

IN BRIEF

Humiliated by man, boy attempts suicide

New Delhi: A 16-year-old boy tried to kill himself by jumping from the terrace of a building in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area after he was humiliated by a man who has been arrested, police said on Friday. The victim, a resident of Chirag Delh, had accidentally damaged the iPhone of a man named Honey (30) following which he was asked by him to give a compensation of ₹62,000 and tortured after being confined to a room, police said. The boy, who received multiple injuries, was first taken to Madan Mohan Malviya hospital but later referred to the Safdarjung Hospital for treatment. His condition is slated to be stable, they said. The police received information about the incident on Thursday. "The victim said on Wednesday around 7 pm, he along with a friend were going to his father's shop on his cycle at Chirag Delhi. He suddenly lost balance and his cycle collided with Honey, following which Honey's I-phone fell and was damaged," deputy commissioner of police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

Man, friend held for killing sister's lover

New Delhi: A 22-year-old man was arrested along with his friend for allegedly killing a person who was in relationship with his sister in Shahbad Dairy area, police said on Friday. The accused have been identified as Armaan, a resident of Shahbad Dairy, and his friend Karan Singh (28), a resident of Sector-16, Rohini, they said. On Thursday at 4.56 pm, the Shahbad Dairy police station received information regarding a body lying near Prahladpur, a senior police officer said. The body of an unknown male person was found in the green belt area opposite water plant. "The throat of the deceased was found slit by a sharp edged weapon and no ID card was recovered. Later, the deceased was identified as Dharmender alias Raj (26), a resident of JJ Colony, Shahbad Dairy," deputy commissioner of police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said. A case of murder was registered at Shahbad Dairy police station and investigation was taken up, the DCP said.

3 arrested for duping people worth ₹90K

Noida: Three men have been arrested for duping people of money on the pretext of providing them life insurance policies in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, police said on Friday. The accused were held on Thursday near Sector 37 roundabout by a joint team of Sector 39 police station and the Cyber Cell, the police said. They have been identified as Durgesh alias Faizan, a resident of Delhi, Rahul and Padam Saini, both from Ghaziabad, a police spokesperson said. The accused had duped several people on the pretext of providing them life insurance policies. They would ask gullible people to transfer money into their account in lieu of the policy and then vanish," the spokesperson said. "Recently, they had duped a man of ₹90,000 similarly. The man who was cheated approached the police after which the trio was traced and arrested," the official said. An FIR has been lodged against the accused men under relevant sections, the police said.

Man held for selling bird, reptile in Noida

Noida: A 45-year-old man was arrested on Friday for allegedly selling prohibited wildlife species, including birds and a reptile, in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, police said. The action was taken after intervention of the Gautam Buddh Nagar forest department in the matter, they said. "Accused Prashant Kumar was held from his shop in Sector 93 market for keeping prohibited birds and a turtle with an intent to sell them," an official from the local Phase 2 police station said. Forest officials rescued a turtle, four parakeets and 10 munia birds from the shop, he said. An FIR has been lodged against the accused under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and he has also been booked under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the police said.

■ City reports 2,914 cases, 13 deaths in 24 hours ■ '33% beds occupied by patients from outside'

Delhi records highest spike in cases in 69 days

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

Delhi recorded 2,914 fresh Covid cases on Friday, the highest single-day spike here in 69 days, as the tally mounted to over 1.85 lakh, while a senior official claimed that there was no chance of another lockdown as it "wasn't an alarming surge".

This is the fourth successive day in September when over 2,000 new Covid cases have been reported in a day. Also, over 36,000 tests were conducted on Friday.

A senior Delhi government official when asked about the spiralling number of Covid cases, and whether there could be another lockdown, however, said, cases have increased as testing has been ramped up, "so, it is not that cases are rising alarmingly, and hence there is no chance of going back to lockdown".

Thirteen fatalities have been recorded in the national capital in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 4,513, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. Medical experts have already flagged multiple reasons that could have led to surge in cases in the past one week or so, including, reopening of economy and many people not wearing masks and adhering to social distancing norms in public.

On June 27, the city had recorded 2,948 Covid cases, the highest single-day spike before September 3.

On Thursday, 19 deaths were reported and the

daily cases count was 2,737. On September 1 and 2, the fresh cases count stood at 2,312 and 2,509, respectively.

The active cases tally on Friday rose to 18,842 from 17,692 the previous day.

Out of the over 14,000 beds for Covid patients at various hospitals in Delhi, around 4,500 are occupied by people, 33 per cent of whom are from outside the city, according to government sources.

As per the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Thursday, the total occupancy rate of beds at Covid hospitals stands at 31 per cent.

Out of 14,140 total beds, 4,477 are occupied and 9,663 are vacant, it said.

"Close to 70 per cent of beds in Delhi hospitals are still vacant. Out of 14,000 beds, around 4,500 are occupied of which 1,500 (33 per cent) are occupied by those patients who are from outside Delhi," a government source said.

Only three out of the 131 Covid hospitals (private and government-run) are fully occupied, he said.

"There's no shortage of beds right now. But increasing number of patients from outside Delhi coming to city hospitals for treatment is a cause of concern," the source said. ICU beds at a few top private hospitals like Max hospital Saket; Max hospital, Patparganj; Indraprastha Apollo Hospital; Fortis Hospital, Vasant Kunj are all occupied, he said, adding that over 70 per cent of these patients are from places outside Delhi.



An employee wearing face shield and hand gloves cleans the counter of a bar at Connaught Place ahead of its reopening during Unlock 4 in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Aug. last week saw 35% hike in cases over previous week: Govt

New Delhi, Sept. 4: The last week of August saw a 35 per cent increase in coronavirus cases as compared to the previous week, with 30 to 40 per cent of the new cases coming from the same family, according to an analysis done by the Delhi government's health department.

The health department analysed the cases in August, which saw a spike, and found that the infection was spreading over to rural and middle-class pockets and there are increasing incidences of cases in migrant habitations.

The government's

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The other reasons it listed for the spike were the festive season, late testing by Covid suspects, cross-infection, return of migrants and unlock

measures.

Fresh and active cases have shown an increase in the last several days, with chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announcing last month that Covid tests in Delhi will be doubled to 40,000 per day within a week as there has been a marginal increase in the number of cases.

In the last week of August amid a spike in cases, Mr Kejriwal had warned people against complacency and said that more and more people should get themselves tested if they observe coronavirus symptoms.

— PTI

City schools to remain closed till Sept. 30: DoE

'Senior students may visit institutes for guidance from September 21'

New Delhi, Sept. 4: All schools in Delhi will continue to remain closed till September 30 in view of the Covid pandemic, but students of senior classes will be allowed to visit their institutions for taking guidance from teachers from September 21, the Directorate of Education (DoE) said on Friday.

The directorate has said that up to 50 per cent of teaching and non-teaching staff can be called to schools outside Covid containment zones for online teaching, tele-counselling and related work.

"All schools shall continue to remain closed for students till September 30 in view of Covid pandemic. However, students of classes 9 to 12 may be permitted to visit their schools, in areas outside the containment Zones only, on voluntary basis, for taking guidance from their teachers," the DoE said in an official order.

"This will be subject to written consent of their parents and guardians and will be permitted with effect from September 21 for which,

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SOPs will be issued by the Health Ministry," it said.

The DoE has directed that online classes and teaching learning activities for students will continue as usual. Universities and schools across the country have been closed since March 16, when the Centre announced a countrywide classroom shutdown as part of the measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. A nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 25.

— PTI

1984 anti-sikh riots: SC rejects bail plea of Sajjan Kumar

New Delhi, Sept. 4: The Supreme Court Friday dismissed the plea of former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, who is serving life imprisonment in an 1984 anti-Sikh riots case, seeking interim bail on health grounds.

"Sorry. We are not inclined. Dismissed," a bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde said.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for Kumar, argued that interim bail be granted to Kumar on health grounds as he has been in jail for 20 months and has lost nearly 16 kg weight and needs to recover from past ailments. Senior advocate H.S. Phoolka, who has been appearing for some of the riots victims, opposed the plea and said whatever treatment is needed Kumar is already being given the same at hospital.

Kumar is serving life imprisonment after the Delhi High Court had convicted him and others in the case on December 17, 2018.

The high court had reversed the acquittal of Kumar by the trial court in 2013 in the case related to the killings of five Sikhs in the Raj Nagar Part-I area in Palam Colony in southwest Delhi on November 1-2, 1984, and burning down of a gurdwara in Raj Nagar Part-II.

— PTI

Adesh faces criticism over appointment of district, block heads

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

Delhi BJP president Adesh Kumar Gupta seems to be having a tough time as he continues to face criticism over the functioning of the state unit. Recently, one of the party Lok Sabha members from the city openly questioned the appointment of district and block presidents at the residence of former Union minister.

In his maiden visit to any district unit after three months to taking over the reins of the party in the national capital, Mr Gupta did not bother to inform the local MP on time. On September 1, former Union minister Vijay Goel had organised a programme to pay tribute to his father and first Speaker of Delhi Assembly late Charti Lal Goel at his official residence. The programme was attended by several MPs and senior party leaders. According to party sources, at Mr Goel's residence South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri confronted Mr Gupta and questioned why transparency was not maintained during the appointment of district and block presidents in his Lok Sabha constituency.

"We witnessed a heated argument taking place between Mr Bidhuri and Mr Gupta. Mr Bidhuri pointed out that genuine opinions were not being considered and the opinion of some leaders were not taken into consideration while suggestions were being sought for names for district and block presidents," said a party leader who witnessed the argument. When questioned about the argument with Mr Bidhuri, Mr Gupta told this newspaper that it was a general discussion on appointments. "For the appointments, wider consultation was held and the organisation's decision was held supreme," Mr Gupta added.

On Thursday, to reach out to workers, Mr Gupta started district 'pravas' (visit) from Navin Shahdara district. Interestingly, local MP and former Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari was informed by Mr Gupta via an SMS three hours before the start of the event.

Mr Gupta's meeting with district president was held without Mr Tiwari.

Delhi BJP media head Ashok Goel said that Mr Tiwari was preoccupied so he couldn't join the meet. Attempts to contact him had turned futile.



Adesh Gupta

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Doc held for giving forged Covid reports

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

A 34-year-old doctor and his associate were arrested for allegedly providing forged Covid test reports to people in the national capital, police said on Friday.

The accused have been identified as Kush Bihari Parashar, a resident of Malviya Nagar, and his associate Amit Singh, they said.

Police said they received a complaint from a reputed testing lab regarding forgery of Covid test reports, following which a case under relevant sections was registered at Hauz Khas police station.

On August 30, one person, who runs a business of providing nursing staff

PARASHAR ADMITTED that he had given forged Covid test reports to more than 75 patients using names of diagnostic centres such as CRL Diagnostics Lab, Modern Diagnostics and Research Centre

to patients, asked doctor Parashar for Covid test reports of his two nursing staff before they were engaged in the job, a senior police officer said.

Parashar forged the reports and sent them to the businessman who, in turn, sent it to his client on her mobile. Spotting a mistake in the name in the report, the client contacted the diagnostic centre and asked for a new report

with correction, the officer said.

On verifying the details of the patients, it came to notice of the diagnostic centre that no such patient exists in their record. Later, a case was registered at Hauz Khas police station.

The accused were arrested on Thursday.

"Parashar used to recommend patients for Covid tests and collect the sample. With the help of co-accused Singh, he used to make forged test report of the renowned diagnostic centre or of the labs as desired by the patients," deputy commissioner of police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

As the reports were prepared in PDF format on a computer and same were

sent to patients on WhatsApp, it was difficult to differentiate between the forged and the genuine report, the DCP said.

Parashar admitted that he had given forged Covid test reports to more than 75 patients using names of diagnostic centres such as CRL Diagnostics Lab, Modern Diagnostics and Research Centre, Dr P. Bhasin Pathlabs (P) Ltd and Prognosis Laboratories.

Parashar said that he had been doing this forgery for the past two-and-a-half months and used to charge ₹2,400 per test.

There was no specific criterion for deciding negative or positive. Just as per the symptoms of the patient, the reports were prepared.



A man with his child waits to give a sample for the Covid test at a centre in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Woman, hubby harassed by 2 men, held after video goes viral

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

Two men were arrested for allegedly misbehaving with and threatening a couple on Outer Ring Road in west Delhi after a purported video clip of the incident became viral on social media, police said on Friday.

The accused have been identified as Karan Chopra (36) and Satpreet Singh (35), both residents of Paschim Vihar, they said.

Police said on social media, a video clip showing two men drinking in a car, misbehaving and threatening a couple on Outer Ring Road, went viral.

"The area falls in the jurisdiction of Paschim Vihar East police station. The complainant, Akshit Nanda, was traced and contacted."

"Based on his statement, a case under sections 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint), 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and 34 (common intention) of the IPC was registered and investigation was taken up," a senior police officer said.

Following investigation, the accused duo were arrested and their car was seized, the officer said.

Noida Metro resumes service Monday, only 1 gate for entry/exit

Noida, Sept. 4: Only one gate would be functional for entry or exit at 15 of the 21 stations of the Noida-Greater Noida Metro, which resumes service on Monday after remaining shut for over five months due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to official guidelines.

In the remaining six stations, both entry gates will remain open.

Also, commuters will have to maintain adequate social distance and have been advised against touching any surface inside Metro coaches.

The Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) had on Wednesday announced that the services of the Noida-Greater Noida Metro, also known as the Aqua Line, would resume

from September 7.

The rail service between the twin cities of Noida and Greater Noida were suspended in March due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

"Only one gate will be kept open for entry or exit at Sector 101, Sector 81, NSEZ, Sector 83, Sector 137, Sector 142, Sector 143, Sector 144, Sector 145, Sector 146, Sector 147, Sector 148, Alpha -I, Delta -I and GNIDA Office metro stations," the NMRC stated.

"Both entrance gates will be kept open for commuters at Sector 51, Sector 50, Sector 76, Knowledge Park-II, Pari Chowk and Depot metro stations," it added.

The NMRC said passengers shall maintain adequate social distance,



A Noida Metro official warns the worker spraying disinfectant on a metro about the high tension wires running over the metro line. — PTI

both at the stations and within Metro coaches.

"For this purpose, suitable markings have been made inside the coaches. Crowds inside the train as well as at stations and platforms will be monitored through CCTV from the control rooms. If

more crowds are observed, entry at the station will be restricted," it stated.

"Passengers will be advised to refrain from touching any surface inside the metro stations or trains," it added. Provision for suitable

THE NMRC had earlier said only passengers with face mask and body temperature not more than 37.7 degrees Celsius shall be allowed entry, as it stressed the need to follow social distancing norms

signages and announcements for information and awareness of the commuters have been made available inside the stations and trains, the NMRC said.

The NMRC had earlier said only passengers with face mask and body temperature not more than 37.7 degrees Celsius shall be allowed entry, as it stressed the need to follow social distancing norms, among other rules

and regulations set by the government amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

The trains would run from 7 am to 11 am and 5 pm to 9 pm with a frequency of 15 minutes from Monday to Saturday. On Sundays the services will start from 8 am, it had added.

The Aqua Line, which connects the twin cities of Noida and Greater Noida in Gautam Buddh Nagar, over a distance of 29 km, has an average daily ridership of around 25,000 passengers, according to officials. Meanwhile, Delhi Metro, which has been shut since March 22 to halt the coronavirus spread, will reopen in a graded manner from September 7-12 under the central government's Unlock 4 guidelines.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

BJP MLA's brother commits suicide

Kannauj: A brother of BJP's Tirwa MLA Kailash Rajput committed suicide here on Friday by jumping from the second floor of a medical college, where he was admitted after contracting coronavirus. Sanjay Rajput (45) was admitted to the medical college after his condition deteriorated. Superintendent of Police Amrendra Prasad Singh said the reason behind the incident will be known only after a probe. The body has been sent for a post-mortem. On getting the news, the MLA and senior officials rushed to the spot. The exact cause of suicide could not be known but locals said he took the extreme step due to a fear of Covid-19. Sanjay and his wife were found coronavirus positive on August 28. — PTI

TN reports 5,976 new Covid cases

Chennai: Tamil Nadu on Friday recorded 5,976 new Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to 4,51,827, while 79 fatalities pushed the death toll to 7,687, the health department said. Active cases stood at 51,633 with 6,334 discharges from various healthcare facilities and in total 3,92,507 have recovered, a health department bulletin said. According to the bulletin, 83,699 samples were tested today, taking the tally to 51,30,741 till date. Chennai clocked 998 new cases while neighbouring Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur and Chengalpattu districts collectively contributed 784 of the new infections. — PTI

Constable shoots SSI over leaves

Badaun: A constable upset about the duration of his sanctioned leave allegedly shot at and injured a senior sub inspector (SSI) with his service rifle before turning it on himself in Ujhani police station here, officials said. "Constable Lalit and SSI Ram Autar had a dispute over his leave after which Lalit shot at the SSI and himself. Ram Autar's condition is serious and both of them have been rushed to Bareilly for treatment," district magistrate Prashant Kumar said. Lalit had applied for leave and it was sanctioned for three days but he wanted leave for more days due to which he had an argument with the SSI, police said. Lalit shot at Ram Autar twice with his service rifle before shooting himself, they said, adding a probe is on in the matter. — PTI

Terror hoax at Gorakhnath temple

Gorakhpur: Police went into a tizzy after they received a phone call, which later proved hoax, that a terrorist had entered the famous Gorakhnath temple here. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath is the head priest of the temple. After getting the call on Thursday night, the police swung into action and SP City Kaustubh along with CO Gorakhnath Ratnesh Singh led a strong force to search the entire temple. But they did not find any suspicious thing or man inside or outside the temple, the police said here on Friday. They said someone from the Bansgaon area informed the police control room over the phone around 10 pm on Thursday about the presence of a terrorist in the temple. However, his family members told the police that he was suffering from mental disease. "The police is investigating the claim of his family," a senior officer added.

Trust & non-aggression key for regional peace: Rajnath at SCO

Moscow, Sept. 4: Peace and security in the SCO region demands a climate of trust, non-aggression, respect for international rules and peaceful resolution of differences, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday, seen as an indirect message to China which is engaged in a festering border row with India in eastern Ladakh.

In his address at a ministerial meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) here in the Russian capital, Singh also referred to the Second World War and said its memories teach the globe the "foibles of aggression" of one state upon another that brings "destruction" to all.

Both India and China are members of the SCO, an eight-nation regional grouping which primarily focuses on issues relating to security and defence.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visits the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces and the Museum Complex in Moscow.

— PTI

"Peaceful stable and secure region of SCO member states which is home to over 40 per cent of the global population, demands a climate of trust and cooperation, non-aggression, respect for international rules and norms, sensitivity to each other's interest and peaceful resolution of differences," Mr Singh said. He made the comments in the presence of Chinese defence minister Gen. Wei Fenghe.

Indian and Chinese troops are engaged in a bitter standoff in multiple places in eastern Ladakh for four months. Tensions flared up in the region after China un-

successfully attempted to occupy Indian territory in the southern bank of Pangong lake five days back.

"This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War as well as the formation of the United Nations which underpins a peaceful world, where international laws and sovereignty of states are respected and states refrain from unilateral aggression on another," he said. The defence minister also talked about threat of terrorism and extremism and pitched for having institutional capacity to deal with the challenges. He said India "unequivocally" condemns terrorism in all forms and manifestations, and condemns its "proponents", adding New Delhi values the works of SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS). — PTI

Top ministers discuss Korea, Afghan issues

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

The foreign ministers of the five BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) nations including external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi had a meeting on Friday through teleconference in which the "discussions centred around overview of global situation - new threats and challenges, regional hot spots". A statement issued after the meeting contained references to the situation in the Middle-East, Africa, Afghanistan and the Korean peninsula.

Indian Navy holds exercise with Russia in Bay of Bengal

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

Indian and Russian navies on Friday began their biennial maritime exercise Indra Navy 2020 in the Bay of Bengal. Initiated in 2003, Indra Navy exercise reflects the long-term strategic relationship between the two navies.

The naval exercise between India and Russia is being conducted at a time when India is engaged in a tense military stand-off with China at Ladakh.

The Indian Navy is being represented by guided missile destroyer Ranvijay, and fleet tanker Shakti, along with their integral helicopters. Indigenous frigate

Sahyadri which was also to participate in the exercise has been currently redeployed to provide assistance to crude oil tanker MT New Diamond, which has caught fire off the coast of Sri Lanka.

The Russian Federation Navy will be represented by destroyer Admiral Vinogradov, destroyer Admiral Tributs and fleet tanker Boris Butoma of the Pacific Fleet, based at Vladivostok.

Whilst the exercise is being undertaken in the Bay of Bengal, defence minister Rajnath Singh is on a visit to Moscow from Thursday on the invitation of Defence Minister of the Russian Federation,

General Sergei Shoigu to discuss bilateral cooperation and issues of mutual interest and commemoration of the 75th anniversary of victory in World War II.

The Indra exercise has matured over the years with increase in scope, complexity of operations, and level of participation. The primary aim of exercise Indra is to further consolidate inter-operability built up by the two navies over the years and also to enhance understanding and procedures for multifaceted maritime operations. The scope of this edition includes wide-ranging and diverse activities across the spectrum of maritime operations.

■ 2 policemen also injured
3 militants killed, Army major hurt in J&K encounter

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, SEPT. 4

Three militants were killed and an Army Major and two policemen injured in a daylong fire fight in Pattan area of Jammu and Kashmir's northwestern Baramulla district on Friday.

Later during the day, fighting broke out between a group of militants and security forces also in Babhoora village of southern Pulwama district when the later launched a cordon-and-search operation on receiving "specific information about the presence of terrorists."

Defence spokesman, Colonel Rajesh Kalra, said that the security forces from Army's 29 Rashtriya Rifles, J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG) and various battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) took on a group of militants holed up inside a private house after they laid siege to Yadipora village of Pattan and the gunmen opened fire at them when they zeroed in on their hideout.

"Three terrorists were

eliminated in the ensuing encounter. The joint operation is in progress," he said. The police sources added that an Army officer Major Rohit Mehra and two Special Police Officers (SPOs) were injured during the clash. The sources added that as the security forces encircled the house where militants had been trapped, the J&K police with the help of the Army and the CRPF evacuated civilians to safer locations to avoid collateral damage.

A rumour spread that the Army officer has succumbed to his injuries at Srinagar's 92-Base Hospital. However, the defence spokesman was quick to deny it.

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A rumour spread that the Army officer has succumbed to his injuries at Srinagar's 92-Base Hospital. However, the defence spokesman was quick to deny it and say his condition was "stable". The police said that the Army officer and two SPOs were injured in militants' indiscriminate firing while they were busy with others in rescuing civilians.

7 women killed in blast inside cracker unit

Cuddalore (TN), Sept. 4: Seven women, including the fire-cracker unit licensee and her kin were killed and two workers critically injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in Kattumannarkoil here on Friday, the police said.

Chief minister K. Palaniswami, who expressed his condolences to the bereaved families, announced a solatium of ₹2 lakh each to them.

The factory owner Gandhimathi and eight other women were allegedly involved in making country firecrackers at the unit in Kurungudi village in Kattumannarkoil when a sudden explosion ripped through the structure, killing five women, the police said.

Four others who were injured were later rescued from the concrete debris by the locals and admitted to a hospital here.

While two women succumbed later, the remaining two are undergoing treatment. The licensee and four of her kin died in the blast.

— PTI

Man rides 1,200km to take wife to exam centre

Gwalior, Sept. 4: Rains and potholed roads were no deterrence for a Jharkhand man who drove over 1,200 km on a scooter, with his pregnant wife sitting pillion, so that she could appear for an exam for aspiring teachers here in Madhya Pradesh.

The tribal couple, Dhananjay Kumar (27) and his wife Soni Hembram (22), travelled on the two-wheeler from Ganta Tola village in Godda district of Jharkhand to reach Gwalior, a centre for DEd (Diploma in Education) exam, required to be cleared by those wanting to take up teaching jobs. The wish to see his wife

MADHYA PRADESH

become a schoolteacher inspired Kumar to undertake the arduous journey, covering more than 1,200 km across four states, braving rains and bad roads in the midst of Covid-19-enforced lockdown.

As trains, buses and other means of transport were not available, we decided to traverse the journey by road on our two-wheeler, Mr Kumar told PTI on Friday.

"My wife, who is pregnant, was initially reluctant to take this arduous journey. But after seeing my determination, she agreed for this

long journey," he said. The couple arrived here on August 30 for DEd exam being conducted by the MP Board of Secondary Education. The examination will continue till September 11.

As a video of the couple and their journey taken by some newsmen went viral on social media, the district administration stepped in to help them.

If I had hired a taxi for coming to Gwalior, it would have cost ₹30,000 which was a big amount for me. Whatever little jewellery we have, we mortgaged it to raise ₹10,000. "So far, we have spent ₹5,000 on our one-

way journey and on a room that we have taken on rent in Deendayal Nagar here, Mr Kumar, who has studied till Class 8, said. We started off on August 28 morning and enroute stayed a night each in Muzaffarpur (Bihar) and Lucknow to reach Gwalior on our scooter," said Kumar, who was working as a cook with a caterer before he lost his job three months ago because of lockdown. "Earlier, I thought that it won't be possible for me to appear in this examination but after seeing my husbands determination and courage, I got ready for this long journey," Ms Soni said. — PTI

ANDHRA PRADESH STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED
Regd. Office: 10-15/31, 4th Floor, Sri Sai Towers, Besides SIRIS Company, Bandar Road, Vijayawada-520007.
No.PDS.3/1199/Tapes/Tenders/2020 Dated: 04.09.2020

TENDER NOTIFICATION

Empanelment and appointment of manufacturers Zone-wise for supply of Packaging Tapes as per the specifications indicated in the tender schedule to be utilised for Packing of rice in Jute bags through AP e-Procurement platform.

All the interested Manufacturers may visit www.apscsl.in and www.apecurement.gov.in to view and download tender documents on free of cost. Interested Tenderers should be registered in website www.apecurement.gov.in and should also obtain Digital Signature Certificates from any Certifying Authority in India to submit bids. The details and procedure for obtaining Digital Signature Certificates are mentioned in the website www.apecurement.gov.in or contact the helpdesk of ap e-procurement portal: 08645-246370/71/72/73/74. Last date for registration and completion of formalities for the e-auction shall be up to 15.09.2020 at 5 P.M and the tentative date of online e-reverse auction through ap e-procurement platform would be 18.09.2020 at 3.00 pm onwards.

Sd/- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

Advertisement for engaging three resources for State Panchayat Resource Center (SPRC) situated at Haryana Institute of Rural Development (HIRD), Nilokheri, District Karnal, Haryana

Applications are invited for three posts namely, **Planning and Management Development Expert, Capacity Building & Training Expert and Gender & Women Empowerment Expert** under Rastriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan scheme of Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Govt. of India for 'State Panchayat Resource Centre' situated at HIRD Nilokheri, Karnal, Haryana. The posts are temporary and co-terminus with the scheme.

The desirous candidates having requisite qualifications and fulfilling other eligibility conditions have to submit their application form at harpal.pan@hry.gov.in and mohit.pan@hry.gov.in till 14th September 2020 upto 06.00 PM only. Candidates having special skill set or certification will be given preference.

Only short-listed candidates will be informed by e-mail to appear for the online interview which will be conducted by video conferencing. For details regarding requisite qualifications, monthly remuneration, relevant experience and prescribed format of application, please visit official websites of the Department i.e. www.harpanchayats.gov.in or www.haryanadp.gov.in

Sd/-
Director
Development and Panchayats Department
Haryana, Chandigarh

RO: 86222

Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Office of the Executive Engineer, (Jal Shakti) PHE, Ground Water Division, Nowshera, Sgr.
Gist of e-Tender.

e-N.I.T. No.: PHE/GWDS/ 21 of 09/2020 Dated: 01 -09-2020

For and on behalf of lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, e-tenders are invited in two cover system for "Construction of 125 mm dia Machine Drilled Hand pump Wells" in below mentioned place with 60 meters depth from registered Water Well Drillers/Contractors as per the details given in tender document.

S.No	Constituency	No. of Hand Pump wells for constituency	Estimated Cost Rs. In Lacs	EMD (Amount in Rs)	Cost of Tender Document	Time of completion	Programme Language
01	Handwara	30 No.	Rs. 77.4 Lacs	Rs. 1,54800/-	Rs. 2000/-	45 Days	LUP Code 2389
02	Lolab	17 No.	Rs. 43.86 Lacs	Rs. 87,720/-	Rs. 1000/-	45 Days	LUP Code 2389
03	Anantnag	10 No.	Rs. 25.80 Lacs	Rs 51,600/-	Rs. 1000/-	45 Days	LUP Code 2389

Position of Funds: Available
AAA: Accorded

Critical Dates/Information.

1. Publishing Date	02-09-2020
2. Period of Downloading of Bids	02-09-2020 (2:00 PM) to 11-09-2020 (2:00 PM)
3. Period of Submission of bids	02-09-2020 (2:00 PM) to 11-09-2020 (2:00 PM)
4. Date of opening of Tender	12-09-2020 at (2:00 PM)
5. Tender Receiving Authority: Executive Engineer, (Jal Shakti) PHE Ground Water Srinagar, Kashmir -190011	
6. Document Cost : Non-Refundable in the shape of Treasury Challan/receipt deposited to Account Head 0215 in favour of Executive Engineer (Jal Shakti) PHE Ground Water Division Srinagar (at Sadder Treasury Srinagar) (The firm shall specify the name of work for which apply)	
7. Earnest Money: The Earnest Money shown against each constituency in the shape of CDR/FDR pledged to Executive Engineer , (Jal Shakti) PHE Ground Water Srinagar.	
8. Bid Validity Period: 180 Days	

No: PHE/GWDS/1913
Dated: 01-09-2020
DIPK-4962/20 DATED 04.09.2020

Executive Engineer
Jal Shakti PHE Ground Water Division,
Srinagar.

DELHI POLICE SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

Beware of Frauds!

Tips to safeguard from SIM Swap Fraud

- Remember, callers offering to swap your 2G/3G SIM to 4G may be cheats.
- Never forward SMS sent by such callers to your telecom operator. That will deactivate your SIM and issue e-SIM to the fraudster.
- Never share your Bank or Card details with such callers.
- Never click on any link or download any mobile App on caller's directions.
- In case of SIM deactivation, immediately contact your bank to secure your linked bank account.
- Secure your phone as it may be hacked by the downloaded App.

Tips to safeguard from Cyber Frauds

- Always treat unsolicited callers/emails with suspicion.
- Never share credit/debit card details with anyone claiming to be bank official or customer care executive.
- Never enter card details in online form sent by the caller. Your credentials might be stolen.
- Do not download remote access Apps as fraudster will get access to all your messages and emails.
- Never click on links in Phishing messages /emails appearing to come from government organizations, officials, banks, etc. They install malware/spyware on your device.
- Be cautious while scanning a QR code sent for receiving payment. You may lose money from your account.
- Be careful of fake customer care numbers appearing in web search.
- Use two-factor authentication (Password + OTP) for all online accounts.

Immediately report on <https://cybercrime.gov.in>

Email to CP, Delhi at: cp.snshrivastava@delhipolice.gov.in | Write to CP, Delhi at P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL 112 TO SHARE INFORMATION CALL 1090

DP/9252/2020

SHORT TAKES

Robbers loot ₹5.7L from Punjab bank

Hoshiarpur, Punjab: Four unidentified masked men looted ₹5.70 lakh at gunpoint from the branch of a public sector bank in Bhagowal village here on Friday, police said. The incident took place around 3 pm, they said. At the time of incident, the security guard deployed at the branch was refuelling the generator set located behind the building, the police said. Senior superintendent of police, Hoshiarpur, Navjot Singh Mahal said an alert had been sounded in the district and the adjoining areas. Police parties have been dispatched in the area to search for the culprits. Footage recorded by the CCTV cameras installed inside the bank and in the nearby areas are being inspected, he said. — PTI

Hemkund Sahib opens to devotees

Gopeshwar, Uttarakhand: Portals of the Hemkund Sahib, a famous Sikh shrine in the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttarakhand, was opened for devotees on Friday with the first batch of over 120 pilgrims attending the ceremony. The Guru Granth Sahib was brought into the diwan hall at 9 am and the gates of the temple were thrown open for devotees after traditional rituals, manager of the gurdwara at Govindghat Sardar Seva Singh said. The opening of the temple was followed by a recitation of the Sukhmani Sahib and shabdkirtan, he said. The gates of the shrine surrounded by snow-clad peaks at a height of nearly 15,000 feet have been opened late by three months this year owing to the coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

Cobra rescued from SBI in Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar: The employees of a nationalised bank here were on Friday panicked as they discovered a cobra inside the branch. It was like any other day for the staff of IMMT Branch of State Bank of India near Acharya Vihar. However, when some of its employees entered the strong room a few moments after opening the branch, they found a long yellow snake. "We were terrified to see a yellow colour snake inside the strong room of the bank. We immediately called up Snake Helpline for its rescue. The volunteers reached the campus and captured the reptile," a staff member of the bank said. The snake, around 4-foot long, was rescued by the Snake Helpline members and later released to its natural habitat on the outskirts of the city. The IMMT campus is full of greenery and snakes have often been found inside the campus by its staff. Incessant rainfall last week might have forced the snake to migrate to the SBI building in search of a safe hideout.

Army turns Ladakh hilltops, ridgelines into 'kill zones'

■ **Continued from Page 1**
control of many strategic heights around Pangong Tso from where they are keeping a close watch on the PLA's movements, tactical measures are being taken to thwart the enemy designs. It is here that the vast experience the Indian Army gained over the decades while dealing with Pakistan along the LoC came in handy. The LoC is one of the most heavily mined zones in the world.

As for the PLA, it has been found that they have planted landmines around their posts, a measure that Indian troops were also taking, as a precautionary measure.

"Now with the LAC hotting up like never before, there is a need for creating multiple obstacles, should the need arise," sources said, adding that the only period when PLA soldiers have dealt with kill zones is during training, not on the battlefield.

Sources said that non-metallic (NMM-14) plastic anti-personnel mines are most preferred by the Indian forces while plans are afoot for creating more obstacles using claymore mines and anti-tank mines, among other explosives, to lay traps. "The LAC will remain hot for a long time. Therefore, all preparations are being made to ensure that there are no more incursions," sources said.

The NMM-14 has a shelf life of 10 years and is difficult to locate as it is made of plastic and contains less than 30 grams of explosive, enough to blow both legs once anyone steps on it.

■ **Sushant's house manager also taken into custody**

Sushant case: Rhea's brother held by NCB

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, SEPT. 4

After the Bandra based drug peddler's revelation of arranging drugs for Rhea Chakraborty's brother Showik, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested him along with late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's house manager Samuel Miranda after grilling them throughout the day on Friday. The arrests came close on heels with raids conducted at their residences earlier in the day by the NCB from where the officials seized electronic gadgets and scores of documents.

The officials had summoned Showik and Miranda for questioning after completing searches at their residences. The action came after peddler Abdul Basit Parihar revealed he supplied narcotics substances to Showik. Parihar was earlier arrested and produced before the Esplanade court and sent to NCB custody till September 9 for further investigation.

The NCB first arrested Zaid Vilatra, who is also a Bandra-based peddler. Vilatra's links with Rhea and Showik Chakraborty are being probed. The officials said that his questioning revealed Parihar,

Kangana's PoK jibe on Mumbai draws flak from Maha parties

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, SEPT. 4

A day after Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut compared Mumbai to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the war of words intensified between Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut and the actress on Friday. Mr Raut said that she should not come back to Mumbai if she is afraid of the city police.

"This is an insult of the real Rani of Jhansi, who was a brave daughter of Maharashtra," he said. "Can't I react to the comments criticising

whose direct connection with Showik has now come to the fore.

"The data from seized gadgets will be retrieved to dig deeper in the ongoing suicide probe. The documents will be scanned to understand if any of them are related with the case," said an officer privy to the investigation.

Statement of Parihar and Vilatra has revealed some more names and the agency is now probing the larger nexus involving the

Mumbai police and the state of Maharashtra? What is PoK? Kangana should tour that place first and the situation prevailing there," Mr Raut said.

State Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant accused Ranaut of being hand in glove with the BJP to malign the Sena-NCP-Congress government and the Mumbai police. "By equating Mumbai to PoK, the actress has insulted 13 crore Maharashtrians and all those who love Mumbai, at the behest of BJP," Mr Sawant alleged in a tweet.

brother-sister and other celebrities.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is probing into the money laundering, alleged by Rajput's father. Rajput was found hanging in his Bandra residence on June 14. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which first began the investigation in connection with the suicide, based on the FIR filed by the Patna police, has hinted of no foul play in the death.



Police personnel baton-charge on youth during a protest demanding permanent jobs in the state government service in front of Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shrivraj Singh Chouhan's residence in Bhopal on Friday. — PTI

Bihar polls: Trouble in NDA after rift between LJP, HAM

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, SEPT. 4

In poll-bound Bihar, the ruling NDA is headed for trouble as rift surfaces between two of its crucial allies — Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM).

Sources said that Jitan Ram Manjhi's entry in the NDA fold and his announcement for unconditional support to Bihar CM Nitish Kumar has irked LJP Chief Chirag Paswan. A section in the LJP also feels that Manjhi has been inducted in the NDA at the insistence of Nitish Kumar but without consulting alliance partners. LJP leaders said that



Jitan Ram Manjhi

the party has called a meeting on September 7 in New Delhi to discuss the state's political scenario and Manjhi's entry into the NDA fold. Reports suggest that the party may also discuss its relationship with JD(U) during the meeting.

"The September 7 meet-



Women Shiv Sena workers burn effigy of Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut in Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

Kannada actress arrested in drug case

Bengaluru, Sept. 4: The Central Crime Branch (CCB) of Bengaluru, which is probing the drug menace in the Kannada film industry, on Friday arrested film actress Ragini Dwivedi along with two more persons, police said. "Ragini Dwivedi has been arrested and taken into custody," Bengaluru joint commissioner of police (Crime) Sandeep Patil said in a statement.

Besides, the actress, two people named Rahul and Viren Khanna were arrested, it said. Police had arrested another person, K Ravishankar on



Kannada actress Ragini Dwivedi after her arrest in Bengaluru on Friday. — PTI

Thursday.

With this four people have been arrested in the case. The CCB had earlier carried out searches at

Ragini Dwivedi's residence here this morning, police sources said.

She was taken to the CCB office in the afternoon and was questioned in connection with the drug case.

Later, in the evening she was arrested and taken into custody, the sources added.

According to police, Viren Khanna is a big catch.

"He (Khanna) is the main person who organises big parties where drugs are consumed. He was in Delhi and two CCB police inspectors had gone to

Delhi and arrested him," Patil said.

He has been taken into police custody for four days, he added.

Ravi also known as K Ravishankar, a clerk in the Road Transport Office, was arrested on Thursday while Rahul, a realtor, was taken into custody today, Bengaluru police commissioner Kamal Pant said.

The actress was in close contact with Ravi, the police chief claimed. According to Pant, police have started the second level of investigation based on their revelations. — PTI

3-yr-old girl raped before murder, 3rd such case in 3 weeks

Lakhimpur Kheri (UP), Sept. 4: The three-year-old girl, who was found dead in a sugarcane field in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri, was raped before murder, a senior police officer said on Friday.

This is the third such incident in the district in as many weeks. The girl's body, which bore injury marks on the head, was recovered from the vicinity of her village in Singahi area on Thursday after she went missing on Wednesday, police said.

"The post-mortem report has confirmed rape. I am with family members right now. Seven of our teams are working on the case. I am myself going for combing in sugarcane fields and strict action will be taken against the accused," superintendent of police, Satyendra Kumar Singh, told PTI over phone. "If needed, NSA will also be invoked against the accused," he said.

In his complaint to police, the girl's father had alleged that Lekhrum, a resident of their village, had abducted and killed the child due to an old enmity with his family. A case of murder was lodged against the accused.

Lakhimpur Kheri district was in the news recently when a 17-year-old Dalit girl was found dead outside her village. She was allegedly raped and murdered after she left home to fill a scholarship application. Her

2 groups clash as Dalit woman harassed by 4 men

Muzaffarnagar, Sept. 4: A Dalit woman was allegedly sexually harassed by four men here following which there was a clash between two groups and they pelted stones at each other, police said on Friday.

SHO Rajkumar Rana said one accused was thrashed by the mob in Morna village and handed over to the police, but a search is on to trace the remaining three accused.

He said the incident took place on Thursday evening when the four youths harassed the woman outside her house. This led to a clash between two groups during which stones were pelted, the SHO said.

In another incident, a 35-year-old man allegedly attempted to rape his seven-year-old neighbour in the district. — PTI

mutilated body was found near a dry pond, around 200 metres away from her village falling under the Neemgaon police limits.

Prior to this incident, a 13-year-old girl was raped and killed in the district. She was found dead in a sugarcane field.

Both incidents drew flak from the opposition, with Congress and SP leaders attacking the Yogi Adityanath-led state government over the law and order situation. — PTI



Mayawati

Muslims in UP targetted under BJP rule, says Mayawati

Lucknow, Sept. 4: Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Friday alleged that besides Brahmmins and Dalits, Muslims are being targeted under the BJP regime in Uttar Pradesh.

She also flayed incidents of vandalising idols of B R Ambedkar in the state and asked the government to take appropriate steps.

"In the SP government, Brahmmins and Dalits were oppressed selectively. Now in the present BJP government, along with them, there is a lot of oppression of Muslims as well. They are being framed in false cases, which is very sad," Mayawati charged in a series of tweets in Hindi.

"Idols of the messiah of Dalits - Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar - great saints and gurus were broken in SP government, and names of districts and institutions etc. named after them (Dalit icons) considerably...In the same way now, the present BJP government is also running," she alleged.

"Now even the idol of Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is being broken. The incidents of Varanasi and now in Jaunpur are extremely condemnable. The government should take appropriate steps in these matters," Mayawati said.

In Jaunpur, some persons desecrated Ambedkar's statue in Mishrapur village in Sujanganj area two days back.

When people got to know about it the next day, they protested after which police lodged FIR against six people.

Ambedkar's statue near the Panchayat Bhawan in the Gadkhara village in Varanasi was also vandalised last week, prompting people to stage protest for several hours. They blocked the main road and staged a protest for several hours. The agitated people demanded arrest of the guilty and building a new statue. — PTI

BJP gen secy Ram Madhav launches mission for 100-plus seats in Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, SEPT. 4

Encouraging the party workers to set the agenda for getting 100 plus seat in 2021 assembly polls in Assam, the BJP general secretary Ram Madhav here on Friday asked the party workers and office bearers not to be afraid of new political alliance of opposition Congress with All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF).

He said his government has adopted a three-pronged strategy involving trust, development and security to woo people in Maoist-infested regions away from Naxals.



Assam BJP president Ranjit Das (R) with party's national general secretary Ram Madhav in Guwahati on Friday. — PTI

year, said, "Let Congress form any alliance, we need not to fear. Some media will try to calculate and add on the votes polled by the two political parties to create a hype

but elections are not simple arithmetic. It is the chemistry that matters the most and our chemistry in Assam is excellent."

Asserting that Assam BJP should set the mission of 100 plus seat in the forthcoming assembly polls, Mr Madhav also lauded the BJP led alliance with regional AGP and Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) that drove out Congress out of power by getting more than 80 seats in 2016 assembly polls.

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass, while supporting the agenda of 100 plus seats

said, "If 42 lakh BJP workers rope in at least one member each to the party, we can achieve our mission of 100 plus seats easily in Assam."

It is significant that the ruling BJP is chalking out a 100-day action plan to strengthen the party at the grass root level, while two separate surveys are being carried out for selection of the party's candidates for the polls.

The BJP president said that the party has already started preparations for the polls and steps have been taken to strengthen the party units right down to the grass root level.

THE ASIAN AGE

5 SEPTEMBER 2020

Ladakh flareup: Only way out is diplomacy

The fresh Chinese provocations in eastern Ladakh in the past week made a region already tense over the past four months even more volatile, as troops of the People's Liberation Army attempted fresh incursions on the southern banks of Pangong Tso last Saturday night but had to retreat as the Indian Army put up stiff resistance. The Indian Army occupied most of the area's hilltops and dominant heights to deter future misadventure by the Chinese forces, that have moved in thousands of additional troops in the Chusul sector, which Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane visited on Thursday as part of his tour of forward areas. With both armies having deployed thousands of troops, tanks and armoured vehicles, Ladakh is more of a tinderbox than ever, and cooler heads are needed to ensure it doesn't erupt again. And despite a lot of talk about the Army being given a "free hand" and of the "military option not being ruled out", the realisation seems to be dawning on both governments that a political or diplomatic solution may be the only way out.

Mr Jaishankar will have a chance to take the diplomatic process further as he meets Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi in Moscow next week when the two attend a SCO meeting

While the external affairs ministry's spokesman on Thursday squarely blamed Beijing for the current standoff, saying it was a "direct result" of China trying to "unilaterally change the status quo" at the LAC, foreign minister S. Jaishankar categorically said the "way out" of the current "difficult" situation is "through diplomacy". Acknowledging while India and China had a long history which was "very good in some parts, very indifferent in some parts and very difficult in some ways", he added that "this was not the easiest of times in the relationship", given the "seriousness of the current situation or the actual challenges of the boundary question". Perhaps responding to China's overtures to keep trade and commerce on track despite the flareup, after India's intensified ban on Chinese-linked apps and entities, Mr Jaishankar emphasised that "the reality is that whatever happens on the border will impact the relationship, you cannot separate it". He will have a chance to take the diplomatic process further as he meets Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi in Moscow next week when the two attend a SCO meeting. In a signal to Beijing to stick to the path of dialogue, Mr Jaishankar said at the launch of his book *The India Way* on Thursday: "Both sides must understand that it's in their own interest to reach an accommodation." With Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat, among others, emphasising a bigger role for the Quadrilateral, which includes the United States, China hit back over US deputy secretary of state Stephen Beigum's reference to Beijing's "outsized" claims in the Galwan Valley, and said: "China and India have the ability to resolve their border disputes bilaterally. We don't accept countries outside the region pointing fingers." If it is really serious, New Delhi and Beijing should be able to move forward.

Facebook's cleanup act

Under fire for promoting hate speech, Facebook has baffled the Indian government and the Opposition locked in a two week long battle of outrage by its swift damage control — with twin deft manoeuvres — a confident, if anodyne, statement proclaiming its non-partisan ethic and a quick ban on T. Raja Singh aka Tiger Raja, the Telangana MLA and *gau raksha* campaigner who is a known offender — he has followers numbering in lakhs and has opined Muslims are "traitors" and Rohingya Muslim immigrants "should be shot" while threatening to destroy mosques.

Hailed as a win by secular citizens, however, this apparent U-turn by Facebook goes against its own earlier line dutifully trotted out by its executive Ankit Das who said this action risked losing users and would damage the company's business prospects. Significantly, Facebook has backed Das' freedom of opinion following revelations that she herself shared anti-Muslim content even if she later apologised for it post the exposé. That had led to the Congress Party accusing Facebook of interfering in India's democratic process and going soft on ruling party members. By not iterating a comprehensive policy change while sidestepping specific accountability, Facebook also leaves the door open for future violations even as it turns a blind eye to countless ongoing ones — even as this controversy raged, over in West Bengal, Murshidabad MP Arjun Singh was falsely claiming on the same platform that a Kali temple deity had been burnt by "members of a particular community" though the priests, themselves, asserted that the fire was an accident. It is indeed fortunate that he has been named and shamed.

India's Parliament thus lost the chance to make Mark Zuckerberg answer to its people as the United States Congress did post the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data mining scandal that resulted in Facebook paying a US \$5 billion fine following a year long investigation. Facebook banned Cambridge Analytica from advertising on its platform, saying that it had been deceived. Most recently, it has committed to restricting political advertisements on its platform in the week preceding the US presidential elections and will remove misinformation related to voting. It is even going to pay users to deactivate their accounts ahead of the polls. New Delhi surely missed that bus.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age offices are located at:

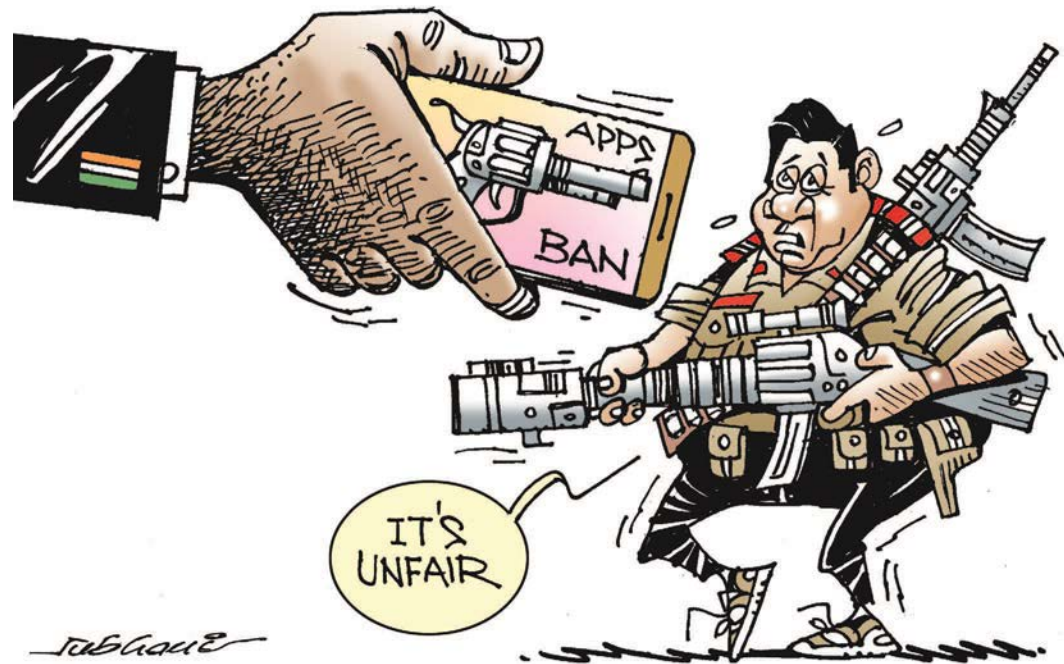
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Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office in the United Kingdom Air surcharge for Kathmandu and J&K ₹1

Published and Printed on behalf of and for:

■ Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301. ■ Mumbai: Dangat Media Pvt Ltd, Plot No 22, Digha MIDC, TTC Industrial Estate Area, Vishnu Nagar, Digha, Navi Mumbai-400708. ■ Kolkata: Satyajit Employees Cooperative Industrial Society Ltd, 13/A, Prafulla Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700 072. ■ London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ. RNI Registration number: 57290/94 Postal registration numbers: DL(S)-05/4189/15-17

Subhani



Chana Kisney Khaaya.. Rasode Mein Kaun Tha?

Shobhaa De

I am in my most aggro Kokilaben mood. Rewind to a highly successful 2010 TV soap titled *Saath Nibhana Saathiya*, which featured a ma-in-law from hell — Kokilaben. Along came Yashraj Mukhate, an engineer and music producer from Aurangabad, who picked up a line from the serial and turned it into a Kokilaben rap that attracted 2.8 million views on Instagram. Voila — *Rasode mein kaun tha?* went viral. And I watched it over and over again to distract myself from the blah during Mumbai's most loved Ganesh Festival, which was a total washout this year, because of the Covid-19 restrictions. This is the aftereffect of the GDP debacle, which has set India back by a staggering 24 per cent. Oooooops! I find myself oscillating between Kokilaben screaming "*Mein thi? Tu thi?*" to mouthing the demented rantings of a television anchor, "*Mujhe drugs do, drugs do, charas do, ganja do...*" These are the two unchallenged champions of last week's meme fest. I am not the only citizen under unbearable stress right now. Going by the disastrous state of affairs in India right now, citizens across the board are in urgent need of mind-numbing drugs — bring them on! How much more can they cope with, while also coping with Covid *ka bhayanak* crisis?

I am looking for some soothing peacock therapy. You know what that means, right? If Prime Minister Narendra Modi can seek solace in the company of a beautiful peacock and a couple of geese, hey... maybe that's the solution to

India's myriad and insurmountable problems. In the concrete jungle called Mumbai, finding the elusive national bird poses a challenge. Most of us, cooped up in cramped spaces, do not have the luxury of pampering hungry peacocks strolling across our vast lawns. Our beloved Prime Minister lives the grand life worthy of his grand position, in a grand mansion where stunning peacocks and well-fed geese roam. A few kilometres away, there may be undernourished children of jobless parents wondering where their next meal is coming from. There is nobody to feed their open mouths or care about their emaciated frames. Different strokes for different folks.

Our trendsetting PM has already unveiled his many masks. The Covid masks, I mean. He prefers to cover his mouth and nose with colour coded, handwoven *angavastrams*, that change daily. It's possible that they have been commissioned and sourced from master weavers across India. The same weavers who are staring at their silent looms, with no orders to keep them from starvation. Their livelihoods have been doubly hit, now that our wise and wonderful PM has disbanded the Indian handicrafts and handloom boards, which so far had been doing a stellar job of providing steady incomes and finding markets for our weavers. Without those committed office-bearers to manage the weaving communities spread across our 28 states, one wonders what the future holds for these gifted people? I guess, there is no cause for worry. Our

stylista PM can keep countless weavers in business just by himself, going by his frequent costume changes while feeding birds on his property. The elaborately staged photo shoots have enchanted his fans across continents who cannot get enough of his sartorial statements. The professionalism invested in getting the camera angles and lighting are being admired as well. When I first saw the pics, I assumed it was a fashion shoot for the leading men's lifestyle/fashion magazine *GQ* — the theme being, "Where peacocks gather..." But no! These shots were from our dynamic PM's personal album, to be generously shared with his fawning followers. An apt comparison between this shoot and the one which was widely shared by Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian Emperor, feeding lions while his country faced famine. This comparison was pointed out in a brilliant critique ("Compliant and Complicit" by Sankarshan Thakur, which was published in *The Telegraph*. The wonderfully written essay made me sigh with longing for those days when journalists and political commentators did what they are supposed to do — write ferociously. And make readers think.

At a dinner for eight (with Covid protocols in place) this week, I found myself sharing a table with some *bhaktis*, who kept saying they were not *bhaktis* but genuine admirers of our fabulous Prime Minister. These are successful Gujarati businesspeople, living in tony neighbourhoods. It emerged during the course of the conversa-

tion that they read nothing! Knew little about history. And were culturally illiterate to boot. But did they have opinions! All it needed was a few pointed questions about the tattered state of our economy, to get them to start frothing at the mouth. I figured — why waste my precious breath... and switched to a topic they were eager to pounce on — the sensational Sushant Singh Rajput investigation. One of the men present did not know what "ED" stood for! So even that topic was a dead loss. When I mentioned an article in an American scientific publication which stated baldly that India "was in denial about the Covid-19 crisis..." these folks changed the topic and spoke about how expertly and ably our Prime Minister was steering India towards new goals, new horizons. It's great to stay optimistic during a crisis — but for that to be termed "optimism" one has to first admit there is a crisis! The same people had sons and daughters in America (their high dollar salaries were disclosed in awestruck terms by proud parents), who had declared their intention of never coming back to the country of their birth! If our future was this amazing, why were their children turning their backs on India? *Jawab hai?*

The reason why that silly dialogue *Rasode Mein Kaun Tha* went viral is simple. At a time when citizens are struggling to come to terms with India's desolate and arid financial landscape, and no salve has been offered by the Prime Minister after the minus 24 per cent GDP drop, all that we have is humour. Black humour! But jokes and memes and birds and masks cannot fight the biggest battle confronting us — a harsh, unforgiving winter of our discontent.

Jokes and memes and birds and masks cannot fight the biggest battle confronting us — a harsh, unforgiving winter of our discontent

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

SITTING DUCK

They may be powerful but their Twitter accounts are vulnerable. And the list includes the Indian Prime Minister. "John Wick" logged in on his behalf just the other day and sent out tweets asking for bitcoins in a copy-cat hack following the July heist in the United States. This one was no inside job, however. The question is how many of the PM's 56 million followers took the bait..

C.K. Subramaniam
Navi Mumbai

MORALE BOOSTER

CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF General Bipin Rawat remarking that the Indian armed forces are well placed to handle the Chinese aggression on the southern bank of the Pangong Tso lake is reassuring. General Rawat was speaking at the third annual leadership summit of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum. The four-star general also cautioned Pakistan against taking any advantage of the tensions with China and warned of inflicting heavy losses. The Indian Army, meanwhile, is putting up a brave front along the LAC and taken up dominating positions north of the Finger area, to cut off possible ingress routes by Chinese forces.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

IMPONDERABLES

THE DELHI METRO is all set to resume services on September 7. To ensure safe and smooth running of the trains, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation has come up with various measures. Some include not stopping the train at stations where there is no social distancing. In which case, how will the passengers reach their destination? Although it is a step towards building up the local economy what of the rising cases? There are too many imponderables.

Radhika Pansare
Mumbai

LESSON FOR ELITES

THE 15-YEAR-OLD Jalandhar girl Kusum, daughter of a daily wage, deserves unqualified appreciation for taking on two snatchers to save her smartphone which stored all her notes sent by teachers. Her resolute fight should be a lesson to our youth. And an eye-opener for elites who think too little of women.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: letters.asianage@gmail.com.

S.B. Shashank



Early childhood education is hit the worst during pandemic times

The Covid-19 pandemic, unprecedented in its spatial extent, has hit every aspect of human life across the world. Political and geographic boundaries have lost their meaning, and even the remoteness of islands have not deterred it from marching ahead. As long as the fury of the calamity lasts, unabated and unchallenged, its effect will keep rattling all mankind. While the divide based on income differentials will continue to determine the gravity of its impact on individuals, however temporary that impact may be in some cases, young children all over are turning out to be the worst sufferers, as recent reports suggest.

According to a Unicef report released in June 2020, there are 28 million children in India, who otherwise could have gone to *anganwadis* but for their closure due to the pandemic health risk and have been at home for the past six months. These children, in general, belong to the economically disadvantaged sections of society, but it's also true that those enrolled in private institutions, mostly in urban and semi-urban areas, such as nursery or KG schools, are

not better off either. What early childhood education intends to impart is to develop social and emotional skills of compatibility and conflict, which won't happen except in the company of other children. Instead of technology-leveraged remote learning, it requires a physical environment which grows listening, speaking and interacting for the healthy mental growth of a child. Digital accessibility and affordability, to some extent, can compensate for proficiency in literacy and numeracy but the overall growth of a child happens best in the company of peers. Why early childhood learning is so important in the growth of children and its effect on lifestyles has been documented in various studies and reports that show that it is directly linked to a child's seamless and confident migration to primary school and further transition to secondary education, a reduced probability of being school dropouts and attaining life skills and higher education. That's the reason why deprivation of early childhood development carries a risk on the lives and future of children cutting across the economic divide or digital divide. On the extent

of deprivation of early childhood care and education, another Unicef report says that worldwide nearly 40 million children, of which 22 million are from South Asia alone, have missed out on learning in the critical pre-primary school year as Covid-19 has shuttered all early education facilities.

The new National Education Policy document that was released last month, amid the pandemic crisis, undoubtedly emphasises the government's resolve to give renewed focus to this critical aspect of child development. Though the report candidly admits that crores of children, and more so those belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged sections, are deprived of quality early childhood care, it provides a roadmap on curriculum design, infrastructure development, technology use and capacity infusion. But these are long-term solutions with primary focus on achieving sustainable development goal SDG 4.2, which is about a commitment to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood education so that they are ready for Class 1 as a stepping stone for primary education.

Every species survives because it cares for its offspring. This is true for human beings as well. A solution to the obstruction posed by the current pandemic is not easy to find. The strategy, therefore, must be on mitigating the effects of this obstruction. On the education front, countries across the globe are grappling with back-to-school plans. Many in Western countries are seriously considering it as a viable choice as they are worried about the loss to society due to missing childhood. In a vast country like India, one solution may not fit all. There will be different solutions for rural areas, urban areas and metropolises for the purpose of restoring early childhood learning. In rural areas, where open spaces are available, active community support will help in organising small groups of neighbourhood children to keep them engaged with day-to-day activities like listening, speaking and learning while maintaining a safe distance. Home-based technology tools such as smartphones, radio, television and cable networks can be used, depending upon digital accessibility and affordability. In urban and metro setups where open

spaces are hard to find, the neighbourhood grooming of one or two children by an older person can be adopted for this purpose. Though group activities may be difficult to perform, such grooming will keep children engaged and save them from neglect due to the closure of pre-schools.

Like all other pandemics in the past, Covid-19 will also become history one day, thanks to human ingenuity. But young children who have lost their formative years of learning should not become victims. This needs to be pre-empted by early action. Anything done too late will be too little. The lack of finance should not be allowed to come in the way. A study by James Heckman, a Nobel laureate in Economics and an expert in the economics of human development, shows that investment in early childhood yields better returns and offers a cost-effective strategy even during a budget deficit.

The writer, a serving IAS officer, is director in the department of women and child development of the Delhi government. The views expressed here are personal.

SHORT TAKES

MAHATHIR SEES
NEW ROLE AS
POWER BROKER

Kuala Lumpur, Sept. 4: At 95, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad isn't yet done with politics. The veteran politician, who had returned to power in 2018 but lasted only 22 months, is not giving up fight against what he said was a return of corrupt practices and a roll-back of reforms under his successor, Muhyiddin Yassin.

In August, Mahathir formed the Pejuang (Fighters) party, months after his reformist government was ousted in a political coup and he was sacked from his own party. He said in an interview on Friday that Malaysia's governing coalition isn't likely to call for early elections due to political infighting and foresees his new ethnic Malay party to be the powerbroker in the next polls.

"We will not form a government by ourselves... we are the third party. We believe that we are not very big but we are big enough to play a middleman role in the country; the two-time prime minister said. Mahathir said he believed that neither Muhyiddin's new coalition nor the opposition led by Anwar Ibrahim can obtain more than 50% of votes. If Pejuang can win just 30 seats, it can be the kingmaker and will then decide which side it will support, he said.

RUSSIA VACCINE
'PASSES EARLY
TRIAL TEST'

London, Sept. 4: Patients involved in early tests of a Russian Coronavirus vaccine developed antibodies with "no serious adverse events", according to research published in The Lancet on Friday, but experts said the trials were too small to prove safety and effectiveness.

Russia announced last month that its vaccine, named "Sputnik V" after the Soviet-era satellite that was the first launched into space in 1957, had already received approval.

This raised concerns among Western scientists over a lack of safety data, with some warning that moving too quickly on a vaccine could be dangerous.

Russia denounced criticism as an attempt to undermine Moscow's research.

In the Lancet study, Russian researchers reported on two small trials, each involving 38 healthy adults aged between 18 and 60, who were given a two-part immunisation. Each participant was given a dose of the first part of the vaccine and then given a booster with the second part 21 days later.

They were monitored over 42 days and all developed antibodies within the first three weeks.

The report said the data showed that the vaccine was "safe, well tolerated, and does not cause serious adverse events in healthy adult volunteers".

HK SECURITY LAW
BREACHES CITY'S
FREEDOMS: UN

Geneva, Sept. 4: China's national security law for Hong Kong poses a serious risk to the city's freedoms and breaches international legal obligations, UN special rapporteurs on human rights have warned.

Beijing has faced a barrage of criticism over the law, which was imposed in late June after pro-democracy protests rocked the semi-autonomous city last year.

The law, which criminalises secession, subversion, terrorism and colluding with foreign forces, carries a maximum life sentence and has intimidated many protesters into silence.

In a letter made public on Friday, the UN advisers warned parts of the legislation "appear to criminalise freedom of expression or any form of criticism" of China.

"The National Security Law... poses a serious risk that those fundamental freedoms and due process protections may be infringed upon," the rapporteurs said.

The letter warned the legislation may "impinge impermissibly on the rights to freedom of opinion, expression and of peaceful assembly." The rapporteurs urged China's "reconsideration" of the legislation and for a fully independent reviewer to be appointed to ensure it complies with China's international human rights obligations.

They also expressed concern over one of the most controversial points of the law — which allows cases can be transferred from the jurisdiction of Hong Kong to mainland China — and warned it could undermine the right to a fair trial.

Ships, boats try to
douse tanker fire
off Lanka, 1 dead

Colombo, Sept. 4: A Panamanian-registered oil tanker burned out of control for a second day off Sri Lanka on Friday as authorities confirmed a Filipino crew member was killed in an explosion in the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lankan navy and Indian coastguard vessels fired water cannon at the blaze on the *New Diamond*, which issued a distress call on Thursday after its engine room exploded.

The fire had not spread to the 2,70,000 tonnes of crude and 1,700 tonnes of diesel the tanker is carrying, Sri Lanka's navy said. "Preliminary information from the ship's crew confirmed that a Filipino seaman on board had died in a boiler explosion," the navy said in a statement. All but one of the 23-member crew — 18 Filipinos and five Greek nationals — were rescued. The tanker was about 60 km from Sri Lanka's east coast when it sounded the alert and during the night drifted

10 km closer. Sri Lanka on Friday thanked India for its support. "We are receiving support from India and thankful to them," Sri Lanka's Army chief Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva told reporters.

Rear Admiral Nandana Jayaratne, the Director General, Operations, of Sri Lankan Navy, said there was no threat of an oil spill. "The Indian Coast Guard saw a crack right under the superstructure of the ship, but that does not mean the ship is falling apart and there will be an oil spill," Jayaratne said. "We will need international support in the event of a spill," Jayaratne said.

He said, "the worst case scenario now would be that intense heat of the fire cannot be controlled, in 5, 6 to 7 days, the hull cracks, ship snaps and starts tilting, you then have to do what is called boom laying to stop the spill, we will need international support to clean in that case." —*AFP, PTI*

NEW ZEALAND RECORDS FIRST
COVID-19 DEATH IN OVER 3 MONTHS

Wellington, Sept. 4: New Zealand recorded its first Covid-19 death in more than three months on Friday when a man in his 50s succumbed to the virus.

Health officials said the man was part of a second-wave cluster of infections that emerged in Auckland last month, ending a spell of 102 days free of community transmission in the South Pacific nation.

The death at Auckland's Middlemore Hospital on Friday afternoon takes New Zealand's death toll from the virus to 23, with the most recent previous fatality on May 24.

"I acknowledge the anxiety New Zealanders may be feeling about today's news, both in the wider community and also for the family and whanau (relatives) grieving over

this death," health chief Ashley Bloomfield said in a statement.

"Our thoughts are with his family and community at this time of loss and grief." The man was reportedly the youngest to die from Covid-19 in New Zealand.

Health authorities did not say whether he had a pre-existing medical condition. The Auckland cluster emerged in a family of four and has since grown to 152, including three new cases recorded on Friday.

It has proved difficult to eliminate despite a two-and-a-half week lockdown in Auckland that ended on Sunday night.

"We have always recognised that further deaths linked to Covid-19 were possible," Bloomfield said. —*AFP*

Fallen US Marines
are 'losers': Trump

Washington, Sept. 4: US President Donald Trump referred to US Marines buried in a WWI cemetery in France as "losers" and "suckers" for getting killed in action, according to a report Thursday in the Atlantic magazine.

The report, penned by the magazine's editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg, said Trump had refused to visit the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery near Paris in 2018 because "he feared his hair would become disheveled in the rain," although the official explanation offered by aides was that the helicopter due to take him there could not fly due to weather.

"In a conversation with senior staff members on the morning of the scheduled visit, Trump said, 'Why should I go to that cemetery? It's filled with losers,'" the article said.

"In a separate conversation on the same trip, Trump referred to the more than 1,800 marines who lost their lives at Belleau Wood as 'suckers'

for getting killed," the Atlantic added, citing four unnamed people it said had firsthand knowledge of the discussions.

Trump slammed the report late Thursday, after his aides earlier called the allegations "disgusting, grotesque, reprehensible lies." "Somebody makes up this horrible story that I didn't want to go," he told reporters after returning from a campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

"If they really exist, if people really exist that would have said that, they're low lifes and they're liars. And I would be willing to swear on anything that I never said that about our fallen heroes," he said. "No animal, nobody, what animal would say such a thing?"

However, some critics pointed to Trump's denigrating comments about late senator John McCain, who was captured in Vietnam and was widely regarded as a war hero.

—*AFP*



Police officers detain a Black Lives Matter protester outside the Penumbra Kelly Building, in Portland, Oregon. On Saturday, protesters will mark their 100th consecutive day of demonstrations following the killing of George Floyd. —*AP*

Biden vows that US will
address racism, slavery

Prez candidate met Blake's family ahead of his Wisconsin trip

Kenosha (US), Sept. 4: Joe Biden told residents of Kenosha, Wisconsin, that recent turmoil following the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a person of colour, could help Americans confront centuries of systemic racism, drawing a sharp contrast with President Donald Trump amid a reckoning that has galvanised the nation.

"We're finally now getting to the point where we're going to be addressing the original sin of this country, 400 years old... slavery and all the vestiges of it," Biden said at Grace Lutheran Church, where he met with community leaders after a private session with Blake and his family.

The visit marked the former vice president's first trip to the battleground state of Wisconsin as the Democratic presidential nominee and was a vivid illustration of the contrast he offers to Trump. While Biden spent more than an hour with the Blake family, Trump didn't mention Blake during his own trip

Washington, Sept. 4: A far-left activist suspected of killing a right-wing protester in Portland was shot dead by police in Washington state as they tried to arrest him, local law officials said.

The man, identified in US media reports as Michael Forest Reineohl, was killed as he ran from four officers on Thursday evening, a spokesman for the Thurston county sheriff's office, southwest of

Seattle, said on Friday.

A regional task force was watching the apartment of a "homicide suspect", who left the building and approached a vehicle "as officers attempted to apprehend him", Lieutenant Ray Brady said.

The man appeared to be armed and officers fired several shots into the vehicle before the man fled, Brady added. Several more shots were then fired.

The presence of a

weapon has not been confirmed, Brady said.

The US Marshals Service confirmed officers fired at Reineohl, who was pronounced dead at the scene, according to the Washington Post.

The Oregon city of Portland has seen more than three months of rolling protests against police brutality and racism that were sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May. —*AP*

to Kenosha on Tuesday. Where Biden traced problems in the criminal justice system back to slavery, Trump refused to acknowledge systemic racism and offered his unwavering support to law enforcement, blaming the recent violence on "domestic terror."

"I can't say if tomorrow God made me president, I can't guarantee you everything gets solved in four years," Biden said. But "it would be a whole better, we'd get a whole lot further down the road" if Trump isn't re-elected. "There's certain things worth losing over," he con-

cluded, "and this is something worth losing over if you have to — but we're not going to lose." Blake remains hospitalised after being shot in the back seven times by a white Kenosha police officer while authorities were trying to arrest him on August 23. —*PTI*

Macron defends blasphemy,
slams 'Islamic separatism'

Paris, Sept. 4: French President Emmanuel Macron criticised on Friday what he called "Islamic separatism" in his country and those who seek French citizenship without accepting France's "right to commit blasphemy."

Macron defended satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, which published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad that helped inspire two French-born Islamic extremists to mount a deadly January 2015 attack on the paper's newsroom.

The weekly republished the images this week as the trial began of 14 people over the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and on a kosher supermarket.

Speaking at a ceremony on Friday celebrating France's democratic history and naturalising new citizens, the French president said, "You don't choose one part of France. You choose France... The Republic will never allow any sepa-



Emmanuel Macron

ratist adventure."

Freedom in France, Macron said, includes "the freedom to believe or not to believe. But this is inseparable from the freedom of expression up to the right to blasphemy." Noting the trial that opened on Wednesday, he said, "To be French is to defend the right to make people laugh, to criticize, to mock, to caricature."

The 2015 attacks killed 17 people and marked the beginning of a wave of violence by the Islamic State group in Europe. —*PTI*

IRAN: REISSUE OF
PROPHET CARTOONS
IS 'PROVOCATION'

Tehran, Sept. 4: Iran has condemned as a "provocation" French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*'s republication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed to mark the opening of the trial into a 2015 attack on its offices by Islamist extremists.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the foreign ministry said the reissue of the cartoons, first published by a Danish newspaper in 2005, was an "insult" to more than one billion Muslims around the world.

"The offensive act by the French publication... is a provocation," the ministry said. "Any insult or disrespect towards Islam's holy prophet... or the other prophets of God is absolutely unacceptable," it added. —*AFP*



Rescue workers dig through the rubble of a badly damaged building in Lebanon's capital Beirut, in search of possible survivors from a mega-blast at the adjacent port one month ago, after scanners detected a pulse, on Friday. —*AFP*

PULSE SPARKS HUNT FOR SURVIVORS
ONE MONTH AFTER BEIRUT BLAST

Beirut, Sept. 4: Rescuers resumed a search on Friday for possible survivors under rubble in Beirut, buoyed by faint hopes of a miracle a month after a monster blast ripped through the city's port.

The cataclysmic August 4 explosion killed 191 people, making it Lebanon's deadliest peacetime disaster. One month on, seven people are still missing.

Hopes emerged on Thursday that one of them could be found alive after a specialist sensor device detected a heart beat under the debris of a

collapsed building.

"I was not aware I needed a miracle that much. Please God, give Beirut this miracle it deserves," said Selim Mourad, a 32-year-old filmmaker.

Chilean and Lebanese rescuers on Friday lifted chunks of rubble from the site between the hard-hit districts of Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael, an *AFP* photographer said.

"We have excavated rubble but we haven't reached a conclusion yet," said George Abou Moussa of Lebanon's civil defence. —*AFP*



Alain Cocq, suffering from an orphan disease of the blood, rests on his medical bed in his flat in Dijon, northeastern France. —*AFP*

LIVING | HELL 57-yr-old draws attention to situation of terminally ill patients after euthanasia plea rejected

Frenchman to livestream his death in right-to-die case

Dijon, Sept. 4: A Frenchman who is suffering from an incurable condition said on Friday he plans to livestream his death on social media as he refuses to take food, drink or medicine after President Emmanuel Macron turned down his request for euthanasia.

Alain Cocq, who suffers from a rare condition where the walls of the arteries stick together, said he believed he had less than a week to live and would livestream his death on Facebook from Saturday morning.

He had written to Macron asking to be given a substance that would allow him to die in peace but the president wrote back to him explaining this was not allowed under French law.

Cocq, 57, has used his plight to draw attention to the situation of terminally-ill patients in France who are unable to be allowed to die in line with their wishes.

"Because I am not above the law, I am not able to comply with your request," Macron said in a letter to Cocq, which the

patient published on his Facebook page.

"I cannot ask anyone to go beyond our current legal framework... Your wish is to request active assistance in dying which is not currently permitted in our country," said Macron.

In order to show France the "agony" caused by the law in its current state, Cocq said he would broadcast the end of his life on his Facebook page which he believed would come in "four to five days."

He said he hoped his struggle would be remem-

bered and "go down in the long term" as a step forwards in changing the law. He would halt all feeding, drinking and treatment from Friday night.

Macron said in his letter that "with emotion, I respect your action." And the president added a handwritten postscript, saying: "With all my personal support and profound respect."

An Elysee official said that Macron wanted to hail Cocq's commitment to the rights of the handicapped.

Right-to-die cases have

long been an emotive issue in France.

Most polarising was the case of Vincent Lambert who was left in a vegetative state after a traffic accident in 2008 and died in July last year after doctors removed life support following a long legal battle.

The case divided the country as well as Lambert's own family, with his parents using every legal avenue to keep him alive but his wife and nephew insisting he must be allowed to die. —*AFP*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,357.18	-1.63
Nifty 50	11,333.85	-1.68
S&P 500*	3,410.34	-1.29
Dollar (₹)	73.14	0.48
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.22	0.46
Euro (₹)	86.62	0.27
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	51,770.56	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	42.59	-1.48
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.930	0.034
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.666	0.044

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Paytm FY20 loss narrows by 40% to ₹2,597 crore

Financial service platform Paytm cut its losses by 40 per cent to Rs 2,597 crore in FY20 from Rs 4,150 crore in the previous fiscal by optimising expenses. Paytm grew its revenues by 1.36 per cent to Rs 3,629 crore in FY20 compared with Rs 3,579 crore in FY19. Overall transactions grew by over 50 per cent in volume terms. The company expects to become profitable by 2022, president Madhur Deora said.

GoAir to add over 100 flights, starting today



GoAir announced the addition of over 100 new flights in its domestic network, including from its base Mumbai besides other cities such as Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, starting September 5. The airline, in a release, also said it expects the capacity to reach 45 per cent of the pre-Covid-19 level by September 21 and by October 15 to 60 per cent of what it was operating prior to the pandemic.

Srei receives 10 mn euros from KfW IPEX-Bank

Srei Equipment Finance Ltd (SEFL) has received 10-million euro (about Rs 86 crore) funding from Germany's KfW IPEX-Bank. The deal allows SEFL to import construction machinery like asphalt machines, road pavers and rollers to India. "We at Srei have always believed in creating an equipment life-cycle solution for our customers and in that endeavour, manufacturer partnerships become crucial," said Devendra Kumar Vyas, MD.

Wipro comes out with Hygienix brand products

Leading FMCG player Wipro Consumer care has launched a new range of germ killer products under the brand Hygienix. As the country faces one of the worst health pandemics ever, Hygienix offers complete protection to consumers, the firm said. Its sanitizer, hand wash and soap are proven to provide 99.9 per cent protection from germs. Hygienix products have formulations that keep skin soft and smooth, Wipro said.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

₹1,350-cr buyout routed via MTR Foods

Norway's Orkla to take over Eastern

Mumbai/Bengaluru, Sept 4: The Meeran family that runs leading spices maker Eastern Condiments has agreed to sell its majority stake to Norwegian packaged food major Orkla for over Rs 1,350 crore, the family said in a statement. The Kochi-based Eastern Condiments sells a variety of spices, pickles and veg and non-veg ready-to-eat items under the brand name of Eastern and is the largest exporter of spices from the country.

Under the agreement, the Meeran brothers—Firoz and Navas Meeran—who now own 74 per cent in the company, will sell 41.8 per cent to Orkla, which owns MTR Foods.

The acquisition will be done through MTR, and the Norwegian company will also buy out the McCormick Ingredients SE Asia, the foreign investor in Eastern that owns 26 per cent. It will take the ownership in the first step of the transaction to 67.8 per cent for Rs 1,356 crore, valuing Eastern at Rs 2,000 crore.

Later, when Eastern is merged with MTR, the Meerans will exit Eastern by selling their remaining 32.2 per cent and in return will get 9.99 per cent of the merged entity, the statement said.

The deal completion or merger is expected to be over in 15 months.

The domestic spices industry is around Rs 22,000 crore and has been annually clipping at 13 per



cent over the past eight years ended March 2020.

After the deal, Eastern will be merged with MTR, and Orkla hopes to double its sales in India with the Eastern deal. MTR, under Orkla, has grown five-times since 2007.

"Following the completion of these transactions, a merger application will be filed with the intention of merging Eastern into MTR," the statement said. It added that "the merged company will be jointly owned by Orkla and the two brothers Firoz and Navas Meeran and will own 90.01 per cent and 9.99 per cent, respectively."

Eastern has seven production facilities in four states and employs close to 3,000 people.

Orkla is a leading supplier of branded consumer goods and concept solutions to the consumer, out-of-home and bakery markets in the Nordics, Baltics and selected markets in central Europe and

India. Listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange, Orkla employs 18,350.

The acquisition expands Orkla's already strong presence in the country's food and spices segment through MTR Foods, which it had acquired in 2007 and is a fully owned subsidiary now. With this move, Orkla hopes to double its sales in the country.

Navas Meeran, chairman of Eastern, said, "Orkla is known for its strong, local brands and holds leadership positions across multiple FMCG categories in several markets. Together with MTR, and as part of Orkla, we will have a stronger platform for our successful operations."

Anshul Agarwal, executive director at Aventus Capital, said Eastern and MTR combined have significant synergy potential in terms of product portfolio and geography.

—PTI

Voda Idea to raise ₹25,000 cr

New Delhi, Sept. 4: Beleaguered telecom operator Vodafone Idea on Friday approved plan to raise up to Rs 25,000 crore through a combination of equity and debt instruments to keep the company afloat.

The decision came days after the Supreme Court directed telecom operators to pay 10 per cent of total adjusted gross revenue (AGR)-related dues this year, and rest of the payments in 10 instalments, starting next fiscal year.

The fund-raising will

throw a lifeline to cash-strapped VIL, which has suffered massive losses, as it has been losing subscribers and average revenue per user and faces outstanding AGR dues of about Rs 50,000 crore.

In a filing on Friday, Vodafone Idea said its board has approved raising of funds through a combination of equity and debt instruments and that the total fund-raising will not exceed Rs 25,000 crore.

The company will consider fund-raising

through global depository receipt-pts, American depository receipts, foreign currency convertible bonds, convertible debentures or warrants.

The fund-raising plans are subject to shareholders' nod and other statutory approvals. The proposals will be taken up at the company's annual general meeting on September 30.

The filing mentioned, "issuance of unsecured and / or secured, non-convertible debentures up to an aggregate amount of Rs 15,000 crore, by way of

public offering or private placement basis or otherwise, in one or more tranches".

Recent reports had suggested that Verizon and Amazon may invest over \$4 billion into the company, but Vodafone Idea had on Thursday clarified that there is no such proposal currently before the board at yet.

Vodafone Idea's overall AGR dues stood at over Rs 58,000 crore, of which the company has paid Rs 7,854 crore to the Department of Telecom so far —PTI

Startups come under priority lending

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, SEPT. 4

In a bid to incentivise credit flow to specific segments like clean energy, weaker sections, health infrastructure and credit deficient geographies, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday included them as fresh categories eligible for finance under priority sector lending (PSL) guidelines.

"Bank finance to start-ups up to Rs 50 crore, loans to farmers for installation of solar power plants for solarisation of grid connected agriculture pumps and loans for setting up compressed bio gas plants have been included as fresh categories eligible for finance under priority sector," the RBI said in a release.

The priority sector guidelines have been comprehensively reviewed and revised to align it with emerging national priorities and bring sharper focus on inclusive develop-



ment, after having wide ranging discussions with all stakeholders.

Priority sector loans refer to loans that banks need to mandatorily lend to economically weaker sections of the society. With the change in definition in 2015, the performance of banks in achieving PSL targets has significantly improved. In FY20, all the bank-groups (public, private and foreign banks) have been able to achieve the overall target of 40 per cent lending (public 41.05 per cent, private banks 40.32 per cent and foreign banks 40.81

per cent).

The revised PSL guidelines will enable better credit penetration to credit deficient areas; increase the lending to small and marginal farmers and weaker sections; boost credit to renewable energy, and health infrastructure. The revised guidelines also seek to address regional disparities in the flow of priority sector credit. As a result, higher weightage have been assigned to incremental priority sector credit in 'identified districts' where priority sector credit flow is low.

The targets prescribed for "small and marginal farmers" and "weaker sections" are being increased in a phased manner, said the apex bank adding that higher credit limit has been specified for farmer producer organisations (FPOs)/ farmers producers companies (FPCs) undertaking farming with assured marketing of their produce at a pre-determined price.

"The inclusion of start-ups in PSL will reduce their cost of capital by allowing them better access to bank credit. Going forward, equity infusion will not be the only route to follow when start-ups need funds for working capital requirements, and this will greatly ease the risk of ordinary shareholders being wiped out due to 'down-rounds'.

However, to boost lending to start-ups it is also imperative to set in place an institutional mechanism.

Auto industry needs govt support: Maruti's Ayukawa

New Delhi, Sept. 4: The Indian auto industry is facing one of the toughest times in history and needs government support through reduction of GST and incentive-based scrap-purchase policy, Maruti Suzuki India managing director and CEO Kenichi Ayukawa said on Friday.

Ayukawa, who is the president-elect of auto industry body SIAM, said the sector has been "set back by many years" by a combination of the coronavirus pandemic and the slowdown that has been going on since last fiscal. As the global health crisis broke out, he said, the auto industry in India also played its part by getting into manufacturing of ventilators, personal protective equipment (PPEs) and importing testing kits from abroad to fight the virus although sales have been hit hard.

"In August we can say we just came back on our feet to achieve performance comparable to last year. Also last year is not a good comparison as the industry saw negative growth of 15-25 per cent. This negative growth has set back the industry by many



Kenichi Ayukawa

years," Ayukawa said at the 60th annual convention of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) conducted online.

Reiterating the long pending demand of the auto industry to reduce goods and services tax on automobiles by 10 per cent, Ayukawa said, "we are facing one of the toughest times in history. The industry needs your support".

"We are eagerly waiting for GST reduction and scrappage incentive scheme. We believe that taxes on the increasing turnover will be more than the government expenditure on the scrappage scheme and GST reduction," he said. —PTI

JAVADEKAR HINTS AT GST RATE CUT

New Delhi, Sept 4: Union minister Prakash Javadekar on Friday hinted at the possibility of GST rate cut for vehicles and hoped that the automotive industry will soon get some "good news". The heavy industries minister also shared that the proposal for the auto scrappage policy was ready with inputs from all stakeholders and its announcement was likely "very soon".

On the GST rate cut, he said the details of the proposals are being worked out by the finance ministry and he is not privy to all the details.

However, Javadekar said, "naturally in a logical sequence, 2-wheelers, 3-wheelers, public transport vehicles, in that category only, and then 4-wheelers, in that order it should come. I hope that you will get some good news surely very soon". —PTI

Retail loses over ₹20 L cr business

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, SEPT. 4

Unorganised retail has lost Rs 19 lakh crore of business in the past five months of lockdown restrictions. Organised retail too has lost almost Rs 1.3 lakh crore during the period.

The retail trade has been going through a rough path in the past five months. Two months of lockdown was followed by unlock restrictions. Further, lower appetite for non-essential purchases amidst economic uncertainty, minimal footfalls and customer preference

of online channel has led to a loss of Rs 19 lakh crore for the unorganised trade.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders, the unorganised retailers lost about 5 lakh crore of business and Rs 4.5 lakh crore in the lockdown months of April and May. Unlock-1 from the month of June did not bring any respite as the loss still stood around Rs 4 lakh crore. By July it was Rs 3 lakh crore and in the month of August it came down to Rs 2.5 lakh crore. Cait had conducted a survey of retailers in 20 cities.

Similarly, organised retail has met with a loss of around Rs 1.3 lakh crore in the past five months as 55 per cent of the business has been lost. These are largely non-essential items, which hardly have any takers in the post-Covid times, said Kumar Rajagopalan CEO, Retailers Association of India. Closure of malls too has hit the business of organized retailers.

Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of Cait, said, "Many shops have already closed and we expect at least 20 per cent or 1.4 crore retailers may end up winding up."

Acreage of major kharif crops		
Rice ▲8.27%	365.921	396.18
Pulses ▲4.67%	130.68	136.79
Coarse Cereals ▲1.77%	176.25	179.36
Oilseeds ▲11.93%	174.0	194.75
Sugarcane ▲1.30%	51.71	52.38
Jute & Mesta ▲1.68%	6.86	6.97
Cotton ▲3.24%	124.90	128.95
Total sown area in lakh hectare		Source:Ministry of Agriculture/KBK Infogratics

AI job searches double in a year

FC BUREAU CHENNAI, SEPT. 4

Artificial Intelligence job searches have doubled in the past one year and have been rising in the Covid-hit months as well, finds job search portal Indeed.

Job searches in AI have risen 106 per cent in the past year between June 2019 and June 2020. Despite Covid-19 hindering business operations across sectors and leading to massive job losses, searches for AI-related jobs have seen a 20 per cent increase in the last 6 months from March 2020 to July 2020.

In the wake of the global pandemic, industries across the board are witnessing an accelerated adoption of AI-led technologies in order to ensure business continuity during the changed circumstances. Further, an increasing number of functions is being automated. This has boosted the creation of jobs in the space.

During the one year period between June 2016 and June 2017, AI-related job searches had grown by 53 per cent. In 2017-18, it went up by 82 per cent, 80 per cent in 2018-19 and 106 per cent in 2019-20.

Denial of health cover still rampant

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, SEPT. 4

Amit Kumar (27), a corporate executive from Bengaluru, says that when his father got hospitalised three years ago, he had to pay a hospital bill of Rs 150,000. The health insurer reimbursed the money later but after a deduction of Rs 40,000, citing pre-existing disease (PED). Amit blames his lack of awareness for accepting this illegal deduction.

Many, like Kumar, face similar problems across the country, despite the regulator framing clear guidelines on risk coverage with waiting period or exclusions.

As per the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of



India (Irdai) norms, a pre-existing disease means any condition that is/are diagnosed by a physician within 48 months prior to the effective date of the policy issued/reinstated by the insurer, or for which medical advice is recommended by a physician within 48 months prior to the effective date of the policy or its reinstatement.

However, insurers are

reluctant to provide health cover for those suffering from PEDs. They rather advise subscribers to enroll for a health insurance policy early in life, as health issues develop as one ages.

"Health insurance proposals are underwritten based on the health parameters and the health status of individuals. Proposals with highly adverse health status or serious health

conditions are commonly not accepted due to underlying high risk. As per the Irdai guidelines, the PED definition is standardised. However, underwriting guidelines are decided by the respective insurance company within the framework of health regulations," said Dr Rashmi Nandargi, head-health retail underwriting, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance.

"In many countries, health insurance is provided by the government and private insurance is opted over and above the mandatory insurance provided by the government. However, wherever private insurance is prevalent, underwriting guidelines are decided by the insurer," Nandargi pointed out.

In fact, the condition on

PEDs is another grey area where people have to face difficulties while buying a policy or at the time of claim settlement. Insurers are putting the lives of sick and disabled at risk even during the Covid19 pandemic through claim denials and obfuscations. There are many instances where policy-holders' grievances are either ignored or not even being heard by the regulator.

Abishek Muthian, a start-up coach from Coimbatore, says the Irdai's grievances cell is biased towards insurers and doesn't really do anything when it comes to policy rejections. He was denied a top-up on his basic policy when he needed it most, despite knocking at Irdai's doors.

SHORT TAKES

Hami dominates in second practice

Monza, Italy: Championship leader Lewis Hamilton topped the times ahead of team-mate Valtteri Bottas as Mercedes continued their emphatic domination in Friday afternoon's second practice for this weekend's Italian Grand Prix. The six-time champion responded to the Finn's quickest lap in opening practice in the morning by clocking a best lap in one minute and 20.192 to outpace him by 0.262 seconds. Lando Norris grabbed third place for McLaren with a late flying lap that was nearly nine-tenths adrift of the leading pace, ahead of Pierre Gasly, who was fourth for Alpha Tauri, both men having overcome reliability issues during the session. Behind the top four, Max Verstappen was fifth for Red Bull ahead of Carlos Sainz in the second McLaren and Daniil Kvyat, in the second Alpha Tauri. — *AFP*

Anunoby rescues champs Raptors

Miami: OG Anunoby drained a buzzer-beating three-pointer as the Toronto Raptors resuscitated their NBA title defense Thursday with a 104-103 victory over the Boston Celtics. Kyle Lowry, tasked with inbound the ball with half a second on the clock and the Raptors down 103-101, lofted a perfect arcing pass over Boston's towering Tacko Fall to Anunoby on the opposite sideline. Anunoby set his feet and fired, and the Raptors narrowed the deficit in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semi-final series to 2-1. "I expected to make it. I don't shoot trying to miss ... I wasn't surprised," said Anunoby, who was mobbed by his teammates. — *AFP*

Babar says no to alcohol brand logo

Karachi: Pakistan's white-ball cricket captain, Babar Azam has told his English county, Somerset that he would not display the logo of any alcohol beverage company on his shirt during the ongoing T20 Blast event in England. Babar, who joined Somerset after Pakistan's tour ended on Tuesday, was seen wearing a shirt which had the logo of an alcohol company on his back. Not surprisingly, it led to some backlash in the social media but a source close to the Pakistan captain confirmed he had made it clear in his contract with Somerset he would not promote any alcohol company logo. "Apparently the logo was on the back of Babar's shirt by mistake and the county has assured him it will be removed for the next match," the source said. — *PTI*

England set for Iceland match

London: Iceland will forever bear a scar for English football after an embarrassing exit at Euro 2016 to a country with a population of less than one percent than the pool on offer to the Three Lions. Four years on, the nations meet on Saturday in the Nations League for the first time since that fateful night in Nice with the visitors in Reykjavik much changed in personnel and mentality. Only six of the squad from Euro 2016 remain. Among them captain Harry Kane, 27, and Raheem Sterling, 25, are now the senior figures in a squad filled with youth, flair and far less fear than the side that were wracked by self-doubt after falling 2-1 behind just 18 minutes into that famous defeat to Iceland. — *AFP*

Live on TV

FORMULA ONE

Italian Grand Prix Third Practice from 3.25 pm; Qualifying from 6.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Trinbago Knight Riders vs St Lucia Zouks from 7.30 pm; Jamaica Tallawahs vs Barbados Tridents from 11.45 pm on Star Sports 1, 2, HD

US OPEN

Matches from 8.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, 2, HD

UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Alistair Overeem vs Augusto Sakai and other bouts from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. And Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

MUM'S THE WORD

Serena among three mothers in US Open third round

New York, Sept. 4: Serena Williams, Victoria Azarenka and Tsvetana Pironkova made up a 'Band of Mothers' who marched into the third round of the US Open on Thursday. Williams, Azarenka and Pironkova were part of a cluster of nine mums who started this week's women's singles tournament here. Six of the nine — Kim Clijsters, Vera Zvonareva, Tatjana Maria, Kateryna Bondarenko, Patricia Maria Tig and Olga Govortsova — have been eliminated. But unranked Bulgarian Pironkova — playing her first tournament in three years after a break to have her first child — prolonged her participation with a 7-5, 6-3 upset of Spanish 10th Garbine Muguruza. Former world No. 1 Williams also advanced later Thursday with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Margarita Gasparyan. Williams and Pironkova were later joined by Azarenka, another former world number one who beat Belarussian compatriot and fifth seed Aryna Sabalenka 6-1, 6-3. Pironkova, who gave birth to her son Alexander in April 2018, says motherhood has given her a new perspective on her tennis career. Only three women — Belgium's Clijsters and Australians Evonne Goolagong and Margaret Court — have won Grand Slam singles titles in the Open era after having children. — *AFP*



Serena Williams of the United States en route to her 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Margarita Gasparyan in their US Open third round match in New York on Thursday. — *AP*

NAGAL LOSES TO BIRTHDAY BOY THIEM

New York, Sept. 4: Sumit Nagal's trademark fighting spirit was on display throughout but it was not enough to get past world number three Dominic Thiem, who notched up a straight-set victory over the Indian in the US Open men's singles second round here. Nagal lost 3-6, 3-6, 2-6 to the second-seeded Austrian, who celebrated his 27th birthday with a commanding performance at the Arthur Ashe Stadium here on Thursday. Thiem, this year's Australian Open finalist, had said that he has seen videos of Nagal's game and knew that he has a ripping forehand. Well prepared, he came out with a clear strategy of not giving many balls on the forehand side of the Indian. "Thank you 2020 US Open. Lots to learn. Going to keep working hard! Thanks for all the support everyone," Nagal later tweeted. Nagal came into the contest after giving India a rare singles main draw match win at a Grand Slam but it was always going to be a daunting task for him to challenge someone who has made two French Open finals. Slow off the blocks, Nagal was broken early but the slogger that he is, he kept Thiem under pressure, creating as many as five chances to break back in the fifth game that lasted 10 minutes. — *PTI*

SELECTED RESULTS

Men's singles second round (number in brackets denotes seeding): Matteo Berrettini (ITA x6) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6); Andrey Rublev (RUS x10) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x14) 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-4, 6-1; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) bt Christopher O'Connell (AUS) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; Roberto Bautista (ESP x8) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Vasek Pospisil (CAN) bt Milos Raonic (CAN x25) 6-7 (1/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x15) bt Andy Murray (GBR) 6-2, 6-3, 6-4; Marin Cilic (CRO x31) bt Norbert Gombos (SVK) 6-3, 1-6, 7-6 (7/2), 7-5; Dominic Thiem (AUT x2) bt Sumit Nagal (IND) 6-3, 6-3, 6-2.

Women's singles second round (number in brackets denotes seeding): Madison Keys (USA x7) bt Aliona Bolsova (ESP) 6-2, 6-1; Donna Vekic (CRO x18) bt Patricia Tig (ROU) 6-2, 6-1; Tsvetana Pironkova (BUL) bt Garbine Muguruza (ESP x10) 7-5, 6-3; Maria Sakkari (GRE x15) bt Bernarda Pera (USA) 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; Amanda Anisimova (USA x22) bt Katrina Scott (USA) 4-6, 6-4, 6-1; Serena Williams (USA x3) bt Margarita Gasparyan (RUS) 6-2, 6-4; Victoria Azarenka (BLR) bt Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x5) 6-1, 6-3; Karolina Muchova (CZE x20) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Johanna Konta (GBR x9) 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Sofia Kenin (USA x2) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 6-4, 6-3.

Murray makes early exit

New York, Sept. 4: Andy Murray said he would keep trying to win Grand Slams after crashing out of the US Open second round in straight sets to 15th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime on Thursday. The former world number one was demolished by the 20-year-old Canadian 6-2, 6-3, 6-4 inside Arthur Ashe Stadium in 2hr 8min. But Murray said he was pleased with how his metal hip coped in his first Grand Slam outing since the 2019 Australian Open, when there was talk of him retiring. "I'm more positive about what I can do in Grand

Slams before I came over here," said Murray, who rallied to a win thrilling five-set match against Japan's 49th-ranked Yoshihito Nishioka in the first round on Tuesday. The Scotsman is trying to rebuild his career after an injury-ravaged three years, and currently sits 115th in the world rankings. "I feel like I'm back at square one having not played Slams for a few years," Murray, a three-time Grand Slam winner, said. "I need to build up my body and my physical conditioning so that, you know, I have the ability to back up

five-set matches. That takes a bit of time, unfortunately." **DIMITROV TUMBLES OUT** Fourteenth seed Grigor Dimitrov tumbled out of the US Open at the second-round stage on Thursday. The 29-year-old Bulgarian fell to 66th-ranked Hungarian Marton Fucsovics in five sets. Fucsovics downed Dimitrov 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 in 4hr 50min. Dimitrov became the second-highest men's seed to exit the tournament after Chile's Cristian Garin, seeded 13th, lost in five sets on Wednesday. — *AFP*

TITLE HOLDERS TRIDENTS BOW OUT OF CPL

Tarouba, Sept. 4: Defending champions Barbados Tridents crashed out after suffering a six-wicket loss to Guyana Amazon Warriors, while St. Kitts & Nevis Patriots too exited the Caribbean Premier League even before finishing their quota of ten leagues matches here. While the Warriors secured their semi-final berth outplaying Tridents, the match between Patriots and Jamaica Tallawahs was washed out after just five overs on Thursday. With three teams yet to play two games each and two of them with one match each in hand, the four semi-finalists have been finalised. Trinbago Knight Riders, Guyana Amazon Warriors, St. Lucia Zouks and Jamaica Tallawahs are assured of a last four berth with final positions dependant on the games left. Tridents' poor run continued as they failed to get to three figures once again, posting a paltry 89/9 after being asked to take first strike. Tridents were never allowed to settle down once Romario Shepherd (3/22) came on as the first change following the first two overs by Chris Green (1/17) and Kevin Sinclair (1/23). — *PTI*

Messi to stay at Barcelona

Barcelona, Sept. 4: Lionel Messi ended speculation about his future at Barcelona by announcing on Friday that he would reluctantly stay for another season rather than tackle his career-long club in court. A week after saying he wanted to leave the Liga side, and with a contract row still raging, the 33-year-old six-time player of the year gave the news Barca fans were hoping for. In doing so, however, the Argentine forward took a big swipe at the club's hierarchy. "I wasn't happy and I wanted to leave. I have not been allowed this in any way and I will STAY at the club so as not to get into a legal dispute," he was quoted as saying by Goal.Com. "The management of the club led by (president Josep Maria) Bartomeu is a disaster. "I told the club, the president in particular, that I wanted to leave. They knew this since the start of the past season. I told them during all (of the) last 12 months. But I will stay here because I don't want to start a legal war." By remaining at the Catalan club for the fourth and final year of his contract Messi is in line for a 63 million pounds (\$83.38 million) loyalty bonus and will be able to leave without a transfer fee. Earlier on Friday, Messi's father and representative Jorge had insisted in a letter to La Liga that a 700 million euros (\$828.03 million) release clause in the player's contract was not valid and his son could leave for free. However, despite the standoff between the Messi camp and Barcelona and La Liga, the player has ended the impasse and will see out his contract with the club with whom he has won more than 30 major trophies and scored over 600 goals. **CLUBS DISAPPOINTED** The news that Messi will be staying at the Nou Camp, albeit reluctantly, will disappoint the clubs who were hoping to sign the iconic forward, including Premier League Manchester City, managed by his former Barca boss Pep Guardiola. Argentine pay TV station TYC Sports, which has close links with Messi, had reported earlier on Friday that Messi was poised to stay with the Catalan club he joined as a teenager. — *Reuters*



Spain's Jose Luis Gaya Pena (left) is congratulated by Mikel Merino after he scored against Germany in their Nations League football match in Stuttgart, southern Germany, on Thursday. — *AFP*

Enrique's boys deny Germany

Paris, Sept. 4: Jose Luis Gaya's late goal gave Spain a 1-1 draw away in Germany on Thursday as the start of the UEFA Nations League marked the return of international football in Europe following a hiatus of 10 months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Valencia defender Gaya was on hand to score from close range in the sixth minute of added time in Stuttgart after Rodrigo Moreno had nodded down a Ferran Torres cross, in a dramatic ending to the League A, Group Four encounter. Earlier, new Chelsea striker Timo Werner had given Germany the lead just after half-time in an entertaining contest between two of the last three World Cup winners. It was Luis Enrique's first game of his second spell as Spain coach, despite being re-appointed in November 2019 just after their last game in Euro 2020 qualifying. "This team is full of faith and hunger. We didn't deserve to lose and we kept fighting to the end," said Spain captain Sergio Ramos. These two teams will hope to feature prominently in the European Championship. **IRELAND GRAB LATE DRAW** Elsewhere on Thursday in the same group, Manchester City's Oleksandr Zinchenko scored a fine goal to give Ukraine a 2-1 win over Switzerland in Lviv. In League B, Artem Dzyuba netted a brace as Russia beat Serbia 3-1 in Moscow, while in the same Group 3, Hungary were surprise 1-0 winners away in Turkey. — *AFP*

RONALDO DOUBTFUL AS PORTUGAL FACE CROATIA

Lisbon, Sept. 4: Cristiano Ronaldo is a doubt as Portugal start the defence of their Nations League title against Croatia on Saturday in Porto and Sweden on Tuesday in Solna. Ronaldo is with the Portugal squad but has a toe infection and did not train on Wednesday or Thursday. He was instead doing "gym work", the Portuguese football federation (FPF) said. Ronaldo has 99 goals in 164 international matches but the FPF, which has closed its training camp to the press citing health protocols, gave no indication whether he will be fit for either game. Ronaldo has not played since early August when Juventus were knocked out of the Champions League by Lyon. — *AFP*