affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress, has been staging a demonstration outside the Ballygunge club for the past couple of days.

"I have given more than two decades to this place. How will I sustain my family if the club does not stand by me in this moment of crisis?" said one of the demonstrators on Wednesday.

Jayajit Biswas, the president, said the salary slabs of the club were above the industry standard.

The letter buttresses his claim. It says that under existing guidelines, the club "is required to pay a minimum wage of Rs 20,581 per month" compared to the "minimum wage for waiters etc, as prescribed by the labour department of the Government of West Bengal for the period January 2020 is Rs 8,349 per month".

"The maximum monthly salary drawn by a bearer in our club is Rs 41,549," said Shah, the treasurer.

Biswas said the club had been a "generous provider" to its employees in the past and expected the workers to "extend some cooperation at this critical juncture".

IIT shifts students to two hostels

SUBHANKAR CHOWDHURY

Kharagpur: IIT Kharagpur has asked students who have yet to vacate their hostels because of inadequate transport to shift to two spacious hostels, where they will stay following physical distancing norms till they vacate the campus.

The boys will be shifted to Madan Mohan Malviya (MMM) Hall of Residence, which has four blocks and can accommodate over 1,600 students. The girls will be lodged at Sister Nivedita (SNV) Hall.

The IIT has 21 hostels, or halls of residence — 16 for boys and five for girls.

Of the 3,200-odd students of the institute, only about 300 are still on the campus. The rest vacated the hostels by June 20 in compliance with a notice issued on June 10.

Some of the 300-odd are from remote areas of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Jammu.

"They (the students still on the campus) are being brought under two centralised facilities so wardens can ascertain whether physical distancing norms are being enforced," said an official of the institute.

A mail sent by the dean of students' affairs, Somesh Kumar, says: "It is noticed that the number of boarders in most halls is very small. In view of the safety and security of the boarders, it is decided that the boarders of all the boys' halls, should be shifted to MMM hall. Similarly the boarders of all girls' halls should be shifted to SNV hall."

One of the students who is still on the campus said it was still not clear whether they would be allowed mess facilities.

"All the mess staff have left. So far we are managing on our own.... It seems we have to continue like this," he said.

3 documents for home isolation nod

SUBHAJOY ROY

Calcutta: Asymptomatic Covid-19 patients or ones with mild symptoms have to provide three documents, along with an application, to be considered eligible for home isolation, officials of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the state health department have said.

The documents are a declaration each from a doctor that she or he will monitor the patient daily, from a caregiver that he or she will provide food and other stuff at the door of the room where the patient will stay alone and from a neighbour or a relative that he or she will deliver ration at the family's doorstep.

Along with the three papers, the patient has to send an application to the civic body expressing his or her desire to be at home. The patient has to state in the application that he or she will stay alone in a room with an attached toilet.

The civic body will forward the documents to the state health department, which will decide on the application. If the request for home isolation is rejected, the patient has to be shifted to a satellite health facility of a private hospital or a "safe home" of the state government.

"If a Calcuttan tests positive for Covid-19, the health department gets in touch with the person immediately. Based on enquiries over the phone, a preliminary assessment is done. If it is found that the person has mild symptoms and prefers to stay at home, health department officials ask him or her to ready the documents," a CMC official said.

Civic health workers then visit the home to collect the papers and verify whether the claims are true or not. "If it is found that the person shares a room with others, she or he will be asked to shift to a quarantine centre, paid or free. If the person or the family resists, police and the local ward coordinator are asked to intervene," a CMC official said.

The doctor's certificate is meant to ensure that the patient is always under proper medical care. "This is an additional layer of protection. If a patient's condition worsens suddenly, the doctor will intervene," the official said.

The CMC has a team that calls up patients in home quarantine every day to enquire about his or her health.

The caregiver's letter is needed to know that the patient will get cooked meals at home and there is someone at home who can do basic monitoring of his or her health. The letter from a neighbour or relative who will deliver ration at the doorstep is necessary because the family members will not be allowed to step out for two weeks.

"Since the family members are the primary contacts of the patients, they must remain quarantined at home for 14 days," a health department official said.

The state government has allowed private hospitals to open satellite facilities in nearby properties where asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic patients can stay. The people in the satellite facilities will be monitored and under regular check-up of the hospital.

"The mild or asymptomatic patients need not be admitted in hospital. They can remain under care of doctors in a satellite facility," said a health department official.

CYCLES EMERGE AS NEW TARGET WITH RELAXATION OF LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

Cycles pedal back, so do bicycle thieves

KINSUK BASU

Calcutta: Cycles have returned to the target list of thieves after a brief hiatus as more people choose cycles over public transport in times of the coronavirus.

Several cycles were stolen from across the city in the past few weeks and police officers said they could not recall the last time such complaints had been registered.

Most of the stolen ones were new cycles bought by people who wanted to use them instead of travelling by public transport with many people to their places of work.

Many of those who have reported their cycles have been stolen said they used to pedal down from Behala, Bhowanipore and Narkeldanga to reach their offices in Dalhousie.

"We used to hear of bicycle thefts in the early phase of our policing career. The crime index board in police stations used to have the last row dedicated to theft of cycles. Motorcycles replaced the word cycles over the years," an officer of the detective department's anti-burglary wing that looks into cycle thefts said. "There were not even 10 bicycle thefts last year in the entire city."

"Lifters" were more keen on motorcycles, taxis, Matadors and lorries, the officer said. The returns on resale were always worth the effort.

Cycles have emerged as the new target with the relaxation of lockdown restrictions.

A week ago, a geared mountain bike was stolen from inside a housing complex in Sinthee in north Calcutta. Earlier this month, a bicycle was stolen from a house in the Regent Park area in south Calcutta.

Both thefts have been reported and FIRs drawn up based on the complaints. Many cycle thefts have gone unreported, though, the police said.

A cycle being readied at a shop in Baguiati for a customer

Many cycle owners said they wanted to avoid legal hassles. Some said the cycles were old but "good enough for a few kilometres".

Some cyclists from parts of Behala, Bhowanipore and Muchipara said the locks had been prised open, possibly with a saw.

The cycle that was stolen in Sinthee was a costly one, the police said. The owner, a woman, had parked the cycle in her housing complex at night. In the morning, it was gone.

"Someone who knew of her new possession must have passed on the information to lifters," an officer of Sinthee police station said. "We are on the job. Let's see."

Mountain bikes or MTBs come in various heights ranging between 4ft and 6ft plus. Their prices vary between Rs 17,000 and Rs 25,000, a cycle shop owner said. A normal cycle will cost anything between Rs 4,000 an Rs 6,000.

A cycle was stolen from a house in Nandalal Mitra Lane in Regent Park between June 11 and 12. The cycle was a few years old but the owner had started reusing it frequently. "We will crack the case in a day or two," an officer of Regent Park police station said.

Gautam Mukherjee, a resident of Roy Bahadur Road in Behala, said he had bought a new cycle for his son a little over a week ago. The cycle went missing from the parking lot of his apartment a few days ago. "It was stolen at night," Mukherjee said. "I didn't file a police complaint because it is usually very difficult, if not impossible, to trace a stolen cycle."

"The theft figures may not be alarmingly high at present but it shows thieves have set their eyes on a new target in this new normal," an officer said. "We will urge all housing associations to ensure CCTV cameras in their complexes are functioning. The same holds true for banks and markets."

Extortion arrest

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Entally: Three men have been arrested and a minor has been detained for extorting a trader and threatening to kill him and hurl bombs at his home, police said.

In his complaint with Entally police station on June 23, the trader has alleged that the four brandished arms and threatened to kill him before forcing him to part with Rs 15,000 near his house on June 21.

"The extortionists threatened to kill the man and blow up his house with bombs if he did not pay another Rs 2 lakh," an officer of the city police's detective department said.

Rescuer mom killed

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bagnan: A 55-year-old woman died on Wednesday of injuries sustained trying to free her daughter from the clutches of a man in Howrah's Bagnan on Tuesday, police said.

The man, Kush Bera, the husband of a Trinamul panchayat samiti member, has been arrested, along with another person, on charges of murder, outrage of modesty and trespassing.

"Trinamul has nothing to do with the crime. Law will take its own course. We have told the police to investigate the matter to its core and arrest the culprit. The man has already been arrested," Trinamul MLA from Uluberia South, Pulak Roy, said.

The woman's daughter, a second-year college student, has said in her complaint with Bagnan police station she was with her mother on their single-storey building's rooftop on Tuesday night.

"The young woman has said she was playing games on her phone around 12.30am in the presence of her mother. Her mother headed downstairs for some work and she decided to join her," an officer quoted her as saying in the complaint.

"Around the same time, a man whom she identified as Kush kaku grabbed her. As she started screaming, her mother came rushing up."

She has told cops that the man, later identified as Kush Bera, was hiding on the rooftop.

The woman tried to free her daughter when the man apparently pushed her before fleeing. She fell down the stairs, the police said.

The woman had received serious injuries to the head, Soumya Roy, superintendent of police (Howrah rural), said. She had been admitted to a government hospital on Tuesday night. On Wednesday morning, she died of her injuries.

"As there was no complaint in the morning, we had started an unnatural death case. Later in the day, the woman's daughter filed a specific complaint and we arrested two people based on the complaint," Roy said.

CMC to build two more electric pyres at Dhapa

SUBHAJOY ROY

Calcutta: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation has started work on building two additional electric pyres at the Dhapa crematorium where people dying from Covid-19 are being cremated.

The crematorium at Dhapa has two pyres but civic officials said they were augmenting the capacity to ensure there was no delay in cremation. After Cyclone Amphan, a queue of Covid-19 bodies had formed as power supply to the crematorium had snapped.

Atin Ghosh, a member of the CMC's board of administrators, said the pyres would be ready in three to four months.

The crematorium was earlier used to cremate unclaimed bodies. But the civic body designated it for Covid-19 bodies after it faced resistance in other crematoriums in the city. "We will now cremate unclaimed bodies at Nimtala crematorium. Dhapa will solely be used to cremate Covid-19 bodies," Ghosh said.

The burial of Covid-19 bodies is being done at the Bagmari burial ground.

The cremation guidelines say a Covid-19 body must be placed "in leak-proof plastic body bag. The exterior of the body bag can be decontaminated with 1% hypochlorite. The body bag can be wrapped with a mortuary sheet or sheet provided by the family members".

NUJS sends workers home

MITA MUKHERJEE

National University of Juridical Sciences

Salt Lake: One-hundred-and-eighty migrant workers stranded in Mumbai because of the lockdown were flown to Dehradun on a chartered aircraft arranged by students, alumni and faculty members of the National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS).

The students started a fundraiser and collected Rs 15 lakh within four days, Prashant Shukla, the president of the Students' Juridical Association (SJA), the students' body of the NUJS, said.

The 180 migrant workers, along with five infants, landed in Dehradun on June 19.

Transport was organised by the students, in coordination with the local administration and NGOs, to enable the workers to reach home from the airport. Similar arrangements were made to transport them to the Mumbai airport.

A section of NUJS students had started planning to help the workers after they learnt about their plight. When the lockdown was relaxed, the students got in touch with three NGOs in Mumbai for help to identify the workers, said Shukla.

"We came to know from the NGOs that 180 migrant workers from Uttarakhand were stuck in Mumbai," he said.

The cost of flying the migrant workers on a chartered flight of a particular airline would be around Rs 15 lakh.

The students got in touch with the alumni, many of them now employed with reputable law firms and companies in India and in London and Singapore. Teachers and some well-wishers were also approached. "They all donated generously. We could collect Rs 15 lakh within four days," said Shukla.

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AIR SURCHARGE
ASSAM/ ARUNACHAL/ MEGHALAYA/ NAGALAND/ MIZORAM TRIPURA/ MANIPUR: 1.00
MUMBAI AND BEYOND: 5.00: DELHI AND BEYOND/ CHENNAI AND BEYOND/ BANGALORE/ PORT BLAIR: 7.00.

CHANGE OF NAME

BY virtue of an affidavit sworn before 1st Class Judicial Magistrate Alipore Court dated 11.03.2020, I Nabanita Halder Peterson became Nabanita Halder, henceforth my name Nabanita Halder should be honoured consider in all occasion.
6786 — 3060008

I, K. Palani S/o. Sri Kotan Karpan by the affidavit of 1st Class Judicial Magistrate at Barrackpore Court dtd. 22/6/20 K. Palani and Kotan Palani is same & one identical person.
13654 — 3060224

NOTICE

My client Anthony Gomes & others of 315/1, L.N. Road, Kolkata-700065 are the only heirs of Gilbert Gomes since deceased. Gilbert Gomes died intestate as bachelor on 23.12.2008 leaving his brothers Valentine Gomes, Anthony Gomes, Paul Lawrence Gomes and his sister Joanna Gomes to inherit the property left by him.
If anyone has any claim or demand on his property other then said brothers and sister, please inform in the below mentioned person within 15 days from the publication of notices after that no claim will be entertained.

Amarendra Kala
Advocate
High Court, Calcutta
Mobile No. 9830035967
21708 — 3060179

PUBLIC NOTICE

Inclusion of names of Mrs. Bhavna Agarwal (wife) & Miss Shefalie A Ghosh (daughter) in place of Tamal Ghosh (deceased) Son of Late Saral Ghosh in the Mutation Certificate of Plot no. HB 129, Bidhannagar, Sector– III, Kolkata– 700106
Notice is hereby given to the general public that Sri. Tamal Ghosh 700106 died on 5th June 2019 at Glenegales Hospital, Singapore leaving behind his wife Smt. Bhavna Agarwal & minor daughter Miss Shefalie A Ghosh as the only legal heirs for the portion of the Plot no HB 129, Bidhannagar, Sector – III, Kolkata – 700106 which was in his name. Now Smt. Bhavna Agarwal intends to transfer all the rights of the above plot belonging to her husband in her own name and in the name of her daughter Miss Shefalie A Ghosh. The other right holders to the above plot, Smt. Hashi Ghosh & Smt. Mahua Ghosh (mother & sister of Late Tamal Ghosh) have no objections to the said transfer.
If any person from the general public has any objection to the above transfer or has any rights in respect of the above property of Late Tamal Ghosh, then they are hereby called upon to produce documentary evidence by registered AD to the undersigned at the address mentioned herein below within 15 days of publication of this notice, failing which the same will be deemed to have been waived and or abandoned. In the event of no response being received to this notice, it will be construed that whatever is stated above is true and there are no other claimants in respect of the portion of the plot belonging to Late Tamal Ghosh.

Sri. Rabi Sankar Roy
Irrigation & Waterways Department
3rd Floor, Jalsampad Bhavan, (Beside Bikash Bhavan) Salt Lake, Kolkata– 700091
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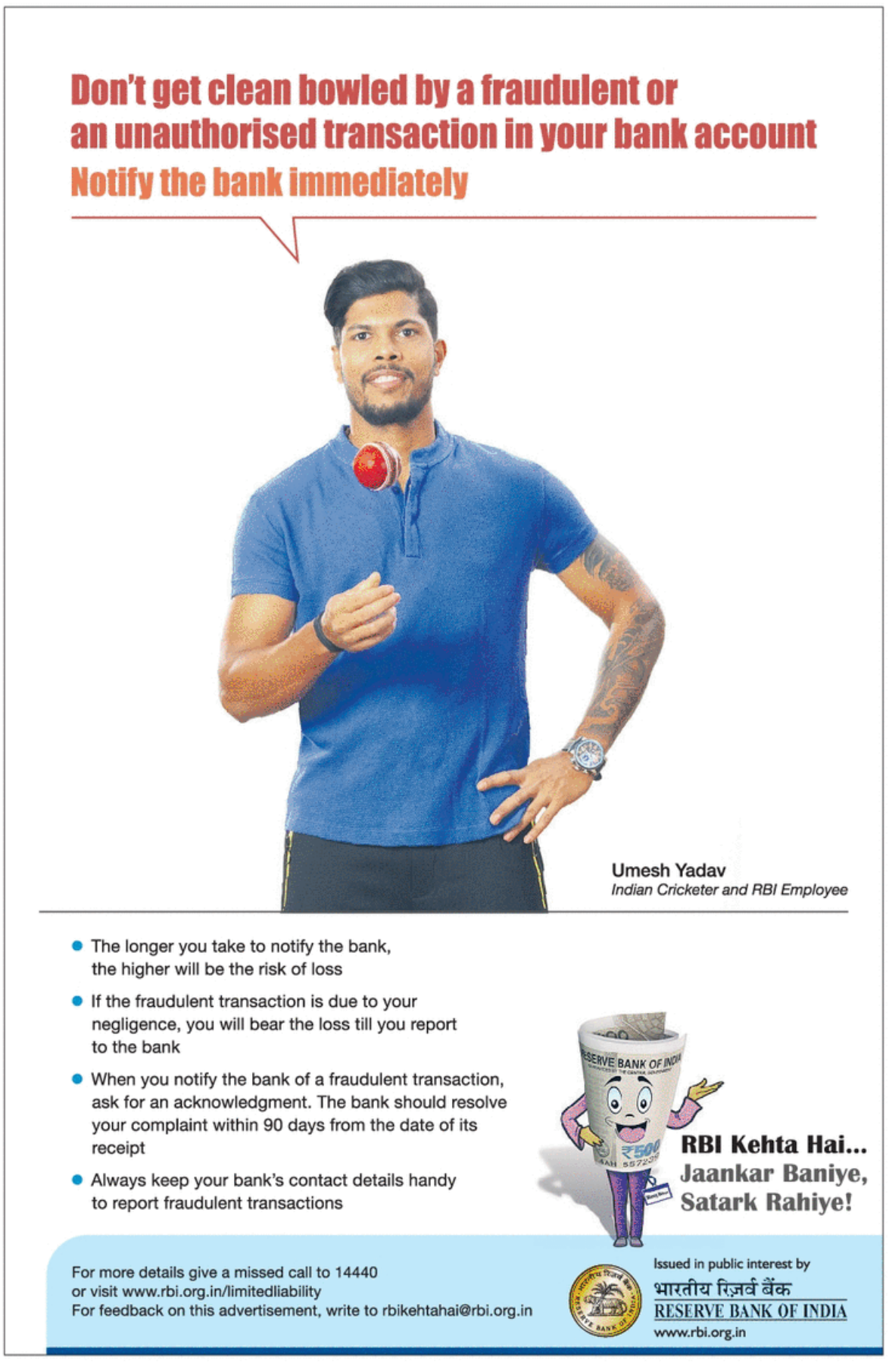

The Telegraph

THURSDAY 25 JUNE 2020 VOL. XXXVIII NO. 347

NARROW VISION

Parochial sentiments are inimical to the national project. But such is the perversity of Indian politics that pandering to narrow — regional — sentiments for the sake of winning an election is no longer considered a taboo. Take, for instance, the prime minister's utterance on the valour of the Bihar Regiment in the context of the tragic loss of the lives of 20 Indian soldiers in the recent confrontation with Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. Narendra Modi made it a point to stoke regional pride by saying that the country and 'every Bihari' are proud of the sacrifices made by the troopers of the Bihar Regiment. Perhaps the prime minister is unaware that the Indian army is a truly national institution. Unlike the politician, India's army takes great pride in honouring and upholding the principle of integration. Even though a particular regiment may have a regional label, citizens from all across the land are welcome to serve it. Of the 20 martyrs who laid down their lives for the motherland, 13 were from the 16 Bihar Regiment; five of those martyred in the attack were from Bihar, four from Punjab, two each from Bengal and Jharkhand. The rest of the brave *jawans* hailed from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. In life and also in death, India's *jawans* have thus held aloft the spirit of unity that has kept the republic together. The army and the phenomenal work it does of keeping the borders safe symbolize the capability of a diverse democracy to function harmoniously. Such a fine blend of faith, ethnicity and belief is rare in the world. Is the prime minister suggesting that the nation is less proud of the fallen men who hailed from states other than Bihar? Such insensitivity at a time of mourning does not behove the highest political office of India.

Yet, it must be admitted that Mr Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party have had no compunction in politicizing tragedies. In this context, Galwan has its precedent in Pulwama. The exploitation of provincial emotions can weaken the glue that holds India together. It is shocking that the BJP, supposedly a patriotic outfit, has readily indulged in such a transgression. It is time Mr Modi learns a lesson from the army's unblemished record of keeping India together, literally and metaphorically.

IN TURMOIL

Covid-19 and the resultant lockdown have thrown the Indian labour market into turmoil. Jobs have been lost, wages and salaries reduced or not paid at all, benefits withheld, and job security has all but disappeared. The future looks bleak with the pandemic showing no signs of remission. Moreover, the Central government appears hesitant and confused at best, insincere and callous at worst. Policy reactions have been slow — inadequate in many respects — and, arguably, misdirected in many ways. As happens with shocks to economic activity, the worst hit are the poor, the rural population, the minorities and other socially disadvantaged groups, including women. Above all, the uncertainty about the future looms large in the labour market. The results of a survey conducted in nine Hindi-speaking states reveal that Muslim workers' perception of future job prospects and the possibility of regaining lost employment is the worst. While job losses have been of similar magnitude in urban and rural India, the uncertainty of getting back to employment is much worse in urban areas. Women and migrant workers fear the worst about the future. Even before the pandemic hit, the trend in unemployment was deteriorating. Surprisingly, those with higher education within the age group of 15-29 suffered higher rates of unemployment. Since the growth of white-collar jobs declined, the emphasis had been on promoting start-ups. Now, start-ups have shrunk too. The educated youth have thus been sucked into the labour market turmoil.

Given the grim picture of employment prospects in the near future, the government ought to do two things immediately. The first is to have a projection of resetting the economy and looking at employment-generation, particularly for the youth. That roadmap has to be shared with the nation and business has to be guided along those lines. The second, and the more important, issue is to assure poor, low-skilled workers that the kind of treatment they received would not be repeated in the future. Economic and other kinds of shocks may occur again, but it is important to ensure that all Indians feel secure about food, health services and shelter. It is a challenge that any government must face with courage and conviction. These loopholes show why India remains distant from its goal of being a powerful economy.

SCRIPSI

'Everyone wants the man who is still searching to have already reached his conclusions. A thousand voices are already telling him what he has found, and yet he knows that he hasn't found anything. Should he search on and let them talk? Of course. But, from time to time, one must defend himself.'

ALBERT CAMUS

The strain in Sino-India ties is Narendra Modi's biggest challenge

A new Cold War

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

The face-off between Indian and Chinese forces in the Ladakh region of the Line of Actual Control, resulting in the death of 20 Indian *jawans* and an unspecified number of casualties in the People's Liberation Army, has provoked a mixed reaction within the country. While diplomatic and military manoeuvres on both sides were only to be expected, the domestic fallout has not followed a single course.

At one level, the country has witnessed a torrent of outrage over the deaths of soldiers defending Indian territory against an organized incursion. This was accompanied by demands that the Narendra Modi government take immediate steps to make India inhospitable for Chinese goods and businesses. In parts of the country, there were bonfires of products made in China. However, in the main, the reactions followed the course of domestic political polarization. The Congress and its allies hit out at the Modi government for its alleged failure to defend Indian territory against foreign aggression and causing the deaths of soldiers who were under instructions to not use firearms — the encounter was in the nature of hand-to-hand combat. The former prime minister, Manmohan Singh, pointed to Modi's statement that there had been no intrusion to accuse his successor of ceding Indian territory to China. In many circles associated with the Congress, China's recent aggressiveness is being viewed as Beijing's bid to cut Modi to size and deny him a place on the High Table of world leaders.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has hit back by pointing to the Congress's dismal record of having more or less gifted the whole of Aksai Chin to China, Jawaharlal Nehru's Himalayan blunders in 1962, and the systematic neglect of border infrastructure during the many decades it was in power. The Congress has also been accused of systematically demoralizing Indian forces by making the LAC skirmish a subject of political dispute.

Yet, viewed with some detachment, it would seem that the latest bout of Sino-Indian tensions hasn't engulfed India in another war hysteria. There are three reasons for this relatively subdued reaction.

First, both at the level of the Establishment and popular opinion, there is recognition that China cannot be dealt with using the same strong-arm tactics employed against Pakistan. Apart from the reality of China's undeniable military superiority, there appears to be a lingering psychological impact of the debacle in the 1962 war, a defeat that rankles in the popular imagination. The national determination that is so in evidence when it comes to dealing with Pakistan's transgressions is diluted in the case of China.

Second, the sheer remoteness of the LAC sometimes makes it difficult for the reality of the conflict to become a pressing issue for a significant number of Indians. Nehru's casual dismissal of Aksai Chin as an area where "not even a blade of grass" grows is, alas, not unique and may even be an underlying reason why many governments in the past were not serious in developing the physical infrastructure of regions around the LAC. Unlike Pakistan, which is regarded as the historic enemy of India — even when it comes to the inhospitable Siachen glacier — China retains its traditional exotic flavour in contemporary India. It is worth recalling that unlike Pakistan, which is identified and somehow equated with Muslim invasions from Central Asia and Afghanistan, China remains mysteriously distant. Historically, India's relations with China, until the 19th century colonial trade, have been extremely tenuous and invariably mediated through Tibet, which, before its recent demographic transformation, was always distinct from China. India, to put it bluntly, still views China as a remote entity, not a visible historic enemy. In British India, the importance of frontiers — particularly for the likes of Lord Curzon — was paramount and the best minds in the bureaucracy were deployed in the Indian Political Service. Independent India, unfortunately, hasn't always maintained this tradition.

Finally, there is the preoccupation of India — and indeed the whole world — with the Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating economic consequences. A border brawl — however deadly — in a remote and unfamiliar region is unlikely to be of paramount importance to

the global community and, indeed, it hasn't.

In today's context, these lapses are ominous. Demarcating the LAC with cartographic precision has always been a difficult project. Since 1949, or even before it, China has been loath to accept the sanctity of the frontiers established by British India. In particular, China has been ambiguous over the status of what it regards as the five fingers of Tibet — Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and Ladakh. It has used these claims strategically to maintain pressure on India and viewed the LAC as flexible on the margins. Interminable rounds of border talks may have settled the status of Sikkim but the status of Arunachal Pradesh has given China ample opportunities to keep the border issue alive. Three years ago, there was a limited face-off over Doklam in Bhutan and today it is Galwan and Pangong Tso in Ladakh.

It would seem that China is intent on using unending pressure in different parts of the LAC to keep India on tenterhooks. Since 2014, Modi has expended a great deal of political capital in trying to develop a personal bonding with Xi Jinping, perhaps hoping that would help the two countries evolve a new equilibrium. Simultaneously, however, India has speeded up infrastructure building all along the eastern borders, reversing the old policy of leaving these areas underdeveloped and even inaccessible. It has done what China has systematically done over the past four decades. Capacity building has also been complemented by the categorical refusal to acquiesce to China's global muscle flexing. India's refusal to join the Belt and Road Initiative and its last minute opting out of the RCEP were widely viewed — and not least in Beijing — as New Delhi's bid to check the development of a unipolar Asia. Additionally, to prevent China from securing a strategic stranglehold over its economy, India has put innumerable roadblocks on the path of Chinese companies, but without blocking them altogether. Finally, Delhi has taken many strides forward in developing its strategic relationships with the United States of America, Japan, Australia, Vietnam and the Gulf countries and has checkmated Pakistan, a country China habitually used as a pressure point against India.

On its part, China has supplemented its pressure on the LAC with resounding success in drawing Nepal out of India's orbit. The creation of an Indo-Nepal border dispute has very successfully pitted Nepali nationalism against India and drawn the Himalayan country into the embrace of China. The recent developments in Nepal constitute a monumental setback to India and could have wider repercussions. China, it should be remembered, still has the capacity to bolster insurgent movements in eastern India and bankroll disruptive movements in the rest of the country. Over the past two decades, Beijing has successfully built influential political and civil society networks within India that can be used in different ways.

In sum, as of today, while the India of 2020 is no way comparable to the India of 1962 that lacked the capacity to translate its pious rhetoric into anything more substantial, China itself is in a far more commanding position globally. Its ability to do harm to India exceeds India's retaliatory strength, at least at this juncture. This asymmetry presents the greatest challenge to the Modi government. India is on the cusp of a prolonged Cold War with China. The conflict has to be played with imagination and foresight. To counter China, India has to think big and play smart.

Engines of change

ARUNDHATHI

For the first time in the history of Independent India, the Indian railways was forced to halt its passenger operations for more than a month. In regular times, this would have been peak season for railway services as people would be travelling across the country during summer holidays, driven to their destinations by nameless engine drivers or loco-pilots, as they are officially called. If you ever look at train engines from afar, you would probably see two male figures huddled in a narrow cab looking ahead at the signal. But how often have you come across a woman in the engine cab? Women loco-pilots do exist. But their small numbers across different zones make them even more invisible than their male counterparts.

These numbers hide behind them the stories of pioneering women in a male-dominated field. What is it about loco-piloting that makes it a male-dominated profession? The discrepancy can perhaps be explained by men's ability to move without social and physical constraints. The association between masculinity and mobility is entrenched firmly, with its roots deep in history. Since ancient times, traders, saints, adventurers — mostly men — have moved freely, unencumbered by the chains of domesticity. In contrast, women have been confined to the private sphere. Even in the 21st century, women loco-pilots who are supposed to drive across the country have not been able to transcend the boundaries of home. In fact, so strong is the belief that home is their rightful place that they are often given shorter routes than men; in some cases, they do not drive at night at all. While this reflects the lack of gender-friendly infrastructure to some extent — toilet facilities are rare for women, to cite one example — it also shows that even though some women workers have managed to temporarily escape from the clutches of home, they are never quite free.

But home is also where they draw support for their dreams. Many women loco-pilots take up the job because they are encouraged by fathers and brothers to apply. As a result, for many of these women, their first journey — which would have been from the natal to the marital home — brings them from their home state to a new state of posting. This transition can be tough because in the course of their duty, the women are expected to learn a different language as well as the nuances of a new culture. They also face other challenges. Male loco-pilots can find running rooms where they halt and spend time with their male co-workers. But women are not a part of this camaraderie. Often relegated to one room, they avoid coming out, so as to not embarrass their male colleagues. When women loco-pilots return home from duty, they often do so at odd hours. The nature of their job often makes it difficult for them to find partners; the desire for freedom thus comes at the cost of companionship.

Women loco-pilots who are married are, however, more tethered to the marital home. Some are fortunate enough to find support, but many others do not. They are, consequently, forced to lie about the nature of their jobs or are harassed because they work with other men late at night. Home is thus transformed into a site of conflict, forcing these women to curb their mobility. In such cases, it is not uncommon for them to ask for stationary duties in the crew lobbies where they sit in fixed places, working on duty charts and leave records while the men move in and out of town. This arrangement seems familiar because this is how most women have known their world and its rituals: women tend the 'home' (lobby) while men go out into the 'world' (locomotive). As a result, the lines between home and world blur only marginally and existing gender hierarchies stay in place. The real conflict arises because women are expected to adhere to their feminine roles while doing a masculine job.

But what if a woman likes driving and finds joy in the mobility that is the monopoly of masculinity? For these rare women, the rail tracks offer the road to freedom. They eagerly await the arrival of faster engines and dream of driving farther. These women are not just engine drivers, but also drivers of change. The engine cab and the journey are where they seek belonging and, in so doing, open the doors for other women to move out of their homes. Not only will they drive the nation to new horizons, but they will also challenge existing structures, helping countless women to realize that the home is not their only world.

Joyous moment

Sir — Last week, Malala Yousafzai shared the news that she has earned her undergraduate degree from Oxford University. For those who remember the 2012 attack on Yousafzai — she had been shot in the head by the Taliban for campaigning for girls' education — this is a moment that had, for a brief while, seemed impossible. Thus, her completion of the degree is a matter of jubilation for the global community. Yousafzai, who has continued to work tirelessly for the rights of the marginalized, has only begun her journey. One hopes that some day she shatters the ultimate glass ceiling and fulfils her dream of becoming the prime minister of Pakistan.

Sreshta Dasgupta,
Calcutta

Shackled truth

Sir — As long as the government continues to regulate the media, the public will fail to trust the press ("Freedom in chains", June 20). In fact, if the government only allows news reports that are in its favour, the exercise will turn out to be counterproductive. A democratic system calls for the right to free and fair expression for all, including opposing views in the media; the latter, in turn, ensures that the rights of citizens are not encroached upon by those in power.

It is, thus, unfortunate that, in New India, this freedom has been denied to the citizens of Kashmir for close to a year since the abrogation of parts of Article 370. The new media policy announced by the Jammu and Kashmir government earlier this month, rather than promoting the freedom and independence of the media, strives to curb it in the Union territory. It is now up to government officials to decide what is "fake", "unethical" or "anti-national" news and take legal action against journalists or organizations if they are found to be in 'violation' of the new rules.

Soon enough, the media in other states, including West Bengal, would be forced to comply with the government's directives or suffer the consequences. Reporters and editors already face harassment by the police and the administration and one can safely assume that this will only get worse. Our country no longer provides suitable conditions for the press to survive and thrive in freedom.

Shovanlal Chakraborty,
Calcutta

Sir — The media face the brunt of the government's ire precisely because the latter is aware of the importance of the press. As a result, upstanding journalists who speak fearlessly against injustice are constantly harassed and punished. The media houses which do not comply are pushed to a corner.

It seems that the mindset of the politicians in contemporary India is no different from the colonial rulers who had issued an ordinance to place curbs on press freedom in British India. In fact, certain draconian laws have not only been retained in independent India but have been extensively used to choke voices of dissent. It is worrying that at a time when millions of people continue to suffer from the lack of basic amenities, the government chooses to focus on curtailing the freedom of the institution that gives a voice to the helpless.

Sanjit Ghatak,
South 24 Parganas

Sir — The excellent article by Ramachandra Guha sheds light on an issue of much concern in contemporary India. The retention of British-era laws and their stringent implementation to stifle dissent suggest that although we have achieved independence from our erstwhile colonizers, true freedom is yet to be attained. In several instances, people have been severely punished for voicing their dissatisfaction with the policies and actions of the government.

At a moment like this, a particular incident comes to mind. The former prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who did not shy away from criticism, had reportedly told the renowned political cartoonist, Keshav Shankar Pillai, not to "spare" him. In sharp contrast, most government officials these days not only abhor criticism but punish those who dare to point out their follies.

Guha has rightly quoted Ram Mohun Roy whose writings are as relevant today as they were in the 19th century. It bears testimony to the negligible progress the country has made *vis-à-vis* the freedom of the press.

Kajal Chatterjee,
Calcutta

Exercise caution

Be cautious

Sir — The recent claim made by the yoga guru, Ramdev, that his company, Patanjali, has launched the first ayurvedic medicine to treat Covid-19 must be regarded with scepticism. The tablet itself, Coronil, should be subjected to independent testing to ascertain its safety and efficacy.

Patanjali's 'treatment' comes at a time when scientists from around the world are racing against time to find a cure for the disease. Thus, the assertion that the medicine is not just an immunity booster but a cure has raised questions.

The development of a vaccine or a drug requires the collective effort of virologists, epidemiologists, immunologists and pharmacologists. At best, Coronil is a concoction of medicinal herbs that have so far not proven to be effective against the novel coronavirus. The ministry of ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, unani, siddha and homoeopathy has, reportedly, sought details about the medicine and has asked Patanjali to stop advertising its efficacy. The entire kit — a pack of three medicines — is priced at Rs 600. One wonders if this is simply an attempt to cash in on a public health crisis.

G. David Milton,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

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