



Mehul Choksi denied bail by Dominica High Court

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Two civilians, as many policemen killed in Sopore militant attack

Page 7



Row over Digvijaya's comments on Article 370 revocation

Page 8



Krejcikova emerges champion; Djokovic beats Nadal, meets Tsitsipas

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NEARBY



CM launches 22 oxygen plants at 9 hospitals

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday inaugurated 22 oxygen plants at nine Delhi government hospitals. The Pressure Swing Adsorption oxygen plants have a total production capacity of 17.3 metric tonnes.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Sisodia's accusation atrocious, says Amarinder

CHANDIGARH
Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday described as "atrocious" Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's accusation that the former had a "secret" friendship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr. Sisodia's made the comment after Punjab secured the top rank in school education.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 5

'JD(U) should get a berth in the Central Cabinet'

PATNA
Amid talks of expansion of PM Narendra Modi's Cabinet, JD(U) national president R.C.P. Singh said being an ally, his party too should get a berth in the Cabinet. "In an alliance, every constituent should be respected."

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4

GST brought down on 14 COVID relief goods

Council leaves the 5% tax levied on vaccines unchanged

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on Saturday decided to waive the tax levied on two critical drugs against COVID-19 and mucormycosis – tocilizumab and amphotericin B – and reset the tax rate to 5% for 14 major pandemic relief items, till September 30.

Non-BJP-ruled States registered a strong dissent, terming the continued imposition of GST on critical COVID supplies and drugs as "insensitive" and "totally anti-people". They alleged that their proposals for zero-rating or reducing GST rates to 0.1% on critical supplies were ignored by the Union Finance Ministry at what turned out to be another stormy Council meeting.

Mitra's remarks deleted
West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra said the Council's chairperson, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, allowed his comments to be deleted at the behest of his Uttar Pradesh counterpart, and accused the Ministry of muzzling his voice and cutting off the virtual conference link when he was trying to voice objections.

The 5% GST levied on vac-

Downward revision

The GST rates were reduced for many pandemic relief goods and critical drugs. A comparison the old and new rates:

Essentials	Existing	New^
Tocilizumab, Amphotericin B	5%	0%
Remdesivir and anti-coagulants like Heparin	12%	5%
Medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrator, ventilator, BIPAP machine, pulse oximeter, testing kits	12%	5%
Hand sanitiser, temperature checking equipment, gas or electric furnace for crematoria	18%	5%
Ambulances	28%	12%

Whatever (vaccines) the Centre is buying, it will pay GST. But when people are getting it free at government hospitals, they will not face any GST impact
NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, FINANCE MINISTER

*5% GST ON VACCINES NOT REVISED ^TILL SEPTEMBER 30

cines was left unchanged, following the recent changes in the country's vaccine procurement strategy that puts the Union government in charge of augmenting supplies. The GST rate on Remdesivir and anti-coagulants like Heparin has been reduced from 12% to 5%. The Council recommended that the same rate be levied on any other drug that may be recommended by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry and the Department of Pharma for COVID-19 treatment. Ms. Sitharaman an-

SAD, BSP to jointly contest Punjab polls

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal and the Bahujan Samaj Party joined hands on Saturday to contest the Assembly polls due in Punjab in early 2022.

Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal and BSP national general secretary Satish Chandra Mishra made an announcement in this regard. "The Akali Dal will contest 97 seats and the BSP 20 – eight seats in the Doaba region, seven in Malwa and five in Majha region of the State," Mr. Badal said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 8

Up in smoke



Damage control: Delhi Fire Service personnel dousing a fire that broke out at the Lajpat Nagar Central Market in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY (REPORT ON PAGE 4)

'Operation Olivia' to the rescue of Olive Ridleys

The Coast Guard helps enforce laws to protect turtles as they arrive to nest in Odisha

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Every year, the Indian Coast Guard's "Operation Olivia", initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.

"For optimal results, round-the-clock surveillance is conducted from November till May utilising Coast Guard assets such as fast patrol vessels, air cushion vessels, interceptor craft and Dornier aircraft to enforce laws near the rookeries," a Coast Guard officer said. "From November 2020 to May 2021, the Coast Guard devoted 225 ship days and 388 aircraft hours to protect 3.49 lakh turtles that laid eggs along the Odisha coast."

The Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is listed as vulnerable under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red



Coast Guard personnel rescuing a turtle. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

list. All five species of sea turtles found in India are included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and in the Appendix I of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora which prohibits trade in turtle products by signatory countries. The Orissa Marine Fisheries Act empowers the Coast Guard as one of its enforcement agencies.

"Studies have found three main factors that damage Olive Ridley turtles and their

trawlers in the waters adjoining nesting areas; prohibiting the use of gill nets on turtle approaches to the shore; and curtailing turtle poaching.

Nesting habits
The Olive Ridley has one of the most extraordinary nesting habits in the natural world, including mass nesting called arribadas. The 480-km-long Odisha coast has three arribada beaches at Gahirmatha, the mouth of the Devi river, and in Rushikulya, where about 1 lakh nests are found annually.

"Sea turtles generally return to their natal beach, or where they were born, to lay eggs as adults," the Coast Guard officer explained. Mating occurs in the offshore waters of the breeding grounds and females then come ashore to nest, usually several times during a season.

New declassification policy gets nod

Cases like 1962 war, Operation Bluestar will be taken up on case by case basis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday approved a policy on archiving, declassification, compilation and publication of war and operations histories by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). However, declassification of older wars like the 1962 war is not automatic and will be taken up on a case by case basis by a committee to be constituted under the policy.

"According to the policy,

records should ordinarily be declassified in 25 years. Records older than 25 years should be appraised by archival experts and transferred to the National Archives of India once the war/operations histories have been compiled," the Ministry said on Saturday.

Confidential cases
Asked about cases like the highly confidential Henderson Brooks report on the 1962 war with China and the

five years, will be for internal consumption first, and later the committee may decide to publicly release whole or parts of it, considering the sensitivity of the subject, the official said. "The policy mandates constitution of a committee headed by Joint Secretary, MoD, and comprising representatives of the Services, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and other organisations and prominent military historians for compilation of war and operations histories."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 7

Bhawanipur bypoll widens Cong.-Left rift

Allies divided on opposing Mamata



SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The by-election to the Bhawanipur (Bhabanipur) Assembly segment in Kolkata, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is set to seek re-election, will test the strength of the five-year-old Left-Congress electoral alliance in West Bengal.

Differences in the alliance have come out in the open on whether to field a candidate against the Chief Minister, who will be contesting after her loss in Nandigram.

West Bengal Pradesh Congress chief Adhir Ranjan

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 7

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HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

It was mayhem everywhere. Bodies wrapped in white were being brought in – in hands and on wheels. Siren of ambulances is all that was heard the entire day. The only sight day in and day out was that of burning pyres, recalled Hemant Kumar Sharma, priest of Seemapuri cremation ground.

Mr. Kumar (29) – clad in a white kurta pyjama – sat in the courtyard of the cremation ground, his mask below his chin, in the company of another priest. There is one pyre burning on the premises with 26 platforms, and another body is due to come. There are hens roaming around...their clucking is now audible.

"It's relaxed now. There's probably one COVID-19 body coming in once in 3-4 days. We have time to breathe, eat, sleep, drink water," he said.

Looking back, he said he had never imagined that he would have to witness such a sight. He wished never to see it ever again.

New platforms

Walking through the cremation ground, he pointed at an empty space and said they had built nine platforms apart from the 26 allotted platforms. At another space, they had prepared five platforms. Now, what remains of the extra space are huge black spots and a few bricks lying here and there.

Mr. Kumar then walked a few steps and showed an empty field adjacent to the cremation premises.

"This is where children are buried. But when deaths were peaking, we had converted it into a cremation space and built 72 platforms. We had to break a wall to make way for wood," he recalled.

For more than 10 days in April, over 20 workers here, including priests, sanitation workers and helpers, worked for 24 hours a day and cremated bodies at night as well, against the Hindu beliefs for cremation rites.

"People used to leave bodies outside here without even informing us. There have been so many families who used to leave asking us to send the video of cremation on WhatsApp. We



Priests and workers at Delhi crematoriums recall the dreadful period when the number of COVID-infected bodies kept swelling as the second wave raged.

They wish never to witness such times again.

used to cremate those bodies at night," he said.

Chant mantras in sleep

Talking about the impact this period had on him, Mr. Kumar said, "During that time, my mother used to forcefully ask me to come home for a few hours of sleep. My family says that I used to chant mantras in my sleep also."

I am able to sleep now, he added. Mr. Kumar, who has a six-month-old daughter, didn't hold her for a month-and-a-half out of fear. Back at home, he used to eat and sleep in a corner, trying to stay away from the other family members as much as possible. "Here we didn't use PPE kits because it used to be so hot. It was impossible to breathe...we used only masks and gloves," he said.

However, they were all a little at ease because the staffers at the crematorium were fully vaccinated. Mr. Kumar said when the vaccination began, they received a call from government officials and were asked to get vaccinated because they were to deal with COVID-19 bodies.

"Sapne main bhi nahi socha tha aisa manzar dekhenge. Dil se

rona aata tha. Ek 6 mahine ke bacche ka antim sanskar kiya tha humne. Uske papa itna ro rahe tho. Vo ankhon ke samne se jaata nahin. [Didn't imagine in my dreams that I'll see something like this. We performed last rites of a six-month-old boy who died of COVID-19]. His father

was crying inconsolably. I can never forget that]," he said.

Signs of new life

At Punjabi Bagh cremation ground, plants in the premises had died because pyres were set up right next to them when the number of deaths increased.

The plants have now been cut and there's a semblance of life as new leaves have started to appear.

"I had become used to it since last year, so it didn't affect me much," said Pankaj Sharma (40), one of the priests here. But he insisted the situation wasn't as bad here as it was at other cremation grounds. "Yes, people had to wait here as well but not for as much time as in other cremation grounds."

Now, there are only one or two COVID-19 bodies coming daily and most of the ground remains empty.

But for the inexperienced priests and staffers, seeing the sight of innumerable bodies had an impact, unlike for Mr. Sharma.

"There were days when we didn't get time to have meals or even drink water. We would start our day at 6.30 a.m. and as-

Clockwise from left: Pankaj Sharma at the Punjabi Bagh cremation ground; Hemant Kumar Sharma points towards an empty spot that was converted into a cremation ground during the second wave at the Seemapuri crematorium; priests at the Punjabi Bagh cremation ground; once teeming with COVID-19 patients, LNJP Hospital now wears a deserted look. • R.V. MOORTHY



that our names were not on the list," said a sanitation worker who didn't wish to be named.

"We were around COVID-19 bodies and COVID positive patients. We deserved it," said Deepanshu.

At Lok Nayak Hospital, the area outside the emergency ward now stands deserted and the two white tents installed as waiting area, a few weeks ago, are empty. There are no people waiting outside with oxygen cylinders. No queue of ambulances and no relatives crying and pleading to admit their loved ones.

It's all gone and everyone's breathing a sigh of relief.

A civil defence volunteer, Abhay, on duty outside the hospital, recalled his duty at the mortuary "during those days" and all he saw was bodies being wheeled in. "I don't want to remember it at all."

Tales of horror

**E-TENDERING PRESS NOTICE**

The Executive Engineer, CD-I, Irrigation & Flood Control Department, GNCTD Opp. ESI Hospital, Basai Darapur Office Complex New Delhi-110027 invites on behalf of the President of India, online percentage rate tender from approved and eligible contractors for the following works:-

1. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/05 (ID No 2021_IFC_204034_1) H.O.A.: -2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Providing and fixing precast RCC road divider at the vulnerable locations prone to encroachment/malba dumping on the right bank of Najafgarh drain between Chander Vihar Bridge D/S (RD 38960) to (RD 39523) E.C. - Rs. 38,06,375/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

2. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/06 (ID No 2021_IFC_204038_1) H.O.A.- 2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Providing and fixing precast RCC road divider at the vulnerable locations prone to encroachment/malba dumping on the right bank of Najafgarh drain between Chander Vihar Bridge U/S (RD 38960) to (RD 38360) E.C. - Rs. 39,09,250/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

3. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/08 (ID No 2021_IFC_204070_1) H.O.A.- 2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Repair of existing road on right bank of Najafgarh Drain from Ranholi Bridge D/S (i.e. RD 34350m to RD 34800m) E.C. - Rs. 42,38,274/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

4. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/09 (ID No 2021_IFC_204072_1) H.O.A.- 2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Removal of hyacinth, vegetation, patera, elephant grass, floating material etc. and grass from RD. 30180m to RD. 45316m i.e. from Kakraula Regulator cum Bridge to Basaidarapur Bridge of Najafgarh Drain E.C. - Rs. 14,98,946/- period of Completion of 365 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

5. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/10 (ID No 2021_IFC_204073_1) H.O.A.: -2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Repairing and Renovation of Boundary Wall from RD 0m to RD 1465m at Right Bank of Palam Link Drain E.C. - Rs. 16,57,425/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

6. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/11 (ID No 2021_IFC_204075_1) H.O.A.: -2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Cleaning/ Removal of obstructions from Meera Bagh Bridge to Basaidarapur Bridge and its vicinity on right Bank of Najafgarh Drain E.C. - Rs. 18,73,640/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

7. NIT No. EE/CD-I/DB/NIT/2021-22/12 (ID No 2021_IFC_204074_1) H.O.A.: -2711-Non Plan, Name of Work:- Repair of existing road on right bank of Najafgarh Drain from Pankha Road Outfall U/S (i.e. RD 37180m to RD 36780m) E.C. - Rs. 37,61,205/- period of Completion of 60 days (Date of submission & opening of bid on 14.06.2021 at 3.00 PM & 3.05 P.M. respectively.)

Note :- 1) Details of above mentioned works & eligibility criteria can be seen and downloaded from the web site <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>

2. Amendment(s)/ alteration(s) / corrigendum if any, will be available at website only.

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Short term notice inviting E-tenders
Gist of e-NIT NO. 11 OF 2021-22 Dated 10.06.2021

For and on behalf of Lt. Governor U.T. of Jammu & Kashmir, Executive Engineer, Mechanical, SKIMS, Soura, Srinagar, invites online e-bids in two (02) cover system from Manufacturers/Authorized Dealers/ registered/Reputed & experienced firms having expertise as detailed in the tender document for the following works:-

S.No	Name of the Work :-	Estimated Cost (in Lacs)
1	Supply of bulk type Cylinders for Disaster Ward at SKIMS, MCH, Bemina	Rs. 21,00,000/-

The complete tender document is available at website <http://jkttenders.gov.in>. Interested bidders/tenders may view, download the e-bid document, seek clarifications and submit their bids online up to the date and time mentioned in the table below. Tender Document contains qualifying criteria for bidders. Specifications, Bills of Quantities, & Terms and conditions of the contract and other relevant details.

i)	Date and time of downloading/Sale of tender documents (Starting Date).	12.06.2021 from 11:00 Hours.
ii)	Date & Time of Bidding Queries/clarification/Pre-bid meet	14.06.2021 at 14:00 Hours.
iii)	Last Date & Time of Bid Uploading	18.06.2021 upto 16:00 Hours
iv)	Date of Submission of hard copies (only Original EMD/DD for Document Fee)	19.06.2021 upto 14:00 Hours
v)	Date & Time of Commercial/technical Bid (Cover-I) opening	21.06.2021 11:00 Hours (or next convenient day).
vi)	Date & Time of Financial Bid(Cover-II) Opening of the qualifying Bidders	Shall be intimated separately.
vii)	Cost of e-bid Document	Rs. 1000/- (Rupees One Thousand & Only)
viii)	Amount of Earnest Money Deposit(CDR/FDR)	Rs. 42000/- (Rupees forty-two thousand only)
ix)	Completion Time	10 days
x)	Budget Head	MPLAD for the year 2021-23

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Mechanical, SKIMS

No.:SIMS 139 EX/MECH/547/2021-552-61-6448-50
Dated:- 11/06/2021
No.:SIMS 6450 Dated:- 12.06.2021

Appeal for Identification

General Public is hereby informed that a male dead body Name: Unknown, S/o Unknown, R/o: Unknown, Age: About 60 Yrs, Height: 5'5", Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Normal, Face: Round, Wearing : White Shirt, Black Pajama and Bare in feet. He was found dead at Gali No. 1,

Sudhmapuri, Near Vinod Gupta Ghar Welcome, Delhi on 08.06.2021. In this regard, a DD No. 91-A, Dt 08.06.2021 has been lodged at PS Welcome, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this person but no clue has come to light so far.

Any person having any information or clue about this person may kindly inform to the following.

SHO

P.S., Welcome, Delhi

DP/828/NE/2021 Ph. : 011-22826808, 8750870722

J&K SPORTS COUNCIL

Bakhshi Stadium Srinagar
Email ID:jkSportsCouncil@gmail.com

e-NIT No. 09 of 2021-22
DATE D: 09 - 06 - 2021

For and on behalf of the Secretary, J&K Sports Council, e-tender are invited from the reputed manufacturers or their authorized distributors/dealers or registered suppliers/Agencies for purchase of General Sports Kit for Khelo India State Centre of Excellence J&K Sports Council Water Sports Academy Dalgate Srinagar and Fencing Academy M.A. Stadium Jammu:-

S.No	Particulars	Adv. Cost	Cost of Tender Document
1	Supply of General Sports Kit for KISCE J&K Sports Council Water Sports Academy Dalgate Srinagar	Rs 15 Lacs	Rs 2000/-
2	Supply of General Sports Kit for KISCE J&K Sports Council Fencing Academy M.A. Stadium Jammu	Rs 15 Lacs	Rs 2000/-

Date of Publishing of tender
Period of Down loading of documents
Bid submission start date
Bid submission end date (online documents)
Date & time of opening of Bids (online)

The tender documents along with other Terms and Conditions of the NIT and relevant documents can be downloaded from the website <http://jkttenders.gov.in> The tender shall be uploaded in electronic format on the website <http://jkttenders.gov.in> The bidders shall have to upload scanned copies of all necessary documents like CDR/PAN/GST Number/ Demand Draft/ (Tender fee)/ registration certificate duly renewed. The cost of tender documents shall be deposited in the J&K Bank bearing Account No.: 006704010006185, IFSC Code: JAKA0Street, Branch: H.S.H. Street. The cost of tender document is non refundable.

No:SC/5816/200-1205
Dated: 09.06.2021
DIPK-NB-1180/21

Sd/-
SECRETARY,
J&K Sports Council

2041 draft plan envisions Capital as a '24-hour city'

Document lays out steps to promote night-time economy

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

Apart from promoting the concept of a '24-hour city' and fostering night-time economy, the draft Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) - 2041 also proposes to encourage public transporters such as the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to operate low frequency night-time services along earmarked routes across the national Capital.

In its bid to develop and strengthen economic centres, the plan proposes to foster night-time economy. "Nodes, precincts or circuits shall be identified for continuing work, cultural activity and entertainment at night to attract tourists and locals. This will improve economic yield by extending utilisation of work spaces and safety by promoting a vibrant night life," read the draft plan.

Public transport

The draft MPD-2041 states that one of the primary objectives is to build on the Capital's extensive public and shared transport infrastructure to reduce dependence on private vehicles.

As a part of special services, the draft MPD - 2041 states: "The plan targets night-time economies to promote higher economic



To disincentivise private transport, the draft plan proposes restricting availability of public parking in markets. ■FILE PHOTO

productivity as well as increasing availability of vibrant and safe public spaces at night. The DMRC and the DTC will be encouraged to operate low frequency night-time services along earmarked routes or for special events or festivals."

The plan also suggests fare rationalisation to improve utilisation of public transport for short and medium distances, frequent intra-city trips and increased ridership in high-density areas.

Congestion charges

To disincentivise private transport and increase reliance on public or shared modes of transport, the draft plan also proposes congestion pricing and restricting availability of public parking in markets, cultural hubs and work centres.

"Road-owning agencies in consultation with traffic police shall notify specific areas

in the city as congestion pricing zones. Parking charges to be used as a tool for disincentivising private transport usage. Dynamic pricing for peak and off-peak periods, on and off-street parking to be utilised to decongest areas with high vehicular footfall," the plan reads.

According to the draft MPD-2041, concerned agencies will also be required to identify specific areas with heavy footfall such as tourist hotspots and markets as "pedestrian only" zones. "Tactical urbanism measures to convert streets into fully pedestrian zones for specific time durations to be encouraged, so that overall traffic flow is not hampered," the draft plan stated.

The draft plan was recently put in the public domain by the Delhi Development Authority and stakeholders were invited to put forth objections and suggestions.

Over 4.5 lakh have received ration: Delhi govt.

Scheme is a walk-in process and does not require beneficiaries to pre-register

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

More than 4.5 lakh residents have been provided free ration by the Delhi government so far and efforts are under way to iron out issues related to the supply of ration at a few sites over the last few days.

According to the Delhi government, as much as 5,000 MT of dry ration has been provided at centres in the form of combined entitlement consisting of 5 kg of foodgrains, including 4 kg of wheat and 1 kg of rice, per beneficiary so far.

The Delhi government is

distributing dry ration at such sites, which include 280 schools, and 5,000 MT will become available at such centres within a week.

The distribution is carried out by the staffers of the Directorate of Education, municipal corporations and other departments in coordination with the area District Magistrate between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on all working days except gazetted holidays and Sundays.

The scheme does not involve the beneficiaries to do any pre-registration and is a walk-in process on the basis of beneficiary details such as

name, parentage, mobile number, Aadhaar which are utilised to generate atoken number via SMS.

According to the government, those in need of dry ration, who do not possess ration cards, are eligible to receive relief under the initiative.

Helped many

Amrita, a resident of Khichdiupur village said, "A lot of people have lost their jobs, and are finding it difficult to feed their families being the sole breadwinners. The scheme has aided such people and many others who

were facing adversities during this pandemic."

Delhi Food and Civil Supplies Minister Imran Hussain said, "A large number of people turned up at several centres in excess of what was expected. But people should not be concerned. We have placed orders with the FCI for more foodgrains, which will arrive soon."

Mr. Hussain added that the government had taken note of all kinds of grievances reported and sought to issue an assurance that the process will be further streamlined in the coming days.

BJP attacks AAP govt. over ration scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Saturday staged a demonstration over the Delhi government's alleged failure to implement the 'one nation one ration card' scheme.

The protest was staged at the Shahdara chowk taxi stand and led by Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta. North-East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari, Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, State general secretary Harsh Malhotra and MLA Jitender Mahajan also participated in the agitation.

"When 34 States and Union Territories have already started this scheme, what is Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's compulsion not to do so in Delhi? The Delhi government is in the grips of the ration mafia and hence wants to start 'Ghar Ghar Ration Scheme'. It is a scam and not a scheme," said Mr. Gupta.

"Mr. Kejriwal wants to distribute ration under the PM Gareeb Kalyan Yojna as his own scheme, which smacks of corruption. When this ration reaches the needy and poor it will include cost of packaging and delivery, making it costlier," Mr. Bidhuri claimed.

Mr. Tiwari alleged that the Delhi government's decision to deprive residents of the Central government's ration benefits by not implementing the 'one nation one ration card' scheme was "cheap politics".

Major fire breaks out at Lajpat Nagar Central Market

33 fire tenders were pressed into service

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A major fire broke out at Lajpat Nagar's Central Market on Saturday. No injuries were reported, the police said, adding that a case has been registered.

Delhi Fire Services chief Atul Garg said that a call was received at 10.30 a.m. regarding a fire in a showroom after which 33 fire tenders were pressed into service in the next four hours till the fire was doused.

Cause not ascertained
Cooling-off operation continued till late evening, Mr.



Firefighters douse the blaze at Lajpat Nagar Central Market in New Delhi on Saturday. ■R.V. MOORTHY

Garg said.

The Fire department said that the blaze first started from four showrooms and later spread to the fifth shop.

Mr. Garg said that the cause of fire is yet to be ascertained. He also added that it was due to the firemen and timely response that the blaze

didn't spread to residential areas behind the showrooms. "There were 100 fire-fighters on the spot," he said.

The police said that senior officers from the force and fire department reached the spot and BSES and IGL were also asked to cut supply immediately. "The crime team and forensic team were also called to inspect the spot. A case under Section 285 [for negligent act endangering human life] of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and investigation will be done accordingly," said a senior officer.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted: "I am constantly monitoring the situation and in constant touch with the fire department officials".

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BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

TAMIL

ALLIANCE WANTED

For Fair, Beautiful & Charming Hindu Nadar Girl 32 yrs / 145 cm B.Tech., MBA. Father Business Man affluent Family in Chennai.

Looking for Handsome Groom 27 - 33 yrs. Entrepreneur / Working Professional from reputed Family preferably Chennai based.

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SC, AGE 31, Fair, MBBS, MD, Doctor, Chennai. Seeks: Doctor, B.E in MNC or Any Govt, 9710840909, 7845089996

CS, 34/5", BE, working in MNC, Seeking Born-Again, Christian Girl, 34/35", M.Sc M.Phil, working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College, Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private), Suitable Alliance, Employed / Settled in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 9841182514

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SEEKING A PQM, well settled in India or abroad, cosmopolitan, under 35, for a good looking working Muslim girl, 30, married and separated in 3 months. Religion no bar. Call 9326524325.

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WANTED GROOM well educated (Doctor/Civil services/Engineer) for Hindu, Kalla(mukulathor) Pillai, Mudalai, 29 years, Fair, Gymnacologist (M.B.B.S,M.S)by profession, working in Chennai .7200442353.

ENGLISH

A well settled Christian family from AP is looking for a committed Christian Groom below 32rs, and working in senior management level for their beautiful Daughter 26yrs MBA, Language and caste not an important criteria. No Mediators. Please contact on WhatsApp: 9862628791 (or) finnyamsuvelam@gmail.com.

MALAYALAM

EZHAVA GIRL- 28/178, M.E, MNC in Chennai, seeking suitable alliance. C.N.B. Ct- 9380648656

WANTED GROOM

NAIR GIRL, 29/155 cms, fair, beautiful, slim, homely, MA, Poornam star, Kochi based reputed Menon family, working at Bangalore looking for a smart, well qualified, Bangalore employed Nair boy. Contact: Mobile: 9847912664, Email: menonvijayakumar@gmail.com

2041 draft plan envisions Capital as a '24-hour city'

Document lays out steps to promote night-time economy

TELUGU

GROOM WANTED
Kamma Naidu only / 24 Yrs
B. Arch & Plus Two Rank Holder
Slim & Beautiful / Very well to do.
Seeks well qualified. Elite and Decent Family, Chennai / Abroad.

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A well established Muslim family seeks alliance for their convent educated graduate 29 years / 5'3" daughter.

Alliance invited from respectable business family or boy well settled in a highly paid job in metropolitan cities in and outside India.

Contact- 9412273364
or
What's app. to 9319245943

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BRIDES WANTED
35, ASTHAM Kannai, 165cm, MBA, Manager Pvt. Chennai, 90K pm seeks suitable Veg. Degree Bride. 9381725577

TAMIL

NAIDU, NAIDU Groom, fair, Chennai, 27/190, final year M.S.(Gen. Surgery), seeks Bride with matching horos cope-98409 01541- E-mail: mrsmeenash@gmail.com

KAVARA NAIDU

29/170 MBBS working GH, 60K pm sks MBBS,MD,MS Dr bride,Caste/All Languages no bar 9442696079

ELITE BRIDES WANTED

NAIDU HASTHAM 30/165 pursuing Ph.D well mannered seeks India based suitable Groom,Caste no bar. 9790981091/9884222828

NAIDU VELLALAR

27, 168 cms, Doctor, Bachelors in Medicine. Lives in Thiruvannamalai. Father is an affluent Businessman with a good net worth. Looking for a well educated match. Contact: 6366448345

NAIDU ISSUELESS

Divorcee 45/151cms, ACS, MBA Empl. PSU looking for Bridegroom, Chennai-CNB, Ph- 8778873501

NAIDU CASTE NO BAR

25, 165 cms, Doctor, Bachelors in Medicine, Lives in Nagercoil. Belongs to an affluent Businessman with a good net worth. Looking for a compatible match. Contact: 6366448346

NADHAR

25, 165 cms, Professional, Bachelor in Engineering. Lives in Chennai. Father is a working Professional. Looking for a compatible and well educated match from the same community. Contact: 6366448347

NAIDU

25, 165 cms, Professional, Bachelor in Engineering. Lives in Nagercoil. Belongs to an affluent Businessman with a good net worth. Looking for a compatible match. Contact: 6366448348

NAIDU

25, 165 cms, Professional, Bachelor in Engineering. Lives in Nagercoil. Belongs to an affluent Businessman with a good net worth. Looking for a compatible match. Contact: 6366448349

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NAIDU

Rajasthan announces package for COVID-19 orphans, widows

It includes ex gratia of ₹1 lakh, free education and pension

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government on Saturday announced a financial relief package for the children who lost their parents to the COVID-19 infection and the women whose husband died of the disease during the pandemic. The orphans and widows will get an ex gratia of ₹1 lakh each, followed by a financial assistance every month.

As part of the Chief Minister's Corona Baal Kalyan Yojana, the children who lost their parents will get ₹2,500 a month till they attain 18 years of age. The orphans

will be provided an assistance of ₹5 lakh on the completion of 18 years as well as free senior secondary education and other benefits under the scheme.

Amount for each child

The women whose husband succumbed to the infection will be given an ex gratia of ₹1 lakh and a pension of ₹5,000 a month, irrespective of their age and financial status. They will also get ₹1,000 a month for raising their children and ₹2,000 per year for their school books and uniform. The amount will be calculated for each child separately.

Trust party cadre, says Mayawati

BSP chief's statement comes after sacking 2 senior leaders

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Saturday asked her supporters and workers to trust her party cadres, but not party leaders as she said some of them did not hesitate before hurting the interests of the party for selfish gains and often got sold out.

Ms. Mayawati's warning, at a meeting held here in preparation for the 2022 Ut-

tar Pradesh Assembly polls, comes days after she sacked two senior party MLAs Ram Achal Rajbhar and Lalji Verma on charges of indiscipline. Members of the OBC community, the two leaders were some of the few remaining fragments of the BSP's old-guard, still associated with the party in the post-Kanshiram era.

Following their expulsion, the leaders had hinted that a dispute with a BSP

'Corona mata' temple built, demolished

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PRATAPGARH (U.P.)

The residents at Juhi Shukulpur village here built a 'corona mata' temple, seeking divine grace to stay clear of the infection. However, the temple built on June 7 was demolished on Friday night.

The villagers alleged that it was demolished by the police, which denied the charge, saying it was constructed on a disputed site and one of the parties involved in the dispute razed it. The villagers said the temple was constructed five days ago with donations from local residents.

DELHI POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, (GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI)
5th Floor, I.S.B.T. Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006
visit us at : <http://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in>

PUBLIC NOTICE

Kind Attention: All Producers, Recyclers and Manufacturers of Carry Bags, Recyclable Plastic Bags, Multi-layered Packaging and Processing of Plastic Waste in NCT of Delhi.

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt. of India has notified the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018. These rules shall apply to every waste generators, waste processors and manufacturers of plastic carry bags, multi-layered packaging material.

As per Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018, all persons who generate, collect, store, transport, re-use, recycle and dispose plastic waste in any form including importer, producer, individuals or agencies, groups of individuals voluntarily engaged or authorized, are required to obtain registration under the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 and Consent to Operate under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 from Delhi Pollution Control Committee.

The Rule 13 of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 provides:-

- No person shall manufacture carry bags or recycle plastic bags or multilayered packaging unless the person has obtained a registration from Delhi Pollution Control Committee, prior to the commencement of production;
- Every producer shall, for the purpose of registration or for renewal of registration, make an application of DPCC, in Form I.
- Every person recycling or processing waste or proposing to recycle or process plastic waste shall make an application to the DPCC, for grant of registration or renewal of registration for the recycling unit, in Form II.
- Every manufacturer engaged in manufacturer of plastic to be used as raw material by the producer shall make an application to the DPCC, for grant of registration or for the renewal of registration, in Form III.

The rule of 4(1) (c) of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 provides carry bags made of virgin or recycled plastic, shall not be less than fifty micron in thickness.

All the Producers, Recyclers and Manufacturers of Carry Bag, Recycle Plastic Bags or Multi-layered Packaging in NCT of Delhi, are hereby directed to apply online at the website of DPCC at <http://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in> for registration under the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 and Consent to Operate under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 by 30th June, 2021, failing which, action shall be taken against the defaulter units including closure of the unit, disconnection of electricity/ water supply as per provisions of the aforementioned acts including levying of Environmental Compensation. Further, the units, who have already obtained Registration under PWM Rules, 2018 shall also apply for renewal of the same well in advance to avoid penal action.

'Sisodia's accusation on Punjab school education atrocious'

Amarinder says AAP leadership is obsessed with electoral politics

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday described as "atrocious" the Aam Aadmi Party's accusation that he has a "secret" friendship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Chief Minister was reacting to AAP leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's statement after Punjab was ranked number one in the Performance Grading Index 2019-2020 for school education by the Centre.

In a hard-hitting reply to the allegation, Capt. Singh said the AAP leadership is so "obsessed" with electoral politics that it saw poll conspiracies even in something as basic as school education.

The fact is that AAP, which "failed" to make a dent in Punjab's political arena over the past over four years, can see the rout which it is facing in the 2022 Assembly elections, he said in a statement.

"Come to Punjab and I will show you around our schools," Capt. Singh said, adding that the revamp of the State's schools was an exercise undertaken by his government as top priority and the ranking released by the Union Education Minis-



Amarinder Singh •



Manish Sisodia •

ter recently reflected the success of those efforts.

Jugalbandi' invite

"If you are really interested in improving the education system of Delhi, may be you should do a 'jugalbandi' with me and I will teach you how to manage things better," the Chief Minister replied to Mr. Sisodia's charge.

Punjab Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla also hit out at his Delhi counterpart saying: "The desperation of Manish Sisodia was quite visible and understandable as paid clamour about the rosy picture of Delhi schools in media by the AAP government had comprehensively been exposed. While Punjab got the top rank, Delhi has not been placed in top five....It has been placed on sixth position."

Mr. Singla said the teach-

ers and other staff of the Education department have worked hard to bring the State on the top position. "Punjab has emerged as a leading State in rejuvenating school education by being a pioneer in bringing in infrastructural development, qualitative improvement and complying with RTE norms in government schools," he added.

Mr. Sisodia on Saturday raised strong questions against the report released by the Central government. "Crediting Punjab government with the best government schools in the country at a time when the State has seen the closure of more than 800 schools and several schools found to be functioning as alcohol factories, is a farce. It is crystal clear that Captain Singh has the blessings of Modiji," he said.

The Delhi Education Minister went on to say that quality education and learning has become a "joke" in Punjab government schools. "Modiji has released this report to hide the inadequacies in quality education of Punjab. Many children had to bear the brunt and parents had to transfer their children to private schools," he said.

BJP flays AAP

Reacting to Mr. Sisodia's allegations, the BJP said that the problem with the AAP leadership is that they are Delhi's local leaders but wish to speak on every State's politics, including that of Punjab, whose people have repeatedly rejected the party in every election after 2017.

"When a Central government report favours Delhi government, they claim credit for their work. Why then they try to discredit the Centre's report which goes against them? Why did the Delhi government during the last six years push out 15 lakh weak students from Class IX and XI, forcing them to opt for NOIS schooling instead of helping them improve," BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana asked.

(With inputs from PTI)

Police warn against fake news on Virbhadrappa's health

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh Police on Saturday warned people against spreading rumours regarding former Chief Minister Virbhadrappa Singh's health on social media.

The move came a day after former Minister and Solan BJP leader Mohinder Nath Sofat and some others posted on Facebook regarding Mr. Virbhadrappa's 'death', just hours after the ex-CM tested positive for COVID-19 and was admitted to the Indira Gandhi Medical College Hospital here for treatment.

Hospital Senior Medical Superintendent Janak Raj told PTI that his condition is stable. The former CM on his Facebook account said he is healthy and being looked after by the doctors.

After realising his mistake, Mr. Sofat deleted his post and expressed regret for it.

The police said strict legal action will be taken against those spreading such rumours. "These acts are in blatant violation of the Disaster Management and Information Technology Acts. The police advise such elements to stop it."

Take corrective steps in housing scheme'

Centre pulls up Odisha after irregularities were found in PMAY-G implementation

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

After coming across large scale irregularities in the implementation of the Prime Minister Awas Yojana - Gramin in Odisha, the Centre has asked the State government to take corrective measures.

A Central team led by Gaya Prasad, Deputy Director General of Department of Rural Development, had visited the State on February 9 and 10 to conduct an inquiry after a complaint from former Union Tribal Affairs Minister and Sundargarh MP Jual Oram.

"The Central team ob-

served several cases of irregularities relating to absence of PMAY-G logo on houses, lack of quality construction and houses being shown as completed on AwasSoft, but found incomplete during inspection," Union Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar wrote to Mr. Oram.

'Recover funds'

Some of the prominent irregularities flagged by the team include allotment of PMAY-G houses to both father and son and construction of PMAY-G houses on government land.

The Rural Development

Department had directed the State Chief Secretary to recover funds from ineligible beneficiaries of the flagship housing scheme.

At one place, beneficiaries were found constructing houses on government land.

"The State government may consider regularising allotment of land to beneficiaries and allow them to proceed. If it is not agreeable to the State government, then the funds released to them should be recovered," the team recommended.

The department also asked the State government to take stern action against people involved in irregular-

ities and file police cases against erring officials.

The quality of construction noticed during inspections is very poor. The State is requested to take measures to improve the quality of the houses that have been inspected during inquiry and bring them to liveable condition," Nagendra Nath Sinha, Rural Development Secretary, said in a letter to Odisha CS.

The State must improve the system of quality monitoring and administrative supervision to bring significant improvements in the quality of houses under construction and those inspected, Mr. Sinha said.

Odisha's daily cases drop below 5,000

47 deaths were reported, taking the State's toll to 3,257

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha reported less than 5,000 daily COVID-19 cases for the first time in 53 days, with the State reporting 4,852 cases on June 12.

The State last reported less than 5,000 cases at 4,851 on April 21. Odisha's total case load stands at 8,47,313. Its active cases stand at 62,515, which had once crossed the one lakh mark.

Highest number of cases – 649 – were reported from Khordha district, followed by 500 in Cuttack. Jajpur and Balasore are two other districts where more than 300 new cases were found.

The highest daily spike of 12,852 was reported on May 23.

Forty-seven persons were reported dead in the last 24 hours taking the total death toll to 3,257, the highest ever

single-day death toll. As death audits have picked up at the district level, the number of deaths has been gradually rising.

Out of 30 districts in Odisha, nine currently have more than 2,500 active cases, which put them in the red category. Another nine districts have active cases between 1,000 and 1,500, for which they have been marked yellow. The remaining 12 districts are green as the total active cases are under 1,000.

Since the beginning of June, the number of patients recovering daily has exceeded the number of fresh cases.

DELHI POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, (GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI)

5th Floor, I.S.B.T. Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006

visit us at : <http://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in>

PUBLIC NOTICE

Kind Attention: PUBLIC NOTICE FOR REGISTRATION AND SUBMISSION OF EPR ACTION PLAN BY PRODUCERS, IMPORTERS & BRAND-OWNERS UNDER PROVISION OF PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT {PWM} RULES

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt. of India has notified the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018. These rules shall apply to every waste generators, waste processors and manufacturers of plastic carry bags, multi-layered packaging material.

The Rule 9 of PWM Rules, 2018 provides Responsibility of producers, Importers and Brand Owners. –

1) The producers, within a period of six months from the date of publication of these rules, shall work out modalities for waste collection system based on Extended Producers Responsibility and involving State Urban Development Departments, either individually or collectively, through their own distribution channel or through the local body concerned;

2) Primary responsibility for collection of used multi-layered plastic sachet or pouches or packaging is of Producers, Importers and Brand Owners who introduce the products in the market. They need to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to their products. This plan of collection to be submitted to the State Pollution Control Boards while applying for Consent to Establish or Operate or Renewal. The Brand Owners whose consent has been renewed before the notification of these rules shall submit such plan within one year from the date of notification of these rules and implement with two years thereafter.

The Rule 13 (2) of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 provides:-

(2) Every producer shall, for the purpose of registration or for renewal of registration, make an application of DPPC, in Form I.

The rule of 4(1) (c) of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2018 provides carry bags made of virgin or recycled plastic, shall not be less than fifty micron in thickness.

Producers, Importers & Brand-owners (PIBOs) are required to fulfill Extended Producers Responsibility (EPR) for the plastic waste generated due to the products introduced by them in the market. EPR is responsibility of a producer/ importer/ brand owner for environmentally sound management of the product till the end of its life. PIBOs are required to obtain registration from CPCB, if operating in more than two States/ UTs and from concerned SPCB/PCC, if operating in one or two States/UTs only. CPCB has evolved Standard Operating Procedure for Producers, Importers & Brand-owners in March, 2021 which is available on CPCB and DPCC's website. PIBOs are required to follow the said SOP to fulfill EPR for the Plastic Waste generated due to the products introduced by them.

This notice is being issued to inform all the PIBOs to obtain Registration from CPCB/ DPCC (as applicable). Those PIBOs who have not yet applied for registration are informed that they shall submit application for registration complete in all respects, to CPCB (for those operating in more than two States/UTs)/ otherwise submit application for registration to DPCC. All the PIBOs are also required to submit EPR Action Plan as per SOP evolved by CPCB by 30th June, 2021 otherwise action, as deemed fit under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, including levying of Environmental Compensation and Closure of PIBO's operations, shall be taken against the defaulters.

(Member Secretary)

IN BRIEF



Haj pilgrimage from India cancelled

PALAKKAD There will be no Haj pilgrimage from India this year too. Kerala Haj Committee chairman C. Mohammed Faizy said on Saturday that Saudi Arabia had decided not to allow pilgrims from other countries in view of the COVID-19 spread. Last year too, Saudi Arabia had banned pilgrims from other nations.

Former TRS Minister resigns from Assembly

HYDERABAD Former Minister and Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) rebel MLA Eatala Rajender on Saturday submitted his resignation from the Assembly. Mr. Rajender, who represented Huzurabad, was sacked from the Cabinet last month over land encroachment allegations. He will join the BJP on June 14 in New Delhi.

Islanders gear up for 'black day' protest

KOCHI The Save Lakshadweep Forum, a collective of all political formations in the Union Territory which was formed to fight the unwelcome reforms being pushed by the Administrator Praful Khoda Patel, may observe a 'black day' on June 14, the day Mr. Patel is slated to arrive at Kavaratti for a week-long visit.

Sonu Sood's firm begins home delivery of oxygen

ANANTAPUR The Sood Charity Foundation, set up by actor Sonu Sood, began delivering medical oxygen at the doorstop here in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday. Anyone living within a radius of 80 km from the city can dial 7609999961 and get medical oxygen, the foundation said. More centres would be set up in the State in a phased manner, it said.

Let her face law here: IS recruit's mother

Nimisha's mother, who has been petitioning leaders for her extradition, is shocked at Centre's stance

SARATH BABU GEORGE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Centre's disinclination to permit the return of four Kerala women who had joined the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), has shattered the confidence of Bindu Sampath, the mother of Nimisha, alias Fathima Isa, one of those languishing in an Afghanistan prison.

Nevertheless, the Thiruvananthapuram native has resolved to continue her five-year-long battle to bring her daughter and granddaughter to India.

Nimisha is said to have surrendered after her hus-

band was killed in an attack in Afghanistan.

"How can the government abandon us at a time of crisis? We never expected them to break our trust when my daughter could have been brought to her motherland after so many years," Ms. Sampath asks from her home at Attukal, near Thiruvananthapuram.

Appeals in vain

The news reported by *The Hindu* came as a blow for Ms. Sampath who has been repeatedly petitioning leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minis-



Nimisha (Fathima)

ter Amit Shah and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

"I have been knocking on all doors in New Delhi for many years. Sadly, none of

our leaders has responded to my pleas. My son, an Army Major, and I have always served the country. Ironically, the Afghanistan authorities had responded to mail seeking details of her well-being," Ms. Sampath, a trustee of the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple, says.

She urged the Centre to extradite Nimisha and her daughter to the country and face trial for the crimes she has committed.

"I have full faith in our rule of law and the justice system. I have no qualms in letting my daughter face punishment for her mis-

takes. We only hope that it happens in our country and not in a foreign land."

Ms. Sampath says those who had "brainwashed" her daughter walk scot-free, despite her seeking action against them.

"Five people, including Nimisha, who studied together in a private dental college in Kasaragod had left the country to join the extremist organisation. Besides, my daughter had revealed her room-mate's role in convincing her to convert to Islam. No agency has bothered to investigate their roles," she alleges.

Two FIRs against Kannada actor Chetan

His posts criticised 'Brahminism'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Chetan Kumar

The city police have registered two FIRs against Kannada actor Chetan Kumar for allegedly "hurting religious beliefs" and "imputations prejudicial to national integration", for his recent remarks on Brahminism.

The two cases have been booked based on complaints by Sachidananda Murthy, chairman, Brahmin Development Board, and Vira Yuva Vedike, a community organisation. The complaints were registered with the Ulsoor Gate and Basavangudi police stations, respectively. In both FIRs, the police have booked the actor under Sections 153B and 29A of Indian Penal Code.

Mr. Kumar had recently made a series of social media posts critical of Brahminism, arguing that it is negation of the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. The controversy began

with Kannada actor Upendra posting a video on social media and Mr. Kumar's response to it.

In the video, Mr. Upendra appealed to people to not talk of caste as it would only perpetuate it further. Mr. Kumar responded with another video in which he denounced Brahminism as the root of caste inequality in India. In the same video, he clarified that he was not against Brahmins as a community but against "Brahminism", which he said had crept into all communities and even other religions.

Appeal for CBI probe into rosewood felling in Kerala

'Given the complicity of govt. officials, SIT inquiry farcical'

E.M. MANOJ
KALPETA

Illegally felled rosewood trees in Wayanad.

While the illegal felling of centuries-old rosewood trees in Wayanad roils the Kerala Assembly, environmental organisations in the district have sought an investigation by the Vigilance wing of the police or the CBI under the supervision of the High Court. The State government has set up a Special Investigation Team to probe the incident.

The massive felling of ancient rosewood trees in Wayanad by misinterpreting a government order by the timber lobby, with the alleged support of a group of top brass at the Secretariat and the Forest Department, is not an isolated incident," said N. Badusha, president, Wayanad Prakruthi Samarakshana Samiti, in a memorandum submitted to Union Environment Minister Pra-

sued by the Revenue Secretary on October 24, 2020, for felling rosewood trees on revenue land assigned for farmers was illegal, said Mr. Badusha. The silence of the senior officials in the Forest Department, despite getting a copy of the order the very next day, was inexplicable, he added. The District Public Prosecutor had advised the Wayanad District Collector and South Wayanad Divisional Forest Officer on January 12 that the felling was illegal. However, no steps were taken to prevent the loot, said Mr. Badusha.

Since the involvement of officials of the Revenue and Forest departments and top leaders of political parties was suspected, an investigation by lower rank officials would make the probe farcical, he added.

The government order is

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP; INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Delhi, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, central Maharashtra, coastal Karnataka, Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Vidarbha, Konkan & Goa, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	9...	35...	26.1	Kozhikode	25...	31...	24.1
Ahmedabad	...	40...	29.5	Kurnool	...	35...	26.8
Aizawl	69.2...	26.0...	17.6	Lucknow	...	35...	26.2
Altaabad	...	34.8...	26.4	Madurai	...	38.8...	26.1
Bengaluru	3...	29...	20...	Mangaluru	3...	27.8...	23.8
Bhopal	48.2...	36.9...	21.8	Mumbai	107...	30...	24.4
Bhubaneswar	1.7...	32.3...	25.3	Mysuru	...	31...	21.6
Chandigarh	24...	34...	22.1	New Delhi	...	35...	28.0
Chennai	...	37.9...	29.0	Patna	12.2...	29.2...	24.0
Coimbatore	...	32.8...	23.1	Puducherry	...	38.6...	25.8
Dehradun	18...	32.4...	19.0	Pune	1.2...	30...	23.4
Gangtok	...	20.6...	17.1	Raipur	10...	32...	24.6
Goa	23.5...	31.6...	25.3	Ranchi	50.4...	27.7...	21.3
Guwahati	7...	31.5...	26.4	Shillong	13...	23...	18.0
Hubballi	...	27.0...	22.0	Shimla	22...	28.4...	14.6
Hyderabad	2...	32.5...	23.3	Srinagar	...	30...	14.7
Imphal	4...	28.9...	20.4	Thiruvananthapuram	6...	30...	24.6
Kochi	...	41.0...	31.5	Tiruchi	...	38.3...	26.8
Kohima	27...	28.4...	24.0	Vijayawada	9...	34.0...	25.6
Kolkata	10...	33.8...	26.6	Visakhapatnam	1...	34.0...	26.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	.3	45	135	42	58	■■■
Bengaluru	.2	33	39	—	53	■■■
Chennai	12	23	45	37	73	■■■
Delhi	.4	32	114	118	125	■■■
Hyderabad	.3	60	17	13	23	■■■
Kolkata	.9	21	22	51	60	■■■
Lucknow	.9	46	60	90	74	■■■
Mumbai	.52	42	36	23	28	■■■
Pune	.7	13	73	108	68	■■■
Visakhapatnam	—	—	—	—	—	—

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Girsia, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 221 indicating unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Gadag, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 12

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

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

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

Facing nature's fury



Blown away: The remains of a steel scaffolding erected for the restoration of Belapur Fort after it collapsed due to heavy rain in Navi Mumbai on Saturday. A passenger travelling in an NMMT bus sustained injuries in the incident. •PTI

A year on, over 17,000 treated at Navi Mumbai's COVID centre

NMMC plans to build an oxygen plant for the jumbo facility to make it more capable of handling the third wave



Keeping fit: COVID-19 patients perform yoga as a part of their daily routine at the CIDCO Exhibition Centre in Vashi. •FILE PHOTO

machine, a high-resolution CT scanner is expected to start operations soon. Plans are afoot to build an oxygen plant exclusively for the facility ahead of a possible third wave. While the CCC has an X-ray

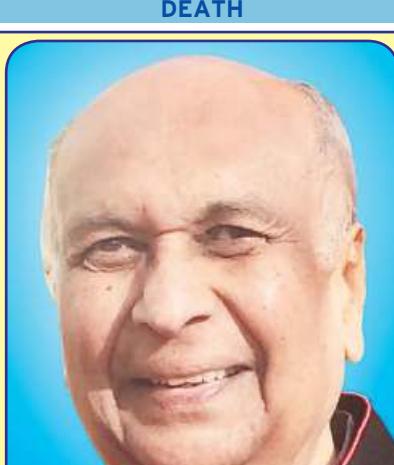
ment at private hospitals, and affluent families during both waves of the pandemic.

Dr. Mane said, "An IAS officer's sister and her husband did not find beds at a private hospital and were provided admission at our facility. A few days later, they found beds at a private hospital, but were so happy being at the centre that they refused to seek treatment elsewhere."

Boon to the city
According to NMMC Commissioner Abhijit Bangar, the jumbo facility has been a boon to the city. "Going forward, we will be adding more beds, equipment, and an oxygen plant to make the centre more capable of handling the third wave," Mr. Bangar said.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



DEHEJIA, Jaykumar (Jay)

Passed away peacefully on May 27, 2021 at home

in Manhattan.

Born April 9

FROM PAGE ONE

GST brought down on 14 COVID relief goods

For oxygen concentrators, medical grade oxygen and related devices such as ventilators, BiPAP machines, the GST rate has also been brought down to 5% from 12%. The same reduction has been approved in the levies on COVID-testing kits and pulse oximeters.

The 5% rate will apply to personal imports of oxygen concentrators as well as pulse oximeters, while the 18% GST payable on hand sanitizers has been reduced to 5%.

Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj said the tax rate changes, to be notified over Sunday and Monday, were

aimed at providing some succour to the people amid the pandemic and were not driven by revenue considerations. "When it (the GST on vaccines) was discussed, it was mentioned that the Centre is buying 75% of the vaccines and will remit the GST on it and the revenue on that will be shared 70% with the States," Mr. Bajaj said, explaining that this will have no tax implications for people as they will receive the vaccine for free.

The rates will remain effective till September 30, but could be extended further based on later assessments.

Breach exposes govt. officials' data to hackers

It then redirected them to a page "@gov.in" that resembles the government website *mygov.in*, and asked for the official e-mail and password.

According to Rajshekhar Rajaharia, cyber researcher, the website was hosted in Pakistan in June. "The page mentioned @nic.in email IDs to make the official believe it is a government page. The purpose seemed to be getting the e-mails and passwords of only government officials and get unauthorised access to government systems, the page does not accept any other domain such as gmail.com," he said.

Air India informed passengers on May 15 that its passenger service system, provided by multi-national IT company SITA, was subjected to a sophisticated cyberattack in the last week of February which affected around 45 lakh "data subjects" in the world registered between August 26, 2011 and February 3, 2021. Government officials are frequent Air India flyers.

The alert sent to officials said, "It is intimated that recent data breaches of Air India and other companies like Domino's, Big Basket etc. have resulted in exposure of e-mail ID and password of many users, which

includes lots of government email IDs as well. All such compromised gov. domain emails are potential cyber threats as they are being used by the adversaries to send out malicious mails to all gov. email users. It may please be noted that largely these are name based email IDs which are available with the malicious actors." It added that the malicious actors try to attack government officials through various means such as phishing where attackers send e-mails to officials and make them click on such attachment or web-link and provide permission.

"Either their systems will get infected/compromised or e-mail credentials will be captured by C&C (command and control) server under control of adversaries... Emails coming from any such random user of .gov domain, on any subject line, asking to click on a link or download an attachment are to be considered as malicious and to be ignored and to be deleted. Users are advised to change the password of their e-mail ID which is registered with Air-India, Dominos etc.," the alert mentioned.

An official said while such phishing attempts were common, in the past one year it had intensified.

New declassification policy gets nod

The History Division will be responsible for coordination with various departments while compiling, seeking approval and publishing of war and operations histories. The policy also sets clear timelines with regard to compilation and publication of war and opera-

tions histories, the Ministry said, adding that the committee should be formed within two years of completion of war and operations. Thereafter, collection of records and compilation should be completed in three years and disseminated to all concerned.

Bhawanipur by-election widens Congress-Left rift

"The Trinamool Congress won the Assembly elections with a huge mandate and Mamata Banerjee has been elected Chief Minister. Elections at Bhawanipur are a foregone conclusion. Bhawanipur has been our seat and I do not see any rationale behind putting candidate against the Chief Minister," Mr. Chowdhury said.

As part of an electoral understanding with the Left, the Congress had fielded candidates in the Bhawanipur seat in the 2016 and 2021 polls. In 2021, it fielded Md. Shabdar Khan. He secured 5,211 votes. The electoral experiment of the Samyukta Morcha, where the Left and the Congress tied up with the Indian Secular Front, failed miserably in the 2021 poll.

While Trinamool secured a massive victory, winning 213 seats, Ms. Banerjee lost the Nandigram seat. Bhawanipur MLA Sobhandeb Chatopadhyay resigned a few weeks ago paving the way

for the Chief Minister to contest. A section of the Congress leadership in Delhi has always backed Ms. Banerjee, and with Mr. Chowdhury, who is among her most vocal critics, taking a soft stand, questions are being raised on the future of the Left-Congress alliance.

Several CPI(M) leaders were of the opinion that if the alliance did not field a candidate, it would send a wrong message to the supporters. "There is no question of backing out from the fight. We cannot allow it to be Trinamool-BJP contest," senior CPI(M) leader Asok Bhattacharya said.

"Victory has many parents and defeat is an orphan. One can come up with various reasons for our defeat, an alliance with Congress, the setting up of Samyukta Morcha," CPI(M) leader Rabin Deb said. He added that the Left parties were not agreeable to the idea of not fielding a candidate against Ms. Banerjee.

Two policemen among four killed in militant strike in J&K

Lashkar behind attack in Sopore, says IGP; regional parties call for end to violence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Two civilians and as many policemen were killed in a militant attack in Baramulla in north Kashmir on Saturday.

The incident took place around noon in the main market area in Sopore town when unidentified militants fired indiscriminately upon a police party. "The policemen were performing duties to enforce COVID-19 SOPs (standard operating protocol) at the time of the attack," Inspector-General of Police Vijay Kumar said.

Four policemen and four civilians sustained bullet injuries. "Two policemen and two civilians succumbed to their injuries," Mr. Kumar said. He said Lashkar-e-Taiba militants were behind the attack. The deceased policemen were identified as constables Showkat Ahmad and Waseem Ahmad. The civilians were identified as Manzoor Ahmad Shalla and Bashir Ahmad, both residents of Sopore.

A police spokesperson



Great loss: Inspector-General of Police Vijay Kumar paying tribute to the slain policemen in Srinagar on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

said a team of policemen was investigating all the circumstances of the crime.

The regional parties in Jammu & Kashmir, while condemning the attack, unanimously said that "dialogue and not gun is the solution to any problem".

"The solution of Kashmir is not a gun. Neither through guns of New Delhi nor the guns taken up by local

youths here. Such attacks only defame Kashmir as a solution lies only in dialogue," PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said.

In a joint statement, National Conference president Farooq Abdullah and vice-president Omar Abdullah, said, "We mince no words in our condemnation of the outrageous bloodshed. Violence in all its forms and ma-

nifestations constitutes the most serious threat to the dignity of human life and universal peace."

CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousef Tarigami said violence in any form was not in the interest of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. "Violence and killings can never be a solution to any problem. Violence must come to an immediate end," he said.

Coast Guard inducts three ALH Mk-III helicopters

HAL to supply a total of 16 choppers by mid next year

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Coast Guard on Saturday inducted the first batch of three Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) Mk-III designed and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL).

"The ALH Mk-III marine version has been designed and developed with in-house customisation of 19 additional equipment by HAL to meet Coast Guard requirements," a Coast Guard statement said.

"The HAL will supply 16 ALH Mk-III to the ICG by mid next year," it stated.

On induction, the 16 ALH Mk-III will be positioned at



Marine version: The state-of-the-art Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) Mk-III being inducted into the Coast Guard. ■ PTI

four Coast Guard squadrons in Bhubaneswar, Porbandar, Kochi and Chennai.

The Navy inducted the first batch of three ALH Mk-

III helicopters into service at INS Hansa in April. Early this week, the Navy inducted three ALH Mk-III at INS Dega in Visakhapatnam.

Pawar-Kishor meeting kickstarts anti-BJP front

'NCP working on uniting Opposition'

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Saturday clarified that it has not given any responsibility to poll analyst Prashant Kishor within the party but the party was working on setting up a national front of anti-BJP parties.

Sources within the party have identified over 400 Lok Sabha seats where regional players could play an important role against the BJP if a front of these parties is set up.

"Prashant Kishor is a political strategist. He looks at the politics from different point of view. Our president has already discussed the need to unite all Opposition parties. He wanted to go to

West Bengal during elections but could not due to ill-health. But he will ensure that all Opposition parties are united," said senior NCP leader and minister Nawab Malik. He said Mr. Kishor shared the experience of West Bengal elections with party president Sharad Pawar with discussions on current national politics.

Mr. Malik clarified that the NCP was constantly working on setting up an united front against the BJP. "This process continues even today and will continue in future as well," said Mr. Malik. Mr. Kishor has, however, said that the meeting between him and Mr. Pawar was only over a "private lunch" and no politics was discussed.

IN BRIEF



Swami Shivamayananda passes away

KOLKATA
Swami Shivamayananda, vice-president of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, died at a city hospital on Friday night due to COVID-19 related complications. He was 86. Condoling the death, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj was actively involved in a wide range of community service initiatives focused on social empowerment. His contributions to the worlds of culture and spirituality will always be remembered."

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said his death had created a void in the spiritual world.

Fellowship on disability issues announced

GUWAHATI
The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) has announced a three-year immersive grassroots fellowship programme for the differently-abled youth interested in disability rights and inclusion and seeking a career in the development sector. The last date to apply for the fellowship via www.ncpedp.org or by mailing to ncpedp.fellowship@gmail.com is August 11.

Arunachal court grants bail to Punjab YouTuber

GUWAHATI
A court in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, on Friday granted bail to Punjab-based YouTuber Paras Singh, who was arrested on May 27 for racial bars against Congress MLA Ninong Ering and people of the northeastern State. The court of the chief judicial magistrate allowed Mr. Singh's plea for bail on the execution of a personal bond for ₹10,000. The court said him not to leave the country and not interfere with the investigation process.

Sudha Bharadwaj moves HC for default bail

MUMBAI
Trade unionist and lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, accused in the Bhima Koregaon case, moved the Bombay High Court on Saturday seeking default bail. Her plea said the Pune sessions court judge was not authorised to take cognisance of the supplementary charge sheet against her and the other accused. "It was not the designated special court under the National Investigation Agency Act, which has exclusive jurisdiction to try scheduled offences like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, and therefore, not the competent court," the petition said. The matter is expected to be heard on June 14.

Visva-Bharati in news for wrong reasons

Faculty member files FIR against V-C Bidyut Chakrabarty for 'humiliating' teachers

BISHWANATH GHOSH
KOLKATA

For the Rabindranath Tagore-founded Visva-Bharati, 2021 was meant to be a year of celebrations, marking 100 years of the university, but it stands overshadowed by COVID-19 and constant clashes between the Vice-Chancellor and the staff.

On Friday evening, Manas Maity, a Professor of Physics, filed an FIR at the Santiniketan police station against Vice-Chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty for humiliating teachers during an online meeting on June 8.

While it is highly unlikely that anything of significance is going to come of the complaint, the FIR is an indication how the university is marking its centenary.

"I guess something must be happening [to mark the centenary] but most of us have no idea about it," said a teacher who has been employed with Visva-Bharati for over two decades now.

Ever since Prof. Chakrabarty

took charge in November 2018, the university has been in news for all the wrong reasons: a gag order on staff, several new dos and don'ts imposed on teachers of an institution that has been in existence for a century, constant issuing of show-cause notices seeking to discipline employees, eviction of "erring" students from hostels, construction of high walls around the campus, and conflict with the local population.

Value landmarks

"As humans we tend to live through landmarks like birth anniversaries, a decade, or a centenary. Our natural tendency is to value these landmarks as course-correction moments. Visva-Bharati has completed 100 years, one would justifiably wish this would be a year of introspection, but the institution seems to be hurtling along the path of all the ills that have befallen it under the present dispensation,"

said educationist Sudipta Tagore, a former student of the university and a descendant of Rabindranath's family.

"Denial is one such ill that plagues the institution today – that is the gift to Visva-Bharati by its administration on its hundredth year. Another gift is walls, both literal and figurative," Mr. Tagore said.

Several questions

A senior academician who was closely associated with Visva-Bharati for many years but who did not wish to be named, said: "How does the Tagore model of education square up to the much-touted New Education Policy; why it is important for the entire world to emulate the nature-based education system that Tagore had envisaged; what is the value of interfacing with the community; why we must integrate the sciences and humanities with creative arts – these are some of the questions that Visva-

Rajasthan gives subsidies to agri. power consumers

It will lead to a financial burden of ₹450 cr. annually on the State government

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

In a major relief to the agricultural power consumers, the Congress government in Rajasthan has announced new subsidies under the Chief Minister's Kisan Mitra Urja Yojana during the CO

VID-19 pandemic. The metered consumers will get a subsidy of ₹1,000 on their bills every month.

The new subsidies will lead to a financial burden of ₹450 crore annually on the State government, according to the official sources here.

The total subsidies for a farmer will not exceed ₹2,000 in a year. Those consuming less electricity will be paid the amount of difference through deposit in their bank accounts.

The sources said the new agricultural electricity con-

Mehul Choksi denied bail by Dominica High Court

Fugitive diamantaire a flight risk, it says

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Dominica High Court has denied bail to fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi in the case of illegal entry into the island country after his mysterious disappearance from neighbouring Antigua and Barbuda, where he has been staying as a citizen since 2018 after fleeing from India, local Caribbean media reported.

The court on Friday gave the ruling by concluding that Mr. Choksi was a "flight risk", did not have any ties with Dominica, and the court could not impose any conditions which would stop him from leaving the country, news outlet *AntiguaNewsroom* said.

Mr. Choksi had approached the High Court after the magistrate rejected his bail petition. The 62-year-old diamantaire, who has an Interpol Red Notice against him, had mysteriously gone missing on May 23 from Antigua and Barbuda. He was detained in Dominica for illegal entry after a possible romantic escapade with his rumoured girlfriend. Mr. Choksi's lawyers had filed a

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the External Affairs Ministry have sought to implead in the *habeas corpus* petition by filing two affidavits in the Dominica High Court, officials said here.

The agency would focus on establishing criminal culpability of Mr. Choksi, fugitive status, pending warrants against him, Red Notice and chargesheets, while the External Affairs Ministry would argue that Mr. Choksi continued to be an Indian citizen, they said.

Swami Shivamayananda, vice-president of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, died at a city hospital on Friday night due to COVID-19 related complications. He was 86. Condoling the death, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said,

"Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj was actively involved in a wide range of community service initiatives focused on social empowerment. His contributions to the worlds of culture and spirituality will always be remembered."

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said his death had created a void in the spiritual world.

The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) has announced a three-year immersive grassroots fellowship programme for the differently-abled youth interested in disability rights and inclusion and seeking a career in the development sector. The last date to apply for the fellowship via www.ncpedp.org or by mailing to ncpedp.fellowship@gmail.com is August 11.

SAD, BSP to jointly contest Punjab polls

Alliance will last beyond next year's election, says Badal

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

As the battle for the upcoming Assembly election in Punjab gains momentum, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) joined hands on Saturday to contest the polls due in the State in early 2022.

SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal and BSP national general secretary Satish Chandra Mishra made an announcement in this regard here.

"Under the seat-sharing arrangement, the SAD will contest 97 seats and the BSP 20 – eight seats in the Doaba region, seven in Malwa and five in Majha region of the State," Mr. Badal said here at



Sukhbir Singh Badal

a press conference. There are a total of 117 Assembly constituencies in Punjab.

Mr. Badal said the alliance was not a temporary one and would remain intact as both parties will contest not just the upcoming Assembly poll but other elections to-

gether as well. "Both the SAD and the BSP have the same ideology and had always worked for the welfare of farmers, poor and farm labourers," he added.

Hitting out at the ruling Congress government, Mr. Badal said: "The Congress party has not initiated a single welfare scheme for the weaker sections and is instead responsible for closing down schemes such as the SC scholarship scheme. It was because of these factors that there was a demand from the grassroots level workers of both the SAD and the BSP to form a common front."

He thanked BSP president Mayawati for her decision to join forces with the SAD.

JD(U) should get a berth in Cabinet'

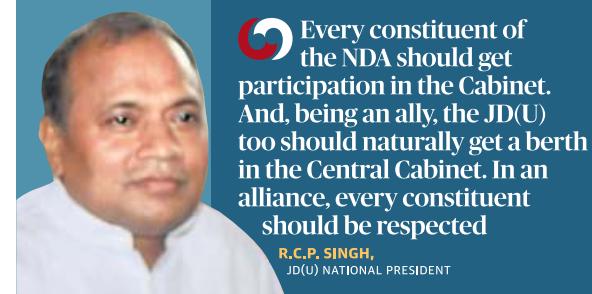
Bihar CM Nitish Kumar had earlier sought proportional representation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Amid talk of expansion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet, the BJP's ruling alliance partner in Bihar, the Janata Dal (United), said on Saturday that every constituent of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) should be represented at the Centre.

Speaking to mediapersons in Patna, JD(U) national president R.C.P. Singh said: "I too have come to know about the Cabinet expansion of the Union government. Every constituent of the NDA should get participation in the Cabinet. And, being an ally, the JD(U) too should naturally get a berth in the Central Cabinet. In an alliance, every constituent should be respected."

The buzz in political circles is that the Modi Cabinet



Every constituent of the NDA should get participation in the Cabinet. And, being an ally, the JD(U) too should naturally get a berth in the Central Cabinet. In an alliance, every constituent should be respected

R.C.P. SINGH,
JD(U) NATIONAL PRESIDENT

would be expanded before the monsoon session of Parliament.

Earlier in May 2019, Chief Minister and then JD(U) president and Nitish Kumar had said his party would not be part of the NDA government as the BJP's offer was only "symbolic representation".

"They [the BJP] said they want to give one Cabinet rank to every ally. Then we said that we will discuss it with party members and then only we can say anything over this symbolic representation. I spoke to my party leaders and the unanimous view was that we should stay out of the Ministry. Everybody felt there should be proportional representation in an alliance government," Mr. Kumar had said after the oath-taking ceremony of the Union Cabinet of NDA-2.

Mr. Singh, Mr. Kumar's close confidant, had been among the frontrunners for a Cabinet berth at that time.

The Bihar Chief Minister was said to have insisted on "proportional representation" for his party in the Union Cabinet.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the JD(U) won 16 of the total 40 seats in Bihar, while the BJP got 17 seats. The JD(U) has also six members in the Rajya Sabha.

Now, after Mr. Singh's comment, names of three JD(U) leaders have started floating as probables for the Union Cabinet.

Besides, party president R.C.P. Singh, names of MPs Rajiv Ranjan Singh, alias Lalwan Singh (Munger) and Santosh Kumar Kushwaha (Purnia) are also doing the rounds. However, NDA leaders declined to comment on the issue.

"Only party's top leadership can say anything on this," they said.



Digvijaya Singh

Row Over Digvijaya's comments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI/BHOPAL

A row erupted on Saturday over Congress leader Digvijaya Singh's purported comments in an audio chat on social media that his party will have a "relook" at Article 370 revocation and Jammu and Kashmir's lost statehood if it returns to power, with the BJP accusing him of speaking "the language of Pakistan" and spewing venom against India.

Mr. Singh's remarks to a person, who the BJP said was a journalist of Pakistani origin, were seized by its leaders to unleash a torrent of criticism against the opposition party and demand statements from Congress president Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi on the issue.

"The decision of revoking Article 370 and reducing the statehood of J&K is extremely, I would say, sad decision, and the Congress party would certainly have a relook on the issue," Mr. Singh said, according to excerpts of the Clubhouse conversation available on social media.

He was responding to a question about the "way forward" on the issue "once the Modi government is gone".

"It was the Congress which committed the sin of imposing Article 370 in Kashmir...Congress speaks the language of Pakistan," Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said.

The fight continues



For the long haul: Farmers and their family members staging a protest demanding a repeal of three farm laws at the Singhu border in Delhi on Saturday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Now, Rajib Banerjee reaches out to Trinamool leadership

BJP leader reiterates his displeasure with the party

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

A day after Mukul Roy severed ties with the Bharatiya Janata Party and joined the Trinamool Congress, another key BJP leader, Rajib Banerjee, reached out to Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh on Saturday.

Mr. Banerjee, a former Minister in the Trinamool Congress government, who contested and lost the Assembly polls on a BJP ticket, met Mr. Ghosh at his residence in Kolkata. Though he described his meeting as a "courtesy call", Mr. Banerjee reiterated his displeasure with the BJP and said he maintained that it was not proper to threaten a government that has won such a massive majority with the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356.

Mr. Banerjee was one of the BJP's prize catches before the Assembly polls and



Rajib Banerjee

the party had sent a private jet so that he and a few other leaders could travel to Delhi and join the BJP. He contested from Domjur and lost by a margin of over 40,000 votes.

Mr. Banerjee maintained that "he was with the BJP till now", but also added the politics of religious division won't succeed in the State of West Bengal. Like Mr. Roy, Mr. Banerjee has been absent at meetings of the West Bengal BJP after the results of the Assembly polls were declared.

There were frantic political developments in the day, with reports of Mr. Roy trying

Modi govt. has failed on every front: Priyanka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, in a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday over his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, said he behaved like a "coward".

"Indians do not come first for the Prime Minister, politics does," Ms. Vadra alleged in a social media post as part of her *Zimmedar Kaun* (Who's responsible?) campaign.

"The government failed us in every front. They could have managed the situation so that we could have had enough oxygen in the hospitals; they could have listened to experts and increased the number of beds; they could have ordered vaccines when other countries ordered them, back in June, July and May, 2020. They did none of this and just left people to fend for themselves," Ms. Vadra said posting a 39-second video.

We are not worried about committed workers [because they will stay in the party]. The defectors (*aaya Ram, gaya Ram*) do not make much difference," State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said.

Cong. working to unite rival Rajasthan factions

Differences over Ministerial berths to Pilot camp holding up Cabinet expansion

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

The Congress party's top leadership is working on a formula to bring the rival factions of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot to a compromise, but differences over the number of Ministerial portfolios to be allotted to the Pilot camp is holding up the expansion of the State government in Rajasthan, a highly placed source said on Saturday.

However, contrary to media reports, there were no meetings between Mr. Pilot, who arrived in Delhi late on Friday evening, and the cen-

tral leadership, on the issue of Cabinet expansion.

Of the nine available Ministerial slots in the State Cabinet, the source cited above told *The Hindu* that the Pilot camp expected six-seven positions. They argue that this was what was promised to them by the late Ahmed Patel, one of the key negotiators with Mr. Pilot when the latter had revolted against Mr. Gehlot in July 2020.

After Mr. Pilot led an unsuccessful rebellion against Mr. Gehlot last July, his camp lost three slots, including Mr. Pilot's position as the deputy CM. The Pilot camp had then complained that the

Minister had kept far too many portfolios with himself.

But the Congress party's central leadership has to proceed cautiously as the Gehlot government has to keep in mind 18 lawmakers – 12 independent MLAs and six former Bahujan Samaj Party MLAs who merged with the Congress – who also expect to be "rewarded" by the Gehlot government.

"Once both sides agree to a number, the next stage of identifying the Ministries and the criteria to become Ministers won't be a problem," said a senior Rajasthani leader.

This leader said that the

criteria to become a Minister would include seniority of the MLAs as well as the caste and region they represent.

"We not only have to ensure no first time MLA from the Sachin camp becomes a Minister as we have more than half a dozen MLAs who have won five-six terms, it is also important that the new Cabinet represents the State in terms of regions and castes," he said.

On Friday, All India Congress Committee in-charge Ajay Maken had asserted that there would soon be an expansion of the Ashok Gehlot government but hadn't spelt out a specific timeline.

कायलिय नगर निगम जोधपुर नक्षण

(नगर निगम भवन, पोलोटेनिन, कालेज परिसर, रेडीडे-नीरा रोड, जोधपुर)

(ceo_nnj@rediffmail.com Tel: 0291-2651464)

क्रमांक:- F15 / गैजेट / 2021-22 / 613

दिनांक :- 08.06.2021

ई-निविदा सुनान: 15 / गैजेट / 2021-22 / 537 दिनांक 25.05.2021 में संभालन

नाम निगम जोधपुर के बारे में 30 से 40 में साथारे एवं नार निविदा के अन्य कार्यों के लिए द्वैकर तरफ़ किया है। इनिया सुनान संख्या 537 दिनांक 25.05.2021 को जोड़ी गई है। उस निविदा की तरफ़ किया गया अन्य सम्पर्क संख्या 0291-2651464 है।

निविदा के लिए सुनान संख्या 537 दिनांक 25.05.2021 को जोड़ी गई है। उस निविदा की अन्य सम्पर्क संख्या 0291-2651464 है।

राजस्व विवरण अनुसार संस्करण किया गया है।

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आयुष्मति, नगर निगम जोधपुर दविधन

(M.L. Saini)

Office of The Additional Chief Engineer,
PHED, Region-Kota
Notice Inviting Bid No. 27/2021-22

Bids for "Work of Augmentation of RWSS Nahargarh of PHED Sub-Division Kishanganj to provide FHTC including one year Defect Liability period of SVS under JJJM in the jurisdiction of PHED Division Baran, District Baran," are invited from interested bidders upto 06-07-2021, 18:00 Hours.

Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the http://www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in, http://sppr.rajasthan.gov.in, and http://rajwater.gov.in departmental website.

(M.L. Saini)

Additional Chief Engineer
PHED, Region, Kota

Office of The Additional Chief Engineer,
P.W.D., RAJASTHAN, JAIPUR
No.F/7(589)/PPP/SHA/WB/2021-22/D-161
Dated: 08/06/2021
NT No. 08/2021-22

On behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Rajasthan, PWD, Rajasthan invites sealed bids in specified format from interested Bidders for Package No WB/RSHDPI/Annuity/03 to be financed by the World Bank through Two Envelope e-Procurement bidding through National Competitive Bidding process as per the World Bank Guidelines. The Bidding documents can be viewed or

/ and downloaded from website: http://sppr.rajasthan.gov.in, http://www.pwd.rajasthan.gov.in and http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in from 14.06.2021; any further amendments shall only be viewed on above websites.

(V.K. Singh)

ACE (PPP), PWD, Jaipur

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Assistant Director [F&A]

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (PPP) P.W.D., RAJASTHAN, JAIPUR

No.F/7(589)/PPP/SHA/WB/2021-22/D-161
NT No. 08/2021-22
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INTERVIEW | BRANKO MILANOVIC

'No trade-off between lives and livelihoods in the long run'

India has a problem that is different to and deeper than the problem that the rich countries have, says a former lead economist of the World Bank

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

As the world stumbles through a second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that both its catastrophic toll on human life and the severe socio-economic dislocation it has caused matter equally. Yet there is growing inequality associated with governments' and private citizens' responses to the pandemic regarding access to vaccines and policies to support vulnerable groups. Professor Branko Milanovic, of the Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality at the City University of New York, and former lead economist in the World Bank's Research Department for almost 20 years, share his perspective on the relationship between inequality and different forms of capitalism across the world.

You have for decades studied capitalism, analysing its sub-types – liberal and political capitalisms – in your 2019 book "Capitalism Alone." The pandemic has thrown its features into relief. How would you describe the way capitalist systems across the world have responded to this global crisis?

If I were to summarise now the situation, I would say that both the U.S. and China have played up to their

able to push it under the carpet. That proved to be a disastrous decision. Then, the good side of the Chinese system kicked in, in their ability to share very strong centralised decisions, to have a disciplined population, to implement draconian measures quickly and to have everybody or most mostly everybody agree to that.

The U.S. [response] also has two sides. The negative side was the total disarray, which is not only due to the Trump administration, but general inability to impose any measures, sniping between different levels of government, whether it is the federal, state, or county governments. That's why the U.S. still has the highest number of deaths and cases.

But on the other hand, the technology of the U.S. and Western Europe kicked in and the success in vaccines was absolutely extraordinary. It has never been the

strong suits, and really have played very miserably in the areas where they were weak.

China did a pretty bad job in the beginning, not because it did not stop the pandemic immediately, but because the political system in China is such that lower levels of administrative units, in this particular case the province of Hubei and the city of Wuhan, had an incentive to not reveal what was happening to the higher authorities hoping that actually they will be somehow



But that's the issue with the virus – whatever you say now, three months later, that turns out that you've been half wrong

case that in 12 months, we have actually developed a vaccine for an entirely new disease and the rollout of the vaccines in the U.S. was quite successful.

Vaccine shortages have hobbled India's battle against the coronavirus with

deadly consequences during the second wave. Is this a case of domestic inequality getting exacerbated by global inequality?

In India's case we have to be a little bit careful. If we had this conversation in February, India was actually considered a success case compared to the expectations, which were actually quite dire for India, taking into account what happened in 1918, and the fact that is an enormous country with many people living in close proximity.

But that's the issue with the virus – whatever you say now, three months later, that turns out that you've been half wrong. Now the situation in India is improving. But it was, as you mentioned, disastrous only months ago.

It could be said that the disregard by the government of the dangers of the virus coming back, and maybe the

disregard by the people who believed that the virus was behind them, led to the catastrophe that we have witnessed in the last two months.

While mRNA vaccines are seen as cutting edge, and they've been largely deployed in the U.S. and parts of Europe and the U.K., India has not had that.

This is the result of what is called vaccine nationalism in the U.S., U.K. and to a much less extent Europe. These countries have decided that they are not going to export vaccines until they have finished vaccination at home. This shows the talk about cosmopolitan approaches and everybody being equal to be wrong.

Is India doing enough by way of welfare measures to support those who otherwise lack a safety net during economic shocks

associated with the pandemic?

India has a problem that is different to and deeper than the problem that the rich countries have. Rich countries such as the U.S. and Europe have been able to go through massive stimulus packages and the support packages, which have never been seen in history. It is much more difficult for countries that do not have resources like that. India could have printed that money, but then you have other issues to face.

Second, the poor population in India is huge. But it was pointed out from very early on that the lockdowns are not really a trade-off in the sense that the lockdowns were saving lives and enabling a relatively fast return to economic activity. There is a trade-off on a daily basis but if you may extend it to one or two months, the trade-off disappeared.

Does India's model of capitalism fall between the liberal capitalism of the West and the political capitalism of China, and if so, will it continue to face challenges of inequality and corruption?

It's not by accident that India had a Planning Commission, given the very strong influence of the Soviet Union in the organisation of the economic sphere, in terms of planning the economy so as to be able to grow faster. That was the similarity which India had in the past. If you look at India today, it is much closer to liberal capitalism because of this political system.

But it is also true that under [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi, there are certain features that really make India [akin to] hybrid liberal capitalism, [including] the general emphasis on growth, and disregard of certain democratic norms.

Expand GST waiver, urges Punjab Minister

'It should apply to all COVID-19 goods'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Punjab's Finance and Planning Minister Manpreet Singh Badal questioned the GST Council's decision to temporarily cut tax rates on COVID-19 essentials instead of waiving them altogether and asked if COVID-19 is going to end in sync with the tax concession deadlines.

Demanding that all COVID-related goods be zero-rated during the pandemic, Mr. Badal, along with other Finance Ministers representing the Congress, vehemently opposed the imposition of GST on COVID-related items and recorded their note of dissent.

He also reiterated the Congress' concerns about no representative from the party being included in the GST Council's Group of Ministers (GoM) that reviewed the tax rates on COVID-19 essentials. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman dismissed the charge saying that GoM members are not selected or excluded on the basis of 'party'.

The GoM should "stop acting like a *shahenshah* (emperor) amid a once in a century crisis", Mr. Badal said.

"COVID-19 GST should be zero-rated... How would a consumer feel seeing GST reflected on an invoice on COVID-19 treatment?" he remarked, terming the retention of GST levies on several preventive material and treatment essentials as "in-



Manpreet Singh Badal

sensitive". While the Council exempted two medicines – tocilizumab and amphotericin-B – from GST altogether, other medicines and goods such as masks, PPE kits, hand sanitisers as well as medical grade oxygen, testing kits, ventilators, bi-PAP machines and pulse oximeters continue to be taxed at a lower 5% rate.

"Stop collecting revenues on furnaces for crematoriums. Stop taxing RT-PCR machines. They are already purchased at concessional rate, and practically all States also regulate the price of the COVID-19 test," he pointed out.

It is preposterous that the principal opposition party of India in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha has been excluded in the GoM," Mr. Badal said.

Mr. Badal cautioned that the attempt to pick and choose exemptions on the grounds of inverted duty structure or cheaper imports would end up destroying the very foundation of GST.

Voices muzzled, says Bengal FM

Amit Mitra sends dissent note after GST Council meet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

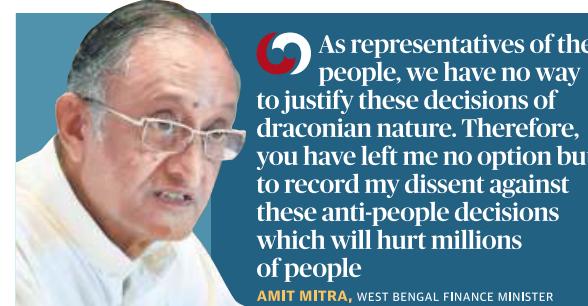
NEW DELHI

Terming the GST Council's move to retain tax levies on COVID relief materials as a 'totally anti-people decision' that was 'thrust' upon members, West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra accused the Union Finance Ministry of muzzling his voice in the Council, in a strongly worded dissent note.

Mr. Mitra said he repeatedly tried to voice objections after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the Council's decision as its chairperson, but "the Secretary brought the meeting to a close and the virtual link was cut off".

"Whither GST Council?" Mr. Mitra remarked in a missive addressed to Ms. Sitharaman, marked to all State Finance Ministers.

The West Bengal Finance Minister said that he, along with several Ministers, proposed zero-rating or imposing a 0.1% GST on COVID related materials for a limited period, keeping the likely



As representatives of the people, we have no way to justify these decisions of draconian nature. Therefore, you have left me no option but to record my dissent against these anti-people decisions which will hurt millions of people

AMIT MITRA, WEST BENGAL FINANCE MINISTER

third wave of infections in mind. Even former Bihar Finance Minister Sushil Kumar Modi, now a BJP MP in the Rajya Sabha, has recommended a 0.1% GST as a solution "cutting across party lines", Mr. Mitra said.

"Unfortunately, you decided not to agree with the suggestions of so many Ministers," the West Bengal Minister told the Union Finance Minister. "The GST Council was to consider providing significant relief to the sufferings of the common people and the struggling health infrastructure... The consumers of the COVID materials in this hour of need would be greatly benefited with only a 0.1% GST," he wrote.

"As representatives of the people, we have no way to justify these decisions of draconian nature. Therefore, you have left me no option but to record my dissent against these anti-people decisions which will hurt millions of people," he emphasised.

Mr. Mitra said that Ms. Sitharaman referred to several of his observations towards the end of the Council's meeting, but he was not allowed to respond.

"Instead, you gave the floor to the Minister from Uttar Pradesh, who sought deletion of some of my comments by name and shockingly, you agreed. I could never imagine that this would come to pass in a GST Council meeting where my voice is muzzled, despite the restraint and decorum I have maintained in 44 meetings of the Council," the Minister added.

Anurag Thakur blames 'poor connection'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur said it seemed as if West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra, who said his voice was muzzled at Saturday's GST Council meeting, did not have a 'stable VC connection' for the meeting.

"Revenue Secretary (Taran Bajaj) repeatedly informed him his line was breaking, that he was not properly audible and to turn off his video for better connectivity," Mr. Thakur said in a series of tweets.

"During the speech made by the Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister, nobody heard Dr Mitra ji speak up nor did he ask to have his opinion heard. Other members can attest to this," Mr. Thakur asserted.

"The Finance Minister has never stifled dissent in the GST Council," Mr. Thakur added.

Claims of CoWIN hacking and data leak are baseless: Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association will hold a protest on June 18 against assault on doctors.

In a statement, the apex medical body asked all its State and local branches across the country to observe the protest, with the slogan of 'save the saviours', by wearing black badges, masks, ribbons and shirts and running an awareness campaign against violence targeting healthcare professionals.

The IMA said press conferences will also be organised, and they will also meet local NGOs and voluntary service leaders.

It termed "extremely disturbing" a series of violence against doctors in the past two weeks in Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and other places.

It demanded the implementation of the Central Hospital and Health Care Professionals Protection Act with the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, standardisation and augmentation of security in each hospital, and declaring hospitals as protected zones, among others. It further said that June 15 will be observed as a National Demand Day and press meets will be held across the country.

In a statement, the Union Health Ministry said the matter of the alleged hacking of the CoWIN system has been investigated by the Computer Emergency Response Team of the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

R.S. Sharma, Chairman of the Empowered Group on Vaccine Administration, clarified that "the claims of so-called hackers on the dark web, relating to alleged hacking of the CoWIN system and data leak, is baseless."

72,899 cases, 1,558 deaths recorded

Tamil Nadu reports highest number of infections followed by Kerala, Maharashtra

Picking up pace

India's average daily COVID-19 vaccination rate has improved significantly from the dip observed in May. An average of 3.1 million doses was administered on June 11



people were tested on Friday (the results for which were made available on Saturday).

About 34.33 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Saturday, which is nearly 1.6 lakh doses more than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. However, it is 2.16 lakh fewer than what was recorded during the corresponding period a week ago. The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccinations continues to increase. It stood at 29.96 lakh on June 12, which is more

'Monoclonal antibody treatment beneficial'

But the timing is key, say doctors

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

NEW DELHI

Monoclonal antibody treatment is now seen as a relatively effective and safer alternative in treating COVID-19 patients, with doctors stating that, as with any other drug, timing is very important for the administration of the therapy.

Monoclonal antibody drugs fight disease by enlisting natural immune system functions.

If given within 72 hours of the appearance of symptoms, it is proven to show good results and could be the way forward in tackling the SARS-CoV-2 virus, doctors note. Monoclonal antibodies have previously been used to treat infections such as Ebola and HIV.

Monoclonal antibody treatment isn't a one-size-fits-all therapy. It is to be given only to mild COVID-19 patients who are not requiring oxygen, and there is high risk of progression or hospitalisation due to existing comorbidities," warns Akshay Budhraja, senior pulmonologist, Akash Healthcare.

"Outwitting the virus" "Antibodies for COVID target specific proteins and destroy them before they initiate inflammation, which causes worsening of symptoms like breathlessness, blood clotting and severe pneumonia. In simple words, antibody response, which takes 7-10 days after infection, gives the virus the window period to attack the body. This window period is covered by injecting mono-

clonal antibodies, which help in reducing the symptoms and disease progression," said Dr. Budhraja.

In the national capital, the therapy was successfully used in two patients recently – a 36-year-old healthcare worker and an 80-year-old male at the Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. According to the doctors here, both patients showed improvement within 12 hours of administering the treatment.

Treating physician Pooja Khosla, senior consultant, Department of Medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, said that the two patients were administered REG-Cov2 (Casirivimab and Imdevimab), designed to produce resistance against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

Monoclonal antibody treatment could prove to be a game changer in times to come if used at the appropriate time. It can be given up to 10 days from the beginning of the symptoms and is not for low oxygen level patients. This awareness about early identification of the high risk category in our population and timely therapy with monoclonal antibody as day care treatment may reduce the burden of cost on the healthcare sector," Dr. Khosla said.

The doctor added that monoclonal antibody therapy cost ₹60,000-70,000 and significantly reduced hospital stay.

"The key principle while using the therapy was that it should be given at the right time to the high risk group," she said.

Covaxin: data on Phase 3 trial out soon

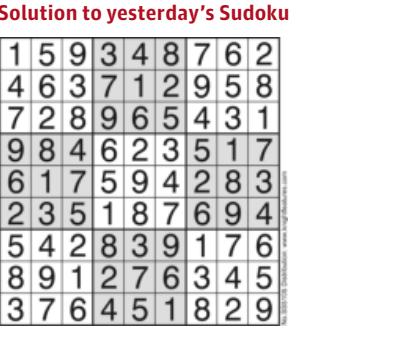
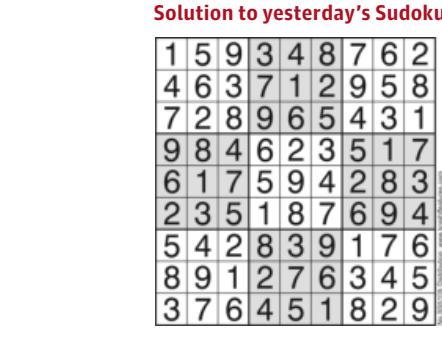
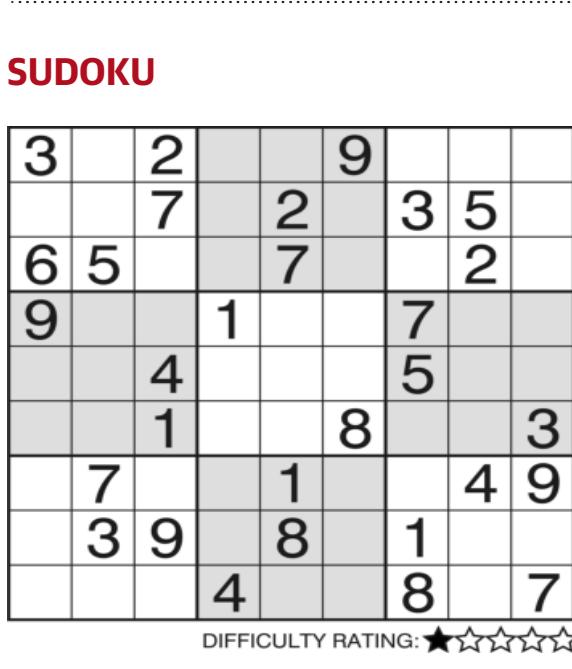
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Bharat Biotech on Saturday said scientific standards of the indigenously-developed Covaxin are transparent, and the company has so far published nine research studies on its safety and efficacy.

"Covaxin's scientific standards+commitment is transparent. Academic journals, peer reviewers, NIV-ICMR-BB researchers-scientists, 9 studies & data published," Bharat Biotech co-founder and joint managing director Suchitra Ella said in a tweet. "Currently, data from both efficacy and safety follow-up of Covaxin's Phase III trial is being analysed and compiled. The company will make the data from the final analysis public soon," Bharat Biotech said in a statement.

SUDOKU



PLA campaign highlights LAC actions

Ahead of CPC centenary, soldiers to present China's flag 'raised on Pangong Lake' during nationwide tour

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has begun a domestic campaign ahead of the ruling Communist Party's July 1 centenary in which it is highlighting last year's actions of its border defence troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), specifically in Pangong Lake, as part of a broader push to underline the military's firm support to President Xi Jinping.

Under the campaign, two groups of eight "youth role models", a mix of military and students, are visiting colleges and universities across China. The group is being organised by the Central Military Commission's Political Work Department and the Party's Youth League. The group includes "elite and skilled" PLA soldiers, including some stationed in units along the LAC, along with "anti-epidemic pioneers, elite female coastguards and scientists dedicated to polar region research", the military said.

As part of the campaign, the soldiers are presenting



Boosting patriotism: A file photo showing PLA soldiers and tanks during military disengagement along the LAC. ■ AFP

China's national flag "once raised on Pangong Lake", a key site of tensions in 2020, at various military units and educational institutions as they tour the country.

Two-fold message

The aim is "to learn and internalise the spirit of President Xi's important speech delivered during his recent visit to Tsinghua University and to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China," the PLA said. Mr. Xi had, in his speech, "encouraged young people to rise up

to the mission of national rejuvenation".

The campaign appears aimed at delivering a two-fold message targeted more at a domestic audience than abroad: to declare the military's unequivocal support to Mr. Xi, and to also send a message of patriotism ahead of the July 1 anniversary. The PLA is unique among militaries in serving, first and foremost, a political party and not a state, and political education is a key part of military training in China.

The PLA's actions during the LAC tensions of 2020 ap-

pear to be figuring prominently in the campaign. Four service members of the border defence troops in the Karakoram went to visit several military or civilian units to share their stories of guarding the border and defending the motherland. PLA spokesperson and Senior Colonel Tan Kefei said at his monthly briefing last month, announcing the campaign.

An "emphasis of combat readiness" was part of the message. "One group of the role models went to the coastal regions in southeast China, and the other group went to the Gobi Desert in northwest China, where they boarded fighting vehicles and warships, visited squads and border sentry posts," he said. "They went to combat positions and training grounds, where they joined the service members in training and guard duty, providing professional knowledge counselling and skill training to soldiers. The Karakoram border defence troops presented the Chinese national flag once raised on the Pangong Lake to the National Flag Guards,

a way of conveying their enthusiasm for defending the motherland."

The PLA spokesperson referred to the campaign highlighting a message to promote what he called the "Karakoram spirit", that was "characterised by devotion to border defence, hard work, selfless dedication and tenacity".

The LAC tensions, which began in late April and early May 2020, culminated in a clash on June 15, 2020 in the Galwan Valley, which marked the worst violence along the border since 1967. Both sides have since disengaged in Galwan Valley and on the north and south banks of Pangong Lake, but talks have remained stalled in other areas, including Depsang, Demchok, Gogra and Hot Springs. Indian officials have said the disengagement process remains partially completed and the de-induction process of troops still deployed in forward areas near the LAC, a key measure to restore normalcy, is yet to take place more than a year after the tensions began.

G7 leaders take on China, plan to stop new pandemics

They pledge huge infrastructure investment to counter BRI

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CARBIS BAY

The G7 on Saturday unveiled U.S.-led plans to counter China in infrastructure funding for poorer nations, and a new accord to prevent future pandemics, as the elite group sought to showcase Western unity at its first in-person summit since 2019.

Promising to "collectively catalyse" hundreds of billions of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries, the G7 leaders said they would offer a "values-driven, high-standard and transparent" partnership.

Their "Build Back Better World" (B3W) project is aimed at competing with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure (BRI) initiative, which has been widely criticised for saddling countries with unmanageable debt but has included even G7 member Italy since launching in 2013.

The White House said President Joe Biden and fellow leaders addressed "strategic competition" with Beijing on the second day of their three-day summit in Carbis Bay, southwest England.



United stand: G7 leaders posing for a photo at the summit in Carbis Bay, Cornwall, on Friday. ■ AFP

while reinforcing global surveillance networks.

The G7 – Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.S. – will formally publish the pact on Sunday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called it an "important initiative". "We can't sit back and say that China will do it but it's the G7's ambition to have a positive agenda for a number of countries in the world which are still lagging behind... I welcome it," she said.

RELATED REPORT ▶ PROFILES

China, U.S. diplomats clash over human rights, pandemic origin

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING

Top U.S. and Chinese diplomats appear to have had another sharply worded exchange, with Beijing saying it told the U.S. to cease interfering in its internal affairs.

Senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi and Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a phone call on Friday that revealed wide divisions in a number of con-

tentious areas, including the curtailing of freedoms in Hong Kong and the mass detention of Muslims in the Xinjiang region.

The State Department said Mr. Blinken "stressed the importance of cooperation" regarding the origin of the virus, including the need for (World Health Organization) Phase 2 expert-led studies in China."

China is sensitive about

calls for investigation into the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 because of suggestions that it might have escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan, where cases were first discovered.

China "firmly opposes any despicable acts that use the epidemic as an excuse to slander China and to shift blames," Mr. Yang was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Putin hopes Biden is not impulsive like Trump

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced hope on Friday that U.S. President Joe Biden will be less impulsive than his predecessor Donald Trump, ahead of his first summit with the U.S. leader.

Mr. Putin described Mr. Biden as a "career man", who has spent his life in politics.

Though he described relations with the U.S. as hav-

ing "deteriorated to its lowest point in recent years," Mr. Putin said he expects he can work with Mr. Biden.

"It is my great hope that, yes, there are some advantages, some disadvantages, but there will not be any impulse-based movements on behalf of the sitting U.S. President," he said, adding that, "I believe that former U.S. President Trump is an extraordinary individual, talented individual."

British PM warns EU over post-Brexit trade in N. Ireland

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARBIS BAY

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday warned Europe he would suspend a deal for post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland unless a solution could be found to a row over border checks.

Brussels has been angered by London's failure to introduce checks on goods heading across the Irish Sea

from the mainland U.K. – England, Scotland and Wales – to the province of Northern Ireland.

European leaders delivered an ultimatum to Mr. Johnson on the sidelines of G7 summit, urging him to keep his word and implement the Northern Ireland "protocol", which was signed separately from a trade deal between them.

But Mr. Johnson defiantly

Security of airports, embassies Afghan responsibility: Taliban

Turkey was ready to keep troops at Kabul airport: reports

+ Riyadh limits Hajj to 60,000 vaccinated

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia announced Saturday it will allow 60,000 residents vaccinated against COVID-19 to perform this year's hajj, but Muslims from abroad will be barred for a second straight year.

The hajj – a must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lives – typically packs millions of pilgrims into congested religious sites and could be a major source of contagion amid the coronavirus pandemic.

This year it would be "open for nationals and residents of the Kingdom, limited to 60,000 pilgrims", the hajj ministry said, quoted by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The pilgrimage, scheduled to be held in July, would be limited to those who have been vaccinated and are aged 18-65 with no chronic illnesses, it said.

Foreign forces should hold 'no hope' of keeping a military presence in Afghanistan after the U.S. and NATO withdraw troops, the Taliban said on Saturday, warning the security of embassies and airports would be the responsibility of Afghans.

It comes as western diplomats and military officials scramble to work out how to provide security for any future civilian presence they keep in the country.

Turkey has reportedly said it is prepared to keep troops in Afghanistan to protect Kabul airport, the main exit route for western diplomats and humanitarian workers.

"Every inch of Afghan soil, its airports and security of foreign embassies and diplomatic offices is the responsibility of the Afghans,"

The United States is in the final stages of completing a military drawdown, along-

side NATO forces, by September 11 – twenty years after they invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban.

The decision to end America's longest war has raised fears that an emboldened Taliban could topple the Western-backed government in Kabul.

The possibility of keeping troops in Afghanistan is expected to be discussed during a meeting of NATO leaders in Brussels on Monday.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said last month the alliance would provide funding to help run Kabul airport and train Afghanistan's special forces after it had left.

Turkish media later reported that Ankara was willing to maintain a presence in the country, including at the country's main gateway, if NATO provided financial support.



Long trek: The herd of elephants near the Shijie Township in Yimen County on Friday. ■ AP

China's roaming jumbos are on the move again

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING

China's famed wandering elephants are on the move again, heading southwest while a male who broke from the herd is still keeping his distance.

The group left a wildlife reserve in the southwest of Yunnan province more than

a year ago and has trekked 500 km north to the outskirts of the provincial capital of Kunming.

As of Saturday, they were spotted in Shijie township in the city of Yuxi, more than 8 km southwest of the Kunming suburb they had arrived at last week, according to state media reports.

A year ago and has trekked 500 km north to the outskirts of the provincial capital of Kunming.

The vessel has been submerged in seas off Colombo since June 2 after burning for almost two weeks and releasing tonnes of plastic raw materials.

Environmentalists have

Sri Lanka seeks \$40 mn in damages over ship fire

Vessel released tonnes of plastic waste

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka is seeking \$40 million in damages from the operator of a ship that left massive pollution when it caught fire off the country's west coast, officials said on Saturday.

Ports and Shipping Minister Rohitha Abeygunawardena said an interim claim had been lodged with X-Press Feeders, which controls the Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl.

The vessel has been submerged in seas off Colombo since June 2 after burning for almost two weeks and releasing tonnes of plastic raw materials.

Environmentalists have

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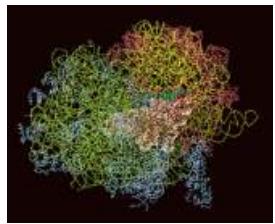
AN-NOE

SNAPSHOTS



Great apes in peril

A study involving over 60 co-authors has found that African great apes, which includes chimpanzees, bonobos and gorillas, are set to suffer massive range declines due to impacts of climate change, land-use changes and increase in human population.



RNA into DNA

Cellular polymerases build RNA messages, copied from DNA so that they can be read efficiently by the proteins. It was believed that this only works one way - writing parts of DNA to RNA. But new research published in *Science Advances* shows that the reverse can also happen.



Climate reconstruction
Dinosaurs must have had to deal with warmer summers than previously believed, finds a new study. Using innovative techniques, it reconstructs climate of 78 million years ago. This suggests that in the mid latitudes, the summer temperatures will rise due to climate change.

Will 25% vaccines for private hospitals aggravate inequity?

R. PRASAD

On June 7, when India announced a reversal of vaccine procurement to a system of centralised procurement with free vaccines to be provided for the 18-44 age group, it allowed 25% of vaccine procurement exclusively by the private sector. In an email to *The Hindu*, Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore, and Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, physician-epidemiologist and a vaccine and health systems expert, discuss the ethical and structural challenges of setting aside 25% of vaccines for private hospitals.

Is it prudent to allocate 25% of vaccine supplies to private hospitals when there is shortage of vaccines? Does selling vaccines, and that too at a far higher price, go against the grain of the universal free vaccination programme that is needed during the pandemic?

Gagandeep Kang: The universal vaccination programme should provide for free vaccines to all. The goal of the immunisation programme should be clearly defined, whether it is prevention of severe disease or deaths, or restoration of the economy, or a calibrated mix of the two primary aims.

When there is a shortage of supply, groups of individuals that need to receive vaccines first should be clearly delineated in the prioritisation policy. Sometimes it is not possible to identify or address all priority groups in an initial listing.

In India, we have always followed a two-tiered structure for immunisation. The bulk of immunisation is provided by the public sector which reaches the length and breadth of the country. A smaller proportion of immunisation is provided by the private sector, on payment basis; a much wider range of vaccines are available for those who can afford to pay for them.

If it is decided, as it has been by the government, the private sector purchase of vaccines is justified then clearly selling vaccines follows prior practice. The difference is the shortage in supply, and the need to ensure the coverage required for the target population. It would have been useful to have

some guidance on the expected coverage that needed to be achieved before opening up to the private sector.

With regard to the pricing, the private sector has always charged a higher price for immunisation both for the purchase of the vaccine, which is determined by vaccine companies, and for the clinics and hospitals that deliver the vaccination.

Chandrakant Lahariya: The private sector has around 3-4% of total COVID-19 vaccination sites. Even if we factor in 'on the campus vaccination drives', which are being carried out by the private sector, the total vaccine requirement of the private sector is not more than 10% of the current availability. Therefore, allocation of 25% of available vaccines to the private sector is essentially cutting down the vaccine supply to the public sector facilities.

Moreover, allocating one-fourth of vaccination at an average 7-8-fold higher price (even if we factor in share of various vaccines); essentially means the total cost which people have to pay for vaccines would be around 1.75-2-fold higher than what the government would spend for three-fourths of the vaccine supply. At the vaccine sharing formula, of the total COVID-19 vaccine cost in India, two-thirds will be paid by the people. Then it becomes predominantly a paid programme, rather than a free vaccination programme, as the government is calling it.

Will private hospitals being predominantly found in urban areas lead to vaccine inequity in rural areas?



Digital divide: With technology-driven solutions to get registered, the gap widens and puts poor, vulnerable, rural and marginalised at the end of vaccine access. ■ GETTY IMAGES

We also need to think about the communication and vaccination messages and processes that need to be in place for rural areas, and the potential private partners to deliver these vaccines in rural or hard to reach areas, to reduce vaccine inequity.

GAGANDEEP KANG

GK: Vaccine inequity is a critical area of concern. However, immunisation in rural areas is not usually undertaken by large private hospitals. Private hospitals are located in and serve the populations of urban areas. Even before the private provision of vaccination started, inequity was a concern, both because of the digital divide as well as the delivery of vaccines in rural areas.

We also need to think about the communication and vaccination messages and processes that need to be in place for rural areas, and the potential private partners to deliver these vaccines in rural or hard to reach areas, to reduce vaccine inequity.

CL: This is actually the key concern. Vaccination from private facilities would remain mostly for urban settings. This essentially

means the rich and urban population has higher availability and easier access to the vaccines. This further aggravates vaccine inequity as even the government vaccination sites are far and few in rural areas. We have already seen that with technology-driven solutions to get registered the gap widens and puts poor, vulnerable, rural and marginalised - who actually need the vaccine most - at the end of vaccine access. There is reportedly higher vaccine hesitancy in the rural population. All of this understanding should be used to develop special strategies by the government to proactively address vaccine hesitancy.

Despite claims that allowing private hospitals will lead to exponential increase in vaccination coverage, only about 10% of vaccines were

administered by private hospitals early on when there was a cap on price. Will we see an encore of this with a cap on vaccine administration charges?

CL: In the four-decade old universal immunisation programme (UIP) of India, the private sector share of total vaccines is around 15%. It is the government facility which delivers around 85% of UIP

vaccines. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the private sector would have any big role in COVID-19 vaccination. Moreover, the market price of currently licensed COVID-19 vaccines is far too high and is affordable to only the rich. The service charge is a fraction of the vaccination cost. The core issue is the vaccine price.

Should vaccine procurement not be 100% centralised and private hospitals provided free vaccines by the government?

GK: I think that vaccine procurement should be 100% by the government. This should be provided through both public and private vaccination facilities until we reach at least 70% coverage of the above 45 years age group and the high-risk categories in the younger ages. After that, the government could consider the allocation of a proportion of vaccines through the private sector and let the free market operate. Of course, once it comes to children needing vaccination, we will need to reconsider based on supply and strategy.

CL: The Central government should pay and procure 100% of vaccines at a single price. For people, vaccines should be completely free, no matter whether they go to a government or a private facility. At a private facility, the service charge should be paid by the government, on behalf of people. It is a public health emergency and not normal times.

Serum is supposed to increase capacity to 100 million doses per month by July. Covaxin production too is supposed to increase to 60-70 million per month by July-August. But the government is set to procure only 250 million Covishield doses and 190 million doses of Covaxin between August and December. This translates to procurement of just 50 million doses of Covishield and 38 million doses of Covaxin

per month during this period by the government. Will that mean that private hospitals will get more than 25% of vaccines produced?

GK: I think the orders currently placed by the government are not the entirety of the vaccine doses that will be needed or procured given the policy announced by the government. Therefore, the figures currently available for the gap between the production and the availability of future doses within the public immunisation programme, are unlikely to be directed entirely to the private sector. I think we should wait for the government to place additional orders with existing manufacturers.

CK: I believe the manufacturers would use some of this to fulfil their bilateral sales/purchase commitment and global commitment such as COVAX, which in my opinion is a fair deal.

Will allocation of vaccines based on a few parameters including wastage lead to fudging of data or denial of vaccines in some cases to ensure reduced wastage? With several States under-reporting cases, will allotment based on disease burden negatively impact virus spread?

GK: It is a truism in public health that we need to accurately measure what matters in order to decide what action needs to be taken. If measurement is inaccurate or deliberately misreported then we have a problem of allocation becoming inappropriate. There are several alternative ways of deciding on allocation, and perhaps the simplest is to do it on the basis of the eligible population.

I think we need to be aware that the most important thing is to be vaccinating as quickly as possible. Allotment based on disease burden would require an approach that could saturate the most affected areas with vaccines to prevent further spread.

Meet *Bharitalasuchus tapani*, a carnivorous reptile that lived 240 million years ago

+ The Indian fossil specimen was not studied earlier because it was not as complete as the specimens found in other countries

ASWATHI PACHA

In the mid 20th century, researchers from the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, carried out extensive studies on rocks of the Yerrapalli Formation in what is now Telangana, uncovering several fossils. By studying some of these specimens stored at the Institute, an international team has now thrown light on a carnivorous reptile that lived 240 million years ago.

This reptile belongs to a genus and species previously unknown to science. They

named it *Bharitalasuchus tapani*. In the Telugu language, *Bhari* means huge, *Tala* means head, and *Suchus* is the name of the Egyptian crocodile-headed deity. The species is named after paleontologist Tapan Roy Chowdhury in honour of his contribution to Indian vertebrate paleontology and especially his extensive work on the Yerrapalli Formation tetrapod fauna.

Further studies revealed that the reptile belonged to a family of extinct reptiles named Erythrosuchidae. "A precise identification had

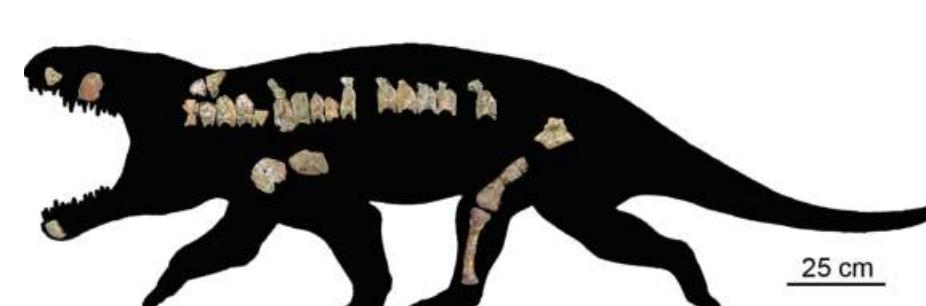
not been possible earlier because the family was not known from other examples in India. It was neglected because the fossil specimen was not as complete as those of other erythrosuchids from other countries. Also, because the few paleontologists with expertise in the family had not examined the fossil or carried out the detailed comparative work needed," explains David Gower from the Natural History Museum London, in an email to *The Hindu*.

"The first Erythrosuchidae remains were discovered in South Africa in 1905 and more were found in China and Russia. The South African one is about 245 million years old, while the ones from China and Russia

Ameghiniana.

The team notes that *Bharitalasuchus tapani* were robust animals with big heads and large teeth, and these probably predated other smaller reptiles. They were approximately the size of an adult male lion and might have been the largest predators in their ecosystems.

"The first Erythrosuchidae remains were discovered in South Africa in 1905 and more were found in China and Russia. The South African one is about 245 million years old, while the ones from China and Russia



Reconstructed fossil: *Bharitalasuchus tapani* were approximately the size of an adult male lion and might have been the largest predators in their ecosystems. ■

seum of Natural Sciences in Buenos Aires.

Biological interaction

He adds: "It was surprising to find tooth marks in the first trunk vertebra of Bharitalasu-

chus, indicating that a smaller animal took a bite probably after the death of the specimen. This is a nice example of evidence of biological interaction that occurred 240 million years ago." One of

the authors Saswati Bandyopadhyay from the Indian Statistical Institute adds: "Apart from this erythrosuchid reptile, the fossil assemblage of the Yerrapalli Formation includes many other extinct creatures such as ceratodontid lungfish, rhynchosaur and allokotosaurian."

She adds that future exploration and excavation in this unit are important in finding new fossils. "Unfortunately, deforestation, mining, agricultural expansion, urbanisation are gradually destroying the fossiliferous localities of India, and the Yerrapalli Formation of the Pranhita-Godavari Basin is not an exception," she concludes.

A molecular view of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus

How scientists make out the difference between variants of a virus



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Our happy memories of school often include chemistry practicals - test tubes and Bunsen burners. Chemistry is the study of the properties of molecules. Everything is made of molecules. The simple chemicals that were learnt in school, such as hydrochloric acid (which has two atoms, one hydrogen; one chlorine), are dwarfed by the complexities of biological chemistry. A protein molecule can have thousands of atoms.

Simulating molecules
With increasing knowledge of chemical principles, it has been possible to move from the 'test tube' to theoretical studies of molecules, their structure and their interactions. Just as there are games that let you simulate the landing of an aircraft on your computer screen, one can simulate the interactions bet-

ween complex biological molecules with reasonable accuracy. Whether in simulating flight, or a molecule, mathematical methods are being linked to fundamental laws of physics. After all a protein is only a linear chain of linked amino acids (of which there are 20, each made up of between 10 and 27 atoms), neatly folded into a unique shape. Amino acids vary in their charge (positive, negative, neutral) or stickiness. Some regions of the chain of amino acids are buried in the core of the molecule. Others are on the surface. Surface amino acids determine interactions between proteins - important for assembling a structure, for binding to receptors, to antibodies and so on.

Back in the real world, many of us have anxiously followed the progress of the covid-19 pandemic, looking for

signs of it slowing down. We have learnt new jargon, got accustomed to scary images of a ball-like virus particle studded with "spikes". Now, we are confronted with new and worrying variants, each of which is described either with a geographical moniker, or with a WHO classification (Greek alphabets alpha, beta, etc.) or more accurately, with a code such as E484K, D614G. The numbers take us back to our linear chain of amino acids in a protein, which in this case is the spike protein on the surface of the virus. The spike protein initiates infection - it is attracted to and binds to a receptor molecule that lies on the surface of cells in your lung and

other tissues. This protein molecule is a chain of 1,273 amino acids, and three individual molecules lock together to form the familiar 'spike' shape. The 484 is the position in the chain. It lies within the crucial motif that binds to the host receptor E is shorthand for Glutamate, an amino acid with a negative charge, which is now mutated to K (Lysine) - an amino acid with a positive charge. This mutation is found in the Beta and Gamma variants.

Effect of mutations
Notice that the mutation has replaced a negatively charged Glutamate with a positively charged Lysine.

Modelling gives us approximations of what to expect whenever a new variant of a viral protein arises. Will this bode well for us humans? Available data from the field suggest that infectivity of this particular variant of the virus seems to be enhanced. It also appears to make this variant less recognisable to some antibodies generated against the virus.

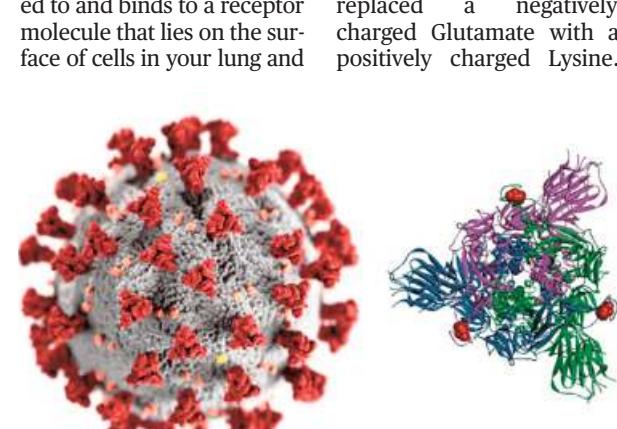
The Delta variant, much in the news, has a E484Q mutation, Q standing for Glutamine - which is not very different from Glutamate (E), but is neutral in charge and polar. The second mutation is L452R, which also lies within the receptor-binding motif of spike. L is Leucine, an uncharged, 'sticky' amino acid and R is the positively charged Arginine.

An important point to be made here is that the numerous variants of concern do not just have the one or two amino acid changes in the receptor-binding domain of the spike protein described above. The Alpha variant first seen in the U.K. has a total of 23 mutations. Nine of these are in other parts of the spike protein, some more are in other constituents of the

virus, and are not well understood. It is apparent that changes of this sort - a replacement or two in a macromolecule - can be modeled in a computational environment quite efficiently and with reasonable confidence. Such modelling would give us quick approximations of what to expect whenever a new variant of a viral protein arises. Going further, modelling could help design and refine drug molecules that would bind tightly to a target protein. For example, the coronavirus has an enzyme, a protease that trims the spike protein to its correct size before a new virus particle is assembled. A drug molecule that would bind tightly to this enzyme would inhibit the trimming action and curtail the growth of the virus. Molecular modelling allows you to try out thousands of potential candidates for narrowing down to a few best-fit candidates that could then be tested in real laboratory experiments.

(This article has been co-authored by Sushil Chandani who is an independent consultant in computer modelling of complex molecules.)

dbala@vpe.org



Spike detail: A spike (shown enlarged on the right) consists of three intertwined molecules of the spike protein, and the E484 amino acid is highlighted in red. ■ SUSHIL CHANDANI



Question Corner

Hardy, vigorous corals



Why do some corals withstand climate change better than others?

In 2014 and 2015, the brown rice coral in Hawaii was completely bleached, but the blue rice coral recovered quickly after bleaching, and blue coral was unaffected by the elevated ocean temperatures.

Researchers from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, U.S., have now decoded the reason for this resilience. Hawaiian blue rice corals have a deep blue pigment derived from algae called zooxanthellae that live inside the coral tissue. The researchers found that these algae produce sunscreen for the coral. This pigment has a protein named chromoprotein which

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



Bitcoin push

How does El Salvador plan to use the cryptocurrency as legal tender and what are the risks involved?

P.J. GEORGE

The story so far: On June 9, El Salvador became the first sovereign nation to make a cryptocurrency legal tender. The law pushed by its 39-year-old President, Nayib Bukele, passed with 62 out of 84 votes. It mandates that Bitcoin should now be accepted as a valid payment by all establishments, except those that do not have the technical wherewithal to do so. This puts the digital currency that does not answer to any government monetary policies on the same footing as the country's primary currency, the United States dollar.

Why is the U.S. dollar the currency in El Salvador? El Salvador fully 'dollarised' its economy in 2001. Countries adopt the U.S. dollar as their official currency for several reasons, such as when their local currencies fail (for example, Zimbabwe, which saw inflation in multimillion percentages), or to take advantage of the stability that it offers and attract investments. One of the downsides is that the economies of 'dollarised' countries get linked to the monetary policies of the Federal Reserve in Washington. The U.S. central bank could set rates that may benefit the U.S. economy but end up hurting economies that use the same currency.

What is the rationale for using Bitcoin? The Bill that Mr. Bukele proposed said that "Central banks are increasingly taking actions that may cause harm to the economic stability of El Salvador" and that Bitcoin was being adopted "in order to mitigate the negative impact from central banks". The country's economy is also heavily reliant on remittances from El Salvadorans working abroad. According to World Bank data, remittances made up almost \$6 billion in 2019, which was about 20% of the country's GDP – one of the highest ratios in the world. By enabling the transfer of money via Bitcoins, Mr. Bukele says El Salvadorans will save on transaction fees of banks and agencies.

Politically, the current government in El Salvador and the Joe Biden administration in the United States are at odds. Recently, some of President Bukele's right-hand men found mention in a U.S. State Department list of corrupt officials in central America. The United States's international aid agency is also moving money away from the Bukele government after it voted to remove all members of the Supreme Court.

Cryptocurrencies as commodities are highly volatile, a recent example being the massive swings in the values of Bitcoin and Dogecoin. Another problem is the increasing energy use associated with cryptocurrencies

How does Bitcoin work? Bitcoin is the first and biggest of decentralised cryptocurrencies, which are online payment systems that are increasingly becoming mainstream. Ethereum, Tether, and Binance Coin are some of the many others that have emerged after Bitcoin. Cryptocurrencies are built on the back of blockchain technology, a system of distributed,

cryptographically-secured account keeping. In this system, the users keep a tab on every digital 'coin' and transaction rather than a banking system with a governing body at its centre.

Why are governments wary? Due to their core nature that shuns centralised control, governments globally have been wary of cryptocurrencies. A report from the U.S. Library of Congress notes that most countries have warned their citizens against investing in cryptocurrencies, let alone allowing transactions in them. Some have tried to use the technology to create government-sanctioned digital currencies. China, a hub of cryptocurrency activity, has issued a digital Yuan on blockchain while it cracks down on other cryptocurrencies. The Bank of England has also proposed a digital Sterling.

However, many countries, including India, have allowed the treatment of cryptocurrencies as commodities, resulting in a rising tide of investment in them. After its introduction in 2009, Bitcoin saw its biggest gain in value last year, having started 2020 at \$7,200 per coin and touching \$65,000 in April of 2021, before falling to \$30,000 in May.

Cryptocurrencies as commodities are highly volatile, a recent example being the massive swings in the values of Bitcoin and Dogecoin, based merely on the tweets of cryptocurrency 'evangelist' Elon Musk.

Another problem is the increasing energy use associated with cryptocurrencies. The 'mining' of Bitcoin, where individuals or companies set up powerful systems to support the blockchain network, for which they are rewarded in the currency, consumes "about the same amount of energy annually as the Netherlands did in 2019", says a *Reuters* report citing data from the University of Cambridge and the International Energy Agency. "Bitcoin production is estimated to generate between 22 and 22.9 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions a year, or between the levels produced by Jordan and Sri Lanka," says the report.

How is El Salvador mitigating the risks? According to Mr. Bukele, the government will protect citizens from the volatility of Bitcoin prices by guaranteeing quick convertibility to dollars. If a shopkeeper does not want to hold the Bitcoin which they now have to accept from customers, the government will purchase it through a \$150-million trust created at the country's development bank.

As for the carbon footprint, Mr. Bukele says he has asked the State-owned geothermal electric company, LaGeo, to connect renewable energy from the country's volcanoes to bitcoin mining facilities.

Changes in vaccine policy for COVID-19

What modifications has the Centre announced and how will the supply of doses be ramped up?

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

The story so far: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 7 reversed the Central government's decentralised policy for procurement of COVID-19 vaccines, declaring that from June 21, vaccines for everyone above the age of 18 years would be procured by the Central government and distributed free to the States. This ended the month-old controversial system of States being asked to procure vaccines for the 18-44 years age group at prices announced by domestic manufacturers and import vaccines through open tenders.

Why was the policy reversed?

The Centre's announcement came after the Supreme Court on May 31 held that the Union government's policy of not providing free vaccines to those in the 18-44 years age bracket was *prima facie* "arbitrary and irrational". "The policy of the Central Government for conducting free vaccination themselves for groups under the first phases, and replacing it with paid vaccination by the State/UT Governments and private hospitals for the persons between 18-44 years is, *prima facie*, arbitrary and irrational," the court said in its order.

Under the latest policy, the Centre said it will procure up to 75% of the doses of vaccines from manufacturers and will provide them free of cost to the State governments. Private institutions can procure the remaining 25% of doses.

What is the state of vaccine availability?

Data on availability from individual manufacturers and supplies to each State have not been published uniformly by the Centre. Amid reports of severe shortages in many States and the vaccination drive being suspended for the 18-44 years age group in a number of places, the Centre said on June 9 that thus far, over 25 crore (25,06,41,440) vaccine doses had been provided to the States and Union Territories through the free distribution channel and direct procurement category. Of these, 23,74,21,808 doses had been consumed, including wastage, and 1,33,68,727 remained to be administered.

Some data is available from the Centre's arguments in the Supreme Court on the three available vaccines at present. The court recorded the position on May 31 as follows: the production at the Serum Institute of India (SII), which makes Covishield, is being raised from 5 crore doses a month to 6.5 crore doses by July 2021; Bharat Biotech, the maker of Covaxin, will raise capacity from 90 lakh to 2 crore doses per month, touching 5.5 crore doses per month by July; availability of Sputnik V will go up from 30 lakh doses to 1.2 crore doses a month by July.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, sent at the end of May, SII said it would be able to provide 10 crore doses in June. Moreover, the Union Health Ministry said the production capacity of Covaxin, which was 1 crore doses in April this year, was expected to touch 10 crore doses a month by September. The Centre said it was in talks with other manufacturers, such as Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, for procurement, but the negotiations were reportedly bogged down by demands from the companies for indemnity against any compensation claims.

Soon after the reversal of the Centre's vaccination policy, it was announced that fresh orders for 44 crore doses of Covishield and Covaxin had been placed by the Union government, which would be available from August-December this year. In addition, it also placed an order for 30 crore doses of a protein sub-unit vaccine produced by Hyderabad-based Biological E.

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to provide



People in Hyderabad kept under observation after being vaccinated. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

The Centre has said that a total of 12 crore doses will be available for June this year. Of this, 6.09 crore doses will be available to the States and Union Territories for the priority groups

specific details of its vaccination initiative, including procurement, percentage of population covered, and plan for coverage.

What is the outlook for June supply?

The Centre has said that a total of 12 crore doses will be available for June this year. Of this, 6.09 crore doses will be available to the States and UTs for the priority groups

priority groups – healthcare workers, frontline workers and people aged 45 years and above – as free supply from the government. Besides this, around 5.86 crore doses will be available for direct procurement by the States, UTs and private hospitals.

This statement was issued at May-end, and the court ordered the Centre to outline its plan and the official policy for the future. Greater clarity will come from the court submissions on how the available doses will be used, including the quantum for private hospitals.

Meanwhile, regulatory requirements for approved imported vaccines have been relaxed and they can be used almost immediately upon receipt, as the government has waived the requirements of bridging trials and testing of each batch at the Central Drugs Laboratory, Kasauli. Small quantities of doses were supplied to State governments in the first week of June as immunisation rates dropped sharply.

How has the pricing of vaccines changed?

Pricing of COVID-19 vaccines, both for government procurement and for beneficiaries, has shifted since the first round of sponsored vaccinations in January for healthcare and frontline workers. For vaccination of these priority sectors, the two vaccines were initially sold to the Centre at special prices – ₹200 a dose for Covishield up to 100 million doses, and ₹295 per dose for Covaxin, with free doses of it provided to the Centre effectively reducing the price to ₹206.50 each.

When the second phase of vaccination was launched on March 1, the Centre capped the price for Covishield and Covaxin at private hospitals at ₹250 per dose.

Under the decentralised distribution of vaccines from

May 1, this cap was removed and manufacturers announced differential pricing for State governments and private hospitals.

However, these developments were soon rendered moot by a widespread shortage of vaccines, and governments largely provided vaccines only to the 60-plus and targeted 45-plus categories.

Now, having taken over the responsibility of free vaccination for all age groups from June 21, the Central government has announced new prices for private hospitals. They can charge a maximum of ₹150 per dose as service charge and a GST of 5%, and with these, the maximum price for a dose of Covishield would be ₹780, for Covaxin it will be ₹4,410 per dose, and Sputnik V would be available at ₹1,145 a shot.

What is the situation in the States?

According to data compiled by *The Hindu*, as of June 12, 14.9% of the population had got at least one dose of a vaccine, and 3.4% had got both doses.

Many big States had fully vaccinated only a small segment of the population as of that date: 51.2 lakh in Maharashtra, 45.1 lakh in Gujarat, 29.8 lakh in Karnataka, 22.2 lakh in Kerala, and 26.1 lakh in Andhra Pradesh. Single-dose coverage in these States varied between 88.7 lakh (in Kerala) and 2 crore (in Maharashtra).

The shortage of doses prompted many States to announce a partial suspension of vaccinations, particularly for the 18-44 years age group, and in some cases, for first doses.

The Hindu's Data Team, based on official data up to May 24 – after which they were not published – estimated that utilisation in the largest States ranged from 86.6% in Uttar Pradesh, 84.7% in Tamil Nadu, 97.9% in Maharashtra and 92.8% in Bihar; the figure was 95.4% for Delhi. In the second wave of infections, the demand for vaccines shot up. For instance, in the past few weeks, Tamil Nadu's utilisation rate has increased sharply, and as of June 6, the State had utilised over 95% of vaccines it received from the Centre and through its own channels.

Most States drew a blank with their efforts to directly procure vaccines at the global level, since pharma companies preferred to deal only with national governments. The Delhi government has complained that the Centre issued a gag order to States and UTs against publishing information on vaccine supply and availability, as the world's "largest immunisation programme" came under intense scrutiny.

New guidelines on Remdesivir, steroids

Why has the Centre revised the protocol for mild cases and which drugs are not recommended anymore?

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

The story so far: The Union Health Ministry has revised its guidelines for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, particularly for the use of steroids, with doctors reporting a worrying rise in medical complications, such as mucormycosis, due to the abuse of drugs and therapies during treatment. The new protocol advises doctors to drop from usage medicines such as ivermectin, doxycycline and hydroxychloroquine to treat mild COVID-19 cases. The revised guidelines, issued on May 27, recommend the use of antipyretics for fever and antitussives for cold in asymptomatic and mild cases.

What are the complications being reported?

Mucormycosis causes black lesions on the nasal bridge or the upper inside of the mouth, which can quickly become more severe, leading to blurred or double vision, chest pain, breathing difficulties, and coughing of blood. COVID-19 patients with diabetes and a weakened immune system are particularly prone to this fungal attack.

Doctors point out that it is clear that the virus affects not just the respiratory system but other organs as well, including the liver and kidneys. "Long COVID-19 is also seen among recovered patients well into three months and beyond. People with co-morbidities are more vulnerable and irrational use of drugs can have extreme adverse effects on the outcome with COVID-19," they say.

Which drugs have been dropped from the list?

For patients with mild symptoms, the Ministry dropped from its recommendations several drugs that were being used widely for treatment until now. For example, the Ministry has removed hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin, azithromycin, doxycycline, zinc and favipiravir from its list of recommended drugs for treating patients with mild infection. Plasma therapy, which was previously used extensively, has also been dropped from the list.

The Ministry also dissuaded medical practitioners from prescribing unnecessary tests, such as CT scans. For asymptomatic cases, the guidelines said no medication is required, while medications for other co-morbid conditions should be continued. The new protocol calls for a healthy balanced diet with proper hydration, while advising patients and their families to stay connected and engage in positive talks through phone, video calls, etc.

In mild cases, the guidelines recommended self-monitoring for fever, breathlessness, oxygen saturation or worsening of any symptoms. People may take antipyretics or antitussives for symptomatic relief, and may inhale



budesonide at a dose of 800 mcg twice a day for five days for cough, the guidelines said. "No other COVID-19-specific medication required. Patients may have to be investigated further if symptoms persist or deteriorate," the document states.

What do the guidelines specify on medicines?

The Ministry has also revised its policy on Remdesivir, stating that it can be given only to "select moderate/severe hospitalised COVID-19 patients" on supplemental oxygen. The Ministry noted that this is a reserve drug approved under Emergency Use Authorisation based only on limited scientific evidence globally. It further stated that the drug is not to be prescribed for patients with mild symptoms who are under home care or at COVID Care Centres, and that doctors are advised to exercise extreme caution in using this reserve/experimental/Emergency Use Authorisation drug.

The Ministry said the advisory and revised guidelines are aimed at stopping the misuse of drugs and therapies which cost a lot and have limited availability, along with the potential to cause harm

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What do the guidelines say for asymptomatic patients? For asymptomatic and mild cases, the guidelines suggest a six-minute walk test. Patients should walk for six minutes with a pulse oximeter attached to a finger. If oxygen saturation falls below 94% or if the reading varies from three to five percentage points, or if the patient feels unwell (lightheaded, short of breath), admission to a hospital for observation may be required.

Has anything been suggested for children with COVID-19?

The government has issued comprehensive guidelines for the management of COVID-19 among children under 18 years of age, in which Remdesivir has not been recommended and rational use of HRCT (high-resolution computed tomography) imaging has been suggested. Also, the guidelines note that steroids are harmful in asymptomatic and mild cases of infection. Mask is not recommended for children below five years of age. However, children aged between six and 11 years may wear a mask, but only under the supervision of parents and the consulting doctor, the guidelines said.

For asymptomatic infection among children, the guidelines recommend no specific medication and advise following appropriate measures (wearing a mask, following strict hand hygiene, physical distancing) and a nutritious diet. The guidelines say that for mild infection, paracetamol at 10-15mg/kg/dose may be given every four to six hours for fever; throat-soothing agents and warm saline gargles in older children and adolescents have been recommended for cough.

Doctors have noted that a high percentage of children who got infected and were hospitalised during the second wave of infections had either co-morbidities or low immunity. They added that healthy children with mild illness recovered without the need for hospitalisation.

GROUP OF SEVEN

Reviving the spirit of multilateralism

The G7 countries seek to overcome internal differences and strengthen their economic and geopolitical bond to face multiple challenges from fighting COVID-19 to tackling the rise of China

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

In Focus

■ Formed in 1975 in the aftermath of the 1973 Oil Crisis, the G7 then collectively produced 70% of the world's GDP, a number that has dropped to 40% now

■ The G7 became the G8 with Russia's admission into the group in 1998. But it reverted to the G7 in 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea

■ Over the years, the group has taken up a host of issues ranging from economic growth to environmental issues and terrorism. The latest summit seeks to address global health challenges

As the leaders of seven nations – the U.S., Germany, the U.K., France, Canada, Japan and Italy – meet in Cornwall in south-west England, they would be marking the 47th edition of the "Group of seven" summit. Besides the international milieu in which this summit is being conducted – the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – its significance lies also in who is not attending the summit: former U.S. President Donald Trump.

The G7 prides itself as a group of nations that steadfastly promote liberal democracy and enjoy economic prosperity, which they seek to institutionalise through multilateral cooperation. When Mr. Trump was at the helm in the U.S., his transactional approach to international relations showed disdain for multilateralism, evidenced in particular in the way he pulled the U.S out of the Paris Accord, and openly complained about the summit itself being "outdated". The current President of the U.S., Joe Biden has sought to reorient his country's policy towards multilateralism, which includes closer coordination with traditional allies in the Global North and this sets the stage for a renewed emphasis of purpose for the G7 as they meet in Cornwall.

Already, the Finance Ministers of the G7, who had met on June 4-5 in the run-up to the summit, had agreed to backing a minimum global tax rate of 15% for multina-

tional corporations, thereby setting the stage for MNCs to pay a fairer share of taxes in jurisdictions where they make money and profits, rather than playing governments in a race where they will compete on who will tax them the least and allowing MNCs to take advantage of "tax havens". Even considering the fact that the tax rate of 15% is low according to some critics (Mr. Biden had himself proposed 21%), this move will herald corrective steps that could benefit both large and medium economies. The U.S. in particular is desperate to shore up its revenues as its government announced big spending plans to tide over the economic crisis wrought by the pandemic. The Biden administration has hinted that it could gain nearly \$500 billion in tax revenue over a decade if the global minimum tax idea comes to pass.

More steps remain for this to become reality – the G7 countries would have to convince other nations in the broader G20, which includes China, India, Russia, and South Africa. According to the U.K.-based Tax Justice Network, India suffers an annual loss of \$10 billion due to lax tax laws on MNCs globally and countries such as India should also agree to this deal, but getting a sign-in from others such as Ireland, which benefits from lower taxes on MNCs, will not be easy. Even within the U.S., where President Biden's power to get legislation passed rests on a razor-thin majority at the Senate and House of Representatives of

Congress, the going would not be easy as the Republican Party is loath to taxing corporations.

Yet, for the G7 to have made a global minimum tax a possibility was a "multilateral" breakthrough of sorts for cooperation among these nations. Despite its collectively large economies and a commitment to liberal democratic values, the G7 is no longer the behemoth that it was. Formed in 1975 in the aftermath of the 1973 Oil Crisis, the G7 then collectively produced 70% of the world's GDP, a number that has dropped to 40%, as the *Economist* points out. The larger G20 has become a more relevant multilateral body due to the inclusion of economies such as Brazil, China, India and South Africa but the ability of the G7 summit to set the tone for cooperation on global issues has not diminished.

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FAME II to spur new tech, says Venu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

TVS Motor Company Limited's Joint Managing Director Sudarshan Venu on Saturday welcomed the revision of FAME II subsidies for electric two-wheelers, and said the move would give a fillip to both increased adoption and technology development.

"Sustainable mobility solutions are very important for the future and TVS is investing significantly behind this," Mr Venu said in a statement.

"The improved incentives for electric two-wheelers will increase penetration. Such policy direction should lead to the indigenous development of future technology," the TVS Motor Co. JMD added.

In the latest modification, the department of heavy in-

Revised subsidies to spur EV demand'

Electric 2-wheeler makers term increased support under Centre's FAME II scheme as 'game changer'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI



Fuelling change: The move is expected to bring down prices of electric two-wheelers close to that of ICE vehicles. ■ FILE PHOTO

Industries also capped incentives for electric two-wheelers at 40% of the cost of vehicle, up from 20% earlier.

"The revision in the FAME (II) policy, increasing the subsidy by 50% per kWh, is a phenomenal move," Ather

Energy CEO and Co-founder Tarun Mehta said in a statement. "Sales of electric two-wheelers have grown despite the pandemic and with this additional subsidy, we expect electric two-wheeler sales to disrupt the market,

and clock 6 million-plus units by 2025," he added.

The government's continued support to drive adoption of EVs, with a keen focus on locally built electric two-wheelers will make India the manufacturing hub of EVs, Mr. Mehta added.

Lower sticker price

Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles (SMEV) Director General Sohinder Gill said, "It's an important and an admirable decision taken by the government, a move that will bring down the prices of electric two-wheelers nearer to the IC (internal combustion engine) vehicles and remove one of the biggest blocks, of the high sticker price of electric two-wheelers." A 'city speed electric scooter' with a range of

100 km/charge will now cost less than ₹60,000 and a high-speed scooter with a range of 80 km will come nearer to the price tag of ₹1 lakh, he added.

"Together with the other important factors like extremely low running cost, low maintenance and zero emission, such price levels will surely spur a substantial demand for electric two-wheelers," Mr. Gill said.

"We believe the time has come for mass adoption of electric two-wheelers and such initiatives coupled with a mass awareness campaign by the government and easy terms financing by public sector banks will bring us closer to the target of 30% of the two-wheeler market becoming electric in five years," the SMEV DG added.

CAIT urges CCI probe against Amazon, Flipkart

Group writes to Goyal after HC ruling



Piyush Goyal

in any e-commerce activity through any type of electronic mode has to take a registration number from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that traders across the country would observe June 14-21 as 'e-commerce purification week'.

'Second wave impacts luxury home purchases'

'Need for space had spurred demand'

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

The second wave appears to have impacted purchases of luxury homes by high net worth and ultra-high net worth individuals, who were seen buying new homes last year to move to safer and sprawling locations.

"Right after the first wave, people wanted to upgrade their homes with larger spaces, more amenities and open areas," said Amit Goyal, CEO, India Sotheby's International Realty. "They made quick decisions. Our average transaction closure time reduced from 4-6 months to less than 90 days," he added.

But during the second wave "demand has quietened," Mr. Goyal said. "We expect demand to return as the country reopens and people are vaccinated."



In Delhi, purchases of luxury properties priced over ₹13-14 crore for high rise apartments, to more than ₹70-80 crore for bungalows were mainly by lawyers, doctors and architects. Industrialists and actors had led the demand in Mumbai.

INTERVIEW | K.E. RANGANATHAN

'Helicopter approach helped Roca post growth during pandemic'

A slew of measures from new product launches to loyalty programmes helped sanitaryware firm post robust revenue: MD

N. ANAND

While most companies have lost business on account of the pandemic, Roca Bathroom Products has managed to increase its market share at the national level by 1% and is confident of a 25% growth in revenue in 2021. The company is also planning a new greenfield project either in Tamil Nadu or Gujarat by 2024, says MD K.E. Ranganathan. Edited excerpts.

How did you manage to post growth during the pandemic year?

■ We laid greater focus on meeting customer needs and this helped the company to gain market share at the na-

tional level by 1% to 35% among the organised sector players. In Tamil Nadu, our market share among organised players is 65% and 45% in the South.

We phased the year 2020 in terms of January-March quarter as high growth, April-June as survival, July-September as revival and October-December as back-to-growth.

How has been the business in 2021?

■ We designed and executed a 'Helicopter' (vertical) take-off during January-March 2021 quarter. We planned higher production, launch of new products, rural market thrust, loyalty programme focus and huge market pull



actions. All these resulted in the business doing a 'vertical take-off' in terms of revenue. We recorded a robust revenue growth of more than 30% during January-March 2021.

April 2021 continued the dream run with a record revenue of ₹20 crore for the company against a total washout in April 2020. May 2021 began with the shock of

COVID 2.0 hitting the country in a big way, leading to lockdowns across many cities. In spite of this, the company delivered encouraging results compared with May 2020 with 40% growth.

How do you see the rest of the year 2021?

■ As we speak today, COVID 2.0 is losing steam. The case loads across the country have started coming down. I guess from July 2021 we can expect to go back to February/March 2021 conditions. As a company, Roca Parryware, is ready for the second helicopter take-off during June/July 2021.

Tell us about your order book position

■ On the institutional front, we see good traction as many construction sites are allowed to continue work even during lockdown. We have more than 18 months' revenue order book in the institutions segment.

Any expansion plans?

■ Given this momentum and expected surge in demand post-COVID curbs easing, we are taking action to expand our faucets and plastics manufacturing capacities in India. We are planning to set up a new factory either in Gujarat or Tamil Nadu by 2024-25.

Overall, we have planned for ₹50 crore capex investments in 2021 and actions are already under way.

Has the spiralling input material prices affected your revenue?

■ In the last three to four months, all input material costs have gone up by 40-50%. Though, we lost few points on our profitability so far, we have not considered to pass on the inflation to market. But given the worsening situation, it looks inevitable in the near future.

What is the targeted revenue for 2021?

■ We have done pretty well so far from January to May 2021 and assuming the lockdowns get lifted soon, we are confident of recording a 25% growth in revenue over 2020 to about ₹1,600 crore.

SPORT

Brazil favoured to defend title on its home turf

Argentina looms as its largest threat; Colombia has improved since the return of coach Rueda

COPA AMERICA

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAO PAULO

Brazil's international players were reluctant to play in the Copa America on home soil. Now that they're committed, they're favoured to win it.

Argentina still looms as a threat to Brazil's title defence. Being away from home takes some pressure off Lionel Messi and his Argentina team.

The Copa America will kick off Sunday with defending champion Brazil against Venezuela in Brasilia. The final will be on July 10 in Rio de Janeiro.

No spectators will be allowed to attend any Copa America matches because of restrictions in place for the pandemic, which has already delayed the tournament by a year.

With the likes of Neymar on board, coach Tite expects not only to defend the title



Primed for it: The National Stadium in Brasilia being readied for the opening of the Copa America.

lifted in 2019, but also use the next 30 days to prepare for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Argentina placed third in the 2019 Copa America, but the team has improved under coach Lionel Scaloni.

Defender Cristian Romero, and midfielders Leandro Paredes and Giovani Lo Celso are now trusted to break the opponents' lines.

Up front, Lautaro Martinez and Sergio Aguero bring the same respect.

And that means Messi, who turns 34 later this month, doesn't need to be part of every play for Argentina to win.

Colombia has improved since the return of coach Reinaldo Rueda. Copa America

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

GROUP B

Brazil vs Venezuela

2.30 a.m. (Monday)

Colombia vs Ecuador

5.30 a.m. (Monday)

Live on Sony Ten 2 &

Sony Six (SD & HD)

could further enhance the team, which will not have midfielder James Rodriguez because of fitness problems.

Uruguay has struggled despite counting on Luis Suarez and Edison Cavani. Uruguay hasn't won any of its three latest matches on the road to Qatar.

The tournament will be divided into two groups of five. Group A includes Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay.

Brazil is in Group B with Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru.

The four best of each group advance to the knockout stage.

MRF Pace Foundation on a fast lane

Senthilnathan analyses promising pacers from its stable

CRICKET

S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI

These are busy days at the MRF Pace Foundation with several promising pacers emerging from its stable.

A few have played for India, others have been selected in the National team and some have found a place as net bowlers.

MRF Pace Foundation head coach M. Senthilnathan analysed them with *The Hindu*.

Chetan Sakariya: Liked the look of him. Lean and mean. Saw him first in 2017, had the left-arm's ball shaping away across the right-hander. We worked on his fitness, in bringing the ball into the right-hander and on yorkers and pace variations.

Sandeep Warrier: Strength is new ball and outswing. Deceptively sharp. Consistent with his line and length over long spells. Has good control.

Prasidh Krishna: Has already played for the country. Tall, high-arm action and on yorkers and pace variations. Has good control.

Arzam Nagwaswalla: Tremendous performance in domestic circuit. A sharp, nippy left-arm with good control. He can bring the ball into the right-hander and can surprise him with pace. Has a compelling yorker.



Sakariya. ■ SPORTZPICS/IPL



Prasidh. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

Arshdeep Singh: A tall left-arm bowler with an excellent wide yorker in the end overs. A calm head in stressful situations. Has been working on his slower ball.

Avesh Khan: Sends down a 'heavy' ball. A strong, tall lad with good lift. Can move the ball both ways. Excellent bowler in the slog overs with variations.

Sandeep Warrier: Strength is new ball and outswing. Deceptively sharp. Consistent with his line and length over long spells. Has good control.

Prasidh Krishna: Has already played for the country. Tall, high-arm action and on yorkers and pace variations. Has good control.

Arzam Nagwaswalla: Tremendous performance in domestic circuit. A sharp, nippy left-arm with good control. He can bring the ball into the right-hander and can surprise him with pace. Has a compelling yorker.

Jeremy: The IWF has also said that the Absolute Ranking cannot be considered final until the relevant anti-doping results management processes are concluded.

Jeremy's ranking will stand him in good stead if the IWF reallocates quota places in the men's 67kg category.

Pragg wins five in a row, shares lead

CHESS

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

Staging a stunning comeback, R. Praggnanandhaa won all five rounds on Friday to share the lead after 10 rounds of the Gelfand Challenge online rapid chess tournament.

Overnight in the tied fifth spot, the 15-year-old seemed to have pushed the reboot button by stunning his second-seeded compatriot Nihal Sarin. He went on to account for Zhu Jiner (China), teammate Leon Mendonca, Vincent Keymer (Germany) and Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Denmark) for a share of the lead with top seeded Uzbek No-

dirbek Abdusattarov at eight points.

D. Gukesh also recovered from the first-day blues and the loss in the sixth round, scoring four straight wins. He now shares the third spot with Keymer and first-day leader Awonder Liang, who lost three successive games.

However, Nihal and Mendonca could add only two points each.

The results (involving Indians): 10th round: R. Praggnanandhaa bt Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den); Sarasadat Khademshahi (Iran) lost to D. Gukesh; Nihal Sarin drew with Polina Shuvanova (Rus); Leon Mendonca drew with Lei Tingjie (Chn).

Ninth round: Praggnanandhaa bt Vincent Keymer (Ger); Gukesh bt Awonder Liang

OLYMPICS

Y.B. SARANGI

KOLKATA

India has sent the lone entry of Mirabai Chanu for the Tokyo Olympics after the former World champion placed second in the women's 49kg Absolute Ranking released by the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF).

Mirabai gathered 413, 6172 Robi points to come second behind Chinese Hou Zhihui (4926, 4422) in the rankings published on Friday.

Denmark's Eriksen taken to hospital after collapsing

Danish FA tweets he is awake and receiving treatment

EURO 2020

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COPENHAGEN

Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen was taken to a hospital on Saturday after collapsing on the field during a match at the European Championship.

The governing body of European soccer said Eriksen has been stabilised and the Danish soccer federation said he was awake.

"Christian Eriksen is awake and is undergoing further examinations at Rigshospitalet," the Danish federation wrote on Twitter.

The Euro 2020 match between Denmark and Finland was suspended after Eriksen was given urgent medical attention on the field near the end of the first half.

He was treated for about 10 minutes after collapsing. He was then carried off on a stretcher. UEFA then announced the game had been suspended "due to a medical emergency."

Restart

Danish soccer federation later said the game would res-



Shock scene: Denmark's players are a distraught lot as they shield teammate Christian Eriksen, who is getting medical attention. • AFP

ume at 8:30 p.m. local time (midnight IST).

A stadium announcer asked fans to stay in their seats and stay calm.

Eriksen had just played a short pass when he fell face-forward onto the ground. His teammates immediately gestured for help and medics rushed onto the field. Erik-

sen was given chest compressions as his Denmark teammates stood around him in a shielding wall for privacy.

The Finland players huddled by their bench and eventually walked off the field while Eriksen was still getting treatment, as did the referees. Eriksen was even-

tually carried off to a loud ovation, with his teammates walking next to the stretcher.

Eriksen is one of Denmark's biggest stars and the incident brought an instant sense of shock to the Parken Stadium, where about 15,000 fans fell into hushed silence. Some supporters could be seen crying.

Krejcikova, the new queen in town

Becomes the sixth new champion in Paris in six years, beating Pavlyuchenkova

ROLAND-GARROS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS

Barbora Krejcikova won her maiden Grand Slam singles title on Saturday, beating Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova to become the first Czech woman in 40 years to conquer Roland-Garros before dedicating her victory to former Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna, who died four years ago.

Krejcikova, ranked 33 in the world and playing just her fifth Grand Slam singles main draw, triumphed 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.

The 25-year-old emulates compatriot Hana Mandlikova, who claimed the trophy in Paris in 1981.

Emotional tribute

The 25-year-old Krejcikova paid an emotional tribute to her mentor Novotna, who died of cancer at the age of 49 in 2017.

"It's hard to put into words. I cannot believe I have just won a Grand Slam," said Krejcikova, who was still outside the top 100 when the 2020 French Open took place last October.

"I spent a lot of time with Jana before she died. Her last words to me were 'enjoy tennis and try and win a Grand Slam'.

"I know she's looking after me. All this is pretty much because she is looking



Cup of joy: Unseeded Krejcikova completed her fairytale run with a maiden Grand Slam title. • REUTERS

after me. It was amazing that I got the chance to meet her. She was such an inspiration. I miss her and I hope she's really happy," added Krejcikova, who had to save a match-point in her semifinal to defeat Maria Sakkari.

Krejcikova was presented with the trophy by Czech-born Martina Navratilova, who won two French Opens in 1982 and 1984, but as an American citizen.

Up and down

In a nervy start to the final, Krejcikova was broken in the first game, serving up two double faults.

However, the Russian was unable to capitalise and dropped the next six games

■ Krejcikova is the sixth first-time Grand Slam champion to be crowned in the last six editions of the French Open. She is also the 13th first-time singles winner in the last 22 Majors

■ The 25-year-old is the third unseeded winner in Paris in the last five years after Ostapenko (2017) and Swiatek (2020)

■ Krejcikova is the 18th active women's singles Slam champion and the second from the Czech Republic after Kvitova

■ Before the 2020 French Open, Krejcikova was yet to break into the top-100. Come Monday, she will rise up to 15th in the world

■ Before this, Krejcikova was already a two-time doubles and three-time mixed doubles Grand Slam champion. On Sunday, she can add a third in doubles

THE RESULTS

Women: Final: Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt 31-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.

On Friday:

Men: Semifinals: 1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

On Saturday:

Men: Semifinals: 1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

On Sunday:

Men: Final: Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

Women: Final: Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt 31-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.

On Monday:

Men: Final: Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

Women: Final: Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt 31-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.

On Tuesday:

Men: Final: Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

Women: Final: Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt 31-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.

On Wednesday:

Men: Final: Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-2.

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TV PICKS

Roland-Garros: Star Sports 1 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 3 p.m. & 6.30 p.m.

England vs New Zealand: 2nd Test, Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m.

Euro 2020: Sony Ten 2, 3 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m., 9.30 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Monday)

NBA: Star Sports 1 & SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m. (Monday)

Copa America: Sony Ten 2 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 2.30 a.m. & 5.30 a.m. (Monday)

IN BRIEF



Russell doesn't take field as precaution after being struck on helmet

ABU DHABI Andre Russell didn't take the field as a precaution after being struck on the helmet by fast bowler Musa Khan in the Pakistan Super League. Naseem Shah came on concussion substitute as Russell didn't take the field as a precaution. Russell smashed Musa for two successive sixes but was struck on the helmet off the next delivery. AP

RKFC coach Robertson in Queen's honours list

NEW DELHI Real Kashmir FC David Alexander Robertson has been honoured with the British Empire Medal for his services to the community in the valley and strengthening UK-India relations. The awards were announced on Saturday by the British government to mark Queen Elizabeth II's birthday. PTI

ECB to review players' social media accounts

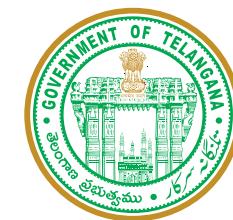
LONDON The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has agreed to review social media accounts of players to "address any historical issues" following pacer Ollie Robinson's suspension. ANI



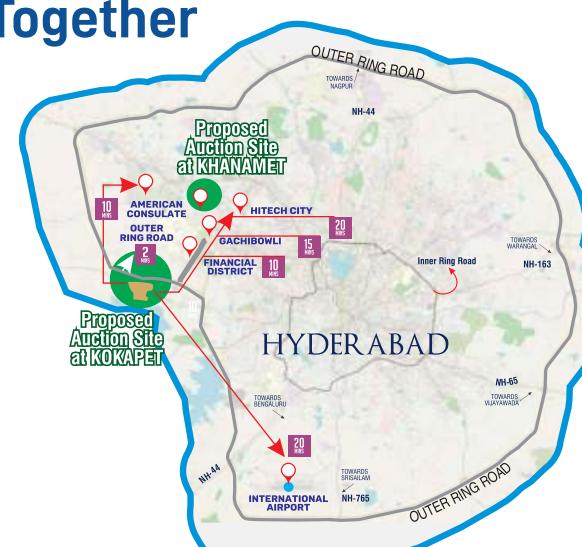
GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA PROVIDES A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO OWN AN ENCUMBRANCE FREE LAND IN THE MOST PRIME AREA OF HYDERABAD

Become A Partner In Development and Let's Grow Together

HMDA NEOPOLIS @ KOKAPET		
S.No	Plot Details	Area (Acres)
1	Plot No. 1	7.72
2	Plot No. 2	7.75
3	Plot No. 3	7.73
4	Plot No. 12	7.56
5	Plot No. 4	8.94
6	Plot No. 13	7.57
7	Plot A on Road No.7 on southern side of Neopolis layout	1.00



TSIIC Plots @ KHANAMET		
S.No	Plot Details	Area (Acres)
1	Plot No. 4	3.15
2	Plot No. 6	3.15
3	Plot No. 12	3.69
4	Plot No. 14	2.92
5	Plot No. 17	2.10
Total		15.01



GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA AUCTIONS 13 PRIME PLOTS FOR A TOTAL AREA OF 64.93 ACRES

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

1 **100% clear assured title** of the Govt. land with no encumbrances

2 **Absolute ownership** of land

3 **Time bound fast track approvals in single window**

4 **Unlimited FSI***
*Subject to abutting road width and maximum height permissible by AAI

5 **Multiple use zone** for office space, IT, Residential, Institutional, Commercial, Mixed Use.

FEATURES

- Adjacent to Outer Ring Road
- Surrounded by commercial hubs, recreational zones and transportation facilities
- Excellent Social Infrastructure
- Very near to - Hotels, Hospitals, Housing & Institutions
- Both sites in heart of CBD (Central Business District)

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO BID

- Any individual or group of individuals (Citizen of India above the age of 18 years), Company (Private/ Public/ Limited Liability Partnership), Proprietary Firms, Partnership Firms/ LLP, Trusts, Registered Societies, Financial Institutions, Banks, NBFC, Real Estate Funds, Public & Semi-public Undertakings of State Govt. or Central Govt., Govt. Departments, Joint Venture Consortium.
 - The bidder must be eligible to build/ own commercial/ multi-purpose properties in India and must be competent to enter into contract.
 - FDI upto 100% is permitted on automatic route as per DIP - GOI.
 - Foreign companies which have established a branch office or other place of business in India, in accordance with RBI, GOI / FEMA / FERA regulations, can acquire any immovable property in India, which is necessary for or incidental to carrying on such activity*
- *<https://www.meia.gov.in/images/pdf/acquisition-and-transfer-of-immovable-property-in-india.pdf>

HMDA

Notification	15-06-2021
Pre-Bid Meeting	25-06-2021
Last date for registration	13-07-2021 till 5.00 PM
Last Date for EMD Payment	13-07-2021 upto 5.00 PM
Date of e-Auction	15-07-2021 From 9.00 AM to 12.00 Noon & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM

E-AUCTION SCHEDULE

Notification	15-06-2021
Pre-Bid Meeting	26-06-2021
Last date for registration	13-07-2021 till 5.00 PM
Last Date for EMD Payment	13-07-2021 upto 5.00 PM
Date of e-Auction	16-07-2021 From 9.00 AM to 12.00 Noon & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM

Auction undertaken by HMDA & TSIIC on behalf of Government of Telangana

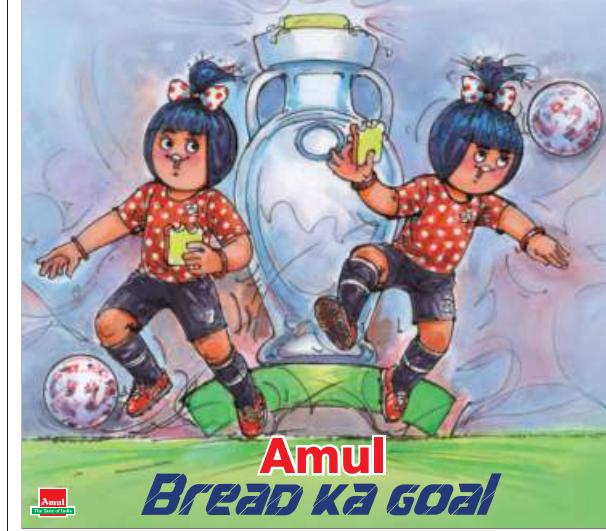
For more details on NEOPOLIS & GOLDEN MILE LAYOUT

Log onto : AUCTIONS.HMDA.GOV.IN (w.e.f. 15-06-2021)

For more details on KHANAMET SITE

Log onto : TSIIC.TELANGANA.GOV.IN (w.e.f. 15-06-2021)

Yaaro aur Euro ke Saath



Embiid helps Sixers roll over Hawks

Suns stretch series lead to 3-0



Smart tactics: Sixers' Joel Embiid, centre, draws a foul from John Collins of Atlanta Hawks. AFP

NBA PLAYOFFS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LOS ANGELES

Joel Embiid finished with 27 points, nine rebounds and eight assists as Philadelphia 76ers snapped Atlanta Hawks' 13-game winning streak at home with a 127-111 win in game three of their NBA Eastern Conference playoff series. The teams split the first two games in Philadelphia, but the Sixers dominated on Friday to grab a 2-1 series lead.

In Denver, Devin Booker scored 28 points and Chris Paul added 27 and eight assists as Phoenix Suns seized a 3-0 lead over the Nuggets with a 116-102 victory.

Nuggets' Nikola Jokic, who received his MVP award before the game, had 32 points.

The results (semifinals): EC: Philadelphia 76ers 127 bt Atlanta Hawks 111 (Sixers lead series 2-1).

WC: Denver Nuggets 102 lost to Phoenix Suns 116 (Suns lead series 3-0).