



Twitter tells HC it will appoint interim chief compliance officer soon
page 8



Vatican indicts 10 people in London real estate deal
page 9



OPEC+ seeks consensus on oil output policy after UAE roadblock
page 13



Kerber rallies past Sasnovich; Gauff, Federer move into fourth round
page 14

NEARBY



Unpaid bill lands Navjot Sidhu in controversy

CHANDIGARH
Former Punjab Cabinet Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu landed in the thick of a controversy over an unpaid electricity bill of over ₹8 lakh for his Amritsar residence. The Congress MLA invited criticism from several quarters over the power dues.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 6

BJP claims sweep in U.P. panchayat chief polls

LUCKNOW
The BJP on Saturday claimed to have swept the elections to the posts of district panchayat chief even as the Samajwadi Party alleged that the ruling party used "force" to stop people from voting. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of making a mockery of the polls.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 7

Police find 4th body in Tripura lynching case

AGARTALA
The death toll in the mob lynching incident in Khowai district on June 20 has risen to four with the recovery of the body of a missing youth. The police said the body of Salim Hussain was found buried in a wooded area in North Mahanaripur on Saturday afternoon.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4

MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

'Covaxin demonstrated 77.8% efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19'

Two-dose vaccine is 93.4% effective against severe disease, and also offers 65% protection against the Delta variant, says Bharat Biotech

JACOB KOSHY NEW DELHI

Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech India Ltd. on Saturday publicised the long-awaited results of the Phase-3 trial of Covaxin that involved nearly 25,800 volunteers spanning 25 hospitals across the country.

Yet to be peer-reviewed
The latest Covaxin study is yet to be peer-reviewed and appears on a pre-print server. While Covishield is the most widely administered vaccine in India, data from a bridging trial on Indians extrapolating the vaccine's potency into Indians from in-

This is higher than the overall 70.4% efficacy reported from the Phase-3 trial results of the AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine published in *Lancet* in January.

effective and 79.4% effective in younger people.

The two-dose Covaxin was also 93.4% effective against severe disease and 63% protective against asymptomatic COVID-19. Moreover, it was 65% protective against the Delta variant of the coronavirus, the most widespread in India and linked to a rising number of cases in Europe as well as the United States.

The pre-print revealed that in those 60 years and older, the vaccine was 67.8% effective and 79.4% effective in younger people.

"Safety analysis demonstrates adverse events reported were similar to placebo (or those who got a dummy dose), with 12% of subjects experiencing commonly known side-effects and less than 0.5% of subjects feeling serious adverse events," the company said in a statement.

Medical professionals welcomed the results.

"These results give all of us a lot of reassurance that

Covaxin is an excellent option to prevent COVID in India," tweeted Vincent Rajkumar, Professor, Mayo Clinic.

S.P. Kalantri, Director and Professor of Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Wardha, said the pre-print was rich in detail and, on preliminary reading, revealed a trial that was "well-conducted" and presented people with an informed choice on the vaccine's efficacy.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Report card | Covaxin had an overall efficacy of 77.8% against symptomatic COVID-19 in the Phase-3 trial, according to a study by Bharat Biotech and the ICMR. The study is yet to be peer-reviewed

Criteria	Vaccine efficacy
Symptomatic COVID-19	77.8%
Severe symptomatic COVID-19	93.4%
Symptomatic in participants 18–59 years	79.4%
Symptomatic in participants ≥ 60 years	67.8%
Symptomatic COVID-19 in participants with a pre-existing medical condition	66.2%
Asymptomatic COVID-19	63.6%
Symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19	68.8%

French judge to probe Rafale deal

Suspicions of 'corruption' raised in the €7.8 bn sale

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS

A French judge has been tasked with investigating the controversial 2016 multi-billion-dollar sale of Rafale fighter jets to India on "corruption" suspicions, the national financial prosecutors' office (PNF) said on Friday.

The decision once again puts the spotlight on the role of the Anil Ambani-headed Reliance Group which is an offset partner to Dassault Aviation, manufacturer of the Rafale, in the €7.8-billion deal.

According to French in-



Cong. demands JPC probe

The Congress on Saturday renewed the call for a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the Rafale deal. Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said the deal had led to a massive loss to the

vestigative website *Media-part*, the judicial investigation was formally opened into the Inter-Governmental Agreement on June 14 following a decision by the financial crimes branch of PNF.

The deal has faced several questions in the past pertaining to allegations of corruption, favouritism and de-

exchequer, and it needed to be thoroughly investigated in national interest. He added that former party president Rahul Gandhi who had flagged corruption in the aircraft deal stood vindicated. ▶ PAGE 7

viations in procedure. *Mediapart*'s investigation has also made new revelations regarding Reliance Group's role in the deal. The report states that the first MOU between Dassault and Reliance was signed just weeks before the surprise announcement on the direct purchase of 36 jets was

(With inputs from Dinakar Peri)

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Pushkar Dhami to be next Uttarakhand CM

Two-time MLA from Khatima elected by BJP legislators

NISTULA HEBBAR NEW DELHI

Pushkar Singh Dhami, a two-term MLA from Khatima, will be the new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. He was elected by the BJP Legislature Party as its leader on Saturday, following the resignation of Tirath Singh Rawat late on Friday.

Mr. Rawat quit citing constitutional reasons, of not seeing his way clear to getting elected as a member of the Assembly in Uttarakhand within the stipulated six-month period. He continues to be a Lok Sabha member from the State.

'Constitutional crisis'
"Given the constitutional crisis, I felt it was right for me to resign. Bypolls could not be held because of COVID-19," Mr. Rawat said in a brief statement on Friday.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and BJP general secretary D. Purandareswaran were the central observers who supervised the election of the new leader at a meeting at the Bijapur guest house in Dehradun on Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Dhami, 45, has been

associated with the BJP since he entered student politics and has twice been head of Uttarakhand's Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP. Working his way up the party hierarchy in the State, he has been State general secretary and party vice-president.

A practising advocate, Mr. Dhami also holds a post-graduate degree in management and public administration from Lucknow University. He has been closely associated with former Chief Minister and current Maha-

rashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

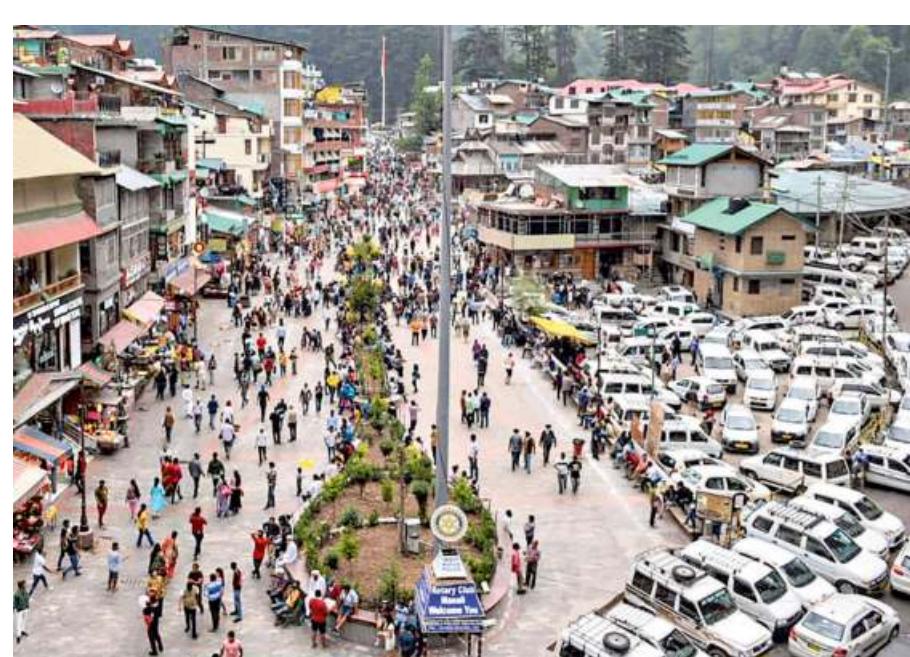
While he hasn't held any administrative or ministerial position in the State government, the BJP is hoping that a youthful Chief Minister with a clean slate could help it wipe out some of the mistakes made by it in the State, which will swear-in a third Chief Minister in seven months.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

MAMATA FACES TIGHT DEADLINE ▶ PAGE 6

BJP HAS GIVEN A LONG LIST OF EX-CMS: CONGRESS ▶ PAGE 6

Chock-a-block



After the mayhem: Tourists visiting Mall Road in Manali on Saturday after the Himachal Pradesh government relaxed COVID-19 restrictions in the State. ▶ PTI

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Rajasthan 'excess deaths' 5 times official toll

Undercount factor in the State is lower than M.P.'s 23.8

SRINIVASAN RAMANI CHENNAI

The number of "excess deaths" registered by the Civil Registration System (CRS) in Rajasthan ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit (from April 2020 to May 2021) was 45,088, which is 5.4 times the official reported figure of 8,385 deaths for the same period.

This high number was largely due to the deaths registered in April 2021 (26,251) and May 2021 (49,046).

In this period, which coincided with the second COVID-19 wave, the excess deaths were around 39,438, compared with the registered COVID-19 tally of 5,567, leading to an undercount factor of 7.1. The overall COVID-19 tally in Rajasthan so

Moderate undercount

Rajasthan's estimated undercount factor for COVID-19 deaths was comparable to that of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and lower than M.P. and A.P.

State	Excess deaths ¹	COVID-19 deaths	Multiple ¹
Rajasthan	45,088	8,385	5.4
Tamil Nadu ²	1,54,965	35,087	4.4
Tamil Nadu ³	1,54,965	24,232	6.4
Karnataka	1,25,732	29,090	4.3
Kerala*	4,178	9,954	0.4
A.P.#	1,95,422	10,930	17.9
M.P.#	1,92,004	8,068	23.8

¹ Baseline mortality: Average of 2018 and 2019 figures

² Reconciled COVID-19 death toll released by State

³ Reconciled COVID-19 death toll mentioned by State CRS

* Based on State's official COVID-19 toll

Data accessed by Scroll

Estimates using other methods are available in the online article

far, as of July 2, is 8,970.

Excess deaths in Rajasthan were calculated based on the month-wise number of deaths registered by *The Hindu*. It was ensured that the data analysed did not include duplicate re-

cords (-1,100 names out of 7.92 lakh deaths from 2018 to 2021). Not all "excess deaths" would be related to COVID-19 but a bulk of them are, during the pandemic.

The undercount factor (5.4) and excess deaths for Rajasthan (45,088) were lower than those for Madhya Pradesh (23.8 and 1,92,044) in the same period and for which complete data have been made available so far. Excess deaths have also been estimated for Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat but these figures are only partial, either for some districts (U.P.) or for a limited period (Bihar and Gujarat).

According to the CRS report for 2019, Rajasthan registered an estimated 98.6% of all deaths in the State, and thanks to the Pehchan system, they are registered online as well.

RELATED REPORT ON ▶ PAGE 8

After 26 years, Kerala bus driver gets relief from SC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL NEW DELHI

A bus driver who fought a six-month prison term for rash driving for 26 years was let off by the Supreme Court with a ₹2,000 fine.

A Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, agreed with Surendran, a native of Kozhikode district of Kerala, that sending him to jail now would only leave his wife and four children in penury.

"Looking to the facts and circumstances of the present case specially the fact that 26 years have elapsed from the incident, we are inclined to substitute the sentence of six months imprisonment," Justice Bhushan held in a recent judgment. The court directed Surendran, represented by advocate P.A. Noor Muhammed, to pay the fine within a month.

Trouble began for Surendran when his bus hit a car, injuring its driver, in February 1995. Four years later, in 1999, the local magistrate sentenced him to six months of imprisonment and a fine of ₹500. The sessions court dismissed Surendran's appeal in 2003. The High Court too did not find any reason to intervene with the verdict in 2015. He appealed to the top court, which issued notice in August 2016.

"Irreparable injury" After a gap of nearly five years and with no one appearing on the other side for the prosecution, the court acknowledged Surendran's case that sending the sole breadwinner to jail after more than two decades of the incident would cause "irreparable injury". It said, "It would be too harsh."

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<img alt="A large tree graphic with the text 'VISION IAS INSPIRING INNOVATION' above it and '7 IN TOP 10 SELECTIONS IN CSE 2019' to its right. Below the tree are nine small circular portraits of successful candidates labeled 1 through 9. To the right of the tree, there is text about



1 A weekly market in north Delhi's Jahangirpuri
2 Wholesale spice market in Khari Baoli
3 Sadar Bazar
4 Azadpur Mandi
5 Ghazipur flower market
6 Laxmi Nagar Market in east Delhi
7 Sarojini Nagar Market in south Delhi



Shopping for trouble

Experts and health officials have raised red flags over massive crowds at market places across the Capital and people not adhering to COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

PHOTOS BY SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, SANDEEP SAXENA



OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

ॐ शांति

RASAM PAGRI

न जायते प्रियते वा कदाचित् नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भ्यः।
अजो नित्या: शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥



With profound grief we inform of the sad demise of our beloved Mother

Smt Sarla Devi Agarwal

on 28 June 2021. Hawan will be held at 11 AM & Rasam Pagri at 3 PM on Wednesday, 07 July 21 at our residence

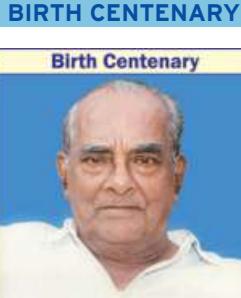
SA-24, Shastri Nagar, Ghaziabad, U.P.- 201001

In Grief

Sh Anil Gupta (Son) Smt Geeta Gupta 971894475
Smt Poonam Chandra (Daughter) Sh Sudhir Gupta (Son) Smt Sushma Gupta 9313709706
Col Mukul Gupta (Grandson) Smt Rashmi Gupta 6900180007
Arth Gupta (Great Grandson)

Sh Umesh Chandra 9761883370

BIRTH CENTENARY



Dr. K V Subramanian
DOB: 04.07.1921 - DOD: 25.04.2001
Fondly remembered
Daughters: Prema Babu & Uma Sankar
Son-in-Law: Babu
Sons: Eswaran & Maheswaran
Daughter-in-Law: Babu
Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren

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1.62L challans issued for COVID violations

R-Day case: court extends + interim relief for Lakha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Saying it would "not intervene in things where fundamental rights are involved", a Delhi court on Saturday extended the interim protection given to alleged gangster-turned-activist Sidhana till July 20.

The court also said it does not want a 'Jail Bharo Andolan' to start.

Sidhana, who was earlier granted protection till July 3, has been directed to join the investigation.

"We do not want Jail Bharo Andolan to start. These are political issues. If they (protesters) wanted to highlight the issue, are they wrong?", the judge said while granting him relief.

Additional Sessions Judge Kamini Lau directed Delhi Police to not arrest

violation of social distancing norms, 1,552 for holding large public gatherings or congregations, 72 for spitting and 156 for consumption of liquor, paan, gutkha, tobacco etc., the data cited.

With a dip in COVID-19 cases, the government had announced relaxations last month. All standalone and neighbourhood shops were allowed to function, including liquor vends.

Of them, 1.37 lakh challans were issued for not wearing a mask, 22,874 for

the

Delhi police issued over 1.62 lakh challans in the national capital from April 19 to July 2 for various COVID-19 related violations, as per official data shared by Additional Delhi Police Public Relations Officer (PRO) Anil Mittal.

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Timings		
DELHI		
SUNDAY, JUL. 04		
RISE 05:29 SET 19:24		
RISE 01:23 SET 14:32		
MONDAY, JUL. 05		
RISE 05:29 SET 19:23		
RISE 01:53 SET 15:26		
TUESDAY, JUL. 06		
RISE 05:30 SET 19:23		
RISE 02:27 SET 16:20		

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	39	24
Safdarjung	39	24
Palam	38	25

Delhi Palam Today
40°C Day remain hot with partly cloudy sky and light winds. Chances of thunderclouds development at some places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
41°C Warm morning and uneasy hot day with warm dry winds and few clouds.

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Zero COVID-19 cases in Delhi unlikely: experts

'Disease will become endemic in future'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Cases of COVID-19 might be declining steadily but as the virus is mutating, attaining that magical zero figure in Delhi is unlikely, experts said, and predicted that the disease will be reduced to an endemic in the future.

The Centre, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Cabinet colleague Satyendar Jain had said last year that one will have to learn to live with COVID-19 and "make its prevention norms a part of our lives".

Medical director of LNJP Hospital Suresh Kumar said there will always be a few cases of the virus. "Zero is an unlikely figure. The virus is mutating and it is difficult to predict its future behaviour," he said.

"Coming down to zero won't be achievable. In hospitals for getting surgeries, one has to get tested for Hepatitis and HIV. Eventually, you will be tested for COVID-19 too," said Sanjeev K. Singh, resident medical di-



A health worker collects a swab sample for RT-PCR test on Saturday.
■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

rector of Amrita Hospitals in Faridabad.

"As COVID-19 gradually becomes an endemic, likely in 12-24 months, it will probably stop being a statistic that is being watched on a daily basis," said Gauri Agarwal, IVF expert and founder of Seeds of Innocence.

Amid concerns over the possibility of a third wave and emergence of the Delta Plus variant, experts assuaged fears of that possible wave being more lethal since a majority of the population has been infected.

Rickshaws at Chandni Chowk to have 'user-friendly' design

Authorities told to shift taxi stand to ensure curbs on motorised vehicles in the area

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

The humble, but ubiquitous, cycle rickshaw is getting a makeover in lieu of its continuing association with the newly pedestrianised Chandni Chowk, which is now out of bounds for motorised vehicles for the most part of the day.

As many as 107 cycle rickshaws, which will be allowed to ply on the redeveloped stretch soon, are being refurbished in accordance with a "better" and more "user-friendly design" in addition to being RFID-enabled.

The rickshaws, which are being redesigned to add more comfort for commuters by the North civic body, will begin plying soon on the restricted area in Chandni Chowk," a source said.

"These will also be equipped with RFID tags for effective regulation and their numbers can be increased later in a phased manner. The North body has been di-



A total of 107 cycle rickshaws are being refurbished to ply on pedestrianised Chandni Chowk. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

rected to finalise the design by July 15," the source added.

At a meeting to assess the situation of the newly inaugurated 1.3 km-long redeveloped stretch on June 25, the authorities were directed to shift the current Phat-Phat Sewa and Maxi Cab stand from H.C. Sen Marg to Sunehri Masjid Parking by July 15.

This, said a government official, was to minimise the possibility of anyone fouling restrictions on motorised vehicles on the stretch, which was notified on June 14. The stretch between Red Fort and Fatehpuri Masjid will be given badges so that unauthorised rickshaws can-

not enter the area.

Joint Encroachment Prevention Teams comprising civic body officials and policemen will also be deployed in the area to counter encroachment by hawkers and vendors on the project, which was completed at a cost of ₹99 crore.

Work left

Meanwhile, the authorities have been directed to deliver on deadlines related to the project's additional hardware components, including installation of CCTVs and construction of toilets.

For instance, tasks such as 30% of the horticulture work, the installation of over a dozen boom barriers, the installation of over 200 streetlights, 131 CCTVs and the construction of two of the four toilers proposed in the area were supposed to have been completed by June 30 but still remain incomplete have been given a deadline of July 31.

Delhi to get first scramble crossing at Red Fort

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Red Fort-Chandni Chowk intersection, which has been under redevelopment, is likely to open from July 15 and it will have a scramble crossing at which traffic lights completely stop vehicles to allow pedestrians to cross in any direction, including diagonally, officials said.

This is Delhi's first scramble or 'X' crossing and it makes it safer for pedestrians and cyclists, they said. Besides this, the redeveloped intersection will also have raised crossovers for cyclists, traffic refuge islands and table top crossings for pedestrians.

Tabletop crossings as pavements work as speed breakers for vehicles while pedestrians can cross the road using them while refuge island is a small pavement where pedestrians can stop before crossing the road.

"Nearly 95% of construction work has been done. Cobble stones are being fixed at present. Once finishing touches are given, we are planning to open the intersection for pedestrians, cyclists and traffic from July 15," a senior Public Works Department (PWD) official, who is engaged in the revamp work, said.

The scramble crossings are widely used in countries like Japan, Canada, the U.S., Australia and U.K.

IN BRIEF



Services restricted on Yellow Line

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Saturday said services on the Yellow Line – between Qutub Minar and Guru Dronacharya metro stations – will remain restricted from 10.30 p.m. on Saturday to 6.30 a.m. on Sunday for track maintenance work.

CM conducts meeting with power dept. officials

NEW DELHI
Amid an increasing power demand in the Capital, CM Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday convened a review meeting with officials of the electricity department and power distribution companies to discuss the current status of the supply in the city. He told officials to identify areas in need of transformers for improved power supply and make high-tension wires underground for safety.

'Probe irregularities in bus procurement'

NEW DELHI
The Delhi BJP on Saturday wrote to L-G Anil Baijal, demanding permission for the ACB to investigate "grave financial irregularities" in the procurement process of 1,000 low-floor DTC buses by the Chairman and others in the DTC Board. BJP Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta wrote that the three-member committee formed to look into the case was "an administrative exercise".

Man held, 3 apprehended for killing minor boy

NEW DELHI
A 18-year-old youth was arrested and three juveniles apprehended for allegedly stabbing a minor to death in outer Delhi's Mangolpuri, the police said on Friday. Accused Sachin from Mangolpuri, who works at a shoe factory, told the police that the victim had filthy language against his cousin sister. So teach him a lesson, he committed the crime, the police added.

Four rescued, fireman injured in Rohini blaze

NEW DELHI
Four person were rescued after a fire broke out at a house in Rohini's Budh Vihar on Saturday morning, said DFS officials. The fire was brought under control but during the operations, a fireman got injured, they said. "A call about fire was received at 6.04 a.m. and four fire tenders rushed to the site. Four persons were rescued and shifted to hospital," said DFS Director Atul Garg. The cause of fire is not known yet.

Making the best of it



Women caught in a sudden spell of rain in Delhi on Saturday. The city received 19 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Delhi Police chief directs officers to focus on visibility and accessibility

Srivastava asks DCPs to not let guard down in view of third wave

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Commissioner Balaji Srivastava held on Saturday his first crime review meeting after assuming charge. At the meeting, he took stock of the situation on the ground and directed the force to focus on anti-terror measures ahead of Independence Day, officials said.

Emphasising the importance of visibility and accessibility in Capital's policing, he directed all district DCPs to intensify checking of hotels and guest houses, carry out verification of tenants and

domestic help, check second-hand car-dealers and cyber cafes as part of the anti-terror measures, they said. He asked the senior officers to reactivate Delhi Police's 'eyes and ears' scheme to gather information and keep vigil over suspicious and nefarious activities, officials said.

Delhi Police Public Relations Officer Chinmoy Biswas said: "In view of a possible third wave, the CP has asked the DCPs not to let their guard down and ensure that steps are taken to implement COVID-appropriate beha-

viour in public places. Against the backdrop of reports of a surging crowd in some prominent markets, he directed the DCPs to seek proactive involvement of the stakeholders – Market and Resident Welfare Associations to implement DDMA guidelines."

"Be visible and accessible. Let notoriety get a taste of the law. The Rule of Law has to be enforced in letter and spirit", Mr. Srivastava told the DCPs. He appreciated the launch of the public grievance redressal interface "Jan Sunwai".

Addressing farmers in Noida, Mr. Bidhuri said the PM Kisan Yojana was launched in 2019 under which 11 crore farmer families were getting ₹6,000/year financial assistance from the Centre.

However, this scheme had not kicked off in Delhi because the government had not prepared and sent the list of beneficiary farmers to the Centre.

Similarly, Mr. Bidhuri said, schemes such as the Kisan Sinchay Yojna, Mudra Card, E-NAM and Jeevika Kheti were also being denied to the farmers of Delhi.

'Not given subsidies'
"Delhi is one of the only States where farmers are not getting subsidies for fertilisers, seeds, and tractors. States like Haryana are providing free power to farmers but in Delhi not only are high power charges being taken from farmers but they are being forced to pay fixed charges," Mr. Bidhuri alleged.

Minor rescued from flour mill

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) on Saturday said a 12-year-old boy, engaged at a flour mill at the north-east Delhi, has been rescued.

The minor informed the Commission that he was forced to work without pay and under difficult circumstances, said officials. The women's panel said a team reached the flour mill in Dayalpur after receiving a complaint pertaining to child labour from an anonymous source. DCW Chairperson Swati Malaviya said, "When we reached the mill we found that the child was pressurised to lie..."

NGO to begin jab drive at Tikri border protest site

It is not just for farmers but also locals'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A vaccination drive for protesting farmers at the Tikri border is likely to begin soon. An NGO, '5 Rivers Hearts Association', that has been involved with the farmers' agitation since November last year, is planning to organise the drive at the Tikri border. "The vaccination drive will not just be for the farmers

but for locals and whoever wants it. We are trying to save lives so it will be open for all," said a member of the NGO.

"It is not an isolated event. We have plans to continue the vaccination drive over the next six months at least. We are hopeful that we will be able to begin the drive soon," he said.

The NGO, had in April this year, written to the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi and expressed interest in inoculating the agitating farmers and sought help from the government.

Delhi govt. sabotaging Centre's schemes: LoP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government was sabotaging the benefits of Centrally-sponsored schemes like Ayushman Bharat, One Nation One Card meant for the citizens of Delhi in addition to benefits for farmers, alleged Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Saturday.

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- JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

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Amarinder

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

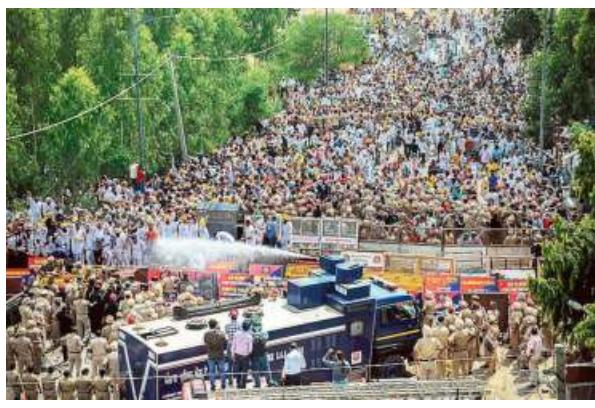
Amid the ongoing power crisis in Punjab, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday said the power purchase agreements signed by the previous SAD-BJP government were already under review and his government would soon announce its legal strategy to counter the PPAs.

The Chief Minister, who chaired a meeting to review the power situation, said a carefully charted legal course of action was being formulated to save the State from further financial losses. Of the 139 PPAs signed during by the SAD-BJP government, 17 were enough to cater to the State's full power demand, he said. He added the remaining were inexplicably signed.

Water cannons used at AAP rally

The protesters were planning to gherao Punjab CM's residence over power crisis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH



Police using water cannons on AAP protesters on the outskirts of Chandigarh on Saturday. ■ AFP

'Resolve crisis'

The protesters, led by State AAP chief Bhagwant Mann, were staging the protest against the long and unscheduled power cuts and wanted to meet the Chief Minister and submit a memorandum, demanding resolution of the crisis.

As they marched towards the CM's residence, they were stopped at the barricades by the police using

water cannons. The police said the protesters attempted to jump over the barricades.

Mr. Mann, addressing a gathering, said AAP volunteers have come to wake up the Congress government from its slumber. "The people

of Punjab are buying the most expensive electricity in the country at ₹10 per unit, but yet they are not getting it. Instead, they have to leave their homes in the heat and paddy sowing in the fields and hold sit-ins," he said.

Mr. Mann said the power purchase agreements signed by the previous SAD-BJP government with private thermal plants and their non-cancellation by the Congress government is the key reason behind the power crisis.

Cong., SAD blamed

AAP senior leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Harpal Singh Cheema said due to the faulty PPAs, the State exchequer was being looted by the private power companies and the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal are both to be blamed for this. Mr. Cheema said the Congress has failed to keep its election promises of 2017. "Even today, the people of Punjab are suffering due to expensive sand, gravel, electricity, petrol and diesel," he said.

6 injured in custody in Assam in two months

Many have gunshot wounds in the leg

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

At least six alleged criminals received gunshot wounds since May 10 while "trying to flee" after snatching the pistol of a police officer, the district's Superintendent of Police Thube Preetek Vijaykumar said.

This period also saw 11 others, including nine claimed to be extremists, killed in encounters with the armed forces across the State.

The injured – most were shot in the leg – were two cattle smugglers, a policeman allegedly involved in case of abduction, a 62-year-old arrested for rape and murder of a minor girl, a dacoit and a drug peddler. A seventh wanted in the rape and murder of two sisters in western Assam's Kokrajhar district was shot in the leg when he tried to "resist arrest and flee".

On Friday night, the police shot and injured an alleged cattle smuggler in Kokrajhar district. "He tried to flee after snatching the pistol of a police officer," the district's Superintendent of Police Thube Preetek Vijaykumar said.

Drive against crime

The encounters and custodial injuries are believed to be the outcome of a drive against organised crime – drug trafficking, smuggling of cattle and forest resources – and extremism after the Himanta Biswa Sarma took charge as the Chief Minister on May 10.

Barring the incident on Friday night, Assam's Special Director General of Police, G.P. Singh, outlined the failed attempts of the five accused to flee.

Police find 4th body in Tripura lynching case

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

The death toll in the mob lynching incident in Khawai district on June 20 morning has risen to four with the recovery of the body of a missing youth. The police said the body of Salim Hussain was found buried in a wooded area in North Mahanaripur on Saturday afternoon.

"We have exhumed the body and sent it to for post-mortem," a Khawai district police officer said.

The body was found on basis of the confession of the accused persons, he said. The police has arrested three men as the investigation progressed. Sources said the police swung into action after the State government asked the police to act tough against the accused.

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RC MDS 31/165 Asst Professor College Chennai PG Dr/ Civil service Caste No Bar Contact: 9444157888

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GIRL, 33 Yrs, Fair, Grammani, Thiruvathirai, B.com, MBA working. Seeks suitable groom. Contact: 7598775261

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MUDALIAR 26, M.Tech, 165cm, Good looking, wellsettled family seeks suitable Groom. Ct: 78778514465/ 720966346

HINDU NADAR Widow, Divorced. Widow Grooms Wanted for Remarriage. Ct Pandian & ThangaNadar Padi 9444017196

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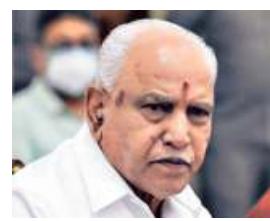
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Hindu Iyer/yengar for USA, Brilliant, Multi-talented good looking, very fair Iyer girl just turned 32Yrs/5' 2"-6' 2" Balamal, Bharadham, Thiruvonam MS PhD (MIT) - Associate Director in a Global Therapeutics Major employed at Boston USA (Green Card Biometrics done). Parents at Chennai well settled. Suitable alliance from well-educated & professionally well placed like MS/PhD/MD/ Management preferably from east coast of USA required. Student v/s holders and Matrimony agencies kindly excuse. Horoscope matching is not a prerequisite. If suitable kindly contact email: perinavacharanam.sankar@gmail.com & Ct: +91 9838180515

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IN BRIEF



Court orders probe against Karnataka CM

BENGALURU

In a serious setback to Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, a special court on Saturday ordered further investigation against him while terming as "defective" the closure report filed by the Lokayukta police giving him a clean chit in the case of alleged corruption in illegal denotification of land in 2006 when he was serving as the Deputy Chief Minister.

Extremists' role suspected in illegal phone exchanges

KOZHIKODE

The probe into the illegally operated parallel telephone exchanges recently unearthed in eight locations in Kozhikode city is in its early stages, but what the investigators are seriously looking into is the suspected involvement of extremist elements in their operation. The exchanges receive international Internet calls and divert them at a cheaper rate to local receivers using a dedicated broadband connection and call router devices.

Victory Flame arrives in Kerala capital

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The arrival of the 'Swarnim Vijay Marshal' (Victory Flame) in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday was an occasion to remember a hero from this city whose brave actions in the eastern sector during the 1971 Indo-Pak war won him the Vir Chakra. During the war, Ramam Pillai Gopakumar, a young Army captain at the time, was posted as GSO-3 (Intelligence) at the Eastern Command. He organised and led the Mukti Bahini operatives in a series of daring missions against the enemy.

Smuggling case opens a can of worms

Probe indicates links between gangsters, local leaders of CPI(M)

MOHAMED NAZEER
KOZHIKODE

Customs officials bringing Arjun Ayanki to Kannur on Saturday in connection with the gold smuggling case. ■ S.K. MOHAN

An early morning accident on the National Highway at Ramanattukara in Kozhikode on June 21 blew the lid off the 'operations' of gangsters involved in gold smuggling and their counterparts committing robbery to snatch the contraband gold smuggled by carriers through airports in the region, including the Calicut international airport.

But that is not the worst of it. The ongoing investigations following the accident that claimed lives of five people are likely to unravel what can be suspected as deep-set ties among gangsters, people convicted in cases of political murders and local political functionaries. What would otherwise have been a

routine probe into a road accident and gold smuggling took an interesting turn when it was found that the accident-hit vehicle had been involved in a chase between rival gangs.

The prime suspect in the case of foiled gold smuggling, Arjun Ayanki, former DYFI worker in Kannur, was brought to his native village of Azhikode in Kannur on Friday by the Customs offi-

cials as part of the probe and to the house of Muhammad Shafi, a convict in the murder of Revolutionary Marxist Party of India leader T.P. Chandrashekharan, in nearby Mahe. The investigators suspect that Ayanki had close links with Shafi and 'Kodi' Suni, another convict in the murder case.

The arrest of Ayanki has put the Kannur district CPI (M) on the backfoot.

Eight Bangladeshi nationals held in A.P.

They infiltrated with fake documents'

RAJULAPUDI SRINIVAS
VIJAYAWADA

"We seized some documents and their mobile phones from them," he told *The Hindu*.

The Vijayawada police took Hyder Ali Khan, Md. Hassan Khan, Indadal Khan and Saifulla Shaik, natives of Bagerhat district, Bangladesh, into custody from the Howrah-Vasco da Gama Express at Vijayawada railway station on Saturday. They were travelling on two trains.

"We are trying to find out the purpose of their visit, how they entered the country and their contacts. We are also verifying their ID cards and other documents," said the police.

K.V. Mohan Rao, IGP, said the police teams checked the Howrah-Chennai Express and took Kayum Khan, Md. Sakhyat Hussain, Shaik Saddam and Mohammad Al-Ameen, into custody at the Rajahmundry station.

No permission for Cong. MPs to visit islands

STAFF REPORTER
KOCHI

The Lakshadweep administration denied permission to Hibi Eden and T.N. Prathapan, Congress MPs, and C.R. Rakesh Sharma to travel to the island.

An order signed by S. Asker Ali, District Collector holding additional charge of Additional District Magistrate, said he was satisfied that "their visit to the islands will certainly disturb the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the islands and it will be against the interest of the general public and security of the Union Territory."

The complaint, which seeks a probe into the possibility of a conspiracy behind the incident, was filed by Joint Chief Electoral Officer Krishnadasan P. two days ago. The Crime Branch re-

Ayanki's wife to be quizzed

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

Customs officials investigating the Karipur gold smuggling case have asked the wife of Arjun Ayanki, an accused in the case, to appear in the Kochi office on Monday for questioning.

The investigation team, which came with Ayanki to Kannur for evidence

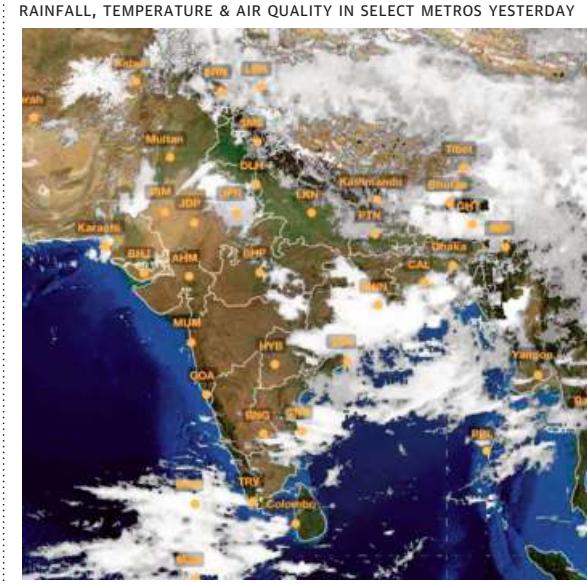
collection, said it obtained crucial evidence from his home linking him to the case. The team reportedly found documents and digital evidence from the house. Meanwhile, Ayanki corrected his earlier statement that his phone was lost. During evidence collection, he said he threw it in the nearby Valapattanam river.

The party leadership was hard-pressed to explain that party functionaries had no links with people such as Ayanki and his associate Akash Thillankey, former CPI(M) worker and accused in the murder of Youth Congress worker S.P. Shuhai in Kannur.

Hotbed of retaliatory political violence, Kannur is no stranger to loyal gangs of rival political parties hired for

killing and maiming their political rivals. The details of the investigation into the gold smuggling rackets in the aftermath of the accident at Ramanattukara have raised the spectre of putative metamorphosis of those gangs into independent gangster groups taking to illegal and anti-social activities for making a fast buck using their political loyalties as protective shields.

WEATHER WATCH



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

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Assam, Sikkim, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Rayalseema, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Thunderstorms with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	5...	33.0...	25.6	Kozhikode	...	31.5...	25.4
Ahmedabad	...	37.5...	27.2	Kurnool	...	35.3...	26.3
Aizawl	0.3...	...	18.3	Lucknow	...	35.4...	27.3
Aligarh	...	36.6...	27.5	Madurai	0.5...	38.2...	26.1
Bengaluru	...	31.0...	21.7	Mangaluru	...	28.4...	23.5
Bhopal	...	35.7...	25.0	Mumbai	...	33.3...	27.0
Bhubaneswar	...	30.6...	24.6	Mysuru	...	30.0...	21.4
Chandigarh	12...	36.4...	22.4	New Delhi	19...	31.9...	24.1
Chennai	13...	34.7...	23.4	Port Blair	55...	32.7...	21.6
Coimbatore	...	33.6...	23.2	Puducherry	29.7...	33.2...	21.6
Dehradun	...	34.3...	22.7	Pune	0.4...	32.2...	21.8
Gangtok	16...	19.0...	17.4	Raipur	...	32.1...	25.2
Goa	17...	32.0...	24.8	Ranchi	15...	32.2...	23.0
Guwahati	3...	33.0...	25.4	Shillong	2...	20.5...	18.0
Hubballi	...	28.0...	22.0	Shimla	26.6...	28.0...	15.5
Hyderabad	0.2...	33.0...	24.4	Imphal	0.2...	30.2...	21.5
Imphal	0.2...	30.2...	21.5	Jaipur	...	39.0...	29.6
Kochi	0.2...	31.8...	24.6	Kohima	2...	26.2...	18.6
Kohima	2...	26.2...	18.6	Tiruchi	...	37.3...	26.4
Kolkata	99...	34.6...	23.8	Vijayawada	3...	35.4...	25.2
				Visakhapatnam	29...	31.4...	25.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE	
Ahmedabad	.4	24	104	.116	.119	■■■	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Fatehabad, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 245 mg/m ³ due to high level of pollution.
Bengaluru	11	37	93	.67	.67	■■■	
Chennai	.9	.5	39	.39	.69	■■■	
Delhi	13	76	97	.152	.171	■■■	
Hyderabad	.2	.58	15	.30	.62	■■■	
Kolkata	.8	28	25	.65	.73	■■■	
Lucknow	10	41	59	.102	.124	■■■	
Mumbai	10	28	11	.51	.117	■■■	
Pune	.6	.54	106	.34	.86	■■■	
Visakhapatnam	12	48	29	.42	.77	■■■	

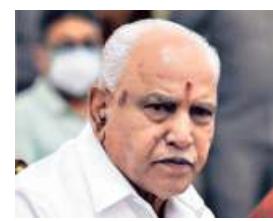
Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

IN BRIEF



Ajit Pawar, Maharashtra CM

MUMBAI

Former Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said that the agency's actions were based on the directions of the Bombay High Court.

"The Bombay High Court directed to file an FIR against all the accused in the Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank scam in August 2019. Based on that FIR, the ED filed an ECIR [Enforcement Case Information Report]. How can there be any political involvement? It

was wrong to say that the BJP is behind all this," said Mr. Fadnavis.

The ED attached assets worth ₹65 crore in the form of the Jarandeshwar sugar factory which belongs to a relative of Mr. Pawar. Speaking to reporters on Friday, Mr. Pawar said that many such inquiries have been conducted in the past and

would be wrong to say that the BJP is behind all this," said Mr. Fadnavis.

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FROM PAGE ONE

'Covaxin demonstrated 77.8% efficacy'

"The true test of a vaccine is whether it protects from hospitalisation and death. The reported 93.5% is very good, and protection in those over 60 as well as against the Delta variant, too, are encouraging," Dr. Kalantri stated. He, however, cautioned that it would be unwise to speculate if Covishield or Covaxin was superior to the other as there were variations in the conduct of the trial.

Priya Abraham, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Virology, said in a statement, "The overall efficacy is wonderful news. ICMR-NIV and BBIL have had very

fruitful interactions during this exhilarating journey. Serum [from blood samples] have also been evaluated against viral variants detected in India i.e., the Alpha, Beta, Zeta, Kappa and Delta. The making of this vaccine entirely on Indian soil is a matter of great pride to every Indian."

NIV was among the partner labs involved in the manufacture of Covaxin and cultured the strain of the virus that was used to design the vaccine.

Barat Biotech began recruiting volunteers in November 2020 and completed the exercise in January.

French judge to probe Rafale deal

In April, *Mediapart* claimed that "millions of euros of hidden commissions" were given to a go-between who helped Dassault conclude the sale, of which "some... could have been given as bribes" to Indian officials.

Dassault retorted that no wrong-doing was flagged in the group's audits.

After the reports, France's Sherpa NGO, which specialised in financial crime, filed an official complaint for "corruption" and "influence peddling" among other accusations, prompting an investigating magistrate to be designated to probe the deal.

Role of Anil Ambani
"Documents seen by *Mediapart* show that Dassault and Reliance had in fact signed their first MoU – a document setting out broad outlines of an agreement – on March 26, 2015. That was 15 days before Mr. Modi's announcement of the turnaround, and the exclusion of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited [HAL], and begs the question as to whether the two companies had been informed of it in advance," the report states. The MoU which was signed at a time when Dassault was still in talks with HAL under the earlier deal, was for a possible joint venture between the two companies.

Following the deal, Dassault and Reliance created a Joint Venture (JV) in 2017. Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL) for discharging the offsets. Revealing the details of the part-

nership, the report, citing documents accessed, states that Dassault provided Reliance "with remarkably generous financial terms for the establishment of their JV."

Stating that ordinarily partners in a jointly owned subsidiary would provide equal funds for its capital. But that was not the case with DRAL. "The two partners agreed a maximum investment in the subsidiary of 169 million euros. Of that sum, Dassault, which held a 49% stake in DRAL, pledged to provide up to 159 million euros, representing 94% of the total, while Reliance would provide just the remaining €10 million."

While Reliance brought neither funds nor know-how of any significance to the joint venture, it did bring its capacity for political influence.

In an extract from one of the documents obtained by *Mediapart* detailing the agreements between Reliance and Dassault, Anil Ambani's group was handed the mission of "marketing for programs and services with the GOI" - the acronym for "government of India", the report added.

Sherpa had already asked for an investigation into the deal in 2018, but the PNF took no action. In this first complaint, the NGO had denounced the fact that Dassault chose Reliance Group as its Indian partner, a conglomerate headed by billionaire Anil Ambani, who is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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Pushkar Dhami to be next Uttarakhand CM

"Pushkar Dhami is a second term MLA from Khatima, in Udhampur Singh Nagar, and he is from Pithoragarh. He has been at the helm of several agitations by farmers against then Congress led governments and is considered to be very close to former Chief Minister Bhagat Singh Koshyari," said a senior party leader. Mr. Tomar, after the conclusion of the Legislature Party meet, said no other name had

been proposed and Mr. Dhami's election was unanimous. Former Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat was also present at the meeting.

"My party has appointed a common worker, son of an ex-serviceman, who was born in Pithoragarh to serve the State. We will work together for people's welfare. We accept the challenge of serving people with everyone's help, in a short time span," Mr. Dhami said.

Yediyurappa writes to Stalin on Mekedatu

"It would be in the interest of all concerned and to have a better relationship between the State of Karnataka and State of Tamil Nadu, if the Tamil Nadu government in the right spirit would not oppose implementation of the project," he said in the letter dated July 3.

He further said, "In order to address issues, if any, it is suggested that a bilateral meeting could also be held in the presence of officials concerned to clear all apprehensions."

On the status of the project, Mr. Yediyurappa said while Tamil Nadu has filed a

Miscellaneous Application in the Supreme Court against the project, Karnataka has sought approval from the Centre for Terms of Reference to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment. He pointed to several projects planned by Tamil Nadu, including two hydro-power projects and some in the main river below Mettur, and said, "The government of Tamil Nadu has neither entered into any kind of negotiations nor secured consent from the Government of Karnataka for the above projects in the Cauvery basin."

After Tirath, Mamata faces tight deadline

She needs to get elected to the Assembly and has repeatedly urged the EC to hold bypolls to 7 seats

SHIV SAHAI SINGH
DAMINI NATH
KOLKATA/DELHI



In a fix: Mamata Banerjee was hoping to get elected from the Bhawanipur Assembly seat, her home constituency.

The resignation of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat as he could not get elected to the State Assembly within the six-month deadline has put the spotlight on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the pending by-election to certain Assembly seats in the State.

Ms. Banerjee faces a similar situation, with her party winning the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election with a massive mandate for the third time, though she lost the Nandigram seat by a narrow margin of 1,956 votes.

Ms. Banerjee was sworn in as the Chief Minister for the third consecutive time on May 5. She was hoping to get elected from the Bhawanipur Assembly seat, her home constituency. To facilitate the by-election, Minister

Shobhadeb Chattopadhyay resigned from the seat on May 21.

By-election to seven Assembly seats – Bhawanipur; Shamsherganj and Suti in Murshidabad, where contesting candidates died before the polls could be held; Santipur and Dinhata, where the elected BJP MPs (Jagnanath Sarkar and Nisith Pra-

manik) did not take the oath as MLAs; and Khardah and Gosaba where successful candidates died after the polls were held – is due in the State.

Ms. Banerjee, on several occasions in the past few days, demanded that the Election Commission (EC) announce the dates for the bypolls to these seats. She al-

so took a swipe at the EC, saying that constitutional body might be waiting for the Prime Minister's nod. "I will appeal to the Prime Minister to allow the bypolls to be held in West Bengal," she had said.

Sources in the EC, however, said the matter of holding bypolls to the vacant Assembly seats across the country had not been decided yet and that the COVID-19 situation would be assessed first.

The Chief Minister has argued that the COVID-19 situation had improved since the eight-phase Assembly election to the two Rajya Sabha seats vacated by Dinesh Trivedi and Manas Ranjan Bhunia, and had written to the officials in this regard. Elections to the Rajya Sabha require only MLAs to cast their vote. The State government, however, was insisting that the Assembly bypolls be the priority.

on how it was not necessary for a Chief Minister to contest and win the Assembly election. Mr. Roy told presspersons that in 1972, West Bengal Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray did not contest the election and was elected within six months of the polls from a constituency in Malda.

On the other hand, the Chief Minister had ruled out holding the civic polls in the State, which have been pending for over a year.

Top officials of the West Bengal government said the EC wanted to hold elections to the two Rajya Sabha seats vacated by Dinesh Trivedi and Manas Ranjan Bhunia, and had written to the officials in this regard. Elections to the Rajya Sabha require only MLAs to cast their vote. The State government, however, was insisting that the Assembly bypolls be the priority.

Row over bill unnecessary: Sidhu's wife

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Former Punjab Cabinet Minister and Congress MLA Navjot Singh Sidhu landed himself in the thick of a controversy over an unpaid electricity bill of over ₹8 lakh for his Amritsar residence.

Mr. Sidhu found himself on the back foot on Friday when, in a series of tweets, he advised Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to resolve the ongoing "power crises" in the State. However, he invited criticism from several quarters after it came to light that he himself was one of the State's biggest individual defaulters in electricity dues.

A day after the controversy erupted, Mr. Sidhu's wife, Navjot Kaur, on Saturday came out to clear the air.

Asserting that there was nothing wrong, Ms. Kaur, in a video message, said an unnecessary controversy was being raked up, adding that an appeal surrounding the "higher" amount of the electricity bill was being taken up with the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL), and whatever the billed amount, it would surely be paid.

"The point is not about not paying the electricity bill. The issue was why the power bill was of a near similar amount in both the summer and the winter as air conditioners were not used in the winter, but the bill was on the higher side.

After the West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry elections were concluded in May, the EC decided to defer the bypolls for Parliamentary and Assembly seats due to the pandemic.

The source added that the matter of the pending Rajya Sabha bypolls would be decided first, with the EC reaching out to the States to assess the situation.

At the same time, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, mandates that a bypoll for any vacancy should be held within six months of that vacancy arising, provided the remainder of the term is not less than one year or the EC and the Centre do not certify that holding the bypoll in that time frame is difficult.

According to top EC officials, the Commission had not yet decided on holding the bypolls to various Rajya Sabha and Assembly seats that are vacant across the country. The EC had to examine the situation.

With the Uttarakhand Assembly term till March 23, 2022, the Assembly election in the State is less than a year away.

BJP has given Uttarakhand a long list of ex-CMs: Cong.

BJP has not delivered on promises made to voters, it alleges

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI



Harish Rawat

The BJP, instead of delivering on its tall promises made to the Uttarakhand voters, has given the State a long list of former Chief Ministers, the Congress said on Saturday, a day after Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat resigned, cutting short his four-month-long tenure. The State now awaits the third BJP Chief Minister since the 2017 election.

The Congress also questioned if the BJP was sacrificing Uttarakhand in an attempt to fix Trinamool Congress leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Ms. Banerjee also faces a similar predicament as Mr. Rawat's. She lost the Nandigram seat to Trinamool rebel Suvendu Adhikari in the poll and, to retain the Chief Minister's post, she has to get a berth in the Assembly within six months.

A joint press conference was addressed by the Congress's Uttarakhand leadership in Delhi, including All India Congress Committee (AICC) State in-charge Devenender Yadav, State Congress chief Pritam Singh and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Kanan Mahra. Former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Harish Rawat, who was unwell, addressed the press conference over phone.

The high drama going on in Dehradun was an insult to the people of Devbhoomi (holy land) of Uttarakhand, Mr. Harish Rawat said. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised a double-engine government to the State, with the BJP in power in Dehradun and Delhi. But instead, what we got was a long list of former Chief Ministers," he said.

The BJP had ruled the State for two terms now. There have been eight Chief Ministers in these two terms, he pointed out.

Congress general secretary (communications) Ranjeet Surjewala asked how the BJP, if it could not even pick its chief ministerial candidate, could administer the State or the nation.

Mr. Mahra said the target was not Mr. Tirath Singh Rawat. "The target here is Mamata Banerjee. Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not tolerate the way she challenged him and won the West Bengal poll," he said.

Why did Tirath Singh Rawat have to resign?

No bypoll possible at this juncture

DAMINI NATH

With the six-month window for him to get elected to the Assembly closing, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat put in his papers on July 2.

Also, the Election Commission (EC) is yet to take a call on holding bypolls to vacant Assembly seats, which would have given Mr. Rawat a way to carry on as Chief Minister.

Mr. Rawat took over as Chief Minister on March 10, after being chosen by the BJP. As per the Constitution, he had six months, till September 10, to become a member of the Uttarakhand Assembly in order to continue in the post.

According to top EC officials, the Commission had not yet decided on holding the bypolls to various Rajya Sabha and Assembly seats that are vacant across the country. The EC had to examine the situation.

mine the COVID-19 situation in the States before taking a call, a source said.

After the West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry elections were concluded in May, the EC decided to defer the bypolls for Parliamentary and Assembly seats due to the pandemic.

The source added that the matter of the pending Rajya Sabha bypolls would be decided first, with the EC reaching out to the States to assess the situation.

At the same time, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, mandates that a bypoll for any vacancy should be held within six months of that vacancy arising, provided the remainder of the term is not less than one year or the EC and the Centre do not certify that holding the bypoll in that time frame is difficult.

With the Uttarakhand Assembly term till March 23, 2022, the Assembly election in the State is less than a year away.

ED conducts searches in mass conversion case

Searches conducted at six locations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday conducted searches at six locations in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in connection with an alleged mass conversion case against Mohammad Umar Gautam and others.

The searches were carried out at Batla House in Delhi and Sant Kabir Nagar and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The premises included the office of Mr. Umar Gautam's organisation, Islamic Dawah Centre, and his house and the residence of his associate, Mufti Qazi Jahanzeb Qasmi, in Delhi.

The offices of the Al Hassan Education and Welfare Foundation and the Guidance Education and Welfare Society in Lucknow and Sant Kabir Nagar were also searched.

'Several documents'

"Several incriminating documents have been seized during the searches. They reveal large-scale conversions carried out by accused Umar Gautam and his organisations all over India. The documents also reveal the receipt of foreign funding running into several crores by these organisations for the purpose of illegal conversions," the ED said.

The second police case alleges conversion of a Hindu woman in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, before her marriage to a Muslim man.



The searches were carried out in Delhi and UP under the PMLA.



In protest: Youth Congress members staging a protest in New Delhi on Saturday against the rising prices of LPG, petrol and diesel. • KAMAL NARANG

Stan Swamy challenges validity of UAPA Section

Jesuit priest says provision creates a hurdle for an accused to be granted bail

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

Father Stan Swamy, an accused in the Bhima Koregaon caste violence, has filed a fresh criminal petition before the Bombay High Court challenging the constitutional validity of Section 43(D)(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). It created a hurdle for an accused to get bail, he said.

Fr. Swamy, 84, is currently

being treated in a private hospital.

Section 43(D)(5) says, "No person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV [punishment for terrorist activities] and VI [forfeiture of proceeds of terrorism or any property intended to be used for terrorism] of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond".

The petition stated, "The

section creates an insurmountable hurdle for any accused to be granted bail under the provisions of UAPA."

'Violating rights'
Fr. Swamy, through his lawyer, had also challenged the use of "frontal organisations" by the authorities to oppose the bail application "blatantly, arbitrarily and also violating the fundamental rights under Article 14

of Equality under the law and 21 [Right to Life] under the Constitution".

INTERVIEW | HAMID KARZAI

'The U.S. has obviously failed in its mission to fight extremism in Afghanistan'

Hopes for regional security solutions rest on Russia, China, Iran and India, and an end to extremism by Pakistan, says former President

SUHASINI HAIDAR

As the U.S. hastens the pace of its troops pull-out, and intra-Afghan talks in Doha hit an impasse, former Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, who is still seen as a power figure in the country, is due to travel for talks with the Taliban and Pakistan. In an interview, Mr. Karzai says the U.S. has failed in its mission in Afghanistan, and said hopes for regional security solutions rest on Russia, China, Iran and India, and an end to extremism by Pakistan.

You have been very critical of the U.S. as it completes its troops pull-out, you've said the West has let Afghanistan down. What could they have done differently?

■ When the United States and its allies, after the tragedy of September 11, came to Afghanistan, they were welcomed wholeheartedly by a great majority of people in the hopes that they would be liberated from the creeping invasion that occurred in our country, and that Afghanistan would then be built primarily with efforts of Afghan people but also the international community, India included. We thank all those who have helped us but the

part which we suffer now, and has not been fulfilled, was the mission, as was stated by the United States repeatedly, that their presence in Afghanistan is to fight extremism and terrorism and bring stability. That has obviously failed.

Just a few months ago, U.S. Secretary of State offered a new proposal to President Ghani for a transition government that includes Taliban officials. Do you think that proposal is workable?

■ The Taliban belong to the same country as we are. And we belong to the same country as they belong to, there-

fore we must sit together. And we must not be victims of a foreign plot in which we Afghans die, and others reap the profits. Therefore, the solution to whatever mechanism that brings peace to Afghanistan and stability to our nation, is something that Afghan people will wholeheartedly work for.

There was a report in India that suggested that you might be the consensus candidate in a transition government?

■ No, leading any such arrangement would hurt my efforts for peace, and I don't want my efforts to be tainted that way. As a citizen of Afghanistan, I'm working for a peaceful life, for the Afghan people, for myself, for my children, for my friends for the country. But in no way would I be part of any mechanism that becomes a government.

You are expected to lead a delegation for talks with



■ **Afghan people will engage in all sincerity in making sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan have good relations**

various groups, including a visit to Pakistan. Do you feel there has been any kind of a shift in Pakistan?

■ We have heard that, we have seen that in writing as well from PM Imran Khan, and from other Pakistani officials. These statements always come, but at the same time, we hope very much that they are put in action,

and that this becomes a reality. If it is true, Afghan people will engage in all sincerity in making sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan have good neighbourly, friendly, civilised relations. A civilised relationship will include the end of the use of extremism.

What do you hope to achieve with this visit? And does this mean that the Doha process for talks has reached a dead end?

■ Doha process has not been productive so far, it has not given us the results that we wanted. We wish it well. We want it to succeed. We're looking forward to meeting with the leaders of the Taliban movement. We also hope that our engagement with Pakistan, if it happens, will be one that will lead both nations to a better relationship. That is a desired outcome people and we're looking forward to substantive real engagement on this.

The Qatari Special Envoy

has said an Indian delegation had met the Taliban. What is your reaction to that?

■ I have been for a long, long time of the view that South Asia must be peaceful, and that we must all live together, exactly the way the European Union is now having a very profitable and free interaction among the states there. And for that to happen, how can we not recognise that India must be part of the processes in this region, not only the peace process, but everything else? Therefore, I welcome India's talks to the Taliban, I think it was long overdue. I hope it has occurred. I don't have first-hand information from either the government of India nor the Taliban. But I wish it is true.

Do you think India has had to acknowledge that the Taliban was, and in fact, it is a force that they have to reckon with, and that violence in Afghanistan will

impact India as well?

■ Extremism in Afghanistan, in any form is going to affect the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Therefore, any engagement by India and Afghanistan, or with Pakistan, that brings about the reduction and the eradication of extremism and terrorism is good for all of us. And I believe that is a responsibility upon us to fulfil.

How long will the Afghanistan democratic leadership continue to engage the Taliban, what are the red lines for them?

■ The red lines are a sovereign Afghanistan, exactly in the same way as it was towards the former Soviet Union, exactly in the same way as we reacted to the United States. An Afghanistan where the will of the Afghan people determines the future, an Afghanistan where people enjoy the rights that God has given to them, and where Afghan women have the

right place in society. Those are red lines that cannot be compromised. And that has been amply, and very often made clear to the Taliban.

What is the role of Russia and China right now?

■ Russia has conducted several very productive rounds of intra-Afghan dialogue in Moscow from November 2018, to last March 2021. And the last Troika-plus meeting ended with a very good declaration statement on Afghanistan. China is a good friend of Afghanistan, a neighbour of Afghanistan, we also hope very much they would step up their profile and activity in Afghanistan.

We hope that the Troika plus would include Iran and India as well. Peace in this region can only come when we join hands, all of us, and remove the competition, or the negativity surrounding this exercise.

(Watch the video of the interview on <https://bit.ly/KarzaiInterview>)

Cong. renews call for JPC probe into Rafale deal

Party says Rahul Gandhi stands vindicated over his allegation of corruption against the Narendra Modi government

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday renewed its call for an investigation by a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the deal reached by the Union government with Dassault Aviation and the French government for procuring 36 Rafale fighter aircraft. The French Public Prosecution Services (PNF) has ordered an investigation into the "Rafale Papers" on a complaint by a French anti-corruption NGO, Sherpa.

French news website Mediapart reported on Friday that the PNF had on June 14 ordered the investigation into the 2016 inter-governmental deal following a decision by its financial crimes branch.

When pointed out that the Supreme Court had already dismissed the plea for a



Controversial flight: A Rafale fighter jet during its induction at an Air Force station in Ambala. ■ FILE PHOTO

(communications) Randeep Surjewala said former party president Rahul Gandhi, who had carried out a sustained campaign against the government flagging corruption in the Rafale aircraft deal, stood vindicated.

He said that the Supreme Court had said it is not the competent authority to hear the Ra-

fale case. The Prime Minister must tell the country when his government will allow a JPC probe in the light of the French enquiry."

Mr. Surjewala said the deal had led to a massive loss to the exchequer, and it needed to be thoroughly investigated in the national interest.

He said that as per the documents that were so far in public domain, Reliance owned 51% and Dassault 49% in Dassault Reliance Aerospace Ltd. (DRAL). Whereas Dassault pledged to provide €159 million of the ₹169 million investment decided by the two, Reliance was to bring only ₹10 million.

"As per the agreement between Reliance and Dassault, Reliance was to provide production facilities and 'marketing for pro-

gramme and services with the GoI'. Obviously, this is a reference for the influence of Reliance with the Modi government," he said.

HAL excluded

The agreement between Reliance and Dassault excluded Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., since it was the DRAL which was responsible for Rafale's "aircraft Final Assembly Line".

On March 25, 2015, CEO of Dassault Aviation Eric Trapier, in the presence of the IAF chief and the Chairman of the HAL, announced in Bangalore that Dassault and HAL were in agreement in accordance with the RFP signed by them. A day later, Reliance and Dassault signed an MoU. This was just 15 days before the unilateral announcement by Mr. Modi on

April 10, 2015 to purchase 36 Rafale Aircrafts for ₹7.8 billion without transfer of technology and bypassing the global tender to purchase 126 aircraft floated by the UPA government.

It is important to remember, Mr. Surjewala said, the "Defence Procurement Procedure" contains mandatory "anti-corruption clauses".

This policy was also part of the tender issued by the Congress-led UPA government for purchase of the 126 fighters. "But later the French government/Dassault deleted the 'anti-corruption clauses'."

Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram in a series of tweets said eight new dates have been revealed in the deal. "Surely, the PM and, if not PM, then Defence Minister can tell us what events happened on these dates?"

BJP accuses Congress of lying about jet deal

'There was no govt. interference'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused the Congress and its former president Rahul Gandhi of spreading lies about the Rafale deal, soon after reports of an investigation into the deal being launched in France broke.



Samit Patra

leader had incorrectly claimed that there was pressure on Dassault to partner with Reliance. This had been denied by the French government, he stated.

"They said the offset arrangements were between two private companies and there was no government interference, whether from France or the Modi government," Mr. Patra said.

BJP claims sweep in U.P. panchayat chief elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LUCKNOW

The BJP on Saturday claimed to have swept the elections to the posts of the district panchayat chief even as the Samajwadi Party (SP) alleged that the ruling party "kidnapped" voters and used "force" to stop them from voting.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of making a mockery of the elections, saying it is strange that while most results in the polls for the district panchayat members were in favour of his

party, the BJP gained in the contest for the district panchayat chief.

Though the panchayat polls in U.P. are not held on party lines and the State Election Commission did not announce the party affiliation of the winning candidates, the BJP claimed that candidates backed by it won 67 of 75 the posts to which the elections were held on Saturday.

Claiming victory, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in a tweet that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pop-

ularity and welfare policies initiated by his government and the Centre are responsible for the party's good show. "This is the manifestation of public confidence in the good governance that has been established in Uttar Pradesh. Thanks to all people of the State and a hearty congratulations for the victory," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this was people's blessings to the party for its work for development, public service and the rule of law.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, TIRUPATI
(An Autonomous Institute under Ministry of Education, Govt. of India)

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IISER Tirupati invites online applications from Indian nationals having excellent academic record and relevant work experience for the post of Deputy Registrar on regular basis.

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The last date for submission of online applications is 25th July, 2021.

Advt. No.19/2021/IISER-T/Rect./03.07.2021

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER PHED REGION I JODHPUR

Office No. ACE/Region I JU Ar. Distt/ 2021-22/ 2017-2024
Date 22/6/21
Notice Inviting Bid
Bids for work of "Execution of works in villages Manaklao, Mathaniya, Tinwari, Banwara-Pratap Nagar and Salwa Kellan- Karwan Dhani as per JMM guide lines with one year defect liability period and hand over the system to VWHSC of village" are invited from interested bidders upto 6.00 pm (time) 13.7.2021 (date). Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal (<http://eproc.rajastrahan.gov.in>, <http://spnp.raj.nic.in>) of the state and PHED department website.

UBN No- PHE2122WSOBO3995
UBN No- PHE2122WLQBO3997
UBN No- PHE2122WLQBO3999
UBN No- PHE2122WSOBO4002
UBN No- PHE2122WSOBO4004

(Neeraj Mathur)
ADDL. CHIEF ENGINEER
PHED REGION I (JODHPUR)

DIPR/C/6252

TAMIL NADU STATE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD
Tender Notice No.T.O/1/S/DO/F/1157/2021/Dated : 02.07.2021
LUMPSUM CONTRACT

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, sealed tenders shall be received for the following work by the Executive Engineer, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, Guindy, Chennai-32, in the PWD registered contractor class I above 75.00 lakhs up to 3.00 p.m. on 20.07.2021. The tenders will be opened by the Executive Engineer on the same day 20.07.2021 at 3.30 p.m. in the presence of tenderer present at that time.

SL. No.	NAME OF WORK	Value put to Tender (Rs.in Lakhs) Approx.	EMD Rs. (Including GST)
1	Construction of 500MT storage godown (Under NADP) at Thiruthuraiappondi in Tiruvanamalai district.	534.29	598500/-
2	Construction of 2000MT and 1000MT storage godown at Poonthottam RM and 500MT storage godown at Thiruvanamalai (Under NADP) in Tiruvanamalai district.	548.34	614200/-

Note : 1. The Tender Schedules will be available during Office hours upto 19.07.2021, after remitting cost of tender schedule for Rs.1600/- including GST in the shape of D.D. in favour of TNSAMB, Chennai-32, Payable at Chennai (or) The tender Schedules can also be downloaded from the web sites www.tenders.In.gov.in, www.tngovt.gov.in & www.tnsamb.gov.in at free of cost. 2. Further particulars can be obtained from the office of the Executive Engineer, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, CIPEP Road, Guindy, Chennai-32 during office hours i.e., 10.00 am to 5.45 pm on all working days. 3. Period of completion Four Months for Each work. 5. Any revision of dates/updates will be intimated through website only.

DIPR/1947/TENDER/2021
Executive Engineer, TNSAMB, Chennai - 32

INDIAN INSTITUTES OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

(Autonomous Institutions under MoE, Government of India)

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Candidates who have passed Class XII/ equivalent examination in science stream (in 2020 or 2021) and meet the cutoff criteria specified by IISER Admission Board are eligible for admission through one or more of the following channels:

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- 3) JEE (Advanced)

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APPLICATION PROCEDURE

1. Applications for admission are to be submitted online only at www.iiseradmission.in
2. Instructions for filling the application form and other relevant details are available on the website.
3. Applicants must carefully go through the FAQ section on the website before filling up the form.
4. A non-refundable application fee of Rs. 2000 (Rs. 1000 for SC/ST & PWD candidates) is applicable.

IMPORTANT DATES

Application Portal opens on	SCB	KVPY	JEE (Advanced)

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Undercounting more in rural Rajasthan

It was the highest in Jalore and Nagaur districts

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

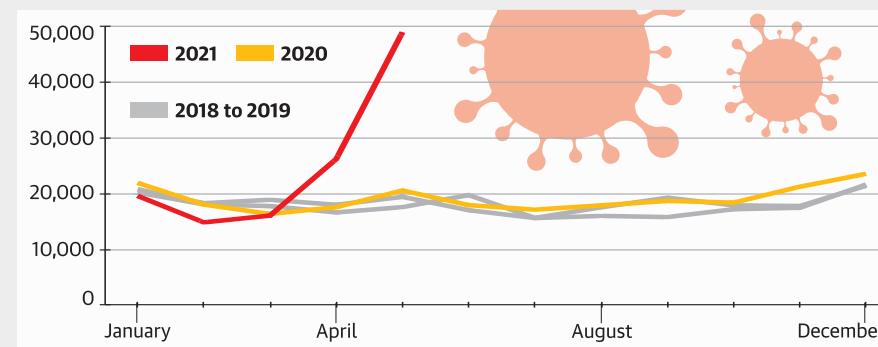
CHENNAI
Rajasthan's 45,088 "excess deaths" are 5.4 times the official COVID-19 death toll of 8,385, based on deaths registered in the State's civil registration system (CRS). According to the CRS report for 2019, Rajasthan registered an estimated 98.6% of all deaths in the State.

The report also mentions that 67.3% of all deaths are registered within 21 days of the event in the State, a number that is comparable to Karnataka (67.2%) and Kerala (65.1%) but lower than States such as Punjab (98.9%), Himachal Pradesh (92.1%), West Bengal (91.7%), Andhra Pradesh (91.4%), Tamil Nadu (90.9%), Gujarat (87.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (81.6%).

This suggests that excess deaths might go up as late registrations are tallied in Rajasthan (similar to Kerala and Karnataka) but at a higher rate compared with States such as Tamil Nadu which

Excess deaths

The chart shows the number of deaths registered each month in Rajasthan between January 2018 and May 2021



Data for Rajasthan were compiled by Pratap Vardhan, Gramener

have quicker registration.

Excess deaths calculations (and therefore, undercount factors) change if the method to calculate it changes based on the years for which averages are considered or if a projection based on linear growth of deaths year-on-year is used.

For Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, excess deaths were calculated based on registrations available only for two pre-pandemic years, 2018 and 2019.

Rajasthan's undercount figure is comparable to those

of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and lower than that of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Karnataka and Kerala's figures fall if the linear growth estimation method is used, indicating that better registration in later years have lowered "excess deaths". Tamil Nadu's undercount factors do not change much.

Among districts in Rajasthan, Udaipur (3,949), Nagaur (3,473), Jaipur (3,334) and Jodhpur (2,874) had the highest excess deaths, but the undercount factor for Jaipur and Jodhpur (1.8 and 2.7)

were lower than that of Nagaur (20.3) and Udaipur (6). Jalore (2,420 excess deaths) had the highest undercount factor (34.1). All numbers correspond to the April 2020 to May 2021 period.

In general, rural and semi-rural districts had a higher undercount factor than districts such as Jaipur and Jodhpur.

Rajasthan's Medical and Health Secretary Siddharth Mahajan told *The Hindu* that the State had commissioned a death audit to ascertain mortality figures and that reports were awaited.

He said that the State had sought to ramp up measures to identify patients through effective surveillance, even those with influenza-like illnesses during the pandemic to ensure that they get adequate care and to avoid deaths.

Faster registration

He also said that the Pehchan application has ensured that deaths that have occurred are registered within 15 days of the event.

A look at the gender break-up of the deaths in the State from 2018 to 2021 shows that the proportion of deaths among women went up marginally during the pandemic years compared with the previous ones.

This was unlike in Tamil Nadu (the only other State for which *The Hindu* had data available for the pandemic years), where the proportion of women among those dead was close to 40% consistently from 2015 to 2021.

(Based on data compiled and aggregated by Pratap Vardhan. Inputs from Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sunmanta Sen)

Pregnant women eligible for vaccination: Health Ministry

Guidelines and informative material given to States, UTs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Pregnant women in India are now eligible to get vaccinated against COVID-19 with the Union Health Ministry giving the approval based on recommendations of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI).



Both online enrollment and walk-in registration for vaccination are allowed.

statement from the Ministry said.

Preventing disease

"Further, pregnant women with COVID-19 infection are at an increased risk for preterm birth and other adverse pregnancy outcomes, including higher chances of neonatal morbidity."

Studies have shown that COVID infection during pregnancy may result in rapid deterioration of health of pregnant women and they are at an increased risk of severe diseases and it might affect the foetus too, a

mass index as factors for severe COVID-19 in pregnancy," the statement said.

The Ministry has accepted recommendations made by the NTAGI and the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration.

It has prepared operational guidelines for vaccination of pregnant women, counselling kit for medical officers and frontline workers, and informative material for the public to equip the States and Union Territories to carry out the vaccination of pregnant women.

A national-level consultation with representatives of State governments, non-government organisations, the development sector and professional bodies was held to build a consensus on vaccination for pregnant women, the statement added.

Pregnant women can opt for any COVID-19 vaccine available in the country any time during their pregnancy, the statement said.

We are complying with guidelines, says Twitter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Twitter has told the Delhi High Court that it is in the "final stages" of appointing an interim chief compliance officer and an interim resident grievance officer under the new Information Technology (IT) Rules.

In the meantime, grievances raised by Indian users are being looked into by a grievance officer, it said in an affidavit submitted in response to a plea by lawyer Amit Acharya, in which he alleged non-compliance of the Centre's new IT Rules by the platform.

The micro-blogging site has also said it may fall within the definition of a "significant social media intermediary" under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

The rules seek to regulate dissemination and publication of content in cyber space, including social media platforms, and were notified in February by the Union government.

Twitter said in "substantial compliance" with Rule 3(2) and Rule 4(l)(c) of the new IT Rules, it did appoint an interim resident grievance officer.

However, even before steps could be taken to completely formalise the arrangement, the interim resident grievance officer withdrew his candidature on June 21, it said and denied that it has not complied

Big step for transparency: IT Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad on Saturday lauded major social media platforms such as Google, Facebook and Instagram for publishing their first compliance report on voluntary removal of offensive posts as per the new IT rules, terming it a big step towards transparency.

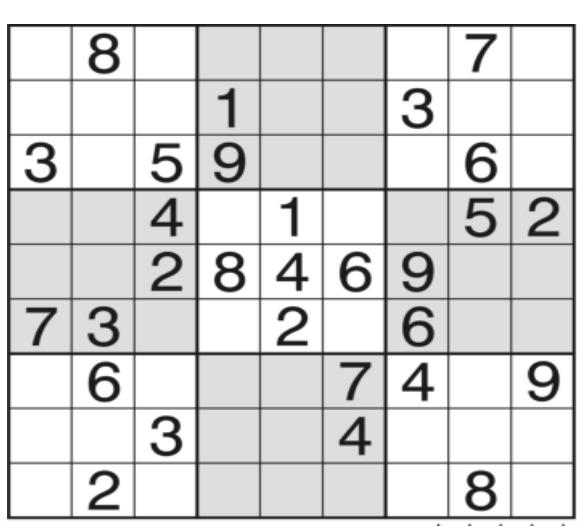
with the intermediary guidelines.

In his plea, filed through advocates Akash Vajpai and Manish Kumar, Mr. Acharya said that he came to know about the alleged non-compliance when he tried to lodge a complaint against a couple of tweets.

Twitter has argued that the plea is not maintainable as a writ petition and that Mr. Acharya moved the court "prematurely" without waiting for the redress of his grievance under the rules.

It said Mr. Acharya had no *locus standi* to raise a complaint with respect to the tweets in question and added it has informed that the complaint has now been considered and disposed of.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

5	4	2	9	8	3	7	1	6
8	7	6	4	1	5	3	9	2
3	9	1	7	2	6	4	5	8
1	5	8	3	4	2	6	7	9
2	3	7	5	6	9	1	8	4
4	6	9	8	7	1	5	2	3
9	1	5	6	3	8	2	4	7
7	8	3	2	5	4	9	6	1
6	2	4	1	9	7	8	3	5

A court acquitted him of all charges after 11 years in jail

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR
Back home after 11 years of detention on unproven charges, Bashir Ahmad Baba from Srinagar's Jogi Lankar area wants to just remember his postgraduate degrees and diploma certificates he earned in his 8x10 ft cell in a prison in Anand, Gujarat, and the letters of his now dead father.

Mr. Baba, who was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in 2010, was acquitted of all charges this week by a sessions court. Additional Ses-

sions Judge S A Nakum dismissed the case. The court said there was not enough evidence to prove the charges levelled against him. "I decided to keep myself busy in a constructive way in the jail. I chose studies to stay sane. I completed a post-

graduate course in Urdu and other diploma courses," Mr. Baba said, who is busy meeting his friends, neighbours and relatives, whom he is seeing for the first time in 11 years.

The jail authorities, he stated, helped him with stu-

dy material and met his requirements to complete the courses.

Mr. Baba, who had a computer degree, was just 33 when he decided to attend a camp management course for post-cancer cases in Ahmedabad in February 2010. "Within six days of my arrival in the city, I was picked up by a Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) team. Later, in March, I was produced before the media. I did not even know what the charges were as the chargesheet was in Gujarati," he observed.

The ATS booked him on

charges of recruiting boys into militancy and affiliation with the Hizbul-Mujahideen handlers across the border on email and phone. He was charged under the IPC and the UAPA.

Long struggle
"It was a long struggle to prove my innocence. I have to nurse the wound all my life for not being able to participate in the final rites of my father in 2017," he said. His father died of colon cancer and bail was denied to him on the occasion. His mother, who met him once in the jail in 11 years "only after selling gold ornaments for tickets and stay," said, "When Baba left home in 2010, I had bid him farewell saying 'Ghas Khodayas hawali' [Go and Allah be your protector]. And Allah has returned him to me," she added.

Student leader files plaint on 'communal' remarks

He accuses J&K BJP president of lies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

SRINAGAR

Nasir Khuehami, spokesperson of the J&K Students Association, on Saturday said he had lodged a complaint against Manjinder Singh Sirsa of the Shiromani Akali Dal and Ravinder Raina and Amaan Bali of the BJP over their "communal" remarks, made in reference to a Sikh woman marrying a Muslim man in Kashmir.

Mr. Khuehami tweeted: "After I was dodged and refused to file an FIR, I moved court on Saturday and filed a complaint against Sirsa, BJPs J&K president Raina and Bali for distorting peace, communal harmony and spreading

lies against Kashmiris. The case is listed on Monday for arguments."

Mr. Khuehami said he first attempted to lodge a complaint in Bandipora and later in Srinagar, adding, "However, I was dodged."

Mr. Khuehami has accused Mr. Sirsa of making "ugly statements that pose grave danger".

It poses danger not only to communal harmony but also, on the societal level, puts into peril the security of Kashmiris outside, as often the common man on ground zero gets brainwashed by the false and fake propaganda unleashed," Mr. Khuehami stated.

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lies against Kashmiris. The case is listed on Monday for arguments."

Beggars should also work for country: Bombay High Court

Everything cannot be provided by the state, says Bench

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Saturday said that homeless people and beggars should be working for the country as everything cannot be provided to them by the state.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by one Brijesh Aarya, seeking directions to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to provide nutritious meals, including potable water, thrice a day; along with sanitation, shelter and clean public toilets from this section of society.

The court said, "They (homeless persons) should also work for the country. Everyone is working. Everything cannot be provided by the state. You (petitioner) are just increasing the population of this section of the society," the High Court said.

While disposing of the pe-

nitition, the court said, granting all the prayers sought in the petition would be like an invitation to people not to work.

Afghanistan fighting rages amid U.S. exit

300 Taliban fighters killed in 24 hours, says govt; Washington plans complete troop pull-out by August

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KABUL

Hundreds of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce battles with government forces across several provinces of Afghanistan, officials said on Saturday, as Washington announced it would finish withdrawing its troops from the country by the end of August.

Washington's announcement came after all U.S. and NATO troops vacated their main Bagram Air Base, from where the coalition forces led operations for two decades against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies.

Over the past 24 hours, more than 300 Taliban fighters were killed in fighting with government forces, the Ministry of Defence said on Saturday.

Scores were killed in air strikes, including a pre-dawn assault on Saturday, in the southern province of Helmand, where the insurgents



Fierce clashes: Armed men pledge their support for Afghan forces against the Taliban near Kabul, on June 23. ■ REUTERS

and government troops have regularly clashed.

There have been fears that Afghan forces would struggle without the air support that the U.S. has provided.

"In recent days, the Afghan Air Force has intensified its air strikes against the Taliban hideouts and the insurgents have suffered casualties," Attaullah Afghan, a member of Helmand provin-

cial council, said.

The Taliban rejected the government's claims.

Both sides often exaggerate each other's casualties and their claims are difficult to independently verify.

But since May 1 when the U.S. military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, the two warring sides have clashed fiercely across the rugged country-

side as peace talks between them have faltered.

As a result, the Taliban have seized dozens of districts in blistering assaults targeting government forces.

The insurgents have encircled almost all major cities across the country, and on Saturday claimed seizing seven more districts in the northeastern province of Badakhshan.

Top U.S. envoy to Kabul, Ross Wilson, lashed out at the insurgents.

"The Taliban is using violent propaganda and hate speech to intimidate, threaten & attack Afghans on social media," Mr. Wilson said on Twitter on Saturday.

"Violence and terror cannot create peace."

The Pentagon pressed on with its withdrawal to end America's longest war.

On Friday, all U.S. and NATO troops left Bagram Air Base, signalling that the military involvement for coalitions forces was finally nearing its end.

tion forces was finally nearing its end.

"For many Afghans, Bagram is remembered as the hub for more than one foreign intervention, as it was the main air base for the Soviets throughout their occupation of the country as well," said Andrew Watkins, an Afghanistan expert at the International Crisis Group.

Civil war' fears

The exit of foreign troops from Bagram has further fuelled concerns the country might slide into new civil war, as in the 1990s after the Soviets left.

"I see history repeating. The Americans are doing the same what the Russians did. They are going without ending the war," said Kabul resident Dawood Hotak.

"I feel our country will slide back into another civil war as the Taliban have intensified their attacks and the Americans are exiting."

"I see history repeating. The Americans are doing the same what the Russians did. They are going without ending the war," said Kabul resident Dawood Hotak.

"I feel our country will slide back into another civil war as the Taliban have intensified their attacks and the Americans are exiting."

Ten killed in Al-Shabaab attack on Mogadishu tea shop

Al-Qaeda-linked group targets cafe frequented by soldiers

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MOGADISHU

A suicide bombing attack by the Al-Shabaab jihadist group on a crowded tea shop in Somalia's capital Mogadishu killed 10 people and injured dozens, the government said on Saturday.

The death toll from the attack, which targeted a tea shop near heavily guarded government institutions on Friday evening, was significantly higher than the four previously reported.

"On the evening of July 2, a suicide bomber wearing a vest detonated the device

near the Juba Hotel, killing at least 10 people with dozens injured," the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism said in a statement.

"The attack occurred during a busy hour where the victims were enjoying a local tea shop," it added, saying the "malicious" attack was by Al-Shabaab.

The al-Qaeda-linked group swiftly claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement saying "15 elements from the governmental intelligence, police, and militia were killed and 22 others were wounded."

Sources told AFP that the attack took place just a few hundred metres from the headquarters of the Somali Intelligence Agency at around 5:30 pm on Friday. "The cafe was crowded when the blast occurred," said witness Abdikarim Ali.

The cafe is often frequented by members of the Somali security forces, sources said. Al-Shabaab, which is fighting to overthrow the internationally-backed government in Mogadishu, regularly attacks government and civilian targets in Mogadishu.

Myanmar coup leader's birthday marked with mock funerals

Almost 890 civilians killed in crackdown: monitoring group

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BANGKOK

Protesters in coup-hit Myanmar marked the birthday of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on Saturday by burning his portrait and staging mock funerals.

The nation has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the February 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Almost 890 civilians have died in a crackdown by the State Administration Council – as the junta calls itself – and almost 6,500 have been arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

On Saturday, several anti-coup demonstrators posted pictures on social media of a traditional noodle soup dish called mohinga, which is often served at funerals in

Myanmar. "Many innocent people lost their lives because of him. So, if he died, the whole country would be happy," a Yangon resident said.

In Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, some activists burnt pictures of the junta leader and set fire to fake coffins at

mock funerals. "Because of this man, our Myanmar has many problems," a Mandalay resident told AFP.

Retirement age

General Min turns 65 on Saturday – the age he would have been subject to mandatory retirement while he headed up the armed forces, as stipulated by the country's 2008 Constitution.

Some analysts believe that was a factor in his power-grab because he had not been able to see a path to higher office with the help of the military-backed political party, which was routed in an election last year. Before the coup, General Min was considered an international pariah, condemned for presiding over the brutal 2017 crackdown on the country's Rohingya population.



Protesters marching with a banner of General Min Aung Hlaing in Yangon. ■ AFP

Vatican indicts 10 people in London real estate deal

Cardinal among those charged over embezzlement, fraud

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME

The Vatican's criminal tribunal on Saturday indicted 10 people, including a cardinal, on charges including embezzlement, abuse of office, extortion and fraud in connection with the Secretariat of State's 350 million-euro investment in a London real estate venture.

The tribunal President, Judge Giuseppe Pignatone, set July 27 as the trial date, according to a Vatican statement.

Five former Vatican officials, including Cardinal Angelo Becciu and two officials from the Secretariat of State,

were indicted, as well as Italian businessmen who handled the London investment. Also indicted on alleged embezzlement charges was an Italian intelligence expert.

Vatican prosecutors accuse the main suspects of bilking millions of euros from the Holy See in fees and other losses related to other financial dealings. The suspects have denied wrongdoing.

One of the main suspects in the case, Gianluigi Torzi, is accused of having extorted the Vatican out of €15 million to turn over ownership of the London building in late

2018. Torzi had been retained by the Vatican to help it acquire full ownership of the building from another indicted money manager who had handled the initial investment.

Vatican prosecutors allege Torzi inserted a last-minute clause into the contract giving him full voting rights in the deal.

The Vatican hierarchy, however, signed off on the contract, with both Pope Francis No. 2, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and his deputy approving it. Neither was indicted. Torzi said the accusations were the fruit of a misunderstanding.

TikTok was running again in Pakistan on Saturday after a provincial court lifted suspension of the popular social media service but ordered it to address complaints that it hosted objectionable content.

Freedom of speech advocates have long criticised creeping government censorship and control of Pakistan's internet and media.

TikTok said on Wednesday it had removed more than six million videos from its Pakistan service in the past three months alone – around 15% featuring "adult nudity and sexual activities".

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TikTok was running again in Pakistan on Saturday after a provincial court lifted suspension of the popular social media service but ordered it to address complaints that it hosted objectionable content.

Freedom of speech advocates have long criticised creeping government censorship and control of Pakistan's internet and media.

TikTok said on Wednesday it had removed more than six million videos from its Pakistan service in the past three months alone – around 15% featuring "adult nudity and sexual activities".

China goes malaria-free with multi-pronged health strategy

It hasn't reported any case in four consecutive years

ANANTH KRISHNAN

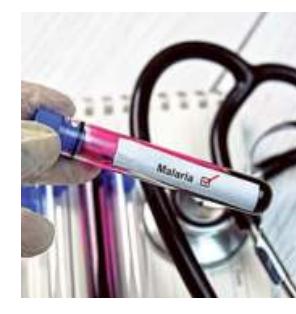
The World Health Organization (WHO) declaring that China was "malaria-free" followed a seven decade-long, multi-pronged health strategy that was able to entirely eliminate indigenous cases for four straight years, health experts said.

The "malaria-free" certification from the WHO this week followed a visit in May from an independent panel to verify China's malaria-free status, which requires four consecutive years of reporting no local cases.

The number of malaria cases worldwide in 2019 was around 229 million, according to the World Malaria Report in 2020, with 409,000 lives lost to the mosquito-borne disease. The 2020 report said the majority of cases were reported in Africa, while India and Southeast Asia recorded a significant drop. Cases in India fell from approximately 20 million to 6 million, according to the 2020 report.

The WHO said China is the first country in the Western Pacific region to be declared malaria-free in more than 30 years, following Australia in 1981, Singapore in 1982 and Brunei in 1987. Takeshi Kasai, Regional Director of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, attributed its success to "strong political commitment and strengthening national health systems" allowing it to "eliminate a disease that once was a major public health problem".

The effort began in the early 1950s, a time when China was reporting millions of cases annually, starting with a multi-pronged approach of providing anti-malarial medicines while targeting mosquito breeding



grounds and using insecticide spraying.

A national effort called 'the 523 Project' was launched in 1967 involving more than 500 scientists from 60 institutes, the WHO

spread by the seventh day, along with continued surveillance in high-risk areas.

At the same time, concern over imported cases remains, particularly from Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, which share a border with the southwestern Yunnan province. The "malaria-free" certification was welcomed by public health experts in China and was welcome news for its health authorities, amid an intense global debate over how they handled the COVID-19 pandemic and scrutiny facing its disease control agencies.

China has been widely criticised for the delays in initial reporting of an unknown pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan that was suppressed by local authorities in late December 2019 and early January 2020, including by silencing doctors, later leading to the sacking of city and provincial officials.

Subsequently, a sweeping nationwide lockdown ordered by the central authorities, along with a massive testing and tracing strategy, allowed China to control the outbreak by the summer of 2020 and avoid a second wave unlike most countries, with continuing travel restrictions as well as test-and-trace strategies successfully squashing subsequent local outbreaks linked to imported cases.

The COVID-19 response showed the duality of the Chinese system, according to Dali Yang, professor of Chinese politics at the University of Chicago, who told *The Hindu* earlier the system can see "shirking" at the local level and a tendency to cover-up problems when they emerge, combined with a top-down approach that is "capable of decisive action when things get big".

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SNAPSHOTS



Goldilocks Supernova

Supernovae explosions can happen in different ways. When the star is not light enough to avoid collapsing under its own core mass, and not heavy enough to prolong its life and die in some other way later, it forms an electron-capture supernova. This has been theorised for 40 years, but has been seen now according to a paper in *Nature Astronomy*.



Detecting life from far

Most biomolecules, such as the DNA, are either left-handed or right-handed and not a mixture. In a study published in *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, researchers show that this property of homochirality, which is a biosignature, can be detected from a distance of 2 kilometres, when travelling at a speed of 70 kph. This could help in studying exoplanets for signs of life.

Can some States serve as a bellwether for the third wave?

Both in the first wave and second wave of COVID-19, increase in daily cases was first reported in Maharashtra, then Kerala and Delhi

R. PRASAD

Both in the first and second wave, an increase in daily reported cases was first reported in Maharashtra, followed by Kerala and Delhi. These could be due to several reasons including greater integrity in testing and reporting data. Can a sharp and sustained increase in daily cases in these States serve as an early warning of an impending third wave? Dr. Tarun Bhatnagar, Senior Scientist at Chennai's National Institute of Epidemiology, Dr. Gautam Menon, Professor of Physics and Biology at Ashoka University and Dr. Giridhara Babu, epidemiologist at the Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru explain the advantages and shortcomings of such an approach.

Considering that Kerala and Maharashtra have shown high integrity in testing and reporting cases, should a sustained spike in daily cases in these two States serve as a bellwether of a third wave?

Tarun Bhatnagar: We should not make the mistake of assuming that because there is more light under the lamp-

post, what we are searching for can be found there.

Given that these States have traditionally recorded well, it would be good to pay attention to them, but in a large and diverse country, a new variant of concern could emerge anywhere. We need to beef up testing and surveillance across India and not just in those States. It would be best if we looked for an unusual increase in cases, novel symptomatology and new variants across India, paying special attention to large and crowded cities, and not just to Kerala and Maharashtra. For example, Bengal is potentially another hotspot for a new wave to emerge, given the diversity of sequences obtained from there and Kolkata, its capital, is dense enough for a new variant to spread fast.

Will future spikes be first seen in Mumbai and Delhi or will tier-2, tier-3 cities serve as a better indicator of the beginning of the third wave?

Predicting future surges

In a large and diverse country, a new variant of concern could emerge anywhere

- New surges can arise depending on magnitude of susceptible population, population density, mobility and implementation of surveillance measures.
- Duration of persistence of protective levels of immunity is another important parameter for the timing of another surge.
- Future surges in cases are expected in areas with low seroprevalence coupled with high population density and mobility.
- Tier-2 and tier-3 cities with relatively low case reporting during the earlier waves are more likely to be affected in the future.



Testing and surveillance need to be sharply intensified in all places. ■ GETTY IMAGES

surveillance measures including testing and contact tracing. Duration of persistence of protective levels of immunity is another important parameter for the timing of another surge in cases. Published data indicates this to be for 7-12 months. Another critical factor is the distribution of variants with high transmissibility or ability for immune escape. Information on all these factors is needed to say where the third wave could be documented.

Gautam Menon: New surge in cases would depend on the magnitude of susceptible population, population density, mobility and implementation of public health

of the second wave across the west of the country originated in tier-2 and tier-3 cities of Maharashtra, spreading only later to Mumbai. Ideally, we should be sensitive to an anomalous rise in cases at the level of districts, since a new variant that has increased immune escape attributes could emerge anywhere.

Will the high seroprevalence recorded in Mumbai and Delhi diminish its ability to serve as a bellwether of the third wave?

TB: Future surge in cases is

expected in areas with low seroprevalence coupled with high population density and mobility. This could happen even in localities within Mumbai and Delhi depending on the representativeness of the serosurveys done in these cities. However, tier-2 and tier-3 cities with relatively low case reporting during the earlier waves are more likely to be affected in the future. However, surveillance is key to early detection of such trends. Vaccination coverage and emergence and distribution of variants that are more transmissible or can evade

immune response would also influence a fresh surge of cases.

Gridhara Babu: With increasing vaccination coverage and decline in the vulnerable population, any wave higher than earlier in these two cities might mean a higher reinfection rate and/or waning immune response. But yes, if these two cities have large outbreaks, the rest of the country will follow a similar trajectory as in previous two waves.

What could be the reasons for daily cases plateauing in Kerala?

GB: There might be two reasons, namely better testing strategy and transmission dynamics. One, the detection in Kerala is better than in other States. Although even Kerala can also do better in terms of the number of tests, their testing strategy is good. The districtwise and rural distribution of testing is higher and well distributed compared to other States. Therefore, they will continue to detect cases. The absence of detection in other rural hinterlands in India does not mean that there is no circulation. Two, it is possible that more spread might

have occurred within primary and secondary contacts due to the contagious nature of the virus, poor isolation and quarantine efforts, resulting in a propagated outbreak in Kerala.

GM: There are no surprises in Kerala vis-a-vis the rest of the country in terms of new variants that are not seen elsewhere. My tentative guess is that despite Kerala's large numbers of cases, the multiplier between cases recorded and background unrecorded cases may be smaller than in the rest of the country. This means a reservoir of those who are still to be infected, an idea supported by the relatively low seropositivity found there, of about 10%, in a survey in March, a surprisingly low number. So the plateauing may simply be a network effect – those most at risk are likely infected already, but many are not and have been able to shield themselves so far, likely due to the stringent measures undertaken by government and precautions at the personal level. They are slowly getting infected, contributing to the cases, but not at the pace seen in the second wave, due to the restrictions in place.

Social structure differs in Asian and African elephants, find researchers

Male Asian elephants spent only about 12% of their time in all-male groups as compared to 30-60% of the time in African savannah elephants

SHUBHSHREE DESIKAN

Despite the fact that they occupy similar ecological niches, the social structure of Asian elephants differs from that of their African savannah counterparts. This is perhaps due to their differing habitats. It is important to understand this and grasp the diversity of strategies that these endangered species might be adopting to survive.

Since there have been many studies of the African savannah elephants since the 1970s and there have not been many of the Asian elephants until more recently, there is a tendency to believe that what holds good for the former also holds for the latter. However, this is not so, as evidenced by studies conducted by the members of the Evolutionary and Integrative Biology Unit of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for

Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru.

Asian elephants, in general, do not move in mixed groups consisting of males and females. "From what we see, males use smell to track females. They also rove long distances when they are in musth to find females," says T.N.C. Vidy from JNCASR, who led the studies, in an email to *The Hindu*.

Young and old
Further, in an African savannah elephant population, young males seemed to prefer old males possibly due to opportunities for social learning. This was contrary to what the group observed.

"This may be because of the differences in resource availability," says P. Keerthipriya, the first author of the paper.

When they do meet, males check females (and vice-versa sometimes) to probably assess fertility and possibly identity. "Rarely, this might lead to a mating. Sometimes, the male just feeds alongside the female herd for some time and then leaves," she adds.

A study by the group, which has been published in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, looked at adult male associations. Male Asian elephants spent only about 12% of their time in all-

male groups as compared to 30-60% of the time in African savannah elephants. There was also a constraint on the group size in the case of the former.

Old males preferentially associated with other old males, and old and young males met each other less than expected by chance. Young males met each other as expected by chance. There was no evidence that young males spent more time with old males relative

to time they spent with other young males. They also did not preferentially initiate associations with older males.

Another important finding of the study is the restriction on male group size. The group had also found a similar restriction on female group size in Kabini. "This is important and suggests that the food distribution is such that it limits large groups of

elephants from feeding together," says Dr. Vidy.

The study documented 138 independent sightings of all-male groups during the study period. "There would be a lot more sightings if we included the non-independent sightings," says Dr. Vidy.

Two hypotheses

The researchers had hypothesised two possibilities for adult male elephants getting together in groups - (i) Testing their strength in a relaxed setting against similarly sized and closely matched age-class peers and settling their dominance position, and (ii) young males preferentially associating with, and socially learning from,

older males.

"We found no evidence for young males preferentially associating with older males, thus social learning from older males does not

seem to play a big role in male associations in our study," says Dr. Vidy.

In the study, elephants aged 15-30 years were classified as young and those above 30 years were classified as old.

Characteristics such as shoulder height, body length, skull size, and skin folds were used to estimate the ages of the elephants.

"We used the semi-captive elephants near the study area, whose ages are known, as a reference while estimating the ages of the adults," explains Dr. Keerthipriya.

The researchers used their field data from 2009-2014 based on observations made at the Nagarhole and Bandipur National Parks.

"We identified 96 adult males. In all, 83 of them were sighted when they were not in musth, and we used this in this study," Dr. Keerthipriya clarifies.

New source of gravitational waves detected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Scientists have for the first time detected gravitational waves produced by the collision of a neutron star and a black hole.

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Time to tackle COVID-19 vaccine delivery bottlenecks

India needs effective communication strategy to tackle vaccine hesitancy

CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA

On June 21, India administered 8.6 million shots of COVID-19 vaccines, the highest daily doses since the start of the drive on January 16. With an officially projected supply of around 210 million doses of COVID-19 in the period from June 21 to July 31, India should be able to administer 5 million shots a day (6 million shots a day, if we exclude holidays) and sustain the tempo for the coming weeks. Yet, this would not be enough to achieve the stated target of jabs for the entire adult population by the end of 2021. To achieve that, India needs to conduct at least 10 million jabs a day, now onwards.

Even with the ongoing vaccination drive, there are many ground reports about two challenges, which demand urgent attention and intervention.

The first is vaccine inequity. There is low uptake of COVID-19 vaccine among groups such as slum dwellers and urban poor as well as in rural population. Some of these inequities have their origin in supply side aspects, as most vaccination centres are in urban settings, and the need for prior and, for some, mandatory, registration on a digital platform.

CM YK



Vital challenges: Even with the ongoing vaccination drive, there are many ground reports about vaccine inequity and vaccine hesitancy that demand urgent attention and intervention. ■ GETTY IMAGES

dent were willing to get COVID-19 vaccine. Many thought that since they were healthy they did not need vaccines and nearly one-third of respondents were afraid of vaccines.

In Madhya Pradesh State, reportedly, 270 COVID-19 vaccination sessions in rural areas ended up as zero sessions.

In the four months since the opening up of COVID-19 vaccination for 45+ populations; only 48% of the 60+ population has received at least one dose. That is a reminder that merely availability of vaccines does not translate into increased coverage. Vaccine hesitancy seems to be playing a role in keeping the coverage low.

In the last few weeks, the Indian government has taken some corrective measures to reig the COVID-19 vaccination strategy, resolve a few

vaccine hesitant group is an urgent need. We need to plan and prepare for such eventualities to achieve coverage as close to 100%, to halt the march of the virus.

Addressing inequity

First, analyse vaccine coverage data by every possible equity stratifiers such as rural urban, rich and poor, religion, deprivation status, tribal and other population sub-groups. The government needs to use more granular data by equity stratifiers and develop appropriate strategies to scale vaccination coverage in those settings and areas. Special mobile-based vaccination sessions should be conducted in those areas and population groups.

By end of June, India's vaccination drive is at an early stage with nearly 4.5% of the total population receiving both shots. The demand seems high, however, once India achieves approximately 50% to 60% coverage of adult vaccination with at least a single dose, hopefully by early October 2021, then there could be a situation of sufficient vaccine supply but not enough takers due to vaccine hesitancy. Also, there is risk that while aggregate coverage may appear high, some population groups, especially the most vulnerable, may have relatively low coverage.

Therefore, early identification of the excluded population sub-groups and the

chayat and local influencers.

Third, implement the evidence informed COVID-19 vaccine communication strategy adapted for local context: the Indian ministry of health & family welfare had formulated a COVID-19 vaccine communication strategy, in Dec 2020. However, many of the health functionaries are not even aware about various communication strategies. Some of the good practices including financial and non-financial incentives (both at individual and community/village levels) implemented by various districts and Indian states should be explored for further expansion.

Science-based strategies

The Indian government aims to achieve COVID-19 vaccination of the entire adult population in India by end of 2021. However, it will be a naive to assume vaccine coverage is simply a function of vaccine availability. It is sine-qua-non that the challenges of vaccine inequity and hesitancy are identified in advance and evidence in social marketing should be engaged in developing vaccine communication campaigns. Instead of newspaper advertisement, science and evidence-based communication for vaccination drives need to be implemented. In rural and urban slums and tribal areas, the communication strategy should be done with the help of frontline workers, Pan-

(Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, a physician-epidemiologist, is a public policy and health systems expert and co-author of *Till We Win: India's Fight Against The COVID-19 Pandemic*).

Question Corner

Salt and Pepper

Does stress make hair go grey and is colour reversal possible?

Researchers at Columbia University have found (*eLife*) that stress can accelerate greying, and surprisingly the hair colour can be restored when stress is eliminated. They also found that stress does not affect the colour of hair that has already grown out of the follicle. When hairs are still under the skin as follicles, they are subject to the influence of stress hormones. Once hairs grow out of the scalp, they harden and permanently crystallise and serve as record of past stresses, much like the tree rings hold information about past.

The researchers developed a new method to capture highly detailed images of tiny slices of human hairs to quantify the extent of pigment loss (greying) in each of those slices. Each slice, about 1/20 of a millimetre wide, represents about an hour



Stress free: Colour of hair can be reversed in young. ■ GETTY IMAGES

of hair growth.

While the colour difference may not be perceptible to the naked eye, under a high-resolution scanner, subtle variations in colour were seen. The researchers analysed individual hairs from 14 volunteers. The results were compared with each stress level volunteer on a weekly basis. They found that some grey hairs naturally regained their original colour and when the change in colour was compared with stress levels, a striking association was seen.

Based on modelling, scientists think in middle age, hair needs to reach a threshold before it turns grey. Stress pushes it over the threshold so the hair become grey. While the colour of hair can be reversed when the stress is removed, it cannot be the case in old people.

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



A woman checking her EU Digital COVID Certificate at El Prat airport in Barcelona on July 1. • AFP

EU's 'Green Passport'

Why is the move being opposed by India and the African Union and what does it mean for travellers?

SUHASINI HAIDAR
KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

The story so far: On July 1, the European Union implemented the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) or the "Green Passport", which allows ease of intra-European travel for passengers who have taken one of four vaccines 'recognised' by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that excludes Indian-made Covishield and Covaxin, among others. The move led to a sharp protest from India, as well as the African Union, as concerns grow over vaccine passports that discriminate against travellers from developing countries with limited access to vaccines. Some European countries have since relented, with a third of the 27-nation EU agreeing to include Covishield in the list of approved vaccines.

What does the EUDCC entitle passengers to? The EUDCC, or the Green Passport, which is in the form of a digital QR code, attests that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, and also if they have had a recent negative test and/or are considered immune having previously contracted the illness. It is recognised by all 27 EU countries, as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway for passengers within Europe, who are bound not to need separate documentation for intra-EU travel.

In its interim guidance published this week, the World Health Organization held categorically that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel

How will it impact Indian travellers? The EUDCC will impact Indians notionally at present, as only essential travel is allowed into EU countries and special permission has to be taken for those travelling from India. With global concerns over the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, more restrictions are in place for Indians travelling abroad. The European Union has pointed out that the EUDCC is only meant for passengers within the EU, and that most, if not all, residents would have received one of the four vaccines that have been cleared by the EMA – Comirnaty (Pfizer/BioNTech), Vaccine Janssen (Johnson & Johnson), Spikevax (Moderna) and Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca Europe).

According to the EU, the Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield was a "biologically" different product and it hence needs to apply separately for EMA clearance. Both SII and AstraZeneca have since clarified that they are in the process of seeking clearances. Meanwhile, the road seems harder for Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, as unlike Covishield, it has not received recognition from even the World Health Organization (WHO) and is in the process of completing its application there.

How did India register its protests? During his visit to Italy for the G20 ministerial conference last week, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar registered a strong protest in his meetings with European counterparts as well as EU High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles, as government sources indicated that India was prepared to initiate reciprocal harsh quarantine measures against countries that discriminated against Indians.

India's concerns are three-fold. It feels vaccine passports will restrict passengers from countries that don't have the same access to vaccines and will increase vaccine inequality. It also argues that the EU should recognise Covishield as it is no different from other AstraZeneca-licensed vaccines, and more broadly that all Indian-approved vaccines should be given recognition worldwide, and that passengers can be certified via the Co-WIN website.

Furthermore, officials point out that Covishield was distributed to 95 countries, mainly low- and middle-income countries of the global South, and the EU action discriminates against all of them. There is a hint of racism, they claim, in the fact that all vaccines cleared by the EMA are those that have been taken by residents in Europe and North America, whereas the ones excluded are those made and distributed far and wide in the rest of the world by Russia, India and China.

Backing India's stand, the African Union and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention issued a statement raising concerns over the Green Passport, pointing out that the Covishield vaccine was the "backbone" of the EU-supported international COVAX alliance's programme in Africa, along with the AstraZeneca-SkBio vaccine produced in South Korea.

What is the WHO's stand? In its interim guidance released on July 2, a day after the EUDCC was launched and implemented, the WHO published its 'Policy considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to travel in the context of COVID-19'. In it, the WHO held categorically that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel and should be optional, stating that proof of COVID-19 vaccination should not be required as a condition of entry and exit from a country.

Will the EU relent? By bringing in the EUDCC, the European Union has made it clear that it intends to use these vaccine passports in some measure to differentiate between those who are vaccinated and those who aren't or have taken 'unrecognised' vaccines. However, with at least nine countries, including Austria, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland, agreeing to independently make exemptions for Covishield, and Estonia accepting both Covishield and Covaxin, there is hope that enough pressure will build on the EMA to include exemptions for Indian vaccines as well.

What lies ahead for Afghanistan after U.S. exit?

How will the pull-out of troops change equations and can Kabul forces hold off the Taliban?

STANLY JOHNY

The story so far: On July 2, U.S. troops departed from the Bagram Air Base that coordinated the 20-year-long war in Afghanistan, effectively ending their military operations in the country. The exit is part of President Joe Biden's plan to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan by September 11. Ever since the remaining U.S. troops began pulling out on May 1, the Taliban have made rapid territorial advances. If the Taliban had controlled 73 of Afghanistan's 407 districts before May 1, the number of districts went up to 168 in two months, according to the *Long War Journal*.

Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan?

Weeks after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan. Mr. Bush said the Taliban regime had turned down his demand to hand over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks. Inside Afghanistan, the NATO coalition troops led by the U.S. quickly dislodged the Taliban regime and established a transitional government. Al-Qaeda's leaders and key operatives fled to safe havens in Pakistan. In May 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major military operations in the country were over. The U.S. focus shifted to the Iraq invasion, while in Afghanistan, western powers helped build a centralised democratic system and institutions. But that neither ended the war nor stabilised the country.

Why is the U.S. pulling back?

The U.S. had reached the conclusion long ago that the war was unwinnable. Presidents, starting with Barack Obama, had promised to bring American troops back home from Afghanistan. In July 2015, the Obama administration had sent a representative to the first-ever meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government that was hosted by Pakistan in Murree. The Murree talks did not progress as the Afghan government disclosed after the first round that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died two years earlier.

Later, President Donald Trump appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, with a mandate to directly negotiate with the Taliban. Mr. Khalilzad and his team held talks with Taliban representatives in Doha that led to the February 2020 agreement between the U.S. and the insurgents. In the agreement, the Trump administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. President Joe Biden endorsed the Trump-Taliban deal, but pushed the deadline for withdrawal to September 11.

What are the terms of the Trump-Taliban deal?

The February deal dealt with four aspects of the conflict – violence, foreign troops, intra-Afghan peace talks and the use of Afghan soil by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. According to the agreement, the Taliban promised to reduce violence, join intra-Afghan peace talks and cut all ties with foreign terrorist groups, while the U.S. pledged to withdraw all its troops, roughly 12,000 at the time of the signing of the agreement in February 2020, by May 1, 2021.

After the agreement was signed, the U.S. put pressure on the Afghan government to release thousands of Taliban prisoners – a key Taliban precondition for starting intra-Afghan talks. Talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government began in Doha in September 2020 but did not reach any breakthrough. At present, the peace process is frozen. The Taliban reduced hostilities against foreign troops but continued to attack Afghan forces even after the agreement was signed. Afghanistan also saw a series of targeted killings of journalists, activists and other civil society figures over the past many months, which the Afghan government says is a Taliban act. Kabul maintains that the Pakistan support for the Taliban is allowing the insurgents to overcome military pressure and carry forward with their agenda.

What does Pakistan want?

Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognised the Taliban regime in the 1990s. The Taliban captured much of the country with help from Pakistan's

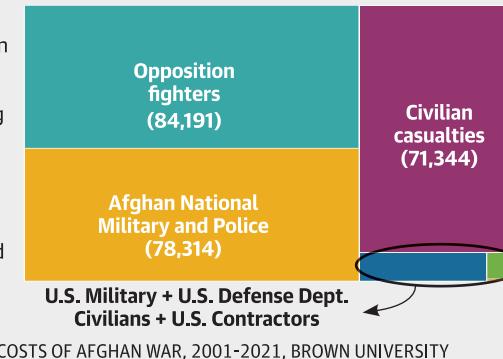
Insurmountable losses

The U.S.'s 20-year-war in Afghanistan has claimed over 70,000 civilian lives and has cost the country more than \$2 trillion. Even as all U.S. combat troops will withdraw by September 11, a large share of the country remains under the control of Taliban. A look at the impact of the war:

Loss of life

Nearly 2,41,000 lives have been lost in the two-decade-long war that ensued after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. According to recent estimates by Brown University's Cost of War, at least 71,344 civilians died in the conflict while the Afghan national military police lost 78,314 personnel. An estimated 6,384 U.S. soldiers and 1,144 soldiers of Allied troops were also killed during the war

SOURCE : HUMAN AND BUDGETARY COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR, 2001-2021, BROWN UNIVERSITY



Impact of war on women and children

As many as 8,099 children and 3,352 women were killed between 2009 and 2020, according to data by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Children 8,099

Women 3,352

SOURCE: UNAMA

The humanitarian cost of war

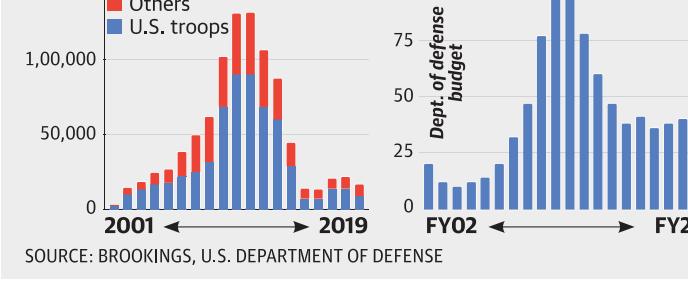
Over 25,889 civilian casualties were inflicted by anti-government parties such as the Taliban and ISKP between 2009 and 2011, according to the United Nations. Since 2018, more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by pro-government forces

SOURCE: UNAMA

Estimated civilian deaths perpetrated by anti-govt. and pro-govt. forces (2009-2020)

Anti-government Pro-government

2009 2020



Any nation planning to deal with Afghanistan should be prepared for several scenarios, including the possibility of the Taliban taking over the country

shelter to the Taliban's Rahbari Shura, a group composed of their top leaders. In Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped, raised money and recruits, planned military strategy and staged a comeback in Afghanistan. The fractious Kabul government, faced with corruption allegations, incompetence, and the excesses of the invading forces, made matters easier for the Taliban.

Now, when the U.S. is leaving and the Taliban are advancing, Pakistan is again in the spotlight. A violent military takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban may not serve Pakistan's core interests. Pakistan wants to check India's influence in Afghanistan and bring the Taliban to Kabul. But a violent takeover, like in the 1990s, would lack international acceptability, leaving Afghanistan unstable for a foreseeable future. In such a scenario, Pakistan could face another influx of refugees from Afghanistan and a strengthening of anti-Pakistan terror groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban. From a strategic point of view, Pakistan would prefer the Taliban being accommodated in power through negotiations and a peaceful settlement, which would also allow Rawalpindi to stabilise its conflict-ridden western border. But it's not clear whether Pakistan has the capacity to shape the post-American outcome in Afghanistan.

Why is India reaching out to the Taliban?

The Hindu reported in June, quoting a Qatari official, that India made contacts with the Taliban in Doha. New Delhi

has not denied reports of its outreach to the Taliban. This signals a late but realistic acknowledgement from the Indian side that the Taliban would play a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years. India has three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban. One, protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees in Afghanistan; two, preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi; three, making sure that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support from the Taliban. In the past, India chose not to engage the Taliban and the costs were dear when the Taliban was in power. This time, New Delhi seems to be testing another policy.

Is the Afghanistan government doomed?

The American intelligence community has concluded, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, that Kabul could fall within six months. None of the U.S. military and political leaders, from General Austin Miller to President Biden, is certain about the survival of the Afghan government. When Mr. Biden was asked this question on Friday, he didn't say that the government would survive, but said, "They have the capacity to sustain the government". One thing is certain – the American withdrawal has turned the balance of power in the battleground in favour of the Taliban. They are already making rapid advances.

So, there could be three scenarios, according to experts. One, there could be a political settlement in which the Taliban and the government agree to some power-sharing mechanism and jointly shape the future of Afghanistan. As of now, this looks like a remote possibility. Two, an all-out civil war may be possible, in which the government, economically backed and militarily trained by the West, holds on to its positions in key cities and the Taliban expand its reach in the countryside, while other ethnic militias fight for their fiefs. This is already unfolding. A third scenario would be of the Taliban taking over the country. Any nation planning to deal with Afghanistan should be prepared for all three scenarios.

Can reducing cess levies ease high fuel prices?

What has the ICRA proposed and will it cool inflation to the comfort level prescribed by the RBI?

K. BHARAT KUMAR

The story so far: Ratings agency ICRA recently postulated that the government had room to cut cess levies on retail prices of petrol and diesel, thereby easing prices. Lower fuel prices will likely help cool inflation levels, which are currently beyond the 6% upper limit specified by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Why has the ICRA said that there is room to cut cess levies?

The ICRA anticipates an increase in the mobility of the population and economic recovery after the easing of curbs and accelerating pace of COVID-19 vaccinations. It forecasts that consumption of petrol and diesel would hence grow at about 14% and 10%, respectively, in the financial year 2021-22 (from the low base in a national lockdown-hit 2020-21).

The agency projects aggregate revenue from such taxes on these two fuels to expand by about 13% in FY22 from the previous year, assuming that the total cesses on unbranded petrol and diesel remain unchanged at ₹32.9/litre and ₹31.8/litre, respectively, in June 2021, from ₹25.5/litre and ₹26.4/litre, respectively, in April 2019, despite the U.S. dollar price of the Indian crude oil basket being at similar levels (about ₹67 on average in June in Indian basket terms) at these two points in time.

Would a reduction in fuel cesses affect the government's ability to pay interest and principal on oil bonds issued to public oil marketing companies (OMCs) as compensation for subsidies?

The agency has estimated that the Centre needs ₹20,000 crore in the current financial year to service the interest and principal related to special oil bonds issued to oil marketing companies (OMCs) in the period 2005-2010. If this debt servicing obligation is to be offset through additional revenues collected from fuel cesses, then the potential duty cut could be to the tune of ₹2 per litre for both fuels, it said. The government had serviced interest of close to ₹10,000 crore related to the oil bonds in each of the financial years FY20 and FY21, according to a recent *BusinessLine* report. The last principal payment was made in March 2015, of ₹3,500 crore. The total current outstanding is about ₹1.30 lakh crore, out of which ₹10,000-crore principal and an equal amount as



interest is payable this year, the report said, citing official data. These bonds are interest-bearing, having a fixed coupon rate and paid on a half-yearly basis. The annual interest due of around ₹10,000 crore has been provided for in the Budget.

How can lower fuel prices make it easier for the RBI to balance economic growth and inflation?

Retail inflation based on the consumer price index (CPI) has been persistently higher than the RBI's medium-term target of 4%, which, however, allows for a range of 2%-6%.

For May 2021, the provisional inflation reading was 6.3%, owing to persistent price pressures in the transport and communication category, which includes the automotive fuels of petrol and diesel and has a weight of 8.59% in the CPI. The transport and communication category saw price gains accelerate to 12.38% in May, from 11.04% in April.

While the RBI has been trying to maintain a growth-supportive stance by retaining an accommodative monetary stance that includes keeping benchmark interest rates substantially low and unchanged in response to the pandemic, its monetary policy committee (MPC) has been repeatedly warning of upside risks to the inflation trajectory from "international commodity prices, especially of crude, together with logistics costs". The MPC's prescription to address this reads: "Excise duties, cess and taxes imposed by the Centre and States need to be adjusted in a coordinated manner to contain input cost pressures emanating from petrol and diesel prices."

Lower pump prices of the transport fuels would ease some pressure on retail inflation and thus allow the RBI a little more elbow room to continue to keep the cost of borrowings lower. This, in turn, could facilitate more demand for credit to both consume and invest in new business activity, spurring growth.

(With inputs from Vignesh Radhakrishnan)

NEEVA

Challenging the Google way in search

A new search engine is offering 'a private, ad-free experience with only real results', but for a price

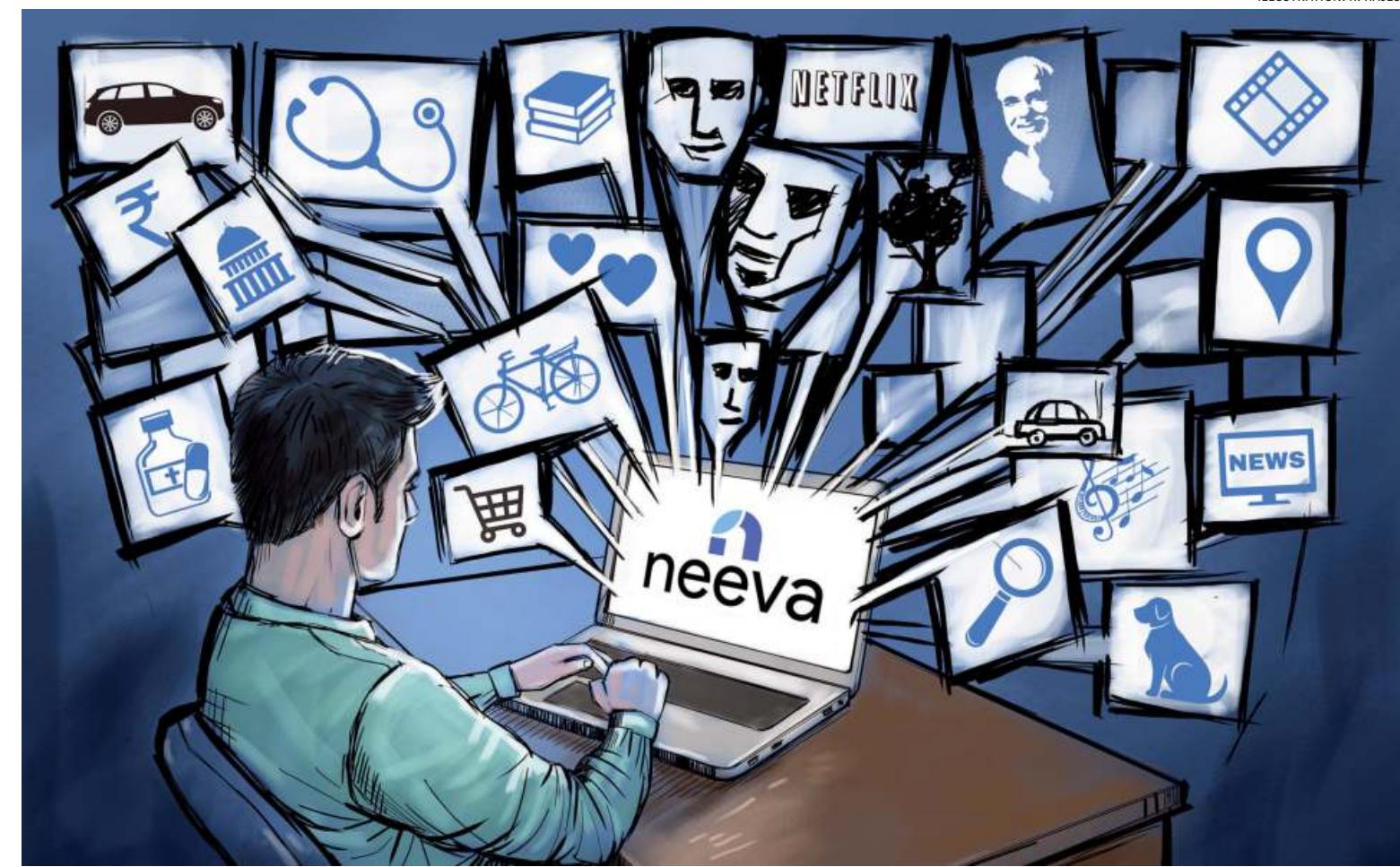
SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

Twenty-three years ago, Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page presented the idea of Google in their research paper, 'The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine', optimistically concluding that "there is a bright future for search". They couldn't have been more prophetic. Google has, over the years, built its massive empire, thanks to the continuing success of its search engine.

It has been so successful that its brand name is synonymous with the word "search", worryingly so for the company. Its rivals have been few and far. And don't forget the commercial success – last year, Google made revenues of over \$100 billion just from its search operation. It is in this Google-dominated universe that newcomer Neeva sees an opportunity. Just a few days ago, Neeva made its search engine available for users in the United States, promising them "a private, ad-free search experience with only real results". Users who sign up get three months of free access, after which they have to pay \$4.95 every month.

There has also been a buzz around Neeva for it being the story of two ex-Googlers, Sridhar Ramaswamy and Vivek Raghunathan, challenging Google in its core business. Mr. Ramaswamy, a former senior vice-president of ads at Google, was part of the team that built Google Search in the early years. Mr. Raghunathan is a former vice-president of monetisation at YouTube. They are both IIT alumni.

So, what opportunity did they sense in a marketplace where Google is near-ubiquitous? Mr. Ramaswamy made this clear in his very first blog for Neeva about a year ago. Google "entered with a new approach to searching – namely, by ranking web pages on the basis of the number of links to those pages and, eventually, by supporting itself with advertising," says author Shane Greenstein in the book, *How the Internet Became Commercial*. Like many other internet services, search has almost always been free for users. In 2008, it was in explaining this business strategy that Chris Anderson wrote the book *Free*:



Instead of adopting the Google model, which has built an empire, Neeva promises to fix the search experience and seeks to build a subscription model

The Future of a Radical Price. Neeva isn't going that way. It has come into being at a time when subscription models are much more in vogue in the broad digital world. In an interview to business magazine *Fast Company*, Mr. Ramaswamy says, "I tell people that Neeva is as much a social experiment as it is a technological experiment." He adds, "If there was a high-quality product that clearly benefits you in multiple ways, would you pay for it as

opposed to having it be free, supported by ads?"

Last year, in one of his blog posts, he weighed in on the question of price. He wrote: "We will start at a reasonable price, say the cost of two black coffees a month. We hope that over time, we will be able to reduce the price as we become more efficient. Everything that we take for granted (our computers and phones, even ice cream) started out at a higher price point before scale and innovation made them available to everyone."

New challengers

Neeva isn't alone in seeing an opportunity in search. Just a few days before Neeva's announcement, Brave Browser announced the beta version of its Search tool – offering users the first independent privacy search/browser alternative to big tech". In recent years, DuckDuckGo has been an alternative that has

emphasised privacy over other things.

Last month, it said, "Spurred by the increase in DuckDuckGo app usage, over the last 12 months, our monthly search traffic increased 55% and we grew to become the #2 search engine on mobile in many countries, including in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands". It further said: "We don't track our users so we can't say for sure how many we have, but based on market share estimates, download numbers, and national surveys, we believe there are between 70-100 million DuckDuckGo users."

Tech Crunch reported DuckDuckGo picking up another \$100 million in investment, saying, "Privacy tech continues cooking on gas."

In March this year, Neeva raised a further \$40 million in funding from Sequoia Capital, Greylock Partners and Inovia Capital. They had

raised a similar amount in an earlier round.

The world has changed in

another way. As David Doty wrote in a Forbes article, "People aren't just typing in a search term on whichever main search engine they prefer – they're searching and consuming in context, on YouTube, Netflix, Amazon or Pinterest and increasingly on any of a zillion specialised apps."

The point being, the search market is more fragmented than ever. And yet, as a study last year by the Competition and Markets Authority of the U.K. pointed out, "There is a long history of search providers other than Google and Bing choosing to outsource some or all of their search engine activities." The reference is to them maintaining web indexes. It said, "The main way that they acquire information for their index is through their automated web-crawling bots. These bots follow the links between webpages and bring data about those pages back to the search engine's servers."

The *Fast Company* story says Neeva "has indexed several billion web pages on its own but also credits Apple, Bing, and Yelp at the bottom of search results; other information providers include Intrinio, Weather.com, and Xignite. Even Google is an ingredient, with Google Maps embedded in search results".

The important question now is: will users pay for search?

In Focus

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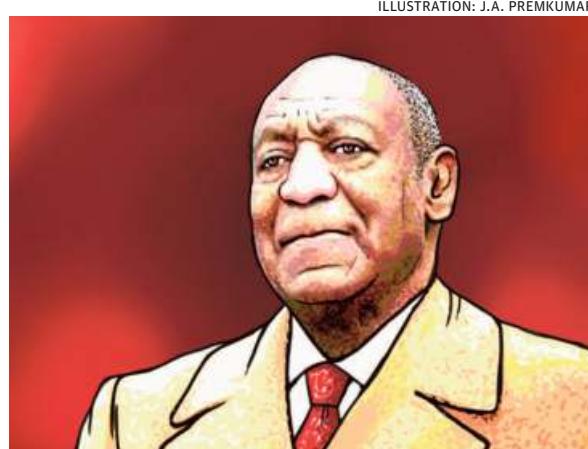
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BILL COSBY

Free from prison

The star comedian's conviction has been overturned over a legal loophole

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN



Bill Cosby (83), the man known as "America's Dad" and famed mega-star of "The Cosby Show", of the 1980s, who then fell spectacularly from grace after being convicted on sexual assault charges after more than 50 women accused him of sexual misconduct, walked free this week after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 conviction, owing to a technicality in the trial. His release prompted an outpouring of shock and despair among his accusers and within the #MeToo movement and broader campaigns for justice for victims of sexual assault and harassment, with some describing his overturned conviction as the story of "a rich entitled man who beat the odds through good lawyering".

Cosby was born William Henry Cosby Junior, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 12, 1937, one of three children to Navy mess steward William Senior and domestic worker Anne. Although his father abandoned their family while Cosby was still a young child, he went on to have a four-year stint as a Navy medical corpsman, during which time he completed high school and secured an athletic scholarship at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Cosby performed well in sports, yet dropped out of university when his comedy career began its meteoric

upsurge. Nevertheless he returned to academia a few years later to finish his BA and then acquire both an MA and a PhD in Education. Cosby married television producer Camille Hanks in 1964 and they had six children, of whom one, Ennis, died tragically after being shot in 1997.

While Cosby's career as a comedian began soaring in the late 1950s and early 1960s, including his debut as a stand-up at Philadelphia's The Underground Club and bookings at New York City's prestigious Gaslight Café, he struck gold with his first comedy album, "Bill Cosby Is A Very Funny Fellow, Right!", which received a 1963 Grammy nomination. He went on to win six consecutive Grammys through the decade.

Many allegations

It was from the mid-1960s, spanning 1965 to 2008, and across 10 U.S. States and one Canadian province, that

he was found guilty on three counts of felony aggravated indecent assault against Ms. Constand, and then in September of that year, he was sentenced to three to 10 years in State prison.

Cosby managed to get his conviction overturned on June 30, 2021, because of a legal loophole, the fact that in his civil case in 2005, erstwhile District Attorney for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Bruce Castor, made a promise that Cosby would not be charged in a criminal case because he had deposited in the civil case brought by Ms. Constand. The Supreme Court last week said the prosecution in 2018 violated Cosby's right against self-incrimination by using statements he made in the civil litigation.

This decision has resulted in a setback for the gains achieved through the #MeToo movement of recent years. Since #MeToo kicked off, Cosby's was the first major criminal conviction, following allegations of sexual assault made against disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

While most TV producers have indicated that they would continue to stand by their decisions to shun the idea of ever signing Cosby on for any new programming after his release, it remains to be seen whether a man once regarded as an icon of wholesome family values will succeed in rehabilitating his public image.

AKHIL GOGOI

Always in opposition

The activist MLA says he will continue to fight the BJP's 'communal agenda'

RAHUL KARMAKAR



Akhil Gogoi has had run-ins with the Assam government since he took the Right to Information (RTI) route to expose alleged wrongdoings in 2005. But it took a turn for the worse in December 2019 when he took to the streets against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). He had been jailed for 18 months for allegedly fomenting violence during the anti-CAA protests and maintaining links with Maoists.

On July 1, he was cleared of all charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act.

In 2004-05, Mr. Gogoi led the Doyang-Tengnani Sangram Samiti that concentrated on the Doyang-Tengnani area of eastern Assam's Golaghat district where the locals, some of them alleged encroachers on forest land, were experiencing ecological transitions due to the government's development agenda. He formed the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) around that time to take up issues on a larger scale. The organisation worked on a diverse range of issues affecting farmers and daily wagers – from public distribution system thefts and non-implementation of the rural job scheme, to land rights and fighting big dam projects. About 100 cases were filed against him over the years.

Ironically, the 45-year-old Mr. Gogoi's political journey began by rejecting the politi-

cal turn the India Against Corruption campaign, led by Anna Hazare, had taken in 2011. His KMSS dissociated from the movement after Arvind Kejriwal, now the Delhi Chief Minister, and his associates decided to form the Aam Aadmi Party. But the KMSS took the political plunge by forming the Gana Mukti Sangram Asom in March 2015 for "changing the capitalist system of India". Later, the KMSS mobilised support for fighting the Sarbananda Sonowal-led government over its "Hindutva" and "anti-people" agenda, specifically the bid to implement the CAA.

being its president. The party contested the 2021 Assembly polls in alliance with the Assam Jatiya Parishad, also borne out of the anti-CAA protests, and Mr. Gogoi emerged the front's only victor, from the Sibsagar constituency. He became the second leader after George Fernandes to win an election from jail.

Assam-based academic Udayan Misra said Mr. Gogoi added a new dimension to the politics of protest in the State. This virtually made him a one-man opposition during the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government and the BJP-led alliance later. He was arrested in June 2012 for instigating violence during a siege of the Assam Secretariat to protest against alleged eviction of locals from the hills around Guwahati. In September 2016, he was arrested again after an eviction drive in Kaziranga National Park turned violent. A decade ago, he said his Marxist belief made him fight

for social transformation. He joined the United Revolutionary Movement Council of Assam, a mass organisation of the CPI-Marxist Leninist in the late 1990s but left a couple of years later to join *Natun Padatik*, an Assamese Marxist journal.

The Congress government charged him for having links with Maoists in 2010, based on a photograph he had allegedly posed in with CPI-Maoist leaders in the Saranda forest of Jharkhand in 2009. The special court of the National Investigation Agency, which acquitted him on July 1, said the photographic evidence was inconclusive. "I may believe in Marxism, but I am definitely not a Maoist the government is desperate to brand me as," Mr. Gogoi said.

He wants to focus on the development of his Assam constituency besides spending quality time with college teacher wife Gitashree Tamuly, son and 84-year-old mother Priyada Gogoi, who had campaigned for him during the election.

Mr. Gogoi has also vowed to revive the anti-CAA fight and continue to protest the "pro-dam" and the "communal" agenda of the BJP-led government. Among his goals is ensuring a "BJP-free" Assam by 2026. But Mr. Gogoi insists that he targets political parties based on issues concerning the peasants and marginalised classes, pointing to his call to vote out the Congress from Assam in 2011.

Kerber, Federer shake off the rust, enter second week

The 2018 champion beats Sasnovich from a set down to set up a meeting with Gauff; Swiss maestro overcomes a spirited Norrie in four

WIMBLEDON

AGENCIES LONDON

Former Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber was put through the wringer early in her third-round clash against unseeded Aliaksandra Sasnovich on Saturday, but rallied from a set down to win 2-6, 6-0, 6-1.

Kerber, who had overcome Sara Sorribes Tormo in the previous round in the longest women's match at Wimbledon since 2011 (3 hours 18 minutes), made a sluggish start against Sasnovich by twice dropping serve in the opening set to go 0-4 down.

World No. 100 Sasnovich, taking on a second former Wimbledon champion this week after watching Serena Williams limp off injured in their opener, wrapped up the first set in style after rain temporarily halted action on Court No.2.

But Kerber's response was blistering, handing her 27-year-old opponent a bagel to level the contest.

A wayward forehand by Sasnovich gifted Kerber the advantage at 3-1 in the decider and the only remaining Wimbledon winner in the women's singles draw finished off the match with an ace.

The German will next meet 17-year-old American Coco Gauff, who matched her 2019 dream Wimbledon debut run with a 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Kaja Juvan.

Gauff, the 20th seed, raced to a 5-1 lead in 18 minutes. She went off the boil briefly to lose two games, before recovering to take the set. The teenager established a lead in the second too and never looked back.

Next on Centre Court was eight-time winner Roger Federer and he dispatched local favourite Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 to enter the Wimbledon last 16 for the 18th time.

Federer on course
Federer is the third-oldest man to reach the round of 16 at Wimbledon in the Open Era – after Pancho Gonzales

(41) in 1969 and Ken Rosewall (40) in 1975.

Victory was in sight for the Swiss much earlier, but he fluffed two break points in the 11th game of the third set and Norrie dug deep to stretch the match into the fourth. But once Federer broke for 5-4, there was no second opportunity.

Federer finished with 48 winners and will face Italy's Lorenzo Sonego next.

Out of steam
On Friday, two-time winner Andy Murray's run ended with a crushing 4-6, 2-6, 2-6 loss to 10th seed Denis Shapovalov.

The tournament, overall, was a positive for the Brit, but the result – it was his most lopsided defeat at Wimbledon – left him with mixed feelings.

"There is a part of me that feels a bit like I have put in so much work the last three months and, you know, ultimately didn't play how I would want and expect, and it's like, is it worth it?", he pondered.

The highlights



I guess this one is special because I'm almost 40. This is the last Slam before I hit the big 40. It's all a bonus

FEDERER after entering his 69th fourth round at Majors

2 After French Open 2021, second straight Major Gauff has reached the fourth round without losing a set

8 Kerber is on a eight-match winning run, her longest since the 10-match streak in early 2018 (Sydney and Aus Open)

29 Number of days between Fritz's exit from French Open on a wheelchair – he underwent knee surgery to repair the torn meniscus – and third round match against Zverev at Wimbledon

338 Ranking of 18-year-old British wild card Emma Raducanu, who is into the women's fourth round

THE RESULTS

Third round

Men: 4-Zverev (Ger) bt 31-Fritz (USA) 6-7(3), 6-4, 6-3, 7-6(4); 6-Federer (Sui) bt 29-Cameron Norrie (GBR) 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; 7-Berrettini (Ita) bt Bedene (Slo) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4, 6-2; 14-Hurkacz (Pol) bt Bublik (Kaz) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

23-Sonego (Ita) bt Duckworth (Aus) 6-3, 6-4, 6-4; Ivashka (Blr) bt Thompson (Aus) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4; 16-Auger-Aliassime (Can) bt Kyrgios (Aus) 2-6, 6-1, retd.

Women: 1-Barty (Aus) bt Siniakova (Cze) 6-3, 7-5; Raducanu (GBR) bt Cirstea (Rou) 6-3, 7-5; Tomljanovic (Aus) bt Ostapenko (Lat) 4-6, 6-4, 6-2; 20-Gauff (USA) bt Juwan (Slo) 6-3, 6-3; 25-Kerber (Ger) bt Sasnovich (Blr) 2-6, 6-0, 6-1; 19-Muchova (Cze) bt 16-Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 7-5, 6-3; 30-Badosa (Esp) bt Linette (Pol) 5-7, 6-2, 6-4; 14-Krejicikova (Cze) bt Sevastova (Lat) 7-6(1), 3-6, 7-5.

Fallen seeds

Men: 29-Norrie, 31-Fritz

Women: 16-Pavlyuchenkova

Bopanna-Sania duo advances to third round

AGENCIES LONDON

India's Rohan Bopanna and Sania Mirza beat the British duo of Aidan McHugh and Emily Webley-Smith 6-3, 6-1 in the second round of the mixed doubles event on Saturday.

The Indian pair hit 11 winners to two by their opponents and made only five unforced errors to seven before Bopanna finished the contest with an exquisite lob on the second match point.

Sania and Bopanna had earlier defeated Ankita Raina and Ramkumar Ramanathan in a historic all-Indian Grand Slam clash in the opening round.

However, Sania tasted defeat in women's doubles along with her American partner Bethanie Mattek-Sands.

Sania, who returned to the grass court Grand Slam after four years, and Mattek-Sands lost 4-6, 3-6 to Russians Elena Vesnina and Veronika Kudermetova in one hour 28 minutes.

IN BRIEF



Robinson gets reprieve

LONDON
Pacer Ollie Robinson is free to play for England again after receiving an eight-game ban – five of them deferred – for offensive tweets he posted several years ago, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Saturday. He will be available for the five-Test series against India as a disciplinary panel ruled he had already served the three-game ban. AFP



Semenya's Tokyo hopes dwindle

CAPE TOWN
Caster Semenya, forced out of her favourite race by World Athletics' testosterone rules, took a late shot at qualifying for Tokyo in the 5,000m, an event not affected by the hormone regulations. The two-time Olympic 800m champion, however, came up short. The 30-year-old South African's hopes of making it to the Tokyo Olympics have dwindled. AP



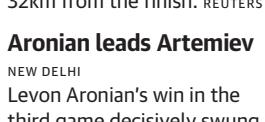
Olympics protest rules relaxed

TOKYO
Athletes at Tokyo 2020 will be allowed to "express their views" before and after competing – but not on the podium – after Olympics chiefs relaxed some of the rules for protests. The International Olympic Committee released guidelines on Friday softening a long-standing ban on political protests. AFP



Teunis wins eighth stage, Pogacar takes yellow

LE GRAND BORNAND
Belgian Dylan Teuns won the eighth stage of the Tour de France, a 150.8-km ride from Oyonnax, on Saturday. Defending champion Tadej Pogacar claimed the yellow jersey with a stunning attack 32km from the finish. REUTERS



Aronian leads Artemiev

NEW DELHI
Levon Aronian's win in the third game decisively swung the first set in his favour against a fighting Vladislav Artemiev in the final of the Goldmoney Asian Rapid online rapid chess tournament on Saturday. **The results (Set One): Final:** Levon Aronian (Arm) bt Vladislav Artemiev (Rus) 2.5-1.5; **Third place:** Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Ding Liren (Chn) 2.5-1.5.

Denmark keeps its dreams alive

Sees off a spirited second-half fightback from the Czechs

EURO 2020

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BAKU

Denmark's fairytale run at Euro 2020 will continue into the semifinals after it defeated the Czech Republic 2-1 on Saturday to move into a last-four meeting with either England or Ukraine at Wembley.

First-half goals from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg were enough to see Kasper Hjulmand's men through despite a second-half rally from the Czechs inspired by Patrik Schick's fifth goal of the tournament.

The Danes have now scored 10 goals in winning their last three matches after



The clincher: Kasper Dolberg, second right, bundles the ball home for Denmark's second. ■ REUTERS

starting the tournament with two defeats, the first amid shocking circumstances when Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch.

Three weeks on, they are dreaming of a repeat of 1992 when Denmark won the European Championship despite not even qualifying. On Saturday, Denmark

was celebrating within five minutes as Delaney was left completely unmarked to head home Jens Stryger Larsen's corner.

Blistering start

Tomas Vaclik then had to deny Mikkel Damsgaard to prevent the Danes doubling their lead in a blistering start.

Vaclik though was powerless three minutes before half-time when Joakim Maehle added another assist to his fine tournament with a teasing cross that Dolberg smashed home.

The result:

Quarterfinals: Czech Republic 1 (Schick 49) lost to Denmark 2 (Delaney 5, Dolberg 42).

Italy motors past Belgium

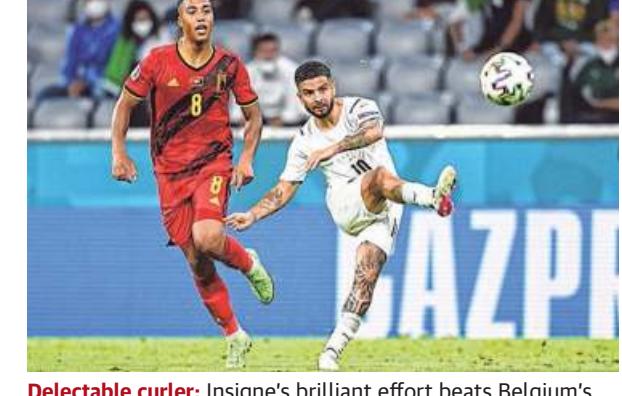
Makes the semis at the expense of the World No. 1 side

REUTERS MUNICH

Italy reached the Euro 2020 semifinals with a 2-1 win over Belgium on Friday as first-half goals from Nicolo Barella and Lorenzo Insigne settled a thrilling encounter against the number one-ranked team in the world.

Barella fired home the opener after 31 minutes before Lorenzo Insigne's wonderful curling strike doubled Italy's advantage on the brink of halftime before Romelu Lukaku pulled one back for Belgium in first-half stoppage time.

Both sides had chances to score after the break in a breathless match, but Roberto Mancini's side held on



Delectable curler: Insigne's brilliant effort beats Belgium's defence. ■ GETTY IMAGES

for a 13th consecutive win to extend its record unbeaten run to 32 games.

Italy will face Spain at Wembley on Tuesday for a

Captain Mithali does it for India

Her unbeaten 75 steers the team home in a tense finish

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WORCESTER

Skipper Mithali Raj struck her third consecutive half-century in the series as India avoided a clean sweep, defeating England by four

wickets in the rain-curtailed third ODI on Saturday.

Chasing a target of 220 in 47 overs, India earned a consolation win with three balls to spare. Mithali, who had scored 72 and 59 in the first

SCOREBOARD

England: Lauren Winfield-Hill c Shikha b Sneh 36 (52b, 5x4), Tammy Beaumont lbw b Shikha 0 (4b), Heather Knight c Shikha b Harmanpreet 46 (71b, 4x4), Nat Sciver c Smriti b Deepi 49 (59b, 5x4), Amy Jones c sub (Radha) b Deepi 17 (26b, 1x4), Sophia Dunkley b Deepi 28 (35b, 1x4), Katherine Brunt st. Tanya b Poonam 6 (9b), Sophie Ecclestone lbw b Jhulan 9 (71b, 1x4), Sarah Glenn run out 6 (6b, 1x4), Anya Shrubsole run out 1 (1b), Kate Cross (not out) 16 (9b, 1x4, 1x6); Extras (lb-1, w-3, nb-1); Total (in 47 overs): 219.

Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Beaumont, 1.4 overs), 2-68 (Winfield-Hill, 16.4), 3-110 (Knight, 24.5), 4-151 (Jones, 33.6), 5-163 (Sciver, 14;

Total (for six wkts. in 46.3 overs): 220.

Fall of wickets: 1-46 (Shafali, 8.6), 2-66 (Jemimah, 15.5), 3-81 (Smriti, 20.5), 4-131 (Harmanpreet, 33.2), 5-164 (Deepi, 39.2), 6-214 (Sneh, 45.6).

England bowling: Brunt 7.3-0-45-0, Shrubsole 4-0-21-0, Cross 8-0-38-1, Ecclestone 10-2-36-2, Glenn 7-0-26-1, Sciver 6-0-34-1, Knight 4-0-15-1.

Toss: India.

Player-of-the-Match: Mithali;

Player-of-the-Series: Ecclestone.

India won by four wickets with three balls to spare, England clinched series 2-1.

First T20: July 9, Northampton, 11 p.m. IST.

Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Beaumont, 1.4 overs), 2-68 (Winfield-Hill, 16.4), 3-110 (Knight, 24.5), 4-151 (Jones, 33.6), 5-163 (Sciver, 14;

Total (for six wkts. in 46.3 overs): 220.

Fall of wickets: 1-46 (Shafali, 8.6), 2-66 (Jemimah, 15.5), 3-81 (Smriti, 20.5), 4-131 (Harmanpreet, 33.2), 5-164 (Deepi, 39.2), 6-214 (Sneh, 45.6).

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